

The Classroom Speaks and Saves Itself

The spoken word is inclusive—rich in detail and nuance. It is a cool medium: a medium that requires deep involvement of several parts of our sensorium.

So too, the hand-written word—the characters speak for themselves in the personal cursive style that becomes part of the message.

We lose much of multi-sensory involvement in typography. And an ever-growing menu of emoticons, fonts, and acronyms cannot make up the loss—although they are serviceable enough to cool down the otherwise too-hot print medium.

We can observe this same pattern in the stressful evolution of the classroom. The traditional classroom, as a product of the hot industrial age, was designed to be (like most of the print-based, industrial world it belonged to) a hot medium. Students were to learn with mechanical, controllable precision.

In reality, of-course, the live interactive classroom blossomed into something much more interesting with the rich sensory involvement that it provided albeit as a by-product of the oral/ear world that it inadvertently created.

Much of the history of the classroom (since the rapid changes in information delivery technology) has been a struggle between those who are still heavily influenced by typographical culture wanting to use the new technology to subvert the messy—and fascinating—classroom social learning environment into their dream of mechanical control. It is misguided mission. But it continues today with our new media; as such, it will continue to fail.

Whether the recorded data that students are slated to consume is in a book, on a screen, or in an interactive computer program, it will still fall short of the impact of the live interaction of an engaged classroom-learning environment.

We could have learned this lesson by seeing how the rich content of the classroom itself broke the promise of those proponents of educational television in the 1960s.

In this sense, the classroom today is remains as McLuhan predicted, “a bomb shelter for media fallout.”

Marv Machura

Teachers, lecturers, or performers who does not understand the power and richness of live interaction cannot expect any more from their expertly prepared PowerPoint slides anymore than the teachers still rolling out prepared overheads for students dutifully copying down (word-for word) the verbiage rolling out there. In both cases (the shiny new computer and its faithful data projector) are not much beyond the cellophane roll, washable felt-tipped pen, and the lowly overhead projector.

It is only through human interaction with the material, can real learning occur. The best teachers, therefore, strive to engage this interaction. They ask questions, they respond to immediate needs, they create and tell stories, they prod and poke, they force individual and group consideration of the material, etc.

We see this same pattern in radio. Recorded radio will never obliterate live radio any faster than recorded classrooms will eradicate live classrooms. And like the best teachers who use the richness of the oral/ear medium to engage their students, the best DJs are the ones who rely heavily on the loaded sensory involvement of oral culture in the engagement of their listeners.