

Educational Broadcasting: Challenges of Shifting Paradigms



by

*Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan
President, The Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver*

*to the
South African Broadcasting Corporation
Conference on Educational Broadcasting in the Service of
Growth, Reconstruction and Development*

Gauteng Province, South Africa

2-5 February 1998

Good Evening. Let me first express my gratitude to the organisers of the conference for their kind invitation to share some thoughts with you on a subject that has enormous interest for us here at The Commonwealth of Learning. I am sorry that I am not able to be with you in person in Pretoria (something I would have enjoyed very much). But in the context of our discussion, the opportunity to use two telephone lines and a television screen to reach you in real time, seems not only appropriate but also positively exciting.

1. At the same time that I was planning this presentation, I was also re-reading your great President's autobiography - *Long Walk to Freedom*.¹ In it, Mr. Mandela recounts a stopover he made north of the Arctic Circle at Goose Bay where a group of young Inuit had come to get a chance to meet him:

". . . In talking to these bright young people, I learned that they had watched my release on television and were familiar with events in South Africa. "Viva ANC" one of them said. The Inuit are an aboriginal people historically mistreated by a white settler population; there were parallels between the plights of black South Africans and the Inuit people. What struck me so forcefully was how small the planet had become during my decade in prison; it was amazing to me that a teenage Inuit living at the roof of the world could watch the release of a political prisoner on the southern tip of Africa. Television had

shrunk the world, and had in the process become a great weapon for eradicating ignorance and promoting democracy."

2. In the context of this meeting, the last clause ". . . a great weapon for eradicating ignorance and promoting democracy." has particular significance. Allow me to reflect on two other stories, which many of you, especially those engaged in educational broadcasting, may already be familiar with:

- The first story, narrated by one Zaffrullah Choudhury of Bangladesh, goes as follows: "*. . . In rural areas we train women without formal schooling for six months a year. They become competent in care and prevention; they learn family planning, minor surgery and how to handle a microscope. These workers have lowered our area's infant mortality rate to about 60 per 1000 live births [compared with 106 for the country as whole. While the national average of maternal mortality is 5 per 1000 live births . . . our ordinary village women have cut the rate to 2 per 1000.*"
- The second story comes from Brazil: "*. . . we work with social communicators including authors of soap operas. Brazilian soap operas are enormously successful on television . . . So we do health "merchandising, using opportunities to introduce into the program's theme subjects that are educational messages in health. We have an enormous numbers of traffic deaths, for example, so the simple use of a seat belt by a soap opera's hero means that an important image will be retained by people who are watching. If we do not use means outside of the health services, we are not going to have results."*

3. Ladies and gentlemen, the organisers of this conference gave me the liberty to determine the subject of my presentation. I thought it might not be inappropriate to perhaps share with you some thoughts on the human development and the role and challenges confronting broadcasters of educational programmes in a Media Rich World. And, if time and technology permit, my colleagues and I here in Vancouver would like to engage in a conversation with you after the presentation.

4. Paul Kennedy (1993), in his insightful analysis of issues relating to life and living in the 21st century, said of education that the forces for change facing the world could be so far reaching, complex and interactive that they call for nothing less than the re-education of humankind. Just what are these forces? Consider:

- Population challenge;
- Ecological challenge;
- Economic challenge; and
- Social challenge.

5. Throughout this century, social thinkers from Toynbee to Wells have repeatedly argued that human kind is in a race between education and catastrophe and, given my earlier comments, you will not disagree that the stakes, as we near the end of the century, are much higher than ever before. Both in the developed and developing nations, quality, access, purpose and value of education are becoming the most important factors in determining not just economic competitiveness but also a range of other considerations from good governance to nation building.

6. Especially over the last five years, the focus is on more diverse and better education. This seems to have taken the centre stage in almost every major developed country. Of course, many of you are by now familiar with the Clinton (2nd term) inaugural address where he made a call for *"(a) new land (in which) education will be every citizen's most prized possession. Our schools will have the highest standards in the world, igniting the spark of possibility in the eyes of every girl and boy. And the doors of higher education will be open to all. The knowledge and power of the Information Age will be within reach not just of the few, but of every classroom, every library, every child."* And not too long before that, Tony Blair declared that the three priorities *"... for (his) government would be education, education and education"*. He then went on to say that *"... education is not a one-off event for the under 18s. The new consensus must be based on wider access to higher education and continual opportunities for all adults to learn throughout life."* In your country of South Africa, you yourselves had declared that access to education will be the right of every man, woman and child for and throughout life.

7. While the level of the decibel may not be similar say between Washington and Addis Ababa or London and Pretoria, I am not wrong in saying that there is implicit recognition all over Africa that education is as important to the vitality of nations in the long term as say famine relief in the short. Perhaps, in the context of this conference, it is worth underlining that these calls for more education are not only about universities and colleges but also about basic, primary and secondary school education and, even more importantly, literacy programmes (the very foundation of ALL learning).

8. I do not have to go into detail why literacy education has to be given priority. This is knowledge that is familiar to you. It is also one that has received more than its share of comments, e.g., The World Bank study on Education in Sub Saharan Africa: *"Without education, development will not occur. Only educated people can command the skills necessary for sustainable growth and for a better quality of life . . . Greater investment in education can . . . be expected to yield broad economic benefits - including higher income and lower fertility - Men and women with more education, in addition to having fewer children tend to live healthier and longer lives; the education of parents affects children's survival and enhances their physical and cognitive development."*

9. An even more passionate plea for greater efforts on literacy was voiced by Commissioners who reported on Population and Quality of Life in 1996. They said *"Literate people find it hard to grasp the full impact of illiteracy. In a world operating on written laws, rules and instructions, being illiterate is a severe handicap when*

participating in decisions affecting life. It is tantamount to disability affecting every aspect of living. It confines job opportunities to the most menial and low paid tasks. It means being unable to read instructions on a packet of seed, a tin of powdered milk, or an oral contraceptive. It means being unable to read newspapers, street signs, warning signs. It means the inability to check legal rights, an inability to check if a title deed is faulty. And it means being exposed to fraud and expropriation."

10. Demanding, wanting and needing more education is one thing; designing, developing and delivering a response is something altogether different. It is different because of the magnitude of the challenge, which is combined with other associated factors such as costs, human capacities and other infrastructure.

11. Consider, even though at the beginning of 1998 we can take pride in saying that colonialism is dead, the achievements of science and technology are finding their way to many parts of the world; there seems to be a freer flow of information; there is greater access to education and health for many and, in principle, the acceptance of equality for all human beings. We can be satisfied with our achievements but, wait, take another closer look, and the achievements of the last 50 years, though remarkable, they show some horrible disparities.

12. Significant numbers of people are still denied equal access to justice and a decent living (particularly women, girls and young boys). We have, as we progress industrially, hurt our environment (in some cases irreparably); barbaric military practices are still widespread and institutionalised terrorism is there in many of its bloodiest forms. Inequality takes many forms as well. One Swiss person still continues to consume almost as much resources as 40 Somali persons. An average North American family consumes more energy than the total consumption of a small-sized Indian village. The life span of a Cameroonian is shorter by about 30 years as compared to that of a Canadian.

13. Nowhere is the equation of disparity as pronounced as in Education. Consider the following:

- In the developed OECD countries of the world, there is almost total literacy capability; between 88-93% participation in pre-tertiary levels of education; and at the tertiary level, about 40 % of the age cohort participate in most countries;
- In non-OECD East Asia and Pacific Islands, while participation rate at the primary school level is nearer 90%, some 100 million boys and girls are still out of school; participation in tertiary level education is limited to under 5%;
- In South Asia, participation in primary education is near 70% but some 380 million young children still continue to be out of school; tertiary level education is only available to about 3-5% of the age cohort;
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, while initial participation rate in schooling is high (86%), completion rates are low (less than 50%) and some 20 million youths

are out of school; in the tertiary sector, less than 6% of the age cohort get an opportunity to go to college;

- In the Arab States, close to 23 million children are out of school, some 80 million individuals remain illiterate and less than 10% of the age cohort are in post-secondary institutions; and
- The grimmest statistics apply to Sub-Saharan Africa. This is a situation with which you are familiar. Some 80 million children of the appropriate age cohort are out of primary and secondary schools. Of those who are in school, less than 2/3 have adequate teachers, classroom and ancillary facilities. In terms of access to tertiary education, less than one person per 1000 inhabitants can ever dream of a post-secondary education.

14. If you and I, our governments and their political masters seriously believe that education can indeed make the difference in Africa as in the rest of the world between wealth and poverty, health and misery, conservation and destruction, national unity and division as well as eradicating disparities between nations and within communities, then we have an obligation to revisit our paradigms of delivering education as well as what the education itself is.

15. In Sub-Saharan Africa, to bring about an equality of opportunities for all, especially in educational access, the countries making up this region may have to provide opportunities for:

- 546 million primary and secondary school places for the 6-17 year age group by the year 2025;
- Training of about 600,000 teachers;
- Increasing the current post-secondary positions, of one kind or another, from one to 50 per thousand to catch up with OECD standards;
- Literacy training for 147 million men, women and girls.

16. Providing a meaningful education from literacy to tertiary levels will require resources and human capacities that seem to be far beyond the reach of many of our countries if we continue to believe that the only way to achieve these objectives are the traditional practises going back to the times of our forefathers. While traditional ways of delivering education have a high value and may have worked earlier for the few who were either highly talented or privileged, fundamental shifts may have to be made as our aspirations go beyond providing education only to the intellectually elite or resource rich.

17. For the first time in the history of the human race, we have an opportunity to reach almost every single community on the planet. The technologies that are available today have made it possible for us to reach millions in a single moment. Consider, for instance, some amazing feats that programming has done in the world of non-formal education

through a combination of human talent, skills and broadcasting technology in the last decade or so:

- The remarkable experience in Honduras, where within a year, a mostly illiterate population was able to learn - from a public health radio programme - the skills necessary to reduce the risk of diarrhoea dehydration by almost 40% through the use of a specific oral re-hydration solution; or
- The case in India where family planning advocates were able to increase the use of condoms by 600% over a 12-year period by an imaginative (or rude) television driven consumer education programme; or
- A rock video in Mexico that motivated young people there to delay sexual activity and thereby reduce health and psychological risks; or
- A mass campaign in Turkey that enabled the country's health officials to increase their catchment for child immunisation programmes.

18. Similarly, in the case of formal education, the capacity to reach millions through interactive media may not be there as yet. However, the achievements of the Open Schools of India, the Correspondence School of New Zealand, the Open Universities of Pakistan, the UK and your own UNISA, demonstrate that which is possible. It seems to me that the capacity to use the old and the new technologies to educate almost every human being on earth is already there. We also have discovered over the last 30 years, the many ways to reach learners at a distance. And, there is a political willingness on the part of our leaders to make education a central pillar of the global agenda. But there are some barriers or challenges. No doubt, you will address them during your many discussions over the next few days. Let me suggest a few that you may wish to include during your debate.

19. The first challenge is the re-orientation of our teachers and the pedagogy they apply to their vocation. The fraternity has still to come to terms with a new type of learner and a learning environment that encourages the student to be independent. Whether it is a radio or television programme, print or web-based instruction there is, on the one hand, a recognition that individuals are capable of self learning if provided with cleverly and sensitively designed instruction but, on the other hand, poorly equipped to utilise the technology imaginatively and non-mechanically.

20. The second challenge is to change the nature and structure of our 'teaching' organisations. Their traditions of teaching and their views on learning have resulted in organisational structures that are almost and completely centred around faculty - from the design of the curriculum to its transformation into learning experience; from decisions relating to assessment of prior learning to elements of exit standards; from administrative arrangements to academic governance; and from delivery systems to learning schedules.

21. The third challenge is to remove the 'time' driven element from today's schools, colleges and universities. These are ruled by time, prescribing when, in his/her life, a

student can or is ready to learn and the length of time required to learn. As a task force report to the International Council for Distance Education recorded: "The instructional paradigm, therefore, holds learning prisoner to time constraints applied by an arbitrary force or by the preferred work schedule of a faculty member. In the desired [new] learning paradigm, learning becomes the primary driving force and, since learning can occur at anytime and at anyplace 24 hours every day, the constraints of time are removed. The technologies allow those who provide education to break the rule of time.

22. The fourth challenge is overcoming the perceptions and the fear of faculty as to the changing nature of their roles and values as well as the rewards in the new learning environment. There is a real, though unfounded, fear on the part of faculty of losing total control of the teaching and learning environment. This fear manifests itself in many forms. Some teachers express anger at the perceived loss of academic freedom and others express disdain at the 'commoditisation' of knowledge; there are those who express dismay at the loss of employment and yet others worry about loss of quality. Learner centrality in the educational environment does pose enormous challenges to the teacher. It requires pedagogical skills, especially in a technology-mediated environment which many of today's teachers are either inadequate in or totally lacking. Serious steps have to be taken to reduce the anxiety of teachers and alienating them from a development that is so crucial to academe and its survival.

23. The fifth challenge is the appropriateness of the curriculum. Those who provide educational services, whether of the formal or informal kind, cannot continue to behave as though their services and the knowledge products that they develop have little relevance to the world of work and living. The real world has been going through a dramatic change - learning and training are needed by people who will function in a globalised economy and the information age. These learners need to understand themselves through an understanding of the world. UNESCO's Delors Commission elegantly describes the framework of a new curriculum, which they call the four pillars of education. These are:

- Learning to know: by having a broad overview of things and the skills to work in depth on selected fields; learning to learn and thereby benefit from the opportunities to learn throughout life;
- Learning to do: by acquiring vocational skills and competencies to work in different situations and to work in teams;
- Learning to live together: and be appreciative of other cultures and people, respecting pluralism, peace and managing conflict; and
- Learning to be: so as to better develop one's own personality, acting with autonomy, Judgement and personal responsibility.

24. The last in my list of challenges has to be the access to technology (telephone, television, radio, Internet access) by learners. Even as we near the end of the century, some 500 million people may not have made their first telephone call let alone use the

Internet. Most of the non-users are found in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America. In her recent book entitled "*The Death of Distance*", Frances Cairncross quoted an International Telecommunications Union report, which stated that in some African nations (Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zimbabwe) the number of people has been growing faster than the number of telephone lines. While in the short-term this seems to be a big impediment, the longer-term view, by all accounts, appears to be promising.

25. It is in this context of much needed paradigm shifts in the educational sector and challenges to the wider community that media managers, such as yourselves, and international development agents, such as my staff and I, must find a role that will enable our respective clients to meet their educational demands. Let me make a few suggestions as to what would constitute such a role:

- Creating nation-wide policy framework that acknowledges learning through life and learning for life as an integral part of national development. South Africa, more than any other country, has been leading the rest of the Commonwealth in this discussion. Can one look to South Africa again to transform those wonderful discussions into action that citizens can benefit from?
- Creating pathways, in association with the formal sector of education, that will enable free mobility of learners from one educational experience to the next; credits are not just earned through public examinations and universities; credits can be earned at the workplace, through studies mediated by the broadcasting agencies;
- Encouraging minimal standards of good practice from those involved in the delivery of education and training for both formal and non-formal;
- Establishing formal and informal networks around themes such as teacher training, technology, literacy, etc., so that collaboration and co-operation can be achieved for the production of knowledge products and the development of learner support systems; and
- Developing professional competencies in the design, delivery, management and accreditation of media or technology driven learning opportunities.

26. The above are not a pie in the sky list. In a modest way, The Commonwealth of Learning has been engaged in such attempts and I am sure that we will continue to do so. My appeal to those of you gathered at this meeting is for you to work with us whenever that opportunity presents itself. You see (and I am sure I speak for all of my colleagues as well), like many others in the development community, I am a firm subscriber to the notion that the progress of the next century, in terms of human development, may have only one yardstick of measurement, i.e., the level of equality of opportunity between nations and among people. Unless people, regardless of race, religion, nationality and socio-economic status, are empowered with knowledge and skills, achieving equality of opportunity will be difficult. Not achieving that equality does not augur well for the

welfare of the planet. Failure to transform today's imbalance of wealth and resources will become tomorrow's cause for conflict between and within nations.

I wish you well in your deliberations.

Footnotes:

¹ Mandela, Nelson. (1994). *Long Walk To Freedom*. New York, NY : Little Brown and Co. p. 558.

² Zaffrulah, Choudhury. (1996). In Paul Harrison (ed.), *Caring for the future: making the next decades provide a life worth living; report of the Independent Commission on Population and Quality of Life*. Oxford, UK : Oxford University Press. p. 359.

³ Buss, Pablo. (1996). In Paul Harrison (ed.), *Caring for the future: making the next decades provide a life worth living; report of the Independent Commission on Population and Quality of Life*. Oxford, UK : Oxford University Press. p. 359.

⁴ Kennedy, Paul. (1993). *Preparing for the Twenty First Century*. New York, NY : Random House. p. 428.

⁵ Clinton, William. (1997). Inaugural Address.

⁶ Blair, Tony. (1996). The Twentieth Anniversary Lecture delivered at Ruskin College.

⁷ *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Policies for adjustment, revitalization, and expansion*. (1988). Washington, D.C. : The World Bank.

⁸ Harrison, Paul (ed.). (1996) . *Caring for the future: making the next decades provide a life worth living; report of the Independent Commission on Population and Quality of Life*. Oxford, UK : Oxford University Press. p. 359.

⁹ Hall, James W. (1996). *The educational paradigm shift: Implications for ICDE and the distance learning community*. Report of the Task Force of The International Council for Distance Education Standing Committee of Presidents. Open Praxis. Vol. 2, 1996. p. 32.

¹⁰ Delors, Jacques (Commission Chair). (1996). *Learning, the treasure within: Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century*. Paris, France : UNESCO.

¹¹ Cairncross, Frances. (1997). *The death of distance: how the communications revolution will change our lives*. Boston, MA : Harvard Business School Press. p. 303.