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# A Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Cultural Learning Through Cable Television

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## INTRODUCTION

**I**T is imperative that today's college students understand worldwide cultural systems if these future leaders intend to participate effectively in solving the economic, social, environmental, health and security problems that beset the planet (Ross and Krider, 1990). In addition, emphasis on international perspectives in American higher education is a critical element for students growing up in a country that has yet to come to grips with its own cultural diversity; today's citizens must appreciate the interconnectedness of the world's social and economic systems, as well as understand the pluralistic nature of their own nation (Taylor, 1989, p. 4).

These objectives embody the rationale for internationalizing across the college curriculum. But while many treatises have praised the pursuit of global awareness in the classroom, it has been repeatedly demonstrated that people across age groups in the United States lack key knowledge about worldwide cultures—worse yet is the meager American interest in international concerns (Starck & Kruckeberg, 1990, p. 2). How can college faculty encourage students to learn about other cultures and countries? How can they inject the international dimension economically and practically into their university coursework?

Several methods are offered by Tuttle (1990 p. 2), who described three basic models for internationalizing the curriculum: (1) bringing international students to local campuses; (2) providing for student experiences in other countries by sending them there; and (3) infusing faculty experiences in foreign countries back into the curriculum at the home site campus.

The present study seeks to add a fourth model: the use of televisual mass media, primarily those available to both educators and students in the United States through local cable

television facilities. The world comes to the classroom through these resources, bringing a variety of programming that can supplement an infinite number of topic areas. Students not only gain knowledge through structured consumption of media, but can also experience a reduction in uncertainty of other cultures and countries, as was demonstrated in a study of mass media by Ross and Krider (1990). Tuttle's three models represent the opportunity for effective experiential learning, but have been found to have limitations. The presence of international students on college campuses enriches college life, but school counselors often find that social interaction between these students and their American peers is minimal. International students, therefore, are a vastly underused resource. The models suggesting that faculty and students actually visit other countries would be an obvious cornerstone of any "internationalizing" effort, but funding for such expeditions has been constrained by economic forces affecting both faculty and students. The mass media model is a far more realistic method of bringing cultural experiences to students. The cost of utilizing television is low, and the so-called "communications revolution" of the past decade has made broadcast and satellite programming available that, until recently, has been inaccessible to ordinary Americans because of technological or financial limitations; in fact, the majority of international news, and informational and cultural fare which can now be found on satellite and cable channels was non-existent as recently as the 1970s (Dominick et al., 1990).

### TELEVISION'S USEFULNESS IN COLLEGES

Non-broadcast television has been successfully integrated into American college curricula since the 1950s. First used in communications classes, the medium's utility soon expanded to enhance science curricula—such as botany—and lecture sessions in psychology and the classics (Callahan, 1953; Griffith and MacLennan, 1964, Chap. 3). More modern applications of non-broadcast TV include "instructional television" (ITV) and distance-delivered instruction through telecourses and interactive televisual systems. The greatest resistance toward the use of television in college instruction comes not from theorists or empiricists, but from faculty who believe that "good teaching depends upon direct contact with students" (Koontz, 1989, p. 46). Indeed, while the inherent merits of ITV have won converts among many communications researchers, ITV's application in higher education has been hindered by resistance to technology and the fear that television lacks pedagogical rigidity (Evans, 1967; Hillard, 1985).

Nevertheless, televisual programming within higher education has been successfully employed in both the U.S. and overseas for language instruction (Morandi and deAguilar, 1991), and for more generalized applications (Hillard, 1985). Empirically, it has been found most effective as a demonstrator of abstract concepts, as a relator of human experiences, and as an imaging tool which can provide students with modeling that they are not likely to conceive of on their own (Bates, 1985).

Using mass media for cultural education is not a new idea, but educators and program producers in the U.S. have not been as quick to use them toward that end as they have in other countries. The British broadcasting system, both radio and television, has from its inception incorporated education in programming as part of its mission. When Britain's Open University was formed in 1971, it had already been promised up to 30 hours a week of television time by the BBC. Other countries that have traditionally offered educational broadcasting through mass media include Austria, Italy, France, Spain, Norway, the Netherlands, and Japan (Schulte, 1983).

In America, television current affairs programming is now being used in place of conventional textbooks in those subject areas dealing with rapidly unfolding world developments, such as history and political science. While it may take years to revise a traditional textbook, college educators are relying on the quickness of television—as well as print mass

media—to help their students comprehend dynamic global events (*Christian Science Monitor*, 1991).

Many academic departments are cable-connected and most have video players, so access to on-air telecasts as well as videotaped programs is already available. The time is not far off when most educators will be able to tap into international broadcasts directly from the classroom. Added to that are the endless variety of programs that can be assigned for home viewing by students, most of whom have access to cable television (CATV).

Nearly 61 percent of U.S. households with television sets receive basic cable TV services, which includes more than 30 channels for each household (*Broadcasting*, 1992). Individuals owning two or more sets make up 65 percent of the 93.1 million TV households in America. Industry figures show that average daily viewing for adults totals four hours and forty minutes, for teens, three hours and fourteen minutes, and three hours and twenty minutes for children. These data demonstrate that students are already spending considerable time as viewers of cable channel programs. "Though the newspaper has been the traditional means of mass communications, evidence suggests that the electronic media now play a more crucial role in the education of great masses of people, whether that education is formal and systematic, or informal," according to Schulte (1983, p. 139). American educators and administrators can build on this reality.

### USE OF CABLE-TV-AVAILABLE RESOURCES

In 1989, recognizing their own potential as an educational resource, major cable companies and programmers created Cable in the Classroom (CIC) to help K-to-12th grade educators integrate educational programming into their curricula. Members set aside special blocks of air time for educational programs that have no commercial interruption and no copyright restrictions except a time limit on use of video copies. CIC also provides free installation and free basic service to selected schools. The Cable in the Classroom organization reports that 9.9 million students at 12,400 public junior and senior high schools now have free cable service in their schools. Some of the benefits of this agenda could also be utilized by colleges and universities because many of the programs listed in the CIC calendar are geared to an audience well beyond high school level. *With greater interest from faculties, college-level guides would probably be forthcoming.*

CIC lists educational programming according to general disciplines — such as "Arts/Humanities" and "Science" — but it does not specifically address the topic of international awareness at the college level. In order to get a truer sense of the commitment of various outlets to programming of this nature, a telephone survey of 35 American CATV producers and providers was conducted in February, 1992.

Although most of the networks contacted did not articulate any official dedication to international cultural programming, 12 qualified as high providers of such programming. High providers are those which either: 1) routinely telecast programs or program segments produced in the United States about other countries, or, (2) telecast shows in the U.S. which are produced in other countries concerning a variety of subjects. This listing distills and supplements the more general CIC catalogue offerings, and can be seen in Table 1.

Among high providers are three important networks that air most or all programs in languages other than English. *The International Channel*, a 24-hour multi-lingual satellite network, offers news, sports, movies, variety shows and performing arts in 17 languages from all over the world. This channel reaches 3.1 million cable subscribers, and gives students vast opportunities to learn about other cultures. Game shows, talk shows, dramas and variety shows constitute the bulk of offerings, but 40 percent of programming is multi-lingual news. Newscasts are telecast via satellite daily from Manila, Montreal, Moscow, Paris, Taiwan, Tokyo and other cities. Other programs include, for example, Hindi serial dramas and

TABLE 1  
LISTING OF CATV HIGH PROVIDERS  
OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMING

SERVICE:	DESCRIPTION:	EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMS:
Arts & Entertainment	performing arts, historical documentary	Shakespeare/"Hound of the Baskervilles"
BBC TV World Service	(U.S. launch in late '93) global public affairs	"World Newsdesk"/ policy specials
Bravo	literary-theatrical	international films
CNBC	consumer news; world business & market report	"Japan Business Today"/ "Smart Living"
CNN	24-hour world news & public affairs	"International News Hr"/ "The World Today"
C-SPAN	Congress, politics and public affairs	"Journalist Roundtable"/ European politics
Discovery Channel	non-fiction / nature, science, history	"The Nature of Things"/ "France Panorama"
Galavision	Spanish-language American general	Caribbean / Latin
International Channel	24-hour multi-lingual (17 languages)	movies; news; drama; talk; performing arts
The Learning Channel	cultural-historical	"History of the World"/ "American Short Story"
Public B'cast Service (PBS)	general instructional, cultural, news	"The Sacred Hindu Text,"/"Civil War"
Univision	Spanish-language	news, talk, sports

specialty shows such as "Armenian Horizon," "Sounds Brazilian," and "Jerusalem on Line." IC is available at reasonable rates for educators; schools and colleges can subscribe at a per-student rate. Institutions can sample the fare before subscribing, obtainable on request

through contacting IC at (617) 734-7815.

*Univision* telecasts in Spanish through 33 stations and 550 cable systems. Programs are varied — movies, talk shows, sports, news, — with about half produced in America and half produced in Mexico, Central and South America, and occasionally Spain. The network does not allow off-air videotaping (a problem addressed later in this text), but permission is freely granted to educational institutions for downlink services.

Another Spanish language network is *GalaVision*, serving 300 cable systems. Programming includes soap operas, sports, dramas and news concerned primarily with Caribbean and Latin American countries. Taping is allowed if used only in part, with no changes to content or edits in video or audio.

*Arts & Entertainment* presents the performing arts, comedy, drama, news and information as well as educational historical and biographical programming that could be used across a number of disciplines to add an international dimension. A CIC member, A&E publishes a study guide and its own classroom listings for educators.

*Bravo* is a cable service that focuses on literary, theatrical and artistic vehicles such as Shakespearean plays, features on European authors, music and dance, and dramatic productions in German and other languages. *Bravo* is a member of Cable in the Classroom, and it can provide students with manifold cultural experiences in the humanities.

*Cable News Network*, broadcasting news and information around the clock, lists several regular international features including “Future Watch,” concerning the global future; “The World Today”; “World News”; “CNN Travel Guide”; and “The International News Hour.” A CIC member, the network offers “CNN Newsroom” for educators’ taping each morning.

*C-SPAN* provides live coverage of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives as well as discussions, interviews and call-ins. With two cable channels, *C-SPAN*’s goal is to give television audiences the opportunity to see public policy and political events as they happen, without commentary; it has covered events such as meetings of the Israeli Parliament, “Question Time in the British House of Commons,” a speech by the Turkish prime minister, and consideration of such topics as “Challenges Facing Zambia.” Educators are free to tape any programs and use them for any length of time. “C-SPAN in the Classroom” is a newsletter for professors that includes listings of programs and hints on using *C-SPAN* as part of coursework. Videos of old broadcasts can be obtained through the Purdue University Public Affairs Video Archives.

*The Discovery Channel* has articulated specific commitments to international programming, and telecasts material from vendors around the world. The service features documentaries, particularly concerning nature, geography, history and the environment, and targets one of its shows — “Assignment Discovery” — toward students. A member of Cable in the Classroom, this channel could plausibly be used by educators in the fields of science, history, biology, ecology, and humanistic studies.

*The Learning Channel* is educational in nature, broadcasting documentaries, dramas and instructional activities, many designed to enhance global learning. It offers such programs as “Science Frontiers,” “Ancient Journeys,” “A Traveller’s Journal,” “Dining in France,” “A History of the World” and a variety of international series and specials. “Electronic Library” is its special Cable in the Classroom offering (it can be taped and used for one year) and it is developing a “Teacher Television” professional teacher development series. TLC offers a complimentary monthly guide and newsletter and study guides.

*CNBC*, a consumer news and business channel, uses three programming strategies: business, stocks and forecasts; consumer advice; and talk shows highlighting social, economic, and political issues. Internationalization is represented by such titles as “Japan Business Today” and “International Business Review.” Management estimates that 25 percent of daytime programming has an international financial and business focus, a lower amount during evening and weekend hours. *CNBC* will soon be making textbooks available

to complement programming, and could be quite useful to students of business. *The Public Broadcasting Service* has a high commitment to multi-cultural programming and provides educational, theatrical, and historical offerings along with news and the arts. About 12 percent of programming is produced by organizations in other countries. Some internationally significant *PBS* shows airing recently included "Australia's Art," "The Victory Garden" (visit to New Zealand), National Geographic Specials and language lessons in German, Russian, Italian and Japanese. A member of Cable in the Classroom, *PBS* offers educators an on-line data system that extends the use of *PBS* programming in the classroom. Numerous other teaching aids are also available on request. Finally, the *BBC World Service for Television* will offer "BBC World News," as well as global current affairs, sports and drama shows. Scheduled to become available to cable subscribers in the U.S. by late 1993, it is currently available in Canada. As an analogue to the *BBC World Service for Radio*, it is expected to compete with *CNN* for coverage of global politics; executives also plan, however, on broadening the service's coverage of cultural events around the world.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Administrators should consider the impact of copyright law upon their potential use of cable programming. Key advice is found in the 1981 "Guidelines for Off-Air Recording of Broadcast Programming for Educational Purposes," which is the primary copyright blueprint used by many institutional members of CIC. The most important conditions are as follows:

Non-profit educational institutions are generally authorized to record programs off-air and use them for 10 school days. Tapes may be retained for 45 calendar days in total for reference purposes. A limited number of tape copies can be generated to meet legitimate needs of teachers, providing that they are replayed in "classrooms and similar places" dedicated to instruction. Recorded programs may not be altered from their original content, although playback of portions of programs is allowed. All videotaped copies of the recording must contain the copyright notice on the broadcast program as it was originally aired.

More explicit copyright help can be obtained through the CIC organization, which has implemented a set of "restriction codes" to inform educators of their obligations and limitations with regard to classroom use of specific cable-available programming. The publication lists nine categories of potential codes, ranging from "FREE" (unrestricted use for educational purposes), to "FAIR" (fair use within 10 days; tape may be saved for reference for 45 days) to "RES" (restricted; no authorization for public replay). Not all programs on all channels are listed, but many programs suitable for educational use are included. Cable in the Classroom magazine subscription information can be obtained through the CIC office: 1-800-343-0728.

The actual integration of televisual resources into courses can be accomplished in three ways: (1) requiring students to view programs at home as an assignment; (2) showing programs live or on tape in the classroom; and, (3) creating special events for classes or campus groups to view productions on a large-screen television which may be provided by the college or university.

It should be understood that most obstacles to ITV incorporation in the curriculum are specific to the institution. Administrators and unit directors will find that facilities and policies vary widely; at some campuses, audio/visual services are restricted in their recording of programs because of copyright worries, while at other institutions, lack of CATV on campus presents its own problems. The following advice is general in scope.

Home viewing is an attractive option because it enables students to reap the benefits of available programs without taking up class time to do so. These viewing assignments can be followed by in-class discussion, individually written critiques or small-group projects based on information gained from one or several programs. For example, in a Japanese language

course, student groups might discuss in Japanese a newscast seen on *The International Channel*, using new vocabulary and pinpointing differences in culture observed through current events. At the same time, small groups in a women's studies class might list observations on the role of Japanese women as shown in the news. One advantage of viewing programs on educational networks is that programs are usually rebroadcast several times in one week, and in some cases twice in a day, allowing flexibility for students to fit viewing times into their schedules.

A word about home access to CATV: While some students do not themselves have the opportunity or finances to subscribe to cable, students can often "borrow" viewing time from friends or from campus facilities, such as student lounges. This is not to suggest that faculty should spontaneously assign at-home viewing without polling their students — even though most American college students show remarkable resourcefulness in gaining access to CATV when they want to. The home VCR has also enhanced the capacity of non-cabled homes to receive CATV programs.

In-Class viewing is versatile since it enables students to see on-the-air programs, videotapes of previously aired programs, and videos purchased or borrowed. Also, 20-to 30-minute videos leave time for discussions and other activities immediately after viewing when the material is fresh in students' minds. On the other hand, viewing a live session of the U.S. Senate on *C-SPAN* could take up a full class period in an introductory political science class. Students would then use the viewing as the basis for activities during the subsequent class period. By way of another example: Having seen a House committee hearing on acid rain or some other worldwide environmental problem, biology, botany or ecology students might prepare questions and answers for a role-playing session in which they "confront" members of the committee. In their preparations, students would do research to arm themselves with data about conditions in other countries. Convocation viewing lends itself to a variety of useful situations. Students from several courses in the same discipline or from several courses in different disciplines can view a program together and then discuss it from different perspectives. For example, the offering, "Drukpa, People of the Thunder Dragon," brings to students the small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, which has only recently allowed itself to see and be seen as a member of the world community. The half-hour program gives an up-close look at the country and its people, and could reasonably be incorporated into a class project that might include a round table discussion with students or faculty from Bhutan and/or students or faculty who have visited there. Such a program would be appropriate for the entire community, but in particular for those in sociology, anthropology, architecture, geoscience, linguistics, art, music and history.

## CONCLUSIONS

In Masterman's view (1985, p. 20), "Mass media are sign systems which need to be actively read. They are not unproblematic, self-explanatory reflections of external reality. . . . Media produce and manufacture their products." The "reading" of television and other mass media, known as media literacy, holds important lessons for educators attempting to infuse multicultural influences in their curricula through televisual media. The concept takes into account that viewers need to be critical and active in their media consumption; it stresses knowledgeable use of television rather than blind acceptance of it. It suggests that the social and economic systems surrounding the mass media communicator are likely to provide clues about video production technique, content inclusions and exclusions, and political viewpoints undergirding the program itself.

"Television exercises" can be conducted which train students to ask questions of the international media they consume — questions like, "What country produced the program, and what socio-political forces likely exist in this country?" "How was it made; how much

did it cost?" "What individual and cultural values are reflected in the telecast?" "Was the producer attempting to convince me of something? If so, what? Did he/she succeed?" "What was left out of the production, and in your view, why?"

Treatment of movie scripts can be analyzed in comparison with filmmakers' treatment of similar scripts in other countries. For example, the *Bravo* channel recently aired Coline Serreau's "Three Men and a Cradle," a French farce about three bachelors who discover a baby on their doorstep. Students could be led through a critical analysis contrasting the French film with the American film it spawned, "Three Men and a Baby." Such an investigation would promote insights into many differences and similarities between American and French cultures.

Science classes could partake of *Discovery's* "Mechanical Universe: The Laws of Newton," or step into the shoes of the ancient mariner who used a sextant with *The Learning Channel's* "Starfinder." *Discovery* videographically put viewers in the place of four-legged animals in "Super Sense," about how animals perceive their environment; it also looked at "The Images of Galapagos," an investigation of native species of volcanic islands. Instructors of fine arts would find worthwhile A&E's interviews with divas who have played "Tosca;" *Bravo* scheduled a profile of the two-time Pulitzer Prize winner August Wilson to discuss African-American influences upon his work. One of the world's leading treasuries of art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was one recent subject for *The Learning Channel*. These suggestions cannot do justice to the infinite variety of televisual materials which are available to college students domestically on CATV services. A college-designed plan of structured, systematic consumption of these services could place a powerful and inexpensive pedagogical tool at the hands of both faculty and the students they hope to reach.

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