

Double-Edges of Change

You see, I am merely overcome by a certain weariness and sadness when I hear people talking about the power of the "media" and what it (sic) can do to redeem the sins of mankind, particularly those that have for so long taken place in our schoolhouses. I am weary and sad for two reasons: first, because I know that good intentions do not justify the encouragement of ignorance and evil; and, second, because I know that one kind of ignorance and evil does not cast out (or neutralize) another kind of ignorance and evil.

As a humanist, I do not believe that we - as a nation, a people, a world - will find our way out of our present confusions by means of any type technology. No, not even communications technology. More incidentally, neither do I believe that video and education possess any sort of natural affinity for one another - any more than I believe that books or films are related by their nature to the task of teaching and/or the difficult art of learning. If books, films - or video - are to reside comfortably in the world of schooling (and they may not), they will have to accept the morals, codes of civility, aims and philosophies of that world and be adapted, by men and women, to these ends. Left alone, they will do nothing by themselves; they are not inhabited by ghosts. Fed and spread by the merchants of mass culture and pop fashion, they will inevitably die in the schoolhouse. I have, over the years, watched countless "brave, innovative forward-looking" programs of televised education die in countless schools and colleges since the day I

finished writing Teach With Television.

You see, in that miserable book, I forgot to tell those early, bright-eyed educational video enthusiasts one thing: that one must know oneself before he sets out to revolutionize anything. (I should have recalled this from my considerable study of great revolutionists; but I had forgotten.) Self-knowledge yields humility, and only the humble possess the capacity to understand the double-edged weapon of innovations: that capacity to destroy what is valuable on one side, and to cut a path to nowhere on the other.

As I grow older, I grow more stubborn. Certainly, I still believe that video may one day make its contribution to American education - on all levels. But it will be a contribution, not a take-over. It will also be a different contribution, I think, for different types of teaching and learning under different circumstances and at different times. Just how, why, what, when and where is a difficult matter to foresee, requiring maturity, wisdom and experience. I think it is a problem for teachers - certainly not for "media specialists" or people trained to "think video." I think, also, that in every individual instance, its solution (possibly a prudential decision not to teach with television) starts at home: in the good sense and honest humility of those of us who are brave - or mad - enough to face fellow humans in the role of teachers and attempt, however feebly, to help them to civilize themselves, which is about the most one may ask of any teacher of any subject anywhere.

Now, fire up those vidicons, kids. And good luck.

Implications of the New Television for the Open Classroom

JOHN LE BARON

Since the mid-1960s, a growing number of elementary schools in North America have been adopting the practices of the open classroom to create activity-centered environments responsive to the needs of individual children. During this same period, the half-inch video movement has been growing at a similar rate. Seldom, however, have the two movements met.

In most classrooms, including open classrooms, video is usually used only as a projection device. Reports of children actively using video in their curricular activities are still hard to find. This is because the video movement has developed largely

outside of and frequently in opposition to formal institutions. Educators, as representatives of formal institutions, have not seen the potential of video for curriculum development. What little documented evidence there is on the application of child-created video in the elementary school does not appear to have reached the classroom teacher. He has for too long been unaware of how video can be used to achieve learning goals, especially those which characterize the open classroom.

Most proponents of the open classroom hold these goals in common:

- 1) The curriculum will reflect the contemporary

culture of the child.

2) Learning will emphasize the skills and abilities that enable people to function productively in their culture.

3) The tools of learning will be manipulated actively by the learners themselves.

4) Different children will learn in different ways.

5) Curricular activities will be designed to integrate the subject areas.

6) Curricular activities will build on the experiences and strengths of individual children.

7) Curricular activities will actively engage community resources, both inside and beyond school walls.



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8) Honor will be accorded children's work through maximum public display.

Task Forces

An illustration of how these goals can be attained by child-created video is outlined in the following project, planned for fifth and sixth grade children of an elementary school near Toronto. A newspaper article headlined "HOW METRO CONSUMERS FIGHT RISING FOOD COSTS: USE IMAGINATION" was chosen as the starting point. The class, numbering about 35 children, is broken down into six or seven task forces of varying sizes. Each task force works on a manageable portion of the whole production.

Taking a specific quotation from the article as a cue, Task Force One plans and executes a portapak field trip to the local supermarket to investigate some causes and effects of the food cost spiral. The kids price selected food items on camera, and conduct interviews with the store manager and randomly selected customers. Prices are compared with those of one month and one year ago, and percentage increases are calculated.

Task Force Two and Three start from a quotation which reports on a woman who, in protest, is cut-

ting meat from her family's diet entirely. After figuring out how to contact the woman, Task Force Two invites her to the school to discover, among other things, the woman's reasons for going meatless, her plans to compensate for the lost nutrition of meat, and the resources other like-minded people might use to do the same thing. Task Force Three asks the woman for one of her favorite meatless recipes and conducts an on camera cooking lesson.

The article reports that this woman's four children are unenthused about the new dietary regime. These children can also be invited to the school so



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that Task Force Four can explore the issue from another perspective. The next task force arranges to take the portapak to the city nutritionist who, it is reported, will mail free recipes for economical dishes on request. The nutritionist is questioned in her office about her specific responsibilities, avenues for citizen action, and food economy.

The sixth task force puts the documentary together. Each of the first five groups selects a representative to the sixth which then selects and rejects raw material from the previous five videotapes, and edits it into a unified whole.

Task Force Seven is the publicity committee. It arranges with the local cable television operator to broadcast the final tape two or three times. (Technically, this is a simple procedure.) Then, the dates and times of broadcast are publicized by posters, personal visits, mimeographed letters and pre-broadcast promos on the local CATV channel to potentially interested individuals and institutions.

Open Classroom Video

These activities have been sketched to show the potential relationship between the open classroom and child-created video. The eight goals mentioned above are met in the following ways:

1) The simple fact that children are actively engaged in television production in the first place is a reflection of the contemporary culture. The typical fifth grader spends more time watching television than he does attending school. Child-created television changes the normally passive-recipient relationship to one of active and creative control.

2) Our communications environment is becoming increasingly visual, at least as far as media use is concerned. In our more print-oriented past, no one doubted the importance of knowing how to write. Today, however, there is considerable skepticism about the need for children to learn to communicate visually. When one knows how only to receive messages in the dominant medium of mass communication and not to send them, he is inevitably subject to manipulation by the few who are so skilled. This situation applies to most of today's kids - and adults.

The production of this documentary also builds other functioning skills: collaboration, questioning, information and resource retrieval, problem-solving, self-analysis, decision-making, and communication.

3) All the technical and most of the organizational responsibilities of production are assumed by the children. The tools of learning are certainly in their hands.

4) Ample opportunity is provided for learning in individual ways: collective and individual; visual and verbal; technical, organization and aesthetic.

5) Most of the old subject areas and some new are unified through work on this project: written and oral communication, computation, art, and environmental study. The science and technology of television production are investigated through action and study.

6) The wide range of production activities allows each child to do a job at which he or she can succeed and which is also enjoyable. In later productions children can move on to less familiar and more challenging tasks, building on the confidence gained from past success.

7) The project encourages a productive sharing between school and community. Community resources are brought heavily into play.

8) A feeling of community involvement and pride arises when the work of children is broadcast throughout their communities on local cable TV systems. The community benefits, too, when this great but underused community resource is opened to kids; the community gains fresh insights into the lives of children from the perspective of the children themselves.

This project provides a structure, but it is a structure of encounters, not one designed to lead to predetermined "outcomes." Video is used as a tool of exploration and discovery, helping children gather information and express ideas freely and creatively. Most open educators would agree that this is as it should be.

The Great Plastic Weekly Video Magazine

CHUCK ANDERSON

[From THE ELECTRIC JOURNALIST: An Introduction to Video, by Chuck Anderson. Copyright 1973 by Praeger Publishers, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.]

An important payoff in making your own video programs comes in their presentation to others in your school. This can be easily achieved if there is a closed-circuit television system - CCTV. Even without a built-in distribution system, it is easy (and sometimes more effective) to arrange to show tapes to a large audience of kids by means of normal playback procedures. Select a central meeting place (the cafeteria, a "student commons," a major hallway will often do), choose a regularly scheduled time, get permission from the administration, do some publicity and you will find an eager audience.

Now that you know something about television-making, let's talk about doing it. You probably have a number of ideas to present, and a variety



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