

BROADCASTING FOR CULTURAL SUB-GROUPS

Introduction

SEBAC (NSW) is becoming increasingly aware of the need to examine more closely the way in which programs cater for the various cultural groups within the one language group - that is, situations where the program is mono-lingual with a multicultural or multinational audience, or situation where there is a geographical identification covering a group of languages.

In the Committee's view these cultural "sub-groups" are distinguished by a number of factors: religion; different national boundaries; and differences in the use of language etc. In identifying such sub-groups the Committee felt that more than one of these factors should be present and that the community should be of reasonable size.

SEBAC (NSW) is already aware of the pressure within the Arabic speaking communities for the Arabic program to be more responsive to the needs of different cultural sub-groups. The Committee also identified the following programs as ones that need to cater for different cultural sub-groups:

Arabic	Jewish
Chinese	Scandinavian
French	Indian Sub-Continent
German	Assyrian
Spanish	Pacific Islanders

It is noted that some of these programs were already catering for sub-groups.

Proposal

In the past SEBAC has considered the desirability of adding "cultural advisers" to broadcasting teams to ensure that the needs of cultural sub-groups were met. However, it was agreed that there could be difficulties with this approach as the cultural advisers would not necessarily be responsible for compiling or directly contributing to programs nor would they be accountable to the listening audience. This could lead to an untenable situation. In addition it would be difficult to assess the effectiveness of the cultural advisers, and further their presence could undermine the authority of the co-ordinators.

SEBAC would rather recommend a different approach. Firstly, the various cultural sub-groups within a particular program should be identified. Secondly, particular individuals, either broadcasters or contributors, should be nominated to be directly responsible for ensuring that the information and entertainment needs of these sub-groups are met. The co-ordinator would retain overall responsibility and control of the program. It may be desirable to formalise this approach by engaging "specialised broadcasters" with primary responsibility for the particular cultural sub-group. In this way responsibility and accountability would be more clearly defined.

To avoid contention a notional proportion of total broadcast time should be allocated for sub-group broadcasting, with the proportion reflecting the size and needs of the group in relation to the overall size of the community.

ETHNIC TELEVISION EXPERIMENT

In response to a request from the SBS for comment on the ethnic television experiment to date, SEBAC (NSW) held an extraordinary meeting on 12 June 1979 to discuss the matter. The following comments summarise the Committee's reactions to the experiment as a whole, as well as listing the individual responses of Committee members.

GENERAL COMMITTEE COMMENT

The Committee made the following general comments:

1. Relationship between Ethnic Television and Ethnic Radio

Ethnic television and ethnic radio should develop independently although in a complementary manner. Each medium should concentrate on what it can do best. Although some overlapping must and will occur, in the light of the limited funds available, the most rationale solution is to utilise available funds in as diversified a manner as possible.

2. Target Audience

The Committee noted that the experimental ethnic television service was a multicultural service designed to appeal to the whole community. It was felt that such a service would provide programming about the cultural backgrounds of ethnic communities and their experiences in Australia in such a way as to appeal to a wide audience. Such programming should contribute to the integration of ethnic communities in Australia. A number of members felt that the service should concentrate on the needs of ethnic communities in Australia rather than simply relying on overseas program material from homeland countries.

3. Objectives

A number of Committee members felt that to properly assess the experimental ethnic television service a clear set of objectives was an essential pre-requisite.

4. Discussion Panels

The Committee felt that discussion panels should only be used to discuss program items when this was important to the understanding or further explanation of the items. In such cases the panels should be selected on the basis of their specific and relevant expertise, experience or knowledge. Meaningless chatter about program items served only to distract the viewers' attention from the items themselves.

It was felt that where explanation was required for a program this could be best done by a brief announcement before and after the item. Such announcements, particularly in the case of potentially controversial or sensitive items, should be prepared by persons from ethnic communities with an awareness of and sensitivity to the problems of those communities.

Some members felt that where program items were to be discussed by a panel, this discussion should precede rather than follow the item.

5. Political, Controversial or Sensitive Program Items

A number of Committee members expressed strong reservations over two program items - the Russian film "Olympics in Moscow", and the Canadian film about a Chilean immigrant, "Steel Blues". They saw the first item as providing an unrealistic and rosy picture of Moscow and being predominantly a commercial promotion by the Russian Government. They saw the second item as being divisive and exacerbating tensions within the Chilean community in Australia.

The Committee felt that great care had to be taken to avoid divisive material or material that was politically partisan. Some members pointed to the fact that even words in a song could have political connotations. SEBAC would therefore recommend that:

- .. any program item made by a Government agency be identified as such and, where necessary, placed in a proper perspective;
- .. that pre-viewing panels made up of members of ethnic communities with a knowledge of and sensitivity to the problems of those communities be established to pre-screen items.

6. Advance Notice of Program Items

Many members mentioned that they had received complaints from members of their communities about the lack of advance notice of program items relating to their particular communities. The following proposals were suggested as ways of remedying this situation:

- .. providing co-ordinators and broadcasters with as much advance notice of future programs as possible - particularly indicating when material relevant to specific communities was to be screened;
- .. at the commencement of the Sunday program providing viewers with information on what items were to be screened that morning;
- .. using a slide during the program, as with some commercial television news programs, indicating what items were still to come.

7. Duration of Items

Some members felt that long items should be avoided in order to maintain viewers' interest.

8. Language Usage

Members agreed with the use of English as a common language to bind the various items together and to make them understandable to the wider audience. However they also stressed the importance of the use of community languages and therefore felt that where relevant, programs should be bilingual.

9. Local versus Overseas Content

Members felt that local production was important to provide exposure to local artists, to provide programming on matters relevant to ethnic Australians in Australia, to provide coverage of local ethnic events and to generally reflect the interests of ethnic Australians. Members mentioned that local production should not seek to imitate in a second or third-rate sort of way material which could be better produced overseas.

10. Interviewers, Interpreters, Translations

The Committee felt that great care had to be taken by interviewers and others to accurately reflect the answers made by interviewees in languages other than English. It noted that there had been many complaints made within the Arabic community about the item in Program 5 involving an interview with a Lebanese taxi-driver. Apparently the translation of the interviewee's responses by the interviewer did not always accurately reflect what was said.

11. Experimentation

Members felt that there should be more experimentation within the program, particularly with the structure of the 3 hour program which basically seems to have remained the same from the beginning. Rather than treating the whole three hours as one unit, it could perhaps be divided into a number of either independent or inter-related sub-units. This could allow for greater experimentation within the program format. It was felt that a three hour program unit was fairly heavy going for viewers.

12. Involvement of Ethnic Communities

The Committee felt that ethnic television provides a very good means of filling the cultural void in the lives of many ethnic Australians and of acting as a bridge between ethnic communities and the community at large. It is important therefore that any ethnic television service be aware of and sensitive to the needs and problems of ethnic communities. This could be ensured by, where possible, maximising the participation of members of ethnic communities within the experimental service.

13. General

Members of the Committee also made the following general points:

- .. the Sunday morning timeslot was inconvenient for many people;
- .. they needed more time to properly assess the experiment.

INDIVIDUAL COMMENT BY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

1. (i) There are some advantages in a 'smorgasbord-type' presentation, in that it is designed to attract a heterogeneous type of audience, and avoid compartmentalized viewing (ie switching off at the end of one's community's program).
- (ii) Allowances have to be made for the difficulty in finding program material which is both interesting and politically neutral.
- (iii) Sub-units of a three hour program unit should be constructed on subject-matter rather than on a cultural or linguistic basis. Otherwise the program is not likely to attract an audience outside a given community.
- (iv) There is no point in having a discussion panel to evaluate a program that has already been inflicted on its audience. Such 'discussions' should take place beforehand. Evaluations 'after-the-event' only prejudice the issue and make it very difficult for the viewers to offer their own unbiased opinion. A team of 'experts' influences the judgments made by viewers (sometimes subconsciously).
- (v) Many of the programs, particularly those offered in the Magazine segment are excellent. Contributions made by migrants should be given all the publicity they so richly deserve. (The item "Weaving" was a very good example of this).
- (vi) The Soviet film promoting the Moscow Olympics should not have been screened. It was 'commercial' (in that its prime purpose was to attract visitors to the country) and as such it represented an abuse of viewing time intended for Australian communities.
- (vii) On the question of "commercialism", while this would be undesirable, the popular contra-argument about its disadvantages for small communities appears to be nothing but lip-service. As it is, small communities have not as yet had a share of television time, though commercial interests have not been injected.
- (viii) Programs must relate to community needs. There are some good Canadian programs on their Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian communities which would be suitable for screening in Australia.

2. (i) Although Ethnic T.V. must consider as its audience the community at large, it must never forget its prime purpose - that is to provide specific services to Ethnic groups and communities. Only within this purpose must it consider the community at large.
- (ii) The Ethnic T.V. must not be allowed to become the platform of the tourist industry of any particular country and of any particular political ideology. For this reason it must never be allowed to become the tool of activists who perceive, understand and project the corresponding communities not as they really are but as they wish them to be.
- (iii) The identification of particular needs and methods by which this will be remedied must be done by people with strong motivation who have:
- .. true knowledge of the particular group;
 - .. good background knowledge and insight into the particular group.
- (iv) To avoid exploitation of Ethnic T.V. against the real needs of the ethnic communities its commercialization must be avoided at any cost. Almost all ethnic communities are subject to the development of monopolies in the Ethnic Press media.
- (v) Migrants have many needs which Ethnic T.V. can help to alleviate. The screening of films in their particular language, culture etc. is of prime importance. At the same time they will appreciate better the present mood of Australia if, in their own language, they are encouraged to learn the history of their adopted country, particularly the period of early settlement. The indigenous people of Australia, the Aboriginal, must also be included in this category.
- (vi) The migration history of each particular ethnic group must in time become the subject of Ethnic T.V. Their present situation, further problems etc. is something which Ethnic T.V. must deal with in a documentary manner.
- (vii) The fact that Ethnic T.V. commands, by its very nature, a large audience, is of great advantage which must be fully utilised. Screening therefore of as many short and cross-ethnic segments will serve and satisfy this audience better. Large segments must be avoided.
- (viii) No specific time slots must be allocated to any ethnic group, but their numbers cannot be ignored altogether in program making and time allocation.
- (ix) The duration and the time allocated to the experimental service are unsuitable to say the least. A large number of interested people are deprived of the

opportunity to enjoy the program and others are tempted to forsake other things to see it. Three hours is much too long for someone to sit and watch the program.

- (x) Consideration should be given to allocating prime time once a week for this purpose. By this manner the integration of the program into general programming will bring Australians of different cultural backgrounds closer and help them realise their common destiny and accept their diversity.
 - (xi) Local and overseas news, and panel discussions, must gradually be introduced with discretion.
 - (xii) If the Ethnic T.V. is to function well and fulfill its purpose the use of English and ethnic languages must be used where appropriate.
- 3.
- (i) Experimental television service appears to have been done in a somewhat rushed manner with the producers grabbing material from wherever they can.
 - (ii) There seems to have been a failure to develop a proper experimental format or to identify a target audience or set of objectives for the experimental service.
 - (iii) Political subjects in programs should be handled with care and sensitivity but should not be totally eliminated. However, communities should not be put in the position of having to counter overseas government propaganda.
 - (iv) Programming should concentrate on local material. Ethnics are ethnics in Australia not overseas. Communities should be able to present themselves without resorting to overseas material.
- 4.
- (i) General community reaction to the experimental service has been good.
 - (ii) It is good that such a service exists.
- 5.
- (i) Would question whether some of the programs give migrants the identity that they are seeking.
 - (ii) Programs about Australia are better placed on ordinary television than on an ethnic service.
 - (iii) There have been complaints from the Chinese community about the lack of Chinese programs.

6. (i) Enjoyed the Portuguese item in Program 7 because of its emphasis on folkloric traditions. Migrants do not come to Australia to learn a new way of life - they already have one. Their traditions are what they bring to Australia and what they wish to show to the rest of the community.
7. (i) There is a lack of local Sydney productions; overseas productions are good but don't relate to local conditions (e.g. problems faced by migrants).
- (ii) Local productions could focus on the life of migrants in Australia, their problems, their entertainment etc.
- (iii) The programs to date have not achieved their objective of bringing minorities and the majority together.
- (iv) English sub-titles should be used in programs in community languages.
- (v) The Greek singer, Alexandra, who featured three times in one program did not reflect Greek traditional music. Her songs were offensive to members of the Greek community.
- (vi) Format of the experimental service should not be continued in the permanent service.
8. (i) The experimental ethnic television service to date has not really been very experimental, it has been more of a test run to check on the suitability of people for the permanent service.
- (ii) Ethnic television should not feature language programs like the ethnic radio, it should be multicultural in emphasis.
- (iii) English should be used as a cement to bind all the program items together.
- (iv) Sub-titles should be avoided.
- (v) Long items should be avoided.
- (vi) The use of local talent should be encouraged within the experimental service.
- (vii) Interviewers should avoid embellishing the responses of their interviewees, nor interpose themselves between the camera and interviewee.
- (viii) Notices in a shop in the Lebanese taxi-driver item in Program 5 had political connotations. The interviewer changed the interviewees name in the sequence from "Ali" to "Alan".

9. (i) Panel discussions to date have been artificial and empty. They have not led anywhere or said anything.
- (ii) Commentaries on program items should be written by people from ethnic communities aware of and sensitive to the needs and problems of those communities.
10. (i) The Canadian film on a Chilean worker "Steel Blues" was completely objectionable.
- (ii) The Government's criteria for ethnic broadcasting include avoidance of political partisanship and this should apply to television.
11. (i) The purpose of ethnic television is to help Australians - particularly ethnic Australians. Ethnic television should be an extension of ethnic radio - no more, no less. It should assist by providing education, information and presenting the cultures of ethnic groups. It should concentrate on the ethnic communities in Australia.
12. (i) Programs should not divide communities by presenting extreme points of view.
- (ii) Ethnic television should be devoted to cultural programming and should not include political matter.