

CONCERN: Consciousness Raising

Action for Children's Television
Maggi Cowlan

No individual group interested in video and kids has had more of a national impact than ACT (Action for Children's Television.) This organization of parents, teachers and leaders in many professions is primarily concerned with changing the nature of broadcasted programming aimed at kids. On one level ACT is about consciousness raising - in the past five years they have grown from a group of four Boston mothers to a powerful advocacy organization of over 100,000. But ACT is also about making specific structural change in children's programming. Maggi Cowlan's report outlines ACT's guidelines for better TV for kids and reviews a few of the specific actions they have taken.

"To those in power ACT is saying - clearly and loudly - that new guidelines for children's program-

ming must be adopted in which different kinds of programs are designed to meet the developmental needs of children at different age levels."

CONCERN: Information Systems

Invitation to a Video Forum
Anne Page

If you want something to happen, you do it yourself. Anne Page believes that kids should exchange the tapes they have made. In this article she offers to coordinate a Video Forum. Anne's idea is to have kids create tapes on particular issues and then to mail these through a network of places where a class or group shares the same interest. The project is initiated right here.

"I have recently been involved with a video-pal exchange between high school video classes. The results have been so rewarding that it has occurred to me that the principle of sharing tapes could be expanded. I'm willing to make this happen."

The Video Carrot

JEFF STRICKLER

Kids wiggle and shout, giggle and wave when they first see themselves on a live television monitor. After the initial blast of self-recognition they begin to pose as tough guys or movie stars or popular singers or Kung Fu experts . . . provoking laughter and imitators. It's all very self-conscious, this trying on of images, almost a seeking to discover their own importance. Soon two or three will want to do a story. . . usually a copy of adult TV. . . or a monster story . . . or a fight scene.

But this takes organization. They have to get a space for action. How do you choose a camera operator when all want to do it? Who does what first? When do I turn on the camera? A group begins to coalesce around the task of creating a story. The action is frantic with advice or heckling from the sidelines . . . and maybe a hand or head in the picture. The result is played back. They again laugh and wiggle, or hide bashfully when they see themselves. But when the playback is finished they want to do it over, do it better, with more organization and fewer shouts and hands from the side. (And if they do it over, they can prolong the experience.) Here a group of children organize themselves to realize a goal, judging their progress toward that goal by periodic replays and altering behavior to produce desired changes. They reproduce in microcosm the kind of organizational effort used in the world around them. Plan, execute, evaluate, play, execute, etc.

Levels of Organization

More than just social organization is taking place however. The original idea changes as they work on it. New ideas come up. They must be worked in or rejected. Actions must come in sequence. What comes first? Soon arguments over the interior logic



Jeff Strickler

of the story erupt. "How can you get killed and then walk home in the next scene?" The logic of the story must be preserved. . . not that it can't veer in unpredictable directions under the charged emotions of performing. After playing the tape back, they may want or need to change their old