

focus on films

Shoot . Cut . Splice . Oops!

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The tenderfoot teacher of student film making who views a dream of making a really great film using the class of thirty as an operating group is heading along a rocky path. It can be done by the genius teacher or by the autocratic teacher who, likely, will have written the script himself. For such procedures the elementary school is the best place for an entire class to begin making a film. Children of various mental abilities can join in the work and enjoy the success of the adventure.

Somewhere in the intervening years between K and twelve the togetherness is lost. Every high school student does not want to see a motion picture, much less make one. In high school the tenth grade seems a good place to start. All of the talent is there before the students start dropping out, going on work programs, gearing for college and taking Advanced Clothing. The newcomers to high school are refreshed with going into a new situation. There is excitement of the unknown. They think things will be different, and before they find out this may not be, the teacher who wants to experiment with films can gently tune them in to a truly magnificent experience.

Basing all action on the premise that there is a motion picture camera in the audio-visual stock room, that the camera does not belong to the football and physical education department, that there is a small fund for supplies or a far-out principal in the office, the would-be film teacher can begin to locate interested students in some of the following ways.

Bring the camera into the classroom and lay it on a desk or table and examine it from time to time wondering out loud what someone could do with it in a school situation. School is not Hollywood. This approach usually snares one curious student, at the most two, one of whom is only interested in taking the thing apart bit by bit. Save that fellow. Later he will be able to tell what is wrong with the camera and anything else necessary for a technically successful film. Another approach is to ask those obviously creative people if there is something they would like to say using the medium. One of them will take the camera

and ask, "Can I do what I want to with it?" This sounds like a dangerous question. Still another good way is to write a sign and post it outside the classroom door, preferably upside down to make sure they read it.

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE A MOVIE COME IN FIFTH HOUR ANY DAY

With this technique more than four might show up, and there's the start of something good. Three or four people do make a good group. This may be the "film generation," but every student does not want to make a film.

Some beginners are quite sophisticated. They don't want teachers hovering around telling them how to do it, and viewing professionally made films discourages them. They are smart enough to know that a sixty-nine dollar special motion picture camera does not carry with it guaranteed "2001" results. They recognize the genre of the television commercial as being their kind of film as far as the limitations of time, space and finances allow. That is a point of departure.

Even with three or four active minds put to the matter, ideas are often hard to come by for novices because they really don't know what is possible. A study of the camera and what can be done with it is worthwhile. A time for learning the buttons and looking at instruction books is helpful. An evening of viewing television commercials may stimulate them to think about the singleness of ideas and driving home one thought. Commercials often take place in ordinary settings: filling stations, porches, alleys, rooftops, kitchens, roads, parks, lakeshores, airports. Thereafter try to avoid having the group get tied up with making a commercial! An occasional take-off on the world of commercials is fine, but it can be deluding and devastating to truly great ideas young people may have.

If there is only a camera and some reels of film, then it is natural for the group to go out of doors to shoot. An excellent student-made film aptly called "Sixth Street at Seventh Avenue or Sixth Avenue at Seventh Street" was the story of an emotional display by a boy and a girl who got their place of meeting confused and never met again.

The emotions are fine places of beginning when subject matter is needed. Vignettes of motivational forces should be considered. What are the basic needs of man? Food. Shelter. Comfort. Why do people fight? Anger. Fear. Frustration. What are the different kinds of love? After discussion and illustration the film makers can begin to think collectively or individually about what they choose to execute. The concept

of music needs to be a part of the picture from the birth of the idea. Records from school or home, live music from guitars, flutes, pianos and other instruments should be considered. A vignette with music can be as short as thirty seconds or as long as the contents of a super eight cartridge.

Since a first movie rarely looks the way the maker saw it in his mind's eye, all efforts should be made to insure some element of success in the first production. In other times the graffiti of young people have been "Think-Snow", "Think Peace", so it is not too far removed to introduce "Think Shot". The question from now on will be "How are you going to shoot this picture to say what you want to say?" Should this be a close shot, a medium shot, a long shot, and why? Could it be a face only, object only, symbol only and for what purpose?

Some students will want to do story cards that show what each shot is and how an actor is involved. Even when actors are not present and abstractions are being dealt with, cards give direction. Each card shows one shot or a combination of related shots. The cards do not inhibit the film maker.

1. Henry Post:	Clumsy	1
	Poorly dressed	
	Thick glasses	
	Dejected Walk	
	Close up	
Henry walks up walkway to house:		
	Long shot	
Moves hesitantly up steps:		
	Medium shot	
Face sad:	close shot	

Thoughts can be added, deleted or shifted at anytime. The utmost in freedom should be encouraged. Everything should be done to keep openness, change and looseness.

Other students will not want to make cards. They will want to go out on their first impulse to shoot, and with luck everything they do will be just as successful as a pre-edited production! Shocking but true. One of the best student films was made during spring recess when a resistance demonstration was mounted on a city mall with scenes switching to hard hatted construction workers excavating for a skyscraper. The story was underlined by the words of a popular piece of antiwar music, "The Great Mandella". The design was circular, moving from a little boy playing soldier, through the contrast between workman in the shadow, youth in the sunlight with flags flying, and back to the little boy and his toy gun. The creative student who has

never used a camera before can do this in one day of feverishly inspired activity. Awesome, indeed, is the sight of five or six young people fleeing across a summer parkland carrying a camera and pointing uphill. A teacher is lucky if he has a second camera along to shoot such scenes of whirling motion and student concentration. It is beautiful.

The cards are made. The props are gathered. The site is chosen. The time is set. The weather is fit for ducks!

While waiting for the weather to clear, the students can search for music, make tapes, work on promotional material for the world premier of their coming presentation, make closing credits and a dozen other jobs that are part of film making. There is never enough time.

As soon as the shooting is finished the fastest developing service possible should be used. If one day service is possible, it should be chosen over any other. Early viewing, discussion, evaluation and improvement allow for quick reshooting of the whole thing to students' greater satisfaction. Rarely are they completely happy with the results of a first film. If several individual films are made, an informal showing of them is the best advertising for getting other interested people together. Peanuts, popcorn, punch and a few invitations to friends make a great World Premier.

Exhaustion is the price student and teacher pay for engaging in film experience. The energy and swiftness of the young director and crew are gripping. The stamina required for outdoor work is equal to refereeing a football game. There are other exhausting activities, such as expanding equipment, purchasing the right viewer, splicers, lights, and other materials. The time consumed in seeing people, reading catalogs, dealing with a "nothing" budget can make anyone wish to return to the good old days of kids, camera, shoot and show!

Expansion of equipment, though, means a turn in direction. Having a way of previewing and splicing frees the mind. Now the student can shoot objects, actions, atmospheric effects whenever and wherever he is. He can film indoors. He can work when the spirit moves him in rare places and times. From a conglomeration of footage he can put together an idea. To say something in film like this is as great as speaking in the language of poetry, painting or music. This becomes another dimension of his being. There is a strange easy warmth in a handful of young people who make motion pictures together.

The joys of filming, cutting and splicing are often cancelled by gross errors of judgment and the finality of a sharp blade. After such a moment a hastily finished film has left the

proud leading lady crawling around among hundreds of snippets of footage on the floor of the cutting room lamenting, "Ronnie, you cut out my smile! Where is my smile? You jerk! That was such a good smile!"

Film making is rigorous. It can consume a lifetime, once begun. Young people say that after filming they begin to see differently. They have greater insights, and though they may never film again, there is for them greater diversity.

"Think Film". The experience is one of pleasurable excitement. Try not to nail it down or tighten it up. That is to say, "Don't kill it!" Keep it swinging! "THINK KEEP IT FREE!"

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