

Maltese Educational Broadcasting:

Education through the Media and the Media in Education

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Broadcasting

Educational broadcasting has formed part of the broadcasting scene in Malta since 1948. Over the years it has passed, as far as responsibility is concerned, from the hands of one to another, including the Department of Information, the Malta Broadcasting Authority, Xandir Malta (Malta's state broadcasting system), and, as it is at present, the Department of Education, which falls under the Ministry of Education and the Environment.

Educational productions (on radio only until the establishing of a local television station in the early sixties) have been handled mostly by a small staff of producer-teachers who, having the academic qualifications and training of teachers

plus the experience and/or training of broadcasters, are in the best position to tailor their programmes for a specific audience, i.e. students, many times in a class-situation. This staff has been organized into a small section which, after years of giving useful service, changed its name and orientation from Schools Broadcasting Unit to Media Education Centre. This recent development has taken into account the new interdisciplinary subject of Media Studies, a branch very closely connected to broadcasting. This subject is being disseminated in state educational institutions through efforts of the newly reorganized Centre. The present Centre is also catering for general education through the media, that is, not only narrowcasting for schools but also broadcasting

for the general public on both radio and television outside school hours. Current examples of this are programmes on the media and the classics on television, transmitted weekly between 6 and 7 p.m., and a programme about the environment on radio scheduled, also weekly, at 5.15 p.m. Both programmes are aimed at a general audience, with young people in their early and late teens particularly in mind. On more than one occasion the section in charge of broadcasting has also collaborated with the University of Malta and other educational institutions to produce programmes meant for a specific audience. The subjects covered included the modern sciences and literature.

All primary level radio programmes are accompanied by a colourful publication, with texts of poems or songs and relevant illustrations. A Guide for Teachers is given free to all class teachers. "Il-Meržuq", the pupils' magazine, is read by over 20,000 children in both state and private schools.

In countries which I have visited, Educational Broadcasting seems to take various forms and reaches its audiences through different channels. Sudwestfunk in Germany, for example, produces a large amount of school broadcasts in consultation with the education authorities of the region and in direct collaboration with experts. Our Centre is not technically equipped to produce television and radio programmes since, traditionally, the Centre has almost always made use of facilities offered by the broadcasting contractor, in our present case, Xandir Malta. Facilities include filming, editing, recording and transmission. Obviously these arrangements, though made with the best of intentions, do impose certain limitations. Any outside producer to any broadcasting station knows very well the amount of effort one has to put in so as to fit into a rigid timetable as regards the use of video equipment, transport and studio availability. All contacts with participants also have to fit into a tight schedule - and such "participants" include the weather!

However, the Media Education Centre still manages to produce not less than sixteen radio series, ranging from English and Maltese to Science and Arts programmes for primary level students. Two weekly television programmes for the general public are also produced. As is the case of the United States and Switzerland, television school broadcasts have not been found as practicable as educational broadcasts outside school hours. Besides the economical dimensions of the problem (like the number of colour T.V. sets required for every class in all schools), programmes will no doubt clash with secondary school subject timetables.

Media Education

What about Media Education itself? Media Education is a relatively new subject and so far, in Malta, it has only been introduced in certain secondary classes and in sixth forms in state schools, and at other levels (primary and secondary) in private schools. At sixth form level, students are following a three month programme of lessons as part of their enrichment course, while all students are free to become members of a Media Club, which provides academic activities. The Centre is also producing a weekly media studies slot on television, and this has proved very popular.

The Education Department, through its contacts with the Council of Europe and several other national institutes in Europe, is busy preparing a series of seminars (with guest foreign lecturers) for teachers. In the meantime a curriculum for primary level is being drawn with the help of foreign experts and text books will soon be available. It is hoped that the subject will be taught at primary level, as interdisciplinary and "en direct" for 15 minutes weekly.

In the past few years the Education Department and Ministry have embarked on a series of projects to open Resource and Documentation Centres for use by state and private schools. Some of these, including one for the French language, another for German and another which should soon be opening for the teaching of Arabic, have premises at the New Lyceum, Msida. These centres are offering reference facilities to students and teachers and are, at the same time, coordinating the teaching of the subject within the Department. The Media Education Centre is another link in this chain. The Media Education Centre is rapidly preparing a library of documents and video tapes to reach its fast growing number of users. A number of state and private schools are already equipped with video machines and the service is becoming quite popular. It is envisaged that the library will shortly be able to offer a series of about 30 slots on Media Education itself for later use in schools.
