

# Pupils' TV Habits

Several interesting findings are reported in this account of a recent study of children's televiewing habits. Educational implications of these findings are briefly indicated.

**T**HANKS TO a grant from the Ford Foundation, I was able to leave my regular assignments for the academic year, 1954-1955, to study pupils' televiewing habits. The study, besides proving exciting in itself, has pointed up some facts and implications which, I believe, should be shared with the profession.

Objectives of the study were to find out how much time pupils are devoting to television, what this time is displacing, which programs they are consuming most, and what educational implications are indicated for the teacher of language arts. More specifically with relation to the last objective, I was trying to measure how much the youngsters' televiewing is contributing to their story-sense, sense of humor, critical sense, vocabulary, and levels of usage.

## Findings

My chief method was empirical observing and auditing both the programs and the children—the latter, especially, during “sharing periods” in Southern California elementary grades. To supplement this method I collated my records with those of comparable studies in the East, the Middle West, and other regions of the country. I drew

cautiously upon statistical polls and rating services (such as *Hooper's*, *Telepulse*, and *ARB Telecues*). I audited panels of experts at school and university conferences. I assessed the literature critically. Following are some of the significant facts.

### Televiewing Time

Median televiewing time for elementary pupils is 20 hours a week—with a low of 13 hours in homes of high cultural levels to a high of 24 hours in homes of lowest socioeconomic areas. Secondary students spend about 20% less time than do elementary pupils. Girls on both levels spend about 10% more time than do boys.

### Television and Reading

Contrary to popular opinion, televiewing is *not* displacing reading. Whether because of TV or in spite of it youngsters (both elementary and secondary) are reading more than ever, according to unanimous reports of librarians (school and public). Biggest gains in juvenile book circulation, however, have occurred in middle and upper socioeconomic strata. In the low-

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est socioeconomic districts librarians report slight circulation losses.

### **What Televiewing Is Displacing Most of All**

Among various activities (house-chores, school-homework, sports, movie-going, etc.) which televiewing has been displacing, nothing has on any level been displaced so much and so consistently as hobbies and creative pursuits. Televiewing has displaced creative activities among school children in New Haven 22%,<sup>1</sup> in Ann Arbor 26%,<sup>2</sup> and in the Los Angeles area about 28%.<sup>3</sup>

By "creative activity" is meant playing musical instruments, singing, acting or working in theatre arts, painting, photographing, writing, working on periodicals, debating and engaging in forensics and other speech arts.

### **Educational Implications**

If televiewing is not making robots

<sup>1</sup> According to the Yale-NCCCA Survey of 1953-54.

<sup>2</sup> According to the T. C. Battin doctoral study of 1953-54, University of Michigan.

<sup>3</sup> Author's studies, University of California at Los Angeles.

of us all (David Riesman's fears to the contrary, in *The Lonely Crowd*), the facts point to a great increase, through televiewing, in *consumer* activities and a serious decrease in *producer* activities of our school population.

Administrators who have not done so already, therefore, may well reconsider the advisability of bringing into the curriculum many of the creative activities that are in some schools still treated as extracurricular—for example: creative writing, speech arts, forensics, theatre arts, musical instrumentation and composition, to mention but a few of the special areas.

Perhaps even more important, supervisors, coordinators, and teachers may well consider reorganizing their courses of study, if possible, to provide—right in class—opportunities and motivations for creative doings. Such activities and opportunities need not, of course, be limited to ceramics and basket-weaving. What could be more productive, both for students and society, than making full use of opportunities in school to further skills in such vital areas as writing, thinking and speaking?

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### **A Notice of Correction**

In the December 1955 issue of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, a Houghton Mifflin Company advertisement incorrectly listed the title of Dr. I. L. Kandel's new textbook as "The New Era in Administration." The correct title is: *The New Era in Education: A Comparative Study*. EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP is glad to make this correction.

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