

Teachers, Students—and TV

What are the problems—and the potentials?

EACH new age brings its own particular "miracle" to society. Sometimes the new development is of special importance to those responsible for the education of the young. During the past quarter century many such "miracles" have been observed on the American school scene—audio-visual aids, speed readers, educational radio, teaching machines, programed texts and educational television, to mention a few.

Yet each "miracle" has, thus far, been but a miniature marvel in the gigantic attempt to improve the quality of education in America. Perhaps this is true because we who are teachers, supervisors and administrators have failed to attack sharply the challenges and problems of each new medium as it appeared. Now, in the 'sixties, we are faced with a vast new array of media from which to choose and, at this crucial point in our educational history, we cannot be guilty of permitting one of these—educational television—to become one more unfulfilled hope.

The challenges and the problems of educational television are many. These have been discussed from almost every conceivable viewpoint by persons who

are actively engaged in some form of educational television work. Such persons have been familiar with successful early experimental projects such as those in Hagerstown, Houston and Dade County. They have also known well the problems of less fortunate projects which were doomed to financial, mechanical or personality failures.

Yet among the vast number of learners, teachers and administrators educational television is scarcely a reality. No single group of persons in our American school system can be held responsible for the success or failure of educational television; the challenges of wise utilization of the media face each group—teachers, learners, administrators, and school directors. This article is an attempt to discuss some of the major responsibilities held by administrators and supervisors, classroom and television teachers, and television students if the promises of educational television are to become a reality.

One common problem is the varied use of the term "educational television." This phrase may refer to anything from an occasional commercial program with educational value to the carefully constructed college telecourse. In this discussion the term educational television will be restricted to mean those lessons,

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or series of lessons, presented for direct classroom instruction in the elementary and secondary schools.

Supervisors and Administrators

For the proper use of educational television, supervisors and administrators face certain responsibilities which can scarcely be delegated to any other group. First, they have a responsibility for knowledge. Any individual charged with the improvement of instruction should carefully examine the potential, the successes, and the failures of educational television. He should become thoroughly familiar with the mechanical operations to discover what can best serve his situation: commercial services; local, regional, or state educational stations; closed circuit; or an experimental project such as Midwest Airborne.

Although educational television is an infant on the educational scene, it has already inspired a substantial body of research. This has been greatly enhanced by Title VII of the National Defense Education Act. Summaries of such major research have been issued by the Educational Media Branch of the U.S. Office of Education and by the National Association of School Broadcasters. The brief bibliography at the end of this article would provide interesting reading to the newcomer in the field of educational television. Knowledge of the results of work already completed is a must in any field; yet it is particularly valuable wherever it can save costly duplication of effort.

A second major responsibility of supervisors and administrators is for objectivity. Almost none of the new media is involved in a greater battle of prejudice than is educational television. Supervisors and administrators apparently

are "sold" on it or they consider it "worthless;" they "must be shown" or they know it is *the* answer to the teacher shortage, poorly trained teachers, inadequate facilities, or anything else the school system lacks. As a matter of fact, ETV is neither a panacea nor a new frill.

Educational television has certain values which are peculiar to it. It does give the effect of a single teacher-pupil relationship; it can bring the expert teacher who has spent hours of planning and research to *every* child; it can focus attention on one tiny object which has been greatly magnified; and it can bring the home and school together as parent and pupil view the same lesson. It can motivate the learner to extend his learning far beyond the television lessons; it can also stimulate the classroom teacher to become more creative. It can be used to overcome the customary 20-30 year lag between educational knowledge and practice in the American classroom. It has many other values which could be developed into an exhaustive list.

There are, however, certain disadvantages which must readily be admitted. Instruction of high quality by the best qualified television teacher does not alone insure optimum learning; the classroom teacher does, in the final analysis, determine the success or failure of educational television in the classroom. Lessons prepared for a general grade level may not meet the individual needs of a specific class. Furthermore, all television lessons do not provide the best possible teaching-learning situations. The classroom teacher's load will not be lessened with one less preparation but may be extended as he attempts to take full advantage of the educational television lesson and its accompanying teachers' guide. The mechanical difficulties may be so great as to create a time-wasting

period. Even the hoped-for relationship between home and school may fall far short of reality.

The wise supervisor rides neither a hobby nor a prejudice, for both are equally harmful. Rather, he must decide how educational television can best serve the particular school system he represents; then he can lend every effort to developing a successful program. He may initiate the use of educational television by encouraging a few of the superior teachers to use one or two programs; by equipping a classroom or two so that optimum viewing conditions exist; and by viewing lessons with the class to evaluate the merits of the lesson series. The continued use or rejection of a televised series should come only after honest evaluation on the part of *both* classroom teacher and administrator. If the supervisor or administrator is convinced that educational television can elevate the quality of education in his schools, he is well justified in using every means at his disposal to encourage wise use of the medium.

A third responsibility, implied earlier, is for supervisors and administrators to become familiar with the television lessons. Such persons are generally lacking in actual knowledge of lesson and course content. Granted, it is difficult to view television lessons and to study teachers' guidebooks, but the classroom teacher can expect little if any honest encouragement or assistance when his building principal has never observed one of the television lessons the teacher is expected to use. On the other hand, when the principal observes the lesson with the pupils, he becomes one of the teammates in the instructional program and in its improvement. He can assist in procuring needed facilities and materials for better television reception, for extended learning

activities, or for home-school cooperation. He can, if necessary, evaluate the suitability of certain programs and recommend their retention or discontinuance. Principals who have become keenly aware of the value of certain lesson series have been known to change those tyrants called building schedules to accommodate the viewing classes.

Another one of the many responsibilities facing the administrator or supervisor who chooses to use educational television is the development of a broad concept of educational worth. With the national need for increasing and improving opportunities for all learners, he must learn to look for the finest television lessons to be found regardless of who has produced them. Local control is important to every school system in America. The author hopes, however, that in the future there will be less insistence upon television lessons produced locally and that more consideration will be given to the merit of the lesson series, even if it is imported from a state, regional or national source.

The Midwest Project on Airborne Television Instruction reaches into hundreds of local school systems. This project has done much to discourage fears of "curriculum control from the outside," while it has provided a high quality of instruction to thousands of children. With support through the U.S. Office of Education, a study conducted by the University of Nebraska recently sought to ascertain what televised instructional materials are available for distribution throughout the country. Some 450 courses are currently in existence and ready for exchange. Other regional, state and commercial efforts also provide, on a rental basis, a good quality of televised instruction that would be too costly for the local school district to

produce. The old argument, "We will use televised instruction only if the quality of instruction is better than we have in our own schools," is a valid criterion, yet it is hardly an excuse for failing to consider for use the excellent lesson series produced by other than the local school system.

The cost of educational television is a responsibility which the administrator must face. Educational television is *not* inexpensive, and, if it is to be well used, adequate budgetary allocations are required. The support of a local broadcasting station, the purchase of closed circuit equipment, provision for adequate reception facilities, released time for television teachers, rental fees for taped lessons are items which must be accounted for each year.

A discussion of the per pupil cost of educational television has been written by Paul Richard in *Televised Instruction*. He says, "The cost of teaching by television can be determined rather easily. The task is materially complicated by the difficulty of determining cost elements involved in teaching by the traditional method." The administrator must, however, take all costs into account in educational television budgeting. He must recognize that he can only make substantial savings if he has a large number of students viewing the televised lessons.

An additional responsibility of supervisors and administrators is shared with the teaching faculty—that of developing new and untried uses of the medium. Thus far, educational television has been used largely for conventional teaching of the "average" student. Yet what of the opportunities for the slow learner? Here is a student who usually has difficulty reading, who learns best through viewing and listening—perhaps there are subjects and techniques which could be

used to maintain his interest in school.

The possibilities of extending the curriculum beyond the normal school day through late afternoon or evening courses are almost limitless. Discussion groups conducted by students, seminars with resource leaders, programs designed to extend the literary and cultural background might be developed to provide a quality and kind of education not commonly available to all students. Staff members will undoubtedly find new uses of the medium as they become increasingly familiar with it and are alerted to its possibilities. The list of responsibilities for this group is extensive, yet this discussion would be incomplete without focusing attention on the two people who are confronted with the teaching-learning situation—namely, the television and the classroom teachers.

The Two Teachers

The two teachers who are involved have certain shared responsibilities for optimum utilization of educational television. The first responsibility, obviously, is to improve the quality of the learning situation. Such improvement necessitates a scholarly and a creative approach by the television instructor. Television teaching is no easy task—it requires careful and detailed planning, subject-matter research, understanding of child development and laws of learning, as well as skill in presentation before a camera. In addition, such teaching demands knowledge of the classroom situation and a recognition that the classroom teacher and the television teacher share the teaching load.

The television teacher's objective is to stimulate, to motivate, to ask open-ended questions, to present learning situations which will challenge the class to fur-

ther research, discussion or exploration. In short, his job is to involve the learner as an active participant in the lesson. The television teacher's greatest challenge is to construct each lesson so that throughout the entire production a maximum learning opportunity is provided for the pupil.

The classroom teacher, on the other hand, becomes a learner with his students, a learner who can individualize the television instruction by preparing the class for the lesson to come and by extending those areas of learning most suited to his class. He knows that some of his students learn best by viewing and listening, while others need to read, to discuss or to experiment in order to know. He can capitalize on the motivation and social value accorded television by the students to develop advanced learning situations not otherwise available.

The reader should be reminded that this is not an easy role for the classroom teacher. For example, the teacher may be faced with materials and methods which are foreign to him. His ingenuity and skills of classroom organization may be taxed to the utmost as he shares his class with an unknown teacher presenting a strange lesson. Yet, if the two teachers recognize their common objectives and their partnership role, the benefits of two teachers for one classroom are almost limitless.

Both teachers are required to master certain mechanical aspects of television. For the television teacher, this may mean hours of practice before a camera to make a brief presentation, consultation with an art department or producer to provide proper visual aids, or practice with a microphone for desired effects. The classroom teacher must learn how to adjust the television set for the best pos-

sible reception, how to light the classroom, how to seat the class, what materials to provide for each lesson, and how to obtain desired pupil response.

Timing is another factor both teachers must master. The television teacher who works on a split-second schedule has to provide ample time in each lesson for an introduction, presentation of new concepts, and a suitable closing. His colleague in the classroom succeeds best when the lesson preparation extends up to the moment the television lesson begins and when he continues the lesson as he flicks off the television switch. This is not easily accomplished by either teacher!

These teaching partners have an additional responsibility to realize the intimate relationship which exists between the television teacher and the pupil. Establishing and maintaining this close relationship demands that the television teacher master the arts and skills of communication. Eye contact, voice, speech patterns all must make the learner feel—"This lesson is for me," as his thinking processes are stirred. Of the classroom teacher, this demands a sense of security which enables him to share his students with another teacher in this intimate teacher-pupil relationship. Apparently the desire to be "all things to all students" is a human attribute which is common to many teachers. Yet teachers grow and pupils learn when each member of this teaching team accepts his unique role and shares this intimate teacher-pupil relationship.

Finally, the two teachers need to be constantly aware of the opportunities for in-service training which are a part of televised instruction. This aspect demands study, skill and wisdom on the part of the television teacher who carries the responsibility for overcoming the

so-called "educational lag" in his presentation. It requires him to utilize every means at his disposal to bring the best in educational knowledge and methodology to the televised lesson. The classroom teacher must maintain a willingness to accept change, to seek new ideas, and to adopt new techniques or methods.

During the first year of the Midwest Airborne experiment, a large number of excellent classroom teachers chose to use educational television for the in-service benefits they received. One enthusiastic young teacher exclaimed to a television teacher whom she met for the first time late in the school year, "You will never know what it meant to have you in my room two days each week. I learned things I could use in every class!"

The Learner

The student who is receiving part of his instruction through television has some unusual demands which are not common to the normal classroom situation. Active involvement in the lesson is of prime importance, since no part of the lesson can be repeated. This calls for a transition from the use of an instrument which is normally utilized for passive recreation to its use for purposes of doing, interacting, remembering, and thinking through consecutive learning sequences. One elementary teacher explained the difficulty by saying, "The first two or three lessons are always the most difficult. At first the class sits back and expects to be entertained. I almost anticipated a request for popcorn. Nobody answered the questions. The children were aghast that anything was expected of *them*. But by the third lesson they realized they were participants in the TV 'show' and they became more enthusiastic."

What does this active involvement require? First, close attention to the television lesson and teacher—the ability to disregard distractions, interruptions, and mechanical difficulties. Second, maximum use of the student's own ability to learn through listening and viewing. The alert student recognizes that he must recall what he sees and hears. He sharpens these skills as he thinks through to a problem solution, draws a generalization from the illustrations on the television screen, or follows a lecture. Third, the ability to adjust the rate of learning to the television presentation. For many students, this means an increase in the speed of learning, with less opportunity for review and repetition. For the student who has depended upon frequent repetition by the teacher, this demand may be extremely difficult.

A somewhat different responsibility placed on the learner is the requirement of adjusting to two teachers who may teach the same subject in a very different manner. It may be no easy "switch" to transfer from a teacher-dominated learning situation to a child centered one and back again (or vice versa) just because a switch has been flicked on a mechanical device.

Finally, the learner is required to alter his sense of values. The American cultural pattern tends to give great importance to televised material and to the personnel involved. From "soap opera" to quality entertainment, the performer and the performance are admired and emulated. The educational television student, however, must learn to recognize that the television lesson is no more important than any other daily lesson, that television, in and of itself, does not create values. In short, the student must learn to question and to evaluate the

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television lesson and instructor as he would if the lesson were not televised. For the pupil, the problem is largely one of adjustment to television as a medium for learning.

In summary, educational television is one of many new media confronting the administrator, supervisor, teacher and student. Its potentials are almost unlimited if it is wisely used. To derive the optimum benefits of this educational tool, each group must accept certain responsibilities. Supervisors and administrators need to: (a) gain all possible information about educational television; (b) maintain an honest, objective attitude; (c) become familiar with the televised lessons and teachers' guides; (d) provide adequate finances; and (e) explore new uses for the medium.

The television and the classroom teachers share joint responsibility for (a) providing a more creative and challenging teaching-learning situation; (b) utilizing the best in modern research and principles of education; (c) mastering the mechanical devices; and (d) functioning as a teaching team.

The learner is required to: (a) change his habit of using TV for passive entertainment to one of active involvement; (b) adjust to more than one teacher's presentation; (c) recognize the value of televised instruction.

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