

# Educational Cable TV in Alberta

Catherine E. Gordey

In Alberta, over 150 hours of educational programming are broadcast over educational cable channels each week. However, each educational cable system is not on the same programming schedule. Each system is an independent organization, a consortium, playing programs of direct interest to its local public.

Programs can range from "People in Power" produced by Canadian Cable Systems, to the Esso Resources series, "The Newcomers," in both English and French; or from a college's photography series to "Car Owners' Maintenance Guide" produced by ACCESS, Alberta's provincial agency producing educational programs. Programs are chosen or produced by an educational cable consortium to answer the needs of the local community. The background of educational cable consortia began with the formation of the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) fourteen years ago.

### Nationally

In 1967, the Broadcasting Act established the CRTC and recommended that "facilities should be provided within the Canadian broadcasting system for educational broadcasting." In 1970, this recommendation was strengthened to state that every cable company would designate one channel for educational broadcasting to be under the jurisdiction of a provincial government authority. At this time, the definition of "educational programming" was established.

*Educational programming is programming designed*

*to provide learning opportunities for the acquisition or improvement of knowledge, or for enrichment, and subject to supervision by the provincial authority;*

*and programming providing information on courses of instruction*

*or broadcasting of special events.*

Two years later, another federal direction, P.C.1972-15 clarified that this one education channel should be licensed through a provincial authority or licensed to an independent corporation. This allowance for an independent corporation was for the benefit of Ontario Education Communication Authority (OECA) which already had established an independent corporation producing and broadcasting educational programming.

### Provincially

In Alberta on August 1, 1970, in response

to the CRTC ruling for an educational channel in each cable company, a ministerial order established the Alberta Educational Communications Authority (AECA) to be responsible for overseeing transmission, production and policies in regards to educational communications. The authority consists of the minister of education, the minister of advanced education and manpower, and the associate minister of telephones, with an executive committee made up of the deputy ministers of these three departments and an executive director. The role of the authority is to administer the Alberta Educational Communications Corporation Act; identify educational needs; establish priorities to be met by ACCESS through the acquisitions and production of both educational programs and other materials; designate all educational television channels in the province; and offer consultative service on technical and other problems related to the use of communications technology.

It is the belief of the AECA that "decisions with respect to the use of cable for educational purposes should be made by such local authorities within the geographical area covered by the cable system or systems licensed to serve that area". (Morton, 1977) Therefore, the authority designates all educational channels in the province and expects that each consortium will establish the organizational and administrative framework which best suits its own need. Besides designating cable consortia as the education programmers to use the channel, the AECA role in regard to cable programming is to:

1. supervise and assess by any appropriate means the programs and materials transmitted by the consortia;
2. monitor and set guidelines for ACCESS, the major distributor of educational programming in the province.

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### What is a Consortium?

The authority may recognize in each cable

geographic area a consortium of educational institutions and agencies organized for the purpose of using cable for educational purposes with the cooperation of the cable system owner or operator. All educational institution within a cable licenced area governed under the jurisdiction of the minister of education or the minister of advanced education and manpower are entitled to become participants (i.e., full members) in a consortium. Agencies such as Alberta Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) or community associations interested in furthering their educational programs may become non-voting members.

### Educational Institution Initiates

Interest to form an educational cable consortium usually originates in a local educational institution which then contacts all other educational institutions operating in the area to solicit membership. The membership would prepare a memorandum of agreement outlining membership, governance, revenues, programming, operation and the term of the agreement. Once prepared, this memorandum is submitted to the AECA for its information.

Membership structures and fees are unique to each consortium. In general, only those institutions governed under the ministers of education can be voting, or full members of the cable consortium, so that control is always within the hands of the education institutions. School districts, community and regional colleges, institutes of technology, and universities usually form the base of the

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consortium. Areas not served by a local university are still within the jurisdiction of Athabasca University and may also be served by Educational Consortia whose aim it is to deliver higher education opportunities to these areas. Further education councils are also likely members for the cable consortia.

Other institutions, organizations and groups may be granted associate memberships by the board. Within the current operating consortia, associate memberships are held by such agencies as the Red Cross, teachers', and trustees' associations, and government agencies like Alberta Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC).

Fees are determined by revenues required by the channel and on the amount of use made by each member as well as its ability to contribute.

Donations are welcome from any source, and several consortia have become or are in the process of becoming incorporated as a society under the Societies Act so that donations can be tax deductible. No funding to date has been given to the consortia by the provincial government, although a request has been made and is being considered.

### Board of Directors

Representatives from each educational institution committed financially to educational cablecasting form a board of directors for the consortium. The board has the authority to appoint an agent board to manage the logistics of the cable operation.

Table 1  
Alberta Consortia

	MEMBERSHIP	STAFF	HEAD END/STUDIO	PROGRAMMING (March 1981)
cetc Calgary	1 School Board 1 College 1 Institute 2 Universities	1 Co-ordinator 2 Part-time Operators	SAIT/access to SAIT studio	57 hr/wk
eecc Edmonton	2 School Boards 1 College 2 Universities 4 Others	1/4 Manager 2 Operators	Warehouse/access to School Board studio in the same building	72 hr/wk
fmcec Fort McMurray	3 School Boards 1 College 1 University 1 Other	IN TRANSITION STAGE		
gpcec Grande Prairie	1 School Board 1 College 1 University	1 Co-ordinator/Operator 1 Part-time Operator	Junior High School/ new studio in school	24 hr/wk
spec St. Paul	4 School Boards	1 Co-ordinator 2 Programmers 1 Student Operator 1 Part-time Secretary	Regional High School/ own studio in school	6 hr/wk
ycet Edson	1 School Board	1 Part-time School Technician	High School/new studio in school	occasional

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**Agent Board**

The agent board is accountable for any operations of the consortium that the board of directors deems necessary, for example:

1. installing and maintaining head end equipment,
2. providing the necessary physical facilities,
3. looking after finances,
4. providing and supervising the necessary staff.

**Program Coordinator**

The board of the consortium usually designates an educator to act as program coordinator. This person may work alone or, as some consortia have done, may organize program committees to be responsible for evaluating and answering program needs.

**Animateur**

Another possible employee of a cable consortium is an animateur, operator, or liaison officer to organize, supervise and coordinate the activities of the consortium. This person is able to have a broad perspective over the whole operation and be the contact person with outside agencies and the public.

**Programming**

Once the AECA grants the educational cable channel to a cable consortium, the consortium sends program logs each month to the AECA as a way of informing the AECA of program content and general operation of the channel. Following guidelines developed by the CRTC, AECA recommends procedures for completing the logs.

Each year using these program logs, the AECA prepares a study which includes a description of each operating consortium in terms of membership, staff, intended audience, and details of programming describing

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daily broadcast times, average weekly broadcasting hours, the number of programs broadcast and the percentages of local, ACCESS and other programming and of Canadian content.

**Alberta Consortia**

At present, cable coverage in Alberta is approximately 70 percent with a prediction for 1985 that cable will be available in 85 percent of the province. Currently within the province, there are six operating educational cable consortia: Calgary, Edmonton, Edson, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie and St. Paul; and at least three more in the formative stages in Drumheller, Lacombe, and Vegreville. See Table 1 for a synopsis of membership, staff, head end and studio facilities, and average programming hours per week during March, 1981.

**Programming**

Aside from being an alternative to commercial television, each consortium tries to:

1. distribute educational and instructional programs to a large number of people within the community that is linked by cable;
2. relate all programming to local needs and interest;
3. provide educational institutions and organizations with a means of communicating with the general public (for example, board meetings, an address by the superintendent, information about courses offered by institutions);
4. provide direct and convenient access to instructional and informational program material; and
5. provide assistance for efficient and effective learning through the visual medium of television.

This individualization of consortia and the emphasis on local needs guarantees that educational television is specifically designed to fulfill unique educational needs within a given geographic area. While having the capability of reaching a wide audience, educational cable consortia can and should

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afford the luxury of appealing to a narrow audience for a variety of programs. Programs assigned to meet specific and unique local needs are insurance towards interesting, satisfying and maintaining a local audience.

Programs range from politics to car maintenance, and sources vary from commercial enterprises like Esso Resources to local school boards. Local productions are encouraged because of their ability to react immediately to local and regional interests and needs. Programming from ACCESS (the provincial production agency) varies from worldwide appeal like "Science International" to more Canadian-specific materials which relate directly to curricula. Community colleges and institutes of technology offer several popular programs. The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) has a basic photography course that has been shared with other consortia. Grant MacEwan Community College offers a course for library technicians which has been broadcast by northern consortia, where this type of course is not available through the regional colleges. Athabasca University, which is the only university with a provincial mandate and thus is a member of each of the consortia, offers the video part of some of its courses over cable. If cable is not received in the home, students can go to a local college or school to view the programs.

With the participation and resources of local educational institutions, including community schools, educational consortia, and Further Education Councils, it is possible to program a new channel at least 10 hours per week and develop it over a few years into a 30 to 40 hours week. This year's study of the educational cable consortia, based on the four consortia operating in March, 1981, indicates worthwhile efforts in local programming. The cable consortium in Grande Prairie has achieved great success in the form of three busy phone lines during the daily hour-long production, "Our Place After School". A fourth telephone line was added near the end of the 1980-1981 programming year in an attempt to keep up with the demand. The study reports that Edmonton's educational cable consortium continues to increase its local programming, and its school board members take advantage of the communications opportunity to inform their rate payers of school board activities. The report recommends that more opportunities be sought to exploit the potential to deal with "hot" issues of interest to education in the communities served by cable.

**References**

- Morton, R. Policy paper for the Alberta Educational Communications Authority. Edmonton: ACCESS, 1977.

## Community Communication: Parent Education Radio Program

Wanda Young

Davis and Baran (1981) credited Lazarsfeld with the development of administrative research in communication, through the establishment of marketing research and audience analysis. In this study audience analysis was applied in a survey of Canadian radio stations to determine whether a particular need of audiences was being met by the stations.

The main topic of concern was parent education. Bronfenbrenner (1978) stated that the groups most in need of parent education were those who do not yet have children, those who no longer have children, and those who will never have children. In explaining his thesis, Bronfenbrenner indicated that North American civilization required a social policy and social practices that would give status and approval to parenthood. Bronfenbrenner recommended media programming about the family, showing where children are, what they are doing, and who cares for them. The conditions of the children and their caretakers should be exposed. Bronfenbrenner's recommendations were for television, but such programming could be applied to radio as well. Programs could be designed for adolescents, the elderly and single persons, the audiences that Bronfenbrenner recommended.

Teenage audiences represent a group who do not yet have children. Adolescents do have unwanted pregnancies (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1976). Buck (1971) found that 98 percent of teenagers listen to radio, spending two hours per day (Dominick, 1974).

A group who no longer have children are the elderly. Foster (1970) and Robbins (1971) noted that the elderly used radio extensively and were loyal listeners.

The adult listening audience might assist in establishing status for parenthood. Mendelsohn (1971) observed that radio plays an important part in the everyday life of many persons. In Canada, 98.4 percent of all households have one or more radios (Segal, 1980).

The purpose of this study was to survey Canadian radio stations for programming about the family and parent education. The questions of interest were:

Which Canadian radio stations offered

programs in parent education?

Who prepared the programs?

What kinds of program were produced?

How were the programs evaluated?

**Background of the Study**

In a study of parenting education resources in the province of Saskatchewan (Health Promotion Directorate, 1979), it was recommended that radio programs dealing with parent education be scripted. The advisory board and station manager of CJUS, the University of Saskatchewan FM radio station, asked for suggestions for educational radio programs. A series on parent education was prepared and funding was obtained from the Health Promotion Directorate to start the project in 1980.

For this study, parent education was defined as the preparation of parents and prospective parents for child care and development, and the improvement of family living. Such areas as nutrition, management of resources, environment, and relationships were of particular concern.

The improvement of family living was an objective of many of the parent education programs reported by Crooke and Glover (1977) in a history of the subject. Breivagel and Parker (1980) pointed out that families have been neglected and need help. Developing countries may be more advanced in radio programming to help families (Clearinghouse on Development Communication, 1980). In North America, media programs often conflict with the parental values of no violence, sexual restraint, lifetime monogamy, and planning for the future (Le Masters, 1970). Schramm (1974) defined communication as an orientation to a set of informational signs about content that would reduce uncertainty. The Simon Fraser University Telecommunications Research Group (1978) observed that it was a purpose of programming to promote social change and development, catering to special interests such as those of parents. Whatever media or methods were used to communicate parent education concepts, evaluation was needed as to the effectiveness of the program in meeting the established objectives (Dubanoski and Tanabe, 1980; Crooke and Glover, 1977).