By audio-visual aids, we usually mean the most modern or the most recently used of these methods (films, filmstrips, radio and television). This is a summary identification of very old methods and very modern instruments, and one should react against it. Visual aids are far older. They correspond to a profound tendency among the immense majority of men: to materialize their thoughts in the form of graphic or sonorous images or to give their thoughts a concrete frame of reference. Plato himself took care to set the scenery of his dialogues, and he used concrete words and concrete comparisons (for example, the cave) as foundations for his most abstract ideas. In France, the Très riches heures du duc de Berry bring out the importance which ‘illustration’ can take in a work which would have otherwise sunk into oblivion. Xylographic images preceded the printing press by three-quarters of a century and the first illustrated book by nearly a century. The tremendous success of the ‘images of Epinal’ in books peddled from door to door in France was only a manifestation of popular taste in a society where illiterates continued to be in a majority and where images went with oral literature. Films, radio and television, considered as educational instruments, have merely developed – at a rapid rate – alongside older means whose importance remains considerable. Their common denominator lies in their function as aids.

This is not a theoretical conclusion, for it is confirmed by the very attitude of the educator. The educator basically must contribute to the training of the individual (in his character and conduct) with a view to his integration into a given society and teach new ideas, facts and techniques to a specific public. It is thus relatively easy to define the goals at which the educator aims. Achieving these goals is another task which brings him face to face every day with the basic problem of pedagogy – that of transmitting or communicating ideas or information. To solve this problem, the educator resorts to infinitely varied means, among them audio-visual aids. If our purpose, therefore, is to aid the educator, we must then offer him as complete an arsenal as possible of these means. But it is the educator and the educator alone who chooses the means which is best adapted to his subject, his audience and his circumstances. It is thus clear that audio-visual aids cannot be separated from educational materials in general.

This tendency toward the use of concrete examples has developed through a complex process. At first, graphic representation was probably only a way to enable man to capture fleeting thoughts and the sole way of transmitting thoughts, compared to oral transmission which was subject to rapid distortion. The invention of writing, a perfect example of a visual aid at its origin, proceeded from the same necessity. It would be interesting to study, for example, in the light of Mayan writing – of the Codex Troano – how man progressed from the talking image to the letter. We can therefore conclude that ‘illustrations’ were looked upon at first, at least by the most educated persons, as a minor complement to thought. The entire history of publishing until the end of the eighteenth century confirms this. But, in the twentieth century, powerful means of reproduction, associated with radio, cinema and television, have changed the aspect of the problem. Sound and visual ‘illustrations’ are no longer mere minor complements to thought but they directly influence the thoughts and the very conduct of millions of individuals. It was therefore inevitable that a desire should spring up to master such a powerful instrument, to discipline it for better (education) or for worse (advertising, for example). But this coveted

1 This article was written in connexion with the Regional Seminar on the Use of Audio-visual Aids in Adult and School Education in Latin America organized by Unesco at Mexico City from 28 September to 17 October 1959.
mastery is still rather crude: it is often reduced to the creating of a few conditioned reflexes, satisfying the merchant but not the educator. Certain of these audio-visual aids (posters, films, radio and television) are both means of education and media for information and propaganda, and it is not always easy to draw the line between what belongs to the educator and what is within the province of information or propaganda. It is also probable that the child is more affected by the violence (colours and slogans) of street posters and by the shock techniques of radio and television (especially when commercialized) at home than by the visual aids used in school. Should we conclude then that these means are harmful and should we condemn them? This negative attitude would be most unrealistic. The only possible conclusion is to accept the need for basic research in these fields. It should bear essentially upon psychology (applied to education and its relations with filmology, for example) and upon the social sciences (evaluation of effects, changes of attitude, etc.). We educators have already ventured forth, but timidly, onto this terrain. Systematic establishment of contacts with research workers and specialized institutes is the duty of all those who are responsible at the national level for audio-visual services.

It can be reasonably hoped that this basic research will lead to a better use of audio-visual aids and to more scientific pedagogy based upon them. It is not difficult to observe that their use is continuing and developing outside the pale of any research. As a result, a pragmatic pedagogy is taking shape and not necessarily in contradiction to the results of the most scholarly research. Establishing or stimulating closer collaboration between research workers and educators, stimulating the writing of theses or documents containing the fruits of the work of both, and publishing and distributing the results of this work should also be the common task of pedagogical and audio-visual services.

Until now, the problem of the use of audio-visual aids has been examined from an intellectual angle. It also includes important practical and technical aspects. To tell the truth, techniques cannot and should not be separated from pedagogy. We have seen that audio-visual aids cannot be separated from educational materials as a whole, this conclusion being thrust upon us by the attitude of the user when confronted by these materials. Now this same user – whether a teacher, a professor or an adult educator – does not act any differently when pedagogy and techniques are involved. He can never be purely a pedagogue or purely a technician. It is clear, therefore, that the pedagogy of audio-visual aids cannot be separated arbitrarily from audio-visual techniques. No one can hope to achieve good results unless he is a sensitive pedagogue and a skilled technician. The problem must be solved globally.

Unfortunately, this initiation into techniques is not always carried out in the institutions where future educators are trained. In underdeveloped countries, the lack of qualified personnel (and equipment) is the most frequent obstacle to such an initiation. But it is not the only one because similar shortcomings are often found in more favoured countries. Routine, lack of initiative and administrative delays are the main factors responsible for educational sluggishness. There is no doubt that audio-visual aids produce their best results when they are used in connexion with active teaching methods. Here, the task of educators is to draw the attention of their governments to these methods and to the recommendations of previous seminars concerned with the introduction of an initiation into film and radio techniques into normal schools and similar institutions. I am thinking, for example, of the recommendations of the seminars at Messina (1953) and New Delhi (1958) organized by Unesco.

Finally, there are other questions which should be taken up in thorough and specific studies. They are related to the use of radio and television in the teaching of reading and writing and of languages. A great deal has been said about the ‘singular, specific and irreplaceable services’ which can be rendered, for example, by ‘teaching by radio’. A great many hopes were stirred as a result of statements repeated with such warm conviction that one could have believed them to be dictated by experience. First of all, we should note the
ambiguity of the term 'teaching'. In the context of the statements to which we refer, this term covers both the
teaching of subjects such as science and history as well as the teaching of reading and writing.

One of the greatest problems which remains to be solved is the liquidation of illiteracy. Following hasty
conclusions, a belief has grown that, thanks to radio, illiteracy can be liquidated quickly, easily and cheaply.
But what do we know about it objectively? Until now, the number of experiments has been limited. Some of
them were frankly admitted failures. Fortunately, we will soon be in possession of an exhaustive report of the
results obtained during the best known of these experiments, the one at Sutatenza (Colombia). One of our
experts has made a global study of these results from which we think that we will be able to derive valuable
lessons, if not definitive conclusions.

A few complimentary remarks should be made here. The first concerns the basic difference between
teaching notions of history, geography, science, etc., by radio and the teaching of reading and writing. We say
teaching by radio because the problem of teaching reading and writing by television is infinitely simpler and the
results already acquired are sufficiently convincing. At any rate, it can never be said too often that the global
use of audio-visual aids always gives the best results. Opposing radio to television or both to films is a typical
example of a false problem. In an educational campaign organized and carried out at a national level, all
complementary means must be used if possible. It is also virtually certain that results are proportionate to the
means employed in a geometrical, not an arithmetical, progression. In other words, overly strict economy does
not pay. There lies a source of misunderstanding. Too often, it has been believed that making an expert and
$10,000 worth of equipment available to a government was enough to solve the problem of audio-visual aids in a
given Member State. Audio-visual aids do not have this magic quality. They require serious study and, first of
all, serious thought about the place which they should occupy in a budget. Pedagogical problems always end
up by leading into budgetary problems – that is, in the long run, economic, social and political problems. The
educator must play his pedagogical role. The tool which is offered to him – and this is the case of audio-visual
tools – can multiply the activity of the educator in large proportion. Therefore, the political authorities must be
convinced of the necessity of a financial effort which is often considerably large. That is a point of view which
often escapes the educator: he must also educate administrators and political authorities. Many mistakes
begin here.

So far, we have talked about audio-visual ‘aids’ and ‘means’. Educators obviously consider them from
this angle in the best of cases. But will this tremendous development of mass information media which we
previously mentioned continue to allow itself to be domesticated? Let us go to the heart of the matter: must we
continue to consider these information media as blind forces whose unleashing – and, as far as the educator is
concerned, the unleashing begins where his own control ends – would be an educational and cultural
catastrophe? Or, to put things in a less impressive but equally embarrassing way, cannot audio-visual ‘means’
be allowed to play their role without the help or simply the intervention of the educator? Before issuing a
condemnation without any possibility of appeal, perhaps it might be wise to remember that films, radio and
television can only be arbitrarily separated from the social, economic and cultural context which gives them
their means of existence. No doubt, the study of these problems takes us a long way from modest film strips,
flannelgraphs, and even traditional black-boards which are still a luxury for thousands of schools.

Let there be no misunderstanding. We know the importance of pedagogy in the use of audio-visual aids.
We know that the training of good educators – in this case, good users of these didactic means – is a long and
difficult matter. We know that we must think about the desperate problem of training teachers. But pedagogy
itself is only a means whose end is education. And education, in the long run, is only a contribution – naturally,
of capital importance – to the integration of the individual into a given society. It is in this perspective – from their production to their final use – that we must look at audio-visual aids and the various questions which they raise.

**Biography of the Author**

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1939-1943 Teacher, Upper Primary School, Tananarive, Madagascar.

1943-1946 Head, Diego-Suarez School District, Madagascar.


1951-1964 Programme Specialist, Division of Fundamental and Adult Education and Division of Special Services for the Advancement of Education, UNESCO.

1964-1971 Chief, Division of Educational Information and Material and then of the Curriculum Division in the Department of School and Higher Education, UNESCO.

1971-1972 Director of the Division of Programmes and Structures, UNESCO.

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