



THE EFFECT OF EDUCATION

Project Proposal

November 20, 2003

International Documentary Association

Fiscal Sponsorship

Most of us would agree that education is important. Most would also agree that, unfortunately, there are problems with education in this country. Yet, if you thoroughly investigate the literature, the federal and state legislation, grassroots efforts and other explorations of the topic, you'll find a myriad of dissenting viewpoints and proposed solutions. Do we need higher standards, lower student-to-teacher ratios, alternative schools, better teaching techniques? Is it a mix of solutions? As a parent, how to educate your child is one of the most difficult, yet critical, choices one has to make. Many parents do not have the luxury of choice, and must rely on the public school system to provide proper education. If we do have a choice, we rely heavily on "Top School" lists that use criteria such as standardized test scores, graduation rates, acceptance rates into "Top" universities, word of mouth, and so on.

A critical question we should be asking ourselves is: "What is the true impact of a child's education?" Do we really understand the effect that a system of education—one that takes a child on a 13 year journey, from the formative age of 4 or 5 through the "independent" 18 year old grappling with all of life's problems—has upon a child? Is the education system achieving its goal? What is education's true goal? And finally, what is the relationship between our system of education and the problems we are experiencing as a society—violence (towards each other, towards the earth, and towards ourselves), imbalance of wealth and opportunity, inadequate health care, psychological suffering, and other societal ills?

These are critical questions that begin very close to home ("What is right for my child?"), and become global in scope ("How does the way we educate relate to the problems of society?"). A sane and powerful quote from Malcolm Forbes, one shared and articulated by many great thinkers in the last century, goes to the heart of the educational conundrum:

"It's so much easier to suggest solutions when you don't know too much about the problem."

Rather than add to the myriad of solutions, let us "know" the problem first. A clearer picture of the effects our educational offerings have upon children is a necessary first step towards the meaningful solution. The problem (or problems), if properly presented, will become so clear that the solution will make itself obvious.

This is the premise upon which we have built an ambitious documentary film project: *The Effect of Education*. The project begins with nine children at around the ages of 4-5 years old. These children will be documented in their school, and within their home. We will speak to them directly, and we will observe them from afar. We will hear from their teachers (to know their educational methods), from their school administrators (to know



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their educational goals), and from the parents (to know their foundation). We will see their homes and their communities. All of this will create a vivid picture of the educational environment of each of the nine children. But this is only a snapshot, and our basis for what we call **Film # 1**.

In order to see the true effects of our system, we must observe over an extended period of time. Education is a cumulative process, and **MUST** be surveyed through cumulative observation. In that vein, we will revisit the same children again in three years to conduct the same rigorous investigation into their environment, and into each child's relationship with the world around them. This is **Film # 2**.

Our goal is to create a visual portrait over time of a child's development through the educational system with **five films** that span arguably the most important 12 years of a human being's development. But this is only one of two important elements of the film series. In order to understand education in the broad sense, we must look at **ALL** of our different educational offerings. Aside from public schools (of which there are many different types), we offer a multitude of alternative schooling (e.g., Montessori, Waldorf, charter, magnet, etc.), and free schools (or sometimes called Democratic schools—that typically ignore national standards and age segregation and give nearly full autonomy to the student). This list does not even take into account the home schooling movement, which has grown sharply in recent years.

To understand the breadth of education, we have chosen to look at a sample: a carefully chosen group of three schools that cover the broad offering of education with regard to classroom structure, adherence to standards, philosophy and other factors. The schools are: 1) a Traditional Public School, 2) a Progressive School, and 3) a Free or Democratic School. From each of these school environments, we will choose three attending children for a total of nine. By portraying the lives of these **nine children**, across **three very different educational environments**, over the span of **twelve years**, we intend to create the most comprehensive and compelling picture of education ever put to film.

The films will fully depict each child's environment; they will show each child's perception of themselves, as well as outside perceptions of the child. A typical portion of the film might cut between the following segments:

- A 5 year old child—we'll call her Jennifer—playing by herself in a Montessori school room. In voice-over, we hear Jennifer's teacher describing the child's need for her own space through much of the school day. The teacher talks about the role of the teacher in a Montessori classroom, and her personal philosophy towards dealing with the different needs of young children.
- Cut to a narrated description of Jennifer's family background over footage of the neighborhood where Jennifer lives. We see Jennifer playing alone in her backyard.
- Cut to Jennifer's mother, who describes Jennifer as a warm, loving and caring child. We learn that Jennifer's parents have been divorced for two years. In



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addition, the mother gives us her view of Jennifer's relationship with her father and the effect of the divorce on Jennifer.

- Cut to Jennifer herself answering questions about her feelings toward school, what love means, and her perceptions of herself.

The relevance of this project will be ensured by our Advisory Board—a collection of educators, academics and filmmakers that will examine the validity of this film project from start to finish. Our advisors will test and challenge the project throughout pre-production, during the selection process of our schools and children, to ensure our approach is valid and meaningful. As each film is completed, the advisors will view, debate, and interpret its meaning—thus creating an opportunity to publish and stimulate thinking within the educational arena. In addition, we are considering a structured roundtable discussion amongst our advisors that will be documented (on video) at the conclusion of each of the five films. These discussions may even be incorporated into the documentary film series itself, providing immediate and credible response to the relationship between these nine children and their educational environments. It should be stressed that this potential aspect of the films is still in the consideration phase.

While there have been numerous films on the subject of secondary school education, and on the experience of children in the high school setting (e.g., Frederick Wiseman's *High School*, Davis Guggenheim's *The First Year*, and the PBS series *American High* just to name a few), *The Effect of Education* is the first documentary to examine the educational experience over time. A snapshot only captures a moment, and is therefore limited in what it sees. The effect of education is a cumulative process, and can only be accurately captured by cumulative observation. These other important films all focused on a particular school, or particular kind of school. *The Effect of Education* takes a broader view by looking across the educational spectrum. Not only will this approach answer some important questions about the pros and cons of one educational philosophy versus another, it may bring into light problems that are common to all schools, regardless of philosophy.

Presently, we are in the pre-production phase of this project which includes procurement of funds, finalization of an advisory board, and solicitation and confirmation of the participating schools. Production is expected to commence in the fall of 2004. We already have a commitment from six distinguished advisors in both the education and film arena (see attached names and short bios), and four prospective advisors who are still considering participation but have not yet committed.

The primary source of the funding for this project will be foundation grants. Additionally, we will seek support from networks that offer funds for independent film projects. These funding agencies include New York State Council on the Arts, LEF Foundation, ITVS, Creative Capital, and the Guggenheim Foundation. Because the subject matter of education is a popular topic among the larger foundations, we are also approaching the Pew Charitable Trusts, Ford Foundation, and MacArthur Foundation.

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The subject matter and style of this film makes it compelling for either public television or theatrical release (the Up Documentary Series, a hugely successful and still ongoing examination of human beings every seven years, started out as BBC public television programming). Therefore, we will look to ITVS for substantial funding of the first film in the series, while simultaneously approaching private foundations for partial funding. Whether the initial audience is from public television, or the international film festival circuit, we feel impact will be made.

A current list of our prospective funding sources—which does not include private donations through our personal and family contacts—is outlined, including the foundation’s deadline and our monetary request, as follows:

FUNDING SOURCE	DEADLINE	FUNDING REQUEST
Guggenheim (Artist Fellowship)	October 1, 2003	\$25,000
LEF Foundation	January 2004	\$12,000
ITVS	February 16, 2004	\$160,000
New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA)	May 1, 2004	\$25,000
Creative Capital	March 15, 2004	\$16,000
Film Arts Foundation	May, 2004	\$3,000
MacArthur Foundation	no deadline	\$50,000
Pew Charitable Trusts	no deadline	\$50,000
Ford Foundation	no deadline	\$50,000
Carnegie Corporation	no deadline	\$25,000

Through our Advisory Board, we also have personal connections to less well known (though just as lucrative and far less competitive) private foundations, and this list of private donors is currently being evaluated.

With regards to participation in the project, we have identified a handful of school districts around the nation that meet the requirements of the project. A strong candidate is the Albany, NY school district, where mature educational offerings from public schools, progressive schools (e.g., Montessori and Waldorf), and free schools are available to primary schoolchildren. In addition, we have identified districts in Massachusetts, Illinois



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and California. Naturally, the schools as well as the parents must be prepared to commit for the entire series. The Montessori schools have expressed a strong interest in this project (they've already allowed us to shoot a "Mini-Documentary" at a Montessori school in Rochester, NY) and we have already approached the Albany Free School. The solicitation process will be finalized by the spring of 2004 so that we may begin shooting in the following semester. Three production teams will be thoughtfully assembled during early 2004 as well.

In the fall of 2004, production will occur simultaneously at the three participating schools and continue for one month. Therefore, there will be three filmmaking teams, one for each school. We feel this is important in order to capture how the children respond to the same societal events (e.g. global events such as war, local activities, natural/ecological events that effect schooling, etc.). Each production team will consist of two team members: the primary filmmaker—responsible for most of the photography; and the secondary filmmaker—predominantly in charge of sound, occasional photography, and all production logistical duties (e.g., keeping track of tape stock, communication with the other film crew, etc.). The primary filmmaker will spend a significant amount of time on campus getting acquainted with the children prior to filming. This level of immersion within the school is critical for attaining a high level of trust and comfort with the students, teachers, parents and heads of the institutions, thereby setting the table for the natural and accurate portrayal of life at that particular school environment. We do not want the filmmakers to influence any action, but we do realize our presence will have some effect and we want to minimize our level of disruption. Dave Danesh (the project creator) will direct one of the teams, and the other two primary directors will be chosen for their understanding of the project and their sensitivity to documenting in a learning environment.

Post-production—which includes capturing B-roll footage, editing, sound, and scoring—will begin as soon as the production process ends. We expect at least two to three months of post-production to get to final cut, and then an additional one to two months to finalize sound, music and any effects. There may be additional time needed to prepare promotional materials.

Depending on our funding, there are several possible strategies on how we plan to reach our audience. If ITVS supports this project, the film series will obviously be directed towards The First Market—broadcast on PBS and perhaps subsequently on other principal and private networks. If large private foundations support the project, we would begin with the international film festival circuit, creating a buzz for the project and simultaneously opening up opportunities for the First Market. In addition, given the presence of pre-eminent academics on our Advisory Board, we anticipate strong interest for the film from Colleges of Education, teacher conferences and education seminars.

Education affects all of us, and the true audience for this film series is broad. If we were, however, to target a specific audience for this project, it would be four related groups:

- **administrators** who will raise questions to their board,



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- **teachers** who will reexamine their relationships with their students,
- **parents** who will better understand their role in educating their children and how their actions support or conflict with their school's actions,
- and **children** who will come to understand the whole movement of education and how their environment impacts them.

The subject of education can be highly subjective and individual, and can even be charged with emotion. Film is the ideal medium to capture the personal nuances, the attitudes behind the exterior...to put a face on a subject that is all about people, their environments and their growth. Focus groups, surveys or written studies cannot adequately capture the scope of emotion. The *Effect of Education* will use the medium of film to provide a groundbreaking window into our various educational offerings, their effects on our children, and on our society.

Advisory Board List

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The Effect of Education—Advisory Board

Michael Apple

Michael is John Bascom Professor of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A former elementary and secondary school teacher and past president of a teachers union, he has worked with educators, unions, dissident groups, and governments throughout the world in democratizing educational policy and practice. He has written extensively on the relationship between education and inequality. Among his many books are *Ideology and Curriculum*, *Education and Power*, *Teachers and Texts*, *Official Knowledge*, *Democratic Schools*, *Cultural Politics and Education*, and *Power, Meaning, and Identity*. He has been awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the American Educational Research Association and the UCLA Medal for Distinguished Academic Achievement.

John Balkcom

John is a consultant to management and boards of for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. Prior to his consulting, John was the President at St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He also served as Chief Executive Officer of the Santa Fe campus and member of the College's Management Committee and on the board of trustees of Santa Fe Pro Musica and Advisory Board of Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. John has a MBA from the Graduate School of Business, University of Chicago, in finance and economics.

Dorothy Fadiman

Dorothy is an accomplished documentary filmmaker, with seven major films under her belt, an Academy Award nomination, an Emmy, and multiple first prize awards at prestigious international film festivals. Her documentaries and those from her production company, Concentric Media, regularly air on public television. Prior to her award-winning trilogy, *From the Back-Alley's to the Supreme Court & Beyond*, Dorothy made a name for herself in the education arena with *Why Do These Kids Love School?* which featured nine innovative schools.

Alfie Kohn

Kohn was recently described by *Time* magazine as "perhaps the country's most outspoken critic of education's fixation on grades [and] test scores." His criticisms of competition and rewards have helped to shape the thinking of educators -- as well as parents and managers -- across the country and abroad. Kohn has been featured on hundreds of TV and radio programs, including *The Today Show* and *Oprah*. He has recently been profiled in the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*, while his work has been described and debated in many other leading publications. Alfie Kohn writes



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and speaks widely on human behavior, education, and social theory. His most recent of eight books is *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools* (2000).

Jerry Mintz

Jerry is a leading voice in the alternative school movement for over 30 years and founder of the Alternative Education Resource Organization. In 1989 he founded the Alternative Education Resource Organization which he continues to direct, and is Editor of its networking magazine, *The Education Revolution*. He has BA from Goddard College, and a Masters in Teaching in the Social Sciences from Antioch New England Graduate School.

Amy Sommer

Amy's most recent production credits include two Sundance 2002 premieres— *Blue Car* (Miramax) and *Teknolust* (Skouras Films) starring Tilda Swinton. Her first feature documentary, *Waco: The Rules of Engagement*, received an Oscar nomination in 1997. Amy holds a B.A. in Psychology from Wellesly College and an M.A. from Columbia University. She is a board member of the ACLU of Southern California and The Pacific High School.

The Effect of Education—Pending Advisory Board Members

We are currently in active communication with these prospective advisors:

R.J. Cutler

Mr. Cutler is a documentary filmmaker who's credits include *The War Room*, D.A. Pennebaker's account of the 1992 presidential campaign, *A Perfect Candidate*, about Oliver North's run for the U.S. Senate in 1994 and *American High*—a documentary about high school seniors—to date one of the most ambitious documentary projects to air on commercial TV (on Fox and PBS).

Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond

Dr. Hammond is currently Professor of Education at the Stanford University School of Education, and The Executive Director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Dr. Darling-Hammond works on issues of education policy and practice, including school reform, authentic assessment, professional development schools and educational research. She serves as the faculty sponsor for Stanford's Teacher Education Program (STEP). She is the author or editor of six books and has authored more than 150 journal articles, book chapters, and monographs on issues of educational policy and practice.

Dr. Eleanor Duckworth

Dr. Duckworth is a Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. A former student and translator of Jean Piaget, she grounds her work in Piaget's theories of the nature and development of intelligence. Her main interest is in teaching and the experience of teachers and learners of all ages both in and out of schools. A former elementary school teacher, she has worked in curriculum development, teacher education, and program evaluation in the United States, Switzerland, Africa, and her native Canada. Her publications include *Tell Me More: Listening to Learners Explain* (2001); and *Teacher to Teacher: Learning from Each Other* (1997).

Frederick Wiseman

Mr. Wiseman is one of today's greatest living documentary filmmakers. For close to thirty years, thanks to the Public Broadcast Service (PBS), he has created an exceptional body of work consisting of thirty full length films devoted primarily to exploring American institutions. Among these works, he directed the groundbreaking *High School* and *High School II*, *Titicut Follies*, and *Public Housing*.



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Principal Staff List

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The Effect of Education—Principal Staff

David S. Danesh

Creator, Primary Filmmaker, Producer

Dave has over six years of experience as an independent director, producer, cinematographer, and editor. His short film, *The Road Not Taken*, was screened at the New York Independent Film and Video Festival in September 2001. He was the producer, cinematographer and co-editor on a hi-definition digital feature, *Jesus Freak*, an official selection of the 2003 IFP Los Angeles Independent Film Festival, among several other national festivals. He has produced a number of documentaries, corporate videos, and commercials of various sizes and subject matters. Prior to being a filmmaker, Dave was a management consultant with a prestigious international consulting firm for over seven years, and he continues to contract on exclusive consulting assignments.

Amy Jones

Producer

After seven years in human resources, where she specialized in mergers and acquisitions and international expansion, Amy turned her focus to yoga and education. Currently, she runs the elementary after school program at Ring Mountain Day School in Tiburon, CA. She is also a volunteer with the Marin Advocates for Children.

Joaquin Alvarado

Producer

Joaquin is an award-winning filmmaker and educator with over ten years of experience producing and directing. His films have been featured in numerous film festivals, including the AFI Los Angeles International Film Festival and the San Francisco Independent Film Festival. His work with students began in the 1980's when he developed the first television program to be produced by Hispanic Youth in the country. Mr. Alvarado holds an MFA from the UCLA School of Film, Television, and Digital Media. He is currently the Director of Academic Programs at San Francisco State University's College of Extended Learning.

Marjorie Kaye

Editor, Filmmaker, 1st Unit Production

In addition to being a filmmaker, Marjorie is a bar-certified mediator and does volunteer work in Santa Monica middle schools as a peer-mediation facilitator. She has written and directed many short films, which have screened at hundreds of Festivals worldwide.

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Pete Kuzov

Filmmaker, 2nd Unit Production

Pete is a multi-dimensional talent— actor, artist, and filmmaker. He has a B.F.A. and M.F.A. at Texas Tech University and Louisiana Sate University respectively in Theater and Performing Arts. Pete continues to be a prolific multi-media artist. He has worked on independent films in many capacities—as art director, producer and actor.

Morgan Nichols

Filmmaker, 3rd Unit Production

Morgan has a B.A. from Brandeis University and an M.F.A. from the USC Graduate Film Program. Morgan is the writer and director of numerous independent films. He directed and edited, *Jesus Freak*, an independent feature film that was named an official selection of the 2003 IFP Los Angeles Independent Film Festival.