Herbert R. Jensen

The Communication Specialist and the Learning Center

WHAT role is implied for the specialist identified in the title? What kind of thinking lies back of the specifications for this person? What kind of center for learning is envisioned by such a specialist?

The philosopher, John Locke, provided in his writings a foundation for the role of this specialist when he wrote, "Unless I have seen it with mine own eyes and perceived it with my own understanding, I am void of knowledge and as much in darkness as before."

An earlier philosopher, Confucius, also contributed a basis in his statement, "one hundred times heard not so good one look." This poetic phrasing is the more accurate translation of the popular misconception that Confucius said, "one picture is worth one thousand or ten thousand words," depending on whether the speaker is from Great Britain or the United States. It might be added that, unfortunately, much of educational television currently appears to disprove both Locke and Confucius.

Now a basic premise of the role of the communication or media specialist, as he is being called with increasing frequency, is the intimate and inseparable relationship between visual experience and language—between the picture and the word. Korzybski, the eminent authority on communication and semantics, held that prior to the age of formal schooling, the child gains all his knowledge essentially by trial and error—from experience itself. All of the words he knows and commands, he learns during and after the "experiencing," never before. His original experiences, essentially visual and audio, are intimately connected to word forms learned verbally from his family and his playmates.

In his formal schooling, however, the child begins to learn words with fewer contacts with direct experience. As he goes through the grades, the meanings of words tend to become less clear. More and more, he uses words without an adequate background of concrete experience. A slight falling behind in understanding soon becomes a major problem in the pursuit of achievement, and the learner is soon on the skids to a career of failures. Visual and audio materials, properly used, provide learning experiences for the school child in his natural vernacular, experiences that make more

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meaningful the words he knows and uses in becoming a more effective person. Modern communication technology, for the first time in the history of the race, can free the learner from the limitation of words.

To Store—Retrieve—Utilize

The concept of communication technology used here refers to planned system-wide development of effective teacher-use of the means used to store, retrieve and utilize:

Print—in all its varieties and loci

Pictorial imagery—from cartoon to television

Audio imagery—from natural sounds through the spoken word.

The revolution in education we read about is possible primarily because technology has now given the educator the potential of essentially the same fluency for visual and verbal symbols that Gutenberg provided for the printed word. This in turn, has developed a new market for the international exchange of ideas and information, the products of which now make it unnecessary for human experience to be translated into print or language and retranslated out by the learner in order to be understood and shared.

Equally important is the fact that when simultaneous visual and audio images are combined, as in motion pictures and television, they far exceed the ability of words to inform and instruct. For the limiting serial order and relationship of words seriously interfere in providing comprehensibility and understanding to the learner, especially the beginner.

By contrast, with visual communication, the learner is a viewer, an eyewitness to all of the forces impinging on a given experience. Comprehension comes quickly through receipt of hundreds of visual and audio cues simultaneously impacting on his senses. The naked written and spoken word, with the inherent requirement that they be lined up and inspected, single file, one at a time, for retrieving meaning can never possess this impact. We hurry to say that we do not hold that the spoken or written word does not have its own unique power. Rather, that for the learner, this power is only derived after long and continuing exposure to the visual and audio imagery of the life experience preceding.

What technology and the new media can do on a massive scale, if permitted, is the conservation of the precious face-to-face time of teachers *with* students. Concern about moral and spiritual values, attitudes and the behavior of youth, indicates that these make up a vital area in need of improvement. We shall not argue whether this is more rightfully the province of the home and the church instead of the school or vice versa. We need only to agree that whatever strengthening can be done by either agency should be done. Technology can make a major contribution in helping the school in personality development.

A massive, appropriate application of communication technology can increase productivity in the knowledge and skill-mastery area of student development. This increase in learning productivity, in the long run, could result in increased salary compensation schedules to attract highly qualified scholars who would also be examples of the kinds of human beings we would like to have our children become. A seldom mentioned contribution of technology to education may be the resulting increase of effective face-to-face impact and imprinting of mature high quality images or models of human

behavior on the developing embryo adult.

We need to develop a learning environment in which the unique contribution of both teachers and technology, in interaction, are brought to bear most effectively on the education of the growing and developing young.

Communication Specialist

It is not expected that the communication specialist can or will bring about this development singlehandedly. Such development must be a cooperative venture of the entire staff operating at a high professional level. This specialist, however, as steward of the important key of communication effectiveness, must be perceived as exercising a basic role in the entire educational enterprise. For effective communication is basic to all of the processes by which a school system attempts to achieve curricular objectives and meet educational needs. Communication is the key that unlocks curiosity and interest in a student's mind, and the knowledge and information in that of the teacher. Greater meaningfulness and interest are catalysts in the learning process. The capability of communication utilizing all forms of symbols, verbal, pictorial and audio, in rich variety, to produce greater meaning and interest, has been proven repeatedly. Applying this quality of communication to the total teaching-learning process will measurably increase productivity in learning.

The communication specialist, it is suggested, needs to base his role on two foundation stones: (a) the important and intimate "experience-word" relationship in learning and teaching, usually so glibly discussed, but essentially still not understood, and (b) the ever-expanding quantity and quality of knowledge to be learned. His concern must be based on the vital interrelationship of pictures, recordings and the printed word of books —the three depositories of the visual, audio and verbal imagery of human experience. Further, he must be concerned with all three as equally essential parts of the process of communication, which is so vital to effective teaching and learning. For, as an instructional leader, his primary task is to provide the variety of both printed and technological facilities and resources in such professional quality, quantity and effectiveness that teachers and learners can and will use fluently these three types of images in vitalizing teaching and learning.

Further, he must be solidly grounded in curriculum and instruction, the psychology of learning and human development, administration, library procedures, and communication technology in all of its aspects, if he is to be fully effective in his work. Such a background is essential to the professional competence required for success in discharging responsibilities for the essential in-service teaching of staff, and for public information programs to solicit community support for change. For major changes in education today, and we have been discussing a major change, are not brought about by small dreams and uninformed leadership.

Currently, many differing roles are being performed by the person perceived, traditionally, in the term audio-visual specialist. These range from "mover of equipment and film," at its lowest, to "mover of the educational enterprise" at its highest.

How the role of the specialist in this area is perceived by two groups of professionals, the specialists themselves and the top administrative officials, is critical in realizing the advantages educational technology can bring to the process of

learning and the rate at which this technology is introduced and applied. Some administrators, having a specialist who is essentially a mover of equipment and materials, are discontented because they do not have a mover of the educational enterprise. Other administrators fixedly oriented to the word and textbook tradition, are disconcerted if they have a specialist showing an interest in actually moving the enterprise.

The Vast Potential

In this brief space our concern has been with what ought to be, rather than what is. For the view is held that in the field of instructional "techni-methodology," one of the specialist's main roles is to assist school staffs in displacing overgeneralized, traditional, non-research oriented bases for decision making about what is taught and how it is taught, with programs of instruction derived from fact interpreted by informed professional opinion and judgment. The facts required need to be obtained from the application of operations research and system analysis approaches to the process of learning and its surrounding ecology. It is ventured that the communication specialist, ideally, should be somewhat versed in the procedures of such research techniques also.

Given this kind of personnel and point of view, if schools were really to proceed full steam ahead in applying research results and follow the premises outlined, education could, as it has been stated, double the rate and quality of teaching and learning within a decade. They would, at the same time, raise the quality of citizens developed.

The instructional environment resulting would be a school system in which each building would be a Center for Learning, wired to the world. Here, for all ages on an ungraded basis with planned achievement levels for advancing, the emphasis would be on individual work-study carels backed up with Learning Resource Centers complete with reference libraries; with accessory meeting rooms of various sizes for discussion and large group presentations as needed; with laboratories and workshops for the affairs of science and the fine and practical arts; auditoriums for the creative arts of music, speaking and theater; and gymnasia for physical development.

The major change would be that these facilities would be designed and constructed to permit the widest possible student contact, on an individualized basis, with the highest quality pictorial-audio-print study material the world makes available.

Communication technology can and does free the packaging of information to be presented and learned, from the obvious limitation of its restricted containment in the mind of a teacher and its cold storage in words in print. The film, magnetic tape, and now the video-tape-cartridge, including programed learning, for the storage of organized units of the selected culture and knowledge of time past, which is often called curriculum, plus the living, pulsating, radio and television broadcast signal of time present, can provide every learner of whatever age with tutorial advantages never previously known by even the children of the world's wealthiest citizens or kings.

Current developments in satellites and television technology can make every schoolroom a window on the world and the universe, making these the living textbook and reference resources for learners everywhere.

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cordings in a listening room or with earphones, according to the circumstances; others preparing materials in an area where facilities and supplies are made available.

The challenge and the opportunity for the librarian in the materials center is all but limitless. How he meets the challenge and takes advantage of the opportunities will make the difference between whether the library will be swallowed up by the materials center, overshadowed by the materials center or expanded to encompass or become the materials center.

A Library—*Wilner*

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Center looks in a different way at a book. I do not believe that books can be relegated to the region of materials, touching as many of them do the realm of the heart and the spirit. Books cannot be discovered by catalogs and indexes alone. They must be read. How else could we answer requests such as, "Find me a book about a girl who goes away for a visit and has a real good time and comes home again." . . . "Find me a book that feels like *Loretta Mason Potts.*" (When you say, "How does it feel?" you receive the reply, "Well, you're there.") . . . "Find me a funny book and a wonderful one." (And, knowing the speaker, you know what *wonderful* means.)

Books are not *things* to be *used.* Too many teachers ask of a book "How can I use it?", expecting it to teach a lesson or correlate with the study of the moment, underestimating the tremendous dimensions in books: the width of wonder and wisdom, the breadth of beauty, the length of loveliness, the height of humor, and the depth of delight.

Books that give information should give it accurately and interestingly, but there are books which give immeasurably more. Books that take us beyond the bounds of time and space into ages past, into other regions and races, into imaginative realms where good and evil are engaged in a mighty struggle. This is what makes children readers: the magical process of converting words on a page into the thoughts and feelings of people like ourselves or people far from here or long ago, in mystical realms like Narnia or down-to-earth ones like Cranberry, Connecticut, in the big woods of Wisconsin, or on the Island of the Blue Dolphins, on Spider Monkey Island or on the Island of Tangerina.

Children become readers from experiences with books in which "you're there" knowing, seeing, feeling, understanding, wondering, watching, waiting, hoping, fearing, guessing, wishing.

In the making of readers the school library exists to help.

Communication Specialist—*Jensen*

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Teachers would be able to devote their time to the tasks that only human beings can accomplish. The planning of programs; the direction of discussion; the identification of student need and difficulty; the evaluation of projects and achievement involving subjective judgments; individual guidance and counseling on the problems of social, personal and career development; the human acts and contacts for which there has never been adequate time and energy—all of these technology can free a teacher to do.

The end result could be that the entire school plant, and local community everywhere and the world at large would be the Centers of Learning, not only for the developing young but also for the graduated adult.