

plot to include the latest inspiration – or they may decide they'd rather stay with the original idea.

The Carrot

It is at this point they need tools to help organize their story – to break it down into separate scenes which come in a defined order. Here is a need for writing. It is important for them to be able to set their story down on paper in order to make a more organized videotape.

If instead of a story, they have decided to interview someone outside their immediate circle – often the interviewer runs out of questions quickly. Then he thinks of one more question. . . and goes blank again. So. . . The camera is turned off. Suggestions from the side come forth and a list is made. Again writing is needed as a tool for the im-

mediate purpose of organizing.

Children want to use the medium well. As they become aware of more complex possibilities, more complex planning is required, and thus more writing. Videotaping leads kids to need writing to help gather information, put it in a chosen sequence, and present it to an audience just as if they were assigned to write a story or an essay. The writing does not necessarily appear as a neat and tidy product but rather it emerges in blocks of described action, in lines of dialogue, or as interview questions. The final videotape has dimensions as a record of the group which produced it, beyond the scope of the written core. They're proud of their tape but they want to do more – and better. They have eaten of the video carrot.

Don't Try to Understand Media—Know Thyself

GEORGE GORDON

I suppose the main reason I have been asked to write this article is because I was co-author of (and propagandist for) one of the early books written in English on how to use television for instructional purposes. The first edition was written in 1960 and published in 1961. Called Teach With Television, I think it is now out of print: a "classic!" (A "classic" is a book that almost nobody bought when it was available, but is still taken out of libraries to pad bibliographies for term papers!) It was a terrible book.

All of which reminds me of a sociologist I know who responded, when asked to lecture on the subject of cannibalism, "Do you want me to argue for it or against it?"

A dozen years ago, I would not have conceived, in my wildest dreams, of asking the same sort of question about the television - education mix. Today, I am asking, and am not a bit comforted by the reactions I get. Twelve years ago, you see, I knew all the answers. Somehow, young people - and I was about fifty years younger twelve years ago - are gifted with intense brilliance in the department of answers. (Maybe this has something to do with glands.) At present, I must admit I know few - if any - answers to questions people pose to me about teaching with television and count myself content that I have, possibly, over the years, been able to figure out a few relevant questions. What bothers me is that I suspect that satisfying answers to them do not exist. (Kids just won't believe that certain questions cannot be answered! Psychologists may explain this general attitude, but I don't like their answers either.)

What questions?

Well, they are nasty questions, hard questions, "put down" questions. They are designed to quench fires rather than light them, dim enthusiasms rather than illuminate them. The faded Toronto guru, McLuhan, who liked to fancy himself a "sparkplug" of intellectual electricity, turned out, in the long run, to be an embolism in the bloodstream of serious study of communications. His motives, however, were exuberant and benign. Mine are downbeat and passive. But I think that both of us end up in the same place: stuck with questions.

Looking for Answers

Let's start with a few easy ones, and then get down to the rough stuff:

Why does video education, to begin at the heart of things, work best on dead-head students, have no apparent positive effects on average students and bore and retard the brightest ones? Is it because they think of the tube with the word "boob" rattling in their subconscious? Is it because writers and "television experts" live in the mistaken notion that God has ordained that short-take, quick-cut, visual razzle dazzle is the only way to use the blasted medium to teach anything? That the aesthetic apogee of video is the cat food commercial? That any television production studio, even those loosely labeled "educational," was intended by nature to operate as a looney bin for insipid puppeteers, animators and people who make things out of Styrofoam? Or is it because good students need good teachers - and any good teacher with brains

will be smart enough to keep his distance from the sort of maniacs who, unemployable elsewhere, gravitate to educational, public or commercial, videoland to find fame and fortune?

How come a zillion (or more) studies show that kids in general do no better (or as badly) in their schoolwork when taught by television than when given old fashioned, text-book, chalk and blackboard instruction? If the medium of video has quasi-mystical powers that "open windows to the world", gather the "best minds" to spread like apple seed their wisdom, etc., etc., etc., how come the sum total of its results of teaching anything (including long-term end-products from alumni of Seesame Street), when held against others, taught in an old fashioned way, demonstrate a superiority that adds up to zilch?

Why was television education once touted by early enthusiasts as the miracle that would economize education, cut costs, use teaching talent most effectively, etc., etc., etc., when in fact, a little arithmetic demonstrated clearly that any kind of video (tape, cable, open and closed circuits) is almost always extremely expensive, far more so than face-to-face schooling? While I myself was quoting these deceptions twelve years ago, I felt something was wrong with them. I was, however, too stupid to attempt some elementary arithmetic with equipment costs, labor costs and other matters that these enthusiasts had overlooked. Why did the Ford Foundation and Uncle Sammy have to spend billions to find out that video education cost many, many more billions? Who goofed? Are they still goofing?

And More Questions

Who was the first twerp who got the words "entertainment" and "education" mixed up? Or the words "salesmanship" and "learning?" Or "personality" and "teacher?" Where is it written that because something - anything - may be able to excite, arouse, or stimulate people, it must also be able to educate them? Did the Roman believe that gladiatorial contests had "enormous educational potential?" Will you look me in the eye and make the latter claim for football games, Mardi-Gras, pie-eating contests or carnival tent-show pitches? What giant intellect surveyed a Trendex chart and concluded that because millions of Americans were at one time worshipping at the feet of Milton Berle (okay kids, ask me "who dat?"), a new era was opening in foot worshipping, that would eventually include adulation of educators and their - inevitably - none-too-attractive wares? Who first fell for the screwball canard that you can sell literature, chemistry, biology and language instruction the way you sell hair tonic?

Where did visual cultism come from, as if mankind's visual perceptions were somehow born the day television (or the movies) were invented? As if people had not been observing other people, ani-

mals, snowstorms, rocks, rivers and moving objects for hundreds of thousands of years before the invention of photography? As if the Italian Renaissance, the most visually oriented culture man had known to date, had never existed? As if the poetry and drama of a Shakespeare is not an exercise for the eye and the minds-eye, and has been for hundreds of years? As if words, villains of the misnamed "print tradition," are not themselves exercises in visual acuity. And as if their main function is not to stimulate a visual galaxy of imagery in the human sensorium - and imagination?

Who coined the term "visual literacy?" Erect a statue to him, shoot him - or both!

Who, in Arthur Koestler's wise words, put the "ghost in the machine?" What diabolical genius - or coven of geniuses - conned a culture into be-



Mary Sheridan

lieving that the very technology that they themselves have created as a servant was somehow inhabited by an incubus that turned it into a master? Was it just a coincidence that, during a period (mercifully past) when opinionated idiots were proclaiming loudly that "God is dead" in our churches, these same mousebrains were muttering incantations over what they feebly (and ungrammatically) insisted on calling "media?" Why were sensible academics, newsmen and others taken in by these dregs of medievalism? (See Richard Schickel's article on this fraudulence in the August 1973 issue of More!) What intellectual devastation has been left in its wake - especially in our schools and colleges?

So I said, I have questions to ask.

I wish I knew the answers.

I do not.

Double-Edges of Change

You see, I am merely overcome by a certain weariness and sadness when I hear people talking about the power of the "media" and what it (sic) can do to redeem the sins of mankind, particularly those that have for so long taken place in our schoolhouses. I am weary and sad for two reasons: first, because I know that good intentions do not justify the encouragement of ignorance and evil; and, second, because I know that one kind of ignorance and evil does not cast out (or neutralize) another kind of ignorance and evil.

As a humanist, I do not believe that we - as a nation, a people, a world - will find our way out of our present confusions by means of any type technology. No, not even communications technology. More incidentally, neither do I believe that video and education possess any sort of natural affinity for one another - any more than I believe that books or films are related by their nature to the task of teaching and/or the difficult art of learning. If books, films - or video - are to reside comfortably in the world of schooling (and they may not), they will have to accept the morals, codes of civility, aims and philosophies of that world and be adapted, by men and women, to these ends. Left alone, they will do nothing by themselves; they are not inhabited by ghosts. Fed and spread by the merchants of mass culture and pop fashion, they will inevitably die in the schoolhouse. I have, over the years, watched countless "brave, innovative forward-looking" programs of televised education die in countless schools and colleges since the day I

finished writing Teach With Television.

You see, in that miserable book, I forgot to tell those early, bright-eyed educational video enthusiasts one thing: that one must know oneself before he sets out to revolutionize anything. (I should have recalled this from my considerable study of great revolutionists; but I had forgotten.) Self-knowledge yields humility, and only the humble possess the capacity to understand the double-edged weapon of innovations: that capacity to destroy what is valuable on one side, and to cut a path to nowhere on the other.

As I grow older, I grow more stubborn. Certainly, I still believe that video may one day make its contribution to American education - on all levels. But it will be a contribution, not a take-over. It will also be a different contribution, I think, for different types of teaching and learning under different circumstances and at different times. Just how, why, what, when and where is a difficult matter to foresee, requiring maturity, wisdom and experience. I think it is a problem for teachers - certainly not for "media specialists" or people trained to "think video." I think, also, that in every individual instance, its solution (possibly a prudential decision not to teach with television) starts at home: in the good sense and honest humility of those of us who are brave - or mad - enough to face fellow humans in the role of teachers and attempt, however feebly, to help them to civilize themselves, which is about the most one may ask of any teacher of any subject anywhere.

Now, fire up those vidicons, kids. And good luck.

Implications of the New Television for the Open Classroom

JOHN LE BARON

Since the mid-1960s, a growing number of elementary schools in North America have been adopting the practices of the open classroom to create activity-centered environments responsive to the needs of individual children. During this same period, the half-inch video movement has been growing at a similar rate. Seldom, however, have the two movements met.

In most classrooms, including open classrooms, video is usually used only as a projection device. Reports of children actively using video in their curricular activities are still hard to find. This is because the video movement has developed largely

outside of and frequently in opposition to formal institutions. Educators, as representatives of formal institutions, have not seen the potential of video for curriculum development. What little documented evidence there is on the application of child-created video in the elementary school does not appear to have reached the classroom teacher. He has for too long been unaware of how video can be used to achieve learning goals, especially those which characterize the open classroom.

Most proponents of the open classroom hold these goals in common:

- 1) The curriculum will reflect the contemporary