

Minding the gaps: teachers' cultures, students' cultures

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In Alvermann, Donna E (ed) (2010) *Adolescents' Online Literacies*. New York: Peter Lang

The story of the digital generation gap is a familiar trope in debates about young people and new media. Its rhetoric of cyberkids, digital natives and immigrants, and the net generation, is already beginning to sound tired; and the excessive optimism about the redemptive power of computer technologies on which it depends has been comprehensively critiqued (Buckingham, 2007; Livingstone, 2009). It may now be time to ask some more specific questions, not least in relation to education. How distinct and different are these generations? How do they (or don't they) map on to the teacher-student relationship? How aware are teachers of students' media cultures? Are these cultures, in any case, as unremittingly rooted in 'new media' as is often claimed? What part do the 'old media' of print, television, film and radio play? Are new media really enabling young people to become producers of media, rather than 'mere consumers'? And how does any of this make its way into the school curriculum; and, specifically, the media education curriculum?

Popular advocates of the use of ICT in education frequently argue that there is a significant gap between children's out-of-school experiences and the forms of learning that are currently available in schools (e.g. Heppell, 2000). While children's everyday lives are suffused with electronic and digital media, they suggest, the school has remained dominated by the medium of print. While some versions of this argument focus at a structural level on the school as an institution, others suggest that it is teachers who are out-of-touch, and largely ignorant or incompetent when it comes to dealing with new media.

To some extent, this can be seen as a variant of a much older argument, which tended to focus primarily on *culture* and *social class*. Historically, sociologists of education have repeatedly argued that schools are bastions of middle-class culture, and are largely indifferent – if not actively hostile - towards the cultures of working-class children (Jones, 2003). The need to recognise and engage with the everyday experiences of working-class students has been a major theme in the history of media education (Buckingham, 2003); although it is also a strong emphasis within progressive English teaching, out of which media education in the UK has largely grown (e.g. Goodson and Medway, 1989). More recently, work in the field of New Literacy Studies has also argued for the need to engage with popular media culture as a means of developing children's literacy practices more broadly (e.g. Marsh and Millard, 2000). Such work increasingly looks to the potential of popular media as a means of reconstructing 'subject English' as it is traditionally defined (Ellis, Fox and Street, 2007).

In the past decade or so, however, this argument has to some extent been recast as an argument about *technology* – in which young people are represented as a ‘digital generation’ or as ‘digital natives’, while teachers (‘digital immigrants’) are seen as largely ignorant of, or resistant towards, new media technologies (e.g. Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005; Prensky, 2001). This argument displays a strong ‘generational rhetoric’ (Buckingham, 1998), rather than placing an emphasis on social class; although it is worth recalling that earlier advocates of media education also looked to generational change as likely to promote the development of the field (e.g. Murdock and Phelps, 1973).

The use of media in education – both education *through* media and education *about* media – has frequently been presented as a way of bridging this gap. Popular advocates of ICT in education tend to suggest that using computers will in itself automatically motivate recalcitrant students, making ‘difficult’ areas of study accessible and relevant to them. Historically, of course, such arguments have also been made about older media such as television and film (Cuban, 1986). Education *about* media (media education) has generally adopted a more critical and less instrumental approach; but here too, there has been a recurring argument about *relevance* and the need to validate students’ cultural experiences. In both cases, teachers are urged to engage with the forms of media and popular culture central to students’ out-of-school experience, thereby reconnecting them with the culture of the school.

This chapter seeks to explore some of these arguments further in a context of significant cultural change. We want to argue that the gap between teachers’ and students’ cultures may not be quite as large, or as simple and straightforward, as some of the arguments referred to above tend to imply. We will also suggest that the task for media educators in bridging that gap might be more complex and more difficult than is sometimes assumed. The assumption that we might construct a ‘common culture’ that is shared between teachers and students seems to hark back to an earlier era of national ‘mass’ media; and in a period of cultural fragmentation and individualisation, such an aim might be seen as increasingly problematic.

To conceptualise the various ‘gaps’ between teachers’ and students’ media cultures, we will draw firstly on Bourdieu’s notions of habitus and cultural capital to consider how the cultural preferences of both groups represent particular dispositions, tastes and values related to their social roles (Bourdieu, 1984). Secondly, we will employ the idea of the ‘third space’ of culture (Bhabha, 1994; Gutierrez, 2005) to consider what happens when these two different (but overlapping) cultural spheres come together in the media classroom.

Research data

We draw on research from a three-year project on media literacy, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council. The project will research and develop a model of learning progression in media literacy, from 5 to 16 years of age, the period of compulsory education in the UK. This chapter uses data from the first stage of our

project, conducted between January and July 2009. It consists of an online survey of all students and staff involved in the project; and semi-structured interviews with a sample of 25 teachers associated either with the teaching of media literacy, or with its curriculum management at both middle and senior management levels. At the time of writing, this phase of the project is not yet complete; the arguments presented here remain very much work in progress.

The project is based in two contrasting locations. The first is a relatively affluent small city, with expanding high-tech industries and two universities. Our research here is based in two 11-16 comprehensive secondary schools (schools A and B, which form part of a federation) and two of their partner primary schools. At A, the majority of students come from middle-class homes; while at B, there are greater numbers from working-class homes.

The other location is a working-class council (public housing) estate in a much more economically-disadvantaged area of a suburban town. Our research here is based in a secondary comprehensive 11-16 school (C), and two of its partner primary schools. Almost all the students in this school come from working-class homes.

The first stage of the project identifies some 'baselines' in respect of media literacy in these two locations. Our questionnaire and interview data focus on how the students in the two sites engage with media; how their teachers engage with media in their own lives; how the teachers perceive the media cultures of their students; and how media are incorporated into lessons, both in the curriculum generally and in media education classes specifically.

Teachers' and students' use of media

To what extent is there in fact a significant gap between teachers' and students' media cultures? One recent study found that the commercial nature of popular media raised considerable concerns for teachers, and that school was not seen as the place to spend time on media texts which occupy enough of children's home lives (Lambirth, 2003: 11).

In our initial fieldwork, by contrast, the small number of teachers who express similar anxieties are significantly outnumbered by those who value popular media in their own lives and are keen to engage with them in the classroom. While some are less enthusiastic about students' media preferences, many teachers also appear keen to enable them to use new technologies.

Nevertheless, as Lambirth (2003) points out, the inclusion of popular media places teachers in an 'ideologically tense position': it raises difficult issues about cultural value, about what is appropriate to address in school, and what will increase opportunities for children to learn. While this is partly a structural question about the nature of schools as institutions teachers' responses to these questions are also greatly influenced by their own personal experiences of media, and by their 'habitus' or cultural orientations and values more broadly (Marsh, 2006). Most of the media teachers in our sample also teach

English, and have English degrees; and so these broader cultural dispositions often include a tension between the popular cultural affiliations typical of media teachers and the inclination towards heritage literature typical of English teachers (cf. Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994; Marshall, 2000).

We explored students' and teachers' experiences of media at home by means of two detailed online questionnaires. The student questionnaire was completed in school by 1,745 students (600 primary and 1,145 secondary). Our analysis of this data is still ongoing; and here we present only some findings from the secondary questionnaire (for students aged between 11 and 16). We compare these findings with a survey of 259 school staff, including both support and teaching staff in the three secondary and two of the primary schools. 21 of these reported having curriculum responsibility for media.

The overall picture that emerges from the student questionnaires largely confirms that of earlier UK surveys (e.g. Livingstone and Bober, 2005; Marsh et al., 2005; Ofcom, 2008). Broadly speaking, these young people enjoy high levels of access to a wide range of media and new technologies in their homes. In recognition of the way the school day shapes their access to media, we asked them to report on what they engaged with before and after school. Most noticeable is the amount of different media activity students report in any one evening. Secondary students report: listening to music (85%), watching television (84%), visiting websites (84%), playing computer, online or console games (79%), watching films (60%) and looking at photos (59%) in a single after school period.

However, these students' lives are by no means wholly dominated by media. Only 47% of students agreed with the statement that 'the media I like tells people a lot about me'; and many were keen to represent themselves as having other interests, including sport, playing music, doing homework, socialising and being involved in family life. 12% of respondents agreed that 'media is not that important to me - I have other interests'. The use of media was not seen to preclude involvement in other interests, as this Year 7 student's comment demonstrates:

I only have 1 hour on the computer or 1 hour on my ipod's (ipod touch) internet and sometimes I watch TV but only like 30 mins a day then I do stuff outside of my home, playing in the park or playing with my lego and stuff like that. And sometimes I don't even watch TV or play any types of media games at my home.

Print media were less popular than moving image media, with fewer secondary students saying they read books (50%), magazines (44%), newspapers (30%) and comics (23%). Even so, they were far from insignificant; and students at the more working-class School C reported a higher level of engagement with magazines and newspapers (51% and 48% respectively), naming among their preferred reading popular titles such as the *Sun* newspaper and *OK*, *Bliss*, *Closer* and *Heat* magazines.

The findings from the staff questionnaire suggest that teachers are also intensive users of a full range of media in their personal lives. Almost 70% of staff reported frequent (almost continuous or daily) use of television, music and radio, whilst 65% reported

frequent use of film and newspapers. 68% percent of all staff (and 86% of media teachers) reported high frequency of use of music: none reported that they never listened to music.

Both teachers and students, then, are accessing and engaging extensively with a range of media in their home lives. The ‘digital divide’ between teachers and students is not particularly apparent here. Furthermore, generational differences did not seem to feature *within* our teacher sample: older staff were no less likely than younger staff to engage with newly emerging media forms such as social networking.

Even so, there were some differences, both between staff and students and between the two locations. Perhaps the clearest difference emerged in relation to games. Few staff reported playing computer games (on- or offline), and for those who did (9% and 15% respectively) there were no significant differences in terms of gender, age, sector (primary or secondary) or the subject they taught. No staff named games in response to an invitation to list favourite media texts. Nevertheless, in a specific question on games, 63 respondents gave examples of recent games played, naming a wide variety, from the MMORPG *Everquest* to the World War 2-themed adventure games *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honour*. Particularly popular were the Wii physical games, mentioned by 19. Around a quarter of our sample of staff, then, has some kind of engagement in gaming culture. Yet by contrast, 79% of students reported playing games, the fourth most popular option for media use after school. Game playing was more popular at the more working-class schools C (88%) and B (85%) than at School A (68%) - although the latter figure is still high.

In the case of television, there was a much greater overlap between teachers and students. Teachers reported watching a wide range of lifestyle, light entertainment, comedy, variety, drama and factual programming. Australian and British soaps, American serials and animation were all popular across the sample (though some preferred ‘classic’ TV drama). Many of the most popular programmes among teachers were also high on the list of the students’ preferences: *The Simpsons*, the UK soap opera *EastEnders* and *The Apprentice*, the school-based drama *Waterloo Road* and the hospital series *Holby City*. There was also evidence of students and teachers watching a range of ‘family’ programmes such as *Britain’s Got Talent* and the sci-fi drama *Doctor Who*. Although there were some distinct youth preferences here – for example, the teen soap *Hollyoaks* – much of the students’ viewing seemed to consist of the same mainstream family programmes also preferred by most of the teachers.

In the case of online media, the differences were more to do with *purposes* of use, rather than *extent* of use. Almost 90% of all staff reported a high frequency of internet use at home. Whilst the greater proportion of personal use could be described as ‘functional’, such as shopping or banking, or work-related, a significant percentage (44%) reported using the internet for social networking. By contrast, students reported greater social, rather than functional, uses of online media. 86% said they used Facebook, with 62% also claiming to use Bebo and 19% MySpace, while instant messaging (such as MSN) was widely used. However, no fewer than 47 other social networking sites were named,

including Habbo, Piczo and Tagged. The internet appears to offer a distinct social space for communication and play, as one Year 7 student commented:

I like to use it to keep in touch with old friends from my primary school that don't come here no more. And to go on games. When I'm bored I use YouTube to listen to music and me and my brother have fun playing online games together.

Further differences emerged in relation to media-making activities. Recent research has been inclined to celebrate the role of new technologies in giving young people access to new opportunities for media production (e.g. Jenkins, 2006). Such opportunities are certainly becoming more widely available, although our research here suggests that these activities may be rather more mundane than is sometimes suggested. In piloting our questionnaire, we found no students claiming to 'make films' at home; although when we revised this question for the full survey, no fewer than 77% reported using phones or cameras to 'film friends and family'. We found little evidence that these home movies were edited, even if they were more widely distributed.

A range of other media-making activities was reported, including creating images (70%), writing stories (62%), creating music mixes (47%), designing websites (46%), making comics (29%) and creating games (26%). By contrast, very few teachers reported making anything other than music (20%): 12% reported making books, 10% websites and 8% films. (It seems likely that the teachers who report 'making films' are referring to more advanced forms of production: had we asked the teachers the same question as the students, it may well be that many more would report casual use of camcorders in the domestic context.) Notably, media teachers appeared to be no more disposed than other teachers to engage in media-making outside school.

Very few teachers (3%) reported sharing their work online, by comparison with 27% of students. However, both students and staff who did create media in their own time reported sharing these with family and friends. Indeed, all media-related activity was reported as being highly sociable: for example, 90% of respondents said that they talked about media with their friends. Nevertheless, only 3% of students reported sharing what they made with their teachers, which contrasts starkly with the figures for sharing with friends (85%) and family (53%).

This latter point would certainly confirm our broader finding that there is very little interaction of this kind in school. Indeed, it is hard under current circumstances to imagine where such interaction might occur. Overall, the students reported that they were not able to use the media they like in school or in lesson time – although School C permits more freedom for personal uses of media such as mobile phones and music players (over 75% say they are allowed them in school, if not in lessons, by contrast with 45% at School B and 27% at School A). More School C students also reported use of their preferred media in lessons, although the majority still reported not being able to do so. Books, newspapers and magazines were reported as the most tolerated media in schools; although even here, texts that students prefer rarely coincide with those they are

reading in lessons. However, students do use school as a social space in which to share experiences of media: 71% of the whole sample said they talked about media they like in class, although we are unable to say at this stage whether this was related to the actual content of lessons.

To sum up at this point, our questionnaire data point to some significant differences between teachers and students in terms of their out-of-school uses of media. However, these are by no means as absolute as is often suggested. Unsurprisingly, teachers make more use of offline media than online (although students do the same); they have some different preferences in TV and film viewing; they read more (and they read different things); they use the internet more for professional and functional purposes; and they play games less than students do. However, TV, film and music are shared dominant interests in both groups; and many teachers use some of the media that are often seen as the exclusive terrain of the young (with Facebook being the most obvious common ground). More striking than the differences are the very significant overlaps and similarities between teachers' and students' uses of media. Although we are still in the process of gathering and analysing our data, our research thus far gives us good reason to question claims about the notion of a media 'generation gap' (cf. Murdock and Phelps, 1973).

This might suggest that there should be less of a gap than is sometimes supposed when teachers and students come into contact in the classroom. However, our survey also presents a map of widely varied choices across a wide range of different media. There is no homogeneous bloc or clear hierarchy of taste evident in either group - although we have some indications of taste being stratified by social class, particularly in relation to games, books and newspapers. Both students' and teachers' cultural tastes are diverse, and this diversity extends into other spheres of social activity than the media.

Teachers' perceptions of students' media cultures

Further questions arise here about the nature – and perhaps the necessity or inevitability – of any gap between 'in school' and 'out of school' identities, for both teachers and students. There may be good reasons why both groups might not wish to bring aspects of their identity into school, or have them reflected and scrutinised in the context of the classroom. Media educators have often expressed a certain unease about being seen to 'colonise' students' out-of-school media experiences; but teachers too might well wish to preserve a clear distinction between their 'personal' and 'professional' identities. The origins of such a desire need further exploration; although it might well take a particular form when it comes to the teaching of English and Media. Our own experience in teacher education suggests that the forms of cultural distinction both implicit and explicit in the training of English teachers, and in the formal curricula they are required to teach, might well encourage teachers to leave their own popular media cultures at the threshold of the school. Here, perhaps, we might be able to identify a rather different 'ideological tension' – between the pleasures, knowledges, and cultural dispositions of their personal uses of media, and those of their professional lives.

Our survey data provide some fairly paradoxical evidence in this respect about how teachers perceive students' media cultures; and they raise further questions about the role of media education in bridging any apparent gap between them. In the case of the media teachers, there was considerable variation here. Some claimed to know their students' media cultures well; others were much less sure, with some even suggesting in interview that they felt quite remote from students' media cultures. The survey also showed that media teachers who claimed a good knowledge of students' media practices were more likely also to disagree strongly with the statement that children were 'more sophisticated than I am' in their understanding of media. though some took a different view. Opinion was similarly divided on whether children and young people understood the influence the media had on them: 9 agreed, 7 disagreed, and 2 expressed no opinion.

While ideal images of media teachers portray them as popular culture enthusiasts closely in touch with their students' media cultures and committed to incorporating them into the classroom, the picture we have so far appears to be more mixed. Some teachers consider they know their students' media experiences well, others do not; some subscribe to the popular notion of the media savvy child, while others oppose it; some believe young people understand how the media influence them, others do not.

The notion of a gap between the teachers' and the students' media cultures appears in various forms in our interviews with media teachers. It is defined, firstly, as a matter of different experiences. At one extreme, there are media teachers who are quite clear that the students inhabit a different media culture from their own. This teacher, for example, makes a general – and generational – distinction between himself and the students:

I found [teaching a course on computer games] quite challenging because it's something I don't do in my spare time. ...I mean one of the issues is that I'm drawing upon examples of my experience from the past as a young person of their age. That's a problem in some ways because I'm not engaging with their experiences ...

This statement reflects a wider awareness on the part of the media teachers in our sample that their curriculum should pay close attention to students' media cultures: their schemes of classroom work typically begin with an exploration of the students' experiences of the media form, text or phenomenon in question. Teachers also attempt to enable students to study their own specific choices of text as part of a wider scheme of work on a given topic.

At the other extreme, another teacher lays claim to the cultural territory she sees her students as occupying, although this cultural proximity is marked as an object of surprise to the students:

They went 'oh my god, the teacher's got Facebook!' It was like, grownups know about our media! They seem to have this idea that things like Bebo – Lily Allen was on Facebook - it just happens, yeah. But [I say] of course that's manipulated – [and they say] 'No!' So there's almost this naivety that their culture's *theirs*.

This teacher claims not just a familiarity with media that the students perceive to be their own, but also a greater degree of knowledge and expertise, particularly about their commercial aspects – directly countering romantic notions of young people as spontaneously knowledgeable ‘cyberkids’. However, the account given here also suggests an instability in the conjunction of teacher’s and students’ media cultures. On the one hand, this reflects a general uncertainty about how to approach the more ‘participatory’ aspects of the internet. On the other hand, it may indicate the genuine difficulty of somehow effecting a synthesis of the students’ and teachers’ cultural worlds, as we will discuss below in relation to the idea of the ‘third space’.

In other cases, specific distinctions are made between different kinds of media. One teacher ruefully observes a distance between his own media experience and interests, and those of the students, yet simultaneously recognised (as did several others) that the curriculum should not be dictated by his own interests:

I’m not kind of gadget man, I don’t tend to have a lot of things, I don’t tend to use a lot of things that perhaps young people are, so I feel a little bit out of touch in that respect. ... And I think it's important to look at those things, I don’t think it's a case of plumping for traditional things just simply because of my deficiencies, I think it would be good to use those technologies.

The gap is defined here in terms of proficiency with technology, rather than of cultural tastes. This teacher also made an argument for the continued study of what he called ‘more conventional forms of media’, on the grounds that it was important for students to know ‘where things have come from’. Yet when it came to choosing his own preferred media for teaching, he opted for computer games, music and film, and said he preferred to avoid newspapers (‘I find it just a very dry topic’) – suggesting that in spite of the distance he perceived between himself and the students, his own interests were remarkably similar to the patterns that emerged from the student survey.

These interviews generally confirm that – even for specialist media teachers - there is seen to be a gap here that can prove difficult to bridge. However, they also suggest that this gap is by no means as dramatic as is sometimes claimed. While some teachers perceive the students’ media cultures as remote from their own, this is not the case for others; and the perceived differences are not always borne out by the data. Some teachers’ media uses are closer to those of the students than they think; while some teachers’ constructions of students as enthusiastic users of Web 2.0 are clearly inaccurate (two referred to the students’ habitual use of Twitter, for example, which our survey showed was used by only 3% of students). Nevertheless, irrespective of their views of this gap, the media teachers generally believed that the students’ media cultures *should* be reflected in the media classroom. Yet to what extent did they feel they were managing to achieve this in practice?

Media education: bridging the gap?

The interview data so far suggest that media teachers perceive several significant gaps between the students' media experiences and the work they are able to do in the media classroom. Some of these are considered to be more or less necessary or inevitable; while some are clearly perceived as a result of the imposition of particular curricular or assessment structures. These gaps take several different forms.

Firstly, several teachers commented on a gap between the media *texts* that were popular with students and those that were actually explored in the media classroom. This was partly a matter of teachers' efforts to select texts that are accessible and familiar to the majority of students: mainstream forms such as comics or television drama. Rather differently, such apparently 'safe' choices could backfire when prescribed by public examination bodies, in ways that effectively constraining the choices available for individual schools. Thus, one teacher at the more working-class School C complained that the examination board's chosen genre for the year was situation comedy, a genre that he felt was much more appropriate for middle-class students. While the need to find a 'common culture' is understandable, it can marginalise more individual or specialised media enthusiasms. As contemporary media cultures continue to proliferate and students' media uses and tastes diversify, attempting to define and secure this shared 'common culture' becomes increasingly problematic.

This attempt, best represented perhaps in one school's programme of study based on two British weekly TV hospital dramas, can be seen in terms of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. This choice of material recuperates the vestiges of shared television culture, opting for a cultural resource likely to be familiar to both staff and students. At the same time, it legitimises this popular cultural knowledge as cultural capital recognised by the mechanisms of education, both local and national, through a series of transformations involving the application of abstract concepts and the use of practical production activities.

A very different version of this 'textual' gap was a distinction between popular media on the one hand, and film (or moving image media) on the other – especially if, as has been the case in some recent work in the field, the latter is closely tied to 'art film', or to literature. As one teacher put it:

There's a danger that you kind of equate in their heads that media equals moving image or film... And if you keep just canonizing stuff ... you're kind of preserving in aspic something that was twenty years old. In the case of film it's a hundred and odd year old media form, isn't it? So to say 'oh we'll accept that now', it very much is the English literature model of... 'well it's been around for long enough now, we'll have that'. And it's not really, it doesn't really engage with those other bits of media which are very new and innovative and postmodern elements of media, and how students interact with media texts...

At first sight, it seems that the issue here is the danger of abandoning the search for a common culture evident in the hospital drama programme, and adopting instead exactly the kind of cultural distinction Bourdieu (1984) condemns so vehemently in his critique of Kantian aesthetics. Yet for other teachers, it was important that media education should not simply follow the latest (even the most ‘postmodern’) aspects of their students’ media experiences. As our survey has shown, ‘old’ media such as film and television, and even print media, remain a significant aspect of most children’s cultural experience. Furthermore, some teachers argued that it was part of their role to enable students to experience ‘media that they would not otherwise have come across’. One teacher, for example, spoke about the benefits of using Hitchcock’s *Psycho* in a course on horror, and the French art film *La Haine*. For this teacher, it was precisely the students’ *lack* of ‘pre-existing knowledge’ that made it possible for them to engage with the texts in a more active way. The question begged here then, is how to move beyond the binary structure of Bourdieu’s model towards a more pluralistic view of the media cultures students and teachers might explore, without simply privileging elite cultural forms over popular ones (or indeed vice versa).

A second gap was noted between the students’ everyday media experiences and the *critical skills* expected of media literacy. Different teachers prioritised different aspects of this critical approach. For some, it was very much a matter of challenging students’ assumptions about studying popular culture, arguing for the need to “identify how those industries work, how they operate, how they play on the audience ...”, as one teacher put it.

This approach falls within the ‘critical literacy’ paradigm widely adopted within media education, although it veers towards a kind of protectionism. However, this teacher was keen to emphasise that this was not ‘completely a negative thing’, and that it was not always ‘teacher-led’ or ‘didactic’.

Meanwhile, another teacher commented that this kind of analytical, ‘deconstructive’ approach could prove frustrating, even when it was embedded in the context of practical media making. This was particularly the case where the examination rubric required students to demonstrate specific forms of theoretical knowledge, for example about shot types, audience demographics or *mise-en-scene*.

In these examples, the process of conversion from one kind of (‘popular’) cultural capital to another (that is perhaps more ‘critical’) entails an uneasy form of negotiation.

Several of the interviews suggested a third gap, between the students’ experiences as media consumers (or users) and the *production* opportunities afforded in the media classroom. For all the schools, media production was a key dimension of media education; and yet with some media, it was still difficult to offer students opportunities that might come close to a ‘realistic’ production experience (although school creative work may possess its own kind of authenticity, as we shall discuss below).

This was less the case with video than with other media. The teaching of moving image production was well-established in all three schools, a picture typical of Media Studies teaching in the UK from 14 to 19 (Grahame & Simons, 2004), but extended here into the 11-14 age bracket. If the camcorder uses of the students are indeed typically low-level and casual (and this remains to be verified), then the school media curriculum is offering ample opportunities, again, to ‘convert’ one form of cultural capital into another - and not only for showing the results to a teacher or examiner, as was once the case, but also for online sharing and exhibition.

Nevertheless, this was more difficult with new media, as one teacher observed:

...there seems to be kind of a clear division, because with filmmaking, we can look at film, we can decode a film, we can take it apart and then it’s very easy for a student to then really make their own film with a camcorder and basic editing software, you can do that. It’s a lot more problematic say with a computer game.

The software package Mission Maker, a ‘drag and drop’ game-making resource, which was used by all three secondary schools, was seen to offer a solution to this – albeit only a partial one:

Mission Maker is very good because it allows you to pull it together, but what you’re not doing is you’re not coding a game, which is obviously how games are put together...

This sense of limitation and uncertainty was also apparent in a fourth gap that emerged from the interviews: between the media curriculum and more participatory aspects of the internet. Several teachers encouraged students to use the internet as a research tool – for example when researching the representation of social issues in the media, or specific aspects of the media industries, such as the music business. However, addressing aspects such as social networking that were closer to students’ everyday uses was seen to be more difficult. Several teachers expressed aspirations to engage more fully with online cultures and new media, both in the survey and the interviews. Of the sample of 259, 131 responded to the question asking what media they would like to make with students if it were possible: of these, 47 said they would like to make animations, 44 said websites, 43 said films, and 31 said computer games. A number of the interviews also focused specifically on more participatory online applications of the ‘Web 2.0’ variety. One teacher commented:

... there’s loads of things which we don’t really touch on at all... machinima, and also kind of online communities, Second Life and things like that where... it’s this kind of virtual social communities, and learning about how people communicate in those ... I’m not sure I can conceptualise yet how one would be able to teach it and what the product would be... but that’s an area that seems to be completely missing for us.

The problem here is seen as partly generational (as this teacher put it, ‘you’re much older than students are’), but it is also to do with the need to rethink established conceptual structures of the media curriculum, such as authorship and audience. Likewise, in discussing other aspects of ‘Web 2.0’ such as Wikipedia or social networking, several teachers recognised the general need to be developing skills of critical analysis, but remained uncertain as to how this might be achieved.

Conclusion: a third space?

To what extent is there in fact a cultural or generational gap between students’ and teachers’ media experiences? Is it desirable, or necessary, or even feasible for that gap to be overcome? And if so, to what extent might media education provide the means with which to do so? Our aim in this chapter has been to open up some of these questions, and to challenge some of the received assumptions about them, rather than to offer a firm conclusion. Our research is at an early stage, and our findings here are still very provisional.

One possible conclusion here would be to say that the ‘problem’ – if it is indeed a problem – is not so much about *teachers* as it is about *schools*, or indeed about the wider culture and politics of education systems. The problem is not that teachers know nothing about their students’ media experiences, or that they are unsympathetic to them, or uninterested in them. While there are some predictable differences between them, teachers and students share many of the same media experiences, and often the same tastes – even if neither group necessarily believes this to be the case. They may belong to different generations, and to different social groups, but they do not necessarily live in wholly different cultural worlds.

Nor is it that case that teachers do not *want* to include media in their teaching. Many believe that learning needs at least to begin with the experiences and orientations of students; and that media and popular culture are an important aspect of that. While the specialist media teachers in our study are obviously enthusiastic about this, the large majority of the staff we have surveyed were also keen to find ways of incorporating and engaging with media in their teaching.

The reasons why they generally do not do so are perhaps partly to do with teachers’ individual dispositions, and the uncertainties or limitations in their knowledge – in effect, their cultural capital. However, much of this is also to do with the logistical, structural and institutional constraints of schooling. Whatever they might individually wish, teachers’ ability to address the diverse and rapidly changing nature of their students’ cultural lives is actively constrained in a context that is characterised by a nationally governed curriculum, an emphasis on testing, and externally specified teaching frameworks.

In his research on the informal literacies of immigrant students in California, Kris Gutierrez (2005) suggests that the classroom could provide a ‘third space’ where the

cultures of teachers and students might overlap and come together in constructive dialogue. The third space conceived of here is as much as series of processes as a space, characterised by the transformation of cultural resources (in the sense that Vygotsky implies), and by the joint construction of a new social reality. While this approach is optimistic, Gutierrez also recognises the difficulties:

Clearly, this process of transformation is anything but harmonious and it is these inherent continuities and discontinuities between individual and the environment and the larger system that, in part, I have been attempting to account for in theorizing the *Third Space*. (ibid: 13-14)

This argument could also be applied to media and popular culture; and these ‘continuities and discontinuities’ describe well the kinds of gap we have observed. At the same time, the effort to produce ‘authentic cultural practices’ in the classroom through play, through conceptual learning, through imagining how things might be different, also tallies in certain ways with the efforts visible in the schools in our project. These include the attempt of one teacher to harness his students’ use of social networking media to consider issues of citizenship; the effort to find common cultural ground in popular TV drama; the use of game-authoring software to address an important cultural form less well-known to the teachers; and the emphasis in schemes of work on accessing students’ prior cultural experience.

Yet however we might conceive of the cultural ‘third space’ in this context, we also need to consider the institutional context of schooling, with its attendant technologies of assessment, its constraints of time and space, and its externally prescribed curriculum. Our early data (interviews with teachers and managers; curriculum plans; policy documents) suggest a range of institutional constraints: the lack of national training programmes for media education; an emphasis on technology (rather than culture) in government policy, to which schools are expected to respond; changes in national procedures for constructing teachers’ workloads, which, while directed benignly at preserving the ‘work-life balance’, may also have the effect of constricting the time available for teachers to discuss these complex cultural factors.

Media education is constrained in similar ways, both by the institutional ‘grammar’ of schooling, and by specific curricular and assessment requirements; and as such, it cannot offer a simple answer to this problem. However much teachers may seek to use it as a ‘third space’, in which to embrace or at least engage with students’ cultures, there are significant difficulties in doing so. As we have shown, current practice in media education continues to face difficult questions about the selection of media texts to be used, the kinds of critical concepts and terminology that students are expected to acquire, the relationships between media consumption and the experience of creative production; and the need to be responsive to the rapidly-changing cultures of digital media.

Yet it would be misleading to suggest that structural constraints exist apart from the individual and collective cultures of students and teachers. The determining functions of cultural tastes and the social contexts in which they are formed, as well as the constraints

that surround the development of teachers' professional identities, must be considered. One move that will be necessary as we continue our research is to shift our focus from the cultural contexts outside the classroom to the cultural work of the media classroom: the 'third space'.

The question of what kind of cultural activity actually arises in this space is a moot one. The British Cultural Studies tradition, in its championing of the vitality of spectacular youth cultures, has often tended to construct schools as culturally inauthentic, even oppressive places. Media teachers have responded by seeking to import their students' cultural experiences into the classroom. However, it could be argued that the kind of cultural production that arises here is not simply an extension of the students' everyday cultures, any more than it is merely an imposition of the culture of the school: it is, perhaps, a cultural encounter of a third kind. Thus, others have suggested that students' creative writing in school is a genre of its own (Moss, 1989); and we may extend this argument to propose that students' drama, media or art productions are also something different from both the professional and the amateur spheres of production in the adult world. Such creative production draws upon on and transforms external cultural resources, certainly, but it also possesses its own cultural authenticity.

Bhabha suggests that the 'third space' involves a kind of cultural translation, in which different cultures represent themselves to each other; and that this act of representation displaces the histories of these cultures, making new kinds of negotiation and political structure possible (Rutherford, 1990). However, while it is useful to think of the culture of the classroom constructed from *representations* of the participants' cultures, we would argue that the cultural work of the classroom is necessarily connected to the cultural histories behind and beyond it; while the idea of 'representations' does not adequately convey the material, embodied work of the media classroom.

What our data is showing, then, can be seen as a series of representations or imaginings, realised in material media and embodied processes: the efforts of the teachers to imagine their students' media lives; the dramatic construction of imagined spaces of consumption and production in the classroom; the representation of media forms, images, narratives, concepts in worksheet, whiteboard and exercise book – and perhaps above all, in the material media productions of the students themselves.

We may find that this third space, rather than displaying any harmonious synthesis of cultures, is necessarily characterised by the hybridity and ambivalence that Bhabha (1994) identifies. It is a space that consequently 'challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force' (Rutherford, 1990: 208). However successful teachers might be in overcoming the structural constraints we have indicated, this hybridity is perhaps the essential condition of media cultures. It is a hybridity whose untidy flux has to be accommodated, however uncomfortably, by the mechanisms of the syllabus and the examination, and yet led by the responsive pedagogies media teachers are reaching for.

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