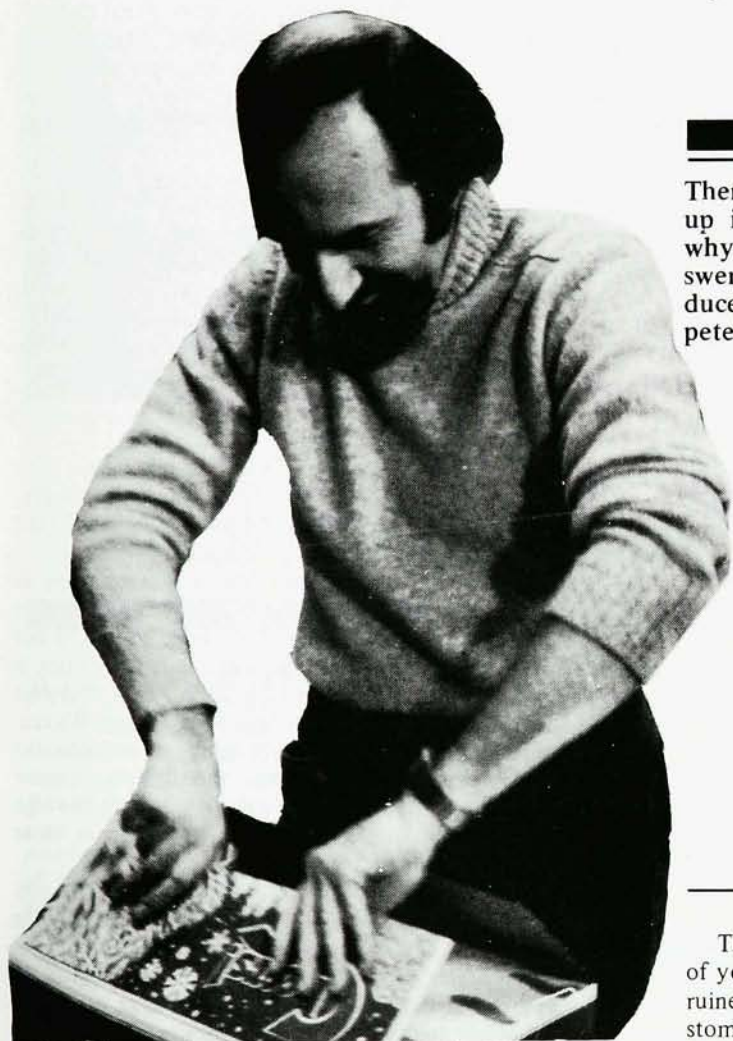


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# open letter to producers

## from a film teacher



Professor, letter writer and amateur digger, Vaclav Taborsky uncovers Suggestions to Film Students from a cache in the holy mountain

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There's no dearth of young people, working their way up in the industry through on-the-job training. So why hire a film school graduate? Vaclav Taborsky answers the question as he initiates a dialogue with producers in the private sector. He promises that competent grads will fit the bill.

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by Vaclav Taborsky

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There must be some things that scare you: news about one of your angel's bankruptcy or an unexpected tax audit or the ruined rushes of the unique footage of five trained elephants stomping a jumbo jet down to nuts and bolts. Somewhere deep in my mind I suspect, though, that the early weeks of spring, when hordes of itinerant film talents start swarming your offices, must be the time of the year you fear most.

I can visualize it perfectly: the mix of your latest film just three days away and half the sound effects have yet to be recorded. Or you discover this fantastic razor blade eater from the Fiji Islands, want to hire him, but the Canadian Union of Razor Blade Eaters says no, stop it, we have our own talented



Schick chewer who has to be hired first. Just change your script a little.

To top your problems and frustrations, there are some young people around your office with fallow complexions, bulging glossy eyes and the looks of demented hermit. They are film students who just passed, failed, succeeded, completed their film production course or a comparative study of bartenders' wrist movements in films by Sam Peckinpah, Robert Bresson, and Sergei Eisenstein. Maybe you will talk to them a little. If you are soft-hearted, maybe you will even watch their film and later on wonder how their explorative refocusing of roughly cut trance or dance or barfing sequences refers to your educational series on pregnancy which is in production. Do not deny it, at those moments some very unflattering thoughts about all those film schools must have crossed your mind.

But here I am to agree with you, to disagree with you, explain a little, and make suggestions.

Fortunately, at one stage of my life or another, I went through many phases and aspects of film. Started as a film student, then a budding filmmaker, later on a senior director/producer who hired many talents, finally I became a film educator.

The quality of Canadian film education has changed for the better in the '70s. Let me explain what we are doing. The curriculum at Algonquin College (and several other film programs in Ontario) is designed very professionally. There are separate courses in each major film profession: script writing, directing, camera, sound, and editing. There is a special course offered on film genres, as most of our cinematic bread and butter is of a wide variety of types: sponsored, news, and educational films, documentaries and commercials.

Our students have access to several different ways of shooting, editing, and sound work: They have exercises with Ariflex, CP, Eclair, Beaulieu; they try single system, sync shooting and multiple camera work; they record, transfer and mix; they direct fiction and action; they learn and try for two or three years. Most of them will specialize; they are supposed to know something about everything and (almost) everything about one subject. I dare to say that the best ones (one or two or three every year) are well trained to become an asset to any production company. Many others are able to complete their experience on the job. That is why I believe that the professional standards of at least three film schools would satisfy even the greatest skeptics.

Oh yes, you are right, there are still quite a few institutions where amateurs train other amateurs, where people without any experience teach film production or film study or film appreciation, whatever the names are. However, you are not going to approach those when you need a boom operator or an AD.

You can argue with me that filmmaking cannot be taught. To use the words from Monty Python, yes it can. No, you cannot. Yes, you can. I know everything about Einstein's poor marks in mathematics and Van Gogh's failure in Creative Composition 124. However, we do not need Einsteins in Canadian film, but dedicated, reliable, and knowledgeable people. We believe that our graduates fit this description.

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*Vaclav Taborsky is a coordinator of the Film Program at Algonquin College in Ottawa. He has been involved with Canadian Film education since 1969.*

## Quality of Graduates

You have probably seen more young applicants than I have, although we have to interview about 120 people every year to select 30 for the first year at Algonquin. Let me enumerate what kind of candidates you meet.

First, it is people who never had any serious film education. Second, it is those who were rejected at the interview. Third, people who started in one of the film schools, but failed – be it for lack of knowledge, or simply because of their unreliability and laziness. I know many students of this kind. They may be talented, but want to pick only the cherries. Otherwise, they are too blasé or conceited or cannot survive the most grueling tests of endurance. As they are not willing to sacrifice everything, we ask them to transfer to flower arranging or let them apply to their grandpa's foundation, Spoiled Brats, Incorporated.

The last three categories to be described are the graduates. Some of them just crawled through with more sweat than excitement. Then come the relatively good ones. They did more than what we asked for. With clenched teeth, they passed the least popular courses, usually subjects not directly related to film. They finished all assignments, including the most boring homework. They did it, because they are dedicated. They would certainly do their best to get and keep any film job.

Finally, the last group includes that one guy (two or three in exceptionally good years) who is the old teacher's delight and pleasure, whom we will cherish in our memory while basking in the sun on the porch of the home for retired and retarded pedagogues. You have a sixth sense and you always snatch them right from under our noses, sometimes even before the student has a chance to graduate. Generally, we do not have to worry about their employment.

## Is Co-operation Possible?

Whenever you have to hire an inexperienced youngster, you are losing your time and money while training him on the job. One hopes that our experience from Ottawa could be adopted by those of you who would like to get qualified personnel.

Several times a year we get a call from a film company in search of a qualified director/producer or a local TV station looking for a good assistant editor. They have employed our graduates on previous occasions and were satisfied, which is the best recommendation. That is why we get calls whenever there is an opening. All we have to do is to be honest. We cannot overpraise somebody whose enthusiasm or attitude was mediocre. It is better to say: "Sorry, this time, we cannot recommend anybody." In most cases though, due to the high fluctuation in our business, there are always two or three competent candidates.

I hope that after this explanation you will have more confidence in our graduates. Whenever there is a position to be filled, please give a call to Stan Fox or Vince Vaitiekunas at York, to Don Gillies, Ben Caza or Jim Kelly at Ryerson, to Bob Bocking or Pat Crawley at Conestoga, to us at Algonquin or wherever there are good teachers and conscientious graduates in Canada.

Although it sounds very trivial, almost a recipe for schmucks, ask them to produce a diploma. And give us a call. A mutual confidence between you – the film producers, and us – the film teachers, seems to be a reasonable way to achieve good cooperation in the future. We want our best people to get a position fast – and you can have them. They are available.