

## Educational broadcasting - just for kids?

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This paper examines and compares the appropriateness of broadcasting and narrowcasting to delivering educational programs for adult learners. It describes some recent developments in Australia and gives a number of examples of how specific groups of students can be targeted by narrowcasting.

It examines the ability of television to be used in a live, interactive capacity using as a major example North Island College and the Knowledge Network in British Columbia, Canada and discusses the recent report of The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *An Apple for the Teacher? Choice and technology in learning* and comments upon a number of recommendations that the Committee made about education and television.

To most people in Australia the term 'educational broadcasting' conjures up a picture of ABC schools broadcasts. The ABC has had a long tradition of providing both radio and television programs to primary and secondary schools in Australia, although its schools television service did not commence until 1957 when a pilot series was transmitted in Sydney, which was extended to Melbourne in 1958. However, it was not until 1961 that a national educational service was provided covering about 85% of Australia's population. To date this broadcasting has been mainly tied to curriculum and programs are usually developed with close liaison between the broadcaster and the various educational systems involved. As is the case with schools broadcasting in the UK, the ABC "is making programmes aimed at 'closed' or known target groups who will view the programmes in a 'closed' or known and controlled learning situation" (Sargant, 1986, p366).

This is the predominant model used for schools broadcasting, with the television program likely to be just one element among a number of educational experiences. "The integration of these elements is likely to be planned for top-down by the course designer or broadcaster and expected to be mediated or facilitated by a teacher or tutor" (Sargant, 1986, p366).

Unlike their counterparts in the UK however, the ABC has made little attempt to address the issue of educational broadcasting (television) for an adult audience. Although it can be argued that the many excellent documentaries, current affairs programs, dramas and other cultural offerings are 'educational' and do demonstrate that the ABC is fulfilling its original charter to 'inform, educate and entertain', there is no attempt by the ABC to provide for any formal adult educational programs as happens with BBC2, ITV and Channel 4 in the UK, many PBS stations in the US and similar broadcasters in Canada.

In the report of a sub-committee of the ABC Federal Education Broadcasts Advisory Committee in 1979, *The Role of ABC Educational Broadcasting*, it was recommended:

That an additional ABC television channel be established to enable the ABC to provide adequate and comprehensive programs in such additional areas as:

- (a) technical education;
  - (b) further and continuing education;
  - (c) adult education;
  - (d) work experience/ career education; and
  - (e) education for ethnic communities.
- (Recommendation 6)

and

That additional finance be provided to enable the ABC to develop courses in community, technical and further education so that the following groups have access or better access, to educational facilities:

- (a) full and part-time workers in isolated country areas;
- (b) unemployed persons;
- (c) persons in institutions such as prisons, hospitals, sheltered workshops;
- (d) full-time students; and
- (e) full and part-time workers in cities.

(Recommendation 8 - Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1984, pXVI).

However, despite the passage of 10 years since that report and despite similar recommendations made by subsequent advisory committees and enquiries, there has been little change to ABC policy or action in this area of formal educational provision for adults.

It is also interesting to note that in the new Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act passed by Federal Parliament in May 1983 the Charter

(Section 6) omits the word 'education' and talks about television services of a high standard, particularly those "that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian Community" (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1984, p10).

What impact then can television broadcasting have on education?

Naomi Sargent in charge of educational programming on Channel 4 believes that "the importance of broadcasting to education is that its message can reach freely into the homes of practically everybody. It therefore overcomes the two main barriers to access faced by all other forms of education; geography and finance" (Sargent, 1986, p367). However, she also sounds a note of caution... "while people do not pay for broadcasting at the point of use, and while there is enough air time to go round, broadcasting is obviously an attractive delivery system both for individuals and for educational institutions" (Sargent, 1988, p140). However, limiting such a valuable and expensive resource only to 'closed' user groups may not be the most sensible and cost effective use of broadcasting. As new options become available such as cable satellite, pay TV and the use of UHF channels it may be more appropriate to use these technologies for narrow-casting to specific and known target groups.

The key to this argument lies in the distinction between needing or wishing to reach any or everybody watching at home, ie the 'open' audience, or aiming at particular known or 'closed' groups such as the OU, training centres or doctors. The most common form of educational broadcasting, that for schools, is of this kind. It is usually curriculum-led and designed to be mediated by teachers. Pupils view in a controlled learning environment and the decision to view is not theirs.

Much educational broadcasting for adults is however not of this kind. The 'open' audience at home makes its own choice to switch on or off. It needs the power of broadcast television to reach people who may not yet know what they want, who are likely to be educationally disadvantaged and frequently also poor. The unemployed, the over 60s and young people are examples of groups for whom open broadcasting will continue to be very important for the foreseeable future. Access to the arts and sciences and consumer education are examples of content areas which should be available for anyone. Only when people know that they want and are able to pay for it can they be moved to more narrow-cast options. (Sargent, 1988, p141)

The satellite television service now available in Australia of course makes this technically possible, allowing programs to be 'narrow-cast' to specific locations and to be seen by a selective audience, selective in that the viewer needs a decoder or some such device to receive the signal. "These programs are not subject to the same controls that apply to programs received by the general community. Low cost educational programs which could not otherwise be transmitted because they are of inadequate

technical standard can now be transmitted to widely dispersed groups of students by direct arrangement with AUSSAT or by using the services of Sky Channel or TSN11" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1989,p28).

An example of this application were the courses delivered in 1987 by TAFE (NSW) for hospitality training using Sky Channel receiving stations located in registered clubs. The students attended the clubs to view the programs and to undertake practical work using the bar, restaurant and kitchen facilities available. A further example is the use of Imparja by Adelaide College of TAFE in South Australia to broadcast community management programs to a number of remote aboriginal settlements commencing in May 1989. These programs will be broadcast live from the studios at Adelaide College with one way video and two way audio interaction using a terrestrial telephone link between the sites and the presenters in the Studio.

TSN11 in Queensland 'narrow-casts' programs to specific groups of people in particular institutions. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment Education and Training, "was very impressed by the TSN11 operations, primarily because they can reach remote and metropolitan areas simultaneously, they permit a wide range of organisations access to a form of communication which otherwise would not be available to them, and they allow the material transmitted to reflect the requirements of a selected audience" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1989, p105).

## **Other Recent Developments in Australia**

### **Learning Network**

In 1987/88 both the ABC and SBS broadcast programs distributed by the Learning Network. These programs, mainly produced by Community College Networks in the USA were curriculum related and some were also of general public interest.

However, for a number of reasons (broadcast times, lack of acceptance and support by educational institutions and the intended audience) they were not an outstanding success.

Although the Learning Network has now suspended its broadcast operations, it is continuing to license educational institutions to use videotape telecourse material for which it holds the Australian rights through Educational Media Australia.

### **TV Ed Australia**

TV Ed Australia is a national educational broadcasting project involving Education Ministries and agencies such as colleges of advanced education, universities and TAFE colleges. TV Ed Australia developed from the Victorian TV Ed project, whereby educational broadcasts were made on HSV7 Melbourne and regional television stations in Victoria.

SBS now undertakes the broadcast function in place of HSV7 Melbourne providing free broadcasts between 3.00 - 4.00pm on weekdays. HSV7 Melbourne still provides the Victorian Ministry of Education with one day per month free studio time and crew and equipment. Programs are provided by tertiary institutions and by government departments of all States and Territories apart from Queensland. The Victorian Ministry of Education undertakes the coordination and scheduling task and all States and Territories receive programs.

TV Ed Australia attempts to target audiences with its particular time slots. Accordingly, its programs concentrate on primary schools, TAFE colleges, or teacher professional development issues, for example, depending on the day. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1989, p27)

### **Golden West Network**

The Golden West Network broadcasts educational material to the non-metropolitan areas of Western Australia. Under the title of 'Ed-TV' it provides up to 14 hours per week of free air time with programs being provided by the 10 participating institutions. However, because of a lack of funds for production the actual air time usually falls well short of the 14 hours available to the institutions involved.

### **Imparja**

Imparja is the recently licensed RCTS station which provides a television service to the rural areas of South Australia, western NSW and the Northern Territory. Imparja adapts and retransmits some educational programs from the ABC and SBS. The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) which is the controlling body, eventually plans to produce a variety of educational programs. As pointed out earlier Adelaide College plans to use Imparja to broadcast interactive programs to remote aboriginal communities in the north of South Australia and hopefully extend this provision to other locations covered by the network.

Under the terms of licenses granted to both Imparja and the Golden West Network it is a requirement that educational material be broadcast. The licenses require that:

The licensee shall provide access for the following number of hours of aboriginal programs to meet the specific needs of the aboriginal population within the service area and educational programs based on or consistent with established curriculums (including primary, secondary, tertiary and continuing education) to meet the specific educational needs and interests of the population within the service area:

- (a) during the first and second year of operation - a minimum of 80 hours per year;
- (b) during the third and fourth year of operation - a minimum of 280 hours per year;
- (c) during the fifth year of operation - a minimum of 560 hours per year.

The licensee shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that the number of hours referred to above are transmitted using program material from independent, educational and its own resources. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1989, p27, 28)

TSN11 coordinates satellite video transmission for all Queensland Government departments. It transmits to 60 educational institutions and centres and to 1100 privately owned satellite receiving facilities. TSN11 produces and transmits around 30 hours per week of interactive programs for professional groups, education, industry and commerce.

### **Live, Interactive Television**

As has been pointed out already in this paper television not only has the capacity to reach large audiences but it also has the capacity to be used for interaction with a widely dispersed audience.

Channel Four in the UK "also wishes to include live programming both for students and tutors, with phone-in and follow-up activities. This will help take account of the scatter of students and help people feel part of a community" (Sargant, 1986, p371).

One of the most successful applications of this style of broadcasting is that used by North Island College in conjunction with the Knowledge Network in British Columbia, Canada.

North Island College is located on Vancouver Island, which lies off the west coast of the Province of British Columbia. The region served by the college covers approximately 80,000 square kilometres, with a population of approximately 131,000 people.

Operating out of 19 local learning centres throughout the region, the college serves a number of small communities and has developed and implemented an open learning concept which emphasises instructional technology to suit the specific needs of its students. Technologies employed are computer assisted learning, television instruction, video tape, individualised modularised courses and computer mediated courses.

## **NIC and the Knowledge Network**

The Knowledge Network's educational television service broadcasts a wide variety of programs; telecourses carrying college and university credit, professional, technical and technological courses for people wishing to upgrade their qualifications; programs for children; support for classroom learning; broadcasts of a cultural nature, etc.

Using the Anik C Satellite KNOW broadcasts to all British Columbia parts of western Alberta and the Yukon and North West Territories.

Since KNOW commenced broadcasting in 1980, North Island College has been the only educational institution within the Province to continuously provide telecourses using the network.

Despite being perhaps the smallest post-secondary educational institution within the Province, NIC has managed to consistently use the network to deliver a number of courses each year.

All NIC telecourses are live, studio based and low cost productions (little more than 'talking head' plus interview situations). A feature of this style of programming is a two way interactive audio link allowing viewers to phone in with questions that go live to air.

The programmes have been tremendously successful with high enrolments (over 2000 students in six courses in 1987/88) and high completion rates (in most cases over 90%).

One course, Psychology 212 (second year university) attracted 493 enrolments from 98 separate Western Canadian communities and as this was also a continuing education (non-credit) course in Parenting, many more viewers than those enrolled watched the programmes (as evidenced by the high TV ratings).

NIC is planning to extend this type of offering over the next few years and hope to be able to deliver at least 10-12 first and second year university subjects by 1992.

## **The Future**

The recent Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training examines a number of proposals and issues which would impact on the provision of educational television and made three specific recommendations relating to this provision.

The Committee heard evidence and examined proposals for the establishment of a national dedicated educational channel, however it was of the view "that a national television channel dedicated only to education is not appropriate in terms of cost effectiveness and educational need.

Nonetheless, the efforts of state governments and individual institutions to produce a broadcast high quality educational programs must be better supported" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1989, p104). With this in mind they recommended that:

By 1 January 1991 metropolitan and regional commercial television broadcasters be required to broadcast educational programs as a condition of their licences, similar to the arrangements applying to remote commercial television services. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1989, Recommendation 11)

The Committee was impressed by the potential of 'narrow-cast', interactive television for education and highlighted the work of TSN11 in Queensland and the plans for the use of compressed video between Adelaide College and Light College of TAFE in SA. Because of the potential of these technologies and/or techniques to target specific groups of people the Committee recommended that:

The Commonwealth and the State governments support and extend innovations in the use of 'narrowcast' television for educational purposes, particularly in the possibilities presented by the use of compressed video. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1989, Recommendation 12)

The Committee also examined the question of pay television and stated that, "the potential and the cost-effectiveness of educational television will be affected significantly if the Commonwealth Government were to decide to permit the widespread introduction of pay television, delivered by cable or as radiated subscription television (RSTV). The issue is actively being considered by the Commonwealth Government at the moment. Certainly, pay television could restrict access by financially disadvantaged people but it also could open new opportunities for education" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1989, pp105, 106).

However the Committee pointed out that the experience in the United States had shown that cable system operators had in many cases abandoned the non profitable, non formal, community education and access programs in favour of entertainment. Despite there being a requirement for the operators to provide access and educational channels as part of their service, the relevant regulations had been overturned in 1975.

Therefore, the Committee thought it important to recommend that:

in the event of pay television being widely introduced in Australia there be a requirement that a specified amount of broadcast capacity be made available free for educational purposes, and that the service operators provide assistance in producing the educational programs which are



broadcast. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1989 Recommendation 13)

While these three recommendations are most welcome and if implemented would provide a major change in direction in the use of educational television in Australia, we must be mindful of the fact that no educational institution or system should be led by the technology available to it. "There are far too many projects in existence, the direction of which was determined by the availability of a new technological toy rather than by the needs of the user or the content of the educational programme" (Sargant, 1986, p365).

Broadcasting (or narrow-casting) is simply a delivery system and is only one of the components that come together to provide a successful learning experience for the student.

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During 1987/88 he spent a year as Director of Instructional Materials at North Island College, a most unique Open Learning/Distance Education Community College on Vancouver Island, BC, Canada.

During May/July 1989 Mr Kenworthy was invited to consult with the newly established Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver, Canada. He was asked to prepare a rationale for a major Commonwealth of Learning initiative in technical and vocational training through distance education techniques particularly in developing Commonwealth countries.

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