

*Mass Communication in Canada*, by R. Lorimer and J. McNulty, McLelland & Stewart, 1987.

Reviewed by Denis Hlynka

*A context for educational technologists.* Whether a textbook on the mass media is relevant to educational technologists depends initially on how one defines both mass media and educational media. While such a question is *not* a concern of the text under review here, it is nevertheless an important prior question for educational technologists. Indeed, from Chapter Two of *Mass Communication in Canada*, we are presented with a useful definition of mass media, which the authors derive from British theorist Denis McQuail. According to this definition, the mass media are "1) a distinct set of activities. . .2) involving particular technological configurations. . .3) associated with formally constituted institutions.. .4) acting according to certain laws, rules and understandings.. .5) carried out by persons occupying certain roles.. .6) which together convey information, entertainment, images, and symbols.. .7) to the mass audience."

While the above is not exactly a definition to carry around for light conversation, it will do to begin this analysis. For educators, the last two components of the above definition appear to be especially problematic. If the definition requires that the medium — mass or educational — carry *both* information and entertainment, then educational media falls short. It does not normally carry an entertainment function, although one might argue that education can be "entertaining" rather than "boring." However, for our purposes, let us assume that it is sufficient that educational media carry *either* information or entertainment, but not necessarily both.

The next and more significant definitional stumbling block is "... to a mass audience . . ." Is the educational audience a "mass audience?" Again, it depends. Lorimer and McNulty suggest (p. 62) that a mass audience implies large numbers. The authors identify further defining characteristics: the mass audience must be widely dispersed, lacking self-identity, and heterogeneous in terms of being drawn from all strata and demographic groups. Are educational media mass media? No, if one assumes that they are used in small coherent groups for specific teaching purposes to a homogeneous relatively small audience. Yes, if one assumes that educational media are available to all strata, all individuals, and if over time the members are unknown to each other and widely dispersed.

To summarize, educational media may or may not fit under the rubric of mass media, depending upon one's defining characteristics of these two concepts. Nevertheless, the text by Lorimer and McNulty is a valuable reference for educational technologists for two reasons. First, it sets out a solid analysis of a field which, at the very least parallels and impinges upon the field in which educational technologists work. And second, it provides a Canadian context to media.

*The text.* The book is written in typical textbook style. Each chapter

contains an introduction, a content presentation, lavish use of headings and subheadings, cueing devices such as bold facing for key terms and concepts, a summary, references, and study questions. There is an index, but no glossary. A glossary would have been useful, and is a disappointing omission. Likewise, the study questions are of minimal value, since the authors have provided no answers. While admittedly some of the questions are value oriented, nevertheless, the authors might do well to examine the format of the Open University course books which provide responses or at least guidelines to appropriate responses. Research on text construction shows quite explicitly that unanswered questions are of minimal value, other than as orienting devices.

Finally, the text has a good scattering of tables and visuals, marred again by the fact that these are not referenced in any way.

*The content.* Chapter 1 introduces the topic and suggests the range of communication in terms of social, political, economic, educational, cultural, technological, familial, and individual dimensions. The traditional historical division of oral, modern oral, literate, and electronic societies is explored, and specific Canadian issues are identified.

Chapter 2 defines mass communication and examines the author's definition in some detail.

Chapter 3 deals with the mass media and government; Chapter 4 with the design of information; Chapter 5 with the audience of the mass media. The fourth chapter deserves to be singled out as a useful, albeit brief, introduction to semiotics as a potential major tool to study mass communication. Semiotics methodologies are contrasted with content analysis. The fifth chapter, dealing with the audience, continues with a semiotics-like analysis, combined with Marxist analysis techniques.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with media ownership and the functions of media personnel. Chapter 8 provides a useful survey of Canadian communications policy.

Chapter 9 shifts directions in order to focus on international perspectives and the global geopolitics of information, while its twin chapter, Chapter 10, focuses on domestic aspects of the same issues. A difficulty in writing texts is brought to bear here, in relation to the title concept "geopolitics," within an international and domestic context. Readers might pause for a moment to try to define "geopolitics" in some satisfactory way for themselves. Unfortunately, the reader *must* define this title concept for themselves, since "geopolitics" does not appear in the index, there is no glossary (as has already been noted), and the term is not defined within either of the geopolitical chapters in any explicit way! Incidentally, for those who wish to compare their answers with a correct answer, Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines geopolitics as "a study of the influence of factors such as geography, economics, and demography" on the politics and especially the foreign policies of a state." Very nice, but the point is, that such terms need to be handled carefully by textbook authors, and not glossed over quickly.

Chapter 11 covers "New communications technologies in a Canadian context," while the final chapter is titled "Canada in an information age."

*Concluding thoughts.* The book is a valuable reference for Canadian educational technologists. It is *not* our field, but is one which is close enough to our interests and activities. As has been indicated above, the text could do with a glossary, answers to the "study questions" and a listing of figures and diagrams within the table of contents. In addition, the historical aspect is played down and might have been a useful inclusion in a comprehensive coverage to Canadian mass communication.

The authors conclude with a comment that "information and its manipulation are changing our world, and far from being a victim of such a change, Canada is one of the few nations of the world in a position to guide and design these changes" That opportunity belongs to Canadian educational technologists as well.

#### REVIEWER

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