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*Andrew Hart*

# **Models of Media Education in England and the Secondary Curriculum for English**

## **Table of Contents**

Recent Developments in the Media Curriculum.....	3
The Current Context.....	8
The Models of Media Education Project.....	12
Aims and Assessment.....	13
Selected Case Studies (G=girl; B=boy; T=teacher).....	17
Jane: Rural Comprehensive School	
Reading a Pop Video.....	17
The interview.....	18
Methods.....	18
Personal Approach.....	19
Resources.....	19
Pupil Response.....	20
Key Concepts.....	20
The Future.....	20

Overview of Lesson Observed.....	20
Lesson Aims.....	21
Resources.....	22
Lesson Introduction (15 minutes).....	22
Lesson Development (20 minutes).....	22
Lesson Conclusion (15 minutes).....	23
Lesson Analysis.....	23
Kevin: Urban Comprehensive School	
Perceptions and Representations of Careers.....	24
The Interview.....	24
Interest in Media.....	24
Aims.....	25
Methods.....	25
Favourite Lessons.....	25
Personal Views.....	26
Key Concepts.....	26
Resources.....	26
School Policy.....	26
The Future.....	27
Overview of Lesson Observed.....	27
Lesson Aims.....	28
Resources.....	28
Lesson Introduction (20 minutes).....	28
Lesson Development (35 minutes).....	30

Lesson Conclusion (15 minutes).....	30
Lesson Analysis.....	31
The Aims of English and Media Education.....	31
Ideology.....	32
Teachers' Aims.....	33
Teaching Methods.....	34
Group Work.....	35
Assignments.....	36
Classroom Environment.....	36
Learning Resources.....	37
Teachers' Development Needs.....	37
REFERENCES.....	39

A recent issue of the British Film Institute's newsletter *MENU* (BFI 1993) suggested that:

*There is still much confusion over whether Media Education just means that the media are a convenient way of bolstering traditional English teaching, or that it entails specifically studying the media themselves. We think it must mean the latter because the former takes no account of existing knowledge and how it ought to be developed during schooling. To develop this effectively, teachers must receive adequate guidance; the production of such guidance must, in the long term, be based on the knowledge, skills and understanding that Media Education should be building.*

One of the main reasons for this confusion is not specific to Media Education, but shared by most other disciplines. There is undoubtedly a dearth of classroom-focused studies of teaching strategies. That is why the *Models of Media Education* project was originally established in England, as explained in the Introduction to this book. This chapter explains the curriculum context and presents the main findings of the English study, including detailed case-studies of two teachers and their lessons.

## Recent Developments in the Media Curriculum

The role of Media teaching within English is widely seen as one of helping pupils enjoy a wide range of media and developing an awareness of how they work. It involves accepting

the validity of the specific meanings which young readers create through their reading of many different kinds of texts. Media Education was defined in this way in the report of the influential Cox Committee:

*Media Education...seeks to increase children's critical understanding of the media...[It] aims to develop systematically children's critical and creative powers through analysis and production of media artefacts... 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. (DES 1989, 9.6)*

Ultimately, pupils should be able to speak independently and with confidence about the characteristic forms and pleasures of a whole range of various texts. This process necessarily involves them in becoming more active media readers and audiences. As they become increasingly able to create a critical distance between themselves and the media texts they value, they are moving towards a kind of autonomy which helps them articulate their own 'voice'.

According to this approach, the essential task for teachers is not to make qualitative distinctions between literary and media texts nor to place them on some form of hierarchical scale. Rather, it is to help pupils learn how to evaluate for themselves any kind of text according to content, form and context. Knowing about the contexts of production and consumption is a necessary basis for understanding how to read texts. The realisation that texts are constructed rather than discovered is central to the development of higher level reading skills.

The question of curriculum location is almost as fundamental as those of purpose and content. If Media is to be taught at all, decisions must be made about where, when and by whom. Should it be a subject in its own right, an integral part of English, or a crosscurricular concern? The term 'Media Education' has been widely used in England during the 1980s to refer to secondary school (11-16) work on the media within English and across the curriculum in, for example, the 'Cross-curricular Themes' work prescribed by the National Curriculum. It is also a term which makes particular sense in a Primary or Middle School context. Its weakness is that it may be rather bland in reality. Its virtues include its generality and its innocuousness.

The strategy advocated in the British Film Institute's document *Secondary Media Education: a Curriculum Statement* (Bowker [Ed] 1991) was to argue primarily for a cross-

curricular approach under the title Media Education rather than for the more specialised term of 'Media Studies'. This cross-curricular framework was developed originally in the *Primary Curriculum Statement* (Bazalgette [Ed] 1989). 'Media Studies', on the other hand, is largely reserved for specialist General Certificate of Educational Studies (GCSE examinations at 16+ years of age), Advanced Level (examinations at 18+ years of age) and undergraduate University courses. It has been seen by some as a political risk, since it suggests distant echoes of the 1970s' work of the Glasgow University Media Group and stereotypical accusations of 'left-wing bias'. Yet specialist understanding of Media Studies is highly desirable if strong forms of Media Education are to develop, rather than some of the weaker forms which currently appear in many secondary school curricula.

Study of the mass media has been growing in popularity in English schools at least since the 1960s. The main impetus for this growth came from teachers of English, many of whom saw themselves as protectors of children from the 'false consciousness' that the media were believed to inculcate. It was this invasion of consciousness which Marshall McLuhan perceived in the 1960s. The media invasion was a subliminal one, operating beneath the threshold of consciousness. In a famous phrase, he warned that the content of the media was "like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind." (McLuhan, 1973, 26) This fear of the seduction of the innocent was to dominate the early years of studying the media.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Media Education in the UK grew rapidly, with the creation of new Secondary level courses in Film Studies and later with new courses in Media Studies and national examinations at age 16 and 18, as documented in the Schools Council survey (Murdock and Phelps, 1973). The availability of the VCR gave an enormous boost to Media work and made the study of television the dominant focus. However, there was a tension over what kinds of texts were legitimate objects of study: those valued by teachers or those valued by pupils? This tension led many teachers to examine their own attitudes in more personal, less theoretical ways, and some recognised the hypocrisy in routine condemnations of what were major sources of information and pleasure for themselves as much as for their pupils, especially when they formed an important part of pupils' cultural identities. During the 1980s both Media Education, mainly in secondary schools, and Media Studies, mainly in higher education, were fast growing areas. After a long period of

antipathy towards the mass media, especially from English teachers in secondary schools, there was a noticeable change of attitude. During that time, for example, the National Association for the Teaching of English had its own working party on Media Education. Actual provision in the education system was patchy, however, and mainly existed where enthusiastic individuals or groups were developing their own ideas.

In 1988 a National Curriculum was proposed for England and Wales. Many individuals and groups (such as The BFI) lobbied for the inclusion of Media Education. Media Education was included first in the Cox Report's proposals for National Curriculum English and then in the Statutory Orders themselves (DES 1989, 1990). In reviewing dominant curriculum models for English teaching, Cox featured five main approaches.

### **Table 1**

A “**personal growth**” view focuses on the child: it emphasises the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives.

A “**cross-curricular**” view focuses on the school: it emphasises that all teachers (of English and of other subjects) have a responsibility to help children with the language demands of different subjects on the school curriculum: otherwise areas of the curriculum may be closed to them. In England, English is different from other school subjects, in that it is both a subject and a medium of instruction for other subjects.

An “**adult needs**” view focuses on communication outside the school: it emphasises the responsibility of English teachers to prepare children for the language demands of adult life, including the workplace, in a fast-changing world. Children need to learn to deal with the day-to-day demands of spoken language and of print; they also need to be able to write clearly, appropriately and effectively.

A “**cultural heritage**” view emphasises the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language.

A “**cultural analysis**” view emphasises the role of English in helping children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live. Children should know about the processes by which meanings are conveyed, and about the ways in which print and other media carry values. (DES 1989, 2.21-2.25)

Media Education established a firm foothold, notably within the ‘cultural analysis’ approach, in schools and in post-16 education (where curricula allow for more flexibility and specialisation). The Cox-based English Order recognised explicitly the value of non-literary and media texts and required that they be given some attention. Media Education was seen by Cox as part of “the exploration of contemporary culture” (9.4) It recognized

that Media Education approaches should be part of every English teacher's practice; that "the kinds of question that are routinely applied in Media Education can fruitfully be applied to literature" (7.23); and that "Media Education has often developed in a very explicit way concepts which are of general importance in English." (9.9) These questions and concepts are listed by Cox as "selection (of information, viewpoint, etc.) editing, author, audience, medium, genre, stereotype, etc." (9.9) The questions resolve themselves into "who is communicating with whom and why; how has the text been produced and transmitted; how does it convey its meaning?" (7.23).

This was the first official recognition of the subject. As a result, all English departments in secondary schools and all teachers in primary schools were required to incorporate Media Education into their English and language work. This initiative produced a flurry of supporting materials and books aimed at helping teachers to achieve this end. There was also an expectation that Media would be taught in other parts of the secondary curriculum and even across the curriculum, as in primary schools.

Many teachers, however, remained either luke-warm about Media Education or, in a minority of cases, even hostile to it. Nevertheless, the trend was towards an acceptance of Media Education within English and a receptiveness in schools for Media Studies. Some secondary teachers and whole departments welcomed it wholeheartedly. A report on English by the national Inspectorate (HMI) during 1990-91 observed that at Key Stage 3 (age 11-14) "most (English) departments had...incorporated information technology (IT) and some elements of Media Education into their work." The BFI continued to lobby for Media Education to be included in a much broader sense in, for example, Art and Geography or in a broader sense as a cross-curricular element throughout the school. This period (1990-1995) has been characterised by enormous changes in schooling in every dimension. One feature of this was a concerted attempt to revise the National Curriculum towards a much more traditional (and so-called) skills-oriented approach. The thrust was to get rid of the 'cultural analysis' model and to insist on the pre-eminence of a 'cultural heritage' model. Teachers resisted these changes but most of their energies went into fighting attempts to introduce simplistic national tests for 14 year-olds in English. Media Education was mainly side-lined in these battles. There was a flourishing of classroom materials and of ground-breaking small-scale research but there is little

evidence to suggest that Media Education has now entered the mainstream. Media Studies, however, at GCSE (National Examinations for 16 year-olds), 'A' level (National Examinations for 18 year-olds) and at degree-level has continued to grow year by year. An estimated 30,000 candidates took public examinations in Media or Communication Studies in 1995. In Scotland, where Media Education had established itself firmly, two very detailed surveys within five years showed strong developments, supported by the Scottish Film Council (SFC) and by local and national education authorities, in both primary and secondary schools (Butts 1986; Brown and Visocchi 1991). In England, the BFI, in conjunction with The National Foundation for Educational Research, undertook a survey of schools in late 1993 (Dickson, 1994). The sample was small (482 schools and colleges) and the response rate moderate, providing only 189 replies. There was no opportunity to cross-check these responses with the actual practices in the institutions themselves. In spite of these reservations, the survey showed that: most institutions claimed that they were teaching some Media Education within English and in 67% of these it was also taught somewhere else in the curriculum; almost three quarters of respondents considered that they devoted 10-25% of curriculum time to Media Education; 69% of respondents thought Media Education was "very important".

The National Curriculum for Art, after going through many similar changes to the English curriculum, also envisages space for Media teaching, especially in relation to image analysis and construction, still photography and video work.

## **The Current Context**

In spite of these developments, Media Education has not achieved a high status or become a major focus within statutory education. Many teachers see the 'new' (post-1995) National Curriculum as further downgrading the position of Media Education within the 5-16 curriculum. However, the statutory document can be read literally or 'between the lines'. The frequent references to media texts do suggest a serious intention to address basic media issues. Yet they still neglect such important aspects of Media as Representations, Audiences, Agencies and Institutions. Committed Media teachers will look for and find many openings, while those who are less convinced or enthusiastic may well ignore the opportunities for Media work which it envisages. Those who wish to include

Media will need to integrate it with linguistic and literary study more comprehensively than before.

The most direct reference states that

*Pupils should be introduced to a wide range of media, e.g. magazines, newspapers, radio, television, film. They should be given opportunities to analyse and evaluate such material, which should be of high quality and represent a range of forms and purposes, and different structural and presentational devices (DES, 1993, p.20).*

This provides a sufficient toe-hold for the committed and the existing specialists but it offers little scope, or pressure, for others to develop or change. Yet the 1994 draft Order for English inspired more responses than any other and seems to have produced significant changes in the final Order. Over 6,500 educationalists responded to it, of whom over one third complained that there was too little reference to Media. What emerged as the post-1995 curriculum is a more balanced, if still flawed, framework for English teaching. 'Texts' are no longer exclusively literary. Media work features in all three Attainment Targets (*Speaking and Listening; Reading; Writing*). There is an appreciation of the importance of the visual and a recognition of the importance of practical work. The dominant 'cultural heritage' perspective has been tempered by a concern for 'cultural analysis'.

There are also new developments, such as the General National Vocational Qualification in Media Studies. The Business and Technical Education Council syllabus continues to include study of the media. However, these latter qualifications are likely to have most impact on colleges not schools.

Currently then, Media Education is surviving in schools and Media Studies growing rapidly. It is likely that Media Education will now also grow. This growth will come through a combination of changing technology (especially computer technology) and through the next generations of teachers who are growing up in a media- and technology-oriented world.

Whatever growth there has been in schools and colleges of Media Education and Media Studies, there has not been a corresponding expansion of training and development opportunities for teachers. The result is that many work in isolation with little more than examination syllabuses to guide them. In-service support for Media Education has been

severely reduced over the last two years as a result of funding changes and a National Curriculum focus on the core curriculum areas. Some teachers have simply inherited responsibility for Media courses from enthusiastic teachers who have moved on. Although some of these 'substitutes' often become enthusiasts themselves, they can too easily find themselves overwhelmed by the scope of the subject and by the unlimited material from which to choose.

Because few teachers have been formally trained in Media Education or Media Studies, there is inevitably a wide variation in theoretical understanding and classroom practice. Notions of Media Education may vary from showing a video recording of a Shakespeare play to the critical study of media institutions and audiences. Some teachers have rejected analytical approaches in favour of creative or technical ones. Others justify the subject for its implicit methods alone, arguing, for example, that its emphasis on group work and projects develops social skills. However, apart from Buckingham's (Buckingham 1990d; 1993; Buckingham and Sefton-Green [Eds.] 1994) work, little is known empirically about teachers' actual classroom practices.

The BFI *Secondary Statement* (Bowker [Ed.] 1991) offers some excellent examples of Media work reported by English teachers themselves. Some of them show clearly the special expertise which English teachers can bring to the study of media in the classroom. Although such accounts may be useful in the context of action-research projects designed to enhance teachers' roles as reflective practitioners, they are not the products of systematic research.

There is a great deal of work being carried out in English classrooms which draws upon media materials and processes. The BFI\NFER questionnaire referred to earlier (Dickson, 1994) showed that nearly 90% of English teachers in 189 schools and colleges surveyed used television for showing 'film-of-the-book' adaptations of literary texts. The focus of learning in such contexts is often what is learnt *through* Media work which is central to the aims of English. But some work is also concerned with learning *about* the media. It is important to distinguish between them, not because one approach is any more effective or worthwhile than others, but because they are actually different and therefore lead in different directions. The goals pursued by each approach can therefore best be reached if

we have a fuller understanding of the strategies, methods and forms of organisation which are appropriate in each case.

A Leeds University study (Brown 1990, known as the DEFT Project) was carried out in conjunction with the Training Services Agency as part of an evaluation of initiatives in English teaching. It began with a broad concern with 'English for participation' and suggests a wide range of appropriate models for the development of such work in English. The report argues that "English has emphasised inward states, private forms of knowing and expressions of the uniqueness of experience (and has neglected) the social dimensions of experience." But if pupils are to develop as speakers and writers, they need to "participate as well as reflect." (Brown 1990:181)

The classroom approaches studied in the DEFT Project were therefore selected for their specific emphasis on: *language* which goes beyond the personal and literary into the more public domain of working in teams, decision-making, persuading people, transactional processes, organising, informing, and helping people; and *content* which includes experience as contributors to technological and economic processes or other aspects of work experience. (Brown 1990:6-7) In summarising their evaluation of these projects, the researchers explained that the best writing they found was when

*the writers were looking outwards, engaged in informative not introspective acts, seeking as much to change the world (or their part of it) as to understand it, or themselves, better. (Brown 1990:182)*

Common to most of the projects evaluated was an engagement with *non-literary texts*. These were often of a quite conventional kind, such as formal reports. But what was new about this approach was that the reports were based on pupils' experience of work situations, rather than simulations. As a result, where more than one individual reports on an experience in the same context detailed comparisons become possible and a critical sharpness is added. The transfer of this kind of alertness to the production and analysis of media texts may also then become more likely and more natural.

For example, unlike the well established routine of devising mock advertisements for nonexistent products, producing real promotional materials for clients demands that pupils address relationships between audiences and styles with great care. (Brown 1990:174) Richard Andrews, the DEFT Project's independent evaluator, concludes that these

approaches produced not only greater personal involvement and more accomplished writing from pupils, but also major advances in oral competence. He attributes their increased confidence in interviewing, decision-making and other forms of oral work to a greater range of communication tasks associated with “real audiences and outcomes.” He also claims that the DEFT project developed imaginative involvement in practical contexts which link easily with conventional literature-based approaches and that ‘Knowledge About Language’ was also developed through interaction with speakers and writers in quite new social contexts. (Brown 1990:144)]

There are certainly some problems, as Buckingham has pointed out, in incorporating work on the media within English (Buckingham 1990b; 1990c) Redefining ‘texts’ to include non-literary ones was difficult enough for Cox and the NCC and may also be difficult for some English teachers. The post-Dearing revisions maintain this more comprehensive notion of ‘text’ as including non-fiction and non-literary forms. But they do not offer a coherent framework which will help teachers approach such texts systematically and analytically.

However, if there really are problems in leaving the teaching of Media to English teachers, there are even more problems in expecting teachers of other subjects to handle it. It is relatively easy to quantify and show the presence of ‘media’ in many different subject areas.

But what is meant by ‘media’ in these different contexts? What kind of teaching is going on? What kind of learning is happening? Without detailed research, these questions are impossible to answer. As a result, many accounts of whole school involvement in Media Education may have more to do with public relations profiles than with a genuine curriculum. As the external pressures on schools increase, there is a danger of creating a ‘virtual curriculum’ which bears little relation to classroom realities.

## ***The Models of Media Education Project***

Most of the teachers in the original English study, accepted the mandate of the the Coxbased curriculum for English that Media Education should be a part of pupils’ education throughout their secondary education, or even earlier. There was very little anxiety about the subject proliferating into other disciplines and most felt secure about

their own contributions to any cross-curricular initiatives. On the other hand, none of the schools concerned had yet developed a school policy for Media Education and in some cases the teachers interviewed proved to be unaware of Media work being done in other departments. Some expressed anxiety about attitudes of colleagues in their own departments and feared some disapproval of what was sometimes seen as the study of ephemera (Hart and Benson, 1993). At this stage in the development of Media Education (ie. during the lifetime of the Cox-based curriculum before the post-Dearing revisions noted earlier) we expected to find that the approach of English teachers emphasised skills of analysis and comprehension. We felt that there was likely to be an inclination to work on the familiar territory of advertising and newspaper language. Teachers, we supposed, would seek to justify their work in terms of language development with a recognition that the media provide a stimulus to the practice of oral skills. Literature and Media work might well be linked, with considerable use of televised adaptations of novels and plays. From this might come some study of audiences, representation and narrative forms.

The Cox-based curriculum in place during 1992 confined its attention to the *Reading Attainment Target*, with particular emphasis on Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils (age 11-16)

### ***NATIONAL CURRICULUM ENGLISH (COX)***

#### ***ATTAINMENT TARGET 2 (READING) LEVELS 5-10***

Pupils should be able to...

*(5c) show in discussion that they can recognise whether subject-matter in non-literary and media texts is presented as fact or opinion...*

*(6c) show in discussion and in writing that they can recognise whether subject-matter in non-literary and media texts is presented as fact or opinion, identifying some of the ways in which the distinction can be made...*

*(7c) show in discussion that they can recognise features of presentation which are used to inform, to regulate, to reassure or to persuade, in non-literary and media texts...*

*(8c) show in discussion and in writing an ability to form a considered opinion about features of presentation which are used to inform, reassure or persuade in non-literary and media texts...*

*(9c) show in discussion and in writing an ability to recognise techniques and conventions of presentation in non-literary and media texts, and judge the effectiveness of their use...*

*(10c) show in discussion and in writing an ability to evaluate techniques and conventions of presentation in non-literary and media texts, and judge the effectiveness of their use...*

*(10d) select, retrieve, evaluate and combine information independently and with discrimination, from a comprehensive range of reference materials, making effective and sustained use of the information. (DES 1990, 3-11)*

## Aims and Assessment

One of the benefits of the recently created GCSE examinations in the UK has been that syllabuses have had to provide clearly expressed aims and objectives. English teachers had in many cases become so used to basing their teaching on past examination papers and taking many of their aims for granted that this approach had considerable novelty. The introduction of explicit aims and, in particular, learning objectives enabled teachers to reexamine their work and to remind themselves of a discourse which had perhaps become under-used. With the new emphasis on coursework, teachers have found that each assignment needed to be justified in terms of objectives, but that in the case of Media work the concepts were sometimes unfamiliar.

Although our teachers listed between them twenty-nine aims for the eleven lessons, it was clear that some were uncomfortable with identifying specific Media concepts and saw the lessons in terms of textual approaches familiar from literature work. The aims of each of the eleven lessons we observed were stated as follows:

### **Table 2**

#### **1 Promoting a Pop Group**

1.1 To understand how the pop music business operates and to be aware of the limitations on the artists in controlling their product

#### **2 Jane Eyre as a TV text**

2.1 To raise awareness of the importance of producing evidence for opinions

2.2 To bring into sharper focus some important aspects of the literary text

#### **3 Analysing Advertisements**

3.1 To develop skills of analysis and deduction relevant to other texts, especially poems and novels, and to life skills

#### **4 Promoting a Pop Group from a Novel**

4.1 To reinforce understanding of the characters and themes of the novel

4.2 To learn to work as groups and to negotiate tasks

4.3 To work to a deadline

4.4 To practise writing in a style appropriate to pop magazines

4.5 To consider the requirements of a teenage audience

4.6 To design pictorial representations of ideas

## **5 Analysing Comics**

5.1 To look at the ways texts function beyond the literal meanings of language, specifically through symbols, cultural icons and implicit values

5.2 To understand the concepts of Audience, Narrative, Institution, Genre and Expectation

5.3 To examine the varied responses readers might make to a text

5.4 To make comparisons between narratives and representations in comics and in Lord of the Flies

5.5 To study a mass medium in terms of who is communicating what to whom and with what effect

## **6 Visual Treatment of Poems**

6.1 To gain understanding of the nature of television audiences and their appropriate language registers

6.2 To improve understanding of the poems

6.3 To make an assessment for GCSE Oral Communication

## **7 Life-styles**

7.1 To see media representations as constructs mediated by bias

7.2 To test the understanding of previous work on life-styles

## **8 Sunday Supplements**

8.1 To examine the ways magazines cater for particular audiences

8.2 To understand the language registers appropriate to specific audiences

## **9 News Broadcast based on Biblical Episode**

9.1 To encourage pupils to look more carefully at television news broadcasts and at the ways in which news is presented

9.2 To discover how far pupils' perceptions of the news is affected by news values, especially in the presentation of violence

## **10 Reading a Pop Video**

10.1 To gain experience in reading visual messages that are part of pupils' lives

10.2 To understand the idea of imagery in the study of literary texts

10.3 To encourage the habit of close reading of apparently simple texts

## **11 Perceptions and Representations of Careers**

11.1 To look at, enjoy and reflect on a television play related to pupils' own recent experience

11.2 To relate pupils' actual work experience to their fantasies about their futures

Our analysis suggested that of the eleven lessons planned, three declared no Media aims at all, five aimed at a balance between Media and English (mostly Literature) aims and only three conceived of the lessons purely in Media terms.

In terms of the 'Key Concepts' criterion, the range was relatively narrow, with over half of all emphases falling within the three most frequently addressed areas.

**Table 3**

<b>Key Concepts' central to lessons</b>	<b>' Frequency</b>
Audiences	5
Language	3
Image Analysis	3
Institutions	2
Mediation	2
Representation	1
Narrative	1
Genre	1

Categories	1
------------	---

In fact, the last four were mentioned specifically by only one teacher, a probationer who had recently completed a Media course and whose lesson did address her aims; it was also, at one hour forty minutes, the longest lesson we observed.

There is scope for some difference in how these aims are classified, e.g. is 'design pictorial representations' image analysis or representation? Clearly, it is both, but here we have to trust our coding category during the observation of the lesson. If we look at the aims which relate more specifically to Literature study, we find this balance:

**Table 4**

<b>Aims related to Literature</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Textual Analysis	5
Thematic work	2
Narrative	1
Character	1
Imagery	1

Teachers' aims which referred directly to Audiences and Language made up nearly half of the specifically Media ones. Awareness of Audience as a concept is probably the borrowing from Media Education that English teachers in general have most enthusiastically embraced. Its relevance to literary study, to imaginative writing and to oral work has been a valuable extension to English studies and it has linked closely with recent emphases on language registers. On the other hand, it can be argued that teachers may have been interested in the concept of Audiences as a direct response to these uncertainties and anxieties. The study of Audiences may have featured as much for its value in studying the written and spoken word as for its centrality to in studying the media. What was happening, perhaps, was that English teachers were seizing on this area as a more accessible way into areas of Media Studies where they felt less secure.

Some of the teachers had trouble bridging the gap between their own experience of the media and the varied experiences of their pupils. Some had found that there was scarcely any, or even no, overlap. With the best will in the world, attempts to draw from pupils observations on their tastes in programmes, music, newspapers etc with which the teachers were largely unfamiliar proved intimidating. By focusing on Audiences, the

teachers seemed to find a way of gaining acceptance for their own tastes while helping pupils to value their own experiences.

Work on images seemed to mark a movement away from a language-directed approach to specifically Media concerns. What was striking about these lessons, though, was that the work was almost entirely 'uncritical' in that the emphasis was on seeing the images studied as models of good practice on which to base pupils' own work. Indeed, comparisons with poetic imagery were often made without irony. This approach extended into the next category, Institutions, where pupils were presented with accounts of media institutions as having their own imperatives which were apparently perceived as inevitable or even to be copied. The idea that institutional ethics might be in any way problematic did not emerge. In one case the approach seemed to be linked to the school's own attempt to promote itself in the local community, each being used to justify the other. This model of institutional acquiescence seemed to be general except in the two schools which dealt with the next concept on our list: Mediation. In both cases, Mediation was interpreted as bias and pupils were warned of its effects. The similarity to work on literary texts is obvious, though both teachers were imaginative in their approaches: one showing that a Bible story would inevitably be distorted by media presentation and the other encouraging pupils to compare their real-life experiences with the fantasy representations of their age-group in colour magazines.

## **Selected Case Studies (G=girl; B=boy; T=teacher)**

### **Jane: Rural Comprehensive School**

#### **Reading a Pop Video**

(Year 10, Class of 23 boys and girls, 1.20-2.10pm, 5 June 1992)

#### **The interview**

Jane was in her first year at her present school but had been teaching for nine years. She took her degree at Nottingham University where she came into contact with Len Masterman. Her first teaching post was at a secondary school in Nottinghamshire, where there was a flourishing Media Department and where she taught Media as an option for pupils not wishing to do Literature. It was not an examination subject, however, and

indeed she has not yet had the opportunity to teach the subject for any form of external assessment. The school was a base for development work with the University, which helped to develop and strengthen her interest in Media work.

She moved to Hampshire after three years and was surprised to find little evidence of Media activity in schools. She was offered an allowance to develop Media Education in the English Department. Discovering the existence of the *Southampton Media Education Group*, she attended meetings in an effort to build up resources and began to learn of other agencies. When the Head of Department took maternity leave, Jane took over the post with the result that she was unable to continue her Media initiative. Moving to another school, she found that Media was not considered important; indeed, the Head seemed hostile to the idea. At the same time, changes in GCSE combined with anxieties about the National Curriculum were making schools nervous of new initiatives. Only when she moved to her present post did she find a Head of Department who was enthusiastic about Media work and a supportive English team. Her enthusiasm restored, she found that she was increasingly integrating Media ideas into her English lessons.

## **Methods**

Jane's methods can perhaps best be described through an understanding of her other English interests. If forced to choose one area of English in which to specialise, she would opt for teaching short literary and non-literary texts. In reading these with classes she draws on reader-response theory introduced to her at Nottingham University and supported by her Head of Department for whom it is "the main idea." She enjoys allowing pupils to offer their personal responses to stories without her intervention. Close reading of texts then becomes easier and more acceptable to classes and coursework becomes more interesting because pupils see that their ideas are valued and worth exploring.

*It's starting from a different end, that's all. Once you have elicited their response you start teaching very hard – just a different emphasis from the old-style GCE.*

This approach makes the introduction of various kinds of text into the classroom more acceptable to pupils. Jane is particularly concerned that pupils should be alerted to the constructed nature of television programmes. She demonstrates that messages are created and ought not to be taken at face value.

*I remember a pupil saying to me after we'd done something on East-Enders, 'Oh, Miss, I couldn't watch it properly after we'd done that lesson...' I felt good about that because she was watching it properly...*

She believes that schools should teach the ways advertisements often try to manipulate consumers and that children should be helped to think about the construction of what are presented as facts, especially in news and documentary programmes. But she feels that the presentational features of the media must also be recognised and techniques for studying literature are relevant in looking below the surface at other levels of meaning.

*We try to look at television and film appreciatively, especially by looking at extracts. The pupils chose the pop video we are going to be looking at next. We would not have chosen that particular one but, looking at it in advance to prepare the lesson, we realised that it is incredibly complex.*

Frequent use of 'we' indicates how closely the members of this department work together, sometimes team-teaching but more often sharing teaching plans and working on material at the same time in order to compare notes immediately afterwards.

### **Personal Approach**

Jane believes that pupils are not made explicitly aware of her own political or social views, though on issues like race or gender it is sometimes not easy to appear objective.

*We were looking at news items when the Los Angeles riots happened. This led to a discussion about Ku Klux Klan attitudes and we asked how they would feel if they were black. Then John layed them Billie Holliday's Strange Fruit. It's difficult then, I suppose, to hide how you feel.*

*You can be a fascist in the classroom, I think, by the way you put the desks out or the way you expect the children to answer the questions you ask them...I'm probably what the government would think of as a trendy teacher, I suppose, because I don't put them in rows and they're allowed to talk without putting their hands up. Rather than in the material I choose, I think they would know my views from the way I treated them and the way I expected to be treated by them.*

### **Resources**

The department prepares much of its own material and, having recently completed the Royal Society of Arts Information Technology Certificate course, Jane enjoys preparing worksheets for her classes. In addition, they all contribute to their newspaper cuttings library. Useful books have been *Eyeopeners* (Bethell 1981) and *The Language of the Media* (Davies 1987, 1988).

## Pupil Response

Jane believes that the department's approach gives pupils confidence. They are willing to say what they think and in this way teachers gain insights into their thought processes that other methods tend to hide. As this is a major justification for 'response approaches,' Jane has found few surprises in teaching Media but she recalls that while teaching in Nottingham she was surprised by what she discovered in studying film extracts in detail and slow motion.

*I was surprised at what they (pupils) didn't pick up but I was equally surprised at what I didn't pick up to begin with.*

This sense of being on a voyage of discovery with her pupils was implicit in much of what Jane had to say.

## Key Concepts

The BFI 'Signpost Questions' are not central for Jane or the department generally. They are developing an *ad hoc* approach based on sharing best ideas but, when pressed, Jane admitted to a reluctance to engage with issues of ownership and control, which she believes pupils find "deadly boring... I am happy with what we are doing but I can see that there is more to it."

## The Future

Jane believes that Media Education is in danger of becoming marginalised.

*Six or seven years ago it probably took off as an area in its own right and I think it is an area in its own right but I think the National Curriculum hasn't helped Media purists to let it become a separate subject. It seems only at some further education institutions and at higher education level that it exists as an entity. For schools going straight down the National Curriculum line I don't think Media is a high priority...you could get away with doing very little.*

Her experience is that other departments have selected areas which suit them:

*So the Humanities Department do comparative journalism...Drama and Art look at their own aspects and that is probably how I see it developing with different subjects taking it under their umbrella.*

## Overview of Lesson Observed

Jane led the class through a close reading of a pop video chosen by themselves. She adopted a relaxed, 'Friday afternoon,' approach, inviting the class to share her pleasure in the pop video they had themselves chosen. By admitting her own surprise at its

complexity, she disarmed those pupils who were inclined to resist the idea that it might be worth studying. The lesson was divided into very short units which enabled the class to move steadily into a deeper analysis of the video's content. The fact that she had previously studied the video with her colleagues meant that she was able to share in the pupils' sense of discovery while retaining the confidence to accept fresh observations from some extremely observant pupils. The focus was on language, audience, mediation and representation.

### **Lesson Aims**

1. To gain experience in reading visual messages that are part of pupils' everyday life.
2. To understand the idea of imagery in the study of literary texts.
3. To encourage the habit of close reading of apparently simple texts.

The lesson was part of a one-session-a-week (Friday afternoon) unit on popular music developed by three members of the English Department, including the HoD, to encourage 'wider reading' around the work being done on poetry and imagery. Popular music is seen by the team as embracing more than is commonly understood by 'pop' and here includes folk songs and jazz. The sequence of lessons had been:

1. Small groups wrote down the names of all pop groups and titles of songs which they felt had a message or deeper meaning. Groups allocated one of the songs to each member to find a recording and write out lyrics.
2. Groups were re-formed according to themes of chosen songs, e.g. war, religion, politics, education, drugs. Each group prepared a tape and presentation of the songs.
3. One group wished to make a video presentation. The teacher provided a pop video of *We Don't Need No Education!* by Pink Floyd which was watched and discussed by all groups.
4. Groups produced and presented their audio-taped programmes of thematically based songs. The video group showed their unedited video based on Billy Bragg's *Sexuality*. They had the assistance of an ex-pupil currently studying media at a further education college.
5. Classes worked on poetry-writing sessions, producing their own 'poetry of protest.' Film of the Los Angeles riots, pictures of lynchings of black people in the 1930s and the imagery in Billie Holliday's *Strange Fruit* were used as stimuli.
6. The teaching team identified themes worth pursuing on the basis of interest shown by pupils. These included: the Pop Industry; Image Creation; Poetry of Protest; Media

Promotion of groups and lyrics through video. Coursework assignments were prepared to cover these themes.

7. A selection of pop videos was shown to the groups and one of these was voted most suitable for detailed study.

## Resources

1. Pop video of *Stand by REM*.
2. TV and videoplayer.
3. Enlarged print photo-copy of lyrics.
4. Photo-copy of adapted shooting script.

## Lesson Introduction (15 minutes)

Jane reminded the class of their choice of pop video the previous week and explained that the purpose of the lesson would be to look at ways of presenting music visually. Their choice had been *Stand by REM (Rapid Eye Movement)*, a video some of the pupils had thought too simple to be worth studying.

Pupils were asked to watch the video closely and then to spend five minutes, without discussion, writing down their thoughts about what they had seen. They were advised to write in sentences or notes but not to attempt a scatter diagram.

## Lesson Development (20 minutes)

After the viewing and writing, she invited pupils to read out their observations. Three pupils commented favourably on the dancing and the reinforcement of the lyric's message through images; they noticed that pictures on a screen behind a team of dancers changed more frequently and in subtler ways than they had realised during casual viewing. It was this point on which she intended to build the lesson and she commented on her own surprise in previewing the video.

A boy known to Jane for his robust expression of his ideas was now asked to read his comments:

*B: I don't like this song. It's got a rhythm on the video involving chickens. The song's pointless... There's no meaning in the song and there are so many scene changes you can't follow the video so you don't know what's happening.*

His contribution created the expected reaction and she asked the class to vote on whether they disagreed. He was happy not to have attracted much support and the class monitored his reactions from that point. Interestingly, he was prepared to modify his views as the lesson progressed. He began to interpret the many changes of image for himself and showed considerable perception in the face of some good-humoured teasing about his antipathy to chickens.

She now asked the class to watch the video again without sound.

*B: Karaoke!*

*T: (laughing) No it's not karaoke. I'm not going to play the sound because I want you to focus on the visual image... and I want you to write a list of four different strands in the video.*

*T: You see that theme several times, you see four people dancing on the compass points, those are strands – images which appear again and again. The words are repetitive and so are the images.*

After watching the silent video, pupils wrote their four points and were asked to discuss these with partners. She asked pupils to read out their lists and then invited them to say what they had noticed that they had missed on previous viewings. This provoked an interesting discussion about the location and meaning of the images. Some, for example, seemed unfamiliar with the idea of a weather vane, whereas one boy was able to identify the one shown as from Lord's Cricket Ground.

### **Lesson Conclusion (15 minutes)**

Jane now moved into what she described as the third stage of the lesson. She had prepared an adapted script on which the pupils were to log the first seventeen seconds of the video. In this brief section there were ten shots. The pupils were asked to describe these in about ten words each in one column against the accompanying part of the lyric. The collaborated on the first two shots to make sure all pupils understood the task. The first two shots lasted barely a second each. Five shots were logged before the bell ended the lesson, some needing to be repeated when a few pupils failed to notice changes that the more observant had commented on.

### **Lesson Analysis**

It was obvious that the experience of watching in this way had been a revelation to some of the pupils. An apparently simple pop video proved to be both complex and subtle,

illustrating the lyrics in ways which went beyond their originally perceived meaning. In the early stages of the exercise, some pupils argued that it was pointless to watch in this way as these videos are not meant to be studied in depth. What emerged, however, was that each pupil had observed differently and some had taken a great deal even from a first viewing. Further, pupils saw that paying attention to the video improved their understanding of the song's message. By the end of the lesson, even the sceptics had become enthused and one, on leaving the room, actually thanked her for the lesson.

## **Kevin: Urban Comprehensive School**

### **Perceptions and Representations of Careers**

(Year 10 Class of 11 Boys and Girls, 1.20-2.30 pm, 17 June 1992)

#### **The Interview**

Kevin has been teaching for fifteen years, nine of them as Head of English at his present school. His chief interest is in "pupils' experiences with the way they respond to text, the way they can empathise with texts in all genres from poetry to documentary." He sees it as part of his duty to encourage pupils to be prepared to examine all texts, from whatever source, that have affected them, and to bring them into the classroom environment for analysis and debate. His own choice of class texts is in no way circumscribed by this approach; *Macbeth* with its themes of ambition, deceit and determination can, if pupils' response is respected, be seen as at least as relevant to their experience as any modern text.

#### **Interest in Media**

Kevin claims that he has always thought of Media work as part of English studies and his interest in film, stage and music have made the idea of exploring and communicating feelings, relationships and ideology through the media integral to his teaching approach.

*I came from a very musical background and that's part and parcel of my approach. I like the whole idea of performance, whether it's doing it myself or sharing or being part of a performance, and I see that very much at the heart of the sharing approach to enjoying a text.*

As a Winchester Cathedral chorister, he was accustomed to TV cameras, microphones and the disciplines of the media from the age of nine. He plays keyboard and is an occasional oboist. His training at King Alfred's College, Winchester provided opportunities

to familiarise himself with media technology and his teaching, particularly at his present school, has maintained his media awareness. The school has worked with broadcasters on a documentary on vandalism; BBC Radio 4 programmes about education have featured in his work; and participation in the National Oracy Project involved experiments with microphones and cameras. In addition, he works happily with computers and wordprocessors.

## Aims

*I want them to be not just watching or listening. I want them to be making decisions or judgments on the quality and relevance of what they are looking at – the influence it may have. An awareness of audience so that they can be a little more objective... the adverts, billboards, newspapers... so that there's a more analytical – don't just take it for granted – awareness of the 'Big M', media as a whole. I'm very much aware of the media as more and more a very powerful influence – if not the most important influence – on our kids.*

## Methods

Kevin's approach to teaching Media is so integral to his view of English teaching that he found it difficult to isolate the separate parts. Conversation constantly drew on parallels from drama, poetry and language study.

All pupils at the school have some Media Education from Year 7 and all English teachers are actively encouraged to develop ideas and resources. Team-teaching is used to take advantage of individual strengths and there are good contacts with the feeder schools and with the local sixth form college to ensure compatibility of approach.

Pupils are encouraged to bring in media texts:

*The media [have] exploded in terms of resourcing the work we are doing and it's not just the teacher that's bringing these resources in.*

## Favourite Lessons

The department has devised a unit of work, *The Language of Persuasion*, exploring the language of propaganda about war. Taking as its starting-point Wilfred Owen's lines:

*The old lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori.*

The unit traces 'the old lie' in words and images through literature and the media. The face of Owen's victim:

... the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;

and the photograph of the charred face of an Iraqi soldier published in *The Observer* at the end of the Gulf War are compared with tabloid headlines. A recording of the Remembrance Sunday commemoration at the Cenotaph is listened to: "Below me is a young boy on the shoulders of his father or it might be his grandfather. I wonder what he makes of all this remembering when only yesterday is years away."

Year 10 pupils answered the commentator's question with a book of responses of their own, *In Memoriam*.

Pupils show very keen interest in Media work:

They know the pressures and impact, whether it be the fashions and fads of the time through to musical influences, through to the pressures pushing them to make decisions which perhaps they're not quite ready to do or they don't feel comfortable about but because they're told to do it or they can see it being done it looks attractive.

### **Personal Views**

Kevin is aware that his own views are developing all the time and hopes that in consequence his pupils are prepared to see him as freethinking, open-minded and wishing to encourage independence of thought. Yet there has been a consistent agreement within the department that has put some issues at the heart of their work. In particular, he mentions equal opportunities, gender awareness and stereotyping.

### **Key Concepts**

Kevin's list was a wide-ranging mixture of topics and concepts, including: selectiveness, analysis, questioning, money, sources, different backgrounds, influence, source-practiceprocess-product and "coping with alternative opinions".

### **Resources**

The key to Media Education in schools has, Kevin believes, been the videorecorder. He uses this and the audiocassette recorder extensively to record news, documentaries, plays and music, helping pupils to recognise the visual and aural challenges that bombard them. He describes how accidents and disasters used to be reported to us first through

eye-witness accounts and later by the media of film and videotape. Nowadays, the first reports are often visual so that the imaginative construction of those events by which we previously assimilated their horrors has been replaced. The implications of this are still not understood but he likes to explore them through works like *Under Milk Wood* in which the blind Captain Cat represents the power of the imagination.

### **School Policy**

Although the school has not produced a curriculum statement on Media Education, the situation is a dynamic one with co-operation between departments. All areas of the curriculum are now influenced by the media and currently the school's policy documents on Information Technology and on Language are being rewritten to include media awareness and access to information.

The Humanities Department is well resourced and the Technology Department has just completed a project in which pupils researched the ways Southampton presents itself to the public. This combined research, interviews, photography, videocamera work and scripting.

Work often develops from tutor sessions:

*A few years ago one of our kids died from solvent abuse... we've looked at the pressures and influences whereby kids at very early ages get little titbits of information, ultimately from the media.*

A pupil's myeloid leukaemia and the need to search for a bone marrow donor has led to a study of the way the media promote charity awareness, while a grandfather's funeral coinciding with an examination question on Adrian Mitchell's *Old Age Report* inspired discussion of media representations of bereavement. Such issues are often focused in the school assemblies which are seen as central to the school's sense of community and in which Kevin plays an active part.

### **The Future**

Kevin hopes that schools will be given the chance to "build on the good practice already going on." He fears that the new requirements at KS4 of the National Curriculum may be 'blowing it apart,' and is dismissive of any value the minimal references to media might

have. His hope is that media output might eventually be improved because of pressure from a more media-aware audience.

### **Overview of Lesson Observed**

Kevin led a discussion about pupils' recent work experience fortnight and its influence on their ideas about the world of work. A video of *The Boy with the Transistor Radio* by Willie Russell was shown and its relevance to the previous discussion debated. He began the lesson by showing an interest in the pupils' recent work experience. His relaxed questioning had the effect of making the pupils feel that the lesson had not really begun and they talked freely and unself-consciously. The questioning skilfully brought the discussion around to ideas about careers, the conflicting sources of advice and the danger of unrealistic expectations. By the time Kevin felt ready to show the video, the class were receptive to its fairly difficult theme. Although not all pupils understood its structure, with its mixture of fantasy and reality, they were able to understand the key notion taken by the teacher from the video and showed enthusiasm for the idea of continuing with the topic in later lessons. A noticeable feature of the discussion throughout had been his willingness to listen and to show sympathy and understanding for the pupils' concerns.

Although this was a class of 'less able' pupils, they achieved a high level of discussion and, for the most part, appreciated the relevance of the approach. Inevitably, a few wanted to use the reference to television as an excuse to discuss favourite programmes etc. but Kevin kept them to the point and by the end of the lesson some appeared to have moved a long way from their original positions of hostility to parental and other adult advice. He achieved this in part by the considered way in which he responded to their observations and the respect he showed them throughout. Discussion of the influence of the media was an integral part of the lesson and provided a useful basis for future work on fantasies about careers. Media concepts included language and representation.

### **Lesson Aims**

1. To look at, enjoy and reflect on a play related to pupils' own recent experience.
2. To relate pupils' real work experience to their fantasies about their futures. The class had recently completed two weeks' work experience and in a recent English lesson had worked on a 'Jobs and Responsibilities' work-sheet.

## Resources

1. Video of 25-minute play.
2. Television set and videorecorder.
3. Work-sheet based on play.
4. Jobs & Responsibilities work-sheet.

## Lesson Introduction (20 minutes)

Kevin reminded pupils of their previous work on jobs and responsibilities and asked pupils to refer to their notes. Their discussion had centred on: how young people make decisions about job value; job importance, and the differences between jobs and careers. He asked all pupils to write an answer to his question to be discussed at the end of the lesson:

“What is the most important job in the world?” He then asked how many intended to look for work as soon as they left school and what those who had other ideas intended to do.

A large group indicated that they hoped to be going on to college and had taken advantage of careers forums and visits from local sixth form college tutors to obtain information. One boy said that it would be better than ending up in a dead-end job. This gave Kevin the opportunity to develop his theme; he asked what was meant by a ‘dead-end job’ and was told that it was one needing no qualifications. Road-sweeper was offered as an example.

*T: Is that an important job?*

*B: Quite important.*

The class was asked to suggest what qualities a road sweeper needed. Several lighthearted suggestions were offered: an interest in rubbish; enough road sense to avoid being run over; a sweeper’s certificate.

*T: I expect many of your families are having conversations at home about your future.*

*G: Lectures!*

*T: Why lectures?*

*G: They get carried away.*

*T: What do you mean?*

*G: They get big-headed. Try to act big. You say what you want to do and they tell you you’ve got to do something else.*

*T: Has that happened to you?*

*G: Yeah. I want to work with animals, right? And they say I’ve got to go to college. I didn’t want to go to college. I want to work for the RSPCA. You don’t need to go to college.*

*T: How do you know?*

*G: ‘Cos I wrote off to them.*

*T: But maybe your mum and dad aren't too convinced by that so what did they say to you?*

*G: I don't know. They just shut up and let me get on with it.*

*T: Anyone else?*

*B: Yeah. I want to take after my dad and go bricklaying. They argued about it and said it's too dangerous for me. He suggested the army (laughter from class).*

*T: So what happened then?*

*B: Oh, I went up to army cadets to see what it was like. After about a year I packed it in because I didn't like it.*

Others in the group spoke of arguments at home. Kevin asked where these usually took place. Pupils said they happened in the kitchen or when something about a job was seen on TV. One said they happened after parents had been talking to their friends at work. This led to a discussion about the influence of pupils' own friends. G: They might be doing a job you want to do – they might feel it's not right for you 'cos they know what you're like.

One boy who wanted to be a fireman said his friends had encouraged him because they thought the job would suit him. He admitted that he had also been made interested by the television series *London's Burning*. As he had done his work experience at a fire station, Kevin asked if the programme was true-to-life.

*B: Some of it.*

*T: If I say 'Andrex' to you, what do you say to me?*

Pupils realised that he was referring to a commercial in which a fireman rescues a puppy. There was a brief discussion about the image of the job projected by TV and of the idea of the hero figure.

### **Lesson Development (35 minutes)**

*T: This time next year some big decisions will have been made for you... We're going to look at a play about Terry... the play deals with everything you've talked about this afternoon. Terry's parents are telling him what he's got to do but his mind is made up.*

He gave and got from the pupils some information about Willie Russell, during which he was able to point out the relevance of Russell's work to their own experience and to introduce very casually the idea of reality and fantasy. The video was shown without interruption or comment.

Some of the class were surprised by the conclusion of the play – Sid Vicious singing *My Way*. Most had never heard of the singer and were convulsed by Kevin's brief

explanation of punk rock and the *Sex Pistols*. He moved quickly on to the main theme, inviting their reactions to the rest of the programme.

### **Lesson Conclusion (15 minutes)**

*T: You actually wrote a fair amount of the screenplay before you saw it.*

The pupils showed little sympathy for Terry:

*B: He's got to get himself sorted out.*

*B: He's in a different world.*

*G: The teacher was trying to make him see sense.*

At this point, Kevin had to steer the discussion skilfully to keep pupils to the point, as some wanted to digress to details about the structure of the programme and its dream sequences (which some had not understood).

*B: They want you to believe it to make you buy.*

Again, some pupils wanted to discuss advertisements they disliked. The lesson was nearing its end and Kevin asked a final question:

*T: Was Terry let down by anyone?*

### **Lesson Analysis**

This was both an unconventional and an entirely typical lesson. It was typical of the kind of interactive flexibility which a skilled English teacher brings to classroom discussion of social issues raised by literary texts, especially with the luxury of a small class who could all be involved simultaneously. This approach enabled Kevin to pursue his second aim, of relating the pupils' real experience of work to their expectations about the future effectively. But it was unconventional as a Media lesson in as much as Kevin's approach was not based on any of the familiar frameworks for Media teaching. His classroom methods were extremely flexible and driven by pupil response rather than predetermined conceptual demands. The pupils' awareness of significant aspects of the media such as language, representation and modality was enhanced inductively by reference to their own personal work, friendship and family experiences. The lesson began and ended with discussion of personal and social experience and the video was used as a development and deepening device rather than simply as a stimulus. At the same time, opportunities for explicit discussion of televisual techniques of representation, such as camera-work and

editing, were not taken up. The emphasis throughout was on social issues in a way which suggested that the media were to be seen as powerful intervening forces operating on the personal lives of pupils. Kevin's second aim, of enabling the pupils to enjoy, as well as reflect on the televised play, did not translate into any form of aesthetic discussion of the presentation.

## **The Aims of English and Media Education**

Many English Departments are currently experiencing high levels of anxiety. They feel unsure of their roles in schools, reluctant to take initiatives and powerless to defend their present positions. Some have found their time with classes cut to make way for 'new National Curriculum demands' in other subjects. Yet, with barely half an hour a day with each class, they feel themselves to be the butt of most of the government and newspaper criticism of declining standards. 'Horror stories' circulate of English Departments amalgamated into Humanities Faculties where they are viewed essentially as servicing agencies, doing the work for which other staff claim to be unqualified e. g. the marking, and occasionally permitted to read a poem or short story if it illustrates an historical or social theme.

Media Education occupies an ambivalent position. While some English teachers have always seen it as central to their work, many approach it nervously, fearing that it will be viewed as further evidence that they are not concerned with 'basics.' These teachers feel obliged to justify excursions into the media in terms of the written, i.e. essay, work they produce. They are inclined to be apologetic, mistrusting the evident enjoyment of their classes and consequently doing less than justice to the many modes of communication the media open up for them.

There is a tension between the desire to assert the value of Literature and the growing awareness of the centrality of the media to most people's lives; a tension made worse by the recent years of debate over the National Curriculum. Few English teachers seem to view the National Curriculum as an enabling document. To most it merely adds to current practice a demand for assessments (characterised repeatedly as putting ticks in boxes) which many English teachers find alien to themselves and inimical to their relationships with children.

## **Ideology**

Most of the teachers interviewed were implicitly aware of the ideological issues underlying Media Education but found problems in articulating them. Although they tended to talk of the media as manipulators whom children needed to be taught to read, they seemed uncomfortable about discussing *who* was manipulating and for what purpose. Only advertisers were clearly identified in this way but even here the methods chosen seemed unlikely to meet teachers' declared aims. In terms of *objectives* for a single lesson, teachers described their intentions with clarity but it was sometimes difficult to match the methods used to their overall aims. Teachers were uncomfortably aware that their own 'necessary' teaching approaches might be seen as closely resembling the methods used by advertisers and propagandists while at the same time their 'exposure of manipulation' often more closely resembled an 'exposition of skills' to be admired and emulated in assignments. It is by no means certain that exposing an advertiser's means of exploiting our fantasies in any way reduces our susceptibility, particularly when, as often seems to be the case, teachers no longer feel that they have an alternative set of values to offer in their place. In any case, teachers often bring to the study of advertisements and other media texts the techniques learned in literary analysis. It was very noticeable that teachers often spoke of links between poetry and advertising; lessons could be read as explorations of the skill and subtlety of the advertising agencies with no reference to a social context. Just so has poetry commonly been taught, often without recognition of the values of its own age.

At the same time, some teachers seem to have been influenced by the current need to advertise and promote schools. There is a growing interest in the skills of marketing through the media. This interest sometimes seems to be pursued on its own terms without reference to the values which teachers otherwise believe underlie their work. Invited to indicate their own ideological positions, teachers tended to refer to issues of gender, race and equal opportunity; the agenda set and sanctioned by the media. There was no reference to approaches to ideology in terms, for example, of manipulative, hegemonic or pluralist models. Yet without awareness of the ideological debate it is not clear how teachers hope to meet their own stated aims. Work often seems devoid of a meaningful context. Virtually all of the teachers interviewed described their unease at the idea of

teaching about media institutions. They commonly spoke of this topic as 'dry,' boring and even irrelevant, a matter merely of factual knowledge about current ownership and profits. They tended to view existing institutions as representing an inevitable hegemony. There was some recognition that bias and distortion might occasionally appear in media texts as they do in literary ones, but there was little sign of any awareness that these distortions might be ideologically determined by institutions rather than personal processes. It is very difficult to see how the media are to be read if their study is devoid of this element.

### **Teachers' Aims**

Teachers tended to describe their aims in instrumental terms relevant to the immediate lesson i.e. objectives. They emphasised understanding (key words were: analyse, deduce, consider, examine, study) and seemed to take for granted many of the aims implicit in the methods used. Often they were in reality *testing* understanding rather than teaching it while the real teaching was of writing skills and oral expression. Some teachers, however, spoke of a shared experience or enjoyment and believed that their own learning about their pupils' perceptions was a necessary objective.

Although seven of the eleven lessons observed included group work, only two teachers referred directly to the aims of such an approach. Given the place of group and pair work in current GCSE Oral Assessment it is surprising that this was not given more emphasis in their stated aims.

Some of the work was arguably at least as valuable for developing the imagination as for understanding but again this was not mentioned. In part, this might be because English teachers are so comfortable with these skills that they take them for granted. But the failure to bring them to the forefront of their consciousness seems likely to mean that they were not given proper weight in planning and differentiating assignments, with the result that such work might be undervalued by the pupils.

### **Teaching Methods**

Because most teachers of English are accustomed to working within the limited space and facilities of a classroom, we expected that lessons would generally focus on front-of-class exposition followed by group work on fairly narrowly prescribed tasks and concluding with

a session in which groups report back or make some form of presentation to the class. These assumptions about method proved to be generally correct. The predominant lesson pattern was indeed teacher introduction followed by group work leading to a brief plenary session. Teachers began with a fifteen-minute introduction, conducted from a dominant position standing at the front of the class, recapping previous lessons and punctuating an explanation of the work to be done with questions designed to test recall and understanding. The class would then divide into groups to undertake a task, usually reporting back to the whole class and teacher at the end of the lesson.

All used question-and-answer techniques but questions were most often 'closed'. More open responses were sometimes offered by pupils but were rarely allowed to develop. The fact that an observer was present clearly made teachers anxious to complete their lessons as planned and this could explain reluctance to divert into open-ended discussion.

Occasionally, though, there seemed to be anxiety about the evident differences between the media experiences of teacher and pupils. It seems likely that in some cases there had been little past discussion of pupils' own media preferences and these had not therefore formed part of the planning of the lesson. In three cases, a television text provided the focus of the lesson and the class remained together, though in one of these cases opportunities for discussion with a partner were given.

Most teachers spoke enthusiastically of the response of their pupils to Media work. They often expressed surprise at the insights they had been able to gain into their pupils' perceptions and preferred modes of working. Pupils who were difficult to motivate often showed new strengths and the pleasant and purposeful atmosphere in the classroom during Media lessons was several times remarked.

It was sometimes apparent that boys' contributions were heeded more than those of girls, especially by women teachers. Boys were usually more direct in their observations while girls' contributions were often tentative and enquiring, demanding a considered response. The knowledge imparted by teachers was often of a 'commonsense' nature, in one or two cases revealing actual misunderstandings about media practice, though never of a kind likely seriously to impede understanding.

## **Group Work**

Given the central importance of team-work in producing media texts, it is surprising that the varieties of approach to teaching Media that group work provides did not seem to be more widely appreciated. Much has been made in recent literature on Media Education of the value of group work for developing skills of social interaction and expression, but perhaps these benefits should not be taken for granted.

Buckingham (1990a) offers a critical look at the claims made for group work in developing social skills, learning to work under pressure, understanding team structures, providing opportunities for self-reflection and exploring the idea that reading texts is a process of negotiation. He endorses the view that in sharing their pleasure in texts with their peers pupils are helped to develop understanding. The evidence of our lessons, though, suggests that group discussions led by an adult are of a quite different order from those in which pupils are left to their own devices. In the latter circumstance, conversation was often restricted by hierarchical relationships that coded the conversation, and was sometimes characterised by uncertainty about, and an unwillingness to engage with, the task prescribed.

When prompted by an adult, though, pupils were much more likely to talk coherently about their perceptions and enthusiasms.

## **Assignments**

The conventional essay continues to be the preferred assignment, though teachers are introducing storyboards, collages, posters, surveys and other tasks, usually to support a written core. It was noticeable that the essay retained its status in pupil's eyes, partly because teachers find difficulty in assessing other forms. Non-essay forms did receive marks and praise but informed comment tended to be reserved for the essay, while posters and advertisements of very dubious persuasive power were often simply admired. Questions about audience, product appeal, placement and alternative approaches were sometimes neglected.

Choice and differentiation of assignments were sometimes lacking with the result that groups often carried 'passengers' who might easily have been usefully involved if a range of assignments had been available.

It was apparent that most Media work was classroom-based with little expectation that pupils would refer to alternative texts or sources. In only one classroom did we see pupils using reference works on their own initiative. In general, research skills seemed to be undervalued and it was assumed that pupils' prior knowledge of posters, newspapers etc. was adequate for them to recall appropriate media conventions.

## **Classroom Environment**

A major surprise was the condition of many English classrooms. It is clear in so many ways that English has not been a main beneficiary of the money apparently poured into schools in recent years. The battered furniture, poor decor, inharmonious jumbles of cupboards and piles of shabby books were often depressing. Teachers have been resourceful in finding ways to manage over-crowded rooms but the results were seldom attractive.

Further, while most rooms could be recognised as English classrooms, very few displayed any evidence that Media Education took place in them. One has only to think one's way around any school to realise how closely subject identity is linked to the appearance of rooms. Only one of the rooms observed was dedicated to Media Education, while another three had very good displays of pupils' Media work, mainly storyboards and collages. Judging from the kinds of posters generally on display – images of nature and portraits of poets – English teachers consider film posters and the like garish and unsettling. There was little doubt, though, that where media texts and artefacts were displayed, pupils made use of these as sources and teachers referred to them for illustration.

## **Learning Resources**

Apologies were constantly proffered for videocameras that would have been used if they had not been so 'unreliable.' A main concern about using videocamera equipment was its reliability and safety in the hands of groups working away from direct supervision. In addition, since English teachers are interested in selecting from and shaping raw experience (literary skills, in fact), they were inclined to think that little useful work could be done with cameras without the help of editing facilities.

English teachers, even the younger ones, seemed to be most comfortable with sets of books, which they expected to last for ever (and which often looked as if they had). They did not seem to have been accustomed to the regular handling of money for disposable items in the way that some departments take for granted, nor did most seem to be confident with anything requiring maintenance. Many had taken computer courses but still lacked confidence in their own ability to use them, believing that their skills were already out-of-date. One teacher, however, had made simple but effective use of a computer to generate questions on Media concepts in very large type. These were cut into comic-style bubbles and attached to relevant posters on the walls.

Underlying much of the fear about resources seemed to be a sense of urgency and a reluctance to 'waste time.' Used to receiving English assignments on a regular, often weekly basis, teachers sometimes showed anxiety over work which might not only take much longer but might be produced at widely varying intervals by different groups, thus affecting the continuity of work.

### **Teachers' Development Needs**

Most of the sample had wide and varied teaching experience, usually involving subjects other than English, and several had business or industrial backgrounds prior to teaching. Surprisingly, though, there was very little evidence of any professional experience of the media or of active engagement. They were generally disposed to accept new challenges and inclined to see English as a subject embracing the whole field of communication. Even so, their involvement with Media teaching was sometimes patchy and determined more by accident than by conscious pursuit of a career option.

Eight teachers had taught for at least ten years and in some cases for more than twenty. None of these had any extended training in Media Education but had generally approached the subject from an interest in Literature and a shifting awareness of literary theory towards ideas that place reader response and a recognition that readers would benefit from reading a range of texts at the centre of their approach. The other three teachers, two of whom were in their probationary year, had deliberately chosen degree or PGCE courses with a Media or Communications content. All of them saw the need for further training in a subject they recognised as changing in its concepts and methods and

all valued the work of county advisers and other training agencies. All but one were attending, assisting with, or seeking courses in Media Education.

The teachers believed that their own enthusiasm for teaching had been refreshed by their involvement in Media Education and that the techniques they were learning were infiltrating their other English teaching. These feelings were strongest where teachers had the security of certain support from other members of their departments. Heads of Departments were particularly important here and their involvement in the design of teaching packages was especially beneficial. The sympathetic interest of other senior teachers was also much valued and several teachers were looking forward to a time when there would be leisure to make a long-term appraisal of the place of Media Education in the whole school curriculum (Hart and Hackman 1995).

Teachers frequently expressed a need for much more 'hands-on' experience of computers and video equipment. Training might focus on specific programs and on editing skills. There is also a need for a greater general knowledge of media practices. This might be partly met, for example, by commissioning media practitioners, in co-operation with Media educators, to write monographs about their jobs, and by financing visits to schools. School visits to media studios and workplaces are much valued, though difficult to arrange on any kind of regular basis. An alternative is to involve pupils in media practice through practical English assignments which emphasise the uses of language in the public domain. Such tasks as producing a community newspaper, writing and performing stories for primary children, producing material on safety and health, investigating local facilities, require pupils to reflect on and communicate actual experience. The need to conduct interviews and make decisions about real social concerns has been shown to transfer understanding to the production and analysis of media texts (Brown 1990). Work experience placements offer obvious opportunities to extend this kind of work. There is evidence that this has been done successfully with newspaper offices and cinemas.

For the future, it seems that it will not be enough for English teachers to be, as Raymond Williams put it, "determined not to be determined" (Williams 1976, 90-1). The critical question for curriculum research and development in Media Education is: how can systematic training and staff development enable English teachers to gain the confidence

and expertise to move beyond the limits of the known and familiar territory of English teaching into the more problematic areas of Media Education?

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