

NHK makes decisive responses to the coronavirus pandemic

Yuki Yoshida

The article summarizes how NHK reacts to the coronavirus crisis by extending and adapting its program offer on every possible platform.

FIGHTING AN “INFODEMIC”

NHK is striving to minimize public anxiety about the coronavirus by preventing an infodemic. A team created last month monitors reliable information from medical and research institutions around the world and feeds it into output such as news programs, science programs, and specials. The flagship *NHK Special* documentary slot¹ will carry programs on the latest coronavirus-related research findings, medical challenges, and social issues. NHK will produce English versions for *NHK WORLD-JAPAN* and other broadcasters around the world.

A daily magazine show offers practical information on ways in which families can protect themselves from coronavirus infection. Other programs also offer information and advice for people of all ages, for instance instructions for making face masks.

NHK also launched a special portal site² on January 22nd, where all related news items and special programs can be searched by key words.

SUPPORTING PUPILS AND CHILDREN

In response to school closures, the NHK Educational TV channel is using diverse platforms including subchannels (special channels that are not being used for other purposes) and websites to deliver a wide range of programs for children. The TV channel provides educational content in the mornings and programs that help kids stay healthy by encouraging them to

dance, sing, and do physical exercise in the afternoons. Programs include subtitles for children with hearing disabilities. NHK radio has created program segments that invite and share requests and messages from children. Also, NHK’s satellite TV channels are focusing their programming on science and history content that is educationally beneficial for students and on content that children and their parents can enjoy together.

NHK is also enhancing its digital content. The NHK for School website³ has a redesigned front-page layout and offers video playlists for different school years and different types of school (including special-needs schools). Also, a website-based initiative called “Watching Alone, Not Learning Alone” supports children who are studying by themselves at home by enabling them to share reviews of video content.

Some parents are complaining that they are struggling to simultaneously work and care for their kids during the pandemic. To help ease the pressure, *Friday Morning School*, a new pilot program, provides 3 30-minute special lessons for children in primary schools on each of 2 Fridays. Materials are available on NHK for School. NHK conducted a survey on parents and teachers to better understand the role of public media. The feedback from teachers showed that they were struggling to set up distance-learning programs for students. Some students have no access to the internet. It is also difficult to reach out to each student who needs support. Finding a better way to support distance learning (not just delivering educational programming) is something we are discussing with a view to taking action. The school closures in Japan are forcing parents and children to spend longer periods in close quarters. Experts have pointed out that there is an accordingly high risk of abuse. NHK has responded

by extending an abuse-awareness campaign that it ran last month. Specifically, NHK is addressing the concerns of parents and children by rebroadcasting related content and by continuing to run the campaign’s website.

In Japan, March is the time for school graduations. The graduation ceremonies are an important milestone for Japanese youngsters, but many have been cancelled. Consequently, NHK organized a graduation-ceremony-style live special⁴ on TV and radio that created precious graduation memories. It also included young people’s thoughts and personal stories about graduation.

EXTENDED GENERAL SERVICES

NHK has redesigned its services so that they can be used by as many people as possible on an anytime-and-anywhere basis. These services include the video-streaming service NHK Plus, which has gone into full operation on April 1st. Catchup playlists on NHK Plus include programs offering the latest information on the coronavirus and programs that answer coronavirus-related questions from viewers. ■

NOTES

¹ <http://www6.nhk.or.jp/special/i/index.html> [25.5.20]

² <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/special/coronavirus/> [25.5.20]

³ <https://www.nhk.or.jp/school/> [25.5.20]

⁴ <https://www.nhk.or.jp/kodomo-pj/sotsugyo.html> [25.5.20]

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