

T H E  
A U S T R A L I A N  
J O U R N A L O F

## EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

### Australia, academia and the airwaves

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Although Radio and Television have been used extensively in School level Education in Australia, relatively little use has been made in Tertiary and Continuing Education. In recent times the Tertiary sector has increasingly employed video in teaching and a number of successful Public Educational radio stations have been set up by consortiums of Tertiary institutions. It is suggested that these stations should receive greater encouragement. With Television, a full broadcast Educational Television Network should be established in addition to the ABC/SBS and Commercial Networks and it should be run in a similar fashion to the Public Radio stations.

Broadcasting in Australia is in a rather unstable and critical phase at present. The ABC is undergoing yet another upheaval with a new Board and the dynamic David Hill as the new chief executive. It will, it is planned, amalgamate with the Special Broadcasting Service. The remote commercial television services are coming into operation, the government is developing its equalisation policy in country television stations and spare capacity on the AUSSAT satellite is at last being taken up both by pay television entertainment channels and even (in some States) by educationists.

At the same time, Higher Education is under review. The CTEC has recently published its report on "Efficiency and Effectiveness in Higher Education", although this is only mildly critical of present practices. The community at large appears to have a rather greater concern about the availability and efficiency of Higher Education.

There is a third circumstance - namely the economic situation in this country. Australia has a high level of overseas debt and there has been a relative fall in our standard of living in recent times. There is much questioning of our traditional role as a primary producer.

These three factors signify to me that it is a rather appropriate time to examine the role of Educational Broadcasting in this country. Broadcast media have a considerable influence on our values. The level of Educational Broadcasting may signify the value we attach to education itself.

### **Television and radio in tertiary education**

To understand the present situation, it is helpful to take a brief overview of the history of Educational Broadcasting and of Educational Media in Australia.

For obvious reasons, the main thrust of educational broadcasting has come from the ABC. However the latter has concentrated mainly on Schools Broadcasting both in radio and television. It has always been a little confused as to its role in the education of Adults.

#### ***Educational radio***

The ABC commenced educational broadcasting over fifty years ago. It was in 1930 that the Australian Broadcasting Company, as it was then known worked with the University Extension Board to arrange a six month program of lectures. These included talks on Aborigines by a Professor A. R. Radcliffe Brown and on Australian literature by a Mr H. M. Green. "A member of that board, G. V. Portus, thought that in general the talks offered by the company were 'not of a very high quality'." (Inglis, 1983, p14)

In the next year, 1931, Broadcasts for schools were mounted on 3 AR but apparently very few schools had 'wireless' sets. However schools radio soon established itself and Australia became a leader in the field.

Adult Education on Radio has never fared so well. For many years it was supposed to be the province of the Talks Department but there appears to have been little emphasis on any specific educational objectives. Talks tended to be concerned with Magazine Programs and Current Affairs. Children were looked after by the Education Department, which for many years was known as "Youth Education". Only very recently has the ABC turned its attention to Radio for Adult Education.

In contrast the Public Radio sector has been involved from its earliest days in Educational Broadcasting. It will be suggested below that its success in this field indicates that Public Broadcasters may be able to play an important role in Educational Television.

### **Educational television broadcasting**

Schools Television was introduced in the early days of ABC Television and a high standard has been maintained ever since. Education Producers have often moved on to very successful careers in other areas of Television production.

In 1961 ABC 'Youth Education' became plain 'Education' and the same year saw the founding of "University of the Air" . This weekly series was the brain child of Sir Richard Boyer and initially at least consisted of learned discussions amongst academics. In 1963, the presentation became more varied but the series was finally taken off the air in 1966. (Inglis, 1983, pp.209-10). "University of the Air" represents virtually the only venture by the ABC into Educational Television for Adults.

Interestingly it was the commercial television stations which ventured into adult education in the late 1960's and early 1970's with "Television Tutorial." It has been suggested that this weekly series only survived as long as it did because it provided 'Australian content' at minimal cost. However the series produced by the University of Sydney in conjunction with local commercial networks had a small but dedicated following. In very recent times it has been the Golden West Network - a remote area commercial satellite network in Western Australia - which has pioneered the use of the satellite with broadcast adult educational programming.

### **Educational radio and television in tertiary institutions**

Public radio was in fact born in a University. VL 2UV at the University of NSW was granted its special license in 1961. The Department of Continuing Education at the University of Adelaide obtained its license for station 5UV in June 1972. Both institutions broadcast on experimental licenses "off the band" but it was in Adelaide that the experimental license was successfully translated into a full broadcast license and thus laid the foundations for Educational Public Radio. (Greig, 1981, Ch.5)

The University of NSW also had the distinction of having its own educational television station which broadcast on UHF to various reception centres around the city. The station transmitted mainly postgraduate courses using a simple lecture format. It ceased broadcasting some years ago.

In the mid 1960s "Educational Television" became manifest in a number of institutions in the form of Closed-Circuit Television. The development of this medium has had an interesting history which has been paralleled in the United Kingdom and in North America. In the early days CCTV used the existing technology to relay live lectures to mass audiences of students.

Videotape allowed the lectures to be recorded and repeated. In times of great expansion in the Tertiary sector this was acceptable but low production values (i.e. boring 'talking head' lectures) and technical failures disillusioned both staff and students and the whole concept of ETV tended to be dismissed out of hand.

With the evolution of "Video" with its cheaper and more reliable equipment and a growing familiarity with the medium, "educational television" is experiencing something of a renaissance. Tertiary institutions are now beginning to produce a substantial amount of material which is acceptable to broadcasters. (Greig, 1986)

### **Educational television/video in tertiary institutions**

Television/Video can be used in an immense variety of ways in tertiary education. These include simple laboratory and field demonstrations, simulations, trigger materials for discussion and complete instructional programs. In terms of institutional politics, Media production departments can often earn brownie points with the Administration for their role in public relations. Video is becoming increasingly indispensable in recruiting students and in fund raising. Another important development is the increasing convergence of television and computing technologies.

### ***Future developments***

Earlier prejudice against educational television is rapidly breaking down in Tertiary institutions and the increase in the use of video is almost exponential. Parallel with this however, is increasing financial pressure on Universities and colleges. Central video production units are having to earn more of their way from direct charging, from sponsorship and from external work. This will almost certainly be a continuing trend in the future.

While there has been almost no broadcast adult educational television in Australia to date, the ABC now has a small department responsible for Further Education. Following the fine example of the Golden West Network, Remote Area Commercial Services will undertake some educational broadcasting. (Since the delivery of this paper, the Learning Network has started to schedule early morning programs in conjunction with the ABC and SBS).

The ABC is now devoting much of its educational radio resources to Adult Education. The Public Broadcasters have proved over the last decade that they can produce extensive high quality educational radio programming. There is of course a problem with course based radio in that it may have fairly limited appeal and the airwaves are limited (the same of course goes

for Television). As Keith Jackson pointed out in a recent paper, serious programming can alienate the very kind of listener that one is trying to attract. He put forward the ingenious idea that one would run two parallel radio stations. One (the broadbased popular one) would entertain people and provide light education, but it would also point listeners with specific interests to more serious programs on a sister station, which would broadcast more specialized course work. (Jackson, 1984)

It seems evident that although commercial television stations have made some efforts in educational broadcasting, they will never be in a position to undertake extensive programming of this kind. Similarly the ABC (and SBS) will only be able to devote part of its resources to educational television and radio. In both these sectors, Education will not be able to command peak viewing times - it will always be second best. Educational Radio and Television will have to look elsewhere.

### ***Proposed network(s)***

Even being very conservative and allowing for numerous repeater stations, there is sufficient space on the UHF band for at least one more broadcast channel in Sydney. Other capital cities, with flatter terrain would be able to accommodate more channels.

It is proposed that the (remaining) channel should be devoted to Educational and Community programming and run on the same basis as Public Educational Radio. A consortium of educational institutions would manage the station and input would come from various government instrumentalities such as the Health Commission. The emphasis would be on Educational programming but Community and Minority broadcasting would also be supported.

Educational radio is already operating very effectively through Public stations, particularly in certain States. However more government and institutional support is needed to promote the educational aspect. There is probably sufficient space on the FM band, in some areas at least, to allow the creation of specialized Educational stations. The use of side-band is another promising area for such broadcasting.

### **Conclusions**

There is an undoubted need for greater access by the community to both Tertiary and Continuing Education. The Tertiary institutions have been slow to take up the challenge although they are making increasing use of the new media in their internal teaching. Broadcast Television and Radio offer a proven and cost-effective method of extending learning. The ABC and the Commercial sector will always be limited in their commitment to

education (although what they can do will be very valuable). Existing Educational Public Radio should therefore receive stronger support. With Television, a new Public Educational Television Network on UHF should be set up.

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