Moping that daytime television serials have been used to teach a variety of subjects, including writing and language skills, this paper reviews literature on the nature of soap operas so that instructors can use them more effectively. Following an introduction citing studies on the educational uses of soap operas, the paper explores the following components of these serials: the audiences and their reasons for viewing soap operas, the basic plot structures, general demographics of characters, female characters, black characters, elderly characters, relationships between characters, and the use of time. The paper concludes with a 7-page bibliography of books and articles dealing with soap operas and education. (HTH)
THE SOAP OPERA: A CRASH COURSE FOR EDUCATORS

Robert Machalow
York College of City University of New York
Jamaica, New York 11451
INTRODUCTION: THE EDUCATIONAL USES OF SOAP OPERAS

Daytime television serials have been used to teach a great variety of subjects. Some have used the soap operas which are broadcast everyday, while others have custom made soap operas to teach selected information. Before the soap opera is used to a greater extent, it is necessary to review the literature to understand what they are and what they do.

Language education has utilized the soap opera technique for many programs. Handscombe (1971) noted the usefulness of the soap opera format in teaching Canadian English to non-English speaking individuals. Cheng (1976), in a unique application of the theory, proposed using the soap opera format to teach oral Chinese language skills. Heaton (1977) applied the technique to the teaching of English to adults in the United States. Wierenga (1979) extended the use of the soap opera to the learning of foreign languages.

In addition, the soap opera has been used to teach critical writing and thinking. LaPota (1973) suggested the use of the soap opera to increase verbal literacy and listening skills; Colasurdo (1981) had students examine the soap opera critically; Migeot (1983) extended the use to include the actual writing and production of a soap opera; Wilson (1983) used daytime dramas with journalism students;
Magistral (1984) employed them as a stimulus to creative writing assignments.

Furthermore, the soap opera has been used to teach skills in many areas, including women’s studies (Fellman, 1978); sociology (Levinson, 1980); sex education (Sparks and Lynch 1974 and Sullivan, 1979). They have been used to increase the comprehension of emotions and social relationships with learning disabled children (Pearl, 1982) as well as with adult education groups (Niemi, 1972 and Black, 1975).

Mendelsohn (1968) utilized the techniques of a soap opera to educate the urban poor by providing helpful information about problems in their everyday lives through created soap operas. This was one of the first uses, and one of the most unique.

Clearly, soap operas can be useful in education. This paper has been designed as a primer on the background research; with this information, the instructor can utilize the soap opera more concretely.
THE AUDIENCE OF SOAP OPERAS

According to Katzman (1972), the soap opera's audience is made up of mostly women, of which the majority is in the South. It was noted that the higher the income of the person, the less likely that person would be a soap opera viewer.

Compezi (1976) discovered that the most popular reason for watching soap operas was entertainment. Men rated amusement highly as a reason, while women favored the exploration of reality and the reception of advice as chief reasons. Breen (1980) found that the two most prominent reasons for watching soap operas were their intriguing plots and their use as topics of conversations.

Bond (1980) stated that there was a relationship between the viewer and their professed values. The greater the artificial relationship between the viewer and soap opera character, the higher the liberal values ranking the viewer will assign characters (and) the greater the viewer's uses and gratifications, the higher the liberal values ranking the viewer will assign soap opera characters.

Buerkel-Rothfuss (1981) noted a relationship between the viewing of soap operas and the viewer's perception of the number of professionals (doctors, etc) and problems (divorce, abortion, crime, etc). On the other hand, Greenberg (1983)
found conflicting evidence, the viewing of soap operas has no influence on the viewer's perception of real world sexual activity and permissiveness.

The viewing of soap operas has been shown to have both positive and negative effects; Thomas (1977) discovered a positive socializing effect on viewers; Phillips (1982) noted a relationship between violence on soap operas and suicides.
SOAP OPERA PLOTS

The plot of a soap opera, according to Adrich (1975), is comprised of a series of disasters crowding one another upon the main character(s) in which episodes are independent of each other in terms of time. Katzman (1972) summarized the four basic types of structure in the soap opera:

a. criminal or underworld activities
b. sexual problems
c. medical developments
d. romantic and marital affairs

Derry (1983) specified the plots found in soap operas as:

a. love confronted by obstacles
b. sudden accident or illness
c. personal tensions that result in murder and trial
d. psychotic killer
e. split personality
f. Romeo and Juliet story
g. amnesia
h. bigamy
i. career striving
j. romantic and sexual adventure
k. slow and drawn out death

The structure of soap operas, according to Johnson (1978), is filled with repetitions, juxtapositions,
interruptions and location changes. Rose (1974) states the techniques used to maintain interest in the plots:

a. varied plots at different stages of development to prevent the story from ever ending

b. juxtaposition of small, dramatic scenes

c. though characters often hide the truth, very little is concealed from the audience

In addition, opposing factors are played one against the other in the soap opera: psychological happiness (which is the equivalent of love) and unhappiness (Aldrich, 1975), openness and secrecy, and separateness and merging (Katzman, 1972).

Many problems affect the soap opera characters, including illegitimacy, abortion, divorce, death, love, juvenile delinquency, and social drinking. On the other hand, world and material problems do not exist in the world of the soap opera (Ramsdell, 1973). According to Cassata (1979) two of the most pervasive problems are sickness and injury, but the diseases are usually unspecified. The most commonly specified illness is psychiatric in nature. When death does come on soap operas, it is usually caused by accidents and/or violence.

Drugs, both legal and illegal, were studied. Illegal drugs were much less common than alcohol (MacDonald, 1983). Lowery (1979) found that the use of alcohol was common and
accepted. Garlington noted that alcohol was used in three one minute intervals per 21 minutes of soap opera air time.

Lowry (1981) and Greenberg (1981) found that soap operas presented a distorted view of sexual behavior in America. There is over three times as much sexual behavior between unmarried couples as between married couples on the soap operas. Lowry (1981) found that over one fourth of the sexual behavior pictured was of the type discouraged by society. Seiter (1983) suggested several reasons for sexuality to be prominent on the soaps:

a. mildly risque subject
b. problems can be solved in terms of individual characters

c. there is a degree of sensationalism attached to the subject
d. reasserts the over-riding importance of monogamy
CHARACTERS: GENERAL

Downing (1974) statistically studied the soap opera characters. She found that the characters were nearly evenly divided according to sex, 95% were white, 66% were or had been married, 90% were middle class, 73% were judged good looking, and over 90% were slender and healthy. Seiter (1983) examined the social classes of the characters, finding that characters remain in their own class, despite marriages into other classes (due to the divorce rate on the soap operas). With the working class, there is an emphasis on the key role that work plays in their lives; the middle class shows professionals on the rise; and, of course, there is the upper class.

Kaplan (1973) studied the characters in terms of intimacy and conformity. Characters are preoccupied with conformity due to their knowledge of the proper rules of society. The characters lose status by not conforming and for suffering in their search for intimacy. Modleski (1979) comments that there is really no resolution of problems on soap operas; rather, there are further complications and obstacles.
CHARACTERS: WOMEN

The research reveals that there are a great number of differences between men and women on soap operas. Finz (1975) stated that the male and female characters respond to situations in traditional and stereotypic patterns. Downing (1974) explained that women are generally non-violent and genuinely concerned for others. Furthermore, the women on soap operas tend to be younger than the men. The occupations of women are less clearly defined than those of men; the full time housewife is the largest occupation (29.5%), the professional is second (19.4%) and the clerical is third (9.3%).
BLACKS IN SOAP OPERAS

Johnson (1982) and Bryant-Johnson (1983) agree that Blacks on soap operas are not interesting characters. Johnson states that they are basically boring because they are denied exploits and miseries. Bryant-Johnson states that they are detached from their ethnic background.

The Black characters are presented in ways that are not perceived as threatening to the white world (Bryant-Johnson). Johnson states that there are only four acceptable roles for Blacks in soap operas:

a. sidekick: the Black is a friend who helps a trouble prone white
   b. Dear Abby: the Black gives advice
   c. protector: e.g. police
   d. true token: these Blacks have no story line or real function, but are simply used to gossip and comment on the action
THE ELDERLY IN SOAP OPERAS

Though the older adult is not the center of plot in soap operas, the genre does not exploit the stereotypes and myths of aging, such as senility (Elliott, 1981). According to Cassata (1980), the older adult is an attractive character, who is employed in an important position and who is living independently. The older adult is more stable emotionally and physically healthier than the younger characters. Elliott (1981) notes that of the older adults portrayed on soap operas, 82.7% are in good health and 75% are from either the middle or upper class.
CHARACTERS: RELATIONSHIPS

Personal happiness motivates relationships which are linked to marriage and the family (Wander, 1979). In general, soap operas openly confront the viewers' concepts of family correctness, and there is, at most, a rare, strong, long lasting commitment to a relationship (Rose, 1978). Abelman (1980) observed that within relationships, unmarried individuals were more sexually active than married individuals. Furthermore, petting was more prevalent among married couples than talk about intercourse. Greenberg (1981) verified the amount of sexual behavior observed in soap operas, and noted that there was more of it on soap operas than on prime time television, though the types of intimacy differed.

Maykovich (1975) compared Japanese and American soap opera families. Japanese soap opera families are based on the concept of continuity while American soap opera families are based on the concept of family love. This difference accounts for the differing focus of each soap opera.
TIME IN SOAP OPERAS

Porter (1977) has defined the soap opera as a "costume drama in a time capsule." Lopata (1977) clarified the concept by noting that time is open ended and expanded. This expansion of time leads to a contraction of space.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abelmann, Robert.
"Afternoon delight: Sex in the soaps."
ED 197 405

Adams, Marjo
"An American soap opera: 'As The World Turns' 1956-1978"
DAI, 41 (1980), 447A (University of Michigan)

Aldrich, Pearl G.
"Daniel Defoe: The father of soap opera."
Journal of Popular Culture, Winter 1975, 767-774

Barjatis, Gretchen S. and others.
A struggle for dominance: Relational communication patterns in television drama.
Communication Quarterly, 31:2 (Spring 1983) 148-55

Black, Mabel.
"Two-Way, Street."
Illinois Teacher of Home Economics, 19:1 (September/October 1975) 16-8

Bond, Mitzi Dale
"Soap operas and liberal education values."
DAI, 41 (1980), 1266A (University of North Carolina at Greensboro)

Breen, Myles P
"Why college students watch soap operas."
ED 195 627

Bryant-Johnson, Sherry.
"Blacks on TV soaps: Visible but neutralized."
Perspectives: The Civil Rights Quarterly 15:3 (Summer 1983) 45-7

Buerkel-Rothfuss, Nancy L. and Sandra Mayes
"Soap opera viewing: the cultivation effect."
Journal of Communication, 31 (Summer 1981), 108-115

Cantor, Muriel G.
"Our days and our nights on TV."
Journal of Communication, 29 (Autumn 1979), 66-72

Cassata, Mary B and others.
"The older adult in daytime serial drama."
Journal of Communication, 30 (Winter 1980), 48-9
Cassata, Mary B. and others.
"In sickness and in health."
Journal of Communication, 29 (Autumn 1979), 73-80

Cheng, Chin-Chuan.
"Teaching oral Chinese in the United States."
Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association, 11:3
(October 1976) 168-71

Colasurdo, Anthony.
"Soap operas: How do they effect your students?"
Forecast for Home Economics (November 1981), 27

Compesi, Ronald J.
"Gratifications of daytime TV serial viewers."
Journalism Quarterly, 57 (Spring 1980), 155-8

Compesi, Ronald James.
"Gratifications of daytime television serial viewers: an analysis of fans of the program 'All My Children.'"
DAI, 37 (1976) 5420A (University of Oregon)

Davis, Leslie K. and Fern L Johnson.
"The nature of conversational structure on family interaction in television programming."
ED 158 611

DeMuth, Philip and Elizabeth Barton.
"Soap gets in your mind."
Psychology Today (July 1982), 73-4

Derry, Charles.
"Television soap opera: 'incest, bigamy and fatal disease.'"
Journal of the University Film and Video Association 35 Winter 1983), 4-16

Downing, Mildred.
"Heroine of the daytime serial."
Journal of Communication, 24 (Spring 1974), 130-7

Downing, Mildred.
"The world of daytime television serial drama."
DAI, 36 (1974), 12A (University of Pennsylvania)

Elliott, Joyce Charlotte.
"Images of older adult characters on daytime television serial drama."
DAI, 43 (1981), 1736A (Columbia University, Teacher's College)

Fellman, Anita Clair.
"Teaching with tears: soap opera as a tool in teaching women's studies."
Signs, 3 (Summer 1978), 909-911
Fine, Marlene Gail.
"A conversation and content analysis of interpersonal relationships in selected television soap operas."
DAI, 40 (1980) 6052A (University of Massachusetts)

Fine, Marlene G.
"Soap opera conversations: the talk that binds."
Journal of Communication, 31 (Summer 1981) 97-107

Finz, Sherry D. and Judith Waters.
"An analysis of sex role stereotyping in daytime television serials."
ED 137 652

Flak-Kessler, Janat and Katherine H Froeschauer.
"The soap opera: a dynamic group approach for psychiatric patients."
American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 32 (May/June 1978), 317-9

Gade, Eldon M.
"Representation of the world of work in daytime television serials."
Journal of Employment Counseling, (March 1971) 37-42

Garlington, Warren K.
"Drinking on television: a preliminary study with emphasis on method."
Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 38 (November 1977) 2199-2205

Goldsen, Rose K.
"Throwaway husbands, wives, and lovers."
Human Behavior, 4 (1975) 64-9

Greenberg, Bradley S. and others.
"Sex on the soap operas: afternoon delight."
Journal of Communication, 31 (Summer 1981) 83-9

Greenberg, Bradley S. and Carrie Heeter.
"Soaps, sex and college women."
ED 236 749

Handscombe, Richard J.
Castle Zarem: a multi-media approach to learning Canadian English as a second language."
English Quarterly, 4:3, (Fall 1971) 33-46

Hardaway, Francine.
The language of popular culture: daytime television as a transmitter of values."
College English, 40 (January 1979) 517-521

Heaton, James.
"Stereotypes in media, or how to avoid functional fixedness."
Workpapers on teaching English as a second language.
ED 144 414
Johnson Jr, R. E.
"The dialogue of novelty and repetition structure in 'All My Children.'"
Journal of Popular Culture, 10 (Winter 1978) 560-570

Johnson, Fern L. and Leslie K. Davis.
"Hesitation phenomena in television family conversations in the USA."
International Journal of Psycholinguistics 6-1 (13) 29-45

Johnson, Fern L. and Leslie K. Davis.
"Hesitation phenomena in the language of family conversations..."
ED 158 612

Johnson, Sherry.
"How soaps whitewash Blacks."
American Film, 7 (March 1982) 35-7

Kaplan, Frederick L.
"Intimacy and conformity on American soap operas."

Katzman, Natan.
"Television soap operas: what's been going on anyway?"
Public Opinion Quarterly, 36 (1972) 200-212

Kilguss, Anne F.
Therapeutic use of a soap opera discussion group with psychiatric in-patients.

Kilguss, Anne F.
"Using soap operas as a therapeutic tool."
Social Casework, 6 (November 1974) 525-530

LaPota, Margherite, and Bruse LaPota.
"The soap opera: literature to be seen and not read."
English Journal, 62 (April 1973) 556-563

Lazarus, Herbert R. and Donna K. Bienlein.
"Soap opera therapy."
International Journal of Group Psychotherapy 17 (1967) 252-6

Levinson, Rochard M.
"The soap opera game: a teaching aid for sociology of the family."
Teaching Sociology, 7 (1980) 181-190

Lopate, Carol.
"Daytime television: you'll never want to leave home."
Radical America, 11 (January-February 1977) 33-51
Lowery, Sharon Anne.  
"Soap and booze in the afternoon: an analysis of the portrayals of alcohol use in the daytime serial."  
DAI, 40 (1979) 472A (Washington State University)

Lowry, Dennis T. and others.  
"Sex on the soap operas: patterns of intimacy."  
Journal of Communication, 31 (Summer 1981) 90-6

MacDonald, Patrick.  
"The 'Dope' on soaps."  

Magistral, Tony.  
"Measuring reality: critical writing and television analysis."  
Exercise Exchange, 30:1 (Fall 84) 20-1

Maykovich, Minako K.  
"Comparison of soap opera families in Japan and the United States."  
International Journal of Sociology of the Family, 5 (Autumn 1975) 135-49

McAdow, Ron.  
"Experience of soap opera."  
Journal of Popular Culture, 7 (Spring 1974) 955-965

Mendelsohn, Harold.  
"Operation gap-stop: A study of the application of communication techniques in reaching the unreachable poor."  
ED 024 274

Migeot, Francois.  
Voyage-potins et bal(1)ade imaginaire (Soap opera and imaginary ramblings).  
Francais dans le Monde, 178 (September 1983) 69-74

Modleski, Tania.  
"The search for tomorrow in today’s soap operas."  
Film Quarterly, 33 (Fall 1979) 12-21

Niemi, John A.  
"Mass media: a cornucopia of ideas for adult educators."  
ED 126 367

Pearl, Ruth and Merith Cosden.  
"Sizing up a situation: LD children's understanding of social interactions."  
Learning Disabilities Quarterly, 5:4 (Fall 1982) 371-3

Phillips, David P.  
"The impact of fictional television stories of US adult fatalities: new evidence on the effect of mass media on violence."  
American Journal of Sociology, 87 (May 1982) 1340-1359
Soap opera: catalyst to communication
American Journal of Nursing; October 1984 p. 1244-6

Porter, Dennis.
"Soap time: thoughts on a community art form."
College English, 38 (April 1977) 783-8

Ramsdell, M. L.
"The trauma of TV's troubled soap families."
Family Coordinator, 226 (July 1973) 299-304

Rose, Brian.
"Thickening the plot."
Journal of Communication, 29 (Autumn 1978) 81-4

Rouner, Donna.
The relationship between active viewing of different television content types and individual perception of a mean world.
ED 220 831

Ruth, Deborah Dashow.
"Views of nonprint media: a case for expanded literacy."
ED 123 647

Schreiber, Elliot Steven.
Comparative assessments of characters of different ages in four daytime television serials by viewers of varying ages.
DAI, 38 (1977) 2418A (Pennsylvania State University)

Seiter, Ellen Elizabeth.
"The promise of melodrama: recent women's films and soap operas."
DAI, 42 (1981) 3800A (Northwestern University)

Seiter, Ellen.
"Men, sex and money in recent family melodramas."
Journal of the University Film and Video Association, 35:1 (Winter 1983) 17-27

Sirota, David Robert.
"An ethnographical/ethnomethodological study of soap opera writing."
DAI, 37 (1976) 6824A (Ohio State University)

Sparski, Florence J. and Cecelia A. Lynch.
"Three teaching strategies."
School Health Review, 5:6 (November/December 1974) 42-3

Sullivan, Michael F.
"Soap opera in the classroom."
Educational Leadership, 37:1 (October 1979) 78-80
Sutherland, John C. and Shelley J. Siniawsky. 
"The treatment of resolution of moral violations on soap operas." 
Journal of Communication, 32 (Spring 1982) 67-74

Thomas, Sari. 
"The relationship between daytime serials and their viewers." 
DAI, 38 (1977) 6383A (University of Pennsylvania)

Tucker, David Earl. 
"A multivariate analysis of soap opera viewers." 
DAI, 38 (1977) 5111A (Bowling Green State University)

Turow, Joseph. 
"Advising and ordering: daytime, prime time." 
Journal of Communication, 24 (Spring 1974) 138-141

Turow, Joseph. 
"Advising and ordering on television dramas: the display of knowledge according to male-female stereotypes." 
ED-093-003

Wander, Philip. 
"The angst of the upper class." 
Journal of Communication 29 (Autumn 1979) 85-8

Wierenga, Leanne. 
"A practical model for listening comprehension activities." 
French Review, 52:6 (May 1979) 866-873

Wilson, Carroll. 
"Soap opera technique works well in Reporting I." 
Journalism Educator, 38:2 (Summer 1983) 42-450

Winsey, Valentine. 
"How soap operas help you cope." 
Family Health, 11 (April 1979) 30-2