

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



Chuck Anderson

of techniques you want to explore. Under those circumstances, you will want to select a format that is varied and flexible, such as the structure of the magazine. The basic difference between a television magazine and a print magazine lies in the use of visual and sound images rather than the printed word and still pictures. It is interesting to note that the rise in television has been matched by the decline of the weekly picture magazine, such as Life.



Chuck Anderson

Some things to think about before assembling a television magazine: Table of contents - how much time or space will be devoted to features, interviews, hard news, reviews of plays or assemblies, film clips, special reports on club activities, humor in the form of satire or parody, editorial comment, etc. The attention span and interests of your potential audience - are you preparing the magazine for the administration? Your teachers? The student body in general? Are there different groups in the school? Will they be pleased or offended by the magazine? Will the magazine help to unify different groups in the school?

Due to such production limitations as other classes, time, etc., you may find that a weekly or bi-weekly broadcast is as much as you can manage. We found this to be true in our case. Also, we broadcast at different times of day, to get a wider audience, and to avoid being repetitious with the same crowd.

Titling

The first thing to think about in your production is the creation of titles. As with printed magazines, titles are used to introduce and call attention to the main idea of each presentation. Creating effective titles can be an art. The only limitation to a dramatic title is the imagination of the creator. Good television titles should be visually exciting. They should move from one side of the screen to the other, appear or disappear just as suddenly. They should be bold, provocative, and verbally colorful. A good title catches the attention of the viewer and makes him want to participate in the material that follows. A good title holds out a seductive promise of interesting things to come.

As is the case with newspaper headlines, a good television title usually involves a subject and a verb, is in the active voice, and is sometimes alliterative. For example: "Pushing the Pentagon," "Then Came Bronson," "The Medium is the Message."

Here are some suggestions for low-budget titling devices.

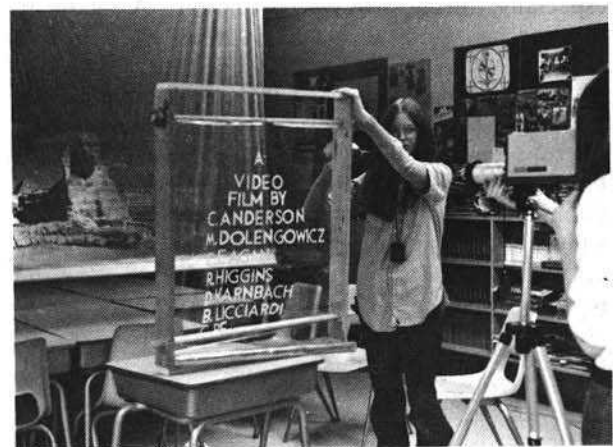
1) Disappearing titles: set up a table with raised rear legs, or directly on the floor. The letters are formed with graphite, mica dust, powdered styrofoam, or soap powder on a black background. The letters are moved with a small electric fan or vacuum cleaner. After the titles are formed, they can be blown away gradually so that they seem to disappear.

2) Movie Marquee effect: attach a track to the back of a rear projection screen. Mask the rest of the screen with black paper. The mask may have a design or logos cut into it. Titles and various commentaries can be written with a grease pencil on strips of acetate or cut into long strips of black paper with a stencil. When the title is to be televised, the strip is pulled across the track, from left to right, producing the effect of moving letters.

3) Titles can be painted backwards on a sheet of glass or piece of paper, then reflected in a tray of water.

4) Titles can be rolled on a long sheet of acetate or paper. Practice makes for smoothness of execution.

5) Titles can be written on clear plastic or acetate and placed between the camera and the scene being filmed.



Chuck Anderson

There are many other simple and inexpensive ways to produce titles. Experiment.

Production Crews and Production Tips

The next step is to pick the production crew. Each person has to be fully informed as to his or her duties well in advance of the actual videotaping time. There should be a run-through of the entire program before the actual taping. Titles and other visuals have to be selected and prepared, mounted, numbered, etc. The cameraman should have a shot list, telling him the sequence to be followed in each

presentation. Similarly, the sound crew should have a list of sound cues. The music and special sound effects that are to be used should be on tape, with an accompanying time sheet. Cue cards should be prepared for the announcers and anyone else who is going to be speaking before the camera. When preparing cue cards, you should use an out-



Chuck Anderson

line form or just list the major points in order; word-for-word idiot cards usually lead to confusion.

Check to be sure that any special equipment required will be available, such as projectors, props, furniture, etc.

If you are taping outside the classroom studio, you should use a remote microphone with a windscreen especially during interview situations. A relatively inexpensive windscreen can be made by punching small holes in a cardboard orange juice can and packing the microphone in the can with tissue paper to keep it from bumping around. Some other microphone tips: While recording, hold the microphone firmly. If your hand moves or the microphone is knocked about, a lot of extra noise will be added to the soundtrack. Do not hold the microphone too close to your mouth; it will pick up the noise of breathing. Don't hold the microphone too close to a tape recorder or projector; it will pick up the noise of their motors.

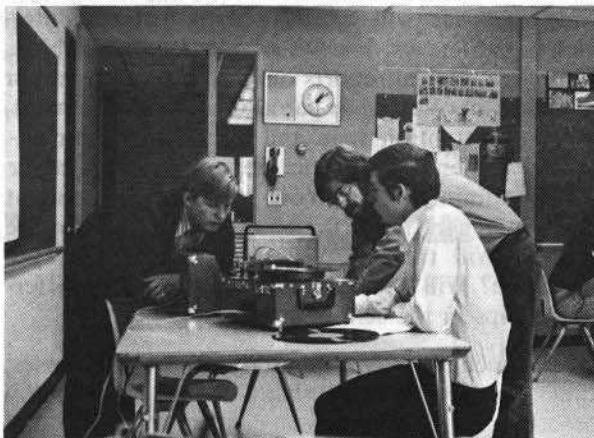


Chuck Anderson

The sound crew should prepare all special sound effects in advance of the final production. If a sound effects record is not available, there are a number of ways to produce sound effects on your own. An unopened door sound can be made by rubbing a balloon half-filled with air. The sound of galloping hoofs can be created by using the time-honored method of tapping halves of empty coconut shells on the top of a telephone book or desk. Crumpling a piece of cellophane sounds like running water, and sometimes, depending on the context of the narrative, like crackling flames. To get the sound of hitting, slap two flat sticks together. There are many other sounds that can be created. Experiment with a tape recorder.

Puppets and marionettes translate especially well into television productions. If you are using marionettes, be sure to use a flat, black background. Video playback is especially helpful to puppeteers, who are backstage, to respond immediately and accurately to audience in street theater situations.

In black and white/monochromatic television, you should avoid the use of extreme black and white colors. Yellow, or light blue translates on the screen as white, and dark red comes across as black. Title cards and background mounts should



Chuck Anderson

be painted flat black; otherwise, the studio lights will reflect off the surfaces.

You may want to make an off-the-air recording of a network television program, and replace the original sound track with one of your own. Check the instruction manual that accompanies your video system. You will probably want to experiment with the audio dub control and the sound volume levels. Conversely, you may want to take a pre-recorded sound track, such as a well-known news commentator, and create your own series of video images to match (or contradict) his words. The best way to accomplish this exercise would be to record the newscaster's voice on a sound tape recorder, then dub onto previously shot video material.

Mixing Mediums

Slides or movies can be transferred to videotape by

use of a film chain, an especially constructed projector. If you do not have such expensive equipment, you can still videotape pre-filmed material by projecting it on a white poster board or a translucent shower curtain which has been recycled as a rear screen projection system.

If you have a silent film, or a film whose sound track is of little importance, show the film on a projector with a variable speed control. Most projectors run at 24 frames per second, and the television camera scans at 30 frames per second, so there is a lag that must be compensated for; otherwise, you will get horizontal lines on the finished video product. After you have transferred the film or slides to videotape, you can add your own soundtrack. It is interesting to change the mood or idea of the film by experimenting with different sound tracks.

Finally, there is the matter of publicity. We use hand-made posters placed throughout the school, the public address system, and our own home-made internal radio system.

SOME POSSIBILITIES

While the content, format, frequency, and style of your video magazine will properly reflect your own particular school and interests, here are some suggestions to help get you started:

1) People observation: visual documentation of the daily activities of a school personality, with his or her permission. (You will find that people are usually suspicious of the hidden camera approach and the invasion of privacy.) "A Day in the Life of. . ."

2) A special report on the senses: what it's like to be blind, or deaf, etc. Try walking around the school blindfolded for a couple of hours. Your adventures can be videotaped. You will need a guide for this exercise, for safety's sake.

3) Make a short 8mm. or 16mm. film about hands, noses, walking, etc. Add an appropriate sound track, and transfer the final results to videotape.

4) Prepare a slide/sound essay on fashions, drug abuse, student rights, etc.

5) Update and revise a radio play for television.

6) Create television commercials for the school store, the yearbook, etc.

7) Select one of your favorite poems, short stories, or songs, and dramatize it for television.

8) Using an 8mm. or 16mm. camera with a close-up lens, film the panels of a re-arranged comic strip. Write a new dialogue, make a videotape of the film, using a voice-overlay to add the fresh dialogue.

9) Prepare a series of short video studies of poster art, graffiti, or editorial cartoons. Add appropriate sound.

10) Prepare a video map of your neighborhood, or the school district.

11) Prepare a newscast, mixing local, state, and national news, by reviewing the parts of a typical

network program: interviews, commercials, editorials, weather, sports, reviews, on-the-spot reports, etc. Sort out differences between hard news and feature reporting. Prepare such props as weather maps, lists of football scores, etc.

12) Prepare a quiz or game show, and videotape it.

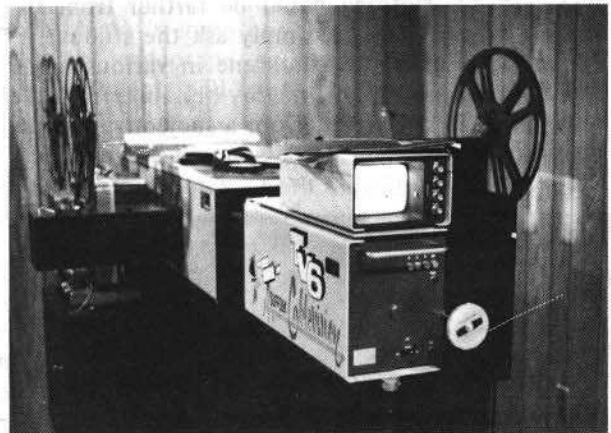
13) Make a video collage. Working in small groups, make 30-second collages. Each collage should consist of no less than ten different shots



Chuck Anderson

on a related topic: student dress, protest, drug abuse, etc. Possible sources for video collages are off-the-air recordings, posters, road signs, bumper stickers, role-playing situations, and real life.

14) Video feedback art: for this exercise, you need a television camera (half-inch portable), a



Chuck Anderson

videotape recording deck, and a television monitor. Connect the tape recorder to the monitor via the RF adapter. Turn the camera upside down. Aim the camera (which is connected to the tape recorder by the camera cable) into the television monitor screen. Adjust the monitor to high contrast. Move the camera to a distance of about 3 feet from the monitor. In a situation analogous to sound feedback, a number of abstract patterns will begin to form. By slowly moving the zoom lens and changing the F-stop, the abstract patterns will grow and change. Practice leads to control of the pat-

terns. Playing with the patterns in accompaniment to rock music makes for an effective and artistic presentation.

15) Prepare public service announcements, such as concise reminders to recycle paper, conserve wa-

ter, save electricity, etc.

16) Prepare announcements of activities. In this case, the announcer should be positioned in front of a rear projection screen, and slides related to the announcements should be projected.

The Tactics of the Truth

IRVING FALK

The date? 534 B.C. The place? Athens. The cast? Thespis, the actor, and Solon, the legislator. The setting? A backstage scene between the above as related by Plutarch and quoted by A.M. Nagler in his book Sources of Theatrical History. The action? Solon, living an old man's life of leisure, went to see a performance by Thespis. After the play, Solon spoke to Thespis and asked him if he were not ashamed to tell so many lies before such a multitude of people. Thespis replied that it was no harm to do so or to say so in a play. Whereupon Solon chastened him, ". . .if we honor and commend such play as this, we shall find it some day in our business."

There is a derived caveat from Solon's remarks which still ensnares us today. Point a video camera at a scene in a street, a park, a subway, and roll through that camera half-inch videotape, and behold, the truth will appear on that tape when it is played back. Nothing could be farther from the truth. To test the idea, simply ask the student video director to shoot the scene in various ways, such as from the top of a nearby building, from the sewer level in the street, from a subjective character point of view and the lesson will become clear

to him. The truth is elusive and always will be as the film *Rashomon* says, or as Pirandello says in Right You Are If You Think You Are. Illusion is the condition of life and communications technology has introduced more people to more lies than even Solon anticipated "in our business." Take that same student-shot scene above and add the techniques of editing to the finished master tape and the lies become compounded.

Very often teachers using video with their students in class criticize the video product with the remark that the student has nothing new to say. This is a common complaint. It is an impatience exhibited by the teacher not with what is said (Solon *aside*), but with the manner of saying it. There may be some unconscious hope that the student using videotape will uncover some new universal truth not realized before when what is really being asked for is a fresh restatement of what we already know. So many of the fundamental truths have been expressed in the past four thousand years. Thespis, as well as the teacher and the student, knew all the basic hopes and fears and frustrations and ironies and ecstasies and despairs which are mankind's. Yet to each age and to each one of us, they come as if they were being expressed for the first time. Seldom has even the greatest of artists been original in his work. What he feels, millions have felt and thought before him. We treasure the work of the great artist because of his manner of saying it. In language, in dance, in music, in painting, in videotape, mastery is achieved by filtering the old universals through the prism of the artist's personality so that we see the old truths with new vividness. Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Donne, Goethe, Tolstoy, all said nothing about the deepest concerns of man which mankind did not already know or feel. But what they said, they said in such a way that mankind's apprehension of these concerns were quickened - our emotional and intellectual batteries were re-charged.

Process of Truth

Frustration has been a theme throughout the long history of creative work. Few artists have given it as eloquent expression as Shakespeare did in *Macbeth's* "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow."



Mary Sheridan