

# Television—

## and Learning

This article examines several important issues raised by the introduction of television as a major instrument of education.

**T**ELEVISION PROGRAMS can be effective education. At every level of schooling, from the primary grades through college and adult education, our classroom experiences with television have shown us that here is a fresh, exciting way of animating and expanding the in-school learning opportunities of students.

Beyond the in-school use of television programs, many thousands of adults throughout the United States have had a chance in the past few years to further their systematic education through extension type television courses ("telecourses") for at-home consumption.

From coast to coast the reports from television teachers and their students are almost unanimously enthusiastic about the virtues of learning from the little screen. Careful research in the classroom uses of television is being conducted in a number of universities, colleges, school systems and military services. All in all, we have a most promising climate in which to further develop our television skills and sharpen our educational techniques.

### Important Issues

In order to help these processes along it might be useful for us to raise

certain questions about television in education. It is only through habitual, close and critical scrutiny of this wonderful invention that we can put it to the best possible use in our schools.

Here are some questions to consider:

1. Is television helping us to develop free, democratic citizens in the schools?
2. Is television helping to develop creative, imaginative students who have varied interests and deep appreciation of the fine arts, music, the theatre arts, literature?
3. Is television offering students and teachers those particular materials and experiences that it can provide better than can any other educational instrument?
4. How can we increase the use of television in education?

These four questions prompt further investigation and may suggest some answers.

### *1. Is television helping us to develop free, democratic citizens in the schools?*

The development of free, democratic citizens is the main job of in-school television programs, just as it is the continuing and increasingly more important job in all education. How can television help us in this task?

It seems to me that the television camera is particularly well adapted to the dramatizing of critical personal and social problems and to visualizing

techniques for their solutions; to the creative retelling of the story of man's struggle against ignorance, superstition and fear; to probing into and displaying the give and take of democratic groups at work on vital issues. To illustrate: at every level of schooling there is the vital personal problem of adjusting one's interest and personality to the welfare of a less personal but equally important larger group. What problems of this kind do the various age levels encounter and what methods may they use to solve these problems? Here is the very heart of drama which the television cameras are so effective in presenting. The endless social problems that we face perennially lend themselves to the maneuverability of the recently developed small, lightweight television cameras and their accessories. Now the television camera, and its companion, the portable motion picture camera, can go out into the world where institutions and customs may be examined and shown with graphic realism. The documentary program can be a highly effective television technique.

Surely, the imaginative retelling of the timeless struggle for freedom is the kind of story that television can do well. The Columbia Broadcasting System's series, "You Are There," is an excellent example of what can be done with this type of assignment.

Further illustrating what might be done by television to help students develop as free, democratic citizens is the need for more light to be shed on

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the actual functioning of adult groups, democratically selected and organized, that are working out solutions to the problems that beset them. Here is something many children and youth seldom get to see. Usually they do not even get to observe the PTA meetings at their own school. Somehow, the television cameras need to be focused on democratic groups in action. They need to show how students, their public officials, their parents, their teachers, the man next door, wrestle with a knotty problem, arguing, persuading, compromising, agreeing. Students then could have a more lively appreciation of democratic processes, with these models to guide them in developing their own group relationships.

I am not referring here to television courses in civics or other social studies. Freedom and citizenship are privileges and skills that are earned and learned both directly and indirectly and sometimes by considerable struggle and discomfort. Students should be fortunate enough to have this brought home to them dramatically and as early as possible in their school life. It seems to me that the television camera is an excellent tool for doing this.

## ***2. Is television developing aesthetic tastes and creativity?***

Television should be used in our schools to bring students the best in the arts and literature. It should be used as a means to foster in students an appreciation for creative living and ability to participate in creative enterprises. Television should provide aesthetic excitement and inspire students to create on their own.

Students deserve and should have, through this newest graphic medium,

regular experiences with the products and performances of talented artists. Children and youth should be well acquainted with the very best in all the arts. They should also be able to see artists at work, creating—to actually see and hear how music is made, how a head is modeled or a picture painted, how a poem, a play, a movie is written. Somehow, they ought to be able to participate in these creative acts—questioning, handling the craftsman's tools, taking guidance from the artist-performer.

I think a by-product of this kind of regular television experience might be (in the hands of an alert and skillful teacher) that students would discover that problems may be solved creatively and imaginatively; that the artist's way of working is effective and instructive.

Young people who sincerely appreciate the arts, both as observers and as active participants, will become adult citizens with heightened senses and with desirable ways of expressing themselves.

### *3. Is television doing those things it is best fitted to do?*

Television, like every other educational tool, has certain unique characteristics that suit it admirably to specific jobs which the teacher alone or books and other materials cannot accomplish as readily or effectively. Some of these uses have already been suggested.

Television is timely. It can be physically present at critical moments and at important events. It can telescope space and time. It can wander about the earth taking note of all kinds of events and all kinds of people.

The television program is concentrated. It is built of closely knit, carefully planned and edited material, so that its impact is apt to be rather dramatic. In other instances it is plainly a powerful, purposeful dramatic force jarring students emotionally so that they may begin to question their "inherited" beliefs and attitudes.

Television can bring students an acquaintance with artists and their products—the best and most interesting artists available from all parts of the world. It can present these talented people and their work in a direct, simple, intimate way. Thus, it is in the more informal, less categorized and subject-centered aspects of schooling that television may be of most value.

Television should be used to guide students through a carefully selected, compact learning experience. It should inspire them to pursue further and more intensive education. To use television in our schools mainly as another method of teaching subjects, such as spelling, or penmanship, or arithmetic, or chemistry, or social studies, or English is as wasteful of energy and as awkward as swinging an axe to cut a piece of thread.

This is not to say that these subjects cannot be taught on television, because they are at present being taught successfully in this way in a number of places. But I believe this should not be done except in certain circumstances: One, in an emergency where schools are closed down; two, in some institutions of higher learning where the immediate problem of meeting "the rising tidal wave" of students with extremely inadequate space, facilities and instructional staff demands the

temporary use of a mass method of subject matter presentation; three, in out-of-school adult education where certain "telecourses" might lend themselves to successful presentation in this way.

Television should not try anything that the teacher in the classroom can do as well or better. Television must not usurp those areas of learning best taught in the personal, face-to-face relationship of teacher and student in the classroom. Most of all, keeping educational goals in view, we should remember that the television teacher simply cannot answer the questions individual students will raise in a free classroom climate.

It is disturbing to hear the prophecy that television will save taxpayers millions of dollars in classrooms, technical facilities and faculties, and that one "master" teacher can "teach" all the freshmen, for example, in a required course. By the same token, theoretically, another "master" teacher can "teach" all the primary grade children in the United States reading or arithmetic by television from some central studio. Perhaps this tells us less about educational television than it does about the limitations in some present educational thought and practice.

I would strongly urge teachers to resist this kind of suggestion by redoubling their efforts to understand and deal with students as individual personalities. There is no substitute for good classrooms, good equipment and well-prepared classroom teachers who know their pupils as individuals.

**4. How can we increase the use of educational TV?**

Out of the 252 noncommercial educational television channels reserved by the Federal Communications Commission since 1952, less than 20 are on the air in the fall of 1955. However, where educators are utilizing the channels the response to the programs by students, teachers and administrators is heartening. In some communities television for in-school consumption is being presented over commercial channels.

But this is a small (numerically), if valiant effort at putting television to work for us. What we need in education are more educational television programs for in-school consumption. And the best way to get these is to make sure that all 252 educational stations get on the air and stay there. This is something we *must* do. It is imperative if we are not to miss the boat to the most exciting educational voyage since our nation embarked on the universal education of its citizens.

Educators must have their own stations. As in the past with radio, we cannot do our job properly if we do not have control of our own television facilities. To have administrators of the stations and program personnel sensitively aware of the needs and methods of education is basic to good educational television. Education on television, as in the classroom, had best be in the hands of the professional educator.

Perhaps the question to ask ourselves is, "What am I doing to help the educational channel in my area get on the air?" Or, if we already have the good fortune to enjoy an educational channel nearby, "What am I doing to help develop good or better classroom tele-

vision programs?" In the meantime before most of us have our own community educational stations to work with we ought to be using the commercial channels available. Are in-school programs for your students being broadcast? If not, what needs

to be done to get such programs on the air? Here is where we must all begin to put this new educational tool to work for us.

Let us join with other interested groups in our area and help to get educational television programs on the air.

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CHARLOTTE HUCK

## **Children Learn from Their Culture**

**This author reports on a study of the nature and the sources of children's learnings as these relate to their culture. Implications of these learnings for the curriculum are also indicated.**

**M**ORE HAS happened to men and to the world in the past fifty years than in the preceding thousand years. Technological inventions which still amaze adults are commonly accepted by today's children as part of their natural environment. In certain areas today, a child of six has never known a world without television. No longer is his physical environment limited to the confines of his own neighborhood. It is extended through the media of mass communication to include hurricanes on the Atlantic, the coronation of a Queen, the inauguration of the President, meetings of Congress, Senate investigations, the United Nations Assembly, and hydrogen bomb tests. A child may push back the barriers of time with a twist of the dial on a television set and witness the days of the dinosaurs or he may project himself into outer space through interplane-

tary travel. The adventures of Davy Crockett, super-sonic planes, and death-ray guns are as common to American children of today as their Rice Krispies and vitamin pills.

Educators have recognized for many years that the school is only one source of educative experiences. The home, church, the street, movies, television, newspapers, comic books and a host of other elements also educate with positive or negative effects. With the progress of mass communication and mass transportation, children's contacts with the adult world have been expanded greatly. Children are bombarded on every side by the sensational and the thoughtful, by the cheap and the beautiful, by the depressing and the uplifting, by truth and half-truth, by fantasy and fact. Much has been said about the impact of this exposure upon children's emotions and behavior, but little has been

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