

Educational broadcasting: A comparative approach

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Review of Meyer, M. (1992). *Aspects of School Television in Europe*.
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The transformation of Europe, politically, has had profound effects on the shape of broadcasting and education. As both the education systems and broadcasting bodies in Europe undergo legislative change and re-orientation, the role of television for schools has also been altered. It's timely for a review of the situation in the late 1980s and to consider the future.

Meyer seeks to describe and document the state of schools' television in the 1990s in Europe and also bring together a diverse collection of papers from practitioners and researchers in the field.

The first chapter of the book reports the results of a survey completed in 1989 of the situation of educational broadcasting in Europe. It is limited to those countries who were members of the European Broadcasting Union. This includes: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, the former Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Iceland, Eire, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in the USA are also members of the EBU but were not included in the survey.

The survey found that in most of the countries there were single educational broadcasting services with a nation-wide coverage. There were more complicated arrangements in the United Kingdom, France and Germany where the national audience was served by more than one educational broadcasting service.

The survey also looked at the organisational framework in which school television departments were placed, hoping that it might be possible to draw conclusions as to the role and importance of school television departments within their organisations. The conclusion was that there was no common pattern as to organisational set-up and considerable diversity.

One common feature, however, was that most of the European broadcasting organisations ran educational departments that contributed to adult education as well as schools. Several other classification criteria were used which enabled Meyer to group the various educational broadcasters. These included the relationship with educational authorities and the educational community, research connections, resources and costs, program promotion and support activities, and broadcasters as producers of educational media.

The overall impression is of the majority of educational broadcasters maintaining present airtime. There have been some casualties with school television departments closing down in Denmark, Portugal and Eire. For those countries where school television continues there has been a change in the style of programs. There is a much greater trend towards the imitation of mainstream TV formats such as news, magazine and information programs and away from typical educational television formats and courses with thirteen instalments. There seems also to be a trend for educational broadcasting departments to provide orientation, stimulation, sensitisation for things to discover rather than structured courses aiming at measurable gains of knowledge. In the adult education area there is a growing trend towards shorter formats that are slotted in other adult programs at breakfast time television.

The book also looks ahead to directions for educational television in the nineties. The contributors are senior staff of the various broadcasting organisations. A common thread is that school television has lost site of its connection with schools and has been seduced by the genres of general programming. The Director of Dutch School Television, Keers Schippers, sets the tone for this section of the book with some suggestions for winning support for school television. His five point strategy is: strengthen the relationship between school television and regular education structurally, base programming on market research, systematically evaluate programs, consider school television as part of a multimedia series of courses, and intensify public relations for school television.

The book also includes details of 24 case studies of "successful" school television programs. These are descriptive rather than analytical and the term "success" is used without much evidence of independent evaluation. It seems that success is defined by such factors as the response from

schools, the number of support materials sold and surveys of school teachers and children.

The final chapter in the book deals more fully with research issues. These include surveys of teacher's attitudes, and some formative evaluation. An exciting project in the Netherlands involves a panel of one hundred primary schools reporting weekly about their use of TV/video programs in their lessons. The approach was based on the coordinated use of a personal computer, a modem and a telephone with the collection and the processing of the data all done electronically.

Aspects of School Television in Europe is a comprehensive and fascinating account of the continuing role of television in education. Meyer takes a relatively uncritical view of educational television and makes no apologies for providing a book which will help advance the interests of producers of school programs. There is little reference to other developments in educational technology including computers, multimedia and interactive video. The assumption of the book is that broadcast television is the most desirable means of delivery of educational programs.

The book would be useful for anyone with an interest in educational television and the politics of educational and broadcasting institutions.

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