

Aspects of School Television in Europe, Manfred Meyer (Ed). Munich, Germany: KG. Saur, 1992, ISBN 3-598-20209-1 (591 pages).

Reviewed by Richard F. Lewis, Ph. D.

Aspects of School Television in Europe contains 66 articles, written by producers, teachers and researchers. The editor explains that allowing authors to speak in their own voices would permit their messages to be communicated more faithfully. As a result, magazine-style articles blend with scholarly works. Short articles highlight specific viewpoints while longer pieces review literature, history and research projects. In the book, the term school television refers to programs which supplement or replace instruction directly in schools as opposed to educational broadcasting, which includes programs broadcast directly to homes. While in-school broadcasts appear to have declined in Canada since early efforts in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, Europeans continue to use them actively.

The editor's lead article is an excellent introduction to school television in Europe, detailing how television authorities are organized, how they are governed, how liaison with schools occurs and how research is integrated into the process. Other chapters deal with specific aspects of school broadcasts. Rather than proceed in section-by-section review, I will describe the major themes and issues in the book.

Television has been used to teach many subjects in Europe. Programs deal with science, mathematics, media literacy, language learning, health and special education. Case studies which pepper the volume cite the importance of television as a motivating force, especially in science, mathematics and language learning. In mathematics, one author mentions three goals: mathematics is fun, it is useful, and it helps you understand your world. Teachers, education authorities and government education departments set content and approaches. Most programs appear to have been effective in achieving their goals. The impact of Sesame Street is felt throughout the volume. Authors credit the research and production model and results of that program with enhancing school television all over the world.

Many authors cite the need for support services for school television. In-service and pre-services workshops, teachers guides, and education officers (like curriculum specialists in Canada) ensure that programs can achieve their goals effectively. Many authors comment on the need to publicize the availability of the television materials.

Research, both formative and summative, figures heavily in many articles. The needs of students and teachers, the effectiveness of the programs and utilization information all receive attention. Research ensures that money is being well-spent and that intended outcomes can be measured.

International co-production is a fact of life in the mainstream media. Authors in this text suggest some specific guidelines for international co-productions which would seem to apply to co-production of any type. Authors highlight the need for clear objectives and standards, research, pilot programs and the use of a few co-operators instead of many in program production.

Authors highlight the importance for quality control in school television. Never mentioned but underlying the articles is the sense that we could very easily lose school television — it is still not a need but more like a want. As a result, they emphasize the importance of relevance, close contact with their audiences, accuracy and appropriateness. They suggest that multi-media products enhance televised material. Companion computer software, learning kits, printed material and teachers manuals containing activities all help television programs become part of an active learning model.

The book contains a wealth of information which will be useful for provincial media producers as well as educational broadcasters. Anyone contemplating the production of any types of mediated instruction would be wise to consult it. It will also be useful as a reference for students in communication studies and educational technology programs. With the increased interest in distance education, producers and educators working within that framework would also be wise to consult the work.

Television continues to be one of the most powerful worldwide communication channels. By continuing to harness its power to present valuable information, we can counteract the effect of less-than-desirable programming. In North America, we would be wise to heed the messages contained in the book, not necessarily to re-introduce school television but to continue to use it to achieve critical educational objectives.

REVIEWER

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