

1-1-1979

The Three R's: Reading, Riting, and Radio!

Howard G. Ball
North Carolina State University

Sarah B. Ball
North Carolina State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons



Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Ball, H. G., & Ball, S. B. (1979). The Three R's: Reading, Riting, and Radio!. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 19 (2). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol19/iss2/16

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.

THE THREE R'S: READING, RITING AND RADIO!

Howard G. and Sarah B. Ball

NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY

The radio presentation is a communication vehicle that provides input to our reading programs through the use of pupil-teacher initiated audio taped presentation, commercially prepared transcriptions and through local and network originated radio broadcasts.

Many radio programs are intended for general public audiences, but increased use is being made of this medium to offer special groups of listeners specific kinds of programs.

Let us take a look at some of the advantages, some of the strengths of radio.

- * Radio is universal. It transcends cultural and geographical distances. Radio programming can be translated into many languages, thus bringing about a more effective system of communication among listeners from diverse geographical, cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. For instance, a group of pupils from one of Chicago's Polish communities could produce and record an audio program reflecting their ethnic, cultural and religious beliefs. This presentation could be exchanged with a recorded presentation developed by black students, enrolled in a similar grade in a rural, southern community.
- * Radio has qualities of immediacy for it reflects current issues and events. Pupils could listen to recorded presentations that simulate the first landing of astronauts on the moon. Spin-off activities for these programs require pupils to research related topics and subsequently write reports or produce related learning materials on man's exploration of outer space. The implications of these related activities on a comprehensive language arts program appear obvious to the professional teacher involved in ongoing reading programs.
- * Radio is flexible in that it is adaptable to many program approaches: i.e., dramatizations, panel discussions, interviews, forums, or narrations.
- * Radio presentations can be programmed rather inexpensively. The financial cost for producing these programs does not require large funds. Audio presentations do not require the costly equipment or the ornate trappings as sound/motion picture film and television presentations. The recording of information on tape can be achieved easily and inexpensively on your personal or the school's open-reel or cassette recorder/player system.

The following focuses on planning and organizing scripting experiences that are not only essential for the professionally produced program as presented on national network radio, but also to classroom oriented

programs: those programs produced in a school's classroom or its media center. It is the development of these locally produced presentations that offers increased teacher and pupil involvement.

Examples of some plays and stories that lend themselves to adaptation to classroom productions in the early elementary grades are *Gingerbread Boy* and *The Three Bears*. For middle-school pupils, *The Night Before Christmas* or *The First Thanksgiving* are suitable. For high school or adult levels, *The Mystery of the Mad Maltese* and the writings of Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, Washington Irving, just to name a few, abound with adventure and humor.

There is a wealth of pre-recorded transcriptions that is available as evidenced by the thousands of titles listed in the *Educators Guide to Free and Inexpensive Transcriptions* and the *NICEM Guide to Pre-recorded Tapes*. These are valuable sources for locating and identifying appropriate pre-recorded instructional materials.

As a note of caution, several of the more elaborate dramatizations, prepared by some commercial manufacturers and industrialists have been criticized by educators as promoting a particular product or politicizing certain points of view. It is best to review any critiques available to you or preview all commercially prepared transcriptions before classroom use to ascertain what implications are inherent in the content of the programs.

How do locally produced presentations offer a greater involvement on the part of teachers and pupils? Young learners, with the guidance of the teacher, or a related instructional specialist, plan and present programs of their own interests. These programs can be presented live, or taped and replayed at a later time. They may be presented to a small, select group of pupils by cassette playback units. They may be presented over the school's public address system. In some cases our locally produced radio programs are "aired" over an educational or commercial broadcasting station.

The content of a school originated production can be instructional or entertaining, or a combination of both. Regardless of the content, or the manner of dissemination, the procedures for scripting and producing radio programs are similar.

Using the scripting activity to motivate pupils to write is an easy task if the writing activity has an apparent, meaningful purpose. Pupils will write when they have something to say and when they feel that someone will appreciate or learn from what they have written. Pupils will involve themselves in constructing a radio script, if they feel that the script will result in a presentation and will be used in a meaningful and credible way.

A few teachers have discovered the radio programming activities as scripting and production creates a new dimension of providing creative language development and increased pupil sensitivity. Also, teachers have discovered that they have created a new role for themselves. They are builders of word imagery and leaders in interpersonal communication.

The use of radio broadcasting and its related production techniques will encourage imagination and creativity while evoking qualities of inventiveness and teamwork among teachers and pupils. Scripting activities

and the subsequent application of production techniques will give pupils a greater appreciation for the efficacy of this medium.

In order to initiate the scripting activity, teachers should organize their pupils into groups to perform the several activities that are involved in radio production: that is, planning, writing, organizing, directing, and acting. Teachers will have to demonstrate how to sit or stand before the microphone. They will have to determine how words should be spoken and emphasized in order to elicit listeners' empathy and understanding. Teachers even have to demonstrate to pupils how to avoid intrusive noises, such as rustling papers as they read successive pages of their scripts.

More effective presentations will evolve when there is a team effort among pupils and teacher(s). The primary function of the teacher is to suggest and to guide. The teacher will suggest sources of information, appoint different pupils to perform specific tasks, and make the arrangements for broadcasting or taping facilities. The teacher might assert a prerogative for being present and making corrections and suggestions during the final editing of the script.

A good idea, thoroughly considered, is important, but a good idea is not enough. Your radio presentation will not come to life until your ideas have been translated onto paper – a script. Even then, the best planned and organized script, if given an uninspired performance, will come over as trite and dreary.

The teacher's responsibility does not end with a well-developed idea and a soundly constructed script, or even the proper casting of characters. The teacher's responsibilities focus on all aspects of the production, from the very first germ of an idea to the final gestured sign of "CUT" given at the conclusion of the production.

A first phase in scripting is to encourage pupils to make up their own stories – stories from their real or their worlds of fantasy. Pupils will have to define characters, describe locations, and delineate the periods of time in which the plot is to take place. As pupils proceed with their scripting activities, they should consider if the inclusion of special sound effects would significantly improve the impact of the program; i.e., musical scores, crowd noises, thunderstorms.

What are some of the pitfalls that will negate the quality of a script? The following are a few common deficiencies as evidenced from a review of several commercial and educationally oriented scripts that were rejected from production:

- A. Lack of proper research or study about the subject
- B. Poor organization of dialog
- C. Poor writing style
- D. Lack of consistency in the development of a plot
- E. Unsubstantial or incongruous plots or themes
- F. Inadequate character development
- G. Improper use of sound effects and musical scores
- H. Ineffective editing techniques

As teachers and pupils plan and organize radio presentations, they must keep in mind that everyday speech should be the guide for words that will be used and the manner in which they will use them.

In order to assist pupils in the scripting activity, teachers must attempt to cluster what is to be said in short phrases, and reduce ideas so they are logically developed and easily understood. Teachers should help pupils avoid stating their thoughts and expressions in lengthy and complicated statements. Why? Listeners have to take all the information as it comes. Seldom does a listener have the privilege to stop the presentation at a particular point, or refer to previously stated information for further clarification. Therefore, our young scriptwriters must develop a script that not only grabs and holds the listeners' attention but assures that the words are clear and the meaning is understandable.

Pupils who have received no instruction in organizing their thoughts and expression will seldom write for a purpose. It is important for teachers to guide pupils in writing with an objective in mind. Pupils must be able to arrange their thoughts and expression effectively in order to use the many words and phrases necessary for them to present diverse and sophisticated ideas and concepts. Writing skills, combined with an accurate discernment of the spoken word, form the foundation for improving pupils' writing skills.

Since reading and writing are both discriminating communication acts, the skills pupils develop through planned and organized writing activities provides a foundation for reading. As the pupils discern an order or sequence in composing and stating their thoughts, so increases the probability for a sequential development of reading skills. Therefore, many experiences useful in developing readiness for initial writing instruction also help prepare the pupil for the prescribed reading lessons and experiences they will meet later. Some examples of writing activities are to present, in a forceful way, the main ideas; to create a visual image; to present relationships between persons and things, and to summarize information.

Combining the teaching of reading with an audio-related activity is helpful and enjoyable. For example, pupils can be given pictures of specific characters, or things, along with accompanying information and sounds. Then, as they listen to *Peter and the Wolf*, for example, pupils will hold up pictures of each instrument as it is played, or a picture of each character and a card displaying the name of each instrument and/or character in the story.

Some techniques that should be considered in script construction are:

* Use descriptive words where possible but use them with care. Visual imagery is created only through the spoken word. Therefore, images must be sketched for the ear alone. However, too many descriptive words will tend to cause the presentation to appear flowery and ornamental. Do not drown your thoughts and expressions in flourishes of rhetoric.

The use of vaporous statements and flowery passages will bombard your listeners with lofty and eloquent expressions. If your objective is directed toward acquainting listeners with sublime and majestic oratorical comments rather than establish a meaningful thought or idea, then flourishes of rhetoric are in place. However, if you want to communicate an idea as concisely and briefly as possible, then simplicity of word and succinctness of dialog are in order.

For example, if your purpose is to present a mythical fairy tale directed towards pre-school or primary grade pupils, then a loftiness of words and an eloquence of graceful expressions are appropriate at certain points in the script. But, if your presentation is to be geared toward pupils enrolled in a vocational or occupation education program, then you would want to be practical in your selection of terms and direct in your use of expressions.

* The level of vocabulary, the concepts being presented, the pacing of information, and the level of word density must be suitable to the understandings and discernments of the intended audiences. That is, if the program is to be directed to pupils enrolled in the primary grade levels, the originators and presenters of the presentation should select concepts and words that are within the comprehensions of young learners. Of special note, pupils' listening vocabularies are generally their largest and the speaking vocabulary is usually the second largest. Therefore, it seems permissible that spoken words in the audio presentation can exceed the pupils' speaking, reading and writing vocabulary ranges. When it becomes necessary to use an unfamiliar word, the word should be accompanied with a short description or definition carefully woven into the fabric of the script.

* When broadcasting or recording the presentations, pupils should be encouraged to talk or read in a natural way and speak with meaning. Intonations and inflections are also important in communicating a certain mood or a particular feeling. The presentation's rate should flow in a natural pace so that listeners will feel comfortable with the pace of the information and the density of the thoughts being presented. All attempts should be made to avoid long and encumbered sentences as well as short, jerky and static phrases and expressions.

Another quality that should be encouraged is that pupil/presenters should strive to achieve a personal and informal conversational style. The following approach was used with considerable effect:

"Good afternoon! I'll bet you can't guess what we are going to bring to you today. It is still in our series of space explorations and it has to do with an astronaut named Neil Armstrong. Does anyone want to suggest what this program will be about? If you think that it is about the first man on the moon, then you are right."

In the above approach, the mood had been established. The listeners' attention had been sought through appropriate questions. Also, there was conveyed a subtle message to the listeners that the presenter was talking directly and only to them.

* Try to create an atmosphere of immediacy: a quality of the "here" and "now." Make your presentation a personal and intimate experience. To maintain the personal approach, you might present additional rhetorical questions or statements as: "Would you like to go to the moon?" "Perhaps, one day you will be able to work in a space station." "Under present conditions, would you want to spend your summer vacation on the moon?" Queries of this kind add a personal resonance to the presentation as well as presenting qualities of the "here" and "now." The qualities of intimacy and immediacy also facilitate listeners' involvement and identification with the characters, experiences and activities inherent in the program's content.

* Use reinforcing statements and redundant activities where applicable. These are valid ingredients for successful radio programming. A major objective for using radio programs is to provide supplemental learning activities and expand the instructional input on a particular unit of instruction. Teachers and pupils can improve the radio program's communication qualities by restating an idea in another way or offering another experience or activity in addition to those suggested through the program's presentation.

Reinforcement and expansion of information becomes a legitimate function for incorporating audio presentations. Since the scriptwriter controls the presentation of information through the scripting activity, a judicious use of redundant information can be incorporated to suit the learning styles of intended groups of listeners. For example, if an objective of the presentation is to communicate to listeners that atmospheric space lacks sufficient quantities of oxygen essential for sustaining human life. Therefore, life sustaining devices could be suggested that would support human life during outer space travels. Subsequently, listeners should be encouraged to become involved in a post-presentation activity to determine various options that man could use to maintain life-support oxygen during space travel. Additional research and readings would add much to the pupils' knowledge and understanding of human travel in outer space.

* The script must contain information on everything that is to happen during the presentation of the program. A well-planned and developed script assures that all persons involved with the production and the subsequent presentation of the program will provide information on not only his or her function, but of the others as well.

As the teacher and pupils review the first draft or rough copy of the script, they may find it necessary to pencil in some additional lines, comments or instructions. This is called “Mechanizing” and comments and instructions usually add to the betterment of the script.

The purpose of writing in these mechanizing instructions is to provide supplemental information that will improve the quality and the continuity of the program. The final draft of the completed script must contain all that is to happen, when it is to happen, and to whom and with what effect. In other words, if it is not in the final revision of your script, it should not be in the final program.

At this point, let us review a portion of a finalized draft of a script that displays evidences of mechanized instructions.

KING JOHN (Pouting like an adolescent). There! (rustle of papers) take your paper!

BARONS (Cheers).

MARY JAME Sir Ritchie you're so wonderful!

RITCHIE (Tossing it off). Oh, it was nothing . . . ! Gentlemen! (As if springing a dramatic piece of information) Gentlemen! We shall call this— (louder than the rest) the Magna Charta!

BARON I Three cheers for Sir Ritchie!

ALL Hurrah for Sir Ritchie! Ritchie! Ritchie! (Simultaneous cross-fades into:)

MISS LUDLOW (Fading in, overlapping). (loud) Ritchie! (louder) Ritchie!

RITCHIE Huh? (Coming to) Yes, Miss Ludlow?

MISS LUDLOW Will you stop day dreaming long enough to answer the question I just asked?

RITCHIE (Grouping). Why . . . uh . . . uh . . . (Timidly) King John . . . ?

CLASS (Laughter).

MISS LUDLOW (After laughter subsides). In fourteen years of teaching. (light humor in tone). that is the first time a pupil ever told me that King John invented the sewing machine?

CLASS (Laughter). (Electric bell rings, scrape of feet).

MISS LUDLOW Wait, class! (raised teacher's voice - students' voices in background) For tomorrow, study Chapter Eight in your General Science book. Class dismissed. (Hurried shuffle of feet. Immediate babbling of released kids).

(Music: Bridge . . . segue into “Inside a Kid's Head” theme).

Excerpt from Lawrence, Jerome and Robert E. Lee. *Inside a Kid's Head*.

Since radio communicates in a single medium, the speaking rate can be more rapid than that of a motion picture film or the dialog in a television production. Motion picture films and television presentations contain multisensory approaches. That is, the messages are channeled through two or more senses. Since the listener is using only the *one* sense to receive radio

messages, words can be presented at an increased rate—120 to 160 per minute. Of course, this also depends on whether the presentation is a dramatization or a news broadcast or whatever.

In estimating the amount of actual broadcast time that will be necessary to present the script, we can use as a general rule of thumb that twenty typewritten lines usually equals one minute, or approximately three seconds per line. However, a better means for measuring the timing of a script is to read aloud and in the manner as it would be presented during the actual broadcast. Of course, it becomes obvious to us that all that has been said about timing is contingent on a variety of factors, such as, the reading levels and word recognition skills of the pupils making the presentation.

It is sometimes necessary for the teacher to take a direct leadership role in gathering the materials; the information and facts that are to be used in organizing an interesting presentation. However, the teacher and pupils must cooperate in organizing the materials and outlining the script for the program. The teacher's role is to provide the guidance and resource information for these classroom radio productions.

Pupils can help to establish the level and pace that information should be presented. Pupils are in an advantageous position to suggest ways the program should be organized and developed since they are in a closer position to understand and empathize with the intended audiences to whom the presentation is to be made.

What are some ways for teachers and pupils to disseminate their locally produced radio productions? There are several. Let us look at a few of them.

The school's public address system is a viable channel. The public address facility can be a kind of closed-circuit broadcasting resource from which classrooms can transmit their presentations to every class in the school, to selected classes, or to a single classroom.

In some instances, some locally produced programs will extend beyond the school's public address system and will be aired over a local commercial or an educational broadcasting station. In other instances, some of our productions will not have the dissemination range of even the school's public address system. In these instances, the presentations will be recorded on audio tape and the information will be played back through the recorder's playback system. The scope and quality of the program that you and your pupils will develop will determine the range of dissemination the program will be given.

Sharing personal experiences through aural expressions and writing is motivational, and can easily be related to reading instruction. Like most adults, children tend to be interested in themselves; they enjoy talking, writing and reading about their own experiences and ideas. The interrelatedness of these language activities and the need to use language skills and abilities in scripting a radio presentation also makes the production of an audio presentation easy to relate to vocabulary study, spelling, and writing as well as composition, sequencing of ideas, and organizing thoughts and expressions.

However, the alert teacher of reading will find many more ways to relate reading instruction to radio production and presentation techniques. The activities that you will uncover will top the suggestions in this article, because you will relate your production and presentational techniques to your particular students and your specific instructional unit.

The most important consideration that should be given at the conclusion of the production activity is if the program assisted in the attainment of prescribed instructional goals. If it did, then your purposes are achieved, your missions attained.