PROFESSIONALIZING THE AUDIO-VISUAL FIELD

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The professionalization of the educational field is a concern of all educators. In this article James D. Finn has undertaken the task of presenting a framework within which audio-visual specialists can work toward such professionalization. It is the first of a series of articles by members of the DAVI Committee on Professional Education on different aspects of this problem.

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Specialization of occupation is a growing social factor in modern life. This factor is as applicable to education as to any other field. Where once there were only teachers, there are now administrators, psychologists, curriculum consultants, counselors, and many other educational specialists. Each of these specialties is developing into a profession within the general profession of education. Educators whose main responsibility lies in the preparation, distribution, and use of audio-visual materials represent another group of specialized personnel newly developed and integrated into the field of education.

In addition to the fact that people working with audio-visual materials are devoting the major share of their time to a specialized phase of education and are developing special interests, techniques, etc., there is also the fact that the audio-visual field itself is somewhat unique in that it embraces all branches of the communication arts and technology and brings new disciplines to bear upon the problems of education. This second fact makes the audio-visual field even more of a specialized educational activity than, say, the teaching of reading.

In recent years audio-visual workers have become sensitive to the professional problems of their specialty. Questions have been raised as to the possible degree of professionalization of the movement; as to what, if any, certification requirements should be set up for audio-visual directors, and as to the long-range professional objectives of associations such as the Department of Audio-Visual Instruction of the NEA (DAVI). DAVI has set up a Committee on Professional Education to study the general problem of professionalization.

It is the purpose of a series of papers, of which this is the first, to present a study of the problem of professionalization to the membership

of DAVI from the Committee on Professional Education. These papers will analyze the present status of the field to determine, if possible, the degree of professionalization that has been developed, to review the historical development of this status, and to suggest some problems that must be met and some possible solutions that might be developed in order to move the field further in the direction of a true profession.

It is hoped that these studies will stimulate the membership of DAVI and other people working in the field to undertake appropriate action. It is very significant to the Committee on Professional Education that this series of papers is inaugurated in the first issue of the new professional magazine of the Department of Audio-Visual Instruction.

Tools of a Profession

In considering the audio-visual field as a possible area of professionalization, a good place to begin is with the question: What are the characteristics of a profession?[1] A profession has, at least, these characteristics: (a) an intellectual technique, (b) an application of that technique to the practical affairs of man, (c) a period of long training necessary before entering into the profession, (d) an association of the members of the profession into a closely-knit group with a high quality of communication between members, (e) a series of standards and a statement of ethics which is enforced, and (f) an organized body of intellectual theory constantly expanding by research.

The statements identifying these characteristics need little comment. That a profession is primarily intellectual in character can be readily seen by viewing the activities of any profession; a doctor who did not reflectively think before prescribing is inconceivable. That a profession applies its knowledge directly to the benefit of man is also obvious.

The long periods of training necessary to develop specialists such as design engineers or oral surgeons are common examples of the third characteristic. Professional associations which began their evolution in the Middle Ages are a part of every civilized society. They identify the members who have successfully passed through the long training

[1]The best quick source on the nature and development of the professions with special reference to the teaching profession may be found in Smith (16). Part Four of this volume, "The Nature and Status of the Teaching Profession," contains pertinent articles by A. M. Carr-Saunders, Abraham Flexner, A. N. Whitehead, and William O. Stanley. Many of Flexner's other works also consider this problem. See also articles relating to the professions and professionalization in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences. A good idea of the development of a profession to a status closely resembling medicine may be obtained by studying the last four or five years of the *American Psychologist.* In this journal reports of committees on standards, ethics, training, etc., are particularly revealing.

stage and, in fact, even control to a great degree the nature of that training. Communication between members of the profession is carried on by meetings, journals of high quality, consultations, and other means.

Architects, actuaries, engineers all have their codes of conduct or statements of ethics and various forms of standards. Coupled with this ethical formulation is a means of enforcing it in the more highly organized professions. Sometimes this enforcement responsibility rests with the professional association, sometimes with the state as a licensing body, and sometimes with both. Although there is much criticism of many professions at this point and some evidence (11) that many codes are window dressing to protect the profession from public interference and are not enforced except to the advantage of the profession as against the public, the fact remains that the idea of an ethic with the power of enforcement places a personal responsibility on each member of a profession not associated with other types of occupations.

Finally, the most fundamental and most important characteristic of a profession is that the skills involved are founded upon a body of intellectual theory and research. Furthermore, this systematic theory is constantly being expanded by research and thinking within the profession. As Whitehead says, "... the practice of a profession cannot be disjoined from its theoretical understanding or *vice versa*.... The antithesis to a profession is an avocation based upon customary activities and modified by the trial and error of individual practice. Such an avocation is a Craft...." (16:557) The difference between the bricklayer and the architect lies right here.

Professional Status of Audio-Visual Education

We can now examine the present status of audio-visual education when measured by these six tests of a profession. Are audio-visual personnel, in fact, professionals? By audio-visual personnel is meant, for the moment, those individuals who spend fifty per cent or more of their time working with audio-visual programs in schools and colleges as directors, supervisors, producers, consultants, etc., or those who engage in in-service and pre-service teacher training or research in this area.

An intellectual technique. First, the audio-visual worker does possess an intellectual technique. He has to think reflectively in such varied areas as the critical evaluation of materials, the visualization of abstract concepts, the improvement of instruction, and in many aspects of planning and administration. Audio-visual personnel, as a group, meet this criterion fairly well.

Practical application of the technique. Second, audio-visual techniques and materials justify their existence only as they become opera-

tive in classroom communication. Hence the test of practical application is completely met. Here the personnel of the field is at its best. The practical problems of classroom design, equipment, and materials are the meat and drink of most audio-visual people. As will be indicated below, there is, perhaps, even an overemphasis on this point.

Long period of training. The test of a high degree of professionalization of the audio-visual field, however, breaks down completely against the third criterion, a long period of rigorous training for the members of a profession. Most professions not only require this long period of training but are also in substantial agreement as to the nature of this training. This results in the professional associations specifying the nature of the training either through state regulation of some sort or through a system of accrediting training institutions.

The teaching profession as a whole does maintain training standards. But specific training for audio-visual directors and other personnel, with few exceptions, is still in the thinking stage. Although there have been directors of programs since before World War I, McClusky's bibliography lists only fifteen articles in the literature which discuss the requirements for audio-visual personnel (14). An examination of these articles reveals that only four are pertinent (6, 7, 12, 15). The others are devoted to administrative relationships and duties of principals, building coordinators, students, and miscellaneous problems. There has been practically no thoughtful consideration of this problem by audio-visual people and no attempt to develop standards.

The history of all professions reveals that the lengthy and rigorous training programs came after a long period of evolution. So it is not surprising to find that the audio-visual field has not made an organized effort as yet to develop such a program. The audio-visual field has developed rapidly and has surmounted many professional problems without showing all the required characteristics of a profession. Now, in 1953, the field is really, for the first time, in a position to take a good look at the problem of professional training. The State of Indiana has already taken action, and proposals have been published in other states as to the training necessary for an audio-visual director and pointing to some form of certification. The Committee on Professional Education of DAVI has this as one of its direct concerns.

The nature and content of professional education for audio-visual directors and other workers presents many problems that must be solved before audio-visual education can claim the status of a profession. The system of apprenticeship training that has been in operation is no longer adequate. Trained audio-visual personnel will not stay in their present jobs forever, and there is no longer the reservoir of service-experienced people to draw upon. Obviously, a graduate program that can provide the

competencies generated by service and industrial experience coupled with a better theoretical background is required immediately. The audio-visual field cannot be upgraded into a profession until this occurs. Other unsolved problems include the nature of certification standards, admission standards and practices, and placement.

Association and communication between members. The fourth criterion of a profession—a closely-knit association with a high quality of communication between members—is another point at which the audio-visual field does not measure up. Considering, first, professional association, the best that can be said at present is that a professional association is in the process of *becoming* and will someday emerge.

For many years DAVI was a comparatively weak organization held together by a small group of stalwarts. DAVI went through several re-organizations and managed to survive a depression and a war, but only in the last two or three years has the organization shown anything like the potential it can develop. The present arrangement which ties in the organization with the NEA through its executive secretary, with working national committees dealing with important problems, and with an increasing and interested membership promises much for the future.

The audio-visual field has also suffered from too many organizations. It is a moot question whether the organizations which represent special applications of the field such as The Association for Education by Radio-Television (AERT), the Educational Film Library Association (EFLA), and the Film Council of America (FCA) should remain outside of the main stream of the DAVI or become divisions within it in order to develop the best possible organization for the profession. The men and women who founded and carried on these organizations deserve nothing but commendation for their continual struggle and achievements, but the field as a profession would probably benefit more by merger than by continued separatism. At least this possibility should be thoroughly explored.

At the state and local levels, the structure of audio-visual organization has not yet even approached the professional. There are some fine state units, to be sure. The Audio-Visual Education Association of California, one of the oldest and strongest, is a professional organization in every sense of the word. AVID of Indiana has achieved national recognition, and AVDO of Ohio is rapidly growing in strength. And there are others. But much work remains to be done on the state and local levels.

It is at the other half of the concept of association—the idea of a high quality of communication between members—that the audio-visual movement as a whole had failed until the decision was made to publish the journal in which this paper appears. With the exception of Edgar Dale's *Newsletter,* all of the journals serving the field had difficulty

presenting professional content. This was true of *Educational Screen,* *Audio-Visual World, See and Hear, Audio-Visual Guide, Business Screen, The Journal of the AERT, Film News,* and all the rest. Most of the time these magazines were not able to print thorough and scholarly papers on the theoretical bases of audio-visual education; research studies for the most part were ignored and left to journals outside the field. When compared to the *Psychological Review, The American Journal of Sociology,* or a hundred other professional periodicals, the audio-visual magazines have simply not measured up professionally. There were good and sufficient reasons for this, but the fact remains.

This is not to say that these other audio-visual journals have failed to contribute as the audio-visual field struggled through its infancy. They have done their share in developing the field. In particular, Nelson Greene made a great contribution through the years with the *Educational Screen.* Greene was a scholar and had an intensive interest in professionalizing audio-visual education. Some examples of this interest were the publication of Krows' somewhat dull but important account of the development of the non-theatrical film, carried serially over two years; David Goodman's abortive column on research abstracts; and an attempt to carry a column which critically reviewed the literature of the field.

In general, the journals until now have made a contribution by carrying information on materials and equipment, occasionally publishing an article of professional merit, and everlastingly promoting and crusading for things audio-visual. This is a sign of the childhood and adolescence of the audio-visual movement. Audio-visual education is here to stay. Promotion and professionalization, while both are necessary, are not the same things. The time has come to add the dimension of professional content to the field's journals and it is hoped that the *Audio-Visual Communication Review* will fill the gap.

Professional communication is also carried on in meetings and conferences. The same criticisms leveled at the quality of the journals can apply to the quality of most audio-visual meetings. The meeting agenda seem to be of two types. One is a type designed to appeal to the practicing teacher and consists of a rehash of one or more chapters of Dale, Hoban, or Kinder carried on for two or three days! To the audio-visual professional, this type of meeting is about as intellectually stimulating as a plateful of unsalted grits would be to Oscar of the Waldorf. The other type appeals to the ever-present gadgeteer in audio-visual circles and, while it may not be concerned any more with the "F-value" of lenses, the topics have merely changed to more efficient booking forms, the JAN projector, or the heat and pressure necessary to laminate a 20 × 24 print.

The writer is not arguing for the elimination of meetings designed primarily for teachers nor for the abolishing of the technical problems

of the audio-visual field from consideration.   Certainly thousands of
teachers need help with the elementary concepts of audio-visual instruc-
tion;[2] certainly the audio-visual field will always be plagued with tech-
nical problems which must be solved.   But professional meetings are not
professional meetings if they are limited to these two areas.   The first
can be best dealt with in regular gatherings of teachers rather than at
audio-visual meetings, and the second area should be reduced to a sec-
tion or two of professional audio-visual conferences to restore perspective.

Again, improvement in recent years has been noted.   The agenda for
the Boston and St. Louis meetings of DAVI showed many signs of pro-
fessionalization not present at earlier meetings.   Many state meetings
have been improving programs.   Nevertheless, the improvement of audio-
visual conferences has a long way to go.

In summary, then, to achieve a real professional status, the audio-
visual movement needs to develop a strong and creative association at
the national and state and local levels; it needs to develop true profes-
sional journals, and it needs to improve conferences and meetings.
When these things are done, audio-visual personnel can say they have
met the requirements of the fourth criterion—the criterion of association
and communication.

Code of ethics and standards.   The fifth measuring point, ethics,
standards and their enforcement, is a function of the fourth, a strong
association.   Statements of ethics and publications of standards are de-
veloped by professional associations.   Audio-visual personnel, as mem-
bers of the teacher profession, are subject to the ethics of the profession.
As yet, nothing has been done to develop a separate code of ethics for
the audio-visual movement.

In the field of standards, there are signs that professionalization is
under way.   The Committee on Buildings and Equipment of DAVI is studying
standards in its field, and has produced an excellent publication. (17)

However, the publication of codes of ethics and manuals of standards
in itself guarantees nothing.   Professionalization occurs when enforce-
ment is possible and vigorous.   Thus, the American Medical Association
wages war on quacks and malpractice; engineers and architects write
building standards into the law, and the courts can disbar a lawyer for
illegal practice.

Enforcement is closely tied in with admission to the profession by a
licensing system (a function of criterion three—training), with placement
which assures that licensed personnel are hired, and, most fundamentally,

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[2]See, for example, the recording: Edgar Dale and James D. Finn, "The Im-
provement of Teaching Through Audio-Visual Materials," Educational Recording
Services, Los Angeles, 1951, an aid for teachers' meetings, illustrating the po-
sition of the writer on this point.

with an obligation on the part of each professional to the ethics and standards of his profession.

In view of the fact that the entire education profession has not met this criterion to the degree that the other professions have, it is questionable whether the audio-visual group will ever completely measure up to this point. And it is even questionable whether such a rigorous arrangement is either necessary or desirable. However, the audio-visual movement will at least have to reach the stage where it has a well-defined code of ethics, a series of standards based upon fundamental research, and a form of certification somewhat related to them. At the moment the field is not at this stage and does not meet criterion five.

Intellectual theory and research. As was indicated in the introductory phase of this paper, the most important characteristic of a profession was the sixth and last, that the technique of a profession is founded upon a body of systematic theory and research constantly being expanded by research and thinking within the profession. When the audio-visual field is measured against this characteristic, again the conclusion must be reached that professional status has not been attained.

Audio-visual workers have put a premium on "practicality" and have been criticized for this by colleagues within the field of education and by the *literati* from without. There is some merit to this criticism. For years, even at audio-visual meetings, someone has always been taking cracks at the "gadgeteers." As the writer has indicated above, it is his position that the audio-visual field *is* a result of the fruits of technology applied to the educational process and a certain amount of gadgeteering will always be necessary. Too much, however, reveals a poverty of thought.

The audio-visual field has never been too clear on the point that theory and practice must constantly interact in any intellectual activity of man. In line with some other mistaken educators, many audio-visual people have insisted that they want to be "practical" and not "theoretical," and that "experience" is the thing. This is, in part, an honest reaction against an older viewpoint that placed theory up somewhere near the Milky Way where it had no relation to practice except to cause aesthetic chills to chase up the spine of some professor.

This attitude, however, also represents a complete misunderstanding of the nature of reflective thinking, scientific progress, and the wellsprings of human behavior. As Dewey (4) has said, "...we find that experience when it is experimental does not signify the absence of large and far-reaching ideas and purposes. It is dependent upon them at every point." Without these large and far-reaching ideas any field, and this is particularly true of the audio-visual field, can go only so far and then has to stop.

Many of the criticisms listed above, lack of content at meetings, journals with little intellectual meat, etc., are merely symptoms of this greater trouble—lack of theoretical direction. Without a theory which produces hypotheses for research, there can be no expanding of knowledge and technique. And without a constant attempt to assess practice so that the theoretical implications may be teased out, there can be no assurance that we will ever have a theory or that our practice will make sense.

The audio-visual movement is new and growing, but it is in danger of becoming stunted if it is left to its present theoretical formulations. The present theory guiding the movement can be summed up in three references (2, 8, 10). The basic concept around which all three have oriented is the notion of the concrete-abstract relationship in learning. This is perhaps most thoroughly explored in Hoban. Dale adds material on retention and forgetting with a brief historical section, and Kinder expands to a very short history of communication and deals slightly with perception and imagery. All also emphasize the gamut of materials approach to learning, the concept of utilization, the experience theory of learning, and the strengths and weaknesses of the various aids.

The remainder of audio-visual theory is scattered throughout the literature. McClusky (13) has related audio-visual techniques to learning theory in a somewhat unique fashion; Brooker (1) began a line of thinking of promise in his discussion of communication which remains to be explored; Exton's (5) contribution of the concept of "optimum synthesis" has not received the attention it merits. All of these are but examples of the scattering of notions throughout audio-visual literature which, when brought together, might constitute a beginning of a fruitful theory.

To these examples, of course, much more would have to be added: most of the writings of Hoban, many of Dale's essays in the *Newsletter*, reports on the proceedings of conferences, generalizations derived from successful practice, generalizations derived from research, etc. The audio-visual field cannot rest its theoretical formulation on the contents of several textbooks designed for teacher training that do not include even all the useful theory to be found in audio-visual literature.

Because of the nature of the audio-visual field, however, useful theory is not confined to its own literature. As most workers realize, there is a literature of the film, of photography, of the museum, of dramatization, etc.; there is also the literature of educational method and curriculum; there is the literature of educational psychology, of social psychology, of social anthropology; there is the literature of art and design; finally and perhaps most important, there is the growing literature of communication. In fact, research and thinking in some parts of the

physical sciences (neurology, physiology, acoustics, etc.), the social sciences (social communication and control, learning theory, etc.), and the humanities (art, music, etc.) are each pertinent to the field. We need to understand the filmic expression ideas of Slavko Vorkapich, the visual experiments of Samuel Renshaw, and the communication philosophy of Susanne Langer.

Viewed in this light, most people in the audio-visual field are still guided by a theory which is fragmentary; theory as now guiding the field (the generalizations held by many of the workers) is not even inclusive of the notions contained in audio-visual literature; it has never worked in most of the pertinent generalizations available from outside these narrow limits.

On the important test of theory the audio-visual field does not meet professional standards. Its workers are craftsmen, not professionals, in the majority of instances because they are operating, in Whitehead's words, on "customary activities modified by the trial and error of individual practice." Absolutely fundamental to the development of audio-visual education as a profession in the sense that DAVI is now using the term is the prior development of an all-inclusive body of theory upon which to assess and guide practice and base research. Once this is done, many of the other criticisms stated above will no longer be valid because their source will have disappeared.

The status of audio-visual research also reflects on professionalization. Not that research does not exist or that it is not being pursued. A recent bibliography (3) lists 163 titles through 1946, and this is by no means all-inclusive. Because of the journal policy discussed above, research pertinent to audio-visual education is published throughout the literature of the social sciences and needs a staff of detectives to trace it down. Very little of it has been reported in audio-visual meetings. This means that many audio-visual workers must be "flying blind"—a black mark for professionalization.

The post-war years have brought an increase in research activities in audio-visual education and related areas. Much of this research is government sponsored and financed, but it is being published in pamphlet form, in psychological journals, or in other places more or less inaccessible to the practicing worker in the audio-visual field. A true profession, such as medicine, makes this information more easily available to its practitioners. Furthermore, outside of the volume by Hoban and Van Ormer (9), there is not much evidence that research is influencing the formulation of theory. Many of the hypotheses now being tested have been derived from learning theory and the "social perception" theories which have been developed by a number of social psychologists. *The audio-visual field is in the peculiar position of having much of its research*

carried on by workers in other disciplines using hypotheses unknown to
many audio-visual workers, and reporting results in journals that audio-
visual people do not read and at meetings that audio-visual people do
not attend. While the research is expanding the intellectual background
of the profession it seems to be having little effect. A tremendous amount
of integration is necessary before this part of the criterion six can be met.

Summary

In summary, then, of the six criteria set forth in this paper: (a) in-
tellectual technique, (b) application of technique to practice, (c) long
training period, (d) association of members with a high quality of com-
munication, (e) a series of standards and an enforced statement of ethics,
and (f) an organized body of intellectual theory constantly expanding by
research, audio-visual personnel meet only the first and second completely.
The fourth and fifth are met to a degree which is not satisfactory but
which is improving. And the third and sixth tests rate such low scores
that failure is the only possible grade. This adds up, in the opinion of
the writer, to the simply stated fact that *the audio-visual field is not*
yet a profession.

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