DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 323 558 CS 212 516

AUTHOR Ciofalo, Andrew
TITLE A Journalism Education Model in the Jesuit Tradition.
PUB DATE 29 Sep 89
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Jesuit Higher Education Conference (St. Louis, MO, September 29, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Catholic Educators; Communication (Thought Transfer); Curriculum Development; Higher Education; *Journalism Education; Liberal Arts; *Mass Media; Models; Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS *Jesuits; Media Education

ABSTRACT

The mass communications discipline is a creature of sociology and technology. The result has been a hybrid of science and craft and an academic rift that has pitted theory against practice. For a while the theoreticians, through control of the doctoral credentialling process, asserted dominance of the academy, but "demassification of mass media" is shifting the central issues in the discipline away from concern for the effects of messages and how to manipulate them to concern for the process that creates the message. Recent advances in computer technology have liberated the individual provider, making it possible for more and diverse people to deliver professionally packaged media products. The communications curricula and pedagogy should be revamped to develop the thinking, writing, and design skills that such an individual should have. Clarity of thought, a spirit of inquiry, and a solid command of the written word provide the only context for actualizing those skills, which plays right into the strength of Jesuit education. (RS)

A Journalism Education Model in the Jesuit Tradition

By Andrew Ciofalo

The trend toward the "demassification of mass media" has become so pronounced that a mini-plenary session of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (AEJMC) was devoted to the topic at the 1989 national convention in Washington, D.C. The session was inspired by the desktop publishing phenomenon which has enabled an individual, working alone, to assume both the editorial and production roles in the print media to create publications for highly segmented audiences. The concept is as old as mimeography, but the computer and laser printers have lent "authority" to the appearance of such publications making them almost indistinguishable from the traditional mass media.

It is not the purpose here to explore the phenomenon, but rather to assess its implications for the mass communications discipline, its research agenda, and current pedagogy and curriculum --all within the context of a special mission for communications departments in Jesuit colleges and universities.

The mass communications discipline is a creature of sociology and technology. The result has been a hybrid of science and craft and an academic rift that has pitted "chi squares" against "green eyeshades," theory vs. practice. For a while the theoreticians, through control of the doctoral credentialling

process, asserted dominance of the academy, but "demassification" is shifting the central issues in the discipline away from the sociologists. The AEJMC's rejection at the 1989 national convention of a move to include the term "mass communications" in the titles of all association publications and journals may be a harbinger of the new trend come full circle.

Put in its simplest terms, the emphasis in the discipline is shifting from concern for the effects of messages and how to manipulate them to concern for the process that creates the message. The first focuses on the audience/receptor; the second focuses on the individual/sender. As the individual becomes the focal point of our study, the relevance to Jesuit ideals, starting with cura personalis, becomes more obvious. Communications education, as it relates to the trivium and the quadrivium, may find its natural home in the liberal arts and in the humanities --all foundations of Jesuit education.

The sociologists and the speech communicators will always have an intellectual stake in the communications discipline --the former in the area of mass communications and the latter in the area of interpersonal communications. They may have to share equal billing with creative writing, non-fiction writing, and rhetoric as the theoretical base for a redefined discipline that will include the applied disciplines of journalism, publishing (magazine and book), media management and business communications (advertising/public relations). Given the entrenched philosophies governing communications education, and with all programs tiered

according to circumstances surrounding their introduction, historicity dictates that a third tier will emerge to encompass a new format geared to the role of the individual in the media. It is this third tier that Jesuit schools and departments of communication can address and perhaps carve out a unique contribution to communications education. By offering a writing/rhetoric based approach to the study of communications, Jesuit institutions will not only be true to their own educational philosophy but will also be positioning themselves more relevantly in a world that needs glasnost and perestroika in many of its institutions.

Breaking the lockstep of communications education will require a grand vision to redirect our thinking. Such vision often emerges out of surprising quarters, such as this 1971 institutional mission statement from the master plan of New York's School of Visual Arts:

> In earlier periods, the establishment of meaning in life, the creation of mediating channels between man and man, man and society, were carried on mainly in the fine and folk arts. But today these are subsumed among many communicating modes. The term art requires expansion to include those advanced technological media which are neither fine nor folk.

The statement goes on to invoke Susan Sontag's definition of the knowledge to be imparted through art: "...it is the experience of the forms or style of knowing rather than a knowledge of the

subject itself."

Communication is at the nexus between knowledge gained from art and knowledge gained from information. McCluhan perceived the blurring of this distinction as "the medium is the message." In an age where media often renders form and substance indistinguisable, when sure fingers at the computer keyboard provide instant verification for our intuitive leaps, communication assumes a more intricate role. It has become the mediator between fantasy and reality, fact and fiction, art and information, subjectivity and objectivity. It links them all, as well as keeps them apart. And no one at either end of the bridge can afford to ignore the middle ground --especially in academe.

In this context, communication is process, just as the teaching of writing is process. And as a process discipline it is more closely allied to doctoral level theoretical studies in writing and rhetoric than in mass communications. This is the starting point for Jesuit institutions that want to reconstruct the discipline.

Career programs are not foreign to the liberal arts. Witness such programs in education, psychology, theater, law, etc. However, the Humanities must swallow hard to accept them. Yet, writing, music and art, also process disciplines, are happily ensconced in the Humanities. The trouble with communications is that its product is not seen as artistic, intellectual or high culture. Admittedly, there is a qualitative difference between media writing and writing in the generic sense. Media writing is

information processing, but its effectiveness is predicated on a solid foundation in pure writing, including rhetoric, logic and literary devices. Since journalism builds on writing, it would be specious to separate it out just because current journalistic practice includes much bad writing. That is precisely the problem we are trying to correct.

It would be difficult to deny the inclusion of communications concerns in the educational mission of any liberal arts college or school. Students and faculty are being stressed by the social, cultural and intellectual adjustments necessary to adapt to the new Information Society. Communications represents a discipline that is increasingly central to the functioning of society and is a synthesizing interdisciplinary force within the academy. As more and more institutions buy into the communications phenomenon, it is important that a new orientation be held out now so that these new programs are not constructed on the old model.

That model is an industrial model that was so vigorously attacked by the Gannett-funded Oregon Report about five years ago. At the time, I saw the report as an intellectual putsch that would generalize all that is specific in the curriculum out of existence. The report advocated a generic model, which assigns more emphasis to conceptual courses than to skills courses. The evolution from an industrial model to a generic model was allied to a perception that the communications industry is changing.

The Oregon Report was responding to the predicted diminished

importance of centrally packaged and distributed print media. It saw modules of data and information available to individual consumers who would be able to select from a menu and package personalized products to suit their needs and interests. This took the concept of market segmentation one step further --to market individuation. Ironically, in the sense that it is market driven, the generic model is kin to the industrial model.

The industrial model has its purpose. Its highly compartmentalized structure is industry specific and its development is patterned along the lines of emergence and growth of those industries. Industrially-modelled programs continue to be the main provider of entry level professionals to the media. Is it possible to obliterate most vocational distinctions in communications education, turning out communicators without portfolio? Will the media hire our conceptually adroit graduates and provide them with the on-the-job training to make them into functional professionals? Such an approach is risky business when one considers that about 85% of the entry level jobs filled in the field today come from the ranks of old-line communications programs.

The Oregon Report was right on target in identifying the emergence of the enhanced role of the individual in the communications process. However, the report saw that individual as the information consumer with the power of videotext and teletext at his/her fingertips. In reality, the technology has liberated the individual provider, making it possible for more

and diverse people to deliver professionally packaged media products. If my version is correct, then we should be revamping our curricula and pedagogy to develop the thinking, writing and design skills that such an individual should have. The mass communications theory courses will become the dinosaurs of a demassified system but remain of interest to those involved in persuasive communications: advertising, public relations and political propoganda. The real revolution in communications is not the liberation of the consumer from mass packaged information but the liberation of the means of production and delivery from the control of the mass packagers.

The resistance to the generic approach to journalism education is fueled by the industry itself. In 1986, Allied Daily Newspapers, an association of 55 newspapers published in the northwest, announced it would begin informal accreditation of the region's journalism programs because it was unhappy over a drift toward theory over practice in journalism education. Pushing professionalism at any cost is not in the best interest of communications education. Editing, reporting and layout skills do not a journalist make. Clarity of thought, a spirit of inquiry and a solid command of the written word provide the only context for actualizing those skills --which plays right into the strength of Jesuit education.

Professor Ciofalo is the Coordinator of the Media Program at Loyola College in Maryland

Appendix 16

END

U.S. Dept. of Education

Office of Education
Research and
Improvement (OERI)

ERIC

Date Filmed

March 21,1991