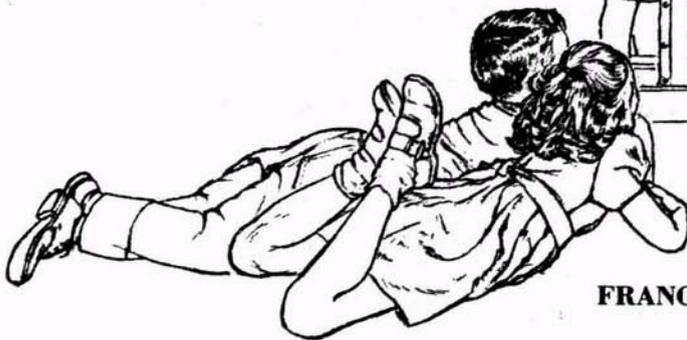


# Essentials in Communication Arts and Skills



FRANCIS SHOEMAKER

Communication, this author asserts, is the symbolic process by which people get life into manageable form. School and home need to cooperate in the essential task of helping children and youth find easy access to various avenues of impression and response to their environment.

**T**HE MAXIMUM context for a discussion of this topic would, of course, take us to the philosophies of George Herbert Mead and Susanne Langer—and on to their research sources in anthropology, psychology, sociology, ecology, political science, public opinion studies, physiology, and the like. Child development specialists among us would feel at home in such breadth. But for our immediate purposes, I'd like to turn our attention to some observations in physiology and to those social sciences that deal with the relationship of culture and social personality—as we find it in such social-psychological oriented people as Erich Fromm (*Man for Himself*), and David Riesman

(*The Lonely Crowd* and *Faces in the Crowd*.)

## Three Kinds of Personalities

Riesman, for instance, gives us an almost too neat but nonetheless convenient working base in three kinds of social personalities—the *tradition-directed personality*, the *inner-directed personality*, and the *other-directed personality*. He suggests that each kind of personality emerges from the prevailing patterns of communication that characterize different cultures at different stages of development.

### *Tradition-Directed*

The first form of society is one which

has both a high birth rate and a high mortality rate—India, China, Central Africa, for example. Here generations are short. There is little accumulation of culture beyond what each man passes on to his son. The content of communication is the traditions of the culture. The burden of communication is carried in face to face use of language, dance, costume and totem, all combined in relatively unchanging routine and ritual. Communication arts and skills essential for survival are only those which permit the repetition of traditional forms of behavior. Individual variation from the pattern is discouraged. Personality, as Riesman sees it in this stage of society, is *tradition-directed*.

### *Inner-Directed*

The second form of society is one in the process of transitional growth. It has a high birth rate but low mortality brought about by advances in technology, agriculture and sanitation. The expanding population bursts the seams of traditional molds for behavior. People move around; they expand their frontiers; they expand production; they accumulate capital; they center their attention on exploitation of natural resources; they manipulate property and other forms of capital. This all opens up a tremendous range of choices in behavior. And choices call for initiative, resourcefulness, self-confidence and goals. Parents and schools in this form of society tend to communicate generalized principles for behavior—industry, thrift, honesty, justice, competition,

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etc. The burden of communication is carried by oral and written language, architectural forms, city plans, styles and other symbols of status. The communication arts and skills essential for survival are not only *learning* the rules, but *internalizing* them so that they can be used in a variety of situations in which the individual is on his own. He becomes highly individualized and, in Riesman's terms, an *inner-directed person*. Our American form of society is of this type?—partly?

### *"Other-Directed"*

The third stage of societal change is marked by an incipient population decline. It is characterized by a leveling off or decline of births, as more and more people move from rural to urban centers. As the frontier of natural resources closes, the society settles in to an economy of consumption rather than production. People "consume" services and entertainment as well as "things." In the smaller urban families and with the spread of permissive child care, there tends to be a relaxation of the sterner patterns of discipline. Riesman says of this stage; "Under these newer patterns, the peer group . . . becomes much more important to the child, while parents make him feel guilty not so much by violation of inner standards as about failure to be popular or otherwise to manage his relations with these other children. Moreover, the pressures of the school and the peer group are reinforced and continued . . . by the mass media: movies, radio, comics and popular culture media generally."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Riesman, David, *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950. p. 22.

The content of communication in this stage of society is largely "human relations." The new frontier is the human personality—open for development in depth in intergroup understandings and cooperative attitudes, or for manipulation and exploitation. The burden of communication is carried by language, obviously, but rarely language by itself. It is language combined with colored pictures in magazines and billboards, language combined with sound effects and music in radio, or language accompanied by powerful pictures and music in movies and television. And insofar as these composite communication media neglect broad community interests, communication skills developed are those which provide a non-evaluative sensitivity to other people—either to find security in group conformity, or to search out the chinks in their personal armor and win them or influence them in a designed direction. The individual in this stage of culture is "*other-directed*." And is America partly in this stage?

### A New Dimension

Here then are three recognizable communication patterns producing three recognizable kinds of persons—the *tradition-directed*, the *inner-directed* and the *other-directed*. Our culture today contains them all—a few *tradition-directed*s in remote mountain communities and immigrant slum areas, generations of *inner-directed*s and an increasing number of *other-directed*s who are being swept along in a communication environment for which they have inadequate skills to maintain their self-direction. And—as we know from a moment's introspection—there are great numbers of us who combine

adherence to tradition with allegiance to principle and still find ourselves taking from others our cues for action. Obviously no one of these prevailing kinds of personality is adequate to a functioning democracy or a United Nations. We obviously need a new dimension of personality—a fourth person, an *autonomous person* who is capable of conscious choice—who may adhere to tradition but be free to abandon it, may choose accepted principles of action but be capable of re-evaluating them, who will be constantly aware of other people but act only in the light of imagined consequences to all who might be affected by his actions.

This is our challenge. If the communication pattern of a culture is a major determinant of personality, what are the maximum essentials of communication that will develop the kind of individual we idealize?

The *autonomous person*, of whom there are as yet remarkably few, uses a complex communication skill, a kind of human radar system, that is sensitive to perceptions in sound, shape, color, texture and rhythm—by turns or simultaneously, as the situation demands. The communication skill of the *autonomous person* extends also to responding to these perceptions in language, drawing, music or dance—each alone or in combination. This begins to look like the maximum essentials for communication arts and skills. The significant thing is that the autonomous person does not emerge and then develop this skill—he becomes increasingly *autonomous* only as he becomes *increasingly skilled* in communication. Communication, in short, is the symbolic process by which people get life into manage-

able form. If our processes are inadequate or unskillful, life remains chaotic and without the "value attributes" that let us feel that things "add up"—that we are "going somewhere."

### **Life Comes into Form for Children . . .**

What are our resources for teaching this kind of communication skill? The simplest answer I have is "our children in living situations." Let me cite an example from two sisters in a neighbor family—one four-and-a-half, the other eight at the time to which I refer. Their parents are both brilliant young people. They are still predominantly inner-directed, though the father now feels it his duty to buy the beer that puts on his favorite TV shows—a curious transitional attachment to *duty* and *other-directed* advertising.

#### *. . . Through Words*

One afternoon in the spring of 1951, the four-and-a-half-year old, a really beautiful little blonde, came to our place to watch me plant some lilies-of-the-valley. The soil was fairly moist from recent rains, and literally crawling with fine fat worms. The little girl watched my digging for several minutes; then she became aware of the worms and squatted down to scrutinize them. Then she began to collect them—a whole handful, which she took over to her mother's flower garden. In a couple of minutes she was back. Discouraged from any further transplanting, she settled in to asking lots of questions. Presently a dreamy sort of look came over her face and she began a poetic, alliterative chant—"In the winter when it's cold, worms go way down

deep. In the summer when the sun is warm, worms crawl up—and make the flowers grow—don't they?"

Here in this little statement a very complex segment of life came into form—cause-effect relationship, ideas of subordination, concepts of space-time. By age four-and-a-half she had mastered all of the primary signals of our language and was using them uniquely to clarify her own experience. (Traditional language study when she goes to school will likely have no effect in improving her mastery of spoken English.) However, at the dinner table the following Christmas, when her father, carving the turkey, said, "What will you have, Holly?" her spontaneous response was "Pabst Blue Ribbon." Here was a keen little mind, extremely sensitive to language, keyed to skillful language response to much of her environment. But her skills were still inadequate to the demands of her "communication environment"—she couldn't "talk back" to the power of suggestion, and free herself from a conditioned response.

#### *. . . Through Symbolic Figures*

Her sister, on the other hand, was far less sensitive to language. She used other symbols to support her words. She came to us one Saturday afternoon and invited us to a "play" in their living room.

She had set up a card table and a cut-away model doll house. Lying beside the doll house were six horse-chestnuts in graded sizes, with toothpick arms and legs. When the "play" began she explained that the biggest horse-chestnut was a daddy, the next largest was a mommy, and the remaining four were the children—curiously paralleling her own family situation.

She then proceeded with running commentary as she manipulated the ingeniously-devised symbolic family. "This is *the* daddy coming home from work. 'Oh, my, am I tired. When is supper ready, mother?' 'Pretty soon, dear.' 'Daddy, will you read us the funnies in the paper?' 'No, I want to read the news!' 'Daddy, will you turn on the TV for us?' 'No, I'm tired of noise, noise, noise all day. I want it quiet!'

"The scene now changes to after supper. 'Daddy, now we've had supper, please read us a story.' 'No, I told you. I've got a headache.' 'Mommy, will you read us a story?' 'No, dear, I must do the dishes.' 'Daddy, just one story.' 'No! I'm sick! I'm going to bed!' (He goes up the stairs.) 'Mommy, will you *please* read us a story?' 'No, dear, I'll have to look after your father. He's sick.' (She goes upstairs—leaving all the little horse-chestnuts in the middle of the floor.) That's all."

Here there is a much less complex language than in her sister's poem, less abstract subordination of ideas (though plenty of personality). The burden of the communication is carried by language in combination with the juxtaposition of the symbolic figures. She gets her chaotic and, from her standpoint, illogical family life into manageable form. But, less word-minded than her sister, she needed the manipulation of other materials with language to harmonize her tensions. Her experience is close to that of our daily lives, for increasingly our culture provides us with the composite kind of communication—from the sample-taste plus language plus picture in the supermarket to the new three dimensional color films

which, with language, color, movement, music, draw us into complete empathic identification with screen figures.

### . . . *Through a Collage*

There is still another level of communication which many children use constantly, and which may or may not involve language skills. Let me illustrate. In 1946 a German refugee lad came to Madison—age thirteen. He had left Germany in 1938, spent two years in blacked-out England—then had come to the United States in 1940. One of his first experiences in this country was a visit to the World's Fair. For the first time, and at the impressionable age of seven, a new world of light and color, space and shape, movement and music, food and freedom, opened up to him.

Only six years later in Madison was he able to find appropriate symbols for communication to get this vast phantasmagoria into manageable form. In a seventh grade arts laboratory he began to gather an assortment of colored paper of various textures—glossy, rough, transparent, etc. These he cut into non-representative shapes and pasted on a yard-square cardboard base. The ultimate design was this: An artist's palette of red paper overlaid with a bar or two of musical notation formed the horizontal base. Over this he erected three structures. One was a spiral ramp of glossy gold paper. Another was an inclined plane made of drinking straws. The third was an inverted paper cup with a drinking straw inserted in it. A quite attractive design.

Throughout the period of construction—several days—he never once ver-

balized any of his processes. He was very much pleased with our interest in his creation, but volunteered no interpretation. Language, and especially English as a second language, was just not his medium of communication. Finally we asked if he had something in mind while he was designing his piece. He thought a moment and then said, "Oh, yes. This is the World's Fair." Pointing to the inverted drinking cup, "This is all the ice cream stands."—To the inclined plane, "This is all the roller coasters."—To the palette and notation, "This is all the color and music."—To the gold spiral, "I guess I don't know what this is."

There are several ways of looking at this lad's process. One, he got one impressive aspect of his life into manageable form without language. Two, he used language later to verbalize his experience. Three, and one which makes most sense to me, he started with a familiar and congenial medium of communication. With his own actively-made designs before him he unlocked his inhibitions about a foreign language and set the stage for more fluent speaking and writing from then on—as indeed was the case.

Through stories of these three children I have tried to illustrate the natural resources that youngsters possess for varied kinds of communication. But lest we dismiss them as just more examples of the fact that "Sure, some children make up poems, some plays and some collages," I want to press on to some physiological observations that, I hope, will raise some profound questions about how inclusive education in these maximum essentials must be.

### Initial Participation in Environment

Last spring I sought out a medical training film on human birth. I wasn't satisfied with hearing the birth cry through a Hollywood prairie cabin door. It seemed to me that this first communicative act must be accompanied by other gestures that might tell us more about communication processes generally. From this experience I recorded these notes:

"This single-noted cry symbolizes the complete awakening of the whole organism. Figuratively, it throws the switch which starts the intricate electronic-mechanical-chemical process that will structure the *self* of the new child.

"During the deft post-partum separation and clearing of mucous from the child's throat, the new little organism lies rigid. It seems to be in suspended animation. But with the exhalation of the first air to have filled its lungs, vocal cords vibrate; muscular tensions relax; the respiratory system establishes its rhythm; the bladder empties; arms and legs lose their rigidity; eyes open for a brief unfocused exposure on moving objects in space; eardrums vibrate to the 'blooming buzzing confusion' as William James called it—and then the organism settles into sleep. It has completed its first cycle of tension-expression-relaxation."

So much for my notes. What are their implications for us? The initial participation in environment involved the maximum essentials for communication. The organic paroxysm involved every fiber of the neuro-muscular system. And the rest of the child's life will consist of gradual refinement of each of these essential processes. The

automatic vibration of vocal cords will take on the refined control of larynx, lips and tongue to make the thirty-three basic sounds of English and combine them within the conventional patterns of our linguistic signal system. The undisciplined thrust of fists and feet will be refined to the point of writing a secondary set of symbols that will stand for the noises we make in our throats—or in the case of feet, to the point of controlled coordination that will make up interpretive dance; unfocused vision will ultimately perceive and discriminate size, shape and shade. Mere noise will become discernible as volume, tone, pitch and quality.

Each of these actions, at whatever stage of refinement—two words of a two-year-old to a Presidential address on the State of the Union; the uncertain rhythm of first steps to Jose Limon or Martha Graham; random scrawlings to the varied designs of Grant Wood, Maholy Nagy, or Frank Lloyd Wright; “pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake” to Arturo Toscanini or Aaron Copland—all are expressive actions. All are interpretive of some phase of an individual’s environment, symbolic of his state of participation in his environment. Each is a medium for the growth and maturation of the individual.

But this does not mean that each original gesture refined to a communication art is merely another way of “saying” what could be “said” more clearly in language. If we go along with Susanne Langer, and she seems a pretty reliable guide, we find that each art provides for control of a different phase of human existence. Painting, for instance, provides for clearer perception of space relations; music for

closer awareness of relationships in time; dance lends itself to understanding the significance of balancing force against force; and literature may assist in a clearer understanding of remembered human processes of behavior.

### **Need for Avenues of Response**

What we would seem to need then is curricular provision for communication arts and skills to function not so much as “creative” activities but as avenues of impression and response to the immediate environment. After all, is not any statement, any drawing, any graph, any bit of music creative when it provides for individual response to a story, a political event or a science experiment? Let me illustrate again. In one of our New York schools a beginning teacher of English has a seventh grade of great big overgrown slow learners. They are well behaved but silent. Last week she read them an excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath*—the two-for-a-penny candy scene at the dry lands filling station. When she had finished, rather than try to get them to talk about the story, she gave them paper and crayons. Their responses through design told the teacher many things. The roadside filling station was almost uniformly a city cafeteria. The desert background was not pictured. The car wreck was a city-corner smashup. But the display of the drawings was accompanied with animated conversation. The class seemed to have broken through the sound barrier with the aid of another medium. What they will do next time, when the teacher uses material that describes their own city streets, remains to be seen. She anticipates that they will begin to take

hold of some part of their environment and feel more sense of belonging in it.

In a very different situation last year an eighth grade group in the training school at Wisconsin State College at Oshkosh confronted the teacher with a request to "study ourselves, now we're in high school." The teacher took this in stride, as it were, and held up a copy of *Time* magazine from his desk. It had a characteristic *Time* cover—color photograph of a current personality superimposed on a background of significant symbols—in this instance, if I remember correctly, a picture of Perle Mesta against a backdrop of oil derricks and diplomatic insignia. In the context of their own question the *Time* cover suddenly meant something for the first time—and they conceived the idea of studying themselves by designing symbols to represent their ideas, interests and ideals. The youngsters brought piles of magazines to clip; the art teacher came in with varied materials and a readiness to help with her skilled know-how.

The results of this sort of communications approach were almost frightening, for they revealed how far youngsters can go when they bring their whole selves into active participation. One very drab and sallow and apparently friendless boy pasted his name in brilliant letters across a black background. Beneath it he drew a circle and attached to it pipe-cleaner figures of human beings in various attitudes of trying to get inside the circle.

Another youngster, a much more fully socialized girl, represented herself with symbols of home, a school, a church and favorite sports. Beside each symbol was a dark silhouette of the

symbol. The whole collage was covered with cellophane, making a kind of transparent envelope, into which she poured a box of confetti containing colors of her symbolic figures. When she came to write about her representation later, she showed that the main symbols represented what her parents and teachers (inner-directeds) wanted her to think about things; the silhouettes were her own thoughts which she dared not express; and the light and ever-moving confetti represented the natural changes that she observed herself going through every minute of the day. Could these approaches to self-knowledge have come to a thirteen-year-old boy and girl through writing an autobiography, or reading a junior high school psychology text?

You can multiply these examples many times—not only of individuals "getting next to themselves" through communication in several media—but of whole classes coming closer to their communities as they spoke and listened to many people, as they read and wrote and prepared maps, diagrams and pictures of their findings.

We have touched on one or two phases of research that, even though we may not channel them directly into the classroom, may provide us with an organizing center for much other research in vocabulary building, the teaching of usage and language structure. It may also provide for a point of view toward the unified teaching of language skill in speaking, listening, observing, reading, writing and demonstrating. It may suggest to some of us the need for eliminating the prevailing separation of language as a "general subject" from music and drawing as "special sub-

jects." In fact, as we come to find all these expressive media so central to personal development, we may be moved to consider seriously a new kind of *core*—"a communication core," if you will, in which children can refine their communication skill in every medium to the point of serviceability in pursuing any interest.

To such a core the language teacher might contribute skill in using the language of journalism and politics, and the language of science and mathematics, as well as the language of letter writing and fiction—for they are all different, in ways that the language specialist knows well. The teacher of visual and plastic arts might contribute skills for interpreting and creating bulletin boards, charts, graphs, maps for

scientific data and experiments, as well as "pictures" in the conventional sense. The teacher of music might contribute skills in interpreting and playing music symbolic of our day, as well as performing concert pieces of another age. And all these teachers of communication arts and skills might gather their forces to develop skills for adequate handling of the powerful composite media of movie and television. Such a core, broadly considered, would not be a competing core, but a "core of cores" enriching every phase of school-life experience.

It may be that nothing short of this communication core, which consists of the processes of personality integration, will meet the world need for the new autonomous person.

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## *The Common Denominator in Religious Values*

MERRILL E. BUSH

A common denominator of religious values and prescriptions for daily living runs through the scriptures of the world's living religions. It is, this author asserts, these enduring values and *not the creeds* which should be taught in public schools.

**T**EACHING religious values in public schools is not only common practice, it is all but inescapable in our Judeo-Christian culture. The values taught command widespread, almost universal approval. Yet we witness today a vigorous controversy over the teaching of "religion" in public schools which often mounts to a bitterness and acrimony entirely out of keeping with the teachings of the great religious leaders.

Charges that the schools are "Godless" and "secular" (strange that "secular" should be used as an epithet!) are met with counter assertions that "religion has no place in the *public* schools," or that the critics threaten to "break down the wall of separation between church and state," or that "it is *unethical*" (if not also unconstitutional) "to compel children of many different religions to submit to religious teachings contrary to their own beliefs

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