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EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

The role of radio broadcasting in TAFE

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Technical and Further Education (TAFE) is the largest provider of education and training for adults, serving more than twice the number of students catered for by the Universities and CAEs combined (CTEC, 1986). Because of the breadth of its charter, TAFE's mission is to deliver almost every kind and level of education required after the age of compulsory school attendance. Courses range from basic education in social, literacy and numeracy skills, personal and leisure interest courses, to the vast array of preparatory and vocational courses at operative, technician and paraprofessional levels.

The diversity of TAFE is such that, within the tertiary sector, it has developed its own distinctive methodology and ethos, characterised by an innovative and flexible approach to serving the educational needs of its clients. The use of broadcast radio is one strategy which is proving increasingly effective in making TAFE more accessible to the community. It is being used to inform the public of the offerings of TAFE Colleges, to support major training initiatives, and to deliver education to people unable or unwilling to attend courses on campus. In a sense, radio is being re-discovered by TAFE educators, who are using it wisely, as one component of an overall educational package, to encourage and facilitate successful learning.

Radio as access to TAFE

'Access' is a concept which informs much of TAFE's educational philosophy. It not only represents the removal of barriers, but asserts the importance of giving people the wherewithal to embark on an educational activity or course of training. This includes making people feel comfortable with the very idea of further education, creating an environment in which they do not feel alienated, helping them to recognise and articulate their needs in their own terms, providing them with the basic information, the literacy, numeracy and study skills which will enable them to engage in the education process, and, importantly, supporting them once they have taken up a course.

As a mass medium, one of radio's strengths lies in attitude formation, and the use of radio to create a favourable disposition towards the idea of recurrent or lifelong education is to address a critical access factor. Over the past decade, many a TAFE College has made considerable use of local radio to publicise and promote its educational offerings, and this continues to represent a major slice of TAFE airtime. Such publicity and promotion is an attempt to enhance access to TAFE by breaking down barriers of ignorance about what courses of study are available at 'the local tech', and by overcoming fears associated with 'going back to school'.

Several Colleges have chosen to do much more than simply advertise their wares in a sixty-second time slot. By putting to air regular programs which both inform and entertain, these Colleges are establishing a strong identity within their community, creating a sense of familiarity about their presence which enhances their accessibility. One of the most successful of this general type of TAFE radio program is presented on 2NCR by Mike Evans of Lismore College. It goes to air on Saturday mornings as a country music program, peppered with news and views about what is happening in TAFE. Other Colleges, at Warrnambool, Wollongong, Padstow, the Riverland, Mount Gambier and the Gold Coast, also provide regular broadcast programs with a strong local community orientation.

In South Australia, TAFE has had a long association with the University of Adelaide's Radio 5UV (the first educational public radio station in Australia). For six years a regular Fine Music program has been bringing performances of the TAFE School of Music to a wider audience, and during each Festival of Arts, TAFE produces a series of comprehensive radio interviews with visiting poets, playwrights and novelists. Under the title *TAFE on Tap* a series of thirty interviews has recently been completed which explores the work of TAFE staff across a range of important activities. Such programs are aimed at a general audience, but subtly

demonstrate the diversity of TAFE's educational provision, and no doubt recruit potential students in the process.

These broadcasting initiatives all represent a particular application of radio to serve a specific educational purpose - that of overcoming initial barriers to access posed by lack of information about TAFE courses or by misunderstandings concerning the nature of the TAFE enterprise.

Radio as outreach

Outreach refines the concept of access by the deliberate focussing of attention on those in our community identified as educationally disadvantaged. The focus normally falls upon groups for whom the education system has failed, or for whom the usual services are unavailable, inadequate or inappropriate. Of all the areas in which TAFE is operating, that of outreach is possibly the one in which radio is having the biggest impact. Several recent initiatives testify to the value of the medium in providing sustained educational support for a community, or in helping to create a community of otherwise isolated individuals.

One example is the highly successful NSW project serving the needs of the Spanish-speaking community in Sydney. Outreach officers at Randwick TAFE College, working with public radio station 2 SER in Sydney, produced a range of programs, in Spanish, dealing with issues such as unemployment, retraining, English as a second language, women in the workforce, and getting overseas qualifications recognised in Australia. While the programs were designed to promote and support educational and training opportunities for the Spanish community, they also acted as a medium of friendship. Talkback was an important feature of the exercise, stimulating a high degree of interaction between the program makers and their audience, and between listeners themselves. It also facilitated the identification, within the Spanish community itself, of people and organisations who could contribute to a broader educational and support network.

The other major radio outreach application in the NSW TAFE sector operates from the Orana Community College at Bourke in the far west of the state. Project Officer Kim Parsons, broadcasting from the studios of 2 WEB in Bourke, provides both formal and informal educational programming to a very isolated audience over an area 300 kilometres in radius. Her approach is to identify areas of strong interest within a target group, and to direct program content accordingly, but in a style which remains accessible and enjoyable to the general listener. There is a strong emphasis on course delivery, with radio operating as an important, but

not exclusive, means to achieving specific educational ends. Its role extends to that of motivator, progress monitor and, via talkback, ideas exchange. The success of the venture is proof that properly-produced and well-presented radio programs, designed to perform an educational function appropriate to the medium, remain a valid strategy for the distance educator. It is also proof of the ability of radio to establish a sense of community amongst isolated individuals, and to effect the interactivity needed to sustain a shared educational enterprise.

The application of broadcast radio to outreach in TAFE is receiving attention in the ACT to service the needs of identifiably disadvantaged groups in the Canberra community. Increased child care costs, and a growing number of people minding elderly parents at home, have meant that many women are increasingly house-bound. For retired pensioners, the second week after each benefits payment, and the long summer holiday in January, are periods of significant isolation and inactivity. The outreach arm of Woden College is planning to utilise radio as part of an overall educational strategy to reach these groups. Proposals include a focus on women's issues through public radio 2XX, the sharing of poetry, short stories and talk amongst the elderly on Radio for the Print Handicapped, and the establishment of radio-based local study groups dealing with topics and issues from ABC Adult Education programs and Radio Summer Schools. Here, radio is being perceived as a more or less open-ended resource, a means of facilitating an educational encounter between the target group and TAFE, and encouraging links between members of the target group themselves.

Radio and formal TAFE courses

The conventional wisdom that courses on radio 'don't work' derives from attempts to teach at a distance simply by broadcasting lectures. That these attempts have failed miserably is not wholly a function of the broadcast medium per se, but of educators' ignorance of radio's particular attributes, of the way people actually listen to radio, and of basic methodological and instructional design principles.

In terms of delivering 'pure subject content', radio broadcasting is quite unsatisfactory - the spoken word is fleeting, broadcast schedules fix the listening experience in time, and course audience sizes normally warrant narrow- rather than broadcasting. If it is to 'work' at all in a formal course setting, radio must be properly integrated into the whole learning strategy. Students will only listen to radio, at what is often an inconvenient time, if they have good reason to do so. This means they must be motivated to tune in, must understand the purpose of the radio broadcast, be able to

relate it to their present stage of progress in the course, be encouraged to respond to the program content. and they must receive feedback on that response. Satisfying all these criteria requires a considerable design and planning effort, to say nothing of the relatively high production standards that must be achieved to satisfy today's radio listener.

An example of a moderately successful venture of this type was a series of programs produced for students of the TAFE Real Estate Certificate in South Australia. The programs were devised by the course lecturer, and took the form of interviews, conducted by a professional presenter, in which practising real estate professionals were quizzed about relevant, commercial, legal and conveyancing practices. The series was paced to accommodate the topic by topic progress of the course. Student response was by way of written assignments, and feedback was provided by the course lecturer in the normal way. Although the series was hardly a novel application of educational radio, it was properly integrated into the rest of the teaching program, and received favourably by the students.

Recent educational trials (Gelonesi, 1986) involving on-air talkback and teleconferencing techniques have strongly supported the use of radio as a medium for live tutorial activity, thereby accommodating the critical factor of interactivity. The Orana College has incorporated this methodology into the radio components of its formal courses, where it has proven an effective and economic means of engaging students and teacher in discussions on the topic at hand. It also provides for input from any listener sufficiently motivated to pick up the telephone! South Australian TAFE and Radio 5UV are also planning to develop a pilot scheme for off-campus students living in metropolitan Adelaide.

The viability of radio as an educational medium is being increasingly asserted in high priority areas of TAFE activity. The School of Administration and Business at Sydney Technical College has prepared a radio-based course on surviving in small business, while in Queensland, the Gold Coast TAFE has applied for an FM licence to develop a youth oriented education support service.

Perhaps the most successful recent initiative in the youth area is the so-called *Work Out* project (Green and Berryman, nd), a joint venture of the Victorian TAFE Off-Campus Network and Radio 3RRR-FM. *Work Out* is a series of radio programs designed to support the Certificate in Vocational Studies - the off the job training course for participants in the Youth Guarantee and Australian Traineeship System. What began as a weekly half-hour information-dense program has evolved into two one-hour magazine style programs broadcast on 3 RRR-FM, with a composite one

and a half hour version distributed for broadcast on country public radio stations and for in-house TAFE use. Each program has regular identifiable segments on specific, course related areas, and uses pre-recorded and live interviews, and culturally relevant music and information. Again, the live-to-air teleconference has proven a successful interactive strategy.

Joint venturing between a TAFE authority and a broadcasting agency is likely to increase as the efficiencies of such cooperation are more fully realised. In Tasmania there are well-established links between the TAFE sector and the education unit of the ABC, which has resulted in TAFE contributing to the *Take Time* series, produced by the ABC in Hobart with the interests of older people in mind. As well, plans are presently underway for the joint development of a 20-program political education series, possibly involving talkback - although there are some problems associated with attempting this nationally because of time zone variations. Under the title *Practical Politics*, the course will seek to provide the "information and skills which enable people to understand political processes and to participate in the determination and administration of public policy" (Holderness-Roddam, 1986). In South Australia initial discussions have been held between TAFE and ABC Adult Education Radio concerning the potential for similar cooperation, possibly in the area of business studies.

The future of TAFE radio

As service providers to a largely similar clientele, TAFE and the broadcasting sector are recognising the advantages, and realising some of the possibilities, of combining resources to achieve mutually desirable ends. In the past, the TAFE-broadcast radio interface has largely been created by individual TAFE staff who have had a personal interest in public radio, and applied that interest to their professional educational activities. This has resulted in the somewhat ad-hoc provision of TAFE oriented educational programming on existing stations, or efforts to establish broadcasting facilities on campus (such as the present SKY FM development at Kingston College of TAFE in South Australia). Recently, such educational radio initiatives have become more focussed, in the sense that TAFE is formally recognising the educational validity of specific broadcasting applications, particularly in the context of outreach and course-related activity. It is likely that the success of the various projects outlined above will prompt at least a partial reallocation of resources to enable their continuation and, possibly, expansion into other areas. But while success is clearly a significant motivator for growth, it is important that such growth be directed towards the most appropriate goals, and in a manner which most effectively exploits the educational potential of the radio medium.

Several examples have already been cited of innovative approaches to realising the effectiveness of educational radio. The story of others such as the use of FM subcarriers to reach highly specific target audiences, is still to be told. But it remains to consider the future educational context in which further successful applications of radio might be implemented.

The present strong emphasis in TAFE on vocational training is likely to remain for some time, and programs such as *Work Out* will have an increasing role to play in orientating people towards the world of work and training. But it is equally clear that there is an increasing need for continuing general education, in terms of helping us to become more critically aware, participatory human beings, capable of dealing with the information age and its political and social ramifications by being able to discriminate the important from the trivial, the relevant from the superfluous.

To speak of 'vocational training' and 'general education' is not to separate them, but simply to assert different emphases within the continuum which is TAFE. The issues of the information age not only confront us as individual members of a community but bring to us new tasks and responsibilities in our roles as clerk, mechanic, trade union secretary or employer. We cannot divorce vocational skills from the social, ethical and political considerations which influence the way we work and live.

Broadly speaking, we are dealing here with issues of value judgment and attitude formation, and the mass media have proven profoundly effective in this context. The role of radio in TAFE must accommodate such a reality.

Perhaps it is misleading to talk about 'the' role of broadcasting in TAFE for radio, like any other educational technology should be given a role appropriate to the educational need being addressed and to the environment in which the solution is to be effected. Thus the way TAFE uses radio to help teach farmers about microcomputers will be very different from the way in which it uses radio to support training initiatives for young people or to encourage the creative use of leisure time by the elderly.

But it appears likely that, with our increasingly 'wired' society, non-broadcast technologies will come to the fore in the delivery of formal education and training to particular client groups. Radio is already, and likely to become more so, the medium which talks to an audience 'on the move' or 'off the job' - an audience which is driving a car, pottering about the house, lying on the beach. TAFE must therefore use radio in a way which 'works' for this kind of audience.

The 'work' is to effect some kind of change, and the success of TAFE radio should be judged accordingly. It may be that one of the changes to be effected is that of helping people to become better listeners, to empower them to use radio as one of the "instruments of education that create permanent communication between the needs and lessons of professional life, of cultural expression, of general development and of the various situations for and through which every individual completes and fulfils himself" (Lengrand, 1975). This may constitute a tall order, but it is one which TAFE radio should recognise as a valid imperative.

While TAFE has worked in association with commercial, ABC and public radio, it is unlikely that the first of these will be a major partner in future TAFE radio enterprise. Recent developments within the education arm of the ABC suggest that significant opportunities may be forthcoming for TAFE to be involved with both national and local ABC program initiatives. But public radio is probably the sector most suited to the kind of educational service which TAFE seeks to provide.

There are already 62 public radio stations in Australia, with around 150 expressions of interest for new stations before the Department of Communications (Green, 1985) and most enjoy substantial community support and wide listenership. The essential characteristics of public radio - local reference, accessibility to community, servicing of particular needs and interests - are congruent with that of TAFE, particularly as it is expressed through its network of Colleges across the country.

TAFE radio, then, has the potential to serve a vast range of client groups in ways appropriate to their educational needs. Programming can be highly focussed or more general in scope, act as a stand-alone educational/promotional effort, or ideally as a component of a learning package. We must exploit the opportunities for interactivity afforded by talkback and teleconference, and look to build courses around broadcast series produced outside TAFE, to adopt bilingual and multicultural approaches to TAFE service provision, to provide in-service support to TAFE teachers - in short, to create an environment in which people can become both the object and instrument of their own educational development.

There is a strong sense in which radio is a 'hearts and minds' medium, impinging upon the emotions, the intellect and the imagination, and TAFE has an important role to play in contributing to the set of attitudes, skills, ideas and information from which people draw to give direction and purpose to their lives.

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