

Educational Broadcasting in West Germany

Francis Cachia

Production Principles

The producers of educational broadcasts in West Germany¹ do not expect their productions to be the only ones used in the class-room situation. Nor do they produce only for class-rooms or lecture-halls. Some of their productions are for children of the pre-school going age, and others are intended to interest people who are long past their schooling days. In other words, educational broadcasting is conceived of as including the home as well as the school. Moreover, it is directed at recipients of all ages who are interested in increasing their knowledge and enriching their culture.

Not only the recipients, but also the particular qualities of the different individual media are carefully taken into account in the planning stage. The first consideration is to decide which subject fits which medium best. It is not surprising that *music*, for instance, should play a prominent part in radio broadcasting and that such subjects as *biology* and *computer technology* should feature prominently on television.

Familiarity with the Media

The best way to learn a language is to speak it yourself. The best way to learn the techniques of writing is to take up the pen yourself. The producers of educational broadcasts realize full well that the more recipients know about how the media work, the more effective the communication between broadcasters and their listeners or viewers will be. Not surprisingly then, 'Schulfunk' producers feel that the best way to ensure that their productions achieve their educational goals, is to involve as much as possible the people for whose use they are intended in the production process itself. In practice this means involving teachers and pupils.

Involving Teachers

Here, if I may, I will refer to my own personal experience to show how careful the Head of the Production Team, Dr. Heide-Rose Verderber, is to seek the views of teachers and profit from their practice in the class-room when it comes to planning the broadcasts. This is the procedure followed. The idea of the programme itself, its contents and its structure are thoroughly

discussed. An article is then written for the W.D.R. 'Schulfunk' Publication (in my case, the booklet 'English for Seniors'), where advice is given to teachers about the most effective ways of employing the particular broadcast in class. I then go ahead and use the broadcast in my lessons to see how my own preformed theories work out in practice. Later on, after the programme has gone on the air and everybody interested has had the chance to use it in the class-room situation, a meeting of teachers is held in which one can compare notes and exchange ideas. The results of these consultations are taken into account if and when the time comes for putting the broadcast on the air once more.

Several of the series of broadcasts for 5th and 6th Formers of Grammar Schools (*Gymnasien*) which I helped to produce, such as short plays by Harold Pinter or Eugene O'Neill, BBC productions of short stories and American political speeches have been repeated on the air after an interval of three or four years. Each time, I was asked to take another look at my article in 'English for Seniors' to see if it could be improved on the score of the experience gained and gathered in the meantime. No automatic reprint of the article concerned therefore appears in the apposite issue of 'English for Seniors'. On the contrary, whenever this is considered advisable, a revised or an entirely new article is published before the programme is rebroadcast.

Media as a Subject

While on the subject of the 'Schulfunk' publication for teachers, it is well to note that a special edition for this year 1986/87 deals with precisely: "How to deal with the Media." It should be noted at this point that on the national level, the study of the media is not considered a separate subject in the curricula. This is the result of a decision made by the Federal Minister of Education in Bonn after much discussion and consultation throughout the Federal Republic. Media education rather than being considered as a subject on its own is expected to find an appropriate place in a number of different disciplines, e.g. sociology, languages, etc. Such an attitude should in no way be taken to mean that media education is not in fact taken seriously enough by German educators. At least as far as 'Schulfunk' is concerned, this is clearly not the case.

The fifty-six page 'Schulfunk' booklet entitled, "Vom Umgang Mit Medien" ("Dealing with Media"), has very wide ranging contents, as one can gather from the rough translation of the titles of the articles which follows:

1. From Records to Videoclips
2. How Radio began
3. Nazi Manipulation of Radio
4. Development of Broadcasting in Post-War Germany
5. The Future of Radio
6. The Most Successful Local Radio Station in Switzerland
7. Commercials on Television
8. The 'Sky Channel' Television Network
9. How about a 'Stock Exchange for News' in Bonn?

Students as Producers

The W.D.R. television branch of educational broadcasting has not neglected the media either. As it happens, in fact, they have a special section for 'Media Education'. The TV producers too, then, are active in promoting a keen understanding of the media and their functions in society and culture.

Television 'Schulfunk' has brought out a series called "Brave New World of the Media". The title is ironical, so that it is clear that no uncritical exultation of the media as such and of their products was attempted or intended. On the contrary, as the producers themselves pointed out to me, their purpose was 'to shock and to provoke' by overstressing the negative aspects and emphasising the cautions. They hoped that the viewers' reactions to the shock would be to realize deeply how necessary it is to discriminate carefully between trash and worthwhile productions. These are the ones which utilize skilfully the potentials of the media to promote genuine cultural values.

To balance off the critical appraisal of productions - especially commercial ones of the well-known American style and variety - 'Schulfunk' TV gives practical advice and help in encouraging schoolchildren to try their own hand at producing their own TV-programmes. A leaflet has been sent to all Grammar Schools promising support, technical advice and the lending of necessary equipment. As I myself am giving a course on 'Television' to Sixth Formers, I was informed that a studio, a camera and even editing and cutting equipment would be made available to my students. This generous attitude is fully in tune with the recent trend in media evaluation and research. Sociologists in the field now insist it is the production process itself that should be thoroughly investigated. Previously, research was concentrated simply on the effects of the media, which are so hard to assess accurately anyhow. Having experienced at first hand all that goes into the making of television programmes, the students will be better able to reap the greatest advantage from

what is offered them day by day on the screen of their TV-set.

Questions and Answers

Contact with pupils and students does not end with putting the programmes on the air for them. There are questionnaires to be filled and exercises to be sent in by pupils who wish to take full advantage of the educational broadcast. In the case of students following the 'Telekolleg' (corresponding roughly in method to the Open University) with the intention of gaining a certificate at the end, clear proof is required that they have been following the broadcasts assiduously and written answers to the set questions are expected from them. Before they are awarded the certificate or diploma they are naturally required to sit for the apposite examinations.

On the Radio Waves

In order that teachers may have ample time to plan their lessons, they are informed of the programmes to be broadcast as early as possible. On request, they are sent 'gratis' by post all the accompanying material. About 5,000 copies of the booklets for teachers already referred to are sent out by W.D.R. each half-year.

The radio programmes offered in the 1st semester 1986/87 cover the following areas:

Primary Schools:		Secondary and Grammar Schools	
<i>German:</i>	Handling the language	<i>German:</i>	Sharing responsibility
<i>Music:</i>	We sing		Narratory Stories from Latin America
	Music for Primary Schools		Literature
	Producing music		German for young Turks
<i>Learning for Life:</i>	Talking about peace	<i>English:</i>	English for Beginners
	Daily living		English for Juniors
	Rheinland and Westfalia		English for Seniors
			Your Friday Song
			English Anyway
		<i>French:</i>	Aimez-vous la chanson?
			Parlons francais
			Branchez-vous!
		<i>Geography:</i>	Rhineland and Westfalia
			Landscapes of the Earth
			Weather Reports
			Homeland and the World
		<i>History:</i>	The way things were
			History
			The Living Past
		<i>Media Education:</i>	Dealing with Media
		<i>Music:</i>	We Sing
			Producing Music
			Music
			Entertaining Music
			Music from different countries
			Great Composers
			Contemporary Music
			Pupils play Music
			Concert for Schools
		<i>Science:</i>	Nature and Technology
		<i>Philosophy:</i>	Thinking hard
		<i>Religion:</i>	Religion
		<i>Sociology/Politics:</i>	Learning about Peace
			Responsibility
			Political Training
			Economics
			The Working Man
			It happened this Week
		<i>Kaleidoscope:</i>	Varia
		<i>Languages:</i>	English
			German for young Turks
			French
		<i>Funkkolleg (Radio-college)</i>	Psychobiology
			The behaviour of human beings and animals.

'Schulfunk' programmes are actually integrated with the daily fare offered by the three W.D.R. Radio Channels. It works out in practice that fifty-five different Radio programmes are broadcast twice on Channel 1 and once on Channel 3. Each 'Schulfunk' programme goes three times on the air for the convenience of teachers and pupils alike. On Channel 1, the time from 9.05 to 10.00 is devoted to 'Schulfunk', and on Channel 3 the time from 11.05 to 16.00.

On the Television Screen

In all areas of the Federal Republic of Germany, there are three television channels, the First (ARD), the Second (ZDF), and the Third. The Third Channel is local and much time on it is devoted to education and culture. The WDR which runs the 3rd Channel in Northrhine Westfalia devotes all the time from 8.10a.m. to noon and from 5.00p.m. to 6.30p.m. to educational broadcasting on week-days, and on Saturdays, from 9.00a.m. to noon and from 4.30p.m. to 6.30p.m.

More Feedback Sought

Wide-ranging and varied as the educational broadcasts in Germany are, both on Radio and Television, they do not by any means exhaust all the potentials that the media can offer for use in the class-room. It goes without saying, for instance, that Radio or Television plays based on classical works are educational in their own right and are well-suited for class-room use by teachers with an imaginative approach. Videorecorders and tape-recorders give broadcasts a flexibility and an independence from

the time factor that make effective use all that much easier.

A thorough-going widely based research into all the ways the media can help teaching would be very welcome both to the teachers at school and to the producers in the studios, and ultimately to people everywhere who still wish to increase their cultural wealth.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the individual schools and the individual teachers enjoy much freedom of action, both as regards the syllabus and pedagogical methods. It is probably because they are afraid of possible interference by people whose criteria for judging successful teaching has not advanced beyond the 'chalk and talk' stage that they are little forthcoming with precise details about how exactly they employ the media in class. Be that as it may, the producers of 'Schulfunk' have put it to me that they would welcome more feedback from teachers and pupils alike. This would help them to make educational broadcasting still more effective.

Note 1: When I talk about West Germany, I have in mind in particular the State of Northrhine Westfalia, where I live, and its own broadcasting network, Westdeutscher Rundfunk (W.D.R.) In the Federal Republic, there is an overall Minister of Education, whose task it is to co-ordinate policies throughout the country. Each 'Land' otherwise runs its own educational establishments and each regional parliament has its own 'Kulturminister' answerable to his own local Prime Minister and Parliament. Therefore, whatever I say about the situation in Northrhine Westfalia and about the W.D.R. does not necessarily apply throughout the Federal Republic. I wish to thank the Head of W.D.R. Educational Radio, Dr. Heide-Rose Verderber and Dr. Lothar Humburg, the Head of Educational TV at W.D.R., both of whom I consulted before writing this article and who furnished invaluable advice and information.