

Learn to give and receive: Students and neighbors
learn to share resources to benefit their communities.

School Safety



119224
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Crime: Close
and personal

Building
respect

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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School Safety

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About the cover:

Schools are benefiting from a resurgence of community involvement — from private citizens, commercial businesses and public agencies — stimulated both by positive school-public relations and, unfortunately, by a series of crime-related crises. Illustration by Deborah Zemke, Copyright © 1988, NSSC.

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BY DALE MANN

Educational use of high technology — like interactive videodiscs — can teach kids about choices and consequences. . . . The future is here, for those ready for it.

High tech for high risk

It's almost midnight and Joe Bob has just hit his first million-point plateau on a new video game. Part of that feat is due to reflexes, part to his extraordinary concentration and recall of screen patterns and consequences.

It's almost noon and Joe Bob can't recall the value of pi or how to trisect an angle. Geometry is about to be added to his growing list of failed or incomplete subjects that will soon push him out of school.

* * *

Guns N' Roses, Motley Crue, Tracy Chapman — Shanelle can lip synch the lyrics to every song these performers ever recorded and do it with perfect mimicry of their wildly diverse styles.

State capitals? Presidents? How to make change from a cash register? How to be polite and forthcoming to a customer? Shanelle has two responses: "Huh?" and "Whaa?"

* * *

Twelve-year-old Jorge has calculated to the nearest thousand the money he wants to make holding crack for his neighborhood source before he loses his

Dale Mann is a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York and has a company, Interactive Inc., that produces high-technology materials for high-risk youth.

youthful-offender status and retires.

Jorge wouldn't know the three branches of government if they grew on trees. And while his working knowledge of the state's penal code would be the envy of some attorneys, it never occurs to him to be on their side rather than his.

* * *

We may think these students are perverse about what they learn and from whom, but the fact remains that they *do* learn. That great educational TV series, *Miami Vice*, is out of production. We may not like what it taught, but it did teach.

Eighty-five percent of at-risk youth are visual learners and that does not mean color illustrations in textbooks. What did we imagine would happen when TV advertising frames began to turn over every second and a half and high school kids started to spend as much time watching TV *every day* as they do on their homework in a week (4.5 hours for each)?

The point is not that TV has ruined society, but rather that society does not effectively use the visual media for its own purposes. TV shows and commercials are cannons, but who loads them, and what are they aimed at?

U.S. Secretary of Education Lauro Cavozos says that "reform has stagnated." If he were a marathon runner, he might have said that teachers have

hit the wall. What more can we expect from a junior high school teacher armed with a piece of chalk and a teaspoonful of authority trying to get the attention of 25 ninth-graders on a Friday afternoon? All for just \$29,608 a year, the average teacher salary.

Sure, there are a lot of things to be done about reform — we ought to orchestrate all the municipal agencies in a cohesive youth-serving movement; we ought to re-structure schools; someone should do something about families, and drugs, and economic opportunity. And we ought to spend more on kids. Last year, each American cow was blessed with \$1,139 of federal aid. Each American child got \$770 from all federal sources (Chapter I, child health and nutrition, Head Start, etc.).

But while that is being done, teaching has hit the wall. Of course, some teachers are wonderfully successful and some kids like to read and do differential equations and sit still and take notes. But the fact remains that half of Los Angeles' new teachers were hired with "emergency credentials"; 90 percent of New York's new teachers lacked certificates or licenses. Over time, the majority of the best teachers leave teaching and most of the worst stay. Personnel policies in every district operate with the same effect — the most experienced teachers trade that seniority to get farthest from the neediest kids. We keep

school not with "the best and the brightest," but with the average and the available. But, as Lyndon Johnson used to say, "You got to dance with the one that brung you."

One thousand pieces of state legislation have targeted teachers in a kind of Japanese policy formulation — the "three mores" — more tests, more mandates about curriculum content, and more credentials. The test frenzy amounts to demanding more performance generally without more support. And state legislators have not learned what parents already know: once the teachers go back inside the classroom and close the door, guess who determines what the curriculum will be? Finally, more credentials don't work unless better entry-level salaries pull new hires from a different stratum.

Schooling is the last social institution that remains unchanged since the 19th century and that may trundle forward, unchanged, to the 21st. Is there nothing else we can do?

Interactive videodisc

The Digital Equipment Corporation was one of the first to put together a personal computer, a laser videodisc player, and a color monitor with a touch screen. An early disc course, "Decision Point," sharpened strategic planning among middle managers.

The camera moves through your office door, your secretary briefs you on the day's appointments, colleagues interrupt you to press for decisions, the phone rings, two visitors can be seen waiting in your office, and the whole learning experience is enriched by on-line support materials — balance sheets, audit reports, quarterly statements, etc.

The computer-driven screen periodically interrupts the filmed action to demand a response. A solution to a production problem may trigger union protests; failure to cope with a distribution bottleneck may pile up debt. The disc experience requires that you learn by doing. Each action is scored.

Some consequences are immediate, others are long-term, and the video simulation ends when the cumulative score causes you to be promoted, transferred or fired.

Xerox announced the installation of DEC's "Decision Point" in the back of an in-house newsletter. Within three weeks, they had to open their training facility on weekends to accommodate demand. DEC reports 40 percent reductions in training time with interactive systems. Workers get back to the job faster and the company saves on travel and the use of training facilities.

Discs make learning faster, stronger and cheaper. It's also fun. At AT&T Information Systems, technicians trained via interactive videodisc consistently master a seven-day course in only three-and-a-half days. IBM developed "PALS," a videodisc curriculum that turns previously illiterate adults into readers six times faster than traditional instruction; students gain an average of 27.4 months of reading skills in only four months.

What causes those sorts of results? It's probably what social psychologists call "the participation hypothesis": the more involvement, the more participation, the more likely we will learn what we are doing. Disc advocates point out that TV is a passive medium (no participation except gazing). But what if we can get couch potatoes off their dead centers? Tests of Digital's interactive

systems indicate that people retain:

- 23 percent of what they hear,
- 43 percent of what they hear and see, and
- 70 percent of what they hear, see and do.

Doing makes the difference. By combining video's excitement with a micro-computer's power, interactive videodiscs give students choices coupled with immediate consequences: to drink at a party or not; to go home early or stay late; to accept a ride from an intoxicated friend or not. Each choice can be dramatized by professional actors and with broadcast-quality production. The results are vivid and immediate: you touch the screen to choose an option, and you get banged with the consequences — *now*. The experience can be scored, summarized and fed back with the energy typical of teen-agers.

Think of the problems of adolescence that we now address with chalk talks, rap groups, film strips and pamphlets:

- 10 percent of all teen-age girls in the U.S. become pregnant every year; 300,000 are under the age of 15.
- Half a million young people attempt suicide each year, a 300 percent increase since 1960.
- 61 percent of all high school seniors report having used drugs, the highest rate in any industrialized nation.
- 3 million teen-agers between 14 and 17 have a serious drinking problem.

High-tech curriculum

Sources for disc-based curriculum materials:

Dropouts
Interactive Inc.
440 Riverside Drive, #117
New York, NY 10027
800/262-6442

Substance Abuse
"TIPS"

National Federation of State
High School Associations
11724 Plaza Circle
P.O. Box 20626
Kansas City, MO 64195
816/464-5400

Literacy

"PALS" Advanced Education
Systems
IBM Educational Systems
P.O. Box 2150
Atlanta, GA 30055
404/238-4055

Career Guidance
"Passport"

South-Western Publishing
5101 Madison Road
Cincinnati, OH 45227
800/543-0487

A Catalogue of Discs

"The Videodisc Compendium
for Education"
Richard A. Pollak, President
Emerging Technology
Consultants Inc.
P.O. Box 12444
St. Paul, MN 55112
612/639-3973

- Car accidents are the leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds.

What do we know about adolescent learners? One way to summarize is with what I call the "Five P's."

Permanence: "I'm gonna live forever, never gonna die."

Probability: Teen-agers are lousy probability calculators. "Yeah, I was wasted last night but I made it," they reason, so why not drive drunk again.

Peers: It almost defines teen-agers that they find themselves in the eyes of others and that combines with probability as in, "Well, Jimmy did it...."

Present Orientation: Long-term is maybe the weekend.

Personalization: "Hey, if it's not just like me and my friends, forget it."

Pour the five P's into a 16-year-old and you have a formula for risky behavior. By the way, girls are more likely than boys to be involved in the most multiple risks — substance abuse, drunk driving, teen pregnancy, smoking, etc.

A successful learning strategy has got to deal with consequences, not simply telling kids what will happen, but letting them choose and then following up with immediate and dramatic feedback. A VCR cannot do that and schools are not now equipped for what interactive discs can provide: choice/consequence routines, customized scoring, immediate feedback, and dramatic video about real world problems.

An estimated 15,000 disc players are now being used in education. Of the more than 400 disc curriculums available, most are in science, data processing and industrial training. Most school discs seem aimed at a suburban market with the discretionary money to equip their kids with the best. At least half of America's districts report that they will increase their disc capabilities in the next few years, but that is like the fact that in 1990, half of America's homes will have PC's. Great, but which half? And what about at-risk youth?

In a joint project with IBM and

Hazelden Health Promotion Services, the National Federation of State High School Associations produced "TARGET," an interactive simulation that runs on IBM's InfoWindow touchscreens and helps kids see the consequences of substance abuse.

My own company, Interactive Inc., has gone after the dropout problem. Every year, 700,000 young people drop out of American high schools, a number equivalent to 65 busloads of students a day. The foregone productivity from one year's crop of dropouts, plus their lost taxes and increased dependency will cost the U.S. more than the federal deficit, currently targeted at \$100 billion plus. To help turn that around, we produced an interactive disc curriculum called "What's Next?"

Students begin the interactive video-disc experience by entering their race and gender to enable customized scoring. After seeing three dramatic consequences of dropping out, players face 10 choices from a typical day:

- get out of bed and go to school or sleep late?
- stay in school all day or leave early and hang out?
- come in for extra help or don't bother?
- take an after-school job or concentrate on school work?
- study for a test or go to a party?

The moment the student makes a choice, he or she experiences the consequences of his/her decision. The microprocessor keeps score: too many bad decisions drop the player out of school. Those negative thresholds are empirically determined by the etiology of risk factors, and those thresholds vary by each player's gender and ethnicity. At the end of play, the de-briefing is customized to reflect the student's choices and demographic characteristics. The whole experience is easy and exciting, but it is also research-based, realistic, fast-paced and relevant.

The video experience is supported with a student workbook and a teacher/

counselor guide. The package is easy and fun to use schoolwide, with or without adult assistance.

A 1989 Harris poll asked what low-income parents most want for their kids. Their number one aspiration for their children is "learning to stay in school." The "What's Next?" disc is part of the dropout program in more than 20 states, but will it lower the dropout rate? Will disc experience keep every kid away from drugs or booze? No one would argue that young people are at risk from too many powerful forces for there to be a magic feather. The better question is, can we arm teachers and guidance counselors with more effective tools? Can we use the best of the computer and video media, combined, but loaded with what kids need, and what society deserves?

New York City has an approved budget line to buy 8.7 million pieces of chalk next year. That's enough chalk for each student in the city to have a new stick every month. But how many will grow up to work with chalk? In the meantime, principals can't buy video disc equipment until the bureaucracy issues a list of approved vendors.

Whether kids have the benefit of the most advanced teaching techniques is determined first by what adults do, and don't do. If the 90,000 elementary and secondary schools of this country don't become a market for the most powerful of the electronic learning media, the 43 million homes in North America, already wired for cable, will be. The public school has been this country's educational delivery mechanism of choice for only a little more than a hundred years. It is entirely possible to bypass that institution and sell education directly to the parents. One consequence is that those parents who can afford the best education will buy it for their children. The others will be in the public school and we will have sunk that much closer to the sort of two-tiered, have/have not society that this country's immigrant settlers fled.

We should do better. □