

## RESERVING A PLACE FOR TRADITIONAL MEDIA IN GUYANESE SCHOOLS

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### Maximising Our Limited Resources

The reality facing the average Guyanese classroom is the virtual ineffectiveness of the education programme, occasioned by the lack of trained personnel, overcrowded classrooms and the inadequacy of teaching/learning materials. It is a scenario which naturally challenges the competence and dedication of even the committed teachers or propels such action marked by migration to lands seemingly offering better facilities thus leaving in its wake a number of dropouts and a growing total of functionally illiterate youth. In a land peopled by six races and with a population of approximately 750000 spread over 83000 sq. miles of 10 Administrative Regions and the capital Georgetown, virgin lands, undeveloped areas, rich in gold and diamonds, one would expect that accessibility to information would not be constrained. The fact is that the country, though rich, has not been positioned to explore its full potential. The 450 primary schools and 101 secondary schools are scattered over the length and breadth of Guyana with the majority being housed on the coastland. About 45% of these primary and secondary schools are located in regions 1,7,8,9 (hinterland areas) and riverain parts of regions 4, 5, and 10. Transportation to some of these areas is by aeroplane and boat which themselves dictate movement since flights are not always readily available and travelling on water is time consuming as well as dangerous at times. This 'distance' is in some measure responsible for the presence of underqualified/unqualified teachers, as qualified persons do not wish to take up appointments in these remote areas. This phenomena is not unusual since as Flora et al (1993) states:

Rural communities are defined by population, occupation and distance from urban centers. Rural folk are usually isolated, stereotyped in agriculture, mining, logging...accessibility, poverty, population decline - lack of other facilities as a consequence of underdevelopment.

For those teachers who do accept appointments to the areas, it is because the promise of early promotion serves as an incentive. Further it has been noted that even persons from the areas who were given the privilege of attending a tertiary institution rarely wish to return to give service after exposure to the life and facilities offered on the coastland or in the city. The regional administration now stipulates that persons from these hinterland areas return to serve their communities after qualifying themselves. As a matter of fact they are "bound" by the regions' offer of scholarships to facilitate their pursuance of improved qualification and training, to return and fulfil their contractual obligations.

But let me return to Flora's definition and focus on his reference to distance and isolation from the urban centers. It is this distance and isolation that was the catalyst for the establishment of the Distance Education and Information Unit (then Broadcasts to Schools) in May 1954 by Ms Celeste Dolphin, the first Co-ordinator of the Unit. The primary objective then was to fulfil a need; to offer Direct Teaching to students and teachers in the riverain/ interior communities; to give them an opportunity to acquire knowledge and enrichment through academic subjects and others of aesthetic value such as music, drama and poetry. The riverain inhabitants suffered more from the paucity of trained and qualified teachers and current, authentic information as it related to the content of the 3 Rs - reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. Today the four core areas of English Language, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies are addressed. Other subject areas include Spanish, Current Affairs, Story Telling and Musical Appreciation. The media then as it is now was the radio transmitting on Short Wave at 560 kHz and 760Khz respectively on two channels. Voice of Guyana operating on 560 kHz medium wave band is the channel that presently transmits the Broadcasts to Schools programmes. I am advised that this transmission reaches 90% of the country. In 1990 Talking About Education was merged with Broadcasts to Schools to form the Distance Education and Information Unit and continued transmission on the medium wave band. This more adult type programme -TAE - does however structure some programmes for fourth and fifth form students preparing for the Caribbean Examinations Council Examination (CXC) in the areas of Social Studies, English Language and Literature, Agriculture

Science and Home Economics as well as acquainting the general public with issues, innovations and practices in education through interviews, commentaries and profiles with functionaries in the education system. The radio then constitutes one example of the traditional media. Complimenting the radio as a traditional source of information is print in the form of Notes to Teachers and students' booklets and more recently the use of audio cassettes.

How then can we describe traditional media? I posit that it is that mode of communication which has transcended the years, has an interesting development story and which has not changed its indigenous form or purpose significantly or drastically. Radio has been around since the 1920s and earned the status during those years as being the television of the age. Larry Barker, Deborah Barker (1993). Situation comedies, musicals, political addresses and game shows formed part of its repertoire. Coming under the umbrella of mass media, the radio's purpose was to "inform, provide news, analyze events and educate people". It was further regarded as a vehicle for "the promotion of political and cultural action as well as advertising goods and services, entertaining and creating the popular arts of our time." Ungurait et al (1985).

In advancing the position of the radio as occupying a reserved place in Guyana's schools, it must be seen against the backdrop of the purposes as proposed by Ungurait et al (1985), the cost effectiveness, and the view of teachers that the programmes, especially Broadcasts to Schools, emanating from the DEIU, serve a very usual purpose. Responses to questionnaires on the impact of the programmes suggest that about 60% of the 'listening schools' (those that receive the broadcast live) enjoy the programmes and find them informative and useful. It is that the programmes today are servant to the needs of the classroom and are therefore linked to the current curriculum. Of the remaining 40% of schools, transmission of the programmes is affected by location of the school in mountainous or hilly areas as well as other domestic considerations such as malfunctioning of the radio, cramped curriculum, priority of the school.

Nevertheless statistics about radio broadcasting help us realize the importance of radio both as a news medium and as an entertainment medium. Research has shown that there are approximately 8500 radio stations in the United States alone and that the demand for the use of the airwaves has been so great that regulation for the use of the air frequencies (AM/FM bands) had to be instituted. Barker & Barker (1993)

I advance that this information points out that in spite of the technological advancement, the radio still continues to hold an important place among mass media. With the radio, information is dated, the news is 'fresh' and current. Radio promotes the skill of listening and auditory discrimination, provides models in speech, communication and language usage. In further support of radio, I submit a table of a CBS Research on the Functions of Mass Media which points to the importance of radio. Ungurait et al (1985)

### Media Utilization in a Typical Week

Activity	Hours
Sleeping	53.2
Working	40
Watching Television	26.4
Listening to Radio	21.2
Eating	8.4
Reading Newspapers	4.2
Reading Magazines	3.3
Listening to Records	1.3
Attending a Movie	.2
Reading Books	.06
Attending a Sporting Event	06
Attending a Cultural Event	.05

Teachers and students who constitute a large number of our listening audience on the DEIU programmes, can only benefit from exposure to the medium. Since the primary objective is to provide Direct Teaching, the teacher through the radio/studio classroom is acquainted with new methodologies for enhanced classroom performance and the maintaining of interest. Listeners are afforded the opportunity of hearing different views and styles of presentation. Especially in the riverain/ hinterland areas, the radio is depended upon to bring news and entertainment. By definition rural communities are distant from urban centers more by virtue of their isolation, population decline, (since persons may leave to obtain jobs), the lack of social amenities and infrastructure, and of course by mileage. The DEIU through its Direct Teaching mode has taken on the responsibility to "construct an environment in which the probability of reinforcing students for correct or proper behaviour is maximized" ((Mathis & McGaghie 1974) Myron H. Dembo 1981). With the support of Broadcasts to Schools booklets and audiocassettes, Mathias and McGaghie's theory is realised and the function of these components of traditional media is concretised. Concomitant with this perception is the humanist view that "the major goals of educators are to help develop the individuality of persons... and to help students actualize their potentialities". (Hamachek 1977:148 Dembo (1981). From the radio, students and teachers can emulate models, can become part of the 'global village' since they will hear and listen to music, news and ideas from around the world. The radio remains national yet local, touching on

topical and sensitive issues; offering a platform for discussion and decision. The audio cassette facilitates reinforcement. It serves to combat the problem of poor transmission through the dubbing of material from the programme tapes for play on tape recorders. This dubbing facility is offered by the Unit free of cost. Schools are only required to bring their cassettes for reproduction. In extreme cases, the Unit offers dubbed cassettes to deserving schools. Taped programmes on audio cassettes

- can be heard/listened to at the teacher/student's convenience
- facilitates immediate clarification of concepts/issues
- meets the needs of individualized learning styles
- aids reinforcement of concepts and feedback
- can be stored and retrieved when necessary.

The booklets developed for use by the teachers contains extensive information which may not necessarily be included in the scripted programme. As such, the booklets or Notes to Teachers may be used to

- prepare students before the broadcast
- serve as reference material
- provide strategies for formative and summative evaluation

and as an instructional tool, provide the untrained/unqualified teacher with pedagogical steps for the teaching/learning process and the instructional environment.

To fully appreciate the potential of traditional media in the Guyana context, is to first appreciate the general climate of the school environment. Reference was made earlier in this presentation to the paucity of trained personnel in the schools. The Secondary Schools Entrance Examination (SSEE) is written by all children of Level 6, age 11-13, irregardless of their ability to perform or their exposure to good teaching. This may seem unfair, but responds to the dictates of the education system with regard to equal opportunity. Programmes designed for Broadcast to Schools closely follow the curriculum, especially at this level. Recipients of the programmes are at an advantage as concepts are reinforced. In keeping with the theory of operant conditioning, as advanced by Skinner 1954, the programmed instruction is presented in small amounts of subject content. Appropriate responses to each item and the immediate feedback help to clarify and reinforce the learning.

Another very crucial factor that justifies the continued use of traditional media is the rate of absenteeism. The increase in labour demands in the outlying regions (2,3,4,5,6) where agriculture activities are most concentrated as well as seasonal changes (1,7,8 and 9), dictate the amount of time spent by children in receiving the instructional programme in school. Many of them have to help their parents during the harvesting and planting of crops. Absenteeism in the urban areas is however more due to social and economic conditions, distraction and disinterest through lack of motivation. This 'forced' absenteeism as it pertains to the rural areas need not be devoid of structured learning. Indeed constructivism contends that 'knowledge with resulting learning is derived from one's experiences' (Duffy and Jonassen) inferring that one is constantly learning as one is constantly experiencing things. In another view, the humanists believe that 'people are not subject to their environment but are free to

make choices about the quality of their lives' (Hamachek 1977). In essence, both views suggest that one can take charge of one's destiny. Traditional media as advanced in this paper, can help persons /students in making that choice about their lives. They can decide their contact/listening times (especially if programmes are prerecorded), which programmes best serve their interest and needs and how the knowledge acquired can be applied to their daily existence, survival or influence betterment. Today radios and audio cassette are of the portable make: walkmans and earphones are readily available and quite inexpensive. Maintenance and repairs of these relatively affordable media is easily effected. These media often require one or two small batteries. Children can walk around with them and listen to the broadcast as they do their chores and. The booklets as with all print, remains accessible and a medium to promote and encourage reading as an art and for enjoyment and is there for easy reference.

It would seem then, that technological advancement in instructional media would not necessarily negate the importance of the traditional and less sophisticated organs of communication. Rather it would challenge the improvement of the traditional tools so that they can effectively compete with modern technology.

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