

MEDIA EDUCATION: INTRODUCTION

This book presents ideas, theories and practices of media education in Australia and the UK in the first decade of the 21st century. The two countries face international questions about media education which have, perhaps, three faces. One is a set of concerns which are local, related to specific educational policies and cultures in each country. A second relates to approaches, both practical and theoretical, which are to some degree shared across the two countries. A third relates to global issues: the global reach of media industries; the globalisation of youth cultures; the communicative, representational and social possibilities of the digital era.

Our contributors touch in various ways on all three levels. We will introduce the book by considering the past – the history of media education in each country, and how these histories have shaped current practices. We will conclude the book by reflecting on the future: possibilities, questions, and predictions that emerge from the contributors, and from our own work and research.

Media Education in the UK

Media Education has a long history in the UK. This is ably summarised in David Buckingham's *Media Education* (2003: 6-9), to which we refer readers for an extended overview of histories, models, theories and pedagogies. Buckingham detects three phases in his history. The first he calls 'Discrimination', typified by FR Leavis, whose continuation of Matthew Arnold's project of culture and civilisation is often cited as the beginning of media education. Its project was, of course, to inculcate a profound mistrust of the mass media, and a consequent appreciation of the values of the literary canon, Leavis's 'Great Tradition'.

Buckingham terms his second phase 'Cultural Studies and the Popular Arts', arguing that media education is influenced in the 1960s and 70s by the new academic discipline of Cultural Studies, represented by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Under this influence, popular culture is seen largely as a positive force, a legitimate part of the 'common culture' described by Raymond Williams. Buckingham associates this phase with Hall and Whannel's *The Popular Arts* (xxx), suggesting that, while popular culture is taken more seriously here, this book still expresses reservations about the nature of commercial culture, preserving a degree of critical discrimination which it is media education's role to develop in school students.

The third phase in Buckingham's scheme is 'Screen education and demystification'. He derives this on the one hand from the influence of the British film journal *Screen*, and its exploration of new approaches to textual analysis, in particular semiotics and psychoanalytic theory. He proposes Len Masterman (eg, 1980) as the arch-exponent of this approach, adapting semiotic analysis for classroom use, encouraging teachers and students to expose the workings of dominant ideologies. While Masterman has been, and remains, an inspirational force in the development of media education in both the UK and Australia, Buckingham critiques aspects of his work as politically defensive.

Buckingham's argument is that all three of these phases involve certain kinds of defensiveness against mass culture; and furthermore that the history of media education internationally is notable – indeed, often begins from – defensive attitudes towards the media, which he sees as falling into three types: cultural defensiveness, moral defensiveness, and political defensiveness.

His own project has been to find a more nuanced approach. This also takes its cue partly from Cultural Studies: he makes the case, with Julian Sefton-Green, for a more positive view of young people's cultural tastes, knowledge and experience in their seminal study, *Cultural Studies Goes to School* (1994). At the same time, they were careful to distance themselves from more celebratory accounts of young people's media cultures, arguing for a role for media education in introducing a critical perspective, an argument which continues to be made by others, as we shall see in the closing chapter, in relation to new media. Buckingham's continuing work has made two other productive associations: with the debates of literacy education; and with the new sociology of childhood. The former is a component of his work on media education in schools, and his discussions of media literacy, which he defines as the outcome of media education. The latter association characterises his research into how younger children watch television, response to advertising, and make use of computer games and associated products such as Pokémon. The connections made here with cultural theory on the one hand and literacy and learning theory on the other, lay a valuable foundation for one of the most neglected areas of media education, the primary sector. In this respect, Buckingham's work is followed by primary literacy specialists such as Jackie Marsh (xxx), who explore how popular culture and media can be taken seriously in an expanded vision of the literacy curriculum in primary schools.

Buckingham's account, and his own work, can be complemented by other threads in the recent history of media education in the UK. One such thread centres on the work of the British Film Institute, whose education section has worked for over two decades to develop resources and curricular frameworks for the teaching of screen media, and to advocate film and media education in the policy domain. The BFI's work has been closely associated with that of other media educators, co-publishing (Buckingham & Bazalgette, xxx), co-researching (Reid, Burn & Parker, 2002; Burn & Parker, 2003), and jointly delivering training for teachers. At the same time, the work of the BFI can be seen in a wider European context, where education in national film heritages is an important component of media education in many countries. This emphasis can be seen as a challenge to some impulses of media education: a privileging of the medium of film over other media; a valuing of national film heritage over popular cinema. However, it can also be seen as a valuable complement, which raises important questions. One is a challenge to the 'bagginess' of the media curriculum. Can we – do we ever – teach a subject in which all media are evenly represented? Can the teaching of adult newspapers really make connections in the minds of students with the pleasures and conventions of Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games? The other challenge is the question of cultural value. The conventional position in Cultural Studies is to relativise value, and locate it exclusively in the realm of cultural taste, in which popular cultural affiliations

are valorised. However, while the social formation of cultural preferences is undoubtedly an important aspect of audience engagement with the media, the question of whether accretions of cultural judgments around particular texts in some way responds to objective qualities of the text itself remains unsettled. At the same time, the question of whether one group's cultural tastes are as legitimate as another's remains unsettled. For Cultural Studies, this is not the case: popular cultural tastes are championed; 'high' cultural tastes are condemned as elite. While this championing is still undoubtedly a strength of media education – often the only defender of popular culture in curricula still dominated by the values of the traditional arts – Film Education does remind us that cultural value is a difficult question with no simple answers. As teachers negotiate the slippery territory between different cultural allegiances, and different kinds of claim to cultural value, they may often need to 'inhabit the paradox', in the words of cultural theorist Steve Connor (1992).

An important element of recent developments in media education in the UK is the explosion of debate about media literacy in the last five years. While versions of this debate exist in many countries, this one began with a statutory responsibility given to the new media super-regulator OFCOM (Office for Communications) to promote media literacy. The debates initiated by OFCOM's processes of consultation, research and advocacy have been interesting. The definition of media literacy it adopted (Access, Understand, Create) is notable for its recognition of the creative process of media production by ordinary people; but also, less positively, for its omission of the word 'cultural', which is, by contrast, emphasised by advocates of media literacy elsewhere in the UK. This debate about media literacy is also connected to a pan-European initiative led by a unit in the European Commission, which is steering a communication about media literacy through the European Parliament and Council of Ministers as this book goes to press.

Quite what the effect of all this high-level policy debate will be eventually on media education in schools in the UK is hard to predict. What is clear, however, is that media literacy, and consequently media education, are moving up the policy agenda, and gaining currency as an important aspect of preparing young people for fulfilling lives in the early twenty-first century.

A final, important initiative to note is the founding in 2007 of a Media Education Association for England and Wales. Scotland has its own association, AMES (Association of Media Educators in Scotland), but England has never had its own association until now. This initiative can be related in various ways to other aspects of the media education picture in the UK. Unlike the top-down policy process of media literacy, it is in many ways a grass-roots phenomenon. It emerges from the long history of media education in this country, and its prominent members are a mix of practitioners and advocates of media teaching over many years, and younger teachers at the cutting edge of new kinds of practice. At the same time, it has certain connections with other organisations: some of its members have been active in NATE, some in UKLA, and these connections represent the related concerns of media teaching and literacy education more

generally, as well as the structural inter-connections of these domains in the school curriculum.

Current Structures and Practices

From a more practical point of view, the history and current state of media education is represented in curricular provision and take-up. In England and Wales, there have been specialist publicly-examined media courses in secondary schools since the late 1960s, and take-up at AS and A2 levels is currently expanding rapidly; although it only represents around 4-5% of the cohort. These specialist courses, along with GCSE, have traditionally provided the concentrated models of media education, elaborated through examination board syllabuses, training procedures and assessment mechanisms, which are a staple element of the kind of media education for which the UK is known, and which is markedly different from other models to be found internationally, especially in Europe and the US. Formal media courses also exist in Northern Ireland (about a fifth of schools offer GCSE Media Studies, and there is growing support for media education from the CCEA); and in Scotland, media education forms part of the 5-14 Art and Design curriculum, as well as leading to specialist post-16 exam courses.

Rather differently, there is some provision for media education in the National Curriculum for English at Key Stage 3 (11-14), and English courses at Key Stage 4 (14-16) typically contain a media component. There is also (somewhat marginal) mention of the media in the National Curriculum specifications for areas such as Citizenship, Modern Languages and History; although there is very little emphasis on media education in the relevant curriculum documents for primary schools. These ‘embedded’ forms of media education are more similar to other European models, where it is typically integrated into mother tongue teaching, the fine arts, or ICT.

There exists, then, no core entitlement for media education for all children beyond what is specified in the English National Curriculum; and this, perhaps, is the biggest weakness in the national provision. Furthermore, while this specification makes a mandatory requirement for the study of media texts, including the moving image, this provision is made in the Reading section of the curriculum – there is no equivalent requirement to ‘write’ or make media. The creation of media texts, which has been such a rich area of development in media education in recent years, is thus dependent wholly on the disposition, enthusiasm and resources of individual schools.

An initiative which has shown government commitment to the importance of the media in education has been the growth of specialist ‘media arts’ colleges, under the government’s specialist schools programme, which will eventually see all schools in England adopting a curriculum specialism of one kind or another. There are now over 40 specialist media arts colleges, and the work of the first one is documented in Burn and Durran’s *Media Literacy in Schools* (2007). The significance of these schools is, as is implied by their name, a shift towards an alignment with the Arts, and thus some loosening of the historical ties with English and sociology observed above. In addition, they have begun to demonstrate what is possible in terms of models of progression, in

contrast to the typically fragmented nature of students' experience of media work in school.

MEDIA EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Background

The teaching of media has had a relatively short history compared with the high-status subjects that have traditionally dominated the school curricula across the state education systems in Australia. As I have described previously (Durrant 1996, 2004), for the most part, media education developed from within subject English in this country, just as it appears to have done in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (See accounts by Masterman 1980, Lusted 1991, Goodwyn 1992, Fleming 1993, Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994, Davies 1996, Buckingham 2003, Quin 1996, 2003 and Burn 2008).

One of the legacies of Federation in 1901 was the adoption of education as a state rather than a federal government responsibility. Over the past one hundred years, this position has resulted in the development of individual state education systems that have remained locally focused, and fiercely independent. Yet a century later, one of the clearest and loudest calls with regard to Australian school education - at both government and business levels - is for more standardization in the way school education is delivered across the nation. More recently, we have seen a very real attempt to launch a national curriculum into the public arena. While such debates have come and gone before, the difference this time is that both major political parties publicly committed themselves to this project, and identified the development of a national curriculum as being a key policy platform running up to the 2007 federal election. Despite its current economy being one of the strongest and most buoyant in the world, common to both sides of the political divide is the argument that for Australia to remain competitive in a globalised market, it is imperative that it develops a national curriculum (See Sections 4 and 5 – CAF: 2007).

Labor has committed to a national curriculum to be developed over three years in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and history (ALP, 2007). At the April, 2007 meeting in Darwin, the Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) announced that it would develop nationally consistent curricula that 'will set core content and achievement standards that are expected of students at the end of their schooling and at key junctures during their schooling, starting with English, mathematics and science' (MCEETYA, 2007). These standards will form the basis for Australia's national testing and measurement program.

Of course such assertions are not new in the context of Australian educational politics; recent sources can be traced back firstly to the *Hobart Declaration on Schooling* in 1989, where the Australian Education Council (later subsumed into MCEETYA) comprising State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education, made an historic commitment 'to improving Australian Schooling within a framework of national collaboration' through the establishment of:

- Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia
- Annual National Reporting on Schooling
- National Collaboration in Curriculum Development
- A Curriculum Corporation of Australia
- An Appropriate Handwriting Style for Australian Schools
- A Common Age of Entry for Australian Schools
- Programs for improving the Quality of Teaching (AEC, 1989).

Ten years later, the Adelaide Declaration revised the above into the *National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century* (DEST, 1999).

As the above description suggests, debates about school curriculum are often about status and territory. Roger Wilkins, from the Board of the International Forum of Federations, suggests that the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government in Australia are becoming increasingly unclear. This is the function of two developments: firstly, a series of High Court decisions has progressively undermined the former limits on commonwealth power, and secondly, politicians at both federal and state levels have refused to address this incremental creep in anything like a systematic way (Wilkins, 2007). The result has been what Wilkins calls the growth of ‘ad hoc’ federalism, culminating with former Prime Minister Howard’s *Millenium Speech* in August, 2007, which effectively asserted the right and determination of the commonwealth to directly intervene at any level or area of government where the commonwealth deemed it to be in the public interest to do so (Howard, 2007).

And it is this very lack of clarity that ‘has allowed ad hoc arrangements to emerge, and encourages sub-optimal policy in vital areas including human services and infrastructure development’ (Wilkins, 2007). According to Wilkins, there are critical areas of government where the current assignment of roles and responsibilities are either unclear or inappropriate, and he identifies one of these as being education. It is significant that when Kevin Rudd made his acceptance speech for the incoming federal Labor government on Saturday, November 24, 2007, the twin areas he pinpointed as being crucial elements of his crushing election victory were Labor’s ‘education revolution’ and ‘industrial relations’ policies. He further reinforced these links by proceeding to appoint his deputy Julia Gillard to the triple portfolios of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

What is interesting in all of this is that rarely, if ever, are media studies or media education mentioned at the level of such national curriculum debates – except where popular culture texts have been set against the study of serious literary texts within subject English (curiously, a subject that is *always* mentioned as soon as the issue of content within a national curriculum is raised). As a non-Key Learning Area (KLA), media education has developed in different ways and directions in Australian education, and has had to find a home in different parts of the curriculum, depending on which state education system is under scrutiny.

It should be noted that media education has a twin presence in most Australian curricula. As a part of subject English, the study of media texts emerged during the 1960s. It can be most easily identified in current syllabus documents under viewing, though with more recent emphases on visual grammar (See Kress & van L: 200_ and Unsworth: 2008), there is also room for media study in English under reading and indeed writing, as Bill Green so aptly points out (Greenxxxxxxxx). Since the adoption of the *English Profiles* from the early 1990s, each state education department in Australia has incorporated reading, writing, speaking, viewing and listening as general organisers for English curriculum up to Year 10. Many states have also continued this trend into the senior years and partly as a consequence of this, media related texts have gradually become more commonly represented in university entrance English examinations at the end of high school. The most recent version of the ‘culture wars’ in Australia has frequently centred on this element as a focal point for highlighting the demise in rigour of subject English (See Donnelly: 2005, 2006 and 2007, Ferrari: 2006 and Slattery: 2005).

The second presence that media education has in Australian school contexts is that of media studies itself. In most state education systems, this element has been restricted to junior high school study only, but there has been a greater push for the subject at the upper school level over the past decade. Its progress has enjoyed mixed success, as the following partial summary indicates.

In New South Wales (NSW), the Board of Studies avoided developing a separate subject in media, electing to leave it within subject English. A draft syllabus for Years 7 – 10 Mass Media was written in the late 1980s, but the committee was dissolved in 1991 (Durrant: 1996). The NSW Board of Studies concluded that the mass media already enjoyed a prominent position within the English syllabus at that time, and that therefore there was no need for the introduction of a separate subject. Were there competing subject interests represented on the Board that led to this decision? One of the developed ideas relating to curriculum histories is that powerful subject groups tend to jealously guard their own interests in the face of emerging groups, and that this is enhanced when those subordinate groups seeking greater status meekly surrender (Goodson: 1983).

Of course, the result of the NSW decision concerning the lower high school curriculum has had significant consequences for the upper school as well. Currently, neither Media Studies nor Media Education has a designated place in the NSW Higher School Certificate (Year 12), except where elements of each appear as part of textual studies in the English Stage 6 syllabus, which can be studied at Standard, Advanced or ESL levels. As Layton (1973) noted in the 1970s, subjects without specific representation at the senior school level struggle for both status and resources, and NSW teachers of media studies have no clearly defined career paths unless they move into other subject areas. In New South Wales, at least, curriculum contestation within subject English has had a significant impact on much more than its own disciplinary evolution. As Goodson (1985) has also observed, established subjects in the act of defending their own academic status are quick to deny such status to new subject contenders, particularly at the level of schooling that determines university entrance.

Other states have taken somewhat different approaches. Queensland, for instance, introduced its Film and Television senior course in 1981 as a direct result of the Radford Committee report, which radically changed school education in that state by creating school-based assessment and teacher initiated (instead of externally examined) courses. The subject attempted to integrate media criticism and production and was taken up by teachers who had been covering film appreciation in their English and Art courses (Dezuanni: 2006). Over one hundred schools offered the subject in 2005. Despite - or perhaps because of - its popularity, concerns were raised about the emphasis of the course, given its title. In 2003 and 2004, a committee met to update it; its considerations included the expanding role of media and popular culture texts in Senior English, the inclusion of multimedia production in design and technology subjects as well as the growth of interest in electronic games and other elements of the new media. The resulting course was renamed *Film, Television and New Media*.

In Western Australia, a *Curriculum Framework* was published in 1998 after ‘almost ten thousand teachers, parents, academics, curriculum officers, students and other members of the community’ contributed to the development, review and rewriting of the *Draft Curriculum Framework* throughout 1997 (Curriculum Council, 1998: 7). While significant elements of media study can be found in at least three of the eight learning areas outlined in this framework (See underlined), no subject area was established that even had a hint of media studies in its title:

- The Arts
- English
- Health and Physical Education
- Languages Other Than English (LOTE)
- Mathematics
- Science
- Society and Environment
- Technology and Enterprise.

The fact that media education has been located in a number of different places in the WA curriculum but not as a separate entity has tended to work both for and against its growth. Initially, the specific subject media studies was one of those areas that emerged in response to the identified need for subjects that appealed to students who were less academically able but who were choosing to stay on at school beyond the minimum leaving age (Quin: 2003). In addition, this coincided with a number of government reports, including the Dettman Report (1969), that recommended amongst other things, a reduction in the emphasis on examinable subjects and the introduction of more school based assessment, a corresponding expansion of optional or elective subjects to match the growth and interests of every student, and the encouragement of more individual school initiated courses that would better cater for each school’s local needs (Education Department of Western Australia: 1969). The consequence of all this was that subjects like media studies were created with the very best of intentions and with plenty of student enthusiasm, but they were established as non-academic subjects, something that in Western Australia at least, has dogged the development of the area to the present day.

Media studies in Western Australia, then, developed out of a different type of reform agenda from that in the United Kingdom; broadly speaking, it was part of the progressive movement rather than a protectionist reaction to perceived cultural decline. Never the less, just as in the example of NSW, media teachers in WA have long complained about the limited opportunities they have had for advancement and promotion, although in the latter's context, it has been more because their chosen – or in many cases 'adopted' – subject area has had a presence at senior school level but has not enjoyed the status and drawing power of an examinable, university entrance eligible course. While it is widely recognized that Australian media studies teachers have felt marginalized and forgotten in their battles for resources and timetable slots over the past thirty years (See Quin: 2003), the establishment of a new course: *Media Production and Analysis*, which had its first public examination in 2007, is an encouraging indicator that things may be about to change – at least in Western Australia. Of course, this possibility raises new tensions, as the subject can now be counted towards tertiary entrance scores, and the number of students who took it up in 2007 was nearly three times the number who elected to do the senior Literature course. Clearly, such shifts in traditional subject participation and status are not viewed with the same enthusiasm by all sectors of the educational community in Western Australia, particularly as part of the debate about the introduction of a national curriculum has centred on the affirmation of the traditional disciplines (See Council for the Australian Federation, Action Plan I: 2007).

THIS BOOK: THEMES, THEORIES, PRACTICES

We have organized the book to address key debates in media education. One of these is the challenge offered to English by media education: to its narrow adherence to print literacy, its intolerance of other modes and media, its traditional hostility to popular culture. This theme is the subject of Howie's chapter on the possibilities and problems of teaching Star Wars in English. Rather differently, it is also the subject of Unsworth's chapter, which considers how a metalanguage adequate to multimodal texts in different media genres might be developed.

Another theme is the conceptual framework most commonly followed in the two countries: industry, text, audience. These themes can be seen as a simpler version of the construct known in Cultural Studies as the 'circuit of culture', which attempts to move beyond the simple binary opposition of text and audience (Du Gay et al, xxx). Instead, it proposes a circuit in which the media industries and their regime of production, with its economy, its politics, its regulatory context and so on form one node, or set of nodes; the media texts and their functions of representation and communication form another; the interpretive activities of audiences another; the use of media resources to negotiate identity another; the creative production work of 'audiences' yet another, possibly feeding back into the industries to complete the circuit.

Thus, Burn's chapter proposes ways in which aspects of the computer games industry's work can be simulated and conceptualized by students working on a game design project. Steve Connolly's chapter explores the language of the media, in this case the specific semiotic mode of the moving image, and how it can be learnt by older students in

specialist Media Studies classes. Notions of media audience are discussed by Robyn Quin and Jan McMahon; and by Steve Archer. The former study looks at how the concept of media audiences has represented in syllabus documents in Australia, and how audience might be taught in the future. Archer's study analyses how students' experiences as audiences of popular music forms feeds into their production of music video.

In one way or another, most of these chapters consider questions of new media, and the possibilities, challenges and questions raised by them for media education. We return to a discussion of this issue in the final chapter as we consider the future of media education for our two countries.

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