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EDITORIAL: EDUCATION & TV

HISTORIES OF A VISION

Following the recent Covid-19 pandemic, television has been once again recognised as an educational medium of great importance by educational institutions and citizens. Throughout the pandemic, a time characterised by an unprecedented period where restricted freedom of movement mandated long stretches of time in the domestic space, television once again came to be seen as a vital component in the education process. For many parents faced with the challenges of home schooling, educational material offered by broadcasters, both current and older programmes accessed via digital platforms, provided a crucial way for learning to be provided within the home and overseen by parents rather than teachers. Television programmes also fit into a useful learning and teaching model in that its programmes are often presented in the form of ‘segments’ or short items, an approach which John Ellis contrasts with the “progressive accumulation of sequences that characterises cinematic narration.”¹

All forms of television programmes, whether factual or fictional, aim to educate their viewers and stimulate them, to prompt reflection and to elicit engagement. Television offers important commentary on the way we live, the way we perceive the world and the way in which we articulate these ideas. As Ellis noted in *Visible Fictions*, “Broadcast TV is the private life of a nation state defining the intimate and inconsequential sense of everyday life.”² It is the very intimacy of the medium and its forms of address along with its focus on the everyday and inconsequential that align it so well as an educational form. A programme may be created to be directly educational or opt to indirectly tackling important topics via subtly embedded messages or an innovative form or approach. Many TV programmes aimed at young children tend to not be overtly explicit in the issues they want to address. *Sesame Street* (1969–) has taught young audiences using a mixture of actors, presenters and characters for over fifty years, educating children about diversity, natural disasters and historical events through gentle engagement, humour and music. More recently the CBeebies programme *Hey Duggee* (2014–) has attained cult status following its creative treatment of educational material delivered in an inclusive and joyful manner. Reaching 1.4 million viewers and being the most watched children television show on the iPlayer during the spring 2020 lockdown, the programme has won national and international awards and accolades reminding us that television provides a happy medium that repackages educational labour as an appealing past-time. As well as fitting within a broadly educational remit and exploring eclectic topics which include the water cycle and evolution it also highlights the importance of teamwork, friendship and family.

In an unexpected development, the COVID crisis of the present day suggests that television (especially publicly financed television) is resuming its somewhat forgotten role as an educational medium. Positive experiences during the pandemic have strengthened the argument that television is not just another audiovisual medium among many doomed by competition with the mass of audiovisual media productions on the Internet. It is also important to place anxieties about the future of television within a broader, and inevitably cyclical, context of audio-visual anxieties; for example, material written about a potential TV-induced apocalypse about ten years before the launch of the World Wide Web suggested that television would not and could not survive.³ Fortunately, such dire pronouncements went unrealised. Serious information, high-quality documentaries, school TV and quality children’s programming are produced in large volume, often by and on behalf of public broadcasters. The genealogical roots of (European) television from state or public radio strongly indicate that television and education can form a vital and beneficial alliance, if the producing institutions are subject to a general mandate and democratic control.

The articles included in this issue take into consideration the relationship between television and education in its broadest sense, offering historical studies of television programming, national policies, audience attitudes and evolving socio-political contexts. It includes case studies of different broadcasters, specific educational programming initiatives, government or state education policy delivered through the television medium, the intersections between broadcast programmes and what is retained in television archives. They cover Turkey, Germany, Italy, the UK, and Finland and map the period from the 1960s to the present day.

All of this material helps situate educational provision on television within broader histories of both television as a form and education as an overarching idea or objective. A number of studies included here examine how television was instrumental in national and transnational efforts to combine learning with entertainment, pedagogical campaigns and information literacy. In 'Look and Read: BBC School Television and Literacy Teaching 1957-1979' Steven Barclay explores the use of educational materials by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and how their approach was progressive or innovative. It places all of this work in the UK post-war context and the focus on social mobility, education and learning that was fostered by the new Labour government. The article argues how the School Broadcasting Council (SBC) offered valuable guidance for the BBC and its existence gave those working in the field of education an insight into the broadcasting world, thus creating an important bridge between the worlds of education and learning and television and broadcasting. Barclay contends that trends in education, such as a focus on literacy and phonics, shaped television educational policy in this period and that many who worked within BBC educational programming often transitioned into other work in the creative and cultural industries, thus allowing educational television programming to operate as a useful training ground.

In his article 'Approaches on the Relation between Television and Education from Public Service Broadcasting to Private Broadcasting in Turkey,' Süleyman İlaslan offers a useful counterpoint to Barclay's intervention with his detailed exploration of Turkish educational television between the mid-1960s and 1990. To address this significant time span, he sets important points of emphasis to offer a systematic understanding. He argues that Turkish educational television was established late compared to Western European TV systems and only had a few decades to develop within an area of tension between different political interests. With the approval of commercial broadcasters from 1990, the heyday of Turkish educational television ended and a new era of strong program competition began.

As well as considering how television material and different broadcast policy evolve and emerge in these periods, some articles in this collection also explore how some programmes were specifically created or commissioned in order to address issues of the past. In "'I am a historian as well.'" - The West German Reception of *Die Wannseekonferenz* (1984) and Portraying Holocaust Perpetrators in Public Television Drama,' Nicholas K. Johnson describes the important discursive role played by West German television in coming to terms with National Socialism. His article deals in detail with the background to the production and controversies surrounding the docudrama *The Wannsee Conference*, broadcasted just before Christmas 1984. Written by Paul Mommertz and directed by Heinz Schirk, the production fitted into a series of television events of the 1970s and 1980s that partly produced in Germany or, like the mini-series *Holocaust* (1979) by Marvin Chomsky, taken over. As the article shows, in the 1970s and 80s television was able to take on a driving social role in dealing with the difficult subject of coming to terms with Nazi crimes, a role that cinema was denied for several years to come. In 'Educational Imperialism: *Phantom India* and The Non-Aligned Movement's New World Information Order, 1969-1980' Jelena Ćulibrk also deals with a topic from the 1970s, the decade after 1968, in which questions about the global future and education were discussed very broadly and intensively for the first time. At that time, as Ćulibrk writes, the dispute over educational television could even trigger an international controversy in media politics, and helps illustrate the overlaps between television, culture, politics and education.

Maarit Jaakkola and Marjaana Mykkänen consider public service broadcasting as a resource for media information literacy education. Their article 'Public Service Television as Education Factual Programmes and The Media and Information Literacy (Mil) Policy Discourse' explores Finland's global reputation for its national media education policy and its strategy to internationally lead in this field frames this discourse. The authors recontextualise factual television from an interdisciplinary perspective, borrowing traditions and terminology from social and pedagogical

sciences and television and media studies to shed light on a genre of programmes which has seldom been discussed in the context of media education and literacy. Jaakkola and Mykkänen argue that factual television contributes to media literacy and education following four modalities: in-media pedagogies, on-media pedagogies, with-media pedagogies and through-media pedagogies. Within the first form factual programmes promote learning based on the specific subject and content they deliver, while in the second modality, learning is based on the medium/genre itself, advancing knowledge at meta-level. With-media pedagogies facilitate informal learning and promote knowledge for different purposes than the original intentions, whereas with through-media pedagogies factual programmes involve viewers in the process of co-production of content, transforming consumers into prosumers of knowledge.

In their audiovisual contribution to this special edition Rüdiger Steinmetz and Judith Kretzschmar focus on the specific uses of television material and how it can help to fill in the historical gaps experienced by younger generations. Their audiovisual piece, 'The Great Transformation in Germany of 1989/90 from the View of Local Television (1990-1995)' presents material drawn from the start of the period of reunification of Germany and the Peaceful Revolution (1990-1995). The authors contend that the local television programmes that they have identified here are a part of living memory that transforms personally experienced memories into a cultural memory. Thus television has a crucial role to play in helping to both establish and maintain culture memory and traditions. Reports on local traditions and customs, the use of dialects, the beauties of the landscapes are all found in the local television programmes identified and are juxtaposed with the acute threats, losses and profound changes which characterised changes in the 'Heimat' in the early 1990s. These programmes also highlight the nostalgia which characterises idealizations of the GDR and the 'longing' for socialist times. The authors argue that utilising a methodology which draws on this archival TV material, privileges the local and adopts a 'history from below' approach, allows for the different views of specific generations, all shaped by the same political events, yet with varying responses to the material, to be explored in detail. They argue for the importance of this local material and how it should be both preserved in an accessible format and catalogued within local archives, but also made available in physical classrooms and as an online educational resource. Along with other articles by authors in this special edition, they highlight the difficulties experienced in accessing the material and argue that much of it has been overlooked and is long overdue for critical reappraisal.

In 'Educational Television Goes Digital. Children's Television and Italian Public Service Broadcasting during the COVID-19 Pandemic,' Paolo Carelli and Anna Sfardini shift the attention to the Italian context, providing not only an analysis of recent challenges brought about by the public health emergency, but also a historical survey of RAI's pedagogical offer. The scholars contribute with a useful overview of crucial educational programmes produced by the Italian public service broadcaster, which has poured significant resources into education also because of its Catholic inspiration. They consider, in particular, diverse programmes involving the direct participation of students and school groups more broadly, *Chissà chi lo sa* (RAI, 1961-1972) and *Per un pugno di libri* (RAI, 2001-2020). In the new millennium the educational function of television, here intended under its more scholastic guide, survived only in this typology of competition shows as younger generations relied more heavily on the internet, social media and hardly engage with television. As a result, the Covid-19 pandemic represented a challenge but also an important opportunity to reinvent and renew the ethos of the broadcaster in terms of educational remit. Carelli and Sfardini carefully studied the challenges faced by Italian PSB in 2020 and underlined how RAI returned to its pivotal and original role in learning and teaching when schools closed and remote learning was implemented at every level. Their article draws attention to three examples of 'television school', programmes aimed at different age groups which embody the distinctive role of RAI in diversifying learning opportunities. They contend that RAI's educational output during the pandemic encapsulates the unique opportunity and reaffirms its role as compass for the national community.

Overall, the articles presented in this issue move beyond the dichotomous relationship between television and education, namely the contrast between considering television *either* as a subject to be taught or a tool for education. Albeit not comprehensive and fully exhaustive, this special issue aims to shed some light on historical and new trends in this complex relationship. More empirical and archival work remains to be conducted and more comparative work will help to develop the work being undertaken in this field. However, the material presented here offers some new points of reflection for future investigation into the ways in which television educates and is the subject of learning. The changes brought about over the past two years have not only guided us into a reflection of new ways in which we can

teach (about) television, but also made us re-consider the ways in which television has contributed to the educational effort of European nations since its inception. We hope this will mark a renaissance of new studies in children's television, pedagogical remit, reception and media literacy.

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Notes

1. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 143.
2. Ibid, 5.
3. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985).