

problem in that it does not communicate to the layman. It does not adequately tell others what we are all about.

Solution?

There is indeed a solution to the problem. That solution, however, lies NOT in arbitrarily selecting one of the definitions and stipulating that this shall henceforth be THE definition. Nor is attempting a composite definition which covers every possible contingency especially helpful.

Rather the solution must be centered in an honest attempt by all of us to communicate our own definitional foci and constraints at all times to all our audiences. It is our responsibility to stipulate clearly the definition under which we are currently operating.

Further, and simultaneous to the above, we must continually monitor the field outside of our own personal domain to keep abreast of current directions and trends.

For a final word we turn to J. Gass, the director of the Center for Educational Research and Innovation, from a report published in 1971 by the OECD under the title *Educational technology: The design and implementation of learning systems*. His comment at once shows the complimentary and integrative possibility between the physical science and behavioral science views, and at the same time, projects the possibilities for the future:

The simple lesson . . . is that there is no technological miracle in education. Neither the television camera, nor the computer, nor programmed learning can provide "instant" education. . . Educational technology is not a bag of mechanical tricks, but the organized design and implementation of learning systems taking advantage of, but not expecting miracles from modern communications methods, visual aids, classroom organization and teaching methods.

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Memorial University's ETV Centre Goes Public

Duane B. Starcher

Welcome to PLAYBACK. From now until 10:30 this evening we will show the television programs that you request. Phone 737-7999 and ask to see any of the 1,000 titles now in our library. Your selection will be shown when you want to see it. If you don't yet have your copy of our PLAYBACK catalogue, give your name and address to be included on our mailing list. It will be sent to you without charge.

Our telephone number again — 737-7999. This is your opportunity to program our channel.

The PLAYBACK service began in November, 1978 with a collection of about 100 titles and perhaps 15 per cent of the cable-franchised area actually connected.

On March 27, 1979, we gave a small prize for the first 1,000 PLAYBACKS shown.

On March 31, 1980, we passed the 5,000 mark. (By the way, these figures are for actual PLAYBACKS and don't include the many requests turned away for being fully booked.)

On April 2, 1981 a young boy home sick from school called us and became the receiver of our 10,000th PLAYBACK, only two years and four months from the beginning of the service.

Service Ends

On May 7, 1981, because Memorial University received a budget allotment from the Newfoundland Provincial Government between \$8-9 million less than it requested, PLAYBACK was suspended. The service had been a huge success, fully booked every day. It had grown from an initial collection of 100 titles into a resource of 1,000 titles and was the mainstay of Memorial University Television, ETV's public channel. It gave the public a reactive form of television, and the university a screen presence of over fifty hours a week, plus prime-time scheduled programming each evening. PLAYBACK was our trademark. Unfortunately, it was also the only portion of the budget, short of releasing staff members, where any real savings could be made.

An exciting experiment in resource-model television, reactive to public demand and a successful application of cable television to education has been abandoned for want of

funds to run it. This paper will examine the operating model plus describe a plan to extend Memorial University Television island-wide by microwave. Lastly it will speculate on the future in serving the province by satellite distribution, two directions we were working on and had indeed prototyped before the financial ax fell.

" . . . we had no illusions that we could recapitulate the history of public television as it had developed out of the universities in the United States."

ETV, the Centre and Newfoundland

When we began to encourage the University to activate a public channel via cable, the ETV Centre already had a successful decade behind it, producing credit courses for videotape distribution throughout the province and providing many media services in television, engineering and photography to the entire university. Suffice it to say that we have been extremely busy in distance education, on-campus production, experimentation in telemedicine, teleconferencing, satellites and other hardware projects. We have solid technical and human core in place on which to build.

As has come even clearer lately, Newfoundland is not a wealthy society and while it has adequately supported its growing university for most of the last fifteen years, Memorial has always operated most of its programs at the borderline of standards accepted as minimal by institutions of similar size in the rest of North America. So, we had no illusions that we could recapitulate the history of public television as it had developed out of the universities in the United States. The American educational broadcasting was built in the mid-1950's upon the television production centres of the wealthier universities, centres that sprang from departments of speech, drama, journalism and the fine arts. By contrast, Memorial, even today, has no departments of speech, drama, journalism or fine arts. Unlike the post-war boom years of the 1950's, our own

CLOSE HARMONY

A 30 min. colour film which will win the hearts of everyone who watches it.

The students captured in the opening frames of CLOSE HARMONY sing a song of life, and their refrain rings out clearly, "God would like us to be joyful!" These fourth and fifth graders 1979-1980 class of Friends School in Brooklyn, New York, have ample reason to be happy. They are members of an "intergenerational" chorus comprised of "youngsters" from nine to ninety, and their story is truly an inspiring one. Arlene Symons, originator and director of the group, first conceived the idea for such a chorus from her separate experiences as a teacher and as a group worker in senior citizens' centers. She brought the two disparate groups together in concert and parent Nigel Noble recorded the entire process on film.

A CINE Golden Eagle Winner.

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enrollment peaks passed through the university about five years ago, so such an undertaking as MUN-TV has to be justified on cultural grounds rather than in response to clear-cut, concrete instructional problems apparent to the general public, as were the educational pressures in the 1960's.

Specific Restrictions

What did we know before we started? We realized that we could never afford even to consider an open broadcast mode of signal delivery. And, we also knew that we could never provide a television signal to a signal home in the city if the university had to bear the capital costs of the delivery system. We would have been forever restricted to distributing credit courses via videotape to borrowed rooms in schools and community centres; we would thus be bound to produce programs primarily in aid of the prescribed, formal purposes of institutions. They would be teacher-loaded, not student-centered or "in the public interest," let alone a cultural force in our province.

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A Cable Channel

Even in our most optimistic deliberations, we realized the obstinacy of the obvious obstacles in our path. So, we considered the problem and re-defined those limitations as virtues. Our vehicle into the home was through Avalon Cablevision Limited, the first cable enterprise in St. John's, selling two United States signals imported by microwave from Maine via Nova Scotia. We requested a channel for the university, independent of the company's legal obligation to provide a government educational channel; our channel was cheerfully granted as a condition of their license.

Cable and Telephone Playback

We felt it highly unlikely that anyone able to pay \$25.00 for a cable hook-up and \$9.51 per month would not have at least one telephone in the house. With these two elements, cable from the university reaching into the homes and viewers' telephones reaching out, we introduced PLAYBACK, a service through which anyone could call us and ask for the replay of any program in our collection. We began with less than a hundred titles from which to choose, but have built that now to over 1,000. Between November, 1978 and April, 1981, we responded to 10,000 individual requests from viewers and turned away uncounted thousands more. PLAYBACK was fully booked nearly every working day, every evening and all day Saturday.

Building the Collection

So, instead of taking the traditional approach to public broadcasting, we concentrated on building a collection from many resources of free films, low-cost film and television programs, spiced with a few "biggies," expensive leaders to attract notice among the "competition," the commercial channels. No matter what titles eventually ended up in our collection, we committed ourselves to a reactive service and retained only 12 hours in prime time out of each 60-hour week which we programmed, in the traditional mold of the broadcaster, to keep our own interest and professionalism high. And, we concentrated our own production effort to create local programming intended to supply a basic core of intelligent productions both about the university and about topics on which expertise at Memorial could shed some light.

Looking Back

In retrospect, these strategies were not merely successful, they proved to be our salvation. We had assessed our weaknesses and transformed them into virtues. We became useful to our viewers in that we were seen to be providing a service; we were responsible in that we could react to viewers' needs; we were creating a resource, a collection more permanent and accessible than any other form of television in our viewers' experience. And, we were avoiding near certain failure

by not attempting to mimic traditional operations for which we were not equipped, staffed or experienced. While we were not always undertaking production tasks that we individually might have liked, still we maintained an operation of which we could be proud and which was seen to be of professional standard, tailored to the realities of our environment.

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Reaching Out

Only new money could take us beyond St. John's out where our presence was even more important than in the city. Obviously, we were always concentrating on the "television" prefix in television; we wanted to extend our service province-wide. We had spent the last two years trying to find the physical and financial means to deliver our signal upstream, that is, from east to west. This was done on a demonstration basis, delivering a week's programming and live coverage of a major oil conference province-wide, but the money to support a fulltime network has obviously not yet come through. Our intention was someday to serve, by microwave, the towns of Gander, Grand Fall, Deer Lake, Stephenville, Corner Brook and Port Aux Basques, all of which have commercial cable systems in place. These particular towns are served by cable companies and all are on the Terra Nova Tel microwave route, but the tariff charges inhibit our establishment on the network. The distribution technology is available, waiting for us to activate it. Some other towns on the island also have cable services, but are off the main microwave spine. These, and all sites in Labrador would have to be served later, probably by satellite.

Problems and Solutions

As I began by reporting the demise of the PLAYBACK service for want of funds, I'd like now to talk about some of the problems of operating such a service and discuss some of the solutions we were coming to terms with before PLAYBACK had to be suspended.

PLAYBACK Met Needs

PLAYBACK had the tremendous advantage of allowing MUN-TV to display many hours of programs from a rather small collection of titles. To have scheduled 10,000 programs in two and a half years in the traditional manner would have bankrupted us even sooner. Through PLAYBACK, we were seen to be in operation by those who flipped channels in search of programs; we were offering a service to individuals; and we were becoming known to viewers who would also consider watching our scheduled, prime-time programs at night.

"We faced exactly the opposite problem of a commercial entrepreneur — we didn't dare be too popular..."

Popular Titles

What was beginning to distress us was the very popularity of some of our titles. There are only so many times that one wants to telecast programs such as "Cars that Crash and Burn," (108 times) "Small Cars and Crashes" (83 times) and "Crashes that Need Not Kill" (56 times). They were well-done programs, but the kids requested them mostly for the slow-motion sequences of death and destruction. Even some of our own productions became a bit embarrassing, some that I produced myself. They were done with our Folklore Department and were about "Newfoundland Country Music Pioneers." The program on Jimmy Linegar was played 173

times and the one on Wilf Doyle 94 times — and this was before Conception Harbour, Wilf Doyle's home town, was connected to cable! It began to seem as if everytime we looked at our channel it either had a car crash or a hillbilly on it — not really your standard image of a university television service.

Limiting Programs

We early took the steps of limiting any program to two plays a week. This helped for a while. Then we bought "All You Need is Love" from TVOntario, thirteen hours of pop music, so theoretically we could have had 26 hours of such music each week. We limited these titles to once each week. And, some other titles caused a bit of trouble. Several programs from Wayne State discussed the evolution of the horror film. This was not particularly disturbing until a parent pointed out that one scene from an old film showed children killing their parents — and then eating them. This, and a few other titles of a sensitive nature were restricted to playing after 9:00 p.m., that is, well after supper.

"...we concentrated our own production effort to create local programming..."

Free Films

As we had collected many titles from sources of free films, we also on occasion had to ignore the imbedded commercial messages about the companies that sponsored the films. On the other hand, most free programs did contain much good information and excellent visual material. Beggars could not always be choosers, nor did we want to become censoring gatekeepers any more than was inevitable by the nature of the task.

Changes

So, what changes would we have made if PLAYBACK had not been suspended? I can't say for sure, but a number of ideas were being considered. First, we considered opening a second channel in the mid-band

(soon to be activated by Avalon Cablevision) and relegating the most popular shows to the new channel. This would have cleared MUN-TV itself for a better controlled, better balanced form of access television. We also considered cutting the catalogue of some of the titles that had been played to death, but as new subscribers were constantly being added, we hated to remove the most popular titles only for the reason that they were popular. We faced exactly the opposite problem of a commercial entrepreneur — we didn't dare be too popular, especially when displaying material that was not representative of the image the university wished to portray before the public.

Another option, and one with much merit, as it would have also saved us a great deal of money in catalogues and postage, was changing the requestable titles each week — restricting PLAYBACK to fifteen or twenty titles, but not limiting the number of plays of any of those titles. Notices could have been run on our information display system, as well as printed in the newspapers and TV guides sold in the city. In other words, we could have incorporated the information about PLAYBACK into normal procedures for listing scheduled programs.

As we have no idea when or if PLAYBACK can be restored, we don't have to face these decisions yet. Perhaps you will have other ideas to suggest that will be of use when the time comes to reintroduce the service.

Summary

This, then, is what we have been doing before our public for the last two and a half years. The public channel has been a spur to us all in the range and quality of our productions and has helped us bring into Newfoundland some of your own best productions. We combined scheduled and access modes and laid the groundwork for our inevitable extension to the other cities with cable services. We were well on our way.

We are still on our way, but the destination is now less clear. Our 1981-82 season will be exciting, but not reactive. We will schedule our own programs and promote them in the traditional manner and hope for better times next year.