

The Need for Mass Media Training in Non-Traditional Settings

Al Hester

Introduction

It becomes increasingly evident that the traditional university as we know it - set up with quite definite structures, periods of instruction, rigid progressions through involved curricula - does not always lend itself to education needs.

There are millions of persons who will never be able to avail themselves of a university education. We do not have the luxury to write off these citizens who do not have the resources to become college graduates. It is dodging the issue to say that these individuals should be taken care of by lower-level educational institutions. There is a need for learning which is not satisfied by lower level education, but which is also not met within traditional university structures.

These introductory remarks do not mean that the general population does not respect the institution of higher education - to the contrary, many have an almost mystical faith that the very process of higher education - the elaborate, slow ritual of the minuet of learning between professor and student - will ensure that there is education. And magic things are expected when the professor imparts learning to the waiting student (note that the teacher is conceived as the active agent and the student the passive one).

First of all, there will be the prestige of having a university degree. The mere blessing of the process as carried out by a major institution of higher learning confers great satisfaction to many. We, and they, too often confuse the form with the substance. The emphasis is not so much upon *what* is learned as upon the *manner* in which it is costumed in the regalia of social prestige.

Those of us who devote our lives to university teaching believe that the institution has much to commend it, and that it can form an environment for rigorous, logical and stimulating approaches to learning. Universities have survived for many centuries, and in many ways have served us well.

But while the traditional educational apparatus of universities is necessary and worthwhile, we cannot ignore the fact that it is impossible for many individuals to obtain a formal university education. And, too, we must guard against the dangers coming through the traditional university system, being co-opted by forces interested in dominating us and in preserving social

control for their own narrow interests. Newly independent countries such as Malta fortunately are more sensitive to the need to search for new ways of outreach between the university and the citizen. The pragmatics of creating a new society or independent nation force educators to take a hard look at their mission within their social system and how they may best achieve it.

Universities can use a wide array of approaches to passing on information - ways which are not included in the more formal, long-term college curriculum. These include, but are not limited to, extension work, short courses, workshops, seminars, training institutes, correspondence work, non-credit courses, evening courses, television and radio instruction, informal "get-togethers" between faculty and non-university learners, informal learning networks, university-sponsored cultural events, etc. The list is a long and rich one. Some of these ways of bringing teacher and student together do not carry the traditional imprimatur of a degree or the awarding of academic credits.

But an Australian educator, John Collins, has noted in his studies of eight West European university extension departments that there is still a hesitancy to experiment with "... different types of organization promising techniques and sometimes, clientele..."¹.

There are some reasons for this hesitancy: a fear that rigor will be missing from the more informal instruction methods, that students will not be serious-minded without the academic don lecturing formally, and sometimes a sub-conscious fear that the professor will have to learn new teaching methods when he or she does not have the captive audience guaranteed by the more rigid, formal university course.

Another impediment toward offering informal education under university sponsorship is the belief that we can wrap up higher education in a neat, four- or five-year package, with an abrupt termination after which we have turned out a completed product, just as an automobile manufacturer completes a car off the assembly line. But more and more educators are now seeing all education as a continuing process - not just the province of formal education but of a number of efforts.

Dr. Kenneth Wain of the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta is one of the leaders in higher education who plainly sees the need for learning as a continuing process.² Ettore Gelpi has also addressed himself to the role of the university in non-traditional teaching, pointing out the vast needs not covered by formal higher education³.

Dr. Gelpi notes that "During the last ten years the concept of lifelong education has, not without difficulty, begun to be adopted as a principle of educational policy and planning by politicians and educationalists: it has been seen not simply as one element of the education system but as a means of transforming it in both its formal and non-formal aspects. This development has signified a new interest in lifelong education for many countries..."⁴.

Not everyone, however, agrees that citizens should be subjected to "lifelong education". Some feel continuing education repressively subjects persons to even more conditioning by the educational process, to take subordinate roles in decaying societies. Ivan Illich is one of the most-quoted and vocal critics of the entire formal education process. He sees schools (and certainly universities) as being the most effective agencies in stimulating an increasingly consumption-oriented society⁵.

It is this author's opinion that Illich's strongly presented criticism must be given attention, but most of us are not ready to share his disillusionment with the social system and take a somewhat more optimistic view of the role of education in our respective nations.

Illich, however, can point the way to freeing us from our preoccupation with lock-step, formalized higher education as being the be-all and end-all of the learning process. The less-formal methods of adult, or lifelong education, including formats given previously in this article, may serve as fresh approaches bridging the gap between academic traditionalists and those who wish for more "deschooling" of society.

A Nigerian educator, E. Odinakachuku Okeem, has also called attention to ways in which formal schooling can be counter-productive, acknowledging his debt to Illich⁶.

These problems which Okeem says apply to traditional education include the following:⁷

1. Formal, long-term schooling is too expensive and not all can afford it.
2. An individual's worth is determined by his "ritual attainment in formal education; therefore schools perpetuate social inequalities".
3. Formal schooling impedes social progress and teaches and encourages competition, rather than cooperation.

4. It imparts a dependency relationship, and the teacher is forced "... into a role and presentation of self in which he thinks and acts like an intellectual dictator - and gives his students only what he feels is good for them".

Okeem then marshals some good arguments for using non-traditional approaches toward less formal modes of education:⁸

The search for possible alternatives to formal school systems therefore is intensified by, among other things, the ineffectiveness of schooling in general, its dictatorial tendencies and consequences of restrictiveness its perpetuation of social inequality and social distance between the schooled and unschooled, and its drag on progress and on individual self-fulfillment and national development. Small wonder then that a more liberalizing system and more effective alternatives are being searched for, hence the increasing attention of out-of-school education in particular and adult education in general.

The Center for International Mass Communication Training and Research

It is against this background, then, of the need to bridge a gap between the traditional university environment and the needs for continuing, mass media adult education, that we have formed the Center for International Mass Communication Training and Research.

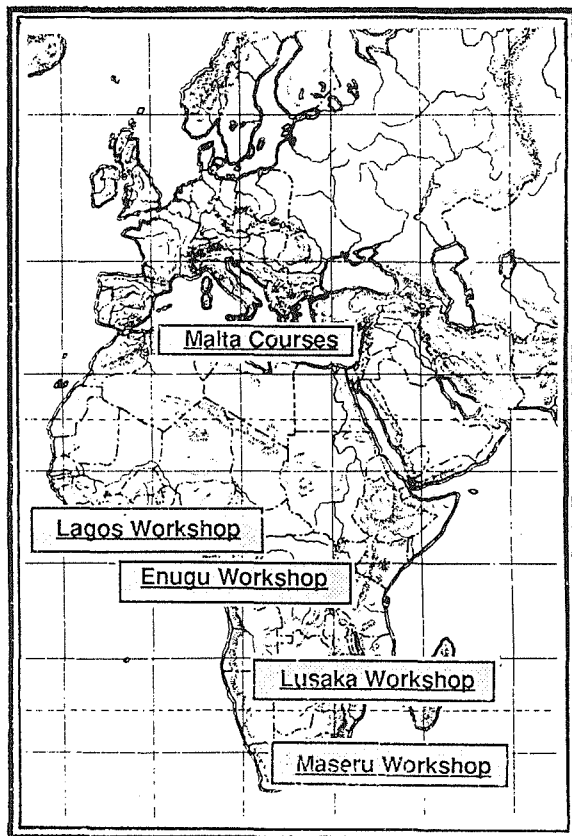
Our University is the nation's oldest land-grant institution, being chartered in 1785, with a gift of land by the state government to be used in setting up the state's first publicly supported institution of higher learning. This heritage encourages many programs of outreach designed to be of public service. The University of Georgia has a very active international development program and seeks to make learning opportunities available internationally as well as to residents of the State of Georgia. In its statement of the International Mission of The University of Georgia, we note that "... the quest for knowledge is universal and the need for global perspectives is imperative"⁹.

The mission statement goes on to say that "The University of Georgia affirms its commitment to the internationalization of its programs for students and the people of Georgia.... The University of Georgia recognizes its mission in developing, refining and sharing knowledge and understanding, *not only in the state and nation, but in the world*". (italics not in original)¹⁰.

The work of the Center for International Mass Communication Training and Research extends this philosophy to working with persons involved in the mass media outside the United States, and with international aspects of media work here in our own country. Activities of the Center include the

sponsorship jointly with governments, journalistic organizations, foreign universities, etc., of training workshops, seminars, short courses, etc. We also act as a liaison to bring foreign media professionals to the University for especially designed courses. These may be for academic credit or may be certificated, non-credit courses which emphasize intensive training in such areas as reporting, editing, broadcasting, public information, etc.

Non-traditional activities of the Center and/or our School of Journalism and Mass Communication have included two workshops jointly sponsored by the Nigeria Union of Journalists, the U.S. Information Agency and the Center, in Lagos and Enugu, Nigeria; a workshop for editors jointly held by the Center, the Zambian Institute of Mass Communication and the U.S.I.A.; a workshop for Lesotho journalists, sponsored by the Ministry of Information, the U.S.I.A. and the Center; a workshop on communication sponsored by the Venezuelan journalists' national organization; and two short courses at The University of Malta, sponsored by that University, the Center, and the U.S.I.A.; and workshops contracted for by Malaysian private media organizations. The School has also sponsored certificated, non-credit training programs for media personnel from Qatar and from Egypt.



We are also currently producing a *Handbook for 3rd World Journalists* with content by journalists from the developing world and by Center associates. Publication will be in 1987, on a non-profit basis.

The Center is not dictated to in any way concerning content of its training and research activities. Teachers or professional media members working on Center projects must be free to develop their workshops, projects, etc., without political interference. So far, we are in the second year of operation, and have worked with approximately 150-200 journalists or students preparing to enter media work in various countries. Associates of the Center who have taken part in training or research missions have come from India, Egypt, Morocco, Hong Kong, Tunisia, Yugoslavia and the United States.

Education and training for mass media work takes on a special importance when we think about how dependent upon the Media most persons are for much of their information about the world. Generally, the media are given first-rank importance in educating, setting the agenda for public discussion, improving the social system and enriching the experience of living. But at the same time, ill-prepared media workers or narrow press philosophies can be a hazard to any nation.

In many of the new nations of the world, no coherent education for media work exists, or where it does, it lacks many resources to be effective. The Center specializes in working as an equal colleague with sponsoring groups in such countries to improve professionalism among media employees. We attempt to show examples of many different solutions to improving the media, not trying to make over nations in our own image. The Center recognizes that each nation is sovereign and should be free to determine its own destiny. Wherever possible, workshop staff includes non-U.S. teachers or media professionals, with teaching aids, texts, etc., drawing upon the experience of different nations.

Frequently lacking in many countries are financial and educational resources for improving the skills and understanding of communicators. There is often a shortage of well-trained media professionals. Personnel in the mass media performance had to learn much on the job, having been denied more organized training by previous colonial governments, by lack of resources, or the lack of trained teachers conversant with actual media work and needs. The Center makes available teachers and professional journalists who may be of help in overcoming education and training problems.

During our work with various adult reporters, editors, broadcasters, public information officers, etc., we have begun to develop a scheme for what we hope will be effective training. All workshops, seminars, short courses, etc., are evaluated anonymously by the participants. So far, these activities have been rated as excellent and relevant by participants. Generally speaking, we feel it is better to work in their own countries with media professionals or students going into media work. This keeps the training in a known environment and reduces the chances that we will carry-over culturally-biased teaching in the non-traditional learning activities.

As a first step, the Center discusses possible projects with interested organizations. Most often, these organizations come to us with specific education and training problems. We then propose what we hope will be effective methods, based upon such discussions and upon the outcomes the organizations desire. Ideally, we try to discuss with those who will receive the training what their own goals may be. In effect, a Center training program is usually flexible and may be changed on short notice to take up needs which were not apparent at the beginning of the project. This flexibility requires an openness and adaptability by teaching personnel - a flexibility which some academics and professionals find unsettling.

We must keep in mind constantly the realities of the social system in which the media personnel must function. This means that training must be adapted to the economic, work, and education situation. Typically, training activities are short-term, because few reporters, editors, or other media personnel can take off months or years of time to receive such training. In many countries, media professionals are in short supply, as are other professional workers. Their organizations simply cannot function well if key personnel are gone for long periods.

We must design practical programs, often holding classes or workshops in evening hours, on weekends, or in half-day modules, in which we repeat learning units so that employees do not have to be absent an entire day.

Instructors "feel their way", since they are often unfamiliar with cultural differences or differing life-styles which can affect efficiency of instruction. For instance, a Christian instructor must realize that Islamic trainees require time off for Mosque attendance or for daily prayers. The instructor, too, must be cognizant that trainees frequently have not been subjected to competitive, Westernized educational systems in which criticism is rather freely bestowed by instructors. First, instructors must realize that some criticisms

may be completely idiotic and culturally blind. For example, it took months for this writer to realize that many Third World journalists are not just being perverse in not learning how to use a typewriter. They compose their stories long-hand, and give them to a clerk to type. This is slower and increases the chance for error in transmitting the media message, but it also is culturally acceptable and gives employment to many clerks - an item of some importance in many countries. Second, in some cultures, it is bad form to criticize someone openly and plainly. Subtle methods and suggestions must be used to get points across. "Loss of face" may result if a trainee or student is evaluated too bluntly.

A foreigner, too, may have criticisms which are not valid concerning the performance of the trainee. The trainee may be reflecting the predominating mode of expression, which to the foreigner's eyes and ears is unsatisfactory, being too convoluted, vague, etc. One cure for this is to involve the entire group in self-criticism, if this is an acceptable way to enhance learning. There is a universal need for clarity in communication, but there are some different ways to achieve it.

Frequently non-traditional education of media professionals must take into consideration the frequent lack-of-assurance among those doing media work. In many developing countries, media workers are not chosen on the basis of any relevant experience, but may come from a variety of educational backgrounds, or may be there simply because no one else was available to fill the job. In some nations, every college graduate is assured employment of some sort, even if their degree does not prepare them appropriately. The adult education specialist must always be alert to sense the depression and sense of isolation which may hit those working without adequate preparation, educational background or understanding of their task. A mixture of empathy, compassion and patience is needed.

There is a delicate dynamic formed even in the briefest of training programs. It includes the following relationships: the relationship between the individual and the instructor, the relationship between the instructor and the group as a whole, the relationship among members of the group, and the relationship between the training group and "outsiders" who may be important. We have found it wise to allow instructors enough time to sense such factors and to deal with them, or to be able to call upon members of the group for help.

Social contact outside the classroom or workshop is needed. One of the most important outcomes of such non-traditional educational experiences is in the sharing which occurs. It is

very valuable for many media trainees to find out that their colleagues are plagued by the same problems and fears the world over. They often gain a sense of mutual caring and support through the training sessions and personal friendships which are formed. In their own evaluations, they tell us they go away strengthened to carry out difficult tasks and feeling it is possible to do a better job.

Such a caring context also engenders trust in which trainees will begin to express real lacks and problems. The instructor, too, must be found worthy of trust if real learning is to take place. It is against such a background that basic philosophical and ethical questions become real. Ideally, the training workshop, short course, etc., becomes a mutual exchange of information with the teacher as a guide or facilitator. He or she acts as a catalyst for the learning process. Of course, this is true, too, in good traditional academic teaching. But where non-captive adults attend workshops or courses through personal choice, dictatorial teaching methods do not often work well. And media personnel have little patience with the "cloud castles" of theory which some university instructors love to build. In some countries, university teachers flee from hard reality to a world of comforting abstractions, but the non-traditional, continuing education workshop or course leaves little room for this. It is not that adults are not hungry for intellectual and cultural stimulation. It is just that they have an uncanny ability to spot the academic who has never earned his or her daily bread outside the classroom.

In our non-traditional approaches to continuing education, we reach for a combination of intellectually stimulating, yet practical learning situations.

Other advantages to bringing instruction to trainees or students in their own countries include saving the country's foreign exchange (an important consideration in some nations), cutting personal costs of the trainee, decreasing time absent from the job or from the family, and not taking key professionals away for long periods. Gerald W. Fry has a more detailed treatment of advantages of taking training or education to the student in his or her own community or country in his article, "The Economic and Political Impact of Study Abroad"¹¹.

Finally, another reason why non-traditional training and education for mass media students or professionals may be needed is this: the traditional university simply cannot afford to embark on an entire curriculum in this area. Educator Doug Stewart recently wrote that the traditional university in many countries faces increasing problems – low salaries for academic staff, deteriorating physical plants, and smaller numbers of administrators and support staff. Frequently we have found it possible to involve several "partners" in non-traditional media education and training activities. This means that the entire burden is not put on one organization, but is shared. This frequently makes work possible which could not be attempted with more limited resources.

Such practical cooperation by different organizations has also paid unexpected dividends to us as teachers. We learn more about ourselves as we are seen by others. We also learn from those we teach, and we can go back to our own organizations and apply what we have learned. Non-traditional, continuing education for media work is a two-way street. Under the right circumstances, with good luck and good planning, real teaching and learning can take place.

Notes:

- 1 "Target: The Community in Extra-Mural Programming", *Australian Journal of Adult Education* 22:1 (April, 1982) p. 21.
- 2 See his "Lifelong Education and Philosophy of Education" in *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 4:2 (1985), pp. 107-117, for a thoughtful discussion of the role of education throughout life.
- 3 "Lifelong Education: Opportunities and Obstacles", in *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 3:2 (1984), pp. 79-87.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- 5 One of Illich's best known attacks upon formal education is found in his *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).
- 6 "An Assessment by Adult Education Personnel of the Problems of Adult Education Programmes in Selected States of Nigeria, 1976-82", in *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 4:3 (1985), pp. 239-257.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 239.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 240.
- 9 "International Mission of The University of Georgia", International Development Office, Univ. of Ga., Athens, Ga., U.S.A., October, 1986, p. 1.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 In *Comparative Education Review* 28:2 (1984), pp. 203-220.