

Classrooms Without Walls

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It's natural today to speak
of "audio and visual aids" to teaching,
for we still think of the book as norm,
of other media as incidental.
We also think of the new media
– press, radio, movies, TV –
as MASS MEDIA
& think of the book
as an individualistic form.

**Individualistic because it
isolated the reader in silence &
helped create the Western "I."
Yet it was the first product of
mass production.**

With it everybody could have
the same books.
It was impossible
in medieval times for
different students, different institutions,
to have copies of the same book.
Manuscripts, commentaries, were dictated.
Students memorized.

Instruction was almost entirely oral,
done in groups.
Solitary study was reserved for
the advanced scholar.
The first printed books were
"visual aids" to oral instruction.

Before the printing press,
the young learned by
listening, watching, doing.
So, until recently, our own
rural children learned the
language & skills of their elders.
Learning took place
outside the classroom.
Only those aiming at professional careers
went to school at all.

Today in our cities,
most learning occurs outside the classroom.
The sheer quantity of information conveyed by
press-mags-film-TV-radio

far exceeds

the quantity of information conveyed by
school instruction & texts.
This challenge has destroyed
the monopoly of the book as a teaching aid
& cracked the very walls of the classroom,
so suddenly,
we're confused, baffled.

In this violently upsetting social situation,
many teachers naturally view
the offerings of the new media
as entertainment,
rather than education.

**But this view carries
no conviction to the student.**

Find a classic
which wasn't first regarded
as light entertainment.
Nearly all vernacular works
were so regarded until the 19th century.

Many movies are obviously handled
with a degree of insight & maturity
at least equal to the level permitted
in today's textbooks.
Olivier's **Henry V & Richard III**
assemble a wealth of
scholarly & artistic skill
which reveal Shakespeare at a very high level,
yet in a way easy
for the young to enjoy.

The movie is to dramatic representation
what the book was to the manuscript.
It makes available
to many & at many times & places
what otherwise would be restricted
to a few at few times & places.
The movie, like the book,
is a ditto device.
TV shows to 50,000,000 simultaneously.
Some feel that the value
of experiencing a book
is diminished by being extended
to many minds.
This notion is always implicit
in the phrases "mass media," "mass entertainment" –
useless phrases obscuring the fact **THAT**
English itself
is a mass medium.
Today we're beginning to realize
that the new media aren't just
mechanical gimmicks

for creating worlds of illusion,
but new languages
with new & unique powers of expression.

*Historically, the resources of English
have been shaped & expressed in
constantly new & changing ways.
The printing press changed,
not only the quantity of writing,
but the character of language
& the relations between author & public.
Radio, film, TV pushed
written English towards
the spontaneous shifts & freedom of
the spoken idiom.*

*They aided us in the recovery
of intense awareness of
facial language & bodily gesture.
If these "mass media"
should serve only
to weaken or corrupt
previously achieved levels of
verbal & pictorial culture,
it won't be because
there's anything inherently wrong with them.*

**It will be because we've failed
to master them as new languages in time
to assimilate them to
our total cultural heritage.**

*These new developments,
under quiet analytic survey,
point to a basic strategy of culture
for the classroom.
When the printed book first appeared,
it threatened
the oral procedures of teaching, and
created
the classroom as we now know it.
Instead of making
his own text, his own dictionary, his own grammar,
the student started out with these tools.*

*He could study, not one,
but several languages.
Today these new media
threaten, instead of merely reinforce,
the procedures of this traditional classroom.*

*It's customary to answer this threat
with denunciations of the unfortunate character &
effect
of movies & TV,
just as the comicbook
was feared & scorned & rejected
from the classroom.
Its good and bad features
in form & content,*

*when carefully set beside
other kinds of art & narrative,
could have become a major
asset to the teacher.*

*Where student interest is already
intensely focused
is the natural point
at which to be
in the elucidation of
other problems & interests.*

**The educational task
is not only
to provide
basic tools
of perception,
but to develop
judgment & discrimination
with ordinary social experience.**

*Few students ever acquire skill
in analysis of newspapers.
Fewer have any ability to discuss
a movie intelligently.
To be articulate & discriminating
about ordinary affairs & information
is the mark of an educated man.*

It's misleading to suppose
*there's any difference between
education & entertainment.*

This distinction merely relieves people
*of the responsibility of
looking into the matter.*

It's like setting up a distinction between
*didactic & lyric poetry
on the ground that one
teaches, the other pleases.*

However, it's always been true
*that whatever pleases
teaches more effectively.*