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AUDIO-VISUAL AIDS
IN THE HEALTH EDUCATION OF THE FAMILY

by

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The "audio-visual aids" or "educational aids" is applied at present to a wide range of material or media which help to improve "teaching methods".

Although such a phrase is relatively new in most countries, audio-visual aids themselves are not entirely modern inventions of our times. Around us, the vestiges left by the Pharaohs, who lived on the banks of the Nile several thousands of years ago, are full of wonderful means of visual expression, both carved and drawn.

But the importance of the audio-visual aids and their role in education was not clearly recognised by everybody in the past; similarly, the use of such aids was an individual isolated effort and their variety was consequently limited.

The situation remained unchanged almost until the cinema made its appearance and became an outstanding means of entertainment, astonishing the world by the strength of its influence and its effect on the spectators. Attention was thus drawn to the advantages involved in "visual" education, and interest rapidly developed subsequently, in other means of illustrating ideas in visual form.

When the World War II broke out, the belligerents had recourse to audio-visual aids and used them very successfully in training troops, in technical teaching and in mass propaganda inside as well as outside their territories.

Those experiments which were carried out lavishly and on a large scale throughout the years of war, resulted in improvement in the ways of using audio-visual aids, and many new varieties were developed. Their field of use expanded from the military training services to the civil education services where further trials of those aids were also successful.

The end of hostilities coincided with a sudden and great expansion of the use of audio-visual aids for educational and cultural purposes. This expansion was due to a general feeling of interest shared both by governments and institutions, and involved all kinds of educational media known so far, such as cinema, radio-broadcasting and television, study tours, exhibits, motion pictures, lantern slides, posters, illustrations, paintings, models, samples, sound recording, amplification and diffusion.

Recent statistics and reports show that the development of audio-visual aids is continually expanding, and the realisation of their usefulness has penetrated deeply into the schools in several countries of the West and the East. They are likewise being increasingly used in all fields of teaching, training, guidance, individual and social services, and of education, in its broadest meaning, either for young people or for grown-ups.

To realize the part which may be played by audio-visual aids in education, we should remember first that the senses give access to the mind. A successful selection by educators and teachers of the most appropriate means of stimulating the different senses is the best way to reach the minds of the people to be educated and will eventually lead to a quicker, easier and more lasting learning.

Education and teaching have long been based on one method, i.e. the symbols of spoken and written language, in other words, on teaching through speaking only. Although such a method proves sometimes to be useful and even necessary, it is impossible to discard it completely, but it is not at all the best means in all cases. When used alone, it is often inadequate, or incapable to a great extent of expressing what is really meant with the required accuracy as has been shown by the results of examinations and other investigations and experiments.

We should not be surprised, then, if a lecturer or a writer failed sometimes because he relied only on language, whilst on the other hand he succeeded in some other instances because he used cinema, lantern slides or some illustrative material. How true, then, is the old Chinese saying that "a single image may be worth ten thousand words".

The varieties of audio-visual aids at present within our reach are numerous, and this is most fortunate, as we have thus many opportunities of selecting and improving. To make things clearer, let us compare the surgeon with the educator. A surgeon with a well equipped theatre can operate more effectively, and cover a wider variety of needs and conditions than he would be able to with only a first-aid kit at his disposal. The educational facilities are like a large and complete equipment the usefulness of which will increase proportionally to the increase of the varieties of instruments included in it.

If we proceed with our comparison between the medical and the educational means, we may be able to look at the image, the model or the record in the same way as we regard a syringe or a sphygmomanometer or a dentist's drill, that is to say, as mere "instruments" which may help their user but cannot replace him. Thus, the advantage which may be derived from them depends mostly on two conditions : the instrument should be good and it should be properly used.

This leads us to a fact worth mentioning, i.e. the success of any programme devised to benefit by the audio-visual aids - whether for general education or health education or family education purposes - depends on the care taken not only in increasing the number of instruments, but also in the choice of the most suitable and in mastering their use by repeated practice.

There is strong evidence that most people perceive by sight, i.e. most of their education is acquired visually. But in addition to this they also learn by audition, and they profit and learn more if the means used for their education appeal both to the eyes and the ears, and to the other senses, ~~such~~ as touch, smell and taste, as may be required by the subject involved.

Learning by doing - direct experience or practice is definitely the best way of education and teaching. But when this is not possible, audio-visual aids may help greatly. It is obvious that the closer the aid brings us to direct reality and experience, the better the educational process.

In some respects, the educational aids may be found superior to direct experience, or may prove a valuable complement of direct experience. Such would be the case when using a large model to show the structure of the ear, the nose or the eye; drawings and figures to show the nutritive value of food or the main elements contained in well balanced meals; X-ray photos to show the pressure of shoes on toes; sound recording for comparison purposes with the heart beatings or the lungs rôle in various diseases; motion pictures to show the functioning of some organs inside the human body which could not have been observed by sight or direct examination.

There are, among others, two basic factors in successful education : the people being educated must feel inclined towards, or interested in what they are being taught and desirous to learn; and the meaning of the matters taught must be clear enough to be easily understood. The audio-visual aids - when properly selected and used - are capable of arousing interest and the desire to learn, and of bringing to the minds of the learners true and accurate meanings, with the utmost precision and clarity.

In addition, there are two other considerations which enhance the importance of audio-visual aids and, generally speaking, make them nowadays essential for every educational and teaching work.

The first is that only a few people are in a position to read, and even fewer read to improve their knowledge of such subjects as nursing, child care, nutrition, mental health and human relationship between the members of the family. As far as most people are concerned their work is so engrossing and exhausting that they are unable to give themselves up to some substantial reading. But all people - with the exception of the deaf and the blind - may see and hear. Therefore, we have to set our hopes on the audio-visual aids to educate people and teach them the various aspects of health.

The second consideration, which should prompt us to attach more importance to the audio-visual aids, is that, nowadays, they are fully used for business and advertisement purposes. In other words, these aids have now been enlisted to serve commercial ends, which are not concerned in any way with our idea of good education.

It is not difficult to anticipate the results if educators and teachers continue to confine themselves to their traditional uneffective spoken means : preaching, lectures and books, whilst business men so lavishly spend money on cinema, commercial broadcasting, posters, advertisements with attractive colours and pictures in newspapers, magazines and publications, in order to continue to influence the public and induce it to a larger consumption of alcoholic drinks and other products which are more harmful than useful.

Therefore, the least the educators can do is to use the same audio-visual means to face the attacks launched by the business men and non-educators since - as the well-known saying goes - "only iron can break iron".

Use of Audio-Visual Aids in the Family Education

Since the above-mentioned advantages derived from the audio-visual aids have been confirmed in all the fields of education and propaganda, in which they were tried, and since the health education of the family is, in fact, nothing else than an accessory part of the general education of the public, we may infer therefrom that the audio-visual aids must undoubtedly play a role which deserve being taken in due consideration in the subject under review.

It would then be appropriate if those responsible for this education could hasten and try to exploit to the greatest extent the possibilities afforded by those aids. Such an achievement depends, of course, on finding the appropriate means and increasing them to meet the different needs which arise in the health education of the family; it also depends on a sound training which would ensure a proper use of those aids.

The training should include the ways of using the aids a sound basis for their selection and improvement and practical work for the local production of the greatest variety of simple audio-visual aids.

In our programmes, priority should be given to training, as it paves the way to a successful selection and creation. A long-term training scheme would be needed in each country, enlisting the facilities of all concerned in the departments and the ministries of education, health and other institutions.

As regards the selection of the appropriate means and their increase for field work, we shall confine ourselves in this respect, to the following short remarks :

1) The best means for health education purposes are those which are devised and produced by experienced educators in the very country or district where they are to be used. They would thus be inspired by, and in keeping with the way of life familiar to the people concerned, and therefore more easily understood and more effective.

Local production also ensures, to a great extent, compatibility of the educational aids with the strongly predominating creeds, ideals and traditions of the population. The production suitable to a country like Egypt may be carried out partly on a centralized basis - for instance, in Cairo - under the supervision of a technical "ad hoc" body, and partly through the individual local facilities available in each village or town.

With regard to the audio-visual aids imported from abroad some may prove suitable whilst others may not. One should not, therefore, rely entirely upon them and neglect the local production. Great care should be taken in selecting them, either for using them as they are, or after amending and pruning them.

2) It is essential to organize the "centralized" production of the aids required to any country by ensuring the participation of all institutions concerned in this respect, and dealing with health education. This should be the main responsibility of the education specialists working in close cooperation with medical men.

3) In addition to precision and accuracy, simplicity should always be aimed at when providing aids. We must always beware of excess and complication and of the intrusion of "art" in texts, colours or drawings. Unfortunately, if the design and the production of the aid were left to the painter, the draughtsman, the sculptor or the stage, broadcasting or cinema producer, the final result would give rise to confusion and would be wasted.

4) We must not give too much importance to "perfection" from the local production carried out in any district. If too much is demanded from the limited human and material facilities available in some areas this would undoubtedly weaken their activity and paralyse any production.

5) It is always advisable to encourage the production of "complete sets" of different types of audio-visual aids in the various subjects of health education, owing to the numerous advantages involved in such sets and to the better results obtained through them as compared to those derived from individual, detached aids. Those sets seem to be the most suitable for institutes, schools, clubs, health and social centres.

6) In order to avoid any waste of efforts or money, and to prevent falling into the "torpor" which usually follows the adoption of "any sort" of aid, even if it proved ineffective, it would be advisable to try the aids on a small scale at their planning and preparation stage. They should likewise be followed up and their effect should be observed after their diffusion and their widespread use.

7) Economy in expenses in audio-visual aids is undoubtedly commendable. But in considering the financial aspects of such a matter, we should not lose sight of the importance of the educational objectives we wish to achieve through those aids which are expected to result in a real improvement of the health and life levels. It would not be advisable to economize when the economy lessens the usefulness of the aids, as may happen if we use too sparingly colour illustrations or if we employ a third rate artist.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to stress the necessity of "attractiveness" and other factors likely to inspire the desire to learn. This is an important part of the role of audio-visual aids. Neglect of this decisive factor in the past, and even up till now, has been a mistake, which has resulted in the failure of education at home, at school, in community. Neither the parents, nor the educators nor the physicians realized the reason and usually attributed the failure to a defect in the people themselves, such as dullness or carelessness.

The audio-visual aids are an important factor of success in the health education of the family, but not the only one. Therefore, in order to achieve this high aim in the health education of the family, we must also take into consideration the many other factors which may encourage learning.

The method of education and teaching is important and many things depend on it. The choice of the right time and the right place for providing those aids is important too. A third factor is everybody's cooperation for everybody's good.

The audio-visual aids may render innumerable services to the health education of the family if they are given the right opportunity and are used by people of good-will.