

# Teaching and Reflecting

JOE PETNER and SUSAN SHERWOOD

Perusing through the literature on teacher training, (HO HUMMmmmm), one notices a great deal of material on videotaping as a tool in teacher training. There are programs all around the country bearing titles like Teacher Self Appraisal, Video in-Service Project and Microteaching - the most familiar tag.

Much of the emphasis in these projects is placed on specifying teaching competencies in an effort to determine effective teaching behaviors. The argument is that to get "good teaching," you determine what "good teachers" do and train everyone else to do it. The problem with this approach is that it is overly behavior specific. Too frequently these techniques are used as a kind of external manipulation.

As Arthur Coombs points out, "The personal character of good teaching can be documented by almost any of us from our own experience. If one thinks back to his own school days, one will probably remember that the good teachers one had in one's lifetime did not all behave alike or even with great similarity. Rather, each one stands as a person, an individual. . . Each had his own peculiar methods, values, techniques. Good teaching is like that, an intensely personal thing."

## Supporting, Not Contorting

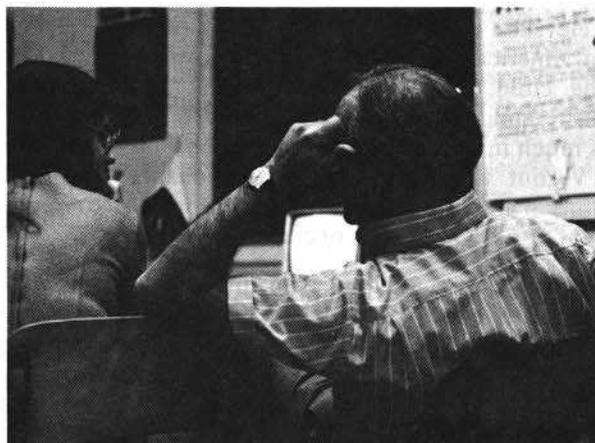
What emerges from this different perspective (i.e., good teaching is an intensely personal thing), is a challenge to use video in supporting teachers, not contorting them to fit some common norm of good teaching. Thus, we must begin to focus on ways of working with teachers that enables them - as individuals - to work through their concerns; ways that help teachers understand what is happening to children and themselves.

## A Mutual Experience

During the 72-73 school year, we (Susan-teacher, Joe-resource colleague) began to explore the possibilities of using ½ inch videotape at one of the elementary schools on the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation in North Dakota. We have come to view that experience as one of teaching and reflecting (TAR).

The notion of TAR deliberately implies two separate processes; teaching - those kinds of activities one spends doing when kids are present; and reflecting - the kind of activity one does when kids are not present.

In our own work we have assumed that a way to proceed (one way in a number of other alternatives that might be utilized), is by operating with a goal of maintaining a certain distance from the immediate press of the teaching situation. For openers we have acknowledged that in the teacher's day-to-day immersion in the life of the classroom, with its insistent and continuous demands, there is not the time nor energy to reflect on what is happening or to attempt to make some sense of it. Videotape strikes us as a valuable means for establishing and maintaining the kind of distance we feel is necessary for reflection.



Kit Laybourne

Our main focus during the taping was kids, although the teacher was certainly present at times in this interactive process. However, the purpose for the taping was to build up our knowledge of the kids. Our assumption was that we could provision better for kids learning by watching them in their engagement with the setting; that we could use this information as base-line data for problem solving about how Susan might better meet the needs and interests of kids. Underlying this assumption was the feeling that Susan would come to see her role as teacher in terms of what she was and how she was affecting kids. In this way, we felt she would begin to understand herself in the role of teacher.

Children were taped in a variety of settings (i.e., playground, classroom, cafeteria, library). This helped provide a more balanced view of particular children.

## Transcending the Media

The experience is now behind us and we certainly

feel it was a valuable one. We have also concluded that it is a whole lot easier to write about than to do!

For others who might begin to use tape in a similar manner, we can make the following suggestions: The viewing sessions might focus on noticing the kinds of activities in which the child engages: interaction with friends; a child's mode of interaction; a child's body tension; his/her eye contact - watching for the child's point of contact; a child's energy exchange - how and when this occurs; content of conversation.

It might also be helpful to balance this by noting

the kinds of materials found in the setting. A sketch of the physical space often provides other useful information.

When viewing sessions are aimed at trying to understand the dynamics of the child, the teacher immediately begins to locate a basis for working with individuals in the class. This level of dialogue also provides colleagues with an opportunity to respond to tapes through specific suggestions about how to help particular children.

Perhaps, the most striking dimension of this approach is that it provides a means for teachers to refresh the setting for themselves and their kids.

## An Attempt at Video Research

MITCH ACKERMAN

Television has had a marked impact on many facets of American society. Its most susceptible viewer is the child. The nature of television viewing has made children passive consumers. To be sure, there is much involvement with the action that occurs on TV, but the child is given little chance to inject himself into the process of television, not to question or discuss what is occurring or why.

Over the past few years, media investigators and educators have been exploring means to overcome this passivity. One possibility is to allow children to make their own television productions with the use of portable VTR equipment. It is felt that through an involvement with the processes of television production, children will become more analytical and critical of this medium.

### A Study

An Exploratory Study of the Observed Differences in Television Program Production Resulting From a Structured and an Unstructured Television Workshop for Elementary School Children.

This study was designed to discover differences in programs produced by structured and non-structured elementary school VTR workshops. The project was planned so that the information obtained would be general rather than specific in nature. The results of this study hopefully contribute to the systematic acquisition of information in the area of video studies and its role in our educational system.

### Conducting the Workshops

The workshops were held in an elementary school in Columbia, Maryland in the winter of 1973. There were six fifth graders in each group, in matched pairs. The matching was done on the basis of sex, race, and a standardized intelligence test.

A pre-test was designed so that general background information on each subject as well as attitudes, viewing habits, and knowledge of television could be obtained. Any effect of the workshop on these factors was obtained by comparison on the same pre-test administered as a post-test.

The two workshops met once a week, for two hours, for eight weeks using a single camera system. The structured group was designed to give the students both theoretical and practical knowledge of the medium through planned lectures, discussions and productions. They were given the types of productions to do but were not told how to do them. The word structure should not connote a strictly controlled atmosphere in this case, but one that was informal and relaxed. The students were simply given more information and assistance in an organized manner than the non-structured group. The non-structured workshop was based on self-exploration and discovery of the television medium. The format of the workshop was very "loose." There were no specific productions nor lectures. The students produced their own programs with little assistance. The researcher was always available to answer and discuss any questions that evolved from their exploration, but no attempt was made to inject discussion, unless it was brought up by the children. A journal was kept for both groups by the researcher in an attempt to relate and analyze the process that was developing and to provide insight to the nature of each of the sessions.

### The Research Design

Provisions were made to record the results of the workshops in as many ways as possible. An audio tape was made of each workshop session in its entirety. The pre-tests and post-tests were also recorded on audio tape. Photographs were taken at