

Audio-visual Aids and the Library¹

Dr. Shane, consultant for the audio-visual education program of the Demonstration School, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, believes that audio-visual aids are really books of an unconventional sort. Accordingly, in his opinion, the librarian is the best equipped to organize an efficient audio-visual service.

BY DERIVATION, the word "library" means a place where books can be had. It is books that librarians are trained to service. Today, books pour from the world's presses in a torrent with which even the best equipped library can scarcely hope to keep pace. Why then should librarians concern themselves with anything but books? What have they to do with audio-visual aids?

The answer to this question is that audio-visual aids are themselves books of a kind. They are picture books in a new format. They are Talking Books but not merely for the blind. Moreover, when we think about the enormous increase in population which recent years have brought to our schools and colleges, and when we think of the changes which this increase has brought about in the preparation of the college freshman, we realize that the need for these unconventional audio-visual books has become very great.

The young people of today do not turn instinctively to books for ideas and information as you and I used to do. They

live in a world which gets many of its ideas and much of its information from neighborhood movies, radios, and even the comic strips. Advertisers and statesmen learned this long ago.

It should be borne in mind, however, that libraries which offer an audio-visual service are really stimulating the wider use of books. Every worth while educational broadcast or motion picture arouses interests which can be satisfied only through reading. It is probably in recognition of this fact that the New York State Board of Regents has granted pupils the right to substitute consistent listening to approved radio programs for part of the reading of books hitherto required in preparation for certain regents examinations. Reports on twenty radio programs may be offered in lieu of reviews of three authors.² In the long run, students who listen to such broadcasts as "The World Is Yours," or who see and listen to such films as the new Erpi release, *Colonial Children*, can scarcely fail to turn to the library for further information about the vital realities which they have glimpsed in film and broadcast.

Audio-visual Aids Defined

Something which stimulates the learner imaginatively to recreate an experience and make it a vital nucleus for further learning—that is what we mean by audio-visual aids. In more conventional language, the term refers to any activity,

¹ Presented at the Chicago midwinter meeting of the Subsection for Libraries of Teacher-Training Institutions of the A.C.R.L.

² Item in *Education by Radio*, Aug.-Sept. 1939.

apparatus, or materials which are used to bring about learning through concrete sensory experience. To be sure, some so-called audio-visual aids are exclusively auditory, others are exclusively visual, and a few involve not only sight and sound, but other senses as well. However, "audio-visual aids" and "audio-visual education" appear to be the most acceptable of the various designations which are currently being substituted for those long-established misnomers "visual aids" and "visual instruction." It should be noted that audio-visual aids are numerous and of many different kinds. It is a serious though not uncommon error to assume that motion pictures, or motion pictures and radio at the most, are the only notable types. The accompanying tentative outline will suggest the kinds of apparatus and materials now generally available.

Types of Audio-visual Aids Now Generally Available³

I. Aids which present the original experience more or less completely

1. School journey or excursion
2. Public address system
3. Radio
4. Museum objects

II. Aids which reproduce the experience more or less completely

1. Dramatization for learning purposes
2. Models
3. Records of visual experience (each requires appropriate projector and screen, except as indicated)

- a) Silent motion pictures
- b) Still pictures
- (1) Stereographs (require stereoscope or telebinocular)

- (2) Flat pictures (no apparatus)
- (3) Opaque projections
- (4) Glass slides
- (5) Film strips
- (6) Other projections
- c) Graphic materials (require no apparatus)
 - (1) Blackboard
 - (2) Wall and bulletin board materials: illustrations, posters, cartoons, maps, charts, graphs, diagrams
4. Records of auditory experience (require phonograph or pickup)
 - a) Instantaneous recordings
 - b) Phonograph records (including radio transcriptions)
5. Records of audio-visual experience (each requires appropriate sound projection apparatus and screen)
 - a) Sound motion pictures
 - b) Sound slide films
 - c) Other visual materials with sound accompaniment

Importance to Education

On the importance of audio-visual aids to all educational agencies, the report of the Regents' Inquiry into the Character and Cost of Public Education in the State of New York may be quoted:

In recent years notable advances have been made also in the mechanisms of recording, analyzing, and communicating facts, ideas, events, and scenes. When the printed book was invented five hundred years ago, it laid the basis for the text-book, scientific treatises, libraries of knowledge, and reference works as tools of education. In our generation many entirely new devices have been invented and perfected—the radio, the moving picture and the microprints; elaborate statistical, scoring, and computing machines; television, and many kinds of mechanical, photographic, and electrical transcription. It is hardly necessary to call attention to the importance of these

³ Freely adapted from the classification of visual aids used by Hoban, Hoban, and Zisman, in *Visualizing the Curriculum*. Cordon Company, 1937.

new tools for education. With their aid the schools of tomorrow will be able to do a far better teaching job than we can do now—and often at less expense. Any educational system which ignores these new methods and mechanisms will soon find that it is out of date.⁴

Systems for administering audio-visual aids range from the state visual education agency or the city department of visual education down to the single school unit. Whether the administrative unit be large or small, there are certain problems which have to be met wherever audio-visual aids are used. Some of these are administrative, as the setting up of a budget. Some are supervisory, as the training of instructors in the use of equipment, and guidance in the choice and use of materials.

Other problems are the selection, purchase, classification, and cataloging of apparatus and materials; provision for booking, charging, and transporting apparatus and materials; and provision for their care and repair. To the librarian these are all familiar procedures, even though applied to unfamiliar materials. And in recent years a few libraries have undertaken this service. The earliest instance which we have found recorded is the distribution of visual aids through the city libraries of Long Beach, Pasadena, and Kalamazoo, as reported by Dunn and Schneider in 1936.⁵

Librarians Best Equipped for Service

As the use of audio-visual aids becomes more general, it will be recognized that the services of acquisition, preparation,

and distribution are much more important than the mere operation of apparatus. It will then become obvious that in any faculty the person best equipped to service audio-visual aids is a member of the library staff. No other faculty member has the training which every librarian has received—training which is indispensable to an efficient long-range audio-visual program.

In accordance with the general viewpoint here set forth, the Library School of George Peabody College is requiring all of its students to take a general course in audio-visual aids, and is increasing the emphasis in its own professional courses upon the servicing of audio-visual aids. In the Peabody Demonstration School a library-centered audio-visual education program has been in process of development during the past two years. Although carried on at the elementary and high school level, this program may offer a number of points of interest to the college or university librarian who is considering the servicing of audio-visual aids.

Several principles have been developed in the administration of this program:

1. Audio-visual materials (but not equipment) may be purchased on the library book fund. Expenses incidental to borrowing or renting films and other needed materials are also charged to the book fund.

2. The library assumes no responsibility for the production of materials. Although our faculty includes candid camera fans, motion picture amateurs, and sound recording enthusiasts, the library does not find it practicable to furnish these persons with equipment or supplies. It sees no objection to purchasing finished materials which they may produce, provided that these are recommended through the regu-

⁴ New York (State) University, Regents' Inquiry into the Character and Cost of Public Education in the State of New York. *Education for American Life*. McGraw-Hill, 1938, pp. 27-28.

⁵ Dunn, Fannie W. and Schneider, Etta. "Practices in City Administration of Visual Education." *Educational Screen* 15:270 f., Nov. 1936.

lar channels. The librarian is nowhere expected to sponsor book production; no more should he undertake the production of audio-visual materials.

3. In our set-up the librarian assumes no responsibility for supervision, which is a function of the audio-visual consultant. In most institutions at least one faculty member can be found who will be able to assist in an informal initial program of teacher training and guidance. In some cases the librarian might prove to be the person best qualified for this service also.

Certain administrative procedures have also been developed:

To meet the problem of acquisition, preparation, and distribution, the following tentative forms are being tried out: (1) accession record for owned audio-visual materials and equipment; (2) accession record for borrowed audio-visual materials and equipment; (3) permanent record card (comparable to the conventional shelf-list card); (4) circulation card for booking and charging.

Thus far in our program the librarian has not undertaken the inspection and repair of apparatus and materials. In the smaller schools this work can generally be done by volunteers from the faculty or student body. In larger institutions, it is better economy to employ a properly trained assistant on a half-time or full-time basis at a moderate salary.

The problem of distribution involves some special difficulties. The importance of booking materials and equipment well in advance of their use simply cannot be overlooked; a last-minute decision on the part of two or more instructors to use the same materials or equipment can only lead to embarrassment and confusion.

Another special problem is that of providing for the transportation of equip-

ment from library to classroom and return. Much of the equipment is fragile and expensive, and some of it is heavy and rather awkward to carry. As a general thing, equipment has to be brought in and set up between classes—that is, in about five minutes.

Problems of distribution on a college or university campus would obviously be more complex than in a single building. It may be suggested that college departments should be encouraged to purchase, house, and care for their own apparatus. Only the most expensive items, such as the sound motion picture projector, might better be owned and circulated by the library. Materials, on the other hand, can probably be serviced most efficiently through the library, no matter how large the institution.

Space is not here available for a detailed analysis of the cost of setting up an audio-visual program. Audio-visual materials may be obtained in a variety of ways, and must be selected in terms of local needs. It would therefore be difficult to estimate the cost of a representative materials collection.

Initial Cost of Equipment

In many institutions the librarian would find much equipment and materials scattered in various departments, and needing only to be brought under some sort of cooperative control for effective use. Here it is tact rather than money which must be expended. However, a small library with no audio-visual equipment whatever could make an interesting beginning on a very small scale by spending about \$100 for a film strip projector, a portable electric phonograph, a dozen film strips, and a dozen phonograph records.

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a record of acquisition, a record of location, a record of gaps—in short, a complete record of all the information necessary for the acquisition, treatment, and use of material. Centralization means that the material need not be held up as it travels from point to point. The difficulties attendant upon the handling of a particular title can be resolved once, for all purposes, and the title made available to the reader.

Centralization also means economy because members of the staff are not assigned merely to an acquisition of material, the cataloging of material, or to reference work. They are assigned to all of these. Functional concentration can be shifted to that particular point where the pressure is greatest at any particular time. We all

know of the situation, where, at a given time, the acquisition work may be eased, while the catalog department is overwhelmed, or vice versa. We know that there may be a time of the year when little buying or cataloging is done, but there is great pressure on the circulation and reference staff. The result usually is that each department is staffed according to the needs of its peak period of work, with a resultant loss in quiet periods. With centralization, there is no such loss.

As a result of the survey that has been made of methods used in the care and handling of serials in one hundred and twenty-six college, university, and public libraries, we find that complete centralization of functions relating to serials offers the best solution of vexing problems.

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To buy audio-visual equipment of all the types implied in the outline above, i.e., small portable public address system, radio, silent motion picture projector, stereoscopes or telebinocular, opaque projector, stereopticons, film strip projector, record players to operate at 78 and 33½ r.p.m., sound motion picture projector, sound slide film projector—to buy one of the smaller models of each of these types of apparatus would cost something like \$1000. As suggested above, in a large institution many departments should duplicate most of this equipment.

Conclusion

This discussion assumes that audio-

visual aids are now too valuable and too widely used to be ignored by any forward-looking educational agency. It recognizes audio-visual aids as a special type of book, and hence takes the position that the librarian is the logical person to service them, even if this involves some slight additions to his professional training. Certain visual aids have long been library serviced. Recently a few libraries have undertaken a more complete audio-visual program. The Peabody Demonstration School Library is a case in point. We believe that the next decade will see school and college libraries emerging as centers of a finer audio-visual education program than has thus far been developed.