## Making vs. Studying

There is much of this schism too. Some people choose only to teach production. (Agreement with question 7.) Others develop courses that are "study" oriented – they have readings and screenings and field-trips and discussions but never involve making video. (Disagreement with question 7.) Some people we know teach both production and criticism yet feel that, in practice, these two approaches don't work well with each other. Still others feel that making video and studying it can only work together.

We're going to fess up to our Editors' Anxiety.

We are unhappy with a choice we made at some point in the development of this issue of Radical Software. Maybe it was a tone we set. We can't re-member. In any event, we feel it is unfortunate that the activities we solicited, collected and ourselves described deal exclusively with production-oriented activities. There are many nifty things to do that make kids smarter about video and television yet don't require a single piece of hardware.

In keeping with our general wish to present as many options as possible, we feel bad about the omission - justifications of only 64 pages notwithstanding. To counter our anxiety we have put special emphasis in the RESOURCES section on materials that provide non-production activities you ought to consider trying with your kids.

BEWARE these dualities.

Studying opposites is a good heuristic device. Yet, although it is helpful to consider clear-cut choices, we suggest that you reject adopting them. We do.

# Introductory Video Exercises

QUINCY BENT

The following activity is designed to provide a series of structured experiences for exploring some of the fundamental techniques of video and TV production. Used as an introduction to some basic visual concepts, these exercises may provide children with a helpful framework for planning and producing their own video material.

## The Activity

The exercises break down into seven main components: the first five are designed for the single camera VTR system, and the last two for a multi-camera, studio system.

For all exercises it is essential that a monitor or TV set be placed so that all participants can see themselves as they perform the various activities. If you are using a portapak system, hook up an RF converter to send the picture directly to the monitor or TV set.

The exercises should be done in sequence. Each child does not have to do every exercise. Generally it is easier to rotate turns so that each child becomes a "subject," then a camera operator, then a switcher (when working in a studio system.) If you



John Le Baron

have a large number of children - 20 to 40 - it is suggested that you use more than one subject for each exercise. Make sure that each child gets a turn with the equipment - especially the camera.

While exercises may seem complex when they are described in written form, you will find that they take a very short time to complete - even with a large class. A group of fifteen to twenty children can usually complete all the exercises in about thirty minutes.

Good luck!

## EXERCISE ONE: Far and Near

This first series of exercises deals with the most basic properties of every visual medium. What happens to our visual concept of size and number when they are defined by a small, flat, one dimensional surface? This problem is incredibly difficult to verbalize, but with immediate feedback from a video monitor, it is easy to experiment with.

A. Static Camera/Active Subject

Set the camera at a wide angle focal length and place it on a table or tripod. It is important that

the camera not be moved for this section.

1) Ask a child to fill the screen with his face. (He should move towards the camera.)

2) Ask the same child to fit his whole body into the screen. (He should move away from the camera.)

3) Ask a second child, then a third, then a fourth etc., to try and fit their whole bodies into the same picture. (How many whole bodies can fit into the picture? If the room was longer would more fit in? If the room was shorter what would happen?)

B. Active Camera/Static Subject

Section A exercises are duplicated, but this time the camera moves and subject(s) remain still.

1) Ask a child to use the camera to fill the screen with a subject's face. (He may zoom-in or physically move the camera towards the subject.)

2) Ask a child to use the camera to fit a subject's whole body into the screen.

3) How many whole bodies can be fit into the screen?

Teaching Suggestions

You may find it more convenient to merge these two sections together into one so that the static camera is immediately followed by its active camera counterpart. However, a child who gets his first turn to work the camera is not going to want to hold it absolutely still without some very strong persuasion on your part. Try and choose a kid who will not be too embarassed to fill the screen with his face. Since the whole class is sharing in this experience it will be a cause of some amusement.

Variations and Follow-Up

Use far and near exercises to judge aesthetic qualities of objects; experiment with different dramatic gestures to determine which ones are effective as close-ups (a clenched fist) and which are effective as medium or long shots (a kicking-screaming temper tantrum); check to see whether there is any difference in the picture between zooming in on a subject and physically moving the camera closer to a subject.

EXERCISE TWO: Image Manipulation

One of the crucial differences between interesting video and boring video is the control that participants have over the images. Whether kids are working in a dramatic, documentary or narrative mode, the camera operators, tape editors and subjects should be able to exert maximum influence on the content. The following series may help in encouraging a greater awareness of how to manipulate images.

"Imagine that the TV screen is a kind of room which has a floor (point to the bottom of the screen), a ceiling (the top of the screen) and two walls (sides)."

A. Static Camera/Active Subject

1) Ask one or more children to walk into the

pretend room (into the camera picture) and pretend to touch the screen floor. They might also pretend to lean their elbows on the screen floor.

2) Ask one or more children to touch the screen ceiling. They may have to jump up.

3) "Can you touch the left screen wall?" This is quite difficult because the monitor image is the opposite from a mirror.

4) "Can you touch the right screen wall?" Don't let them 'poke a hole' in the pretend wall.

B. Active Camera/Static Subject

1) Ask a camera operator to put a subject's head on the screen floor.

2) Bowling Balls - ask the camera operator to move head(s) on the floor from left to right across the screen.

3) Feet on the ceiling - camera operator places subject's feet on the screen ceiling.

4) Ouch! - camera operator moves subjects from left to right across screen and bumps them into the pretend wall.

Teaching Suggestions

These exercises are designed to help children define themselves as video images or as video image manipulators. (Subjects can move; subjects can be moved.) It is important that all children have the opportunity to be subjects and try to move themselves around on the screen. Some of these exercises are difficult for young children to perform so you may wish to scale them down accordingly.

Variations and Follow-Up

Use image manipulation as a means of 'blocking-out' dramatic scenes, video dance arrangements; use camera manipulation as a means of exploring how a subject's image may be distorted or mistreated; use objects instead of people.

EXERCISE THREE: The Camera vs. the Subject

Both the camera and the subject(s) are quite active in this series of activities. As well as providing some target practice for camera operators, they are useful for illustrating how difficult it is to excape from the prying eye of the camera.

1) Hide and Seek - a child must try to escape from the camera; he may not hide behind any object in the room but instead must rely on fastwork, ducking, etc. It is amazing how hard it is to escape under these circumstances. Big Brother clearly has the edge.

2) Hide and Seek - this time the camera must try to prevent the subject from getting his picture on the screen. Be careful that camera operators don't get too excited.

Teaching Suggestions

This series can be quite wild. It's a lot of fun and may be worth the extra effort of trying to keep the noise down to a tolerable level. Proper treatment and respect for video equipment is an essential idea that children must learn; this series is a good test of

that respect. It's better to point out mistreatment under these conditions rather than later when children may not be under the same type of supervision.

Variations and Follow-Up

These exercises can become counter-productive. The emphasis for video should be cooperative rather than an adversary one. It may be helpful to get this process out of the system once and not encourage it again.

EXERCISE FOUR: Camera and Subjects Cooperate

This series attempts to demonstrate what good video is all about. When camera, audio, lights and subject(s) are all working together each controlling their separate inputs towards a common objective. Some beautiful things begin to happen.

1) Clapping and Zooming - one or more children stand in front of the camera and clap slowly in rhythm. As the hands come together the camera zooms or physically moves in; as the hands part, the camera zooms or moves out. As the children become better at this exercise they may wish to make it more elaborate - i.e., snap fingers, pick up the tempo, etc.

2) The Earthquake - a group of children walk, sit and stand around acting as if they were going about their everyday business. Suddenly the camera starts shaking and tilting (not too violently.) Someone makes a thunderous noise into the mike. Children scream, fall down, die dramatically.

3) The Monster Museum - Three children visit a monster museum. The monsters are frozen into horrible poses with hideous expressions on their faces. The three visitors wander among the monsters stopping to look at each one. They touch each monster and remark on how real this one's hair looks, how ugly that one is, etc. Finally when they come to the last monster and are ready to leave, the monsters slowly come alive. The visitors are surrounded and finally buried under these snarling, horrible creatures. Make sure that you yell "cut!" as soon as the visitors are properly disposed of.

Teaching Suggestions

These exercises are particularly useful in enabling everyone in the class to have a starring role. Encourage each child to work out his activity with the camera before you begin this exercise. Once again: these exercises are potentially wild so work hard to keep unnecessary noise to a minimum.

Variations and Follow-Up

With the class, invent other scenes, illusions, tricks, etc. Use the exercises as a basis for future scene devices.

EXERCISE FIVE: Live Edits

This is the final single camera exercise. It demonstrates how varied camera shots taken over at different times can be juxtaposed to create the illusion that an event occurred in one time period. If you do not have an edit button on your VTR, you can use the record button. The quality of the edits will not be terrific in either case, but kids will get the idea.

1) Two children are walking down the street on their way home from school. The camera watches them as they happily discuss the day's events. (10-15 seconds)

2) Some robbers crouch behind a trash can(s) waiting for victims. They are anxious and whisper among themselves. (10-25 seconds)

3) The two victims look towards the camera, scream and attempt to run away. (5 seconds)

4) The robbers advance towards the camera looking nasty. (6 seconds)

5) A scuffle involving both group ensues. First the robbers have the upper hand, but the victims finally beat up all the robbers. (20 seconds)

6) The camera watches the two children walk away from the camera heading towards home. In the foreground are the unconscious bodies of the robbers. The camera fades out (by turning the aperture slowly.)

Teaching Suggestions

Some teachers may not approve of the violence in this particular episode. If so, they may wish to design a similar scene of a less violent nature.

To make the edits as tight as possible, rewind the tape approximately 5 seconds beyond your starting point for each shot. Let the end of the previous shot play for the children so that they may see when they are to begin the next shot. Push the edit button firmly down when you are ready. If you have no edit button, use the counter to determine exactly where you wish to begin recording. The picture may be unstable for a second between shots, but there is very little you can do about it.

Variations and Follow-Up

If you don't have access to a second editing deck, this method is currently the best and easiest available. Don't let technical limitations bother you too much. Children should understand that they are not competing with broadcast TV. Make up shooting scripts for other scenes.

EXERCISE SIX: Switching

This is the first series of exercises for a multi-camera studio system. Switching from one camera to another enables the production to present a greater range of visual information in a shorter period of production time. The exercises are also useful for demonstrating to children the basic techniques used for most of their favorite TV programs.

1) The Fight - a child stands in front of each camera. A monitor is placed so that both children can see which camera has been switched onto line. The switcher punches up camera 1. The child facing camera 1 pretends to punch the camera. The switcher

37

punches up camera 2. The child in front of camera 2 pretends that he has been hit in the jaw; he staggers back and then pretends to punch camera 2. This can go on as long as you can stand it. Playback the tape as soon as each group has finished. The final product will appear remarkably realistic.

2) Far and Near - a child sits in a chair and faces a line monitor. Camera 1 is positioned close to the subject; camera 2 is farther back for long and medium shots. The switcher alternates between cameras. The subject changes his expression or pose according to the shot on live, i.e., if it is camera 1 (close-up) he might stick out his tongue; if it is camera 2 he might make a gesture with his arms and legs.

Teaching Suggestions

These exercises are helpful in developing coordination between subjects, camera operators and switchers. Make certain that each person knows what he is to do before you begin.

Variations and Follow-Up

Watch a TV program and count the number of times the picture is switched. Contrast a switched program your children have made with one that uses only a single camera. When preparing scripts include rough ideas about when cameras should be switched during scenes.

EXERCISE SEVEN: Special Effects

Special effects should be used sparingly for most work by children because it is important that the technology not be directing the content. Too much reliance on fades, wipes, keys, etc., can prevent children from dealing with the central problem of how to communicate information to others. However, there are times when special effects can be useful. A fade instead of a switch can indicate the end of a sequence and the beginning of another; a "super" can be a useful tool for creating a fantasy scene. The following exercises will demonstrate how some of these effects can be used.

1) Split screen - a child in front of camera 1. A child in front of camera 2. Split the screen vertically so that each child occupies one half of the picture. Have them attempt to pretend to shake hands.

2) Split screen - same as above but split the screen horizontally. Have one child attempt to pretend to stand on the other's head.

3) The moving split screen - a child in front of camera 1; camera 2 focused on a dark piece of paper, rug, etc. Start with camera 2 and slowly move wipe 1 across the screen from left to right so that the child can pretend to push camera 2 picture off the screen.

4) Super dance - put both faders on so that the two camera pictures are superimposed. Have children dance, jump up and down, etc. In order to accentuate the action, have camera 1 tilt up and down over subjects, while camera 2 pans back and forth over subjects.

Teaching Suggestions

These exercises require some difficult moves by all participants. Allow children time to make mistakes - often these lead you off into exciting new directions. These exercises can be done by preschool children if they have the time to practice.
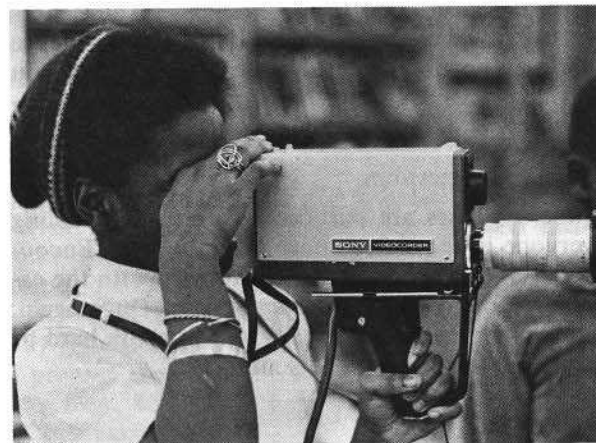
Variations and Follow-Up

By mixing close-up shots and long shots into the same super you can make interesting effects such as a giant hand chasing a little person. Discuss with class where special effects might get in the way of the content.

# Portraits

KIT LAYBOURNE

This activity seems particularly good for introducing kids to the equipment. It insures that everyone is both creator and subject of a tape. There is a special focus on inductive learning of disciplined ca-



Richard Chin

mera control and on learning audio-editing. The product is invariably good, which means that kids will get a positive feedback and raise their frustration thresholds for more difficult projects.