

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

most sessions to capture individual moments during the productions and of the children at work using the equipment. A journal was kept for each session, describing what went on that day. The journal was used to note observations as to the processes that were taking place. The videotape productions are naturally the most significant documents of this project. Although only thirty minutes of tape were shown to evaluators for judging, approximately three hours of production tapes were recorded, and are still available for study.

Finally, there is the written thesis. The thesis was devised to provide general rather than specific information. The first chapter deals with the philosophical approach to the problem and provides a background of similar projects that have been done by other people. The design of the study is covered in the second chapter. It is divided into five basic sections: the selection of the subjects, the pre-test, the workshop sessions, the post-test and the evaluation of the productions. The whys and hows are given in detail. The data obtained from the tests, the journal and the evaluation sheets are then presented and analyzed. The last chapter presents conclusions and recommendations for future studies. The appendices include many helpful materials such as the pre-test and post-test questionnaires; the structured workshop curriculum; the evaluation sheet used by the judging panels; a videotape catalogue of all the productions made by the students; and the weekly journal of the workshop sessions. Copies can be obtained through the University of Maryland, Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts, College Park, Maryland.

#### Evaluating the Findings

The productions of the final two weeks of each workshop were evaluated for technical quality, visual attractiveness, content and message differences. Three different panels of judges were selected; parents, teachers and broadcast professionals.

The pre- and post-tests showed that most of the children greatly enjoy television and that it takes

up much of their time. There was, however, very little change in their viewing habits over the two month period. On production related questions, both group's knowledge basically increased or remained the same.

The weekly journal provided information that could not be obtained from any other of the data. The researcher viewed the non-structured group as more "creative" and the structured group as better organized. The non-structured children were more individualistic, whereas, the structured children worked better as a group. There were no significant differences between the groups that appear related to sex, race or intelligence differences.

The data from the evaluations of the programs offer evidence that, in general, there were no obvious differences between the productions of the structured versus the non-structured workshops, although the non-structured group programs tended to be rated slightly higher by the panel. There were also very little differences in the ratings by the individual panels of judges, (except for the broadcast related judges, who rated the non-structured group's tapes slightly higher.) It also appears that although each group's programs as a whole were rated almost equally, there were various aspects of the shows in which one group did better than the other. The non-structured group seemed to be better able to keep the audience's interest level and convey their message, while the structured group seemed to be more adept at most of the camera skills. Neither group showed any differences in use of visuals or in acting. The individual panels varied in their ratings of the various elements of the programs, but once again the broadcast related judges were most similar in their ratings to all three groups totalled.

#### Conclusion

In this writer's opinion, what this study has shown is that the ideal television workshop is one that is based upon the principles of both a structured and non-structured format. Children need some structured impetus. In order for quality to be present in a program, children need some authoritative advice when they are doing things wrong or poorly. Teaching them to be analytical and critical appears to aid them in both producing their own programs and watching others. But for a more interesting and better presented show, it is advised not to force children into doing suggested genres of television. Let them freely decide what they want to do. This combination of structured and non-structured, is sure to produce the best results possible in their final products.

#### Why Research

There are some real good reasons for education to conduct rigorous research about what kids learn with video instead of merely evaluating their work by "gut" reaction.

Experimental research becomes important in times



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when money and funds for educational projects is scarce. To be able to give school administrations or foundation people a very specific outline of experimental procedures and hypotheses can have tremendous influence. The presence of a research model was one of the factors that led the Imagination Foundation and Antioch College/Columbia, Maryland to support this project with equipment even though I had no previous relationship with them.

Much investigation still needs to be done concerning children's television workshops. Future re-

searchers should take larger samples over longer periods of time with more adequate budgets and facilities. There is a need to incorporate a measurement for visual literacy and to relate that measurement to workshop conditions and program production. A redesign of the evaluation instruments will be necessary in future studies.

It is imperative that children today be exposed to some type of television workshop. It is hoped that this report will be of help to those dedicated people who can "see the light" now.

## Action for Children's Television

MAGGI COWLAN

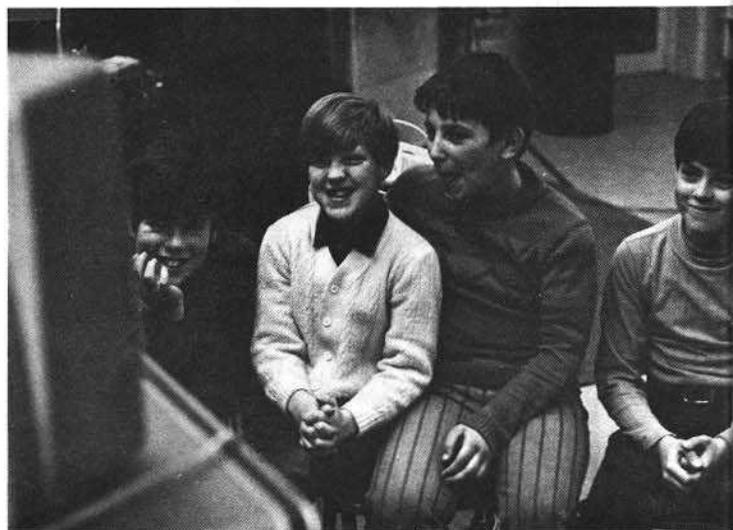
Who is out there talking to our children? There's one rather simple answer to this question — TELEVISION. ACTION FOR CHILDREN'S TELEVISION, however, is talking for children who are being talked to and at. ACT is a Boston-based support group for parents, teachers and professionals concerned with television programming and how to change it. The group has been responsible for drastic changes in children's programming.

ACT has: influenced broadcasters to appoint vice-presidents in charge of children's programming; encouraged the National Association of Broadcasters to reduce the commercial time in children's programming from 16 minutes an hour to 12 minutes (adult programming is 8-10 minutes an hour); been instrumental in eliminating children's vitamin advertising through law suits leveled against three major drug companies and the Federal Trade Commission; held symposiums with the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Yale University Child Study Department, among others; encouraged the diversity of children's television on Saturday mornings; alerted parents to the problems and the potential of children's television and collected their feelings and their hopes for action.

Originally, ACT was a core group of four women concerned about the television their own children were watching. They watched children's television, met with local station executives and read as much as possible about children and television. Their initial meetings in 1968 were concerned primarily with the prevalence of violence on television. The group came to realize that violence existed on television because it sold products and that as long as broadcasters believed such programming was the easiest way to get large audiences, the highest ratings, the most advertising dollars, they would continue their present scheduling. ACT saw clearly that the entire financial structure of television, especially with regard to children's programming, would have to be changed. Broadcasters could not

be allowed to justify using the same criteria for planning children's programming as for adult television. Television, for children, must become a public service arena designed to be responsible to the needs of the child rather than the pressures of advertisers.

Right now, over 100,000 other parents, teachers and professionals have joined ACT's demands for better children's programming. Organizations which sponsor ACT read like a Who's Who of concerned educators and professionals. They include: The American Academy of Pediatrics, The American Friends Service Committee, The American Group Psychotherapy Association, The Association of Childhood Education International, The National Congress of Parents and Teachers, The National Conference of Christians and Jews and The National Health Council. For financial support, ACT relies on \$5.00 membership dues as well as administrative funding from the John and Mary Markle Foundation in New York and program support from the



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