

Teaching and Reflecting

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Perusing through the literature on teacher training, (HO HUMMmmmm), one notices a great deal of material on videotaping as a tool in teacher training. There are programs all around the country bearing titles like Teacher Self Appraisal, Video in-Service Project and Microteaching - the most familiar tag.

Much of the emphasis in these projects is placed on specifying teaching competencies in an effort to determine effective teaching behaviors. The argument is that to get "good teaching," you determine what "good teachers" do and train everyone else to do it. The problem with this approach is that it is overly behavior specific. Too frequently these techniques are used as a kind of external manipulation.

As Arthur Coombs points out, "The personal character of good teaching can be documented by almost any of us from our own experience. If one thinks back to his own school days, one will probably remember that the good teachers one had in one's lifetime did not all behave alike or even with great similarity. Rather, each one stands as a person, an individual. . . Each had his own peculiar methods, values, techniques. Good teaching is like that, an intensely personal thing."

Supporting, Not Contorting

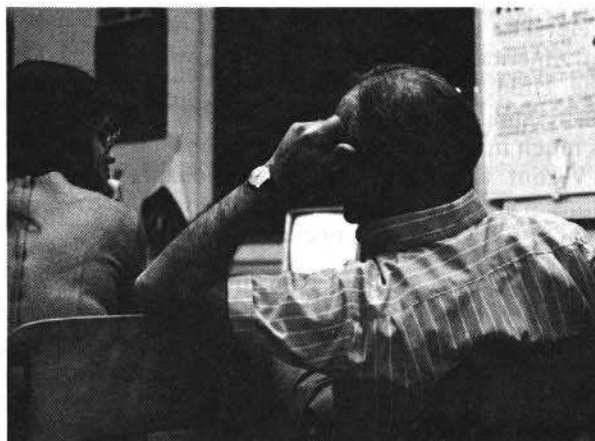
What emerges from this different perspective (i.e., good teaching is an intensely personal thing), is a challenge to use video in supporting teachers, not contorting them to fit some common norm of good teaching. Thus, we must begin to focus on ways of working with teachers that enables them - as individuals - to work through their concerns; ways that help teachers understand what is happening to children and themselves.

A Mutual Experience

During the 72-73 school year, we (Susan-teacher, Joe-resource colleague) began to explore the possibilities of using ½ inch videotape at one of the elementary schools on the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation in North Dakota. We have come to view that experience as one of teaching and reflecting (TAR).

The notion of TAR deliberately implies two separate processes; teaching - those kinds of activities one spends doing when kids are present; and reflecting - the kind of activity one does when kids are not present.

In our own work we have assumed that a way to proceed (one way in a number of other alternatives that might be utilized), is by operating with a goal of maintaining a certain distance from the immediate press of the teaching situation. For openers we have acknowledged that in the teacher's day-to-day immersion in the life of the classroom, with its insistent and continuous demands, there is not the time nor energy to reflect on what is happening or to attempt to make some sense of it. Videotape strikes us as a valuable means for establishing and maintaining the kind of distance we feel is necessary for reflection.



Kit Laybourne

Our main focus during the taping was kids, although the teacher was certainly present at times in this interactive process. However, the purpose for the taping was to build up our knowledge of the kids. Our assumption was that we could provision better for kids learning by watching them in their engagement with the setting; that we could use this information as base-line data for problem solving about how Susan might better meet the needs and interests of kids. Underlying this assumption was the feeling that Susan would come to see her role as teacher in terms of what she was and how she was affecting kids. In this way, we felt she would begin to understand herself in the role of teacher.

Children were taped in a variety of settings (i.e., playground, classroom, cafeteria, library). This helped provide a more balanced view of particular children.

Transcending the Media

The experience is now behind us and we certainly