

Feeling Like a Beginner

The writer takes on video

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“Video is the new text”.
– Consultant Mark Anderson

Many people who are my age (68), and even decades younger — including most of our teacher corps — have spent a good part of our lives perfecting the ability to write well. I never thought of myself as a writer until late in my life, but I have, through practice, become (I hope) a good one. Publishers, at least, have seen fit to publish hundreds of thousands of my words, and thousands of my pages.

But what I am lately discovering is that my well-honed skill at logical and persuasive writing is worth less and less. What I *need* to be good at is making good, persuasive videos. And in that domain I feel like an illiterate beginner.

When did I realize this?

I’m currently in the process of stating up a new organization, The Global Future Education Foundation and Institute, whose mission is to raise awareness that the world needs a new education – not just in terms of the HOW, but in terms of our goals, our content and our output. (We believe the goal of education should be becoming a good, capable and world improving person, the content should be effective thinking, effective action, effective relationships and effective accomplishment, and the output should be real world projects.) I have written many articles about all of these things, published *The World Needs a New Curriculum* in this magazine, and am in the process of writing a longer volume, *Global Future Education* to be published next year by Teachers College Press.

So one of the first things I did was to write a clear and concise mission statement for the organization, which many praised.

But when I started to create the website for the new organization (www.global-future-education.org) the requests I started getting were for a short video, explaining the mission, that someone could watch in a couple of minutes.

No problem, thought I — I'll just video the mission statement I have written. And therein started my problems. While I could write a powerful statement easily, I knew hardly anything about creating a powerful, effective video.

(I could, of course, have hired someone to do this for me, just as people who can't write hire ghost writers. But not only is this expensive (the cheapest quote I got was for \$15,000), it goes against my grain. I'm a literate person. I'm a public speaker and good communicator of ideas. What I need is not a feature film. I should, it seemed to me, be able to do this.

My first attempt was to just record, essentially, a video "selfie" i.e. a closeup of my face as I recited the script. The first reaction from a friend: "I can see you licking the spit off your lips." So I got someone who had shot many videos to record me. We did it twice, with and multiple takes and two different backgrounds (the best we had available without an expensive studio). "I'll just edit these myself," I thought.

Unfortunately, I had never used video editing software. So I found some (already, unbeknownst to me, on my computer) and taught myself its basics, using You Tube and websites as tutors. And I was able to produce, in one day, something that I thought was pretty good — you can see it at www.global-future-education.org. But then the comments started flowing in. "Good content", they all said (i.e. my script). BUT... "A minute too long." "Too much hand waving." "Bad backgrounds." "Too much cutting." "Add voice overs over stock footage." (Those are the nicer comments.)

What they are telling me, essentially, is that when it comes to video I am a rank beginner, certainly not the professional I am in the rest of my work life. So I've spent my career perfecting a form of communication that a large part of the audience I want to reach no longer consumes. "But writing is still important," many will retort. Of course it is, for some people and things, including the communications in this magazine. But less and less for spreading ideas to the masses. Thick books hardly get read. Make it "80 pages max," is advice I've been given. "Better to tweet and make good videos."

Take my friend and colleague Sir Ken Robinson. He has put his powerful message on creativity into a couple of very good books which he promotes in his many talks. But while he does sell many books (I'm sure several hundred thousand or more at this point) most of the people who want to learn about his ideas just watch his videos on the Web. The video of his first TED talk has had over 17 MILLION views.

This is a new fact of intellectual life. Video is now the best way to communicate powerful ideas to a large audience. Capturing an idea in an exciting way in 18 minutes (or far less) has been honed by TED and other like Big Think and Aspen to a high level. Video is the new text, and my video illiteracy no longer cuts it.

Again, one solution is for me to go out and hire video professionals, rather than do it myself, in the same way I would hire professional programmers. But should this really be necessary? Or is it more akin to the situation in former times when most people — even powerful people — had to go to a scribe to communicate anything in writing? Are programming — and making good videos — things that we want our kids to grow up competent at — and that we need to be competent at ourselves if we are to be effective workers in this age? Are video making and programming skills people will require in order to be considered literate in the 21st century and the third millennium? I believe so.

Fortunately, writing, which I am good at, will not disappear. But it is definitely becoming more of a niche medium than it used to be. So I'll continue trying to get better at making videos as well. With professionals' help and advice I'll learn to add graphics, additional footage, and other elements and I'll try to be as effective in video as I am in my writing. Maybe I'll make it out of video kindergarten ☺.

Or, if I'm lucky, I'll find a sixth grader to teach me.

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