

Children's Media Workshop — A Television Literacy Curriculum for Children

By **Dr. Lois J. Baron**

What better support for a curriculum than a teacher's reporting that "it made the students' year"? Not only was Children's Media Workshop praised by parents and the children who participated in the 10-week session, but its curriculum has also been evaluated, and has proven to be a springboard for further media-oriented activity.

The last five years have seen increased interest in projects whose main goal has been to raise children's understanding about the medium of television. While some projects have emphasized a uses and gratifications approach (that is, giving children insight into why and how they use television), this particular curriculum project emphasized the more technological side with the belief that if students understand the form of the medium, they will in turn develop better understanding of both the content and their own interaction with the tube. In other words, knowing how T.V. works lends insight into the language, the "magic" of the medium and how it affects you the receiver.

This curriculum was based on a "hands-on" approach to television education, the basic premise being to make children active participants rather than passive consumers of T.V. fare. In designing the curriculum, efforts were made to include language arts, science, and art activities. This was done in support of the

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idea that television education or media literacy projects must not stand alone, but must be integrated into other curricula areas. In fact, as a secondary outcome of the project and in support of the media literacy curriculum reinforcing other subject areas, the teacher reported significant improvement in the children's art projects and other class work as a result of their experience in the Children's Media Workshop.

The curriculum described below is by no means a panacea in the area of media literacy. It is however a tried and tested curriculum designed and implemented by a teacher in conjunction with an educational researcher.¹ In developing the curriculum, a review of student-produced television projects was made, and those activities best-suited to meet the needs of the grade 5 class in which the curriculum was implemented was designed.

Two teachers and one technician introduced the 10-week curriculum to one-half of the class at a time each half participating in 1½ hour weekly sessions during the Fall of 1981. This particular class could be considered "average" — there is no reason to believe that they were particularly gifted or more suited to being involved in a special project like Children's Media Workshop.

The curriculum taught students certain skills of production whereby units were hierarchically arranged leading up to final production skills. However any or all of the units could be introduced to a class and in any particular order. Activities could be carried out during periods of time allotted for art or science activities.

The activities outlined below are suggestions that have proven to be successful over time when implemented in an experimental program. Teachers can choose those activities that best suit the needs of their class and grade level. Although a portable video camera and monitor would be a bonus, little equipment is necessary. In fact, most activities can be carried out with basic art supplies and a little ingenuity on the part of the teacher.

The curriculum outlined below is not described in "cookbook" fashion. References and materials are given for activities, and a curriculum bibliography in which more detailed descriptions of the activities can be found is included.

Children's Media Workshop provided children with activities they could relate to that also motivated them to build on their experiences. Feedback from the children, teachers, and parents proved that Children's Media Workshop was a positive and truly exciting learning experience.² By sharing this experience with other educators, it is hoped that more children will also benefit.

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REFERENCES NOTES

- ¹Baron, L. **Television Literacy Project** (Continued on page 27)

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION AN INSIDE LOOK AT TELEVISION PRODUCTION

- Objective:** The students will learn that communication consists of sending and receiving messages.
- Activities:** 1. Discussion of the purpose of the course — objectives — introduction and explanation of technician and taping
- Objective:** The students will learn that communication may contain visual, auditory and emotional stimuli.
- Activities:** 1. Discussion of communication theory (**Non-verbal Communication**, Eisenberg and Smith, ch. 2). — game of broken telephone
2. Introduction of logbooks
- Objective:** The students will learn and be able to explain the principle of the transmission and reception of television signals.

- Activities:** 1. Showing the film "The Electronic Rainbow"
2. Game: simulation of the vidicon camera — **Behind the Third Eye**, Moriarty and Livesley, p.32.
- Objective:** The students will learn to operate the portapak unit by simple taping of activities.
- Activities:** 1. Introduction of the portapak — **Behind the Third Eye**, Moriarty and Livesley, pp5-15.
2. Making a viewfinder (**Video in the Classroom**, Kaplan, p. 27).
3. Explorations with the portapak — simple taping in dyads; who are you? (**Hands On**, Taylor, p. 75). — role-playing: video art (**Doing the Media**, Laybourne and Ciancolo, ch. 12). — abstract machines (**Video in the Classroom**, p. 66).

SESSION 2: A VISIT TO A CABLE TELEVISION STUDIO

- Objective:** The student will understand the functions of a television production studio through the experience of a guided tour of a studio.
- Activities:** 1. Preparatory discussion of various equipment and roles of personnel (**Picture This**, Zuckernick and Raices, p. 122).
2. Guided tour.
3. Evaluative discussion with highlights.

- Simultaneous Conversation; Find Your Partner; Silent Passing
— Feeling Words Game (**Hands On**, Taylor).
2. Nonsense Words (**Jabberwocky** by Lewis Carroll)
— illustrate the words (**Visual Literacy**, Collins et al., p. 82).

SESSION 3: LISTENING

- Objective:** The students will learn and be able to demonstrate the difference between hearing and listening.
- Activities:** 1. Discussion of the selectivity of listening — difference between hearing and listening — figure-ground of sound — techniques of active listening (**Looking Out, Looking In**, Alder and Towne, p. 179). — difference between sound and noise (**Doing the Media**, Laybourne and Ciancolo, p. 127).
2. Running a movie with sound only, no image (**Sound Ideas**, Rice).
- Objective:** The students will enhance their listening skills through various activities with sound.
- Activities:** 1. Sound games — Sound Symphony; Interviews (**Sound Ideas**, Rice). — Words for Sounds (**Communication Arts Guide Two-Radio**, Byrd, Emery, O'Donnell, & Thomas).

- Objective:** The student will learn to produce sound montages of everyday activities.
- Activities:** 1. Sound Sculptures (**Sound Ideas**, Rice)
- Objective:** The student will be able to identify most of the sounds that their classmates recorded on their sound montages.
- Activities:** 1. Finding Sounds (**Hands On**, Taylor, p.39).

SESSION 4: NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Objective: The student will learn the principles of non-verbal communication.
Activities: 1. Discussion of aspects of non-verbal communication (Non-verbal Communication, Eisenberg & Smith).
2. Non-verbal games
-watching television without sound (Visual Literacy, Collins et al., p. 9, #15 - television monitor).
-tape recording nonsense syllables with different emotions (Non-Verbal Communication, Eisenberg & Smith, p. 36
-organism exercise (Video in the Classroom, Kaplan, p. 91).
-speechmaking exercise (Visual Literacy, Collins et al., p. 11, #18).
-dialogue in darkness; tough and tell (Non-Verbal Communication, Eisenberg & Smith, p. 112).

Objective: The student will be able to demonstrate non-verbal communication, communicating simple messages to each other non-verbally.
Activities: 1. Communicative Hands (Video in the Classroom, Kaplan, p. 132).
2. Trust Walk (one student leads a blindfolded student around the classroom or school).
Objective: The students will be able to produce simple stories non-verbally, using mime, music and dance.
Activities: 1. The guessing game (Visual Literacy, Collins et al., p. 3, #10).
2. Non-verbal gaming (Doing the Media, Laybourne & Ciancolo, p. 104).
3. Improvisational games (Video in the Classroom, Kaplan, p. 62).
4. The Mime Show (Media and Kids, Morrow & Suid, p. 35).

SESSION 5: STILL PHOTOGRAPHY

Objective: The students will be able to demonstrate the use of figure-ground perspective in photographs.
Activities: 1. Discussion of figure-ground perception (The City as Classroom, McLuhan, Hutchon, McLuhan, pp. 8-14).
-figure-ground activities.
Objective: The students will learn the principles of photographic communication.
Activities: 1. pre-camera warm-ups (Doing the Media, Laybourne & Ciancolo, p. 32).
2. Looking at pictures
-analyzing magazine photos (Hands On, Taylor, p. 8).
-light; black & white versus colour; point of view (Visual Literacy, Collins et al., pp. 91-111).

Objective: The student will be able to produce photographs communicating simple messages.
Activities: 1. Picture taking (Visual Literacy, Collins et al., p. 121).
2. Portraiture (Doing the Media, Laybourne & Ciancolo, p. 33, #8, #10; Media and Kids, Morrow & Suid, p. 85).
Objective: The students will be able to identify the fine details of a photograph which enhance its stated purpose.
Activities: 1. Reading a photograph (Video in the Classroom, Kaplan, p. 43)
2. Making a framing device (Hands On, Taylor, p. 12).
3. Reflections (Visual Literacy, Collins et al., p. 92).

SESSION 6: GRAPHICS

Objective: The students will learn and be able to describe the basic principles of graphic design.
Objective: 1. Discussion of the principles of graphic design; examination of examples of successful television graphics (Video in the Classroom, Kaplan, ch. 4; Graphic Design in Educational Television, Clarke; Television Graphics, Hurrell).
2. Making universal symbols (The Third Eye, Moriarty, p. 114).
3. "Limp lines" (Media & Kids, Morrow & Suid, p. 56).
4. Extending words (Hands On, Taylor, p.44).

Objective: The students will be able to produce a graphic design which conveys a simple message.
Activities: 1. Video art activities (Video in the Classroom, Kaplan, Appendix A).
2. Television Graphics (Doing the Media, Laybourne & Ciancolo, p. 114).
3. Making a logo for Children' Media Workshop

SESSION 7: CINEMA

Objective: The students will learn and be able to explain the "trompe a l'oeil" principle of cinematography.
Activities: 1. Viewing and discussing film shorts
-"Danced Squared" Rene Jodin
-"Neighbours" Norman McLaren
2. Discussion of "trompe a l'oeil" with examples (Hands On, Taylor, p. 90).
3. Making flip-books (Doing the Media, Laybourne & Ciancolo, pp. 83-4).
4. Working with the zoetrope (Hands On, p. 93

Activities: 1. "Scratch and Doodle" movies (Doing the Media, Laybourne & Ciancolo, p. 75).
2. Experiments with pixillation (Doing the Media, Laybourne & Ciancolo, p. 81).
3. Plasticene animation and cut-out animation (Hands On, Taylor, pp. 102-103).

Objective: The students will be able to describe at least five differences and five similarities between film and videotape.
Activities: 1. Discussion and demonstration of the differences between film and videotape (Video in the Classroom, Kaplan, pp. 16-17; Media and Kids, Morrow & Suid, p. 122).

Objectives: The students will learn to produce at least two examples of film animation.

SESSION 8: STORYBOARDING

Objective: The students will learn to present ideas clearly and in sequence using storyboards.
Activities: 1. Discussion of storyboarding (Hands On, Taylor, p. 9; Video in the Classroom, Kaplan, p. 47).
2. Analyzing and making comic strips (Doing the Media, Laybourne & Ciancolo, p. 160).

Objective: The students will demonstrate their ability to apply the principles learned in still photography and graphics.
Activities: Exercises in storyboarding (Visual Literacy, Collins et al., p. 105, #7).
-producing a narrative storyboard and a group thematic storyboarding (Hands On, Taylor, p. 9, 109).
-a design storyboard (Doing the Media, Laybourne & Ciancolo, p. 66).

SESSION 9: SCRIPTWRITING

Objective: The students will learn to use their storyboards to write scripts complete with dialogue, action directions and scene descriptions.
Activities: 1. Discussion of scripting principles and formats (Video in the Classroom, Kaplan, pp. 44, 70-1).
2. Developing script ideas (Picture This, Zuckernick & Racies, p. 12).
3. Screenplays, scenarios and shooting scripts (Doing the Media, Laybourne & Ciancolo, p. 70).
4. Alternative scripting (Doing the Media, Laybourne & Ciancolo, p. 92).

SESSION 10: SET DESIGN AND COSTUMING

Objective: The students will learn the basic principles of architectural design and costume design by producing examples of sets and costumes.
Activities: 1. Discussing of basic design principles (Architecture, Hamlin; Designing and Making Stage Costumes, Motley).
3. Fantasy costume design
4. Integrating set, and costume, into video planning (Video in the Classroom, Kaplan, p. 33; Doing the Media, pp. 113-4).