

The Idea of a Radio Series

David V. J. Bell

**Presentation to the Brownbag Seminar Series
Atkinson College of York University
3/28/00**

Origins and Background

- ◆ I had done a 5-part CBC Ideas Series in 1981 on my book “The Roots of Disunity” so I was familiar with writing and hosting radio programs
- ◆ In 1996 I heard an Open College show that related vaguely to environment
- ◆ I called Open College and spoke to the Director, May Maskow
- ◆ Several months later May received a CIDA RFP for media programming that would popularize the work of CIDA
- ◆ One of the topics included Environment and Sustainability
- ◆ May called York to try to trace down the person she had spoken to, vaguely remembering that he was a "former Dean of Environmental Studies"
- ◆ She spoke first to Ted Spence, then Rodger Schwass, then me
- ◆ We had only a few days to put together proposal to CIDA. May and I worked on it with help from Dr. Sam Mikail Director of Ryerson International.
- ◆ I prepared an outline of a series of 12 one-hour broadcasts that included some thematic shows and a number of case studies of CIDA-sponsored projects (mostly from FES but a few from other institutions, including a Ryerson project on “Greening Brazilian Industry”)
- ◆ In June we were informed that CIDA had awarded \$40k for the series (but this included no money for travel; no money for the proposed internet development of the “electronic classroom”)

Getting Started

- ◆ I met my producer David Carroll
- ◆ “voice tests” and work with a “voice coach” (Earle _____, who is also a critic of content and delivery)
- ◆ and made email contact with the CIDA officer in charge of reviewing their end of the project (Mary Malone)
- ◆ got the academic freedom principle established (in face of CIDA’s desire to review all scripts)
- ◆ began to block out “story lines” and make initial arrangements for interviews – logistics and a set of questions
- ◆ later got much more concise, only outlining “topics” for interviews rather than actual questions

First Interviews

- ◆ unlike CBC, which sent me off with my own tape-recorder and mike, OC made producer/technician available wherever feasible
- ◆ first interview with Ray Anderson, CEO of Interface Flooring (whom I met in October at a “Professional Institute we ran in Kingston)
- ◆ met with him at Metro convention centre after he had delivered the keynote at large MOE-sponsored conference
- ◆ also ran into Colin Isaacs so pulled him in too
- ◆ next interviews done of colleagues here at York – Bill Found, Peter Victor, and Rodger Schwass
- ◆ got Bill Rees by telephone with David Carroll recording at his end (in Vancouver) during a visit out there
- ◆ senior CIDA officials cooperated – David and I traveled to Ottawa
- ◆ many interviews at the UNESCO conference on sustainability education in Thessaloniki in December ’97 (while Kyoto was in progress)
- ◆ these interviews typically done late at night, with a glass of Scotch for the interviewee
- ◆ traveled to Brazil in April 1998 (without David) to complete a review of the project and to carry out interviews there
- ◆ started to do additional interviews with business leaders (primarily in Canada) in hopes of doing a follow-on series on Business and Sustainability

Points about Interviews:

- ◆ most everyone gave very articulate, insightful responses
- ◆ wonderful way to get academics, policy makers, business people, and civil society leaders to distill the essence of their ideas, policies, and initiatives
- ◆ **should be used much more often a research tool**
- ◆ a different “mood” than a lecture -- ideally the interview is a conversation in someone’s living room; intimate, rather informal, and personal.
- ◆ Sound bites from lectures not generally usable (except as formal speeches about which comments will be made – e.g. Churchill; Marshall)
- ◆ Technical point – avoid giving verbal feedback – more use of nonverbal, especially eye contact, facial expression

Writing Scripts

- ◆ Some very useful pointers in a brief Open College booklet called “Writing for Radio”
- ◆ Biggest challenge – **writing material that sounds as though it was not written**
- ◆ It must “sound good”
- ◆ Pronouns are deadly
- ◆ It can be fairly sophisticated as long as it is clear (unlike scripts for TV – “Keep it simple and say everything 3 times. People aren’t really listening – they’re looking at the pictures.”)
- ◆ The “Producer” transmogrifies into an “editor” – and helps you translate ideas into a good script
- ◆ Script cannot be written in a vacuum – must connect to the available interview clips
- ◆ These are selected out of the interview transcripts (typed for Open College by Ellen Garforth)
- ◆ With no particular background in the field, Ellen occasionally transcribed as best she could but with little connection to the audio (e.g. “Lucian Pye” came out “pollution pie”!)
- ◆ While I reviewed the transcript of the interviews, David Carroll listened to the actual tapes. His ear was better than my eye in picking out clips that would work better for radio

Going Into Production

- ◆ Getting the script “off the page” the biggest challenge
- ◆ You are now **reading something that must sound as if it is not being read**
- ◆ Some technical concerns about breathing; lip-smacking etc
- ◆ Biggest task is to turn in a good performance
- ◆ Producer/editor now transmogrifies once again into a director and coach
- ◆ You can’t put make-up on your voice – must not be overly tired; must not be “flat”
- ◆ Clips have been “pulled” – but there may not be time to hear each of them (that would have been done in an earlier session in any event)
- ◆ Must be good balance between narrative and clips

Producing the Workbook for the University Credit Course

- ◆ First I looked at some examples of other OC courses
- ◆ Referred to other syllabi (including those on the website of Second Nature)
- ◆ Excellent work on preparing the Workbook for my course was completed by my Graduate Assistant, Annmarie Isler
- ◆ We included many website sources
- ◆ We tried to design assignments that would challenge students

Web-based learning

- ◆ Funding came available from Industry Canada (“Notemakers project) to develop capacity to put course “on line”
- ◆ Work on electronic classroom was already underway
- ◆ Challenge was adding audio
- ◆ Prototype never fully tested or implemented because of sad fate of OC (moved to “Ryerson – lost all personnel)
- ◆ Still hoping to use this platform in the future at York (if not at Ryerson)
- ◆ Meanwhile the audio portion now on homepage of YCAS website; www.yorku.ca/ycas

Offering the course

- ◆ “tutors” do the actual teaching/interacting with students
- ◆ a few course evaluations completed from first offering
- ◆ tapes used by students and faculty in FES (and Schulich?)
- ◆ several graduate students have done what amounts to a “reading course” listening to and critiquing the programs
- ◆ will now become a formal graduate course
- ◆ not accepted for BES program
- ◆ no interest at all from Political Science

The Larger Issues: Education for Sustainability

- ◆ education mentioned more than 600 times in Agenda 21
- ◆ chapter 36 identifies 3 kinds of education: formal, non-formal, and informal
- ◆ the broadcasts are a type of “informal education” for the general public broadcast 3 times in Canada by CJRT (which is available on ExpressVue); and once by short wave from Costa Rica’s Radio Peace International
- ◆ can be marketed for non-formal education (in both private and public sector) – and have been used for that purpose in a few government agencies
- ◆ will be used in a few instances by high school students (in connection with the work of LSF)
- ◆ can be a supplement in various university courses

EFS at York – General Education for the Twenty-first Century?

- ◆ Fritjof Capra’s “Web of Life” – identifies need for a “change in perception” if we are to adjust to the sustainability challenges of this century
- ◆ David Orr’s work on “ecological literacy” as a parallel clarion call:
 - ◆ the sustainability challenges "loom like icebergs in the path of the Titanic"
 - ◆ universities have played a major role in producing and reproducing modernist culture (with its emphasis on growth, consumption, and domination); and the modernist educational

system which encourages the fragmentation of “knowledge”, the devaluation of wisdom, and the disconnection between people and (non-human) nature

- ◆ key phrases: “promiscuous chemistry”; “midnight optimists”; "walking north on a train headed south"; the "tyranny we impose on future generations – a form of permanent slavery with no manumission."
- ◆ York well positioned to consider making ecological literacy/sustainability education part of our commitment to general education
- ◆ If Murray Ross were writing about a “New University” in the year 2000, he would surely have included this as a basic “core competency” for all York students
- ◆ Has implications for professional training in all fields as well – business, law, education, fine arts
- ◆ Note work of the Sustainability Task Force which is hosting a lecture series; will be inviting campus-wide participation; is visiting each Faculty Council.