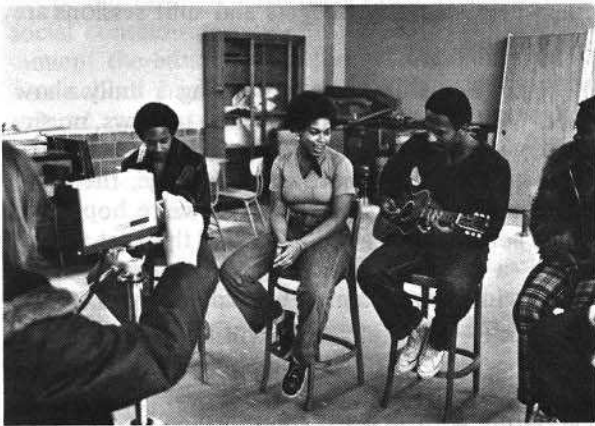


Video in a Therapeutic Community

BRUCE COST

My student population is unique. The school in which I work is part of a residential treatment program for adolescent drug addicts. Over 80% of the boys and girls are from New York City, with the remainder coming from upstate New York communities. Prior to admittance most of the kids have attended school sporadically and have a history of hard drug use and involvement in crime. Most all are alumni of city youth houses and come to this campus via criminal or family court. There is one admission requirement: an indication on a kid's part that he wants to gain some control over his life and break loose from the circle of judges, courts, social workers and drugs that dominate his existence.

Holy Cross School in Rhinebeck, N.Y., can be viewed as a "therapeutic community," mixing 85 students with 80 staff members (including psychiatrist, psychologists, social workers, administrators, counselors and a school staff of 30.) The campus, 90 miles north of New York on the Hudson, is a 1000 acre facility owned by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York. State child-care and education funding contribute to the maintenance of the institution.



Bruce Cost

The school was voted a state school district unto itself by the state legislature, and as a result is a self-supporting institution within an institution. The school atmosphere can best be described as innovative. Teachers receive full support for whatever they feel will turn a kid on educationally. The school's willingness to experiment has recently won it a large state grant to begin a pilot program in outdoor education. Classes have ten students, at most, and several courses have two instructors.

I work as a teacher and am responsible for the development of a media program for the school. This, includes videotape. However, the use of videotape is not limited to the classroom. And since I have been the most vociferous advocate of the use of videotape throughout the institution, I am involved in developing uses for it in all phases of the program. Three broad categories are necessary to describe our uses for videotape at Holy Cross: education; therapy; and staff training.

Education

Typically, students here are not only turned off to schools and institutions, but in many cases have a hard time functioning in anything resembling a structured activity. Class periods in which the teacher lectures for 40 minutes are seldom successful and class discussions cannot be counted on to involve everyone. But these students consistently react positively to involvement with videotape. They like the equipment and its power to record them.

For example, I have found that kids who are unwilling to spend time discussing a topic in seminar fashion will thoroughly explore the same subject as "experts" on a TV panel show. Because, while they may not have heard many after-dinner discussions of ideas or events in their homes, they have seen this on TV. And they can readily identify with this format. Plus, the playback is reinforcing. They see themselves in brand new roles - positive ones which they can enjoy.

As with most videotape programs, we use this tool heavily for various dramatic activities. For these students, however, learning to explore emotions in a controlled situation is particularly important. Learning to exercise emotional control in a dramatic situation may help these kids exercise similar control in real-life situations. Tape is tangible evidence of accomplishment. Videotape drama gives them the rare chance to excel in a classroom.

Student camera crews of two and three have recorded various situations and events on campus in documentary fashion. For example, they have invaded classrooms to record the mood and important activities of the class session. On playback, the teacher watches himself conduct a class, the students view their classroom attitude and behavior, and the camera crew is forced to really observe and understand the classroom environment because of their responsibility to record it well.