

Teaching English And Media Education

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Abstract

The media, especially television, is the main means of cultural transmission in our society and it is well attested fact that many students spend more hours in front of TV screen than they do in a class room. 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 they work, how they produce meaning, how they are organised and how audiences make sense of them, and the issues that media education addresses. It aims to develop systematically children's critical and creative powers through analysis and production of media artefacts. This also depends their understanding of the pleasure and enjoyment 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.

Key word: teaching English, media education

Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris dan Media Pendidikan

Abstrak

Media khususnya televisi adalah sarana utama transmisi budaya dalam kehidupan sosial, dan menjadi sebuah fakta banyak siswa yang menghabiskan waktunya berjam-jam di depan televisi dibandingkan yang mereka lakukan di dalam kelas. Media pendidikan meningkatkan pemahaman kritis anak-anak mengenai media diantaranya televisi, film, radio, music terkenal, perangkat lunak komputer. Bagaimana media itu berfungsi, bagaimana media itu menghasilkan makna, bagaimana media itu terorganisir dan bagaimana masyarakat memahami media tersebut. Hal ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan pola pikir kreatif dan kritis anak secara sistematis melalui analisis dan produksi media. Hal ini juga tergantung pada pemahaman mereka tentang kesenangan dan kenikmatan yang disediakan oleh media. Media pendidikan bertujuan untuk menciptakan para pengguna media yang lebih aktif dan kritis sesuai dengan permintaan dan dapat berkontribusi lebih besar dalam keanekaragaman produk media.

Kata kunci : Pengajaran bahasa Inggris, media pendidikan

A. INTRODUCTION

The media sub-section comes to a close with a far more valuable and powerful statement about media education dealing with fundamental aspects of language, interpretation and meaning, and having developed in a very explicit way concepts which are of general importance in English.

In many other parts of the English speaking world, including the Principality, 'viewing' is well established as part of the English curriculum alongside reading and writing, speaking and listening. It is a matter of some astonishment, as well as concern, that this is not true of the English curriculum. Yet the media, especially television, is the main means of cultural transmission in our society and it is a well attested fact that many students spend more hours in front of a TV screen than they do in a classroom. We have been very reluctant to educate school pupils in how the media operates, even though this task has been placed into the hands of the English teacher.

English teachers have often had towards the media in general 'discriminate and resist' become the slogan. Resistance, thankfully, being no longer possible, the English teacher needs to embrace the opportunities that media education provides; given the insights of post-structuralist criticism we have no choice but to extend our awareness of the wide range of 'texts' that we have available to us in our classrooms and in the experience of our students.

Some English books and media education present volume provides practical help for the teachers wishing to include media education within the work of the English classroom. It is a balanced and considered account which avoids the extremes which characterized much of the emerging climate of Media Studies. By its very nature the field itself is difficult to define and can sprawl until it becomes all encompassing.

B. DISCUSSION

1. The relationship between English and media education

English as a school subject is changing. There are a number of reasons for the change but one of the most important originates in a broadening of the subject to include media education. The change is in process and so there is a considerable degree of uncertainty about what English is going to look like in the future. The formal inclusion of media education within English, effectively from 1989, through the documents of The National Curriculum (*English 5-16*), is one cause of the uncertainty. What had been a rather haphazard and erratic development as more English departments began to include media-related work in their normal practice was suddenly a uniform and consistent requirement. However as the emphasis on media education within English was part of an already existing momentum, the National Curriculum has simply provided recognition, albeit a rather vague one of the progress already made toward a proper integration of the two subjects. The vague and rather scattered references to media education in English in the various National Curriculum documents will not in themselves resolve uncertainties. English teachers should not compound their uncertainties by looking to add on bits of media work, they need instead to rethink and reformulate aspects of English itself.

a. Defining the relationship

English almost everyone agrees, is a subject, and a very important one, although it rare to find any total agreement on what it is. It is much easier to define Media Studies although some might dispute whether it a subject at all. My starting point is a broad definition of English as the study of the production and reception of texts in English and the contexts in what those processes take place. A text is broadly defined as any meaningful utterance and so includes speech and media output as well as writing. Contexts include everything from society and culture to two speakers in conversation.

This broad definition places media education firmly within the domains of English but a great deal more elaboration is needed to explain my case proponents of media education and Media Studies have reacted negatively to the official positioning of media education within English (Masterman 1983, Buckingham 1990a, b). It is worth examining the official rhetoric and some reactions to it in order to provide some understanding of the current demands being made upon all English teachers.

b. English and media education or Media Studies?

Media Studies as an academic subject has a fascinating background of its own. Like English, it has been the site of numerous battles between champions representing differing views of the subject. The way its various underlying theories have evolved is well documented (there is an especially useful overview in *Culture, Society and the Media*, Gurevitch *et al.*, 1982). Media Studies in school has often been defined (see, for example, Buckingham 1990a) as if it is far more homogenous than English and, although I think that this is accurate, it does not mean that we can assume that in itself it is fixed.

English has a relatively brief history as a subject (see Eagleton 1983, Doyle 1989, Goodson and Medway 1990) and the nature of its origins are much debated, although there is a rough agreement that it began to appear in the late nineteenth century. The study of the media (Masterman 1985, Alvarado *et al.* 1987, Inglis 1990) is certainly more recent in origin but the novelty of the two disciplines is very similar. Over the last 15 years the two 'subjects' have been coming much closer. The narrowing of the gap stems from their common concern with textual understanding, analysis and production. In school the subjects begin to divide into separate specialisms once the students have become, almost exclusively, critics.

In order to establish a sense of the present continuities in English and media education, it is important to start with the primary curriculum and move up the Key Stage. Until 1989 'English' did not exist in primary schools. The great majority of work associated with activities called English in secondary and tertiary education was called in primary schools 'Language'. This definition stems from the holistic nature of the primary teacher's role. When particular attention was being paid to the production (speaking, writing) or receiving (listening, reading) of language then 'Language work' was the most helpful term. This helps to explain the evolution of the BFI/DES document *Primary Media Education: A Curriculum Statement* (Bazalgette 1989). The document argues first for media *education* rather than the narrow, more specialist sounding term media study, and it is significant that the Cox Committee (DES 1989: 9.6) selected this terminology. The use of the term *education* is a key point in showing the commonality of English and media education. They are both principally concerned with the broad area of language and, in particular, with the reading, production and interpretation of texts. The BFI/DES document throughout refers to media *texts*.

- If we take these questions:
- *Who* is communicating, and why?
- *What* type of text is it?
- *How* is it produced?
- *Who* receives it, and what sense do they make of it?
- How does it *present* its subject?

They might just as readily be applied to a poem, a play or any other literary work as to media text. The fact that these are given as the significant questions to raise with children about their understanding of media texts (Bazalgette 1989: 8) suggest to me how clearly media education comes under the language brief in Key Stages 1 and 2. Cary

Bazalgette goes even further than this in her chapter in *Reading, Learning and Media Education* (Potter 1990: 22) where she argues that ‘‘‘Literacy’’’ needs rethinking.’ She concludes by highlighting the way the question above provide a framework for extending primary teachers’ conception of literacy: ‘I would argue that the questions this structure makes possible meanings of any text, and to extend the range of texts available to us. This means, extending our pleasures as well as our understandings’ (Potter 1990; 25) In the primary years it seems that Language, i.e. English and media education, not only spring from the same source but are part of a definite, particular curriculum area.

c. In English or across the curriculum?

In the secondary curriculum there has been a considerable debate about whether the study of the media should come principally from within a single subject or should be cross-curricular.

Media education across the curriculum is an admirable goal but potentially a misleading one. There is absolutely no contradiction between media education operating in every school subject whilst also receiving specialist attention in English. Every teacher should help pupils with their language development and the Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) movement highlights how crucial it is to make attention to language the brief of every teacher but also the specialist responsibility of few. Many teachers, especially some English teachers, think of the LAC movement as having failed when in fact its success is evident everywhere. Their disappointment stems from the impossible expectations raised by some missionaries for the movement. Supporters of media education might learn from what happened to LAC. The latter’s considerable success lies in the fact that it influenced the language awareness of all teachers and also reinforced the key role of the specialist contribution of English (DES 1975). In

Watching Media Learning Buckingham is concerned that 'media education will simply be 'ghettoized'' within English. The fact that media education has been so successful in gaining a place within English could easily be used as an argument to prevent it permeating elsewhere – and even from continuing to exist as a separate subject' (Buckingham 1990b: 10). A different, more positive, approach, however, is what is needed. Media education is essentially placed within secondary English, and its influence and significance across the curriculum can be extended from that base. This remains as an essential issue for teacher education, both initial and in-service.

d. English and media texts

The best formulation of how we conceptualize the media is the same as it is for more traditional print forms, through text. We experience written texts of all kinds and then we begin to differentiate between them and to appreciate intertextually. As we begin to produce texts the same applies, we gradually become familiar with and adopt different ways of writing them. We experience media texts ranging from newspaper and magazine print to television and radio programmes and begin to recognize a great deal about them and then to 'read' them more precisely. Our product of such texts tends to be mainly through talk and writing but the tape recorder and the video camera provide approximations of the 'real thing'. Student's written texts have the same relationship to published books as do their media texts to, for example, broadcast programmes. We are all exploring the reception and production of texts.

English teachers develop number of essential elements in human understanding. One is personal response, the area designated by many media specialists as a kind of impossibility (see Gurevitch *et al.* 1982) but by so many English teachers as their *raison d'être* (for example,

Protherough 1983). For media specialists the personal has been seen as a form of disengagement, a retreat into a spurious individuality for what scope has the individual in a society utterly controlled by an establishment? However, English teachers have premised almost all of their work in literature and language on the assumption that each pupil can construct and refine a personal meaning.

A great deal of the debate in this area seems to me to be misdirected. Many recent examinations of reader response theory (for example, Corcoran and Evans 1987, Hayhoe and Parker 1990) have shown how the personal is inextricably bound up with our impersonal responses, i.e. all those elements, social, cultural, ideological and so on that make up the context within which we can respond. The personal response invokes the second area, our interpretative response. At the same moment as the personal response all the above factors are creating possible readings. The individual's particular perspective is potentially present when we read any kind of text, media or other and is struggling with a host of possible interpretations. English is concerned with recognizing the nature of response, enjoying it and sharing it with others. The teacher of English has a key role in developing the interchange and enrichment of the personal and the impersonal. English and media education are working in partnership already in many primary and secondary schools. The existing divisions between English and Media Study at GCSE level are very real but are as much to do with the historical and abstractly theoretical origins of the latter. Media education just like Language education in their focus on texts, contexts and the response of readers form together a powerful, dynamic specialist subject.

e. Kingman, leading up to The national Curriculum

The Cox Committee paid reasonably close attention to media education within English but initially it is worth placing this attention within the context of comparative neglect found in other official publications of the 1980s. In the document *English 5-16* (DES 1984) there are some tiny beginnings that are worth nothing. The objectives for 11 year olds include 'follow the plot of a story or a broadcast play written for this age group', 16 years old should be able to 'Read newspapers, magazines and advertising material critically so as to distinguish between unbiased information and attempts to manipulate the reader; and apply similar critical attitudes to television reporting and advertising'. In stressing that pupils should 'have some ability to judge the value and quality of what they read' the HMI extended this point to include media texts, insisting that pupils should 'Have some ability to apply similar judgement to entertainment in order media theater, cinema or video films, television and radio'. When considering language the HMI added, almost as an afterthought, that 16 year olds should 'recognise that language is a spectrum which ranges from simple factual statements to complex uses of the sound and texture of words, of rhythm, of imagery and of symbol; and that such effects are not confined to poetry but occur in daily life (e.g in advertising)'.

f. English, media education and the National Curriculum

One of the few genuine links between Kingman and Cox is the heading placed at the top of Section 9 of *English 5-16* (DES 1989), 'Round the city of Caxton, the electronic suburbs are rising. To the language of books is added the language of television and radio.....the processed codes of the computer. As the shapes of literacy multiply, so our dependence upon language increases, (DES 1988: 2. 7; quoted in DES 1989: Section 9). I feel that the city/suburb metaphor is completely inept but presume that the Cox Committee wished to show some

continuity with their predecessor. It is, however, far more important to look on Cox as a decisive break with this earlier tradition of grudging acceptance of the inescapability of media influence.

The definition in the companion secondary document is almost exactly the same (Bowker 1991):

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 they work, how they produce meaning, how they are organised and how audiences make sense of them, and the issues that media education addresses. [It] aims to develop systematically children's critical and creative powers through analysis and production of media artefacts. This also depends their understanding of the pleasure and enjoyment 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.

2. The media context

a. Defining the media

News about what the media are and how they can be defined have change once like years and convince to do so however, it is still much easier to find a relative construct these what is meant by “the media” than it is to find a cognize about “english” the media are usually defined as a list, it for example thr BFT discument Secondary Media Education a curriculum. Somehow, the media include television, film, video, radio, photograph popular media, primer materials books, comics, magazine and the press and compose solition. However as masterman asks it from idea. How it is possible to make any conteptual sense of a held which convey such a wide range and diversity of forms, practise and challenge. In answer, and that of others, has been to stop wortying about a native and prescriptive definition of the content of the content of the media and inten to look for unilying prnciple in the study of the media.

b. Relevant areas of the media: some initial distinctions

It is very important to explore initially what the English teacher might define as the appropriate areas of the media to include in English. That media education belongs chiefly in English but that there is no contradiction in every other subject and as a consciously highlighted cross-curricular concern. Every teacher using English as a medium is a teacher of English. Every teacher using the media either directly spectrum of concerns from working with concepts to illustrating a subject-specific point, for example, painterly allusions in advertising and their relation to understanding the history of Art.

c. Relevant areas of the media: some definitions

Most missionaries for media education begin with an account of the awesome influence of the media, their comprehensive penetration into our everyday lives and the various statistics that we have as evidence of just how many hours teenager, especially American teenagers, watch television (see Masterman 1980, 1985, Lusted and Drummond 1985). I take it that we can accept much of this as evidence whilst reserving some very real question about what influence means in relation to the media. What we need to consider here is what content from the list is relevant and in what ways? Now that I have made some tentative suggestion about the differing contribution that school departments might make I need to make a case for how the media should be defined in relation to children's learning in English. The following sections are intended both to clarify and raise some key points, and the practical examples are intended to provide both an extension of these initial points and a more detailed supporting argument.

1) Television

We must start with television because it can claim most universal sense of any of the media. For children particular, it is a far more

insist medium in that watching is likely to come well before reading.

2) Film

Of all the media film is the one least likely to arouse concern as a form. It comes with all the necessary status to take its place alongside traditionally canonized books as part of art rather than commerce. In the 1960s and 1970s film was the respectable end of the media spectrum. Cheap and reasonably reliable equipment meant that schools could use film in a range of ways for study, entertainment and so on. The result was a rapid growth in film study as such and its rapid validation by examination boards. English teachers seem to have liked film because of its artistic seriousness which in turn meant that it was worth studying, pupils also liked this rather out of the ordinary treat so different from most of their lessons in school.

3) Video

The impact of video technology on aspects of life, including life in school, is enormous if, as yet, undocumented. For our purposes it is worth setting out some basic points. The video has given the teacher highly sophisticated control of pupils' viewing and I shall return to this point. Recent legislation means that the teacher can record almost anything from television to show to a class, providing nearly unlimited access to all kinds of programmes for all teachers but, in particular, for the media teacher. For a small cost the teacher can hire any number of prerecorded videos to use in the classroom. Despite the fact that these points are well known in school by teachers of all subjects little has as yet been done to make the most of the learning potential offering by video.

4) Radio

Radio is an underused medium, presumably because for most pupils, and many teachers, it is chiefly a source of music. As a result pupils tend to be less knowledgeable about radio in general and often associate any programming that is not mainly popular music with a dull worthiness. Wherever there is a distance between most pupils and the great majority of radio there is a great deal of potential in the medium. Pupils start with fewer preconceptions as well as less knowledge and they also have to concentrate extremely hard simply to absorb what is happening. This is a very rich area for the English teacher and I shall provide a fuller example of work.

5) Books

One of the ironies of secondary school English for many pupils is that they spend a great deal of time working with books without ever considering how the books themselves have been produced. I suspect that many pupils do retain a certain awe of books, although they may retain no interest in them because of the mystique about books' origin that is never dispelled. English teachers are part of the conspiracy to build the magical aura of the author that extraordinary creative genius who is, apparently, the sole producer of the holy text. I obviously exaggerate, but there is inevitably a paradox understanding.

C. CONCLUSION

The cumulative effect of reading about the six key areas in media education may be off-putting to some teachers. It may seem as if all classroom work in media education sounds fiercely analytical and hyper-serious. It is always the prerogative of the teacher to decide what terminology to use with pupils.

It is worth reiterating here that these six key areas were identified as the most important aspects of media education in the late 1980s. They are simply part of a developing basis for media education that at no point excludes or attempts to diminish pupils' enjoyment or personal response. For experienced or inexperienced English teachers these six, key areas, provide a way of planning and evaluating media education within English. They also provide means of challenging and clarifying existing practice. An English department can think through how it may cover these media education areas, to what extent this coverage involves introducing new material or adapting and extending existing work. The key questions related to each area of media knowledge provide a precise way of raising issues about the broadest possible range of texts. Through such scrutiny it should be possible for a department to integrate media education and also to analyse how such integration can extend and develop existing good practice in English. And we have considered media education largely as part of the exploration of contemporary culture, alongside more traditional literary texts. And we emphasise elsewhere that the concepts of text and genre should be broadly interpreted in English. Television and film form substantial parts of pupil's experience out of school and teachers need to take account of this. Pupils should have the opportunity to apply their critical faculties to these major parts of contemporary culture. This material is useful in that it insists that teachers show.

There are great many other teachers, I suspect, who are somewhere in between the two groups. They feel that young people, future citizens, must understand and recognize not only the importance of the media but also must come to some understanding of how it works, this latter group suffers particularly from tensions brought about by valuing and enjoying the media whilst deeply distrusting it. For example, they find aspects of television, especially documentary and drama, of real significance but fear what seems to be the narcotic and mindless appeal of soap operas, quiz shows.

In order to invite the three groups considered above into this discussion about media education as well as interested teachers from other disciplines. I feel the need to provide not just a convincing argument about our current needs but also a rationale that helps to rate past opinions and prejudices to contemporary issues.

The understanding of media texts, their close reading , should be bound up with practical work in the same way that the reading of print texts is deepened by discussion and writtin, there are many ways of achieving this integration and I offer here just a simple illustration, one that presumes that the teacher has access to an ordinary camera or two and camera video.

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