

Author: Hart, Andrew.

Title: Teaching Media in the classroom: Research and Practice.

Source: <http://www.soton.ac.uk/~mec/MECWEB/ATOM.pdf>. [12.08.2003] Southampton 2001. P. 1-14.

Publisher: Research and Graduate School of Education.

Published with kind permission of the publisher.

Andrew Hart

Teaching Media in the Classroom: Research and Practice

Table of Contents

The Teaching Media in English Project.....	4
What are teachers of English doing when they say they are doing Media at Key Stage 4 in UK secondary schools?.....	4
Post-Dearing National Curriculum English Order (DfE, 1995).....	5
Ten Key Findings.....	6
Discussion.....	8
Status, Coherence, and Progression.....	9
Teacher Consensus and Support.....	10
Technological Change.....	10
Contexts.....	11
Media Pedagogy.....	11
Implications.....	12
References.....	13
Further Information.....	14

There has never been a time of such strong advocacy in the United Kingdom for teaching about the media. The Film Education Working Group Report (BFI, 1999), set up by the Government's Department for Culture Media and Sport, has proposed a detailed model of progression for mandatory Media teaching and an extensive framework of curriculum and inspection support. Research on young people's media usage from the London School of Economics concludes that a wide-reaching programme of media and computer education is essential so that young people can operate media technology effectively in their work and leisure, process and manage information efficiently, critically evaluate information sources and develop a practical understanding of screen-based forms. (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999: p. 53). And, most recently, the new mandatory post-2000 National Curriculum framework for ages 5-16 includes, for the first time, a requirement for learning about moving image texts within the teaching of English. Add to this the dynamic increase of candidates for formal specialist examinations at 16+ (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and 18+ (Advanced and Advanced Subsidiary Level) and the picture in the UK looks very healthy.

Yet the evidence base for what is happening in classrooms is very small. At one end of the research spectrum, David Buckingham's work focuses on the microsocial interactions of small groups of learners and on individual teachers' reflexive accounts of their work. (Buckingham, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1993a, 1993b, 1998;

Buckingham, and Sefton-Green, 1994; Buckingham, Grahame, and Sefton-Green, 1995) It does not pretend to say anything about broader patterns of teaching or how teachers are adapting their work to the opportunities and constraints of National Curriculum and Examination Board specifications.

At the other end of the spectrum, the British Film Institute's surveys (Dickson, 1994; Barratt, 1998) give a sense of landscape, but say nothing about what actually happens in classrooms, as opposed to what teachers say happens (often retrospectively). These wide-angle surveys are useful, but they lack the depth of field and methodological focus that we need in order to understand more about the day-to-day decisions made by teachers as they seek to articulate and manage a developing media curriculum. Barratt's questionnaire-based survey of over 700 secondary schools in 129 LEAs, supplemented by focus group discussions with 39 teachers (Barratt, 1998, pp. 10-12), confirms most of the

findings of the Southampton study of Media teaching at Key Stage 4 under the post-Cox National Curriculum for English (DES, 1989, 1993; Hart and Benson, 1993). He found similar disquiet amongst teachers about the coherence and rationale of National Curriculum requirements for Media within English (p. 17). Learmonth and Sayer's observations of teachers, based on a small sample of eight schools, only offer detailed evidence about one of them. They conclude that there is a 'marked lack of objective evidence and debate about methods of teaching and learning that most effectively develop students' skills in media education' (Learmonth and Sayer, 1996, p. 9).

Recent research at the London School of Economics (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999) has begun to map young people's media interactions outside the classroom. Using a combination of focus groups, individual home-based depth interviews with children and (separately) parents, questionnaires, diaries of media usage by young people, and interviews with IT teachers and cybercafe Internet users, the LSE project explores in great detail young people's interaction with media in their own homes and at school. It reveals the relative usage by young people of a range of media that together occupy around 5 hours of their time daily. On average, half of this time is devoted to television, with 99% of young people watching in their leisure time. Music is the next most used medium, with 86% listening for about an hour daily (often as a secondary activity). A similar number of young people (81%) watch videos for a further daily average of an hour. Computer games (64%), non-school books (57%) and other personal computer uses, including the Internet (55%, most often in school) provide the other most frequent media interactions. (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999: p. 5)

Beneath these figures lies behaviour that is clearly differentiated by social class, gender and location. For example, twice as many young people have access to IT at school as at home, where inequalities of access are not reproduced and where IT is used for different purposes. The researchers note the vital role of the school in redressing inequalities of access to IT in the home. Yet teachers and schools are over-stretched, under-trained and ill-equipped for this task, despite widespread enthusiasm for the potential of IT. (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999: p. 45) The report concludes that a wide-reaching programme of media and computer education is essential so that young people can operate media technology effectively in their work and leisure, process and manage

information efficiently, critically evaluate information sources and develop a practical understanding of screen-based forms. (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999: p. 53). Given this rich and diverse picture of old and new media usage by young people, we now have a sense of the media context in which young people are operating. So there is a strong case for more detailed and systematic empirical research that looks at teacher strategies and classroom practices in depth. That is what the Southampton *Teaching Media in English* project has tried to do.

The Teaching Media in English Project

Following the success and international extension of the *Models of Media Education* project (Hart and Benson, 1993; Hart, 1998) this new study examined the range of approaches to Media teaching within English in secondary schools at Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16) in the context of the post-Dearing curriculum for English. Using systematic classroom observation and in-depth interviews with teachers, the project aimed to investigate the forms and purposes of Media teaching in schools in the South and South West of England, taking into account the new provisions for National Curriculum English and Examination Board syllabus specifications. It also aimed to provide an account of the forms and purposes of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in English teaching.

The primary research question addressed was:

What are teachers of English doing when they say they are doing Media at Key Stage 4 in UK secondary schools?

This question was broken down into the following underlying components:

- who teachers of English are (experiences, background and training)
- how they see themselves in relation to schools and curricula
- what they say (and think) about Media as a discipline
- how they define their own approach to Media
- what they actually do when they teach Media

As in the 1992-93 study, we found a wide range of practice, but that most lessons observed lacked:

- interaction and dialogue (teacher-pupil or pupil-pupil) about media
- space for young people's own media experience and knowledge
- opportunities for active involvement in the social production of texts
- teaching in context through engagement with media processes and technologies
- engagement with political issues
- focus on media institutions.

The revised National Curriculum Orders based on the Dearing Review repositioned Media within English (DfE, 1995). The importance of Media was now much clearer, though the actual number of Media references were fewer. At Key Stages 3 and 4 the most significant reference to Media comes in the *Reading Programme of Study* and requires that ,pupils should be introduced to a wide range of *media, eg, 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, purposes, and different structural and presentational devices.*' (1.f.) Many other references within *Reading* would, to the committed Media teacher, encourage opportunities for Media work.

Post-Dearing National Curriculum English Order (DfE, 1995)

Pupils should be taught to:

- extract meaning beyond the literal (2.a.)
- analyse and discuss alternative interpretations (2.a.)
- consider how texts are changed when adapted to different media. (2.b.)
- evaluate how information is presented (2.c.)
- recognise, analyse and evaluate the characteristics of different types of text in print and other media...consider the effects of organisation and structure, and how authors' purposes and intentions are portrayed, and how attitudes, values and meanings are communicated. (3.a.)

In addition, there are, within the Speaking and Listening, and Writing

Programmes of Study, ample opportunities for the inventive teacher of Media to bring in quite naturally the study of media texts. For example, the range of forms in which pupils are expected to write includes ,playscripts and screenplays' (1.c.) The force of the post-Dearing curriculum and the place of Media within it were enhanced by the School

Curriculum Assessment Authority's (SCAA, now Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) GCSE regulations and criteria which instructed Examination Boards that 'The range of reading assessed must also include non-fiction, media and texts from other cultures and traditions' (p. 37). Thus, many teachers who had feared the demise of Media Education within English, found that it had, in fact, been given the status that, arguably, only comes from a secure position within the assessment system.

The environment in schools has also changed in terms of the spread of multimedia resources. Some recent studies also indicate a growing interest in IT as an object of study rather than simply as an instrument for teaching and learning. (Goodwyn and Findlay, 1997)

Ten Key Findings

These were the most important findings to emerge. The numerical order in which they are placed here is not significant.

1. *The status of Media study within English has been enhanced by its assessment position within the new, 1998, GCSE syllabuses.*

New syllabus demands have meant that teachers are gaining in confidence in their teaching of Media; those less confident acknowledge the need for more expertise. Teachers were optimistic about the future of Media Education.

2. *Progression and continuity within Media have been enhanced since 1992-93, with all departments introducing a Media policy into their English schemes of work.*

Although examination syllabuses and departmental Media policies have been highly influential in determining the nature of Media Education within English, individual teacher choice within the syllabus or scheme of work was still critical in determining the approach to Media within the classroom.

3. *All Examination Boards except NEAB, by positioning the assessment of Media within a terminal examination, have effectively limited the study of Media to the printed text, with the emphasis strongly upon written, verbal communication.*

As a consequence of syllabus choice, a narrow view of Media Education has emerged in some schools, although teachers did strive to move beyond the syllabus limitations. Also,

the definition of Media Education has been muddied by some Boards through their failure to define clearly the position of *media* texts in relation to *non-fiction* texts.

4. *Though television and the VCR were the technologies most likely to be used, television broadcasts, other than in the form of pre-packaged advertisements, did not feature in any of the lessons. That is, there was no study of television drama, documentary, news or light entertainment. Film, however, did feature in three lessons.*

IT did not feature in any of the eleven lessons seen. Teachers and their pupils are just beginning to use the new technologies, including the Internet, but there is, as yet, no evidence of any attempt to make technologies (new or old) the focus of Media study within English.

5. *Media Language and Representation were the concepts most likely to be addressed by the teachers. Institutions or Agencies were least likely to be addressed.*

Texts were likely to be studied without significant attention to context. Even Media Studies specialists saw no place for *Institutions* within the crowded English curriculum. In several schools Key Concepts had become 'hybridised', a mixture of rhetorical principles borrowed from literature combined with the original BFI Signpost Questions.

6. *The 'discriminatory' paradigm was the one most likely to frame teachers' perception of Media teaching within English.*

Within this context, there was still, amongst some teachers, a sense of equipping pupils with the means to defend themselves against Media manipulation.

7. *Teachers were unlikely to have attended a recent Media professional development course unless it was provided by the Examination Board.*

Exceptions were teachers also running specialist Media Studies courses.

Experienced teachers were especially dependent on Media understandings gained some years ago.

8. *When teachers used commercial resources, those produced by the English and Media Centre, and, in particular, The Advertising Pack (Grahame 1993) were the most frequently used.*

Within this pack, most teachers were familiar with the materials related to the selling of Levi Jeans.

9. *There was little evidence of motivation to teach about the media coming from anywhere outside the English curriculum and the examination syllabuses.*

In the eleven schools visited, no teachers recalled any Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspector making a significant reference in the verbal feedback or in the written report to the teaching of Media within English. No school had developed a cross-curricular approach to the teaching of Media.

10. *In schools where GCSE Media Studies was taught, there was a significant impact on Media teaching in English as a result of strong internal links and staff development provision by the Media specialists.*

In the eleven schools visited, four Media specialists had a significant role in providing professional development for teachers of Media within English and this had a positive impact on colleagues' confidence and competence in their work.

Discussion

The most significant conclusion from this research is that little has apparently changed since 1992-93, despite new National Curriculum and Examination Board provisions. This is hardly surprising in one sense, since nearly half the sample of teachers we studied this time were the same as those in the earlier study and it is unlikely that their practice would change radically in the intervening five years. Four out of the five who were re-visited used the same medium on each occasion (two print and two television) and the fifth 'switched' from television to print.

It is also unsurprising to find a predominant focus by these English teachers on Language and Representation more than on Institutions and Agencies. The study of text, rather than context could be said to be a defining characteristic of English teaching as it is currently understood.

The 1993 report noted few opportunities in lessons for space to be given to pupils' own media experiences, but in comparison with the 1998-99 study there was a strong element of popular culture in the lessons. In 1992-93, three dealt with the making or marketing of popular music and another with the analysis of comics, but in the 1999 report there are no obvious examples of popular culture being addressed, other than in the study of the Levi Jeans advertisements. Arguably, the curriculum freedom offered in 1992-93 allowed for a more open interpretation of media experiences, but this freedom had its disadvantages.

Between the eleven teachers there was less of a common purpose, more of a sense of individual preoccupations being explored.

On the other hand, the new study shows that in spite of an apparent narrowing down of the Media curriculum, all teachers felt a clear sense of purpose. They all had a sense of the place of Media within the English curriculum, and each lesson was clearly designed to fulfil an identifiable Media requirement of the appropriate GCSE syllabus. It is possible to interpret the changes that took place between the two studies as a development of coherence and focus in Media, but, perhaps, at the expense of inclusiveness, and creativity.

Status, Coherence, and Progression

There are areas in which significant advances have been made. For example, the 1992-93 research noted the doubtful status of Media Education within the English department. In 1998-99 that status had been significantly enhanced, and there was a strong sense that most were gaining confidence in their Media expertise, or, at the very least, recognising the need to gain more expertise if they were to do justice to their pupils. The motivation for this, of course, has been the new GCSE requirement that Media (as a reading skill) is assessed in all syllabuses. This may, however, not be all good news. Where the GCSE Board elected to test Media within a terminal examination, there was a strong emphasis upon analysing printed texts, considered without the benefit of their original context. Where the Board elected to test Media understanding within coursework, there was much more likelihood of study of context and of the moving image. If the status of Media within English has been enhanced, then so has its coherence within the English curriculum. OFSTED inspections have ensured that every school now has clear curriculum statements outlining curriculum content and opportunities for progression and continuity. (Ironically, inspectors were extraordinarily consistent in their failure to make the teaching of Media in English a significant issue). There were clear examples in 1998-99 of such curriculum statements having a significant impact on the Media curriculum, and being strongly based on a conceptual model of Media teaching. It seems that there is now much less likelihood of pupils endlessly repeating advertising projects as they progress through the school with each teacher unaware of their pupils' prior curriculum experience. Collaboratively

produced units of work, supported by relevant and centrally held resources (particularly from the English and Media Centre) were the norm.

But, in most cases, the final choice for curriculum content at lesson level still resides within the individual teacher. Teachers can use this freedom to 'play safe' to rely on tried and tested lessons taken from a collectively produced scheme of work. Or, they can use the freedom to assert their individuality within a coherent curriculum framework. Thus, continuity and progression for the learner can be guaranteed, but this may be within a narrow or limited Media diet. For teachers to make informed choices they need the benefit of research such as this. They need to see the advantages of common purpose, but, at the same time, to recognise the dangers of the curriculum straitjacket. A very careful balance between collectivity and individualism needs to be struck.

Teacher Consensus and Support

In 1992-93 the National Curriculum framework was still 'bedding in'. By 1998-99, the National Curriculum had been largely accepted, or at least tolerated. Teachers themselves were likely in 1992-93 to have entered Media Education down a variety of avenues; in 1998-99, regardless of length of teaching, memories of first encounters with Media Education tended to be forgotten, with teachers now linked by the National Curriculum connection. With this new uniformity, there is arguably, a common base on which teachers can agree and move forward, though some may regret the loss of diversity. Yet if teachers of Media can now look with more confidence to the English curriculum and to their English teaching colleagues for authority and support, they are likely to find the whole-school context more of an obstacle. In 1991 the BFI were, (misguidedly, as history has shown), advocating that the main Media thrust should be cross-curricular (Bowker, 1991: Buckingham, 1990a 1990b; Hart, 1992). Certainly, there has been no obvious development of cross-curricular Media initiatives since then, and OFSTED-driven whole-school imperatives have made it harder for the English teacher to justify leaving classes to attend Media-related courses. Media professional development in 1992-93 was noted as being sporadic and inconsistent. In 1998-99, with the collapse of much local authority-based provision, Media training seemed even rarer.

Technological Change

Five years of technological development have meant that teachers are beyond the stage of struggling to get on computer training courses, or talking about the importance of 'keyboard skills'. In 1998-99 there were references to use of scanners, digital cameras and, of course, the Internet. But in practice, the pattern of lessons in both research projects seems very similar. IT was not used in any lessons seen, though folders of work and lesson plans suggested that the use of word-processing was common enough outside these lessons. In 1998-99, the Internet was beginning to be used as an information source to support study of film and literature. But still, such technologies were tools of occasional use rather than the focus of study. Perhaps another five years will see more attention paid to the significance of accessing entertainment and information via the Internet and the possible impact on how we collectively and individually perceive the world.

A significant and surprising feature in relation to choice of Media technology remains the absence of television broadcasts as focal 'texts'. If television broadcasts have yet to gain a major foothold in the English curriculum then what chance has the Internet as an object of study?

Contexts

Whatever texts were studied, a common thread in the 22 lessons featured in both projects was the significant absence of context. Printed texts were commonly seen as isolated fragments, and though broad institutional contexts were raised, the emphasis was nearly always upon engaging with the text itself. Five years have made little difference to teachers' attitudes towards teaching about Agencies, Institutions or Ideology. The 1998-99 teachers were never opposed to the notion that the context of production was important, but considered the issue too slippery for pupils to grasp, or too low a priority in a crowded curriculum that offered no encouragement to go beyond the text itself. Indeed, the Media Studies specialists, those most likely to know about Institutions and Ideology, were no more likely than any other teacher to bring these issues into the English classroom: they were strong in their assertion that such matters were best tackled in a discrete Media Studies context.

Media Pedagogy

Despite the curricular and technological changes of the past five years, teachers' aims and approaches seem to have changed little. They still seek to empower their pupils with the ability to 'analyse', 'understand' and 'deconstruct', with a hint of inoculation in the empowerment. Their approaches within the classroom also remain broadly similar.

Analysis is still likely to involve teacher-led discussion, with learning handed back to pupils once the parameters of textual understanding have been defined. This seems especially strong where television technology is used, with teachers finding it difficult to separate control of technology from control of learning. And the outcome of textual analysis in a production sense is still more likely to be the essay than the video. Indeed, given that all Media work in the 1998 GCSE syllabuses has an assessment outcome, one cannot blame teachers if they 'play safe' in this respect. The gap between teachers' description of most successful or favourite Media lessons and the lessons observed in the research reveals a tension between what teachers actually do teach and what they might wish to teach. They often cite in the interviews successful lessons that were group-based or technology-dependent, lessons that some find difficult to accommodate in the current English curriculum.

Implications

The National Curriculum for English was revised yet again while this research was being completed. It requires more emphasis on 'moving image texts' and a clearer distinction between non-fiction texts and media texts, but no strong encouragement to engage with the social and economic contexts in which texts are produced. The way in which Examination Boards 'translate' the new curriculum into assessment criteria and practices will be central to the development of Media teaching over the next decade. Another factor will be the possible 'trickle down' effect from the new syllabus specifications which the Examination Boards are producing for Advanced and General examinations in Media Studies for students at 16+ and 18+ years of age. Optimistically, another five years could see a significant opening up of the Media in English curriculum. But if the English curriculum does not take account of the pace of technological change, then a 'credibility gap' could open up between pupils' personal media experiences and schools' engagement with them. It is arguable that the gap already exists. Nearly 30 years ago,

Murdock and Phelps (1973, p.143) suggested that pupils' media assignments, 'should be produced with a real audience or public in mind...the school, or even better, the local neighbourhood.' That recommendation is unlikely to be fulfilled in the current English curriculum, which generally encourages conservatism rather than innovation.

This research shows unequivocally that National Curriculum requirements and the way they have been interpreted by the Examination Boards define, but do not ultimately determine, what Media is taught in English-teaching classrooms. In practice, local factors such as school policies, Head of Department preferences, access to resources, professional training and individual commitment, work in tension with external factors. Teachers still have relative autonomy in curriculum planning and lesson delivery. However, If teachers like the eleven in this project are to close the increasing gap between the new media environment outside school and educational responses within school, they will need the curricular, technological and institutional contexts in which they can effectively operate and in which innovation is encouraged.

References

- Barratt A.J.B. (1998) *Audit of Media in English* London: BFI
- British Film Institute (1999) *Making Movies Matter* London: BFI
- Bowker, J. (Ed.) (1991) *Secondary Media Education: A Curriculum Statement* London: BFI
- Buckingham, D. (1990a) 'English and Media Studies: Making the Difference' *English Magazine*, 23, pp. 8-12
- Buckingham, D. (1990b) 'English and Media Studies: Getting Together' *English Magazine*, 24, pp. 20-23
- Buckingham, D. (1990c) *Watching Media Learning* London: Falmer
- Buckingham, D. (1993a) *Children Talking Television* London: Falmer
- Buckingham, D. (Ed.) (1993b) *Reading Audiences: Young People and the Media* Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Buckingham, D. and Sefton-Green, J. (Eds.) (1994) *Cultural Studies Goes to School: Reading and Teaching Popular Media* London: Taylor and Francis

Buckingham, D. Grahame, J. and Sefton-Green, J. (1995) *Making Media: Practical Production in Media Education* London: English and Media Centre

Buckingham, D. (Ed.) (1998) *Teaching Popular Culture: Beyond Radical Pedagogy* London: University College London Press

Department of Education and Science (1989) *English for Ages 5 to 16* London: HMSO (The Cox Report)

Department for Education (1993) *English in the National Curriculum* London: HMSO

Department for Education (1995) *English in the National Curriculum* London: HMSO

Dickson, P. (1994) *A Survey of Media Education in Schools and Colleges* London: BFI

Goodwyn, A. and Findlay, A. (1997) *Media Education and Mother Tongue Teaching: Conflict or Convergence?* Paper delivered at Southern Media Education Research Group Symposium within the European Conference on Educational Research, Frankfurt

Grahame J. (1993) *The Advertising Pack* London: English and Media Centre

Hart, A. (1992) *Mis-reading English: Media, English and the Secondary Curriculum* *The English and Media Magazine*, 26, pp. 43-6

Hart, A. (Ed.) (1998) *Teaching the Media: International Perspectives* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Hart, A. and Benson, T. (1993) *Media in the Classroom: English Teachers Teaching Media* Southampton: Southampton Media Education Group

Learmonth, J. and Sayer, M. (1996) *A Review of Good Practice in Media Education* London: BFI

Livingstone, S. and Bovill, M. (1999) *Young People, New Media* (Summary Report of the Research Project: Children, Young People and the Changing Media Environment) London: London School of Economics

Murdock, G. and Phelps, G. (1973) *Mass Media and the Secondary School* Basingstoke: Macmillan

Further Information

The author and MEC 1999

Copies of the full research report are available from:

Dr. Andrew Hart

Media Education Centre
Research and Graduate School of Education
University of Southampton
S017 1BJ
England
Website: <<http://www.soton.ac.uk/~mec/>>
Email: aph1@soton.ac.uk
Tel (01703)-593387
Fax (0)1703-593556

Dr Andrew Hart is Senior Lecturer in Education at the Research and Graduate School of Education, University of Southampton, where he teaches Media Studies on the MA(Ed) course and supervises MPhil/PhD research. He has also taught on the postgraduate Initial Training course in English, Drama and Media Studies for many years. He has published widely on Media Education and has worked closely with teachers as Director of the *Southampton Media Education Group* (winner of the British Film Institute's Paddy Whannel Award for innovation in Media Education), as Director of the Southern Media Education Research Network and of the recently established *Media Education Centre*. He currently represents the UK on the World Council for Media Education. Recent publications include *Teaching Television, Making 'The Real World'* (CUP 1988), *Understanding the Media* (BBC/Routledge 1990/91), *Developing Media in English* (Hodder 1995) and *Teaching the Media: International Perspectives* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998).

This work, and any part of it, is copyright. Putting any part of this work to any unauthorised use is a punishable offence and liable to prosecution. This applies in particular to reproduction, translation, copying, micro-filming, electronic storage or any other electronic re-working.