

Teri's role as catalyst, it is hoped that the community and school will find its own way to continue this project which they feel is important.

Bridging the Media Gap

We at the Center are constantly drawn between two poles: at the same time that we are very conscious of our role in the creation of a new field, we also must be even more conscious of ways in which to serve that field. As video specialists, we seek to expand our knowledge and to explore the full benefits of the technology's potential. We want to make ourselves smarter. Yet, as video educators, we must continually face new generations of video

learners who have the same problems and ask the same questions as everyone else beginning video.

As we can, we will continue activities which promulgate media studies in educational settings and assist those individuals and groups who have creative inputs to render. There is lots to do in this emerging field. As John Culkin, Director of the Center for Understanding Media said: "Anything that helps the child to understand and control the media environment is a good thing. Any way the media can help the child to define himself and his relation with others is a good thing."

Inner-City Video

JON DUNN

The Communications Experience, an E.S.E.A. Title I project in Philadelphia public and parochial schools, designs its projects to increase understanding of and competency in the basic skills of our culture and also to equip teachers to play an important part in this process. These basic skills go far beyond language and quantitative competency and include a broad range of basic communication skills such as media competency (the ability to decode and encode signals in mass media and environmental media) and understanding human interrelationships. These basic skills enable students to begin to deal effectively with themselves as valuable human resources and with the ever pervasive electronic/technological environment. It is often pointed out that children entering school today will be under the age of 35, in the year 2001. So that an additional, indispensable skill becomes the ability to deal effectively with the profound changes in the basic structures of our society.

It is hardly accidental that the artist-educators who comprise the staff and consultants of The Communications Experience all see themselves moving toward a less specialized vision of the world. It is not simply a throwback to a Renaissance mind set, but a phenomenon that recognizes the nature of the rapid changes within our culture that demand extreme flexibility and adaptability among those striving to retain their humanity amid a growing technocracy. The recognition of these concerns is hardly limited to this group. On the contrary, educators and social scientists throughout the world have voiced with clarity and vision the need for this kind of viewing of the future. The programs of The Communications Experience confront these concerns and attempt practical learning strategies.

In working toward our goals, we deal with a number of media tools including video. Film, photo-

graphy, audio tape, radio, synthesizers, maps, newspapers, cities, towns, woods, clothing, language, group interaction analyses, and institutions are other media through which we work to prepare teachers and students and ourselves to deal with our multiple worlds.

Let me sketch out a few examples of how The Communications Experience has used video over the past five years:

- Fifth grade students studying the urban environment have videotaped its institutions in action (hospitals, police, sports clubs, businesses, etc.) One high point was a tape of a Mayor Frank Rizzo press conference. One young interviewer asked, "Is there any connection between your appointment of Joe Rizzo as fire commissioner and his being your brother?"

- A drug program in which addicts see a film and then explain, in front of video cameras, what they saw. The tape is played and they question what they saw. They then tape that playback session and play it back. Insights begin to pile up as the cycle



Jon Dunn

continues.

– Young prisoners in both the Young Study Center and Women's House of Detention who have great difficulty talking about their situations and feelings, are taped in role play situations of their own design. Attitudes, feelings, and perceptions come pouring out and, because they are on tape, can be discussed and understood and hopefully transferred to their own lives.

– Tape exchanges are developed to share perceptions: between rival gangs; between prisoners from one neighborhood and the people from that neighborhood; between inner-city and suburban students; between teachers and students in the same classroom; between citizens in remote areas and their legislators.

– Using non-network formats, mixed aged elementary students produce a weekly closed-circuit show about their interests.

– Institutionalized emotionally disturbed adolescent boys write and develop stories for taping. The tapes are used to develop self-concept and inner control.

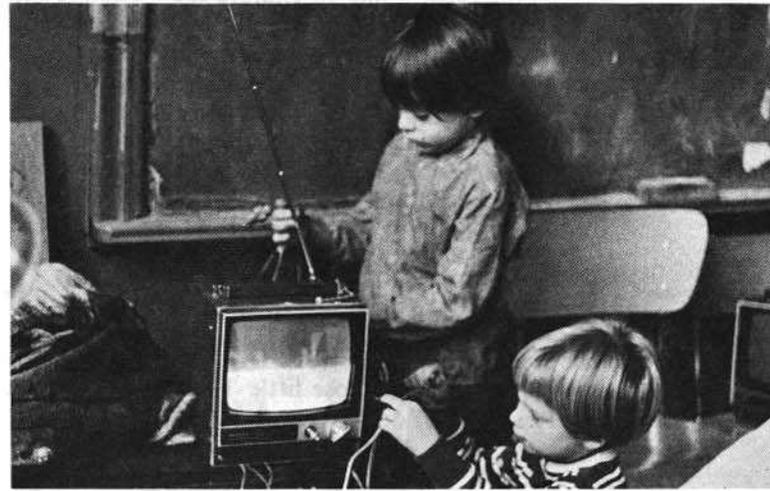
– First graders role-play and play back so they can see how they appear to others in decision making situations. Then they do the same for the principal.

– Video is used as an evaluation tool with interns of the Parkway Program. Three two minute situations are acted out by a student, a teacher, an intern, who have switched roles, (e.g., a student playing a teacher.) The group then decode the various perceptions, problems, viewpoints, etc. which arose through the taped situations.

– High school students combine a sociology and a community health course by going out to neighborhood facilities, videotaping them, then returning for analysis, argument, etc.

– Staff and students develop games and exercises which metaphorically reveal learning processes and problems.

These few examples only begin to tap the range of possibilities of educating through, with and about video. One truth, at least, comes apparent. What we learn is the "how" we learn. What we legitimize as valid learning processes is what students retain. Even if they never remember the "content," they retain for form. So it seems important not to allow media to harden into a new orthodoxy but to help people to be open to the new tools that are coming at us with increased frequency.



Kids Today: A Cable Project

PAUL RABIN AND MYLES HALSBAND

They peek through the viewfinder of a camera, push buttons in the control room and see themselves on television. They weave, compose songs and pet strange animals; they produce plays; they learn about pantomime.

For the elementary school children of Malden, Massachusetts, it's all part of their school program through field trips to the television studios of Warner Cable of Malden to take part in an experimental television project called Kids Today.

Producer Myles Halsband and Program Director Paul Rabin conceived of the series as an ideal use of a community cable television station by a public school system. Kids Today was designed to make the educational experience of Malden's children an

entertaining as well as informative process, supplementing classroom fare with an entirely new environment replete with people, ideas and experiences that children could not normally receive in a conventional classroom.

Participation is the key – and each program in the series invites the maximum interaction between guest (there is no host) and students. Subjects covered in each episode are often arranged prior to the videotaping by the producer and the classroom teacher; the program itself is telecast on the local community station at a time convenient for parents, teachers, and educators.

Since the show began in February 1972, almost 1300 elementary school students have participated.