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The Limitations of E.T.V.

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Elsewhere in this issue, the remarkable growth of educational television is documented, research investigations attesting to the effectiveness of the medium are cited, and the overall efficacy of using television in the educational process is demonstrated. As a protagonist for the use of television in the field of education for over a decade, this observer has participated in demonstrating and evaluating the effectiveness of ETV in a wide variety of learning situations. During that period of time, the medium has conclusively demonstrated its effective role in education. Properly used, ETV can enhance, enrich, and improve the quality of instruction in a learning situation. To embrace the medium, however, without thoughtfully considering its limitations as well as advantages is shortsighted and is, in fact, a disservice to a proven educational tool.

The use of television in an educational environment does indeed have many advantages. The advantages lie primarily in the extension of the impact of superior teachers, the multiple sensory effect on the student, the equalization of learning opportunities for all students, and the one-to-one intimacy of the learner with what appears on the television screen. These advantages are obtained without damaging the inherent values of conventional instruction, for television does not modify the recognized

goals of education. It does not require the elimination of the classroom, even as the advent of the book did not mean the elimination of the teacher. Rather, it suggests alternative and better techniques for reaching the same goals in conjunction with conventional methods of instruction. Alert educators have always experimented with and learned to use new teaching methods and devices. After a decade of experimentation, ETV has demonstrated its value. Educators now have a responsibility to use the advantages of the television medium to achieve the goals of education more effectively.

ETV No "Cure-All"

Educational television, however, is not an educational cure-all capable of solving the manifold problems facing education today. ETV has certain limitations which need careful appraisal in considering its use in the educational process. If we agree that the process of learning is largely that of communication, we must also recognize that in ETV, we are only dealing with another means of communication.

For television itself has no magic. Television cannot teach. No matter how complex its electronic components, television is simply another medium of communication. What is transmitted through any medium may be good or bad, harmful or helpful, simple or complex, ignorant or learned. The quality of learning achievement at the end of the transmission is in direct proportion to the quality of material transmitted. It

is important that we keep in mind that the medium of communication should not be confused with what is to be communicated.

Television is primarily a one-way communication vehicle. By its very nature, it is limited to exposition. It, therefore, does not offer the opportunity for interaction between student and teacher which is so essential to effective learning. Information, stimulation, inspiration and other factors in learning can be transmitted and projected by television. Educational television, as a communication medium, however, must be differentiated from these factors. A wide variety of methods of instruction can be presented to students by means of educational television, but not by educational television. This more than semantic difference is important in conceptualizing the role of this medium in the field of education.

As many educators have often stated, television *by itself* cannot effectively:

1. Lead a classroom discussion.
2. Clarify immediate misunderstandings stemming from material presented in a television lecture-demonstration.
3. Supervise activities, recitation or lab work growing out of a lecture-demonstration.
4. Recognize and care for individual differences in student abilities, intelligence and education.
5. Supervise needed practice in subjects where skills are necessary.

Television as a communications medium is not capable of performing these learning functions and the vast majority of educators involved in the production and use of educational television have always recognized this. In the use of television in a learning situation, these important functions are the responsibility of the only factor in education capable of performing them — the classroom teacher. In turn, educational television performs its function in the educational process by bringing its unique advantages to the learning situation. Thus, educational television and the classroom teacher combine to become an instructional team, each making valuable contributions to the learning environment.

For the educator, who looks to ETV to solve all the problems in education, there are other limitations in the use of the medium. Television cannot supply subject matter content; it cannot determine to any great extent, the form of instruction. The form, content, method and objectives must be developed by the instructional and curriculum staff, for with or without television, the responsibilities for teaching and learning rest squarely with teachers and students. In most cases, the selection of subject matter for transmission via ETV is made by a "problem-solving" approach. The question most often asked in contemplating the use of television is, "Is there a

recognized problem or need in a certain subject area which can be partially alleviated by the utilization of educational television?" If no problem or need exists, there is no real reason for the use of educational television, for it then becomes an expensive frill to the educational budget. If a need or problem is identified in certain subject areas, educational television may be utilized to assist in solving the recognized need.

There are, however, some restrictions on the subject content that may be presented by television. Television is a visual and auditory medium; it does not offer tactile, olfactory or gustatory involvement. Many subject areas dealing with the abstract and philosophical are not readily adapted to the medium. In general, expository lecture-demonstrations are most suited for effective presentation on ETV and the medium has been most successful in transmitting lectures in the subject areas of science, foreign language, mathematics and the social sciences.

Technical Limitations

Technically, the medium also has limitations. Black and white reproduction may not reproduce all textures. In pictorial representations, color is omitted and the third dimension of depth may not be accurately represented. The dimensions of space and aspect ratio on television often

require the condensation of written and visual stimuli. In addition, the visual intelligence of the small television screen often requires a simplification of visual material for accurate comprehension. In some instances, this condensation may interfere with the learning process. These limitations are important. In recognizing them, however, we recognize the limitations inherent in many other communication devices used in education.

Can television educate? Of course not, and perhaps that is its greatest limitation. At the same time, we must recognize that in the same sense, neither can the textbook or the motion picture film educate. The inescapable fact is that the student, either independently or guided by a teacher, largely educates himself. Television, like a dozen other tools, can contribute to the educational process when it is used as a cooperative tool with other factors in learning.

In short, ETV, if wisely used as a tool of instruction, can make an important contribution toward extending and improving education. However, it cannot perform the entire teaching function. It is but one tool which can be used as an aid in the instructional process. Conscientiously used in effective combination with the traditional methods of instruction, however, it has made, and can make, excellent contributions to the field of education.

