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MEDIA EDUCATION

By

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The telephone number for the Centre for Mass Communication Research has changed from that shown on the cover. The new number is 0116-2523863. The fax number is 0116-2523874.

**What is meant by 'Media Education'?**

The term 'media education' has gained wide currency. At one time it signified a particular approach: an approach to teaching *about* media rather than teaching either *in* media (production) skills, or teaching *through* the media (e.g. educational television); an approach to media that had its own place as a subject in the curriculum, or which was consciously applied across the curriculum, but which was comprehensive, tied neither to a particular medium (such as film, or television) nor exclusively to a particular academic tradition (e.g. sociologically inflected media studies). The term was a *contested* one, in competition with others, including film studies, media studies, or English. Care was advisable in using it, for fear that for the listener it might have particular significations.

Media Education as defined by the British Film Institute (see Bazalgette, 1989, and Bowker, 1991) in the 1980s and 1990s, however, is both comprehensive and consensual :

"Media education seeks to increase children's critical understanding of the media - namely, television, film, radio, photography, popular music, printed materials and computer software. How media texts work, how they provide meanings, how media institutions and industries are organized, and how audiences make sense of media products, technologies and institutions - these are the issues that media education addresses. It aims to develop systematically children's critical and creative powers through analysis and production of media artifacts. This also deepens their understanding of the pleasure and entertainment provided by the media. Media education aims to create more active and critical media users who will demand, and could contribute to, a greater range and diversity of media products"

This definition is specifically about education for children, but could be applied to a media-related education in higher education and for adults. It is relatively broad-ranging in its view of what constitutes 'the media', incorporating both print and the electronic media, including computing. It seems to focus on media *products*, and in its insistence on computer *software* rather than hardware or computer networking, and its exclusion of telephony, it is still partial in its compass of media technologies. Whereas the term 'printed materials' appears studiously neutral with respect to the kind of content which these might represent, the expression 'popular music' indicates a view of media education as being about popular media texts as opposed to those 'canonical' texts which are usually the province, for example, of literature and music studies. Some proponents of media education would argue that this is unnecessarily limiting, and that media education is about concepts and analytical skills applicable to *all* media and mediated communication.

The BFI definition takes no position on other long-standing controversies: for example, whether media education should be taught across the curriculum, as a separate subject, or as

part of English. It does encompass both critical understanding and creative production. Its key questions are articulated more in the language of social science and linguistics than of literature and aesthetics. It seems carefully to avoid taking a position with respect to the media themselves - until the very last sentence, that is, with its veiled suggestion that media could be more diverse than they currently are.

### **The History of Media Education**

The BFI definition was developed within the context of its campaign to persuade Government to include media education in the National Curriculum, which was introduced to England and Wales by the Education Reform Act of 1988. While the BFI Royal Charter requires it to 'foster study and appreciation' of cinema, television and video, its campaign adopted a proactive role on behalf of most media.

David Buckingham (1997) has identified four major phases in the development of media education. For the most part, these phases are phases in *thinking* or theorizing about media education - and in *attitudes* to the media within education. Our knowledge of actual classroom practice for any of these phases, on the other hand, is scanty, although it is probably better for phase (iv) than for the others. In recent years there have been more systematic attempts to accumulate case-studies of good practice. Buckingham's categories are UK-bound, but arguably the UK has been a leading influence for media education theory worldwide. Buckingham's phases are as follows:

(i) The Leavisite phase associated with the Cambridge tradition of F.R. Leavis, whose principal aim was to teach children to discriminate between good and bad art, and to inoculate children against the products of commodified mass culture. This has its origins in the 1930s (associated with the literary journal, *Scrutiny*).

(ii) The Cultural studies phase grew out of a tradition inaugurated by Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and others, whose emphasis was on the appreciation of the popular arts and a reformulation of the concept of 'culture' to signify 'living' art (often in the sense of being rooted in the everyday life of communities) as opposed to 'processed' (commodified) art. This originated in the 1960s.

(iii) A phase associated with the BFI journal, *Screen Education*, which was much influenced by neo-Marxist structuralism, focussing on the role of the media as ideological tools, and on the consequent necessity to 'demystify' their ideological work, especially through the analysis of media language and representation. This had its origin in the 1970s.

(iv) A more recent phase, particularly associated with the 1980s, is the Media Education phase, more open minded than its predecessors as to how readers actually 'read' media texts,

and whose focus is much more on children, children's learning, and with a more positive attitude to the integration of critical theory and creative production.

These phases are not altogether linear; they overlap and run in parallel. As Buckingham notes, they should be considered in the light of broader changes in society and in education. Running throughout them all, he claims, is a tension between enthusiasts who wanted to establish a link between media education and democratization, and conservatives whose attitudes to media were suspicious and defensive. The 'democrats' saw in media education a way of introducing children to critical study of the same media products which surrounded them in the home. They believed that this would link education with life as actually lived, and would contribute to democracy in society by helping people to become more critically aware of the role of the media and of their powers of persuasion.

The conservatives, on the other hand, were more concerned about culture (in particular the perceived erosion of 'high' culture, and the - malign - influence of American culture), about morality, and about politics. They saw the media as alien to refined and civilized thought, brash and commercial (American), corrupting of behaviour (encouraging sex and violence). Yet such 'conservative' preoccupations could be found on both the political Left (e.g. Frankfurt school) and Right (Leavis); the Left also worried about the role of the media in fabricating 'false' beliefs and ideologies, i.e. beliefs and ideologies which did not correspond with the 'real' interests of the majority (often defined as their 'class' interests), essentially revealing a 'transmissional' view of media communication that was increasingly in conflict with the findings of research.

Buckingham's phases are not watertight. He attributes 'discrimination' and 'inoculation' philosophies to the first phase, but alternatively we may see 'discrimination' growing up in reaction to 'inoculation' approaches. These concepts in the context of media education were first developed by Murdock and Phelps in their now classic 1973 study of teacher attitudes to media, and probably still the most sophisticated of its kind. The 'discrimination' which Leavis urged between high culture and mass culture was rejected by Hoggart and others, who were more concerned to distinguish between the culturally authentic and the inauthentic manufactured culture of (many) mass media products - the 1945 *Daily Mirror* (+) against the *Daily Express* (-), the *News of the World* (+) against the *Sunday Pictorial* (-), although the basis of such judgments, in retrospect, look shakily subjective, with their claims to understand the mood, instincts and tastes of 'ordinary people'.

Buckingham's phases are cross-cut by more continuous tensions which put into some doubt his principles of categorization. These tensions include those between practical work and theory, between creative doing and critical understanding, between literary-oriented work and social scientific investigation, between a popular education for academic failures and an esoteric subject for subversive intellectuals, between instruction in media production skills and using

the media to cultivate literacy or other skills, between the media regarded as tools for self-expression and the media deployed as resources for textual reconstruction, between simulation of mainstream media performance and radical explorations of new forms, between a transmissional, one-way teaching about media industries or operations and an approach to media education that stresses children's existing experience, between media education as *knowledge* to media education as *process*, teaching *about* the media as opposed to teaching *through* the media, between teaching media through a single medium such as film or television or newspapers, and including all these and more within a comprehensive analytical framework.

#### **Who Teaches Media Education, for Whom?**

In the period leading up to the introduction of a national curriculum in the wake of the 1988 Education Act, considerable effort was invested by the BFI, lobbying the government and the educational community to support the inclusion of media education in the new curriculum. The outcome was not particularly successful, and amounted mainly to a requirement within English that children at Key Stages 3+4 (ages 11-16) should study "a range of media texts" and to make judgments about how they present their messages". (Dickson, 1994, p.23).

The 1992 national curriculum order for English stipulated that media education should be included, and 95% of all respondents to a BFI survey (Dickson, 1994) said that their teaching included planned elements of media education (as opposed to only 58% in a previous 1988 survey). Changes proposed for introduction in 1995, however, did not contain any requirement to study the media *per se*; rather, the media are seen as significant only in the context of developing verbal language through reading, writing and listening. Thus by 1996, Learmonth and Sayer (1996) conclude, 'media education as such is not in the national curriculum and is not routinely inspected by OFSTED' (the national body charged with inspecting schools). At Key Stages 3 and 4, (ages 11-16), however, the Programme of Study stipulates that pupils should be introduced to a wide range of media, and be given opportunities to analyse and evaluate such material, which should be of high quality and represent a range of forms and purposes, and different structural and presentational devices.

To make sense of these evaluations one has to distinguish between the use of media as a resource for the attainment of English language achievements, and the study of media in their own right, incorporating analysis of their production, content and reception in broad political, economic, social and cultural contexts. Even if the view of media within English was to be sustained principally on the basis that the media represent a range of means for self expression, it is obvious that this would entail much more than conventional language skills. The concept 'media education' as now generally applied, encompasses the study of media production, content, and reception, in their full context from the viewpoint both of critical analysis and of production, and its view of language goes far beyond the encoding and decoding of spoken and written forms. While such a view does inform some of the teaching within English that

occurs, it is given no space within the national curriculum.

The future prospects within compulsory education are limited, first of all, because media education has been ascribed mainly (but weakly) to the sphere of English, yet is here hindered by philosophical differences of approach to media between media education as defined above and traditional English teaching. Buckingham (1992) argues that English is primarily defined and organized in terms of activities and practices, whereas media education gives much more sociological emphasis to agencies and audiences, and to critical 'readings' of media texts, often to the exclusion of 'writing'. English is concerned with the 'humanizing' effects of certain kinds of texts (usually printed texts) which it recognizes as 'literature'. Secondly, central government interest in media within education has been consistently cautious, notably cool in recent years, with the important exception of information technology which by contrast is celebrated because it is connected with national economic benefit and with the advance of science. Such coolness to media education has been stubbornly persistent despite the ever intensifying role of media throughout society, affecting central institutions of politics, economics, the judiciary, and the monarchy, amongst other things. Even as the Conservative government in the 1980s under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher ushered in a radical policy of media de-regulation, which has increased the commodification and commercialization of media and media products to the detriment of non-entertainment goals and public-service broadcasting, it resisted the extension of serious analysis of media within education, and at least one Conservative minister of education (John Patten) rubbished the very project of media studies in higher education. In this time, therefore, it is hardly surprising that the advance of media education has been far short of spectacular.

Within the United Kingdom, the BFI survey of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions by Peter Dickson (1994) shows that most institutions (86%) teach media education within English and that 67% of the institutions teach media education in other areas, including media studies, communication studies, theatre and drama, art and design. Media education at primary level is strongly associated with English, and in two-thirds of secondary schools is concentrated in English, but only in around one third of colleges. At secondary level (11-18 years), nearly three quarters of respondents devote at least 10% of their time to media education in English.

55% of institutions claim to have policy statements about media education - interpreted by Dickson (p.4) as a 'sign of commitment to a subject area which has no national profile in cross curricular themes or dimensions'. Uses of literary adaptations are particularly common, but the report notes there is a 'substantial interest in media as a subject of study in its own right'. The production of media texts features in the work of around half of those institutions dealing with media in national curriculum work at key stages 3 and 4 of the curriculum. In commenting on his findings, Dickson worries that media education within English 'is likely to be undermined and underfunded', tending to be designated for the less academic at Key Stage 4.

In their survey of good practice in media education, Learmonth and Sayer (1996) note that there are no national standards against which achievement in media education can be assessed in key stages 1, 2 and 3 (ages 5-11). While there are examples of adventurous and exciting media education work in primary schools, some teachers need support in understanding media theory at an appropriate level and in handling practical work. In secondary schools, much media education is undertaken by English departments, which not unreasonably have other priorities; the quality of practical work is found to be uneven, with limited experience of extended audio-visual projects at Key Stages 3+4, for example, but there is more opportunity at earlier stages of the curriculum wherever media education is taught. Assessment of pupils' learning in media education is rarely undertaken. There is too much dependence on the enthusiasm of individuals or small groups, with little hope of embedding the subject successfully without clear strategic planning as part of coherent school-wide planning. The support of heads, governors and parents is essential. The authors note that teachers consistently express a need for continued training, particularly in practical skills, but are less aware of a need to become more confident in using a conceptual framework to underpin their teaching. Provision of training, however, is being undermined by cut-backs in government support for in-service training.

#### **What is Media Education About?**

The modest acknowledgement of media within the national curriculum notwithstanding, there exists no national consensus for the teaching of media in the UK. While the UK has a formidable record in theorizing about media education, it can boast of only a very uneven record in doing it and, until very recently, an extremely poor record in evaluating what is actually done inside classrooms.

In lobbying for the inclusion of media education within the national curriculum, the BFI had proposed a general framework, broadly applicable and inoffensive (which has informed various BFI teaching materials and the BFI/OU course, *Media Education*, 1992). As indicated in section 1 above, the history of media education has been turbulent and often political. It represents a marriage of film studies, literary theory and sociology of the media.

The attempt to establish a respectable aesthetics of cinema in the 1950s and 1960s, much influenced by 'auteur' and 'genre' theories as applied, especially, to non-mainstream and often subtitled 'continental' film of France and Italy, was very text-focused, and often antagonistic to mainstream cinema. Whatever its limitations, the generation of film studies prepared the way for later endeavours to take television seriously. Outside the circle of film studies' enthusiasts, the prevailing characterization of film and television as a popular medium led to an attitude that other than in the case of specialized GCSE and 'A' level studies, film and television was best suited for the less academically able children who, since the raising of the school leaving age to 16 in 1973 had grown in significant numbers. Media studies was seen as



a 'soft option' that might help pacify a restless and conscripted army of non-academic teenagers.

Between this target population and the heady intellectual debate within the BFI's *Screen Education*, there was an immense chasm. The intended beneficiaries of media education belonged to an anti-academic sub-culture soon to be identified by the RSA's 'capability' movement as the most in need of (now revalued) practical skills, 'competency' or 'capability'. But teachers looking for inspiration in the BFI's journal would have found cerebral, sometimes inaccessible debates on radical screen theory, dealing with such issues as the ideological work of film, and the positioning of audiences, much influenced by the work of structuralists such as Althusser and Lacan, semioticians such as Barthes and Eco, and the work of Hall and others at Birmingham University's Centre for Cultural Studies.

The influence of *Screen Education* is commonly asserted rather than investigated by many who write about media education. Excepting with respect to teachers of the relatively small numbers sitting for examinations in film studies or media studies at the age of 16-18, I think this source of influence should be weighed against others. *Screen Education* was but one forum for the development of cultural studies - in particular, of popular culture, a movement which was spearheaded largely by humanists with a background in language, literature, and film studies. Social science approaches were not much in evidence and this may help account for the 'transmissional' models of communication that sometimes lay behind the construction of film study through this journal, through theories which asserted rather than demonstrated the ways in which texts (might) work to make meaning. Alternative hypotheses concerning the likely sources of pedagogic influence, especially beyond the examinations streams, also deserve to be explored.

Many teachers in the field would have been influenced by their exposure to social science at first degree level or in teacher training courses: such exposure would have provided an introduction to the major traditions of social science enquiry, including: the orthodox positivist approach of the 'media effects' school of social psychological research; the empirically-oriented 'political economy' approach (exemplified by Golding and Murdock's contribution to the 1973 edition of *Socialist Register*) which developed from 1960s neo-Marxism; and the new cultural studies. During the 1970s and 1980s media research began to flourish in the UK at university level, largely within faculties of social sciences, spear-headed by the Universities of Leicester, Westminster, Glasgow, the Open University (whose course, *Mass Communications and Society* was published in 1977) among others. Within the panorama of higher education media journals, *Screen Education* was but one of many, and not a specially significant source.

The clash of political economy (social science) and cultural studies (language and literature) traditions is manifested from time to time in the media education literature, Masterman (1980)

for example clashing with Alvarado (1981) on the merits or otherwise of teaching media industry. Masterman, who at that time had wanted to restrict media education to television on the grounds that this was all that most children had experience of, argued that teaching about media industries was too difficult to make interesting. Alvarado retorted that this was simply a question of appropriate pedagogy. Supporters of both cultural studies and political economy agreed that media education was principally about the study of ideology, but came at it from different directions and with different intellectual traditions and tools. In addition to the influence of these approaches to media study at higher education, teachers were probably influenced by many other sources: including enthusiasm for amateur photography and film making, drama, religion and civic concern. In many parts of the world, for example, the Roman Catholic Church took a keen interest in media education; in Latin America, the church supported media teaching for pupils and parents outside of formal education as part of a movement of resistance to American cultural imperialism.

One odd outcome of the excitement generated by theory, and by the focus on the ideological work of the media was the slightly disparaging place allocated to practice and media creativity. While some researchers claimed that participation in media production helped to develop a range of general literacy, oracy and social skills (Lorac and Weiss, 1981), the media education theorists (like Masterman, 1980, Ferguson, 1981) fretted lest too much practice would be at the expense of critical textual deconstruction, encouraging children to aspire to commercial models of production, in comparison with which their own efforts would seem pitiful, serving only to confirm as self-evidently natural the established hierarchies of access to media technologies and mass markets. They also worried lest practical work would lead to excessive interest in technology, or, on the contrary, become too creatively self-indulgent (see Stafford, 1990, for a summary of such concerns). At best, they believed that practice should illustrate or exemplify theory. Such an outlook undermined teachers who wanted to improve the (continuing) low level of technical resourcing for media education.

This uneasy relationship between theory and practice in a field whose main 'customers' were the less academically inclined, signalled that media education was moving diametrically against the *zeitgeist* of the long conservative epoch that began in 1979 and helps to explain subsequent political distrust. One of the few yet most celebrated attempts to evaluate the application of media education theory to practice (Williamson, 1981) is a wretchedly small-scale and personal reflection, a tiny oasis of empirical test in a desert of theory and speculation. Williamson, doubting that her male pupils truly assimilated the implications of her deconstruction of gender in texts into their personal value system and behaviour, did not consider that attitude and behaviour-change was anything other than a desirable goal: a revival of the inoculation approach to media education.

A helpful route out of the impasse in relating theory and practice was offered by Buckingham (1987) who differentiated between practical work as self-expression, as a method of learning,

or as deconstruction. In each case, he argued, the process of learning was more important than the product, was thought to benefit from the presence of an audience, and could be used to illustrate but not do without theory.

As theorized, media studies was radical in a number of ways. First of all, it drew on neo-Marxist structuralist studies of ideology, and was hostile to 'monopoly capitalism'. Secondly, it was a new subject in an overcrowded curriculum, which could only find a pragmatic home within a discipline which, for much of the time, was deeply hostile to media texts. The home was 'pragmatic' because many if not most teachers of this new area had themselves been trained within English. It was a discipline, furthermore, associated with the anti-educational forces of society, in a society where the claims of teachers to a key role in the packaging and transmission of knowledge and values were subject to attack as never before by journalism and entertainment media. It wanted to take as its proper subject for study the kind of texts which most of society derided as trivial, at the expense, possibly, of introducing children to the revered classics. Some (see Donald, 1977) noted parallels between critical deconstruction of media texts, and the potential for deconstruction of many other forms of text, including the texts of formal education itself with its socially regulated conventions for the labelling, packaging and distribution of knowledge, and equally open to critical appraisal. Given the novelty of the subject, the nature of its content, the youth of its proponents, the nature of its clients, media studies could too easily be associated by the political right with the worst excesses of permissive or progressive education.

There has been considerable controversy as to the proper range of media education. Masterman's (1980) focus on television on the grounds that television was the one medium with which most children would have any day-to-day familiarity - a position from which he had retreated by 1986 - now seems only eccentric, and even at the time it hardly squared with the by-now popular semiotic insight that social 'texts' are not limited to 'media' texts, yet can be accessed by much the same intellectual tools. Only towards the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s is there a developing awareness not simply of the full range of the conventional mass media but of the need to link this range back to classical print, and forward to the new electronic media.

### **The BFI Framework**

The BFI developed a framework (see Bazalgette, 1992) within which it would be possible to locate all the questions and issues which people typically raise concerning the media. The framework consists of six 'key aspects', each representing a cluster of concepts. The boundaries between the clusters are not intended to be water-tight. Nor does the BFI insist that there should be six - it is possible to collapse them into three. But they have a broad heuristic value. It is not suggested that media education in practice should work from category to category. Rather, the idea is that in any media activity it is generally possible to explore issues,

engage in practice, that touches on each of these key aspects. The key aspects represent a core source of guidance and inspiration as to the full range of learning potential which exists in any given teaching context. A critical limitation of the key aspects is that they tend to be somewhat 'media-centric', and arguably do not focus sufficiently on the general social, cultural, political and economic, contexts within which the media are situated. A second limitation is that the aspects do not of themselves constitute a pedagogy, even though they may facilitate pedagogical thinking.

In the remainder of this section I shall elaborate on the six key aspects, as these are valuable in delineating the broad compass of media education as it is generally encountered in the UK in the 1990s.

(i) Agency.

This aspect is concerned with the people, whether singly, in teams, working within or outside of institutions, who produce media texts. The producers of media texts (oral, print, still and moving image, computer-generated communication) typically undergo a lengthy and sometimes rigorous process of learning and training, whether formal or informal, and acquire 'professional' knowledge to help them function effectively in production teams and to develop texts which suit the format of the media for which they work and which are considered likely to be popular with their intended audience(s).

The multi-authored character typical of mass communication texts entails an array of distinct specialist roles and specialist knowledge, whether technical (relating to technical equipment), directive (relating to the management and organization of creative human talent), administrative (relating to the management of non-human financial and material resources), or performative (writing, editing, reporting, drawing, filming, photographing, drawing, acting, dancing, 'hosting', composing, playing, singing, etc).

Agents are typically concerned that media products should make a profit or that they should contribute to the overall competitive health and viability of the institutions within which or for which they work. By extension, therefore, questions of agency also include issues of distribution and scheduling, media ownership and control, financing, industrial concentration, and the relationship of media organizations to political, legal, regulatory and similar environmental influences upon media operations. Such factors can often be situated at a range of different levels from local, through national to international or global.

(ii) Category

Media texts can generally be identified as belonging to one or more different categories of text. The concept of 'genre' is useful here, and film and television studies routinely make use of

genre categorizations such as 'horror', 'western', 'musical', 'news', 'soap opera', 'situation comedy', 'quiz or game shows', 'chat shows', 'sport'. There may be less consensus as to how to refer to programmes that could be described as 'hospital drama' or 'crime drama', although a case could certainly be made for constructing such groups. Genre categories can also be useful in newspapers ('hard news', 'foreign news', 'editorial', 'op-ed' articles, 'women's features', 'fashion', 'motoring' etc.), magazines ('women's interest', 'men's interest', 'soft porn', 'hobbies') books ('romance', 'murder mystery', 'horror', 'science fiction') and radio ('call-in programmes', 'record requests').

Some genres, as the above lists indicate, can clearly work across media. But not all media products can easily be identified in terms of genre. Some programmes or products represent more than one genre (e.g. the 'drama-documentary', the 'comedy-western'). There may be similarities between programmes of different genres which are more significant than their differences. The genre identification of programmes may vary between different people, according to their relative experience of media texts, their interests, and expectations. Furthermore, genre conventions change and develop over time.

Even more fundamentally, the aspect of 'category' draws our attention to the expectations we bring to different kinds of texts and to our assumptions about how different kinds of text can be used.

Although there are idiosyncratic features in the ways in which individuals categorize media, categories also have a cultural and sociological reality in that they form the basis, for example, of explicit production, promotional and scheduling practices, even of training programmes and career structures: many journalists spend substantial periods of their entire careers identified as specialist 'sports' journalists, say, or 'crime correspondents', while television producers may specialize in news, current affairs, consumer, sports or drama programme making. The sociological reality of media categories also has implications for 'reading' practices, in that viewers or readers who have relatively little experience of the conventions of certain categories may experience more 'difficulty' with such texts than more experienced readers, perhaps finding that they cannot position themselves in relation to a text in a way that affords them the pleasure which the producers of the text had hoped to achieve.

### (iii) Technology

The technologies of any given system of media production and delivery may seem to be just another way of categorizing media. Technology has to do with the tools and materials that are used for the creation of meaning. Elevation of 'technology' as a key aspect of the study of mass communications has the heuristic value of concentrating attention on the extent to which media communications reflect technological choices, both at an infrastructural level (design of telephone systems for point-to-point rather than for large audience communication; replacement

of valve radio by the transistor), as well as at the level of individual programmes or messages (choice of black-and-white photography, depth-of-field, wide-angle lens, position of microphone). It also highlights the implications of technology choice for the range of meanings that are possible, for the development of communication conventions that accrue to particular technologies, and the importance of technology in determining the relative costs and necessary skills of particular forms of media expression. Technologies both define significant differences between the media (radio as opposed to television technology) while also undermining those differences (note the convergences between television, cable, computing, CD-ROM, and telecommunications - through the development of 'binary' computer language as the common 'linguistic currency' into which messages can be 'translated' for delivery through a variety of different delivery systems).

(iv) Language

The media constitute important contexts for the use, experience, and decoding of spoken and written, or printed, languages. There is an immense range of issues that touch upon the choice of languages and language styles in the media, to do with the different language 'registers' or 'patterns of discourse' which are associated with different media or different genres. What may be called the 'socio-linguistics' of media is interested in such issues as the political implications of language choice for media in multi-lingual societies; the extent to which media language is restricted to standardized and official language categories; relative degrees of formality and informality of language use; how language use varies according to genre, to the kind of relationships that exist between participants within media programmes, and to producer perceptions of their audience; particularities of the language structure of media texts; the significance of uses of 'oral' mode in printed media and of 'literary' mode in audio-visual media.

Increasingly, the study of media texts is influenced by post-modernist approaches that stress the inter-relationships between given texts and their implicit and explicit borrowings from and representation of existing discourses in society. These discourses may consist of clusters of ideas and associations which are shared by members of a social, occupational, gender, social class or other grouping (sometimes referred to as 'interpretative communities'). The 'repertoires' of discourses available to particular groups, whether through media or non-media sources, is constrained by wider structural features of society which influence the distribution of resources and skills which people need in order to generate and appropriate meanings. In this view, texts do not have single authors; if a production team is responsible for, say, a given film, it need not actually constitute the 'author' for that film. Rather, a text is multi-layered, it contains echoes of all manner of previous texts and of the broader social discourses from which those texts have drawn.

The media do not generate meaning only through spoken and written language; just as language

has 'paralinguistic' features, including tone, inflection, posture, and gesture, which constitute related but distinctive semiotic (sign) systems, so too the media represent complexes of interdependent semiotic systems of visual, aural, even tactile communication. Some of these, like the 'languages' of bodily proximity, architecture, dress, and food preparation, are found in the everyday world; others are peculiar to the media - like the conventions governing the use of different styles and sizes of type, page lay-out, the relationships between visual and verbal communication on the printed page, camera positions and movements, juxtapositions of shots, continuity editing, framing, lighting, and montage.

(v) Audience

Studies of audiences were at one time mainly concerned with the 'effects' of media on audience beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, and with how such 'effects' were differentially distributed according to the social positioning of audience members, especially in terms of their social class, education and occupation. Audience studies are now as likely to be concerned with the ways in which members of audiences use the media in their day-to-day lives, how their different cultures appropriate media contents, and the range of different meanings, interpretations and pleasures that audience members take from the media, as well as with how media use varies according to age, culture, gender, social class and other influences which shape 'personal' identity. Audience studies may still be informed by institutional (and advertiser) interest in the popularity of particular programmes, political interest in the 'effectiveness' of political or other campaigns, the interest of psychologists, criminologists and others in the implications of exposure to programmes containing scenes of violence, or the interest of educationalists in the potential of the media for education. But social anthropologists are interested in the ways in which people use, experience, relate to, live around, and take meaning from the media, and how these factors are contextualized by particular cultures, communities, family structures, and ideologies.

A key feature of many contemporary audience studies is their rejection of the view that the 'meaning' of a text can be accessed merely through detailed analysis of the text itself, in favour of a view that audiences make meaning, and that to understand the meanings of media texts it is therefore necessary to study, observe and talk to audience members. An unqualified focus on individual difference, however, may simply reflect a liberal theory of the world premised on an assumption of the supremacy of individual choice as sufficient explanation for variations in behaviour. Alternative theories look for systematic patterns or clusters among the differences, and then seek to explain these regularities.

Post-modernism has broadened the concept of audience to include those who participate, as audience, in media programmes (e.g. studio audiences), the audiences which given producers may have particularly in mind when they produce (e.g. influential peers), as well as imagined audiences of their 'average' viewers or readers (the 'Kansas City milkman' of Associated Press

folklore). Some audiences are directly addressed in a programme, while others are merely 'listeners-in'. A text can contain echoes of previous audiences for the older texts that are embedded within it.

(vi) Representation

With representation we move back to the texts for an understanding not of their codes and conventions, nor of the languages which they manipulate to construct their meanings, but of their content, and in particular of how they portray, reflect, filter, negotiate the 'real' world. Such concerns are often expressed through the use of terms such as 'ideology' or 'bias'. Today it is commonly appreciated that the media do not simply mirror reality, even where that is their stated aim. Every form of representation involves selection, exclusion and inclusion, from the stage of initial perception through to decisions about what aspects to focus on and from whose point of view, and the kinds of evidence that will be used, using what kind of language(s) and subject to constraints of time, resources, money, imagination. In this respect the media are merely dramatic examples of the ways in which our own everyday 'non-mediated' representations of 'reality' are subject to similar processes of selection and interpretation. This does not reduce the importance of studying how the media represent the world, whether it be that of political events in news bulletins, the 'news-geography' of news agency 'wires', or gender relations in soap operas.

We can form judgments about such representations in the light of a range of evidence, including other media texts, alternative sources of information, perspectives and evaluations. We will be left at the end of the day with a judgment - perhaps a more reasoned, convincing judgment than that which informed the original media representation - but, none the less, a judgment - not a comprehensively 'true' picture of 'how it really is'.

**Action Research**

The BFI framework secures a structure for the subject which is broadly applicable across every phase of education. In that sense it is ingenuously catholic. But in itself the framework does not offer a pedagogy. The BFI has contributed to pedagogy mainly through the provision of case studies of practice, exemplified, for example, in its Primary and Secondary 'Curriculum Statements' (Bazalgette, 1989 and Bowker, 1991), and in the course which it co-produced with the Open University (1992), *Media Education : An Introduction* .

The BFI/OU course was designed for teachers of media education in primary, secondary and tertiary education, no matter in what part of the formal curriculum they were located. The course was innovative in a number of important respects. It was produced in the period 1990-1992, by which time the BFI had already made a commitment to mainstream education in its



attempts to reach compromise with the government in securing (unsuccessfully) a curriculum niche for media education. Media education had begun to abandon its single-minded focus on ideology and deconstruction. Throughout the 1980s, media research, especially ethnographic research within reception studies, critiqued the older certainties of 1970s political economy and cultural studies' focus on 'hegemony'. Not only was it clear that people read off many different things from the 'same' media message, but that there were many other interesting questions to ask about media as well as about their ideological role.

The course was cross-phase in its scope, and was structured around the BFI framework. It promoted a pedagogy that began with the assumption that teachers and children bring to the subject a great deal of experience with and knowledge of the media, and that such knowledge and experience could be articulated with the aid of the key concepts. The course incorporated many examples of practice, through print, audio and video case-studies, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It offered examples of different kinds of audio, still and moving image text, some of which were accompanied by comment and analysis to illustrate how they might be useful in the classroom and with the aid of the key aspects, and it also provided resource materials for teachers.

The case studies incorporated within the course are themselves problematic in as much as they are not informed by the systematic procedures of self-evaluation known as 'action research' in British education. Significantly, however, the course reader does contain a chapter on action research by Peter Scrimshaw (Scrimshaw, 1992). Equally significant is a chapter by Neil Mercer (Mercer, 1992) on the influence of Vygotsky in education, and his theory of how learning is achieved - is 'scaffolded' - through talk between learners and their 'more competent peers' or teachers. In effect, the course acknowledges that virtually nothing is known about the extent of children's media knowledge or about the nature of learning about media through media education, and that the only way in which such knowledge could be acquired would be through the collaboration of teachers on the course, and the assessment of their work. This approach matched well with the course's use of recordings of children's talk about media as a resource material for interrogating the role of such talk in classroom relationships. It paralleled the work of Buckingham, Moss and others who in their research had begun to examine how children make sense of their media experiences through talk, talk which in turn is influenced by the social dynamics of their interactions with each other, with teachers and with researchers.

The course signifies a more flexible and open-minded approach to media education, in marked contrast, say, with the certainties of the 1970s. It is an approach which lays great store on recognising that children come to the classroom with relevant knowledge, and that their knowledge deserves to be respected and used as a the basis for 'scaffolding'. What is to be built has to be informed by the 'key aspects', but may be primarily cognitive or practical in content.

### **Criteria of Excellence**

Learmonth and Sayer's survey (1996) identifies features of both successful and less successful media education, based on the schools which they observed and which tended to be those where media education was relatively well established. Successful media education, in their judgment, generally evinces the following features: -

- clear conceptual framework
- range of tasks reflecting the different contexts in which the conceptual framework might be encountered and applied
- provides an opportunity to develop work over an extended period of time
- values highly pupils' personal responses
- gives opportunity to work in a variety of situations: independently, in pairs, as groups, as a class
- offers right balance of support and challenge
- its high expectations and rigorous standards do not affect the pleasure which pupils derive from media work
- pupils sense continuity and progression in their media work which gives them fresh motivation and commitment
- teachers take account of the fact that pupils often know as much, if not more, as their teachers about the media

Learmonth and Sayer observed the following overall strengths in media education teaching in the schools which they observed:

- a clear and consistent relating of the work done to a set of explicit theoretical concepts
- an approach by schools or groups of teachers that showed evidence of a common understanding, joint planning and a concern for continuity and progression within the media education curriculum
- skilled and flexible class management, particularly in relation to group work in practical lessons

- a teaching approach that was sensitive to the accessibility of media material but which reflected high expectations in both analytical and creative work.

They also observed the following weaknesses: -

- a lack of awareness in teachers of the theoretical basis of media education;
- an inability sufficiently to disseminate within the school the good practice of one or two skilled practitioners, with the result that pupils' experience of media education over time is often arbitrary and fragmentary;
- teaching that exploited the pleasures and accessibility of much media material without insisting on high standards of analytical and creative work;
- a lack of confidence in teachers resulting either from uncertainty about media education's subject matter or from anxiety about their competence to do and manage practical work, or from both of these.

### **Conclusion**

Teaching media in UK schools has developed significantly over recent decades. This development has been accompanied by considerable contestation between different academic and pedagogical theorists. The national curriculum of England and Wales tends to inscribe media education within English, which can only represent a small part of the field of media education as it has increasingly come to be defined by institutions such as the British Film Institute. A significant feature in recent years is the growing realization of the benefits of case study and action research, which can contribute significantly to our understanding of children's knowledge and experience of media, how such learning progresses with age, and the potential contribution to such learning of systematic curriculum design and pedagogical principles.

An important challenge to the future of media education is presented by the pace of media and multi-media development. Older assumptions about the separability of magazines, film, radio, television, from video, Internet, CD-Rom and computer graphics etc. will be increasingly untenable. Just as the technologies themselves become more complex and flexible in their applications, accessibility to them and to the possibility of producing texts through them is improving, even if access to mass markets will always be out of reach for the majority. Traditional media education was developed by a generation of teachers for whom technology was rare, expensive, inaccessible and mysterious. The new environment of multi-media complexity, flexibility and availability may require a revision of old attitudes and assumptions. If children one day have as much instruction, opportunity and time to create audio-visual images and narratives as they traditionally have had for the production of written

texts, for example, it is possible that their audio-visual achievements will carry as least as much conviction, comparatively, as their written achievements. This in turn should invite a much less 'precious' anxiety about practice, and will invite new perspectives on the relationships between theory and practice.

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