TEACHING OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION IN THE COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM

by

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SINOPSIS

Kertas kerja ini dibahagikan kepada 4 Bahagian dan akan mempersoalkan tentang pengajaran matapelajaran Komunikasi Visual. Walaupun bidang ini belum merupakan sebagai salah satu bidang pengkhususan dalam disiplin Komunikasi, tetapi ianya merupakan "bahan" utama sebagai Media Komunikasi.

Bahagian Pertama memberi gambaran secara rengkas kepada sistem ijazah yang ujud sekarang ini di pusat-pusat Pengajian Tinggi di Malaysia.

Bahagian Kedua mempersoalkan bahawa kandungan kurikulum terutamanya di bidang komunikasi merupakan persoalan bersama antara industri, swasta dan masyarakat dan tidak semestinya dipertanggungjawabkan kepada para akademik semata-mata.

Bahagian Ketiga membincangkan secara am tentang Komunikasi Visual dan disiplin-disiplin Komunikasi yang berkaitan dengannya.

Bahagian Akhir merupakan kesimpulan dan beberapa syor yang dikemukakan untuk difikirkan bersama.

This paper is intended to cover the "ICONOGRAPHIC" aspect of communication — communicating with pictures or other form of images. Practically every discipline of communication will resort in some form or other of utilizing this type of media. There is a specific skill to be acquired both in theory and practice before an individual can fully understood the various principles involved in the production in any medium. As media is so essential in communication, emphasis should also be given towards better understanding of this aspect of the discipline. The printed media is a good example. Before any information can be disseminated to the public, letters have to be arranged, composed, photographed, reproduced and re-arranged and perhaps bound before the product can be distributed.

State of the Art

Most university personnel — including faculty members in conventional programs — are becoming less interested in what students do outside the classroom which is beyond the control of examinations. (I am referring, of course, of conventional institutions and not of experimental/vocational schools.) A trend is currently visible: the vocational oriented institutions of higher learning such as Mara Institute of Technology, Kolej Tuanku Abdul Rahman and the Ungku Omar Polyteknik are receiving increased emphasis and attention from the employment sector. As this emphasis increases most academicians in humanities fields at most universities in the country will increasingly feel defensive about their own specialized fields.

The emphasis on vocational goals is reflected in the development of all sorts of new programs such as are being currently offered. But these programs, although new, are not experimental or innovative; they share the educational objectives of the traditional vocative; they share the educational objectives of the traditional vocational programs and exists side-by-side with them. These programs are created to meet the need for more middle-management personnel, usually semi-professional in nature. And many campuses, following the trend of institutions of higher education, who had much

earlier embarked on providing Communications as a major discipline, are beginning to introduce new programs to meet the ever-increasing need for professionals in the communication field. The approach normally used to prepare students is the "conventional" method called the Degree System.

The Degree System

There are certain essential parts or dimensions present in any degree program — no matter what the nature of the program is, no matter how it is described by the teachers and learners involved in it, and no matter how it is conceived by the administrators who operate it. I shall try to present and illustrate a theoretical model of the university degree system. It will describe each dimension of the degree system functionally, but as a high level of abstraction, so that it will fit all conceivable degree systems at any type of tertiary-level educational institution.

The dimensions of every degree system fall into two categories — "structural" and "implemental". The structural dimensions would appear in any blueprint model as those we ordinarily associate with the term *curriculum;* they are structures that are planned before the system goes into operation. They differ qualitatively from the other dimension, which we call implemental dimensions and which will not be discussed in this paper. ·

Structural Dimensions

Program Content:

The first dimension consists of the organization or patterning of the program that the student follows to obtain a degree, diploma, or certificate. This dimension consists of the entire topics, problems, texts and study areas that are sampled or systematically covered in the students program — all of the kinds of knowledge that are formally transmitted to students ás they moved from entrance to exit in the system. The term *knowledge,* in this context include facts and principles, skills and abilities, attitudes and values, everything that a student (in any given curriculum) is expected to acquire,

master, or internalize in order to earn his degree. This method I think suits well with certain disciplines that do not require the understanding and functioning of creativity per se. It has to be slightly modified so that as far as the teaching of communication goes, a slight in-depth knowledge as regard to "skills and abilities" mentioned above has to be given more emphasis. If we look into the programs offered by our universities in the communication disciplines, we will find that subjects that are being offered to fulfil the visual communication aspects of the degree requirement are either offered in the form of electives or as a subject that is not given credits.

Society's Shared Responsibility

The current spate of oral and perhaps written comments on performances of graduates especially in newly introduced disciplines such as in the field of communication makes me reluctant to add my voice to the already existing chorus. I made this remark, not that our institutions of higher learning are not turning out graduates that are sub par, but merely trying to emphasise that certain improvement can be made in the program in existance. Surely, it would seem by nów that everything worth saying has already been said, that all the contradictions of opinion and fact have already been resolved and the course of action for the future is patently clear. If not, I feel this is the opportune moment when something can be thought of, especially with this gathering of practically every aspect of the communication disciplines where both the practitioners as well as the academicians are present.

The many and diverse elements of our society, including the educators, must agree on what they expect of education, if educationists are ever to agree on what it should provide. This involves a long and tedious process of communication to lead to such agreement or understanding. It also involves basic attitudes, points of view and philosophies on which any specific action should be based. It would appear obvious that those who devote their lives to the profession of education should be constantly ponder-

ing over the nature of the institutions to which they are dedicated. To be part of a college and never to give thought to the essential character and purposes of that college would be to pattern one's activities after the underground burrowing of the mole. The contemplation of the college in the wholeness of its structure is, therefore, a prerequisite for all who labour within its walls.

Nor should such a contemplation be reserved to the faculty and administration alone; it is equally the duty of every student and every alumnus. The progress of our educational institutions in the future will depend very largely upon the degree of understanding of their purpose which students carry away with them into their adult lives.

If colleges and universities today, or in fact all educational institutions at every level, are not being supported as they should be, it is to a great extent because students are rarely, if ever, reminded about their responsibility for the education of others, particularly as that responsibility projects itself into the future. There is such heavy concentration by the college and the student upon himself as the individual and such attention given to his own growth as a person, that he frequently forgets to include in his scheme of life the idea of perpetuating and improving education for all in the future. Some of the least active among the proponents of better education in Malaysia are its best educated, or at least those who have spent more years than most within the halls of learning.

A significant statement on the present difficulties which arise in the relationship between education and business, labor, and industry was prepared by Prof. Lewis B. Mayhew of Michigan State University as part of a report presented at the Thirteenth Annual Conference on High Education. In it he said that society is demanding that education serve a larger segment of the total population. For the college to assume such new responsibilities require greater financial assistance. Before this subsidy will be willingly granted, other social

institutions must understand what colleges are doing and the social pressures on them to do it. As business and industry demand more and more graduates, education must know what kind of college graduate is wanted and why .... Similarly business, industry, and labor must discover what are and are not legitimate demands on education. For example, business and labor groups cannot expect education to inculcate certain moral and spiritual values if these are different from those practiced in the world of work. Lastly, when purposes and functions become interrelated there is danger of wasteful duplication of effort or of important needs of society being met by no institution ....

Such problems of relationships and functions have been difficult to solve. In spite of good intentions in education, labor, and the other important social agencies, a great deal of mutual suspicion exists. The schoolman feels that business stifles humanistic man in the interest of stark materialism. The laborer feels that colleges and universities are servants of the managerial classes. He points to the business and professional men on board of governors of colleges, to the many course training present of future managers and to the few course oriented toward the worker's needs. Language, accurately reflecting how men think, is another serious obstacle .... But even in a sitution free from suspicion and with a common universe of discourse, there would be other obstacles. Education has been to some extent an agent of social change. Professors and their students are expected to explore every facet of human life and to scrutinize every tenet society holds ... Business, on the other hand, frequently interprets its role as a conservative one. Assembly lines, mass production and advertising have all seemingly contributed to the good life. These, then, should be preserved because they have worked. Thus here are two conflicting views — progress and change, and conservation — which must be reconciled in some way. Yet education, business, labor and industry have not been able to classify for themselves what their essential purposes are. College faculties cannot decide

whether they should train the intellect or the whole man, nor what their responsibility is for transmitting the culture to new generations. Labor had not yet settled whether it should play an important role in management. Business has not yet decided where its productive and distributive functions end and its educational and community services begin ....

What Professor Mayhew is illustrating so vividly is the narrow point of view which sees everything in its own narrow framework. Not much effort have we seen to develop more and more communication among these disparate elements of our society. What we have seen was business, industry and employers merely harvesting the fruits of the colleges and universities. Only in the past few years have we seen efforts made by some institutions other than universities and colleges toward training their future employees.

There are two other aspects of the parochial point of view which evidence themselves within the structure of our education system itself. The first is the inability, ordinarily, of the various levels or segments of education to communicate with one another. The amount of conferring which takes place today among colleges, secondary schools, and elementary schools is anything but sufficient when one considers the important of their relationship. Our failures in such communication might contribute to the terminal characteristics as experienced by American education at each level. They have contributed to the name-calling and finger-pointing which occur all too often as educators vie with each other in emphasizing the deficiencies of the particular level of education with which they happen not to be associated.

The second aspect of the parochial point of view within education is the indifference in many instances of members of the college faculties to academic disciplines other than their own. The scientist and non-scientist on many campuses find little in common and are often professionally antagonistic. With both the humanistic and the scientific areas of knowledge so vital to life in the world today and

tomorrow, this division is both tragic and dangerous. Departmental lines must be broken down wherever possible and bodies of knowledge so presented to students that they see the integrating patterns which form a total life for the individual and his world.

Visuals — As Media of Communication

Subjects that can be categorized under visual communication are: —

The Printed Media

i) Graphic
ii) Illustrations
iii) Layout
iv) Printed Page

Films

i) Still Photography
ii) Cinematography
iii) Animation

Television

i) Radio (more as an audio media)

The Printed Media

Graphics:

In practice, graphic communication encompasses a variety of independent disciplines, ranging from technical illustration and cartography to visual education. In all these diverse fields, graphic thinking is primary, and design is the vehicle which carries the graphic thought to its destination as a graphic statement. While the text speaks with words, the graphic figure speaks with form. Although subject matter provides the substance for the figure, what the figure actually says as a visual statement depends more on the communicative aim which shapes this raw material into a purposeful visual idea; and upon the form which embodies and animates that idea. In speaking, however, one says not only what he wants to say but what his language enables him to say. The capabilities and limitations of visual language are themselves decisive factors in determining the kinds of ideas the figure may show about a given subject.

Illustrations:

Fluency in visual expression, as a verbal expression, derives not only from practical experience but also from a knowledge and understanding of the language itself and of the principle guiding its effective use. As in other languages, visual language has resources and capabilities peculiar to its own nature — vocabulary of form elements, a grammer of spatial organization, and a syntax for phrasing the image. While in the fine arts visual language often become an end in itself, to be exploit in all it is worth, as a tool for communication it fills several functions. Galileo's Sketch is part of a series made originally as notes. These sketches then become learning tools in his investigation of sunspots. Later, he no doubt used them to communicate his theories to his friends. Edison's drawing for the phonograph was another example.

Layout:

An arrangement of headlines, copy blocks, photographs, work of art, logotypes, borders and other typographic devices, that services as a guide for the finished work to be visualized in advance. Knowledge of this technique is very useful for both the advertising and journalism disciplines.

Printed Page:

As an instrument for touching human emotion and influencing thought and behavior, the printed page has one outstanding weakness — which is also its strength. This is a paradox that is prevalent in different form in each of the communication media. The printed page, alone among mass media, does not have the human voice. Thus it lacks an element from which film, radio and television derive warmth and impact. The film industry went to huge effort to acquire the human voice. Print lacks it. But at second glance, the weakness is strength. The printed page is the one medium in which the audience sets tempo. He can race ahead, or stop to savor. He can go back or skip.

Anytime over the past 500 years William Caxton or Johann Gutenberg, the first European to print with movable types cast into moulds, could have walked into a newspaper office and instantly been at home. The speed of the printing presses might have improved but basically, the system had remained the same. Today, things are beginning to move. Computer typesetting is making its debut. Satellite printing is becoming a reality. Instead of having to print and despatch from one point, newspapers can now transmit complete newspapers by satellite so that they can be instantly reprinted and despatched from regional centres throughout the country. Color too is beginning to appear in more newspapers. Knowledge of technological innovations in this field not only will be of benefit to the journalism and advertising but also for those in the Public Relations discipline.

Films:

Films started with pictures, then added words. The press had started with words, then added pictures. The early press, having the power of words, had no difficulty pleasing specialized audiences. The silent film, having pictures, had no difficulty pleasing huge audiences.

Film, like press, found strength in its weakness. Shifting viewpoints, various angle shots comprising of long, medium and close-up shots requires a great deal of audience participation. Film making has become the construction of a carefully calculated succession of shots. Shots are the building units of film. All these suggest the *technical complexity* of the making of a film. To have a good understanding of the whole concept individuals in the communication disciplines need more knowledge if film is to be used as a successful medium of communication.

Television and Radio:

Aptly termed as the "electronic media" these two are no less complicated technically, perhaps more so. Although their impact as a tool of communication cannot be denied it is by no mean a cheap medium.

We have noticed now that in each medium, a tendency to become involved in the affairs of other media. Television has become the meeting ground of all media.

From the world of print, the press associations and the wire-photo services soon began to serve television. Users of newspapers and magazines bought television times for their advertising purposes, while magazines and books (printed media) became story sources for television drama.

Summary

Visual Communication encompasses a variety of independent disciplines as presented above. These are the media mix used in communication, as meaning and intent are conveyed by more than words along. Many other factors influence the overall impact of communication. Certainly, visual communication form part and parcel of the entire communication process. The typical adult does not use one mass medium to the exclusion of all others, so discussion about the superiority of one medium are unproductive. Printed media rate high, along with television and radio, in overall use by contemporary adults. As such, it is felt that consideration has to be made on how much emphasis is to be given to visual communication in the curriculum content of the communication disciplines.

Recommendations

In conclusion, I would like to make certain recommendations:—

1. The current degree program in universities should be amanded to accommodate the ever-increasing need of the various communication disciplines especially visual communication.

2. Visual Communication disciplines such as graphics, photography, printing and production technology should be offered as an adjunct to communication disciplines like advertising, journalism, filming and broadcasting.

3. The ratio of theoretical knowledge as opposed to practical knowhow should be established so that graduates will have a more-in-depth knowledge in production techniques, especially so with the rapid technological advancement in communications technology.

4. The current practice of offering visual communication disciplines as elective subjects should be look into.

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