

Tools for Learning

AUDIO-VISUAL TEACHING AIDS ARE ESSENTIAL I

I. KEITH TYLER

A realistic view of child learning makes it clear that now more than ever a variety of teaching aids must be employed if the education of children is to be effective. With the present shortage of teachers bringing many who are inadequately trained into classrooms and with new and unfamiliar subjects added to the teaching load of others, it is imperative that no false notions of economy should prevent any school from supplying an abundance of mechanical aids to assist the over-burdened teacher.

The armed forces have faced the gigantic problem of training millions of men quickly and effectively with a minimum of skilled technical assistance. That this problem is being solved is attested by the superbly trained and smoothly operating forces, mechanized to an unprecedented extent, which are engaging the enemy successfully on widespread fronts. This feat would

never have been possible had it not been for the intensive use made of a variety of learning aids in all the services. Motion pictures, models, film-strips, recordings, maps, charts, training machines, demonstrations, and field experience—all played their part in supplementing books and lectures. The streamlining of education for war was made necessary by the very size and importance of the problem which the armed services faced. The education of boys and girls for the postwar world is no less crucial, yet the overpowering inertia of conventional teaching practices may prevent our schools from undertaking a similar modernization. Experience is apparently not always a good teacher.

With the variety of teaching aids now available—sound and silent films, slides, film-strips, radio programs, recordings, maps, globes, charts, and models—it should be possible to enrich and facilitate learning in almost every field. Each of these aids has its peculiar contribution to make; the teacher ought to be familiar with them all. Outside of the school, picture magazines, maps in newspapers and periodicals, radio programs, and motion pictures are being avidly consumed by a public anxious to learn more about the world and its fast-moving events. Surely the school can do no less than supply equally helpful aids.

Educational Leadership is inaugurating a plan which we believe will be a unique service to readers and advertisers. Each month we will present a section devoted to one category of materials only, introduced with an article by an educational specialist. The categories will be: Oct., Audio-visual Aids; Nov., Recreational Reading; Dec., Art, Science and Play Materials; Jan., Understanding Ourselves; Feb., Understanding Our Times; March, Understanding World Cultures; April, School Furniture and Equipment; May, Reading for Teachers.

What general criteria may be used in selecting such aids to learning?

First, of course, must be considered the *educational value* of the material. What contribution will this film, or set of slides, or map, make to the educational objectives which have been set up for the group? Will this bring important facts to the attention of the boys and girls? Will it aid in the development of specific skills? Will it give insights into problems and relationships? Will it develop greater understanding of democratic ideals? Will it assist in sensitizing students to new problems? Is the material accurate and authentic?

Second, we may consider the comprehensibility of the material. Is it pitched on the proper grade level? Are processes developed slowly enough to be followed intelligently? Are relationships clear to boys and girls of the intended group? Is the vocabulary suitable? Is it clearly and logically organized?

Thirdly, we may consider the interest and appeal which the material is likely to have. Is the aid attractively organized and presented? Does it make contact with the existing background of the students so as to develop *rapport*? Is it related to students' needs, interests, and environment?

While the first two general criteria, educational value and comprehensibility, have long been recognized by the producers of teaching aids, the third criteria, appeal and interest, has too often been neglected. Because children were required to be in the school, little attention needed to be paid to their likes and dislikes. But the experience of the producers of such commercial media as radio, motion pictures, and picture magazines, who had to win the voluntary

attention of their audiences, taught much about the greater educational usefulness of material with adequate attractiveness and appeal. Only the confirmed academics who resist any attempts at "popularization," would refuse to learn from them.

Funds for the purchase both of teaching materials and of equipment for its use ought to come from regular appropriations of boards of education. Certainly a motion-picture projector is just as "educational" as a textbook or a blackboard. This principle ought to be established and fought for if the use of aids is to be general and accepted as a part of schooling. Frequently, however, other sources have to be sought when such materials are first introduced. Contributions from Parent-Teacher Associations, school funds from entertainments and athletics, even voluntary pupil contributions, have been utilized initially in developing the program. As a permanent policy, however, this is clearly undemocratic, for it penalizes the community with lower economic resources—the very place where these enriching experiences are most needed.

At present crucial war shortages prevent the purchase of many kinds of equipment. Many teaching materials, however, including films, recordings, maps, slides, slide-films, and the like, are still abundant and the war has actually operated to increase the educational offerings available in certain fields. Schools with abundant equipment, therefore, are in a splendid position to expand. But schools not possessing projectors or recording playback machines should not consider the field closed to them during the war. There are still many possibilities in the development of libraries of

flat pictures, maps, posters, exhibits, and the like which are still available to schools from local resources.

The postwar period should see a tremendous development of the entire field of teaching aids. The impact upon the communities of the millions of men and women from the armed services and from war industries, themselves trained quickly and efficiently by these aids, will bring public pressure upon the school for modernization. The productive capacity and the technological advances brought about by the war on the part of industries producing equipment should result in lower prices and improved performance. School administrators should plan now for expansion of teaching aids to follow Victory.

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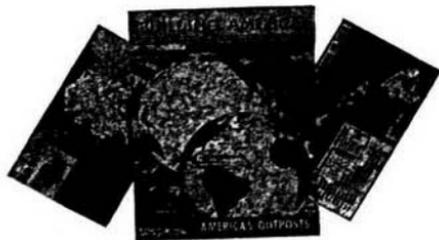


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