TV-Ontario

founded for Learning

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The television service of
The Ontario Educational
Communications Authority.
A BRIEF BACKGROUND

Educational broadcasting was a controversial issue for two score years and ten before it made a noticeable impact. Today it is a moot point whether it has been more successful in the school system (through Videotape Program Services - VIPS) or through public telecasts. Through TVOntario the Ontario Educational Communications Authority is deeply involved in both.

PART I of this essay tells something of the beginnings of ETV in Canada. PART II will give an account of the novel, almost adventurous operations of the most extensive ETV network in Canada.

Under the BNA Act education is a provincial and communications a federal responsibility.

This anomalous distinction was no bar to the introduction of educational broadcasting into Canada by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a federal body.

In 1942 the CBC and its affiliates initiated national school broadcasting in 30-minute periods daily. This radio service covered a more extensive geographical area than any other of its kind anywhere.

The initial broadcasts were far from successful. Teachers resisted the intrusion of this new element into their field of work. Provincial governments were apathetic. According to Dr. Duncan McArthur, Minister of Education in the Hepburn government in Ontario, expenditures of public money on school broadcasting would serve no worthwhile purpose.

There were other obstacles such as the diversity in the school systems across the country.

The failure of school broadcasting to take hold proved what Dr. E.A. Corbett, Director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, had concluded in a report in 1938. The Corbett study, commissioned by the CBC, advised against national school broadcasting as likely to be counteracted by inaction by provincial education authorities.

But in 1942 a conference chaired by E.L. Bushnell, the CBC's general supervisor of programs, decided that a national approach to school broadcasting was desirable. The CBC proceeded to introduce an educational radio service.

After a second CBC-sponsored conference in 1943, a National Advisory Council on School Broadcasting was established "to build a real working alliance between broadcasts and educators".

Soon the CBC's School Broadcasts Department was expanded and developed a closer relationship with educators in the school systems. The Canadian Teachers' Federation acted as a liaison...
between the broadcast service and the teaching profession. One result was that program planning became a responsibility of the National Advisory Council (NAC) on which the CTF had two representatives.

In 1951 the CTF completed a study of the school broadcasting recommended by the NAC. The study solidly supported the continuation of school broadcasting as devised by the Advisory Council. It urged the use of tape recorders so that broadcasts could be fitted into class periods. It urged provincial departments of education to prepare more support material and guide books for teachers.

In addition, the CTF study recommended that the NAC should eventually expand its operations to include television.

The report was welcomed by some and criticized by others. The Ontario Teachers' Federation established its own television committee. The critics favoured radio but considered TV only for limited use - e.g., in the home.

To fill the breach opened up by TV, the Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation formed a media committee and named two representatives to the National Advisory Council.

This new committee mailed a questionnaire to Home and School Associations across the country. It discovered that the adult listening audience was unaware of what educational broadcasting was doing.

In 1951, the Massey Commission - the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences named by the federal government in 1949 - proposed that the CBC be the leading force in television.

The Broadcast Act of 1958 established a Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG) which allocated TV channels in major cities to the private sector, thus precluding CBC dominance. But the CBC alone was to give priority to Canadian content, although both public and private sectors were to give special consideration to educators.

Only the CBC paid much attention to this last point. In 1953 the Canadian Education Association encouraged the CBC to direct TV programming to the school systems. Its position may well have been influenced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) which had already opted for educational TV.

The CBC turned again to the National Advisory Council. The Council suggested that the CBC experiment with educational telecasts to supplement the national school radio broadcasts. National telecasts were started in 1954 but on a limited basis because of budgetary restraints.

In Great Britain over eight hours of telecasts daily were available to the school system, and in the United States over 50 educational TV stations were started with support from the Ford Foundation for Advancement in Education. At the same time community TV stations operated by non-profit institutions co-operated in educational telecasting.

In Canada educational broadcasting was almost exclusively directed to the schools and gradually paid more attention to provincial needs. Individual school boards responded to these efforts but generally provincial departments of education stood aloof.
In 1960 a new and major initiative resulted from the founding of the Metropolitan Educational Television Association (META) of Toronto. This association involved the boards of education of thirteen municipalities, the University of Toronto, the Public Archives of Toronto, the Royal Ontario Museum and other community organizations.

META effectively introduced educational broadcasting to Ontario even though most of its work was confined to the Greater Toronto area. It obtained financial assistance from the school boards and made use of the production facilities at Ryerson College, now the Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, and CBC and CFTO.

It negotiated with both CBLT (public) and CFTO (private) on educational programming and in 1961 introduced a training course at Ryerson for teachers.

It involved the Ontario Trustees Council in educational TV. This Council had established the Ontario TV Association to serve rural Ontario in particular.

Except for Saskatchewan, other provinces continued to lag behind in educational telecasts. Saskatchewan established the Saskatchewan Educational Advisory Council in 1958.

The National Advisory Council was concerned about the discrepancy in these developments among the provinces and urged the resumption of school telecasting on a national basis. In 1960-1 the CBC produced a 13-week series of half-hour telecasts and expanded the program in the following school year to 58 programs twice weekly.

In May 1961 NAC held a conference in Toronto attended by over a hundred representatives from the educational systems and broadcast media. The objective was to encourage greater interest in school telecasts across Canada. Diverse factors made this easier said than done. Geographically and demographically Canada did not yield easily to national persuasion. No doubt about it, education was a provincial responsibility.

Moreover, money to invest in TV equipment was hard to come by. Schools which had invested in film equipment were reluctant to spend additional sums on TV equipment.

The report of the national Committee on Broadcasting, the Fowler Committee, in 1965 influenced further decision-making. Educational broadcasting was dealt with in four areas: 1) scholastic education, 2) vocational training, 3) special enlightenment, 4) TV general enlightenment (meaning the humanities and improvement of the mind. In effect this widened the scope of educational broadcasting.

The Fowler Committee made three major recommendations. Briefly, 1) a new body, the National Advisory Council for Scholastic Broadcasting should be established (revitalizing the NAC) with the objective of providing a nationwide service under provincial sponsorship; 2) new life should be breathed into educational TV, which still had not caught on; 3) scholastic broadcasts should not be subsidized by the federal government and the CBC should be reimbursed for all costs of these services by educational authorities and institutions making use of them.

The third recommendation was less
than helpful, especially to the poorer provinces. A White Paper in 1966 re-
jected it when it stated that educa-
tional TV was both a federal and a
provincial responsibility. "Federal
policies in the field of communications
must not work to impede but must faci-
litate the proper discharge of provin-
cial responsibilities for education." Co-operation was the watchword.

On July 1, 1966, the Ontario Depart-
ment of Education established the ETV
branch with T.R. Ide as chairman.

Negotiations were carried on between
the Canadian and Ontario governments
for the next three years. Of impor-
tance were a 1966 federal White Paper
on broadcasting, public hearings first
by the BBG and later by the Commons
Committee on Broadcasting, Film and
Assistance to the Arts, and a proposal
to establish a Canadian Educational
Broadcasting Agency. Plans submitted
to the BBG by the ETV branch in late
1966 specified ETV channel require-
ments for transmitters which could
reach 95 per cent of Ontario's citizens.

The Broadcasting Act of 1968 defin-
ed broadcast policy as "a balanced
service of information, enlightenment
and entertainment." It gave full
recognition to educational television
(ETV) as an essential element in
broadcasting, stating that facilities
should be provided within the Canadian
broadcasting system for educational
broadcasting.

In Ontario federal proposals that
the CBC be given the responsibility
of establishing transmission facili-
ties in response to the province's
request and that the provincial agency
be responsible for the programming,
were acceptable to both parties. As a
result a joint submission was made in

November to the CRTC by the CBC and
the ETV branch on behalf of the OECA.
This joint application stated that
the necessary transmission equipment
could be installed and be ready for
broadcasting by the fall of 1970.

On January 30, 1970, the applica-
tion was approved and work finally
began on the installation of the
CICA-TV transmitter on the CBC Jarvis
Street, Toronto, tower.

Programs on CICA-TV Channel 19
were inaugurated on September 27, 1970.

While Channel 19 was preparing for
broadcasting, preparatory work was
also being carried out in order to
draft the necessary legislation for
the establishment of the OECA. This
legislation was introduced in the
Ontario Legislature by the Minister
of Education as Bill 43 on March 19,
1970. Final reading was given on
June 25 and the Act to establish the
Ontario Educational Communications
Authority was proclaimed on July 2,
1970.

As contained in the legislation,
the policy of the Authority is deter-
mimed by a 13-member board of direc-
tors named by the Lieutenant Governor
in Council. The first board meeting
was held on August 20, 1970, with
T.R. Ide as chairman.

It took a score of years for educa-
tional TV to make a noticeable impact.
No communications medium outside the
CBC has done more to develop educa-
tional TV and achieve its public
acceptance than the OECA. (The second
article in the next issue concerns the
development).

The establishment and progress of
OECA were not well received by private
broadcast interests. They considered non-profit, publicly-financed broadcasting as inimical to private commercial broadcasting which, they said, was a highly competitive business devoted to the provision of service to the public in all its interests - for profit. Education is included in the public's interests as a source of profit.

Private broadcasters, according to their spokesmen, the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, objected to OECA's offering more than school material in a wide variety of programs without commercials of any kind.

The CAB's attitude may have been exacerbated by OECA's successful incursion into the open sector, starting with the Metro Toronto outlet Channel 19.

But OECA's position is soundly based on the Canadian Radio and Television Commission's definition of educational programming:

1. Programming designed to be presented in such a context as to provide a continuity of learning opportunity aimed at the acquisition or improvement of knowledge or the enlargement of understanding of members of the audience to whom such programming is directed and under circumstances such that the acquisition or improvement of such knowledge or the enlargement of such understanding is subject to supervision or assessment by the provincial authority by an appropriate means;

2. Programming providing information on the available courses of instruction or involving the broadcasting of special educational events with the system.

Continuity of learning opportunity, improvement of knowledge, enlargement of understanding are demonstrably the objectives of the Ontario Educational Communications Authority. If entertainment is also included in the overall concept, so much the better.