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Media Training: A Though On Broadcast Training

By

R Balakrishnan
"MEDIA TRAINING - A THOUGHT ON BROADCAST TRAINING"

L. Bala Krishnan

A paper presented on 21.6.84 at The Media Roundtable on Health Education organised by WHO-UNESCO-IPDC-AMIC at Singapore
Mr Chairman, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen.

First of all I wish to apologise to you for not having been able to join you earlier, despite my commitment to the organisers that I’ll be available for all of the three days of the Roundtable. A number of circumstances, beyond my control disabled me from joining you yesterday, and I would hope that it will not be regarded as a discourtesy to anyone, least of all to those of you here just now.

Secondly, at the onset I wish to acknowledge that I do not have the experience to talk about training for all media. Time is limited to broadcasting, and that too not an altogether practical/professional level, but in the stuffy corridors of organisation, coordination and management at the National Broadcasting Training Centre (IPTAR) and the Asia Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD), a regional organisation grafted on and located at the Malaysian Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

This is not the first occasion one has had an opportunity to talk about broadcast training, it is not likely to be the last time either. Certainly therefore my remarks will not be startlingly new or original. My attempt will only be to share some thoughts in the hope that the interactions after the presentation will till the many gaps in the presentation itself. For that opportunity, and the pleasure of being able to be with you, I would wish to record my thanks early in the day!

That broadcast training has been a subject of concern for some time now, and has featured in many a national, regional and international debate is sufficient testimony to the fact that it is as much a "live" subject or concern, as many others in the area of education and development have been. To those of us whose bread and butter (rice and curry) it is to be engaged in the business of broadcast training, this Roundtable should give some hope about the prospects of more and qualitatively improved actions in the development of training programmes at various levels.
As far as one experience at the Institute is concerned, thus far, training has been developed in a deliberate way as a response to needs expressed or determined. Neither the Institute, nor those interested in the better utilisation of broadcasting could any more be content with that approach alone. That training must respond to a need is realistic, sensible, desirable and pragmatic! But that it should also envisage a need, and prepare for it by setting a lead is also an equally forceful and desirable reality. Such a lead could be set in examining various areas of broadcasting - programme formats; technology, policy and planning questions; systems, research, management and organisational features etc may be considered, for instance. The lack of appropriate resources* and vision about the totality of the training function have disabled us from giving due and fair attention to the latter. They have not merely been obstacles, but indeed barriers for the emergence and development of appropriate schemes of training!

More and more has been available, by way of resources to meet what are perceived to be immediate and urgent needs, arising from unplanned decisions in respect of expanded services in broadcasting in the developing world over the last 2 decades. In spite of logistical difficulties the response to those needs have been fairly easy, in that it has had to deal with numbers of persons to be trained in a given range of skills areas or in the number of manuals and learning materials that could be designed or produced. The statistical outcome of such a response has also been quite impressive. The AIBD, for instance, can claim today that it has organised 333 activities accounting for 5958 persons from the Asia-Pacific region. Such impressive statistics would make donor and recipient ecstatic, feel good, for these could be reported on and verified for the benefit of the taxpayer, the critical world community that expires interest in human resource development, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, skills sufficiency etc in the developing world.

* Resources refer not only to money: more importantly they refer to attitudes and dispositions of managements and decision makers; of those engaged in technical cooperation and assistance; of materials and infrastructure; of political commitments etc.
It is not always understood or appreciated, however, that quantities alone do not or cannot solve the problem for broadcasting to be effective or socially relevant to a society. To ensure qualitative improvement to it, the preparation therefore - training, the availability of training materials etc - rests squarely on investments that need to be made in research, evaluation, experimentation and other development considerations. Any training, in isolation to these considerations, which constitute the linchpin for planning future needs, would be of limited value; if anything, short-lived too! It is in the continuing disposition to learn from the past and dream about the future, an approach demanding of time, patience and resources, that will grant professionals unassailable opportunities and facilities to investigate, plan, forecast, experiment and execute training activities with features of qualitative improvement. Such features could only help the cause of broadcast practice and broadcast professionalism. That assumption, however, can have meaning only when managements in broadcasting on the one hand, and international technical assistance sources on the other, are also equally given to the same belief that broadcast training to be meaningful and relevant would require investments in research, experiment and evaluation of broadcasting as well as training. But believing means doing. Doing, however, means problems, and often many will opt the way not to have problems - which is not to do anything or do those that will be statistically dazzling!

If the experience up to now is anything to go by, instilling an appreciation among management that training aims at not only skills formation, but also at a wider education and knowledge formation which demands the utilisation of skills and knowledge other than those associated with broadcasting, will continue to be an uphill task. Nevertheless, I must hasten to add, that there have been, at various times, people and institutions with a commitment to, and a belief in, training in widest serve and its value. This Roundtable is testimony to it!
The problem with training seems to begin with what is meant or understood by that word; how it should be defined, determined and carried out; and what is expected of it. It has been said that training means "a systematic instructional process aimed at improving the knowledge and skill of employees so that they may better understand and perform their tasks."

In the world of broadcasting, however, one often encounters the argument that formal training is not possible. Proponents of that argument would suggest that ours is a world of the arts, the make-belief, dependent on creativity, talent, emotions, moods, intuition, dreams etc. They are not wrong. Indeed, they obviously are right; but possibly only so much and no more.

That a great number of skills, talents and disciplines are involved in the making of a broadcast programme, no one can dispute or doubt. Some, one may be born with; others could be acquired either through formal learning or practical experience of trial and error. They range from scripting, editing, presenting, producing, designing to engineering and technical operations. They do not exclude psychology, sociology, politics, economics, culture, values, ethics, norms, education, religion and social patterns and institutions in a country. They are dependent on the state of technology no less than they are on the organisational and structural patterns of the institutions that make them. They are not just the creations of those who work in broadcasting, but the result and reflection of the total society and the interactions therein. In the circumstances, whether broadcasting is open and straightforward or closed and politically motivated, the people in it (who by and large are quite ordinary, I think) need to be made aware of the relationships between broadcasting and society, broadcasting and government, broadcasting and other media, broadcasting and its constraints or potential, and a whole host of other relationships depending on, or despite, the manner broadcasting itself is structured or used within a country. Against these premises, a number of questions arise:-

- What should be the content/structure of any training scheme that may be devised?
- Could you train broadcasters from different disciplines or skills areas, in groups? or
- Do you need to train people of each skill area separately?
- Where and when in the life of a broadcaster, do you train him/her?
- If it is a continuous affair, are there critical points in his career when he could benefit from some training?
- Who determines, and by what means, these critical points?
- Should the broadcaster be trained exclusively in relation to broadcasting practice and broadcasting technology, or should he also be trained in relation to other media and other concerns?
- To what extent should there be a meeting ways (or hearts/minds) in training programmes between the classical role of the broadcast media, and the new-found missionary role of development support assigned to it or expected of it?
- How do you rationalise a mix of these roles, in as much as there is a need to find a balance between theory and practice, in designing training schemes?

There could be many more questions. The answers, however, will all point towards the positive results that training can or will yield. No matter what differences there may be in approaches to, or content of, training there can be little disagreement that the product of training should be a professional broadcaster, much better than he was before being subjected to it; one whose skills have improved and who is sensitised to the society and audience he serves; one who does a professional job of his work on completion of training; or one who is professionally equipped to meet challenges and tasks ahead of him!

Economic and cost/benefit considerations apart, by universal standards of responsibility, public respect and professionalism, it is fairly true to say that the best broadcasting organisations in the world are those which are most deeply committed to training. None can claim that such organisations are unaware or do not care about the costs involved; none has diminished its training commitment on account of cost awareness.
I do not believe that broadcasting, which to some extent as a profession is dependent on innate/native talent, imagination, creative ability etc., is so special that it can't be bought within the parameters of formal training. The possibilities in training are much more significant than mere instruction in a craft. The day may not be far off when the need for the academic preparation of broadcast producers will be considered as obvious and essential as it is today for engineers. Time was when the informal apprenticeship system, still used and loudly supported in many/most cases to prepare producers, was also the practice in engineering - or for that matter, in other professions such as law, medicine, architecture, accountancy etc. In as much as they have moved and changed, broadcasting too will, or must.

While in some cases commercialism and show business have been the chief influences in the character and development of broadcasting, a decade or two of worldwide Development Experience however has brought about a growing recognition that meaningful development in/of society can only be achieved through a wide involvement of the population, and that mass communication - notably broadcasting - is among the principal instruments for initiating and sustaining this development. The recognition of broadcasting's potential must inevitably lead to the conclusion that the amateur "producer"/"broadcaster" is an anachronism. The need for production and programme training, its purpose and realisation should be seen as part of "a new professionalism" or "a new profession", expressed in the development and emergence of trainers and appropriate training programmes.

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