

# Video as a Tool in Institutional Analysis



ANTIOCH COLLEGE  
WASHINGTON - BALTIMORE CAMPUS

SOCIAL RESEARCH AND ACTION CENTER  
525 ST. PAUL STREET  
BALTIMORE, MD. 21202  
301-752-3956

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Faculty, Staff, Students of SRA

CC:

FROM: Abram Engelman

DATE: 1/71

SUBJECT: Institutional Analysis Project

Abram Engelman and a group of his students from the Center for Social Research and Action (SRA) will direct an institutional analysis and need assessment of a State Training School for Girls (a correctional facility for delinquent young women and female children in need of supervision.) The entire staff of the institution and fifty percent of the inmate population will be interviewed with the aid of 1/2 inch video tape to determine their needs and to document areas of conflict between the staff/staff, the staff/inmates, the inmates/inmates. The video document will be fed back to the staff and young women in an effort to make them more cognizant of the contradictions and conflict within the institution.

By heightening the contradictions and delineating the conflicts, video will act as a mediator, forcing both staff and inmates to recognize and identify their own and each other's needs. Based on the recognition of those varying needs, staff and inmates can mutually develop programs that, given incarceration, will allow them to begin to deal with the institutional and interpersonal conflicts and to productively utilize their time.

We have included a description of SRA's attempt to assist Training School "X", by means of VTR, to restructure and clarify the school's program and goals. This account consists of: (1) excerpts from the original summary of the project (2) a transcript from the institutional analysis VTR edit (3) why VTR? and (4) some proposed programs.

### (1) Summary

Need assessment is a valuable training device. It offers possibilities for programming in many directions. First, it could be the basis for a concentrated training program directed to the management people at X. This should offer the opportunity for attitudinal development and improvement of organizational techniques. The emphasis would be the use of training as a means of approaching programming on a conceptual level rather than on a maintenance basis. Second, the training program would offer direct training on a departmental level to line staff such as youth supervisors, social workers, teachers, etc. A third and major training aspect of this program would be to establish a beginning thrust toward initiating a governance system among the young inmates at X. Their video taped responses indicated a high level of positive thinking which could be invaluable in the reorganization of the institution. Finally, this training program can be instituted at X initially and then be used

for the other training schools provided by the Department of Juvenile Services. It will serve to clarify the primary objectives and purposes the Department must have when serving the juvenile offender in the State of Maryland. The training offers an opportunity for positive change with maximum input of staff/inmates and a chance to develop a guideline structure for training throughout all of the juvenile institutions run by the state.

Through the use of the video tape method both the implicit and explicit were revealed in the interviews. A clear need for unified programming was amplified, as well as a need for organizational restructuring. There is a definite and unanimous desire for change at X. The training program as designed would affect the top management of the institution, the line staff and all other management areas including the clerical-secretarial pool, maintenance staff and all other supportive services. It would also offer an opportunity for the young women inmates to learn training techniques.

The methodology of using video tape as a means of training for staff and young women in residence should develop a heightened sense and awareness of individual potential and an awareness of each person's role and the contribution that each individual can and should make to life at the training school.

The training will take ten weeks. Six students from SRA who have been trained in media and communications techniques will be in residence at X. Three SRA training staff members will supervise the

students. The SRA staff will conduct the training sessions and work with the staff and inmates at X.

This program offers a rare opportunity to this institution in addition to serving as a model and experiment in training techniques for other juvenile and adult residential institutions. It is our understanding that to date this type of video training has not been tried locally or nationally and as a pilot it has potential for influencing the corrections field throughout the nation.

Although this proposal was not funded by the State of Maryland, the VTR institutional analysis and need assessment did take place. The following is a transcript from the institutional analysis VTR edit:

Head of Clinical Department:

"I want to make a distinction between the superficial mood of the department and what the real mood is. I think superficially, if you were to come in there on any given day you would find that the mood is pretty good; but then if we got involved in a meeting such as we did the other day during the taping you begin to find that maybe the mood isn't as good as it appears superficially. I think this comes about because of frustration a lot of workers are feeling. I know I'm feeling it myself. I can name a couple of examples of things that are causing frustration. One would be, in what direction are we moving? Accompanying this, how do you move in that direction? How do you implement the cottage treatment team concept? I would have to take part of the responsibility for this lack of clarity on the part of the workers because I'm not clear myself. And, if I can take the liberty I think sometimes the superintendent himself isn't clear. We don't know what the policy is for the day. It seems at least, whether this is reality or not, it frequently seems that the policy for today is not the policy we had yesterday. They are also frustrated because of lack of adequate supervision from me. Supervision in terms of child treatment, interviewing techniques, things that they should be receiving, I think, on a weekly basis that they are receiving very intermittently if at all. Supervision seems to come about as a result of crisis situations. Putting out fires - if you have a problem, that's the time to get your supervision whereas it should be on an on-going basis. And finally, frustration resulting from a lack of clarity in relation to what or whose philosophy are we following in relation to certain policies."

Young Woman Inmate:

"When you're on the outside and you just first come in, that's when it all really comes out because you come and they tell you to take all your clothes off and take a shower and put on a white robe. They lock you in the Clinic for three hours. You see

the nurse - she takes a smear to make sure you don't have the clap - they send you over to this thing, you're stuck in this little room - you're going to stay there for five more hours. The biggest shock is really the first couple of days because all of a sudden these people are putting you in this room and are saying you can't come out of the room without knocking on the door. You can't go to the bathroom except for four times a day when they let you out. If you want to go any other time you use your pot. You look out your window and there are these big screens on your window and you just say wow and it all of a sudden just hits you. At first I was kinda numb about what was going on and then it hits you like hey I'm at X. All this stuff at first is really bad. When you see that gynecologist out here it's like being in an animal camp because everyone lines up outside the room and one after another you walk in the room and spread your legs. It's really crude."

House Parents' Supervisors:

"I think sometimes we fail our children by becoming too permissive and I think this is our problem now because we have more kids coming back now - they've been here and we think they are ready to go home and next month you see them out here at the front desk. They are right back again. I think, on the whole, although we feel it may be helping them, I think we are too permissive with them."

"I think our discipline should be a little different. I think all children expect to be punished for the things that they do but I don't think we are giving them what they want."

Teacher:

"I think planning is important but it doesn't have to be the type planning that has to be on paper in these nice little squares with the time of day written beside them. I personally have to psych myself up for the week. Like every weekend I might think well, this week I'm going to see if I can go to Wednes-

day without getting too upset with a certain girl. That's more my planning than anything I put on paper. I make no secret of the fact that I don't make lesson plans, I might like to have some idea about what I would like to cover in a day, but that's as far as it goes. I think it's better too."

Teacher:

My biggest frustration is that I never seem to make any progress. I've got the same girls this year I had last year and they are just as bad and I'm not sure they remember a thing I tried to teach them last year. If they don't remember, then I didn't teach them to be honest about it. The things I tried to get across didn't sink in and discipline is really no better. I thought I made some progress some - where along the line - I don't quit because of this, but it is frustrating.

Young Woman Inmate:

"You just find out that after awhile if you start believing in people, they let you down. If you just don't let people touch you at all then you hardly ever get hurt."

Business Office Personnel:

"When I speak of it I speak as a training school but I don't believe myself. I don't believe they are being trained."

"It's more like a country club in plain words."  
"We don't train them to do anything."

Probation Officer:

"Juvenile Court in Baltimore - the staff down there, the training is very poor. I started work two years ago. I had a so-called training period of maybe two-three weeks - haven't received anything since which is ridiculous. There isn't anything. I'm inadequate and most of us are. We need a mandatory, ongoing weekly or bi-weekly training thing with vital seminars and real stuff which we don't get. We don't get anything."

#### House Parents:

"You can't have no type of rehabilitation unless you have some type of discipline because the girls were out in the street doing everything they want to do. Then they come here to X and do half the things they want to and they are not disciplined and we are not teaching them no sense of moral value and no sense of responsibility. They can't have no rehabilitation program not unless you have some type of discipline first for the girl."

"What values do they want to teach the children? What do they want us to do because we could do a lot more than what we are really doing but you don't really have a chance."

"A set of values has to be set down by administration. We have to decide what goals. Administration will have to decide what goals they want to meet with these girls and they have to set a standard and have us go by this standard. I see no point in a girl going back home and getting dope that night. It just isn't helping at all."

#### Young Women Inmates:

"In here, it's take care of Number One. I don't see that. To me that's conceited - I'm taking care of myself and don't care about anyone else - they can do what they want. That's what this world is. Take care of yourself and leave Number Two alone. I don't want to change because of that. You see something bad here--everybody's stuck up like a pole or something. I don't want to be that way. It's on the outside even if you're not locked up. People will lock you up and run your life. This is what X is doing right now--trying to run your life and these girls don't want to be run they want to live their own life."

"I thought the training school would teach you something but what the housemothers tell me this ain't no training school and we haven't learned nothing since we've been in here but to bicker."

#### Social Workers:

"I think one of the biggest threats we have

is that we don't know what we are doing. Our role is very undefined and we have had a lot of difficulty with it. Historically, social workers here have not had that much power, they haven't had a defined role. We get stuck with a lot of cleaning up of dirt. We don't know what we are doing. We are supposed to be therapeutic in a custodial institution which immediately puts us in a bad position. Are we really therapeutic? I really don't see where we are trained to deal with it. A B.A. from college does not teach you any therapeutic principles. You have no idea in an interview how to approach subjects, how to get information from the kids without threatening them. You end up making fantastic mistakes and alienating them forever, at least from you. Those are big problems we have here. We don't get that much training. Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ spends most of his time with administrative duties, we don't get supervision, through no fault of his. We get crisis supervision - what do I do in this case - but as for him training us in therapy we don't get it."

"In those sensitivity groups we had we really found out how diverse we all are philosophically, morally, whatever you have, and I wonder if that isn't part of our departmental problem we have right in social service. Clinical is saying absolutes, absolutes, absolutes and I don't mean to sound all kind of personal all of a sudden, but I think it is a problem."

"Then people who work in one institution can't always believe the same way as you. We can't ever hope to achieve that because I'm never going to believe absolutes and he is never going to believe what I believe. It's just a matter of how we are dealing with it and we aren't dealing with it. How are we going to accept the fact that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ believes in absolutes and the rest of us don't. We can never hope to achieve unity in that way."

#### Young Woman Inmate:

"I'd rather kill my own child than to bring him up so he could wind up in city jail, state

penitentiary. Why should I bring something into this world I have already been through? If my mother couldn't change me, why should I try to change a child of my own?"

#### Psychotherapist:

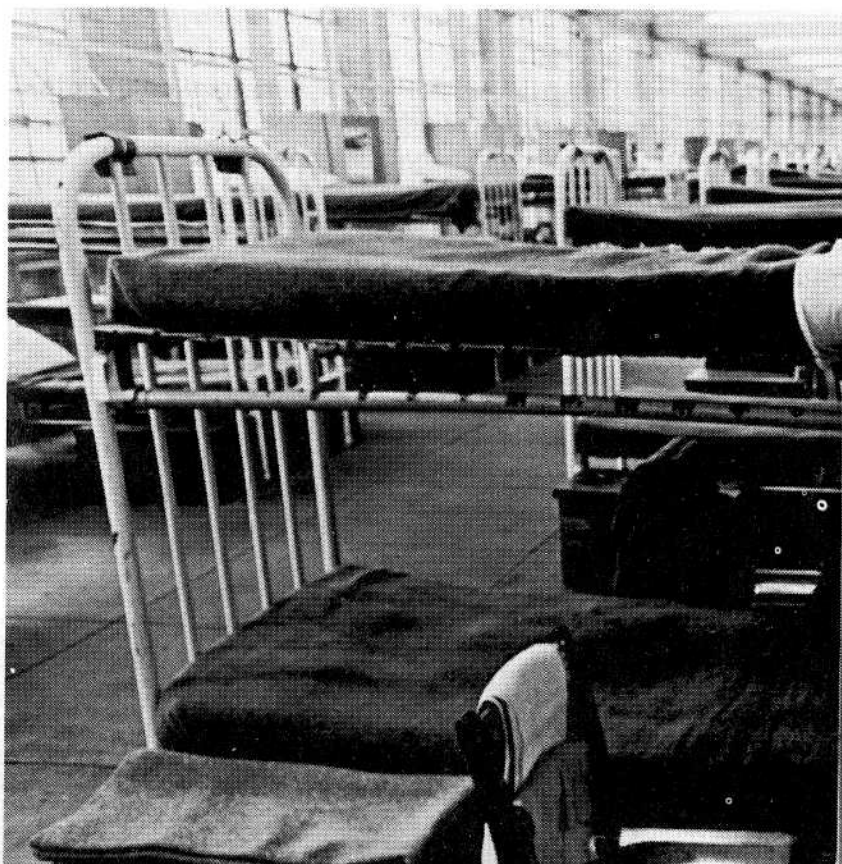
"I don't believe there is a reconciliation. As I said before, the institution is evil even though it is a necessary evil. I work with my feet on the ground and this is the environment and I will not be able, because I am not Nixon, to change this today or tomorrow. I will not find three hundred families to accept three hundred girls. This is reality, so even though my approach is completely pessimistic basically, at least I can make something out of what I have on my hands. In my hands now I have this type of institution, these poor girls. They are wounded, they are frustrated, they are rejected, so let us do what we can. I think the reconciliation is only psychological but if you try to be concrete and wise trying to make something out of what we have even though if I could have done something - if I had the power on a fantasy level, I would destroy all institutions."

#### Young Woman Inmate:

"People are tired of running like dogs and cats. That's what it seems like. Once you are raised up running it seems like it's no end to it. You feel like you're going to run all the rest of your life. And, be ashamed to walk the streets because they say yeah, that's the girl they locked up and it hurts it really hurts. You have to be proud of yourself, and your people. They laugh in your face and call you all kinds of names - that hurts. If people kick you down, how can you trust somebody? Do they trust me, say I'm their friend? Huh! They don't trust anybody."

The video tape transcripts, a history of the institution and other selected materials will be available soon in book form.

People interested in the clinical and political implications of this effort may write: A. Engelman, SRA, Antioch College, 535 St. Paul Place, Baltimore, Maryland 21202.





### (3) Why VTR?

One of the most effective and exciting tools for this kind of institution building is VTR. We will use VTR as a foundation of the training program. It will be self-discovery through problem solving with the emphasis upon breaking down communications barriers and creating new communications linkages. We will use VTR to open up the information flow - the flow has become channelized and strangled over the years.

Our initial inquiries at X (recorded on VTR) demonstrated that each group - house parents, teachers, social workers, administrative staff ... even the young women themselves had common concerns, complaints and corrective suggestions. Each group spoke of these things from their own frame of reference - and each group felt very much alone in their concerns. Since they felt alone, they also felt powerless to implement their suggestions and exercise their good will outside the definitions of their "roles" as they are conventionally defined by the "system".

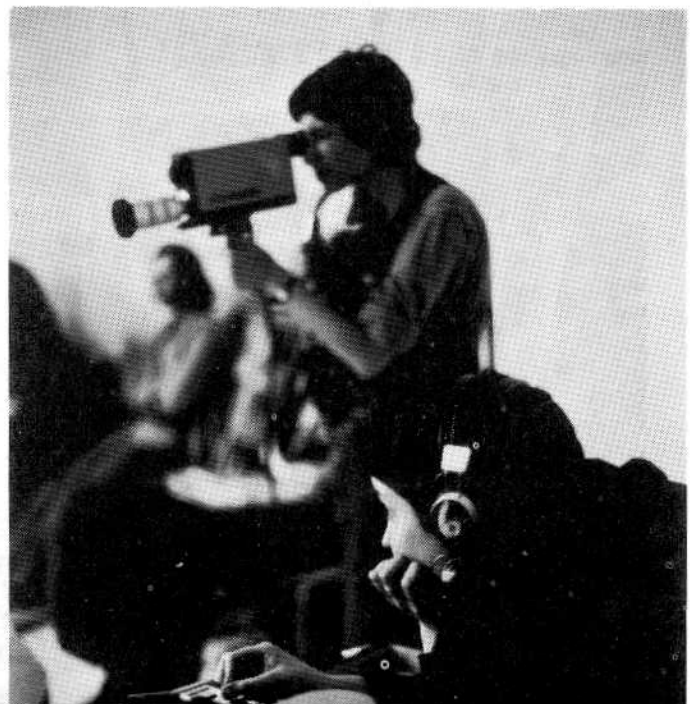
The simple process of recording an individual or a small group in conversation or basic role playing situations can break down restricting role patterns and change one's self image. To see and hear oneself is the starting point for constructive change. Along with this VTR recording process goes a subtle sense of power and self-determination. Because each individual (or group) will have the editorial power over what tape is saved and what is erased, the taping process will not inhibit free discussion (this has already been proved beyond a doubt with the tapes which have been made to date). Equally as important is the constant "going on record" which is taking place. The folks in the program will feel an increased responsibility for what is being said. They will feel a commitment to making it work which is not the case where no such process is used.

Recently we did a thorough VTR need assessment. We have a clear idea of what is needed at X. Our role as trainers with a video capability will not be to spell that out; rather, it will be to offer technical assistance

to the groups who have asked for it. We will explore the areas of need with them and together come up with creative and constructive answers to their questions within the X context. The houseparents have asked how they can assume a more helping and less strictly custodial relationship to the girls. The teachers are concerned to create an atmosphere more conducive to learning. The social work staff wants some way to insure continuity in their consultation process both on a day-to-day basis and at the final process of review. The administration has expressed the desire to perform more of a developmental role in the institution and to improve the channels of communication. The young women have asked for a greater self-determination function (for growth and self-development).

We will assist these groups individually at first. We will deal with role frustration and seek to clarify the helping relationship in each case. Each group's overriding concern will be to maximize its input in the educational and therapeutic (rehabilitational) aspects of the system and keep the custodial functions to a safe minimum. We will begin to develop group strategy toward this end.

At an appropriate point, we will regroup the participants into the "teams" of cross disciplinary staff who will be working together. The concerns and strategies developed in the earlier groups will be compared and tested in light of the overview provided by the "team" grouping. The teams will begin to work out differences with the members from each category serving as advocate for that point of view.



#### (4) Some Proposed Programs

##### Training Process

To build an ongoing process of education at X for all participants.

- 1) Work with supervisory and executive staff for administrative reorganization on developmental and maintenance lines.
- 2) Work with house parents and cooks so that they can be more helpful not just punitive. Develop better cottage programs.
- 3) Work with teachers to help create a better learning and teaching environment.
- 4) Work with social workers to be more clinically effective, primarily with girls but also with staff.
- 5) Work with young women so that they will be more receptive to help, develop with them a self-governing process and a communication network.

##### Step I

We will begin working initially with the groups as they are naturally constituted at X: Social Workers, Teachers, Administrative Staff, House Parents, Supervisors and Young Women.

Working with the same general goal in each case, i.e. how can we make X a better, more efficient institution in serving the needs of the young women sent there? How can we do our job more efficiently, etc? We will introduce a set of tapes edited from the material we collected recently. Each group will react to that material from its own frame of reference. While they will learn something more about the total working of the institution, they will each feel that the general "need assessment" process as carried on from the outside was inadequate from their point of view.

##### Step II

We will briefly familiarize them with the equipment and let them build their own set of data related to their particular needs viewed in light of the needs of the whole institution. The areas of frustration will be explored. Questions will be raised about the most creative, constructive ways to deal with this. Where the aims of the group seem to be in conflict with the aims of the institution as a whole or with the aims of other sub-groups, the position will be clearly spelled out and, wherever possible, documented visually.

##### Step III

The group sessions will be co-ordinated so that at the end of five sessions, the groups will have covered much of the same ground. Needs will have been assessed from an institutional point of view and from a group point of view. A document will be prepared from the VTR material (the data collected).

Speaking from the relative strength of their "role" groupings, each report will tend to have great areas of overlapping common concerns (as well as differences).

##### Step IV

The sessions will be regrouped into "teams" made up of interdisciplinary mix. The VTR documents from the previous "role" centered workshops will be presented by the representative from that sector ... they will serve as advocates for the areas of "special concern". The workshops will begin to strengthen these teams as interpersonal working units.

##### Step V

Evaluation.

During the time that the staff has been working with their own role definition and problem solving, the young women will have been given work in a self-discovery, and the understanding of their social and institutional role.

At the heart of the training program will be a portable video communications system. It will serve the whole school as an ongoing report, evaluation (feedback producing), and educational tool.

A fifteen minute "program" of news relevant to the staff and the students will circulate through the houses on a regular schedule (perhaps just after meal time so that after six days of lunchtime, dinnertime playback all the houses will have been covered and the cycle can begin again). The program will consist of short segments from the various training workshops, brief information pieces, in-depth interview segments with key staff members, news reports from the outside which have to do with the world of the institution or the world of the young women, and perhaps an entertaining insert. The play-back will be followed by a brief discussion period designed to clear up any misinformation, to request additional information in areas covered or to suggest areas to be covered, but most of all to keep the institution current on the status of the training program. New pieces will be added each day and stale ones replaced. By the time the cycle is complete, it will be a new show. This video-information system will be supervised by a member of the S.R.A. student staff, but participation in the selection and editing of the pieces will be encouraged from the staff and from the students. It will be regarded as a "X" system and not part of the specific training design. It will be run as an "extra-curricular activity".

By opening these channels of communication, the overall level of mistrust will be reduced. The staff, teachers, social workers, houseparents and the young women will come to know each other better. It will make the helping relationship easier, and it will reduce the resistance level to being helped.

abram engelman and tom johnson

"When any profession, institution or system seeks to further itself without due regard to, or at the expense of, its clients and services, that profession, institution or system may be justly deemed psychotic."

Chaim Greenbaum

