TELEVISION - A FIRST TEACHER?

Towards a Media Curriculum
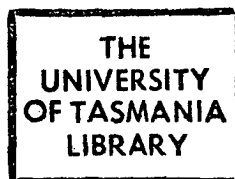
BY

Jennifer Marion Louise

JENNI CONNOR

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ABSTRACT

TELEVISION: A FIRST TEACHER?

TOWARDS A MEDIA CURRICULUM

Since the arrival of television in Australia, there has been widespread public concern about its potentially negative impact on the lives of children.

The question of the relationship between viewing and attitudes, values and behaviour, has been the focus of clinical and field studies now for over twenty years.

Given the complexity of the messages embedded in television programs, the sophisticated nature of their transmission and the highly variable contexts of their reception, no definitive conclusions about cause and effect were possible.

However, there have emerged a number of well-supported trends and a growing body of knowledge about the role of the viewer and the processes of enculturation. This knowledge offers a sound basis for the development of Media Studies programs in schools with the aim of developing informed, discriminating and responsible young viewers.

This paper focuses primarily on children aged approximately four to eight years for whom appropriate content and teaching strategies for media education have proved somewhat elusive.

It sets out to draw together and to analyse the evidence about television's impact and from this to derive a rationale for educational intervention.

Alternative constructs for media education are described and the models used in several programs compared and judged for effectiveness.

From these analyses, a framework for the development of a media education strand in the curriculum of Tasmanian primary schools is suggested.

A detailed curriculum is not described, but organising principles, learning processes and teaching strategies are outlined.

Chapter 1

Media and the Young Child: Care and Concern

The notion of childhood as a separate and special age is but a few centuries old and if Postman (1983) and Aries (1986) are to be believed, it is already endangered. The concept of childhood that we take for granted is based on the belief that young children are not merely physically vulnerable, but also psychologically impressionable and that therefore the adults around them have a special duty of care. We would once have said for instance, that one of the main differences between an adult and a child was that the adult knew more about life's harsh realities - violence, sex, death and the like - and that these were "secrets" from which children were protected until an appropriate time (Elias in Postman 1983, p.48).

The history of literature for the young (Townsend, 1977) reflects the view that the child's developing character and morality are influenced by vicarious life experiences; that the stories we tell have the power to change the person, for better or for worse.

Plato, in the fourth century, expressed concern about the influence which folk stories and the popular poets might have on young children (Cornford, 1955).

The Victorians put morality and instruction first, carefully diluted entertainment second. Bruno Bettelheim (1976) reminds us that even in the age of psychoanalysis, many would have outlawed folk fairy tales lest they lead the young to wasteful and dangerous imaginings.

In Australia this century, many parents and teachers were convinced that comics were corrupt and decadent.

But at least past generations had the means to keep adult secrets locked away. To gain access to the print-records of human experience, one had first to be literate. And not just basically literate, for the nuances of adult literature required relatively sophisticated linguistic and conceptual skills. Literature presented information in a form that was differentiated in its accessibility, the new media do not necessarily do so. With the advent of television in Australia in 1956, a new element was added to the storytelling, information conveying process - we acquired an open communication environment. Unlike reading, television at the level of pure "access" requires no special skills, maturity or intelligence.

It is reported that children from as early as six months of age, are attracted to the visual and auditory components of television and "watch" with some concentration. (Hollenbeck and Slaby, 1979). With the push of a button, two year olds can and do, "choose" their favourite programs. And increasing numbers of young Australians have chosen television (and now video) watching, in preference to other pastimes.

The work of Dr. Patricia Edgar, over more than a decade, indicates that:

- there is a television set in 98% of Australian homes;
- the *average* child views for 23 hours per week;
- pre-school children up to age six are the single heaviest television viewing audience in Australia with an average of 30 hours per week;
- by the time children finish school they will have spent 11 500 hours in formal education and 15 000 hours watching television;
- they will witness 18 000 murders and 500 000 advertisements;
- for every hour they read they will watch seven hours of television.

(Edgar, 1983)

The availability of this new source of information and entertainment undoubtedly has enriched the lives of many children, extending their knowledge and vocabulary, taking them into worlds beyond their limited life experience. Sadly, but inevitably, it also brought less halcyon visions, of the carnage of war and road accidents, incest and promiscuity, drug abuse and other aspects of "adult" life - and all in colour and sensationalised detail.

With television emerging as the dominant experience in the life of the average Australian child - monopolizing more of his or her time than any other activity apart from sleep (Senate Committee, 1978) - academic research and public interest shifted from a concern about the effects of books, comics and radio, to concern about the impact of television. In recent years this subject has generated debate among parents, educators and members of the public, in Australia and overseas. Both the medium itself and its messages have attracted comment.

That children were experiencing a perceptual environment unknown to previous generations was immediately obvious. Some researchers suggested that television's rapid-paced sensory over-stimulation might lead children to passivity, escapism and a constant search for novelty and sensation (Singer and Singer, 1983).

Parents and teachers were increasingly aware of the difficulty in controlling children's access to a medium so appealing and instantly available.

Advertising, particularly that "aimed at children", became a focus for criticism as adults claimed that it encouraged consumerism, an expectation of easy gratification, and a particular view of what constitutes "good times" (Fakouri, 1984).

More pervasively, it began to be suggested intensive television viewing presented the child with a picture of the world as a frightening place, filled with stereotypical men and women, who either acted purely out of self-interest or else were life's victims (Rubinstein, 1983).

Clearly there are numerous underlying assumptions here. Firstly, that television carries value messages capable of influencing personality, attitude, belief and behaviour. Secondly, that children in their formative years are particularly likely to have their view of themselves, of others and of the world, shaped by television watching. Thirdly, that a significant proportion of the messages thus conveyed are socially undesirable and philosophically inconsistent with the democratic and egalitarian principles on which western societies claim to be based.

Expressions of concern received by various Commissions enquiring into the impact of television have been remarkably consistent across time and place (National PTA Commission 1976-77, U.S.A., Senate Committees 1978, 81, 86, Australia).

Although published a decade ago, the hearings conducted in the United States provide a useful summary of the public perceptions of the problem.

Four major issues were addressed by respondents who expressed the belief that:

. viewing televised violence will lead to increased aggression, desensitization or paranoia;
. television displacement has a negative effect on family life;
. extensive television viewing is linked with learning problems and school failure; and
. television distorts a child's picture of reality.

Then, as now, television violence and its possible effects on children's behaviour elicited the most profound concern and spirited debate.

Respondents claimed two likely results from prolonged and intensive viewing of violent programs. Firstly that aggressive behaviour may be directly stimulated and encouraged, secondly that the young viewers might become desensitized, gradually increasing their violence threshold.

This view was especially supported by those who worked with troubled youth. These adults suggested that children must respond in some way to this stimulus - either by seeking to emulate it or by separating themselves from natural human feelings of shock, pity and horror.

While there are those who would still claim a direct modelling effect (Peake, 1987), there has been a move in the past two years, towards the less simplistic "desensitization" notion (Stanton, 1987).

Closely linked to the "violence debate" is the question of whether the amount of violent action on television may lead children to a distorted perception of the real world.

Characterising fearfulness of the world and other people as "paranoia", many of those testifying to the United States hearings expressed the concern that long-term exposure to television violence may lead the child to see the real world as a dangerous and frightening place. Unable to separate fantasy and reality, especially when the two are blurred in program design, the child may ask "if it happens there, could it happen to me?"

A distorted view of the world was perceived to result not only from watching televised violence, but also from the racial, ethnic and social stereotyping inherent in many programs. Children who had low self-esteem and impoverished life circumstances were deemed most at risk from images that devalued them, their family and/or their lifestyle.

This of course, raises the crucial point that, as with other aspects of human development, television viewing interacts with a host of personal and familial variables.

Television is not the sole or even the most significant influence in the formation of values, it is but one component of a child's experience. Its degree of influence, however, seems largely dependent on the level of adult/child interaction and on other factors in the child's environment such as the level of viewing control in the home and the concurrence of parental and "television" values (Fakouri, 1984).

On the basis of these factors, therefore, television is a major bearer of ethical and social values for many of our children.

Australian research is clear on several points:

.   children in single parent families watch more television and seldom discuss it with an adult;
    and
.   children in low socio-economic groups watch commercial programs exclusively and for
    greater periods of time than children in more affluent families.

(Senate Standing Committee, 1978)

In fact, one third of the viewers watch television for twice as long per week as the "average"
child. Edgar (1983, op. cit.) suggests that the heaviest viewers are the lowest school
achievers, lonely children with poor self-esteem, and children with unsatisfying family
relations and negative life experiences. These children watch television for 40, 50 and even 60
hours per week and they persist with heavy viewing when their more "academic" and
gregarious fellows have turned to other pursuits (Edgar, 1983).

The studies undertaken by Jerome and Dorothy Singer (1983) in the United States support the
conclusion that school failure is likely to result from television viewing in combination with the
following factors:

.   a home environment in which television viewing is uncontrolled;
.   heavy viewing in the early childhood years;
.   parents whose means of discipline is physical force;
.   recent viewing of programs with violence; and
.   parents whose values do not include creativity, imagination and curiosity.

It would be falsely romantic to suggest that prior to television, all families "played together and
stayed together". However, the adults in today's world do seem increasingly involved in their
own pursuits. Thirty four percent of women with children under four year's old work outside
the home (Institute of Family Studies, 1986) and there is an increasing use of child-care of
varying quality.

Given these circumstances, and the trend to single child families, the television set very often
fulfils a convenient role in child-minding and entertainment.

Television, by its very nature, cannot take the place of stories read, conversations held and experiences shared. More importantly, it would appear, the very children who do not have these experiences and who may not receive a clear, consistent and positive set of values from the adults in their homes, are the ones watching television most intensively. They are perhaps those most vulnerable to its effects.

Television has brought about an altered experience of childhood for all of our children. They are undoubtedly in possession of some kinds of information earlier in their lives than many adults would like. The question is what, if anything do we want to do about it? Some adults in Australia work constructively to improve the quality of television programs for children, others would prefer to turn off the television sets of the nation. Those representing the moral "right wing" incline towards the institution of rigid censorship and Postman (1983, op. cit.) suggests that we pull up the educational "drawbridge", promote only "high culture" in schools, and mourn "the loss of a sense of shame" in our young.

Educators properly take note of public concerns when establishing curriculum priorities. These concerns have led to the development of some form of mass media studies curriculum in most Australian states. However, topics such as "television and violence" are apt to raise more passion than intelligent thought, and uninformed emotion is a poor basis for educational decision-making. It seems instead, that we need to carefully review the accumulated evidence on the impact of television on children in order to determine whether or not a media-critical curriculum is required. We need to know what Australian children actually do with their current media experiences. From these pieces of information and from reflections on young children's cognitive and moral development, we should gather some clear directions for the nature of an effective media curriculum.

Although "the media" clearly comprise a range of print, sound and film materials, this paper will concentrate primarily on television because of the major role that it plays in the life of the young child.

To try to gather some of the background information, I will turn first to research pertaining to children aged approximately 4-9 years, since they are the focus of this investigation.

The questions of television violence, advertising, stereotyping and television's effects on learning will be considered in turn.

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Chapter 2

For and Against

The television violence issue has been both the focus of greatest lay concern and the subject of the most intensive investigation in clinical and field studies.

An examination of some of these studies should reveal trends in the evidence and illuminate the question of television's effects.

Research into the impact of a complex set of messages, transmitted into highly variable contexts by sophisticated processes, is naturally beset with methodological difficulties.

It is these difficulties of course, which fuel the debate between competing researchers with differing paradigms and findings.

While "violence" is variously defined according to the aims of the particular project and this can make comparisons difficult, generally the term includes physical action which hurts another person. There is little agreement between researchers on the significance of verbal and psychological abuse.

The research tends to fall into three broad theoretical categories. Firstly, the belief that television content is a stimulant to violent behaviour, secondly, that there is little or no demonstrable effect, and more recently a third view, that watching violence may even have a therapeutic or cathartic effect.

Pioneering studies such as those of Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince (1958) in Great Britain; Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) in North America; Campbell and Keogh (1962; 1970) in Australia; and Furu (1962; 1971) in Japan, provided the first detailed information on viewing patterns and the effects of the introduction of television (in Murray, 1976).

The methodology employed survey instruments, diaries, detailed questionnaires and interviews with parents, to assess children's exposure to television and teachers were asked to rate each child for aggressive behaviour (Smith, 1979).

These surveys failed to isolate clear increases or decreases in either aggressive or prosocial behaviour (Murray, ibid). Because these early researchers in most cases were able to compare children in situations before and after television exposure, their studies are not replicable. They did however, raise the major issues that are still the focus of current research.

Central to research from the 1950's to the present day, is the assumption that television is more than mere entertainment, that it is in some sense an educator.

Many of the better known studies, particularly those with younger children, look for imitation of behaviour that has been seen on the screen. In 1963, in their now classic study of the effects on nursery school children of watching the filmed aggressive behaviour of adults, Bandura, Ross and Ross (1963) produced results which indicated that aggressive models supplied the children with examples for learning new aggressive behaviours.

Further, they suggested that aggressive models also reduced the children's inhibitions against performing aggressive acts which they had previously learned, even when these were not given as examples in the experiment.

Like most early studies, these investigations were conducted in laboratory settings. Typically, the child viewed a model (either live or televised) engaging in behaviours including some novel aggressive ones. For example, a model might use a hammer to strike a life-sized doll. The child would then be left in a room which contained neutral materials and replica materials such as the doll.

An unseen observer would then score the child for the number of imitative actions.

There have been many variations on this basic experimental design, but essentially the results are the same. Children who watch a model displaying violent behaviours exhibit more of those behaviours than children who have watched a neutral film. Boys usually display more aggressive actions than girls and males are more likely to be imitated than are females (Holman, 1980).

Clearly, the implication is that aggressive behaviour is occurring through a process of modelling (acquiring new behaviours) or disinhibition (employing known but taboo behaviours).

However, observation alone does not necessarily lead to changed behaviour in the observer. Liebert and Fernandez (1970) suggest that two factors, vicarious consequences and the status of the model, are of particular importance (in Langham, and Stewart, 1981).

This is supported by Bandura's findings that children who observed aggressive models who were rewarded, imitated more than those who observed aggressive - punished exemplars.

The male child imitating male model nexus perhaps also supports the notion that high status models are more likely to be imitated.

This laboratory-based research has predictably been criticized for its artificiality. It has been suggested that what occurs in a laboratory setting may be no guide to a child's real-life reactions, that the level of focussed concentration on the violent content is far greater in experimental situations than in the busy life of the home and that clinically designed "programs" bear little similarity to commercial television fare (Holman, op-cit.). One has to conclude that Bandura and associates have demonstrated that some sort of link exists between viewing and behaviour, but have failed to establish a direct, long-term cause and effect relationship.

The other side to the question of imitation is of course, desensitization, and Drabman and Thomas in 1975 examined this issue (in Holman, ibid). They set up a situation in which children from third to fifth grade were shown either a violent or non-violent film. The experimenter then asked the child to "keep an eye on" younger children while he left the room. He then played a videotape of these fictional children becoming increasingly unruly and aggressive. The test child was led to believe that these events were really taking place. Both boys and girls who had watched the violent film took much longer to seek appropriate adult help than those who had watched a non-violent film or merely played with toys.

This result, while by no means conclusive, is chilling and carries the authenticity of common experience - as adults we too suspect that we tend to become numbed by repeated exposure to human suffering.

Recent research has begun to look less simplistically at the whole social learning question.

Leifer and Roberts (in Murray, op. cit.) suggest that each television program conveys a variety of messages to a variety of viewers. The messages conveyed to a four year old and to an adult may be different, but both may be capable of producing an effect. These researchers have demonstrated that the child's understanding of the motivation and consequences of televised action increases with age. Younger children tend to recall discrete events out of context. This

may be particularly significant, since within a "normal" television program, the consequences may eventuate long after the aggressive act. The young child may therefore not connect the action with its unfavourable outcomes. Leifer and Roberts found that children who had watched full half-hour programs containing violence, were more likely to resolve interpersonal conflicts violently. This effect was most marked in children 12 years of age and younger and diminished with maturity (in Smith, op. cit).

Subsequent studies have used available commercial programs to avoid some of the criticisms levelled at the contrived experimental situation.

Stein and Friedrich (1972) (in Murray op. cit.) presented children with a "diet" of antisocial, prosocial or neutral television. Such programs as **Batman, Mister Roger's Neighbourhood** and travelogues represented the three "dietary" components.

The overall results indicated that children who were judged aggressive became significantly more aggressive after viewing **Batman** and **Superman** cartoons, while those who viewed **Mister Roger's Neighbourhood** became more co-operative, helpful and generous. There are of course, moderating variables in the equation, some of which will be discussed later. The studies by Ekman et al (1972) (in Murray, ibid), however, are germane to the question of viewer involvement already alluded to in relation to modelling. Ekman and associates closely observed the facial expressions of children as a guide to their emotional reactions while they were viewing aggressive behaviour. There was a positive correlation between expressed happiness, interest or involvement and the incidence of later hurtful activity.

Steuer, Applefield and Smith (1971) (in Murray, ibid) moved away from the experimental setting to the more meaningful social context. They demonstrated that children who viewed aggressive programs over a ten day period, were more aggressive towards other children than their matched controls who viewed non aggressive material. Significantly also, they pointed to a cumulative effect - *some* children were more aggressive on day ten, than on day one. As with other studies of this kind, the crucial factor of individual differences should be noted. Apart from this question of predisposition, the other central issue relates to the lasting quality of any impact of media on behaviour. Lefkowitz and his associates (1972) attempted to answer some of these complex questions by assessing the relationship between preferences for violent television programs during early childhood and socially significant aggressive behaviour when the subjects were adolescent.

The research design allowed for the effects of the child's level of aggression at age eight, socio-economic status, intelligence, amount of viewing and parental treatment and aspirations.

The investigators obtained peer rated measures of aggressive behaviour and preferences for various kinds of television, radio and comics, when the children were eight. Ten years later, they again obtained measures of aggressive behaviour and television program preferences. The results indicated that for boys, aggressive behaviour at 18 was linked with violence viewing at 8, that preference for television violence at 18 was significantly related to aggression at age 8 (r=.21), but that preference for television violence at 18 was not related to aggression at 18 (r=.05). This last point has been used to discount partially the alternative interpretation that already aggressive boys merely choose violent programs. The other two findings seem more fundamental however, in that they suggest that an early preference for violent television programs may play a causal role in producing aggressive and antisocial behaviour when the young boy becomes a young man. Stein and Friedrich (1975) have argued that the two factors are interrelated.... "the more aggressive a child is, the more likely that child is to seek out violent television and the more likely that child is to show increased aggression as a result of seeing that violent television" (in Holman, op. cit. p.7).

The longitudinal correlation studies have been criticized for non-comparability of measures (Comstock and Rubinstein, 1972 op. cit.). It has been suggested that such aspects as who rated the subject aggressive and the nature of the programs viewed, cannot be held constant over a ten year period.

Despite these legitimate objections, there does seem to be a strong case for some form of role modelling as explanation for the statistical evidence. One could hypothesize that this might be based on a search by boys for prototypes of adult masculine behaviour. Belson's study (1978), while concentrating on children aged 12-18 years, is interesting in that it investigates the relationship between the *types* of violence on television and the effect on behaviour. Belson identified five particularly potent types of television violence:

- film in which violence occurs in the context of close personal relations;
- seemingly gratuitous violence;
- fictional violence of a realistic kind;
- "justified" violence; and
- westerns of the violent kind.

By contrast, several programs which cause adults concern, such as violent forms of "sport", cartoons and science fiction violence, had little or no effect on this age group.

Meyerson's work prior to this in 1966 lends support to Belson's hypothesis. Meyerson found that the greater the similarity between the setting portrayed on the screen and the child's actual surroundings, the greater the likelihood of aggressive imitation (in Smith, op. cit.).

Similarly, the work of Professor Noble (1975) in England and Dr. Edgar (1977) in Australia, supports Belson's findings on realistic violence in fictionalised settings. Noble found that only violent content of a realistic kind was likely to lead to aggressive behaviour. Edgar's study found that children were more disturbed by events which they could relate to their own experience. Children with low self-esteem were particularly affected.

Standing in opposition to these accumulated findings on the effects of media violence is a major study by Feshbach and Singer (1971) (in Comstock and Rubinstein, op. cit.).

These researchers theorized that the vicarious experience of violence might discharge pent-up anger, hostility and frustration.

To test this theory they presented adolescent boys with a "diet" of either aggressive or non-aggressive programs over a period of six weeks.

Concurrently, researchers measured the day-to-day aggressive behaviour of these boys. The results indicated that *some* children who viewed non-violent programs were more aggressive than those on the diet of violent programs.

However, this research has been the subject of fierce debate (Murray, op. cit.). The reliability of the daily ratings and the access of the "non-violent" group to regular programs containing violence have been seriously questioned. There is moreover, a fundamental inconsistency between these findings and all other research in the field. If viewing violence acts as a release, then one would expect an inverse correlation between preference for film violence and aggressive behaviour. The evidence is of course, to the contrary. Aggressive children generally prefer *and watch* violent programs.

The only tenable conclusion to be drawn from the conflicting findings is that, for *some* children in some circumstances, viewing violence may be therapeutic. Clearly, one would need more precise identification of these factors before using the conclusion as a basis for action. It represents no argument in favour of the general transmission of screen violence to the wider audience.

The major arguments against all of the findings so far cited are that in laboratory studies induced aggression may be transitory or short lived and that, in the long term correlational studies, the evidence does not necessarily imply cause and effect. These two variables may be related to a third - i.e. that socio-economic factors may be even more influential in terms of behaviour than exposure to televised violence. This hypothesis of a third variable was supported by studies with adolescents (Hartnagel, Teevan and McIntyre, 1975 in Langham and Stewart, op. cit.) but required testing for younger children.

Langham and Stewart in 1980, conducted an Australian study with children in our focus age groups (Langham and Stewart, ibid) They set out to examine the relationship between aggressiveness, viewing habits and preferences for younger children. They predicted that aggressive children would prefer violent programs and characters who could act as models for their behaviour. The subjects comprised "equal numbers of male and female, 7-8 and 10-11 year olds, aggressive and non-aggressive children (n=160) from five metropolitan schools in Newcastle, (who) were selected by their teachers on the basis of their age and aggressive/empathetic status. The schools were of similar size and socio-economic status, and could be labelled middle-class" (ibid, p.125).

Each child received a questionnaire with items such as favourite program, bed time, father's occupation and activities of the child's favourite television character.

The results are unsettling. They suggest that normally aggressive children show a significantly greater first choice of violent programs on television and at the cinema than non-aggressive children. Their choice of a favourite television character and their use of these in classroom story-writing, follows a similar pattern. The marked preference for violent cinema drama seems to imply a deliberate search by quite young children for this kind of experience. Additionally, Langham and Stewart found, aggressive children went to bed later and watched a wider range of commercial programs, thus suggesting saturation exposure to violent models. That typically, the father was unskilled and absent from home and that the child's best friend was also aggressive, may indicate the lack of positive role-models in the child's environment. This is consistent with the findings cited earlier by Edgar in Australia and Singer in the United States of America, that the value position of the home is central to the degree of television influence.

The nature of family interpersonal relations and child-rearing practices were not the object of this Australian study, but clearly these are also crucial influences on children's behaviour.

The complex nature of the medium and the process of message assimilation were finally recognised and resulted in a new approach to the study of television and behaviour. The team at the Annenberg School of Communications (Gerbner and Gross, 1979) suggested that the social science paradigm of subject/control group was of limited value in the study of the effects of television. This model relies on one group being exposed to a selected stimulus while the other is protected from it. In a world pervaded by television this differentiation between the two groups cannot be made with any certainty. The control children for example might well receive film stimulus outside the research timescale and not subject to its measurement. Further, Gerbner and other educationalists involved in the Cultural Indicators project believe "the world of television drama consists of a complex and integrated system of characters, events, actions and relationships whose effects cannot be measured with regard to any single element or program seen in isolation" (Gerbner and Gross, 1979 p. 179).

A child does not normally watch only one program nor only one episode of it, so any change in behaviour cannot be conclusively traced to one stimulus.

Instead, Gerbner and his colleagues used two different methods of research. First they analysed the content of the range of progams viewed regularly by children on an annual basis between 1967 and 1979 (ibid). Thus they were able to establish the composition and structure of the broad system of messages of television. They identified the prevalence of violent programs, the prevalence of violence within programs and the roles played and status exemplified by violent characters. Secondly, they tried to determine what viewers absorbed from the world of television. To do this they directed questions such as "can most people be trusted" to both adults and children. They then analysed the responses to establish whether these indicated a "television answer", i.e. the way things appear on television, or one closer to the way things are in the everyday world.

They expected, and found, that heavier viewers were more likely to give the television image of the world (ibid p. 196).

This might not be seen as important if this view of the world was a positive and balanced one. However, they found that eight out of ten children's programs contained violence, that old men, lower class, non-white males were likely to be killers. Females of all categories were usually victims.

Clearly the underlying assumption of the investigators is that television in today's world is a significant cultural influence, presenting to children a picture of socially constructed reality. Most importantly, it is a picture representing power relations between groups in society and a

view of what is right, moral and acceptable. If the project teams' conclusions have any validity (and other studies on enculturation processes suggest that they do), then we must ask if this television view of the world is one which we wish to have promulgated. At the very least, Gerbner concluded, children aged 7-11 years who were heavy television viewers exhibited greater expressions of fear and mistrust - "a sense of danger in the mean and selfish world" (ibid p.196).

While this discussion focuses primarily on television's effects, the work in South Australia of Dr. Glenn Cupit (1986) into video watching, is relevant to this issue of "distortion of the child's world picture". The study, the first of this kind relating to Australian children and aspects of video viewing, was undertaken in response to increasing concern expressed by school principals, teachers and parents.

Cupit's team conducted a survey to ascertain the extent to which children aged 9-12 years had access to video material, the type of material viewed, the context in which it was seen and the children's response to such material. Cupit found that 60.9% of the sample children (from 34 Adelaide schools, randomly selected) had a home video, and 85.7% reported watching at friends' homes.

The range of materials viewed indicated clearly that parents did not control watching in accordance with present censorship classifications. Fifty percent of the titles listed by the children were in M (33%), R (16%) or X (1%) rated classifications.

Children were then asked to identify parts of videos they "found hard to forget, although they'd like to" and which they remembered "because they found it so enjoyable" (Cupit, ibid p.6).

The respondents identified parts with an emphasis on "violence and horror" as most disturbing (36.9%), specifying "mutilation, dismemberment and murder" as most frightening (Cupit ibid p.10). The titles they listed included **Texas Chain Saw Massacre, Dune** (baby killing) and **Halloween.**

In terms of "desensitization", the categories of "enjoyed responses" are also perturbing - 23% focussed on violence, including an emphasis on the method of killing.

While the Annenberg team and Dr. Cupit moved away from the clinical social science experimental design, their basis in learning theory still appears essentially Behaviourist. They did not observe children in real-life settings or converse with them naturalistically. Instead adult-to-child questions such as "Can most people be trusted?" and "Can you describe a part of

a video that is so enjoyable that you always seem to remember it?" were asked by researchers who were unfamiliar to the respondents.

To raise these criticisms is not to attempt to negate all previous findings, merely to suggest that more exploratory, home-based studies might present a more contextual, holistic picture in which the child may appear less like "a willing sponge", absorbing all the stimuli around him or her.

In Australia, Patricia Palmer (1986) conducted one of the first studies of children and the media from a Symbolic Interactionist perspective. This sociological theory holds that human social life is fluid and dynamic and that "all human behaviour takes place in a social setting mediated by shared meanings" (Palmer, ibid p.10).

Thus, statistics on the number of hours watched or programs viewed do not answer the crucial question of the "role of TV in children's lives". Research which takes into account the actual physical and social circumstances of viewing, and the *child's* view of what TV means for him or her, was needed. Hence, Palmer's methods included interviews with children, observational studies, and surveys to identify trends.

In general, the team's observations discounted the "passive child" image. Instead they characterised the child viewer as active in selecting and in viewing, often engaged in other activities such as eating, talking and playing in front of the set, "tuning in" when it suited him or her. They found that children's choices were governed by their developmental and personal needs - they chose to watch for fun, for information and for excitement. These needs and choices vary therefore with age and sex, and this developmental perspective will be taken up later.

It is the new notion of a "lively" and discriminating child audience that should concern us here, for it runs counter to the popular notion, reinforced by Winn (1985) and Postman (1982), that the child is virtually "hypnotised by television", resulting in "narcosis, dulling to sense and sensibility" (Postman, 1982, p.105).

This view of "television as a narcotic" concludes that *any* television is "bad for a child", more television, just like "more drugs", simply compounds the addiction and its effects. Postman et al suggest that not only does television "bombard the mind" with fragmentary, unverified assertions, but watching it "requires no skills and develops no skills" (Postman, ibid p.79). Palmer on the other hand asserts that "because the meaning and structure in television messages is *complex*, the child must become engaged in a dynamic communication of diverse messages" (Palmer, op. cit. p.137).

An investigation into brain wave activity conducted by researchers for the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (1983) is relevant to this debate. The investigation was initially undertaken because of the proposition by Emery & Emery (1975) that television viewing whatever the content "produced an alteration in brain activity" which resulted in the minimum retention of television - gained information. The ABT researchers found no empirical support for the electrophysiological effects claimed by the Emerys. Instead, changes in brain functioning were found to relate to the *kind* of information received and the amount of mental processing necessary (Palmer op. cit. pp.135-136). The effect was not television - specific therefore; simple messages whether verbal, print or film, are processed with minimum brain effort, complex messages create different brain patterns.

Palmer wisely advises that "it is equal folly to replace the passive child notion with one of a critical and sophisticated child viewer" (Palmer, ibid p.10).

We are all familiar with the sight of the three year old who seems "glued to the TV set". We now need to interpret this in terms of age, choice and the range of available options, rather than simply as the "magic power of TV".

Research in the 1960s and 1970s examined "what television was doing to us" and the educational response, especially in the United States, was to try to "inoculate" children against its worst effects.

More recently, researchers have looked at how children interact with television and at individual propensities and contexts. The medium itself is no longer seen as automatically damaging, although all caring adults would wish young children to engage in a wide range of play and social activities.

The notion of simple emulation by children of anti-social behaviours seen on television, is also much less popular as an explanation for behaviours. Psychologists working with the aftermath of Melbourne's Hoddle Street murders for example, have stressed the particular configuration of events that lead to acts of extreme violence. Low self-esteem, dependence on others, feelings of rejection and immediate access to a weapon, appear to be key elements (Bretherton, 1988).

It would seem that television cannot initiate behaviour in an individual which is not part of that person's value system. However, young children are still in the process of establishing a value system. These tentative ideologies are constantly interacting with the beliefs and values depicted

on television and so television's view, together with other views surrounding the child, contributes to the formation of values.

Some children are particularly vulnerable. Those with fewer leisure pursuits do watch more, as Edgar has said, and they are, as Palmer discovered, less active agents (Palmer, ibid pp.82-83), more tied to television as an escape from boredom or depression.

In line with Lefkowitz (1972), Langham & Stewart (1981) and Cupit (1986), Palmer suggests that the shows children *choose* to watch above others - their "favourites" - are likely to be more memorable and perhaps more influential in their lives (Palmer, p. 46). Like Ekman, she found a higher level of viewer concentration on these programs, involving greater mental activity and resulting in stronger influences on children's games and conversations.

This influence is often benign. As June Factor (1988) has found, children use television-inspired games to process their impressions and later to parody television's content.

Children benefit from encouragement to continue with this kind of activity and to look critically at television's less constructive statements about people and their lives.

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Chapter 3

Social Values

Television then, is not a machine that grabs at children's minds as some emotive critics would claim. Viewing is not a conditioned response. The child is usually a purposeful actor, using television as part of life's experience, in a continuous process of adaptation towards a world view.

But because this is so, the stories television tells are important, not trivial, and in terms of this *content* there is much to criticize and change.

The stories television tells about social life, should not be accepted uncritically. Messages about roles and aspirations may be encoded bluntly or subtly, in advertising material as well as in program time.

Questions such as:
.   Do advertisements promote materialism and consumerism in young children?
.   Do they place low income families under unreasonable pressure?
.   Do they purvey images and lifestyles along with product promotion?
are inevitably raised.

The nature, placement and amount of television advertising directed at children, are at the centre of this debate.

Australia is in the top three countries in the world in relation to the amount of advertising allowed on commercial television. In the United States of America, nine and a half minutes of advertising are permitted per hour in prime time, in Canada, twelve minutes per hour, in Australia thirteen minutes per hour (Senate Committee Report, 1978).

Much of the criticism of advertising which has been directed to the Senate Committee has carried the belief that advertisements designed to appeal to children were deliberately placed in children's viewing time, thus causing them to put pressure on their parents to purchase the advertised products. Parents were particularly concerned about the conflicts which arose when they refused to purchase very expensive items. Low income families were seen to be especially affected by this kind of discord. Underlying these complaints was the assumption that young

children's natural credulity was being exploited (Senate Committee Report, 1978). The advertising industry on the other hand has claimed that children are naturally acquisitive for particular foodstuffs, that television advertising holds no special "magic" and that children need to "learn to choose" in a consumer society (Senate Report, ibid).

These arguments do not withstand close scrutiny. Advertisers are not altruistic, they are paying for programs transmitted on commercial stations and they choose the time and content of the programs and advertisements with particular audiences in mind. The use of children's favourite characters for promotion and the placement of advertisements for toys, clothes and snack foods in proximity to popular children's programs, supports this contention; we see few advertisements for motor mowers or washing powders at 5 p.m. We must assume that advertisers predict the timeslots when they will have a large, captive, child audience and given a child's limited personal buying power, we must assume too, that the child is expected to tap a source of finance - the parent.

It is nonsense to suggest that film advertising has no greater persuasive power with children than promotion through print media. Children are notorious non-readers of newspapers and magazines, whereas television pervades their lives. Additionally, moving film can convey a multitude of "signals" with simple, familiar images - a pair of ears, for example, soon comes to represent a rabbit, a cylindrical shape, a cigarette. The triggers are not subliminal, but they are quick, barely noticed, and made effective through familiarity and association.

A current package of Drug Education materials entitled **Kangaroo Street Gang**, produced with the support of the Mercantile Mutual Group, seems to reflect these beliefs about subtle message conveying. The materials include a video, which is in cartoon style. The main character is a "wise owl" called "Canti" and a recurrent symbol with omniscient powers is in the form of a stylised "M" which has an uncanny resemblance to the Mercantile logo.

As Atkin has noted, commercials "generally attract the attention of the less involved viewer through the use of entertaining production techniques, intrusive placement between popular programs and repetition." (Tan, 1979 p. 284)

The notion that advertising provides educational value in terms of "practice for a consumer society", is ethically fraught. We might ask whether consumerism is an attitude this society wishes to perpetuate. We might also ask whether the intensive promotion of one product is really likely to develop viewer discrimination between products.

Research into the impact and nature of advertising is a relatively recent development. Murray, in Australia (Senate Report 1978, p.124), found that children aged 2-4 years recalled advertising jingles, slogans and product names and that they asked for these products. That these very young children might be particularly vulnerable to manipulation or confusion because of a developmentally-related inability to distinguish commercials from program content, has been cause for general concern. This belief prompted the Senate Committee (1978) to recommend that no advertising be permitted during pre-school programs. Studies by the Children's Research Unit in the United Kingdom on the other hand (Howarth, 1985), have shown that children from four year's old can distinguish between programs and commercials.

Howarth (ibid) further suggests that from this age children can identify selling intent, but that very young children relate this to self - "they're showing me things to buy"; older children relate it to seller and product "they're trying to sell something" (op. cit. pp.15-16).

Lee Burton's work at the Phillip Institute in Victoria makes some of these patterns clearer in relation to Australian children.

Burton points out that the effect advertisements have on children is determined by age, sex, the amount of television the child watches, and the economic and educational background of the parents (Burton, 1988).

At kindergarten, Burton suggests, children cannot separate the product from the commercial, and do not understand the purpose of advertisements. By second grade they become aware of the intent to sell, but still tend to ascribe to the product the qualities and value designated by the advertisement. Although increasingly sceptical by about third grade, children seem to become *more* persuaded and more capable of influencing their parents to buy the desired product.

Older children, although quite cynical, still use advertisements as a source of information. Burton concludes that as a group, children are more susceptible to advertisements than adults (Burton, ibid.).

This contention is supported by earlier work conducted overseas by Rossiter (1979, in Holman, 1980) and others. They hold the view that even when children develop sufficient cognitive skills, decentering or cynicism to be critical of commercials, they still act in the market place in exactly the way that the advertiser hoped - they reach first for a much-promoted brand name. While product requests, according to the advertising fraternity (Howarth, op. cit.), decrease between the ages of 5 and 12, observational studies (Palmer, 1986 A) show that children aged 5-7 years pay greater attention to commercials than younger or older children.

The requests may simply decline because these children have increasing control over some money.

A study initiated by Dr. Peck from La Trobe University (1978) is relevant to the debate. The researchers video-taped a fifteen hour sample period of television broadcasting on the three commercial channels in Melbourne in March 1978. The study set out to provide quantitative data on children's television advertising in Australia and qualitative statements on the ways in which products were presented. Researchers considered the sex, age and ethnicity of the characters and their role and status and the buying rationales behind the products.

They found 103 commercial announcements in the 15 hour period (1 hour, 6 minutes and 40 seconds of time), being well within the permitted amount of advertising time.

Most of these (83%) were presented in "live-on-film" format, but two thirds of animated presentation occurred in relation to sweets. Sweets and snacks together accounted for almost one third of the announcements and these products were very much more likely to use fast camera/subject movement and high audio volume. While in half of the announcements, price was indicated, this was so in less than 5% of the sweets advertisements. Even where price was given, cost diminution phrases such as "only" and "merely" were employed. These techniques are consistent with what the advertising industry has described (Howarth, op. cit. p.11) as effective strategies for children - visual emphasis, action sequences, animation and music.

Recent work conducted in Victoria, again by Lee Burton, revealed that little has changed in ten years. Burton compared the frequency of advertisements for particular products in general viewing times with the occurrence of the same products at times when large child audiences could be predicted.

Foodstuffs were intensively advertised at both times, but the rate dramatically escalated in child-viewing periods. At these times, books, magazines, and records became the promotional focus well ahead of household cleaners, furnishings and electrical equipment. 73% of the foods advertised in "child-time" were sweets or snacks. (Appendix 1)

Apart from nutritional concerns about sweets promotion, what other "messages" were inherent in the presentations?

Peck's work indicated that when there were clearly distinguishable major and/or minor roles in the commercials, there appeared to be a hierarchy of sex-age ranking.

Adult males most often played major roles (69%) and adult females minor (46%), female children were least likely to be depicted in major roles (2%). Ethnic minorities were represented in only 3% of the sample and then often in stereotype.

While 56% of the advertisements used inherent product enjoyment as a marketing strategy, more than a third (36%) sold by "pleasing association", and although advertisements based on "superiority to one's peers" are specifically banned in children's viewing periods, they occurred 10% of the time.

It was also clear in Peck's study that producers of food products were prepared to pay for quality advertising in children's time and that most of this was directed towards buying sweets.

A stereotypical and inegalitarian world picture was certainly presented to the viewers.

Concurrent studies by Tindall and Reid (1978) confirm this impression that "it's not what you are, but what you have that counts", "nice mothers are always beautiful", and "the best fathers always buy things for their children". Television advertisements have much to say about aspirations, little about achieving those goals through personal endeavour.

Transmission of these values to children cannot be said to occur with any more certainty than the transmission of other attitudes such as tolerance or the acceptance of violence as a solution.

However, cultivation studies such as those conducted by Alexis Tan (1979, op. cit.) tend to confirm that television's values influence young people's social reality. Tan hypothesized that teenage subjects exposed to television beauty commercials would rate sex appeal, youth and beauty characteristics as more important in terms of "self-worth" and "appeal to the opposite sex", than would the control group teenagers.

Cultivation effects were clearly present in terms of these two aspects of status and relationship.

Another startling example of the impact of television advertising on teenage behaviour can be seen in the more recent Paul Hogan/Winfield case. The Hogan/Winfield partnership ended following public disquiet at the results of a survey of 1200 eleven to fourteen year olds which showed that half of these children bought Winfield cigarettes (Metro 53, in Burton, op. cit.).

It would seem that these commercials had a very effective penetration of this young market and that the perceived status of the model, was not unimportant.

In the case of many advertisements however, the persuasive force is heightened by technological artistry ("special effects"), peer pressure to conform by ownership, and the huge industry surrounding some products.

Some war toys for example, have associated products in clothing, bed linen, records, books and "add-on parts". The child viewer is therefore swamped with related advertisements. It is not suggested that children are extremely gullible or extraordinarily acquisitive, but the resultant "cult" must be difficult to resist.

Television toys consolidate and extend sex stereotyped play in children at an early age (Palmer, A. op. cit.).

Clever marketing strategies separate the demands of boys and girls, and different age groups. The majority of fluffy toy advertisements are aimed at the female market, with soft pastel colours and romantic overtones. These toys are usually love objects in the advertisements, and language and feeling are emphasized. The toy marketing aimed at boys on the other hand, sells toys emphasizing fighting, physical strength, sophisticated technology and technical mastery. (Transformer toys convert into a fighting robot or a machine man - never a machine woman!)

This emphasis on fighting is perhaps hardly surprising considering the nature of the manufacturing companies concerned. Mattel and Westinghouse for example, the creators of the "Masters of the Universe" toys, had a billion dollar contract with the United States Department of Defence as an Arms supplier in 1981 - 1982 (Palmer, 1986 B).

Interestingly, in recent times the toy has been created first and the cartoon series has then been made as a selling device.

The influence of these toys on children's play is twofold. If given "goodies" toys, children play creatively, but when a "baddie" is introduced, aggressive play begins (Palmer, ibid).

Also, boys and girls seem to be developing different levels of confidence and skill with technology because of the toys with which they play. While girls are playing with "Barbies" and cuddly toys, boys are manipulating quite complex "transformers".

Together with other risk-taking and technologically-oriented life experiences, this early play appears to contribute to the relative ease with which boys approach computer technology.

One submission to the 1977 Australian Broadcasting Tribunal complained that "women and girls in advertisements are almost universally depicted in subordinate roles or domestic situations ... the Australian woman ... has as her major preoccupation, the capture and retention of a male partner, her physical appearance, the cleanliness of her crockery, floors and washing and the nurture of infants ... she is somewhat stupid, needs male advice on anything mechanical or, if she is intelligent, spends a lot of time concealing the fact ...." (ABT. 1977 op. cit.)

This somewhat emotive description is not only supported by the research into advertising content (Bushby, 1975 and Peck, 1979), but also by analysis of *program* content (Edgar, 1979, Mukerji 1976, Patterson 1981).

When women are shown to be independent and capable, they typically achieve this through magic (e.g. **I Dream of Jeannie** and **Bewitched**).

Even programs like **Prisoner**, which portray women as active, ordinary-looking and angry, "punish" them. The message implied is that it's safer to be submissive.

Males are still predominantly characterised as dominant, dangerous and adventurous (**Moonlighting** and **Dukes of Hazard**). Males are stereotyped too, but at least they're rewarded for it - they are given more positive roles.

Essentially, television in advertising or program material does not portray the world as it really is - complete with attractive, successful, older women, unemployment and cultural diversity.

Both advertisements and programs (except for repeated American programs from the 50's and 60's), are now less blatantly sexist, but it is doubtful if their producers' basic premises about women's rightful roles have altered significantly.

There are some strong role models for girls, such as Molly in **A Country Practice** and Daphne in **Neighbours,** but mostly they are "just mothers". Even in the latest batch of "role reversal sit coms", career women are usually shown in their domestic roles. Additionally, we are in danger of new stereotypes gracing our screens - the coldly assertive female executive, the Karate-learning housewife (**Valerie**) the "superwoman" who manages career and housework superbly (thanks to certain household products).

Even where the father is given a nurturing role he's often shown as "trying to get out of it" (**Valerie**), as if it's only a passing joke, not to be taken as "proper" and "serious". Humour

and hyperbole have always been effective cultural weapons (Sharpe, 1978; Lakoff, 1975; Adams, 1976).

Men's changing roles in our society are not yet adequately reflected in either our literary or film fictions.

Involvement, as we have noted, is a significant factor in the potential of television to influence people's ideas and actions. Patricia Palmer, (1986 C), found that girls related particularly to programs that they designated "true to life", "down to earth", and which concerned people their age and older. The girls became involved with these programs in a variety of ways. Not only did they harmlessly follow the screen lives of their favourite characters, but more importantly, they took note of the television action and seriously applied the ideas to their own lives. If the outcome of screen action was pleasing, they consistently reported that they'd try it out for themselves (Palmer ibid p.15). If female behaviour on television was "punished" they said they would deliberately avoid such action (Palmer ibid p. 26).

In terms of "future self", sisters, mothers and television characters provided examples for the girls and very few thought to challenge the options presented by TV (ibid p 28). In the programs they described, women were hardly ever shown as career women and yet this was the area in which these girls needed to extend their personal and family experience. While this study related to teenage girls, other cultivation studies indicate that children form an image of themselves and their relative value, very early, and the kinds of programs enjoyed by younger children are no more even-handed in their treatment of the sexes.

Helen White Streicher (1974) working in Chicago, analysed the age, sex and activities of characters in cartoons and the accompanying commercials. In many of the cartoons the characters were all male, particularly those of the "I'll do you in" variety (**Woody Woodpecker** etc.). When a female did appear, her lines were in the "Help", "Save Me" category. In continuing adventure style series (**Josie, Archie,** etc), females outnumbered males, but the roles were strictly stereotypical - daffy blondes, bossy brunettes, etc.

Where the rare, active female was presented (**Sealab 2020**), even when she was technologically competent, she was derided as a "walking disaster area", by the male characters.

Males, of course, did not escape stereotyping. There were bumbling husbands, ego-maniacal villains and brawn without brains.

In more recent programs on Australian TV (**Voltron, Batman, Thundercats** and **Astroboy**) technological triumph is usurping physical prowess, but good and bad are still absolutes, and men are still not portrayed as sensitive, domestically competent or caring. Females in these programs largely exist as foils to the impressive qualities of the males, as little helpers or as victims to be destroyed or saved.

Since young boys in particular, are noted "cartoon addicts", these limited images of males and females cannot be helpful in achieving a balanced view.

Sex roles are not the only values shaped by television. Breaking the law, using violence, conniving to deceive, are all offered as legitimate ways of solving problems - and furthermore, the perpetrators are promoted as modern heroes.

The sex-role and violence questions are closely related. If women are devalued and men have to be aggressive to be admired, then violence against particular groups is legitimised.

Stereotyping of all kinds, has the potential to limit life aspirations, and simply does not represent the real world accurately. Noble (1975, in Burns and Goodnow, 1985), suggested that children's perceptions of occupational roles and ethnic stereotypes were related to their vicarious television experiences. Greenberg and Reeves (1976, ibid), found that heavy viewers were much more likely to perceive television entertainment programs as real. Kippax and Murray (1977, ibid) found high television viewers to have a differentiated view of the world of crime, but a poor one of the world of work. It would seem that television was one of their major information sources.

Again, it is not suggested that television alone shapes a world view, but if the characters you most admire hold particular values and engage in particular activities (such as drinking and driving fast), if your friends mimic their mannerisms and if no adult in your household offers an alternative viewpoint, television provides an influential perspective on the world and its people.

Children do operate on what they believe to be *real*, and therefore drama and documentary programs shown in "children's time" should be particularly value-careful. Amoral dramas may have a special case to answer.

Children, at the moment, mainly watch poor quality programs which present a limited world and make limited demands for participation. They do so because they have little alternative. If we see children's television as "important" rather than "dreadful" or "trivial", we will encourage the making of different programs. We will also encourage children to reflect on what they see and hear and provide skills for them to interpret the messages they receive.

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LEADING PRODUCTS ADVERTISED DURING ALL TIME PERIODS

RANK	CATEGORY	% OF ALL TELEVISION EXPENDITURE
1	Foodstuffs	23
2	Cars and trucks	12
3	Household Cleaners	8
4	Household equipment and furnishings	7
5	Electrical (household) equipment	6
6	Travel and tours	6
7	Women's toiletries	6
8	Magazines, newspapers and books	5
9	Records	5
10	Building materials and industrial machinery	4
11	Other categories	18

LEADING PRODUCTS ADVERTISED WEEKDAYS LATE AFTERNOONS AND SATURDAY MORNING WHEN THERE ARE LARGE CHILD AUDIENCES

RANK	CATEGORY	% OF CA'S BROADCAST
1	Foodstuffs	42
2	Books/Magazines	11
3	Records	9
4	Travel Services	8
5	Clothing/Accessories	6
6	Other categories (each less than 1%)	24

THE FOODS ADVERTISED DURING THESE HOURS

RANK	CATEGORY	% OF ALL FOODSTUFF COMMERCIALS
1	Sweets	52
2	Snacks	21
3	Meal Food	17
4	Breakfast Food	10

Chapter 3
Appendix 1
Burton, L. Advertising Directed Towards Children.
Phillip Institute of Technology, Victoria

Chapter 4

Television and School

Schools have contributed to the "discussion vacuum" that leaves children alone, to process unaided, the myriad messages of television. Schools have basically downgraded the stories the children want to tell of television, labelled them trivial, if not dangerous, and asked that they be left at the classroom door. Educators have done this for a number of reasons, some legitimate, some dubious: because they feared to reinforce television's impact, because it was an alien world to them, because they blamed television for academic failure and/or because they saw schools as the last bastion of print and high culture - a refuge from the world of Disney.

Teacher opinion is in fact divided on many of the issues relating to television's effects on learning. Marjorie Renwick (1977) surveyed teachers of five year olds in New Zealand and found that the most positive gains in the view of the teachers were increased general knowledge and enriched vocabulary, while the most significant disadvantages were that children viewed too late, too long, and indiscriminately. Some felt that television limited children's imagination, creative play and outdoor games, while others saw it as contributing positively to their games and discussions.

Similarly, many teachers were convinced that television displaced reading to and by the children, in contrast to those who argued that television "turned children on" to stories that had been made into screen plays.

Clearly, much depends on what is watched. In this instance however, even in relation to specific programs, there was little agreement. **Sesame Street**, for example, was both lauded as a teaching instrument, and damned for what was described as Americanized material, leading to superficial learning and the unreasonable expectation that any learning situation would be just as entertaining. There is little substantive Australian research on the issue of television viewing and academic achievement, and the findings on the long-term effects of "teaching programs" such as **Sesame Street**, are equivocal (Cook, 1975). Edgar (1983) does suggest that late night and early morning watching renders some children tired, apathetic and unable to concentrate. Tindall and Reid (1978) certainly found a correlation between viewing hours and school achievement. The average viewing time for under achievers was 23.2 hours per week, in comparison with an average of 18.7 hours for "over-achievers" (sic). Tindall and Reid stress the difference in the amount of time each group spends in front of television set over a

school lifetime, but this is to imply that successful students use their non-television time to academic advantage. Cause and effect may be linked in quite a different way. Less able students may resort to television more often for reasons connected with a sense of social and academic failure, rather than television itself deterring the child from other pursuits.

At first sight, Schramm's classic study (1961) seems to contradict the suggested nexus between heavy viewing and school failure. Schramm seemed to establish that the heaviest viewers gained "the highest marks", that television encouraged children to read, and that it had widened the vocabulary of the low achievers.

More recent replicating research by Busch (1978) in the United States of America and Walsh (1979) in New Zealand, however, makes clearer the patterns in relation to viewing intensity, age and academic success. All three studies indicate that television may be helpful in *learning to read*. However, Busch and Walsh found that more able students began to decrease viewing intensity from approximately age 10, less able students persisted beyond 13 and 14. Busch attributed this to the fact that the latter group became increasingly aware of their lack of skill, especially in reading, and that from frustration they turned to television as an easier and more entertaining means of gaining information. Nor was this a particularly effective means it seems, for the students demanded less, became less discriminating and gained less information from their viewing than their "reading" peers (Busch, ibid, pp.670-671).

In other words, television watching may support academic success up to age 10, but thereafter there is a negative correlation. In addition, Busch identified a far more significant variable than mere viewing and success correlations - that of *parental attitude* to reading and to television. The parents of successful students were themselves enthusiastic readers (95%) and read aloud to their child (100%). These adults seldom watched television, they encouraged the child to view "child-oriented" and "teaching programs" and they praised the child for reading (75%). This seems consistent with Cook's findings (1975, in Renwick, 1977 op. cit.) that the viewing of **Sesame Street** eventually widened the achievement gap between more and less privileged children because it was watched most by, and had greatest effects on, children of wealthier and better educated parents.

It also confirms the conclusion of the Singers (1974) that the pro-social effects of television were markedly increased by an adult being present to focus the child's attention. Interestingly, in the light of Palmer's recent observations, Busch also found that high ability children were able to read *and* watch television concurrently, while less able children watched with greater absorption (Busch, op. cit. p.669).

One must conclude that television is not a *cause* of reading difficulty or school failure. Indeed, as David Hill (1970) found, quality adaptations of children's books for television (sadly, a rare event in Australia), markedly increase their readership (Hill, in Walsh, op. cit.).

Even Zuckerman, Singer and Singer (1980), who predicted that television would detrimentally influence reading habits, imagination, and enthusiasm for learning, failed to prove this point. Their belief that "damaging brain activity" occurs while viewing, seems highly questionable in the light of subsequent studies (Senate Committee Report, 1983). However intensive television viewing may be a *symptom* of loneliness, and of academic and reading failure.

So, television is not the villain of our worst dreams, nor is it the simple answer to ignorance, bigotry or superstition. Its programs are the products of human minds and imaginations and they interact with other human minds and imaginations in a variety of circumstances. It seems likely that the same principles govern both the acquisition of socially undesirable and socially valued behaviour. These appear to include the element of viewer choice which predicts involvement, role models with which the child particularly "identifies", and a concurrence of "screen values" and "life values" surrounding the child. An examination of the kinds of television programs Australian children choose to watch, and the way in which they use this content, may well reveal something of children's cognitive development as it relates to the medium and indicate some ways in which schools can prepare children to be wise consumers of television information.

Patricia Palmer's (1986 A) recent work, referred to earlier, takes just such a developmental perspective. Palmer, like other Australian researchers, MacDonald (1981), Patterson (1981) and Hewitson (1981), found consistent age and sex related patterns to children's program preferences.

It should be noted at the outset that adults and older siblings often "intervened" in program choice and that the habitual time for watching - between the end of school and the family meal (Paterson, op. cit.) - was the *most* influential factor in what was watched. However, within the range of choice open to children, clear trends emerged. As with literary preferences, differences between boys and girls became more marked as they grew older.

Cartoons or cartoon-like programs containing animal characters (**Bugs Bunny** and **Spiderman** for example) were firm favourites with children under 8 years and persisted, with many, for the next two years. From age eight, girls began to prefer 'family' shows such as **Brady Bunch** and **Sons and Daughters** while boys sought well-defined hero figures in fight sequences, such as **Knight Rider** (Table 7.4, p.119, Palmer ibid).

The differences in preference due to age, relate to expected stages in intellectual development. Younger children, as we know, tend to enjoy immediate impact, colour and action with perceptual features they can understand. Gesture and facial expression seem to fascinate 8-9 year olds. (Indeed one watches children of this age exploring body antics in their own play.) Hence cartoons satisfy and delight.

As a sense of narrative develops older children demand more complex story forms. Gender choices appear related to the developing sense of social identity by middle childhood: - "how do boys and girls behave", "what might I become as an adult". Girls become more engrossed in character and motivation, boys in action and plot; both want increasing realism within the fictional context (Palmer, ibid pp.121-122).

Interestingly, while children were perfectly aware of which programs were *intended* for their viewing, their favourites did not include "C" programs and ABC child drama. This tends to suggest that programmers need to take more note of the crucial elements in successful children's programs - comedy, light entertainment, magic, drama, mystery, good acting and reality (Hewitson, ibid 1981, p.92). Such programs would need, perforce, to be made with high budgets and shown in peak viewing times. There was of course, some overlap between preferences and "designed-for-children" programs, and between boys' and girls' choices. Comedy, realistic adventure and drama containing 'real-life' Australian families, won broad popularity (Palmer, p.130, ibid).

It is worth noting that "adult only" shows generally were *not* popular with children below age twelve. They found them "scary and hard to understand". In this context, the News was the most intensely disliked program (Hewitson, Patterson, Palmer op.cit.). Children appeared to find it most disturbing because it was real, and yet it was disjointed, with no story framework to give it meaning, and no resolution.

The study reported by Alix MacDonald, from Monash University, contributes usefully to the discussion about television and children's development.

This research generally confirmed the age and sex basis for program preference. Grade three children preferred cartoons, while Grade fives liked British and American comedies. However, Grade three *girls* were less likely to like cartoons. The older the child, the more they enjoyed action and adventure. Technical features, in program or advertisement, attracted the attention of the older group. Both groups were able to distinguish between fantasy and reality, although the certainty with which they could do this increased with age.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this study is the challenge it throws up to a traditional view of young children's understanding of character and motivation. One of the researchers, Anne Knowles, found that children as young as five to eight could infer parts of the action of a story and correctly ascribe motives and events which led to an action. While older children remembered more and reconstructed better, even young children appear to have been *intellectually engaged* with their favourite programs in ways which confirm Palmer's findings and refute Postman's assumptions. Rendell, in the Monash study, also identified girls as being better able to reconstruct a program segment with many scene changes, while boys seemed to concentrate more on segments with few changes. This may have implications not just for programmers, but for teaching generally.

Similar patterns in terms of age and sex differences are evident in the ways in which children not only remember, but use television content in their games and conversations. Cummings and McCain (1982) in the United States were among the many researchers (Smilansky et al, 1968-1982) who have focussed on the television - inspired play of young children. They found that children in the age range 3-7 years frequently used the same characters, plots and actions, but they used the material in very different ways.

The most popular games played by these children included **Batman, Bionic Man/Woman, Emergency** and **Star Trek** (Cummings and McCain, ibid p.788). While three year olds for example would simply cry "Look at me, I'm Batman", to draw attention, four and five year olds used "props" (either replica or representational) such as a "bat cape" or "batmobile", in their games. The older the child, the more consistent and specific the role definition in their games and the status of the performers assumed greater importance. Boys avoided female roles, higher status or older children always "won star parts", and girls tended to incorporate television into language games while boys devised action-packed television-style sequences. There were commonalities across these variables: superhuman/high action characters such as **Tarzan, Captain Kirk** and **Wonder Woman**, were emulated by all groups (girls playing female and male parts).

Physical attractiveness was also a prerequisite for mimicry. While this indicates a life-value position; it also confirms the power of the high status model - a potential influence on either prosocial or antisocial behaviour.

Again, time in front of a program does *not* denote influence - choice, status and involvement are more crucial.

Despite Postman's (1982) view to the contrary, the game themes of yesteryear live on. Age-old preoccupations such as "good guys versus bad guys", "doctor/fireman", "house/family" etc. continue to form the basis of play.

Television has provided some characters, mannerisms and props - we merely have Bionic Woman, tackling evil while managing a house and family "on the side"!

These older themes have of course, been identified by Iona and Peter Opie (1974) as consistent across Western culture for many decades.

Television content may now also fulfil a communication function between children. Cummings and McCain found that as the direct use of television as inspiration for action decreased, its influence on children's talk over the age of seven increased. Palmer (1986 A) certainly identified a progression in television talk. Talk established a common bond of shared experience between children. While it facilitated entry to a particular group, a lack of knowledge was not, of itself, reason for exclusion, although pre-teens, predictably, felt the need to demonstrate conformity with their peers. Young children tended to simply retell sequences of action, older children were more critical, noticing special effects and "sending up" characters by hyperbolic imitation for the amusement of friends.

Girls from 11 years were beginning to analyse the ethical content of programs. Noble's (1979) study of teenagers' use of **Happy Days** suggested that they used the program as a source of information about how to behave in social groups.

All of these studies suggest that television content (rather than the act of watching) can have positive value in terms of providing imaginative stimulation, communication bridges, opportunities to try out new personas, and pure fun.

The implication for the community at large is that quality programs in children's time might have positive learning potential.

At school, the use of television as a direct teaching tool may have less effect than has been thought; it may be more beneficial to find ways of connecting with children's home viewing experience. It would appear that Postman is partly right in that television may function as "an unplanned curriculum", i.e. - a range of learning experiences about life.

A recent French project (Cohn, 1981) has attempted to make children more alert and selective in television watching. The project was based on the view that "television is a language that must be learned". Children were encouraged not just to understand and criticize what they saw on television, but to develop further their natural viewing characteristics - partial viewing, active viewing, interactive and sceptical viewing (in Palmer, op. cit. p.144).

The middle childhood period of 7-9 years seems a crucial time for the development of thinking and inferential skills. Younger children might benefit more from opportunities to "play through" their television experience, express fears and confusions and come to understand more thoroughly the fictive nature of the stories they see. It might be interesting now to examine the nature of the theoretical bases of existing media curricula to see to what extent they are in tune with what we know about children's natural processing of television material as they change and develop.

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Chapter 5

Alternative Constructs

Ironically, the widespread distaste felt by educators about the ubiquitous place of television in children's lives has delayed the development of media curricula for Australian schools and maintained them as predominantly print-oriented institutions.

Educators have decried the perceived negative physical and psychological effects, the commercial exploitation of children and the narrow window on the world television offers in terms of roles and relative values. Television has been blamed for everything from hyperactivity to cynicism and insolence, and yet there has, until recently, been a reluctance to try to counter these apparent effects in any systematic and formal way. Over the past ten years, most state departments of education have begun to devise some form of media studies program for their schools. It should be noted, however, that in most instances, these programs have been developed only for the final years of schooling.

Few have grappled with the problem of what kind of curriculum should or could be devised to help *young* children, television's heaviest viewers, to deal with their film experiences.

Predictably, America and Canada, with the longest television history, have made some efforts in this regard and these will be examined later in this chapter.

The underlying pedagogical assumption of most media studies programs has been that critical skills direct the processing of information generally, and that the nature of the medium (print, sound, film) affects the kind of skills that will need to be applied to the information presented. Where a "media literacy" approach has been taken, there is also the implication that there are elements of syntax, semantics and symbol systems that are medium-specific, that can be taught, and which may be learned.

Most debatable, there is the assumption that skills learned in one context (school) are transferable, and will be applied to media experiences in other contexts (out of school).

Anderson (1980) helpfully identifies four alternative constructs which underpin media curricula. These constructs indicate the philosophical position of the curriculum designers and

obviously this affects the aims of the particular curriculum and the approach taken to student learning.

The first he terms the "Intervention Construct" based on the tenets that "television does things to the viewer" and that "intervention can change the consequences" (Anderson, ibid p.65). Such curricula set out to teach students to recognise negative portrayals of social behaviour and to offer alternative interpretations. The teacher therefore promotes "positive values" and acts as a "therapist".

The second, "Goal Attainment Construct" operates from the contrasting belief that "television does not do things to people", but that "people do things with television" (Anderson, ibid p.66). Students are therefore taught to recognise their own motivation for television use and to make rational decisions about it; the teacher, in this model, is always value neutral. This construct, together with some aspects of the next, has something in common with Palmer's "symbolic interactionism". It could be seen as a process of enabling students to reflect on their experience and the meanings they are making from it.

The third, "Cultural Understanding Construct", is perhaps the most difficult to define precisely. This model sees "television as creation", its content merely a valid expression of the shared values, ideas and symbols of the culture at the time. Students would therefore merely analyse television's statements and comment upon them from a rational distance. Teachers are seen as assisting the development of these analytical skills as they do other modes of criticism throughout the curriculum (Anderson, p.67).

The final, "Visual Literacy Construct" forms a part of most media curricula and is the dominant focus of some. As the name implies, this construct familiarises students with the symbols, grammar and techniques of visual communication. It emphasizes students' active participation in the production of film material and presumes teacher skill and confidence in these techniques (Anderson p.68).

In practice, of course, media curricula tend to be eclectic and can only be differentiated by emphases, although occasionally, for example, in the case of the N.S.W. Mass Media Studies package, they may specifically exclude some tenets and goals.

In the early nineteen eighties, a number of Australian state education authorities undertook to draw up media curricula covering the whole of their schooling system. However, in several instances drastic reductions in funds have resulted in a concentration on syllabuses for senior secondary students only.

In Tasmania, the development of Media Studies guidelines for primary and secondary students has been mooted. A framework for Kindergarten to Grade 12 is being drawn-up and a syllabus for Grade 9 is to be written in 1989. It is therefore timely to look closely at interstate curricula to identify the philosophical and pedagogical elements that might be consistent with the approach taken to teaching and learning in Tasmanian primary schools.

The South Australian and New South Wales Media Studies programs offer the most developed Australian models for analysis in relation to young children.

South Australia's R-7 Media Studies (1983) takes as its rationale the pervasive nature of the mass media, the negative aspects of its content, and the presumed influence on children's perceptions of life and values. It concludes from these beliefs, that there is an educational responsibility to inform children and to give insights that will enable individuals to critically evaluate their media experiences.

The program has as its central organising principles a developmental sequence of skills, an interrelationship, but not integration with other subject areas, and its content is grouped under broad conceptual headings. It attempts to link up with children's home film experiences and assumes that increasing children's understanding about media processes and their knowledge about the cultural implications will lead to more discriminating and critical viewing outside school.

The curriculum framework is based on five core areas:

- Media Language - technology, techniques, vocabulary etc.
- Media Purposes - messages, motives and audiences
- Form and Content - how content and intent influence the form of delivery; genre classifications in media
- Media in Society - the effects of the media on society and how media reflect society's values
- Development of the Media - demystifying media production

A number of features of this framework appear to be entirely admirable.

The concept of a developmental sequence is a sound one. The broad areas for study are preferable to fragmentation into isolated topics such as "advertising", "stereotyping" etc, and the connection between home viewing and school media study seems essential.

An excellent, detailed guide is given to teachers to implement the curriculum. The success of the program would depend on an accompanying large-scale teacher-development program. The curriculum is based on film production activities by students for example, and this obviously requires teachers to be familiar and confident with film hardware and software. The development of teacher skill and commitment, and the allowance of adequate time in the school program to accomplish these objectives, are also prerequisite. With sufficient resourcing and support, such a program could be implemented. However, there remain some more fundamental criticisms of the detailed curriculum. The assumption that children are automatically "moulded" by their current television experiences is debatable. As well, in practice, the "concepts" specified under each core area of study are often reduced to trivial pieces of knowledge (e.g., "sound effects"), and the activities and the ideas behind them are insufficiently tied back to more important concepts such as "how techniques persuade or influence" (Appendix 1). As a result, the tests to evaluate student learning tend to be narrow and superficial. Observation, discussion and careful questioning perhaps, might have been more revealing of students' changing perceptions and attitudes.

The South Australian curriculum would seem to be based largely on the "Intervention" and "Visual Literacy" constructs although it does hope to empower students to reflect on and make decisions about their own viewing habits.

The New South Wales K-12 Mass Media Studies project (1983) by contrast, appears to work philosophically from a "Cultural Understanding" premise, incorporating visual literacy elements into the curriculum as it is experienced by students.

It too recognises that mass media form an important component in children's lives, but significantly, it affirms that pop-culture is valid and valuable. It does not set out to change student tastes or even to judge the relative merits of mass media products. However, it does aim to develop an understanding of how mass media constructs its reality and what the social, political, cultural and economic implications of these constructions may be. While negative connotations about the media are not axiomatic, the development of critical schema is an implied goal. The curriculum is said to contain a body of knowledge and skills that should be studied holistically and it is organised on the framework of a conceptual spiral where key ideas are revisited over time. Teachers' knowledge of students' media experiences is assumed and, most importantly, parental support for the program is specifically sought.

The curriculum package identifies learning processes, core concepts, and links with other subjects. The content is classified into four areas:

.   The Nature of the Product

.   Techniques

.   Audiences

.   Agents.

(Appendix 2)

These areas of content have much in common with the "key concepts" outlined in the <u>Resource Book for Media Literacy</u> devised by a Canadian Ministry for Education (Ontario, 1987). (Appendix 3). The Canadian curriculum is overtly critical of media products and takes a much more interventionist stance than the New South Wales model. The former therefore, explicitly states the critical thinking skills it aims to develop in students.

Both curricula however, purport to "accept student tastes" without imposing "elitist values" and both emphasise the need to decode the "language" of mass media products.

The New South Wales program suggests an impressive variety of forms for the on-going assessment of student progress, including student and parent interviews and questionnaires, anecdotal records, personal diaries, and the evaluation of the students' construction of mass media products. Perhaps this last is the only debatable criterion since it is difficult to see how creative and artistic talent could be ignored when judging the final product and yet this may not be a fair reflection of a student's depth of conceptual understanding.

The New South Wales Studies Directorate this year has produced a new Discussion Document on Mass Media Studies. This document is in draft form and not yet in general circulation but I am informed that, while the key components of the 1983 draft have been retained, some changes have been made. "Narrative" is now discussed in greater detail and integration rather than separation is recommended for the study of mass media in primary schools.

The curricula discussed so far have concentrated on "teaching about the media", albeit often through the production of non-print materials by students. Other projects have focussed on using educational television programs to promote learning in other subjects or on the production of film as a classroom activity for its own sake. (Kitt, J. 1978, Miles, B. 1976, Potter R.L. 1980 and UNESCO-APEID Papers, 1987). These latter projects are relevant to this paper only in so far as they give a guide to effective or ineffective techniques for the teaching of the analytical and discrimination skills that students might use in "unpacking" their everyday media experiences.

A number of key questions remain un-addressed by most media curricula. Although they may entail a broad notion of a "critical viewer" they do not classify the particular discrimination skills to be expected at different ages or in different circumstances. As a result, achievement goals tend to be imprecise or unsequenced, as in the Canadian model, or expressed in knowledge terms, as in the South Australian and New South Wales (1983) examples.Unless we are clear about how children of different ages are likely to approach their media experiences, how will we know which factors influence viewing behaviour and how will we then tailor the curriculum and monitor change?

There is general agreement that schools need to link with the out of school media "diet" of students, but how appropriate is it to use mediocre commercial materials as the content basis for a curriculum?

Most importantly, perhaps, what evidence is there for the effectiveness of media curricula?

Most media curricula have as their stated or underlying aim "to make children more critical evaluators of television's content".

Some curricula see this as a means of modifying television's perceived negative effects on attitudes and values.

To gauge the success of these learning programs then, one would presumably look for changes in children's viewing habits, in their attitudes towards television content, and/or in the social attitudes such as racism, sexism or aggression, that could be seen as television-influenced.

Several overseas projects have conducted such investigations. The renowned team of Dorothy Singer, Diana Zuckerman and Jerome Singer, working from Yale University, provide one example. The study was designed to develop, implement and evaluate a series of eight lesson plans which aimed to teach third, fourth and fifth grade children in Connecticut, to understand television better. It also sought to describe the relationship between family background and viewing habits (Singer, Zuckerman and Singer, 1980 p.86). Current television shows and original materials were used to introduce topics such as "Reality and Fantasy", "Special Effects", "Stereotypes" etc.

The lessons were of forty minutes duration and involved discussions, activity sheets, vocabulary lists and homework.

Pre-test and post-test responses were collected from the "experimental" and "control" schools and compared in order to determine the effects of the lessons on knowledge and attitudes towards television (ibid p.87).

Children in the experimental school showed a greater increase in knowledge about television. They could explain for instance "how television characters disappeared" and "who pays for programs"; they learned more television vocabulary including such terms as "fiction", "animation" and "sponsor"; they could identify such techniques as "close-ups" and "edits".

Moreover, these learning effects appeared to last for at least six months and the children seemed able to generalise this information to new film situations (ibid pp.88-89).

In such a short time scale (October 1978 - March 1979) the team was unable to assess how close it came to developing long-term discriminating viewers. However, they were able to pinpoint some particularly successful curriculum components and some concepts that appeared to be developmentally intransigent.

Not only were the mechanics - the "secrets" - of television production fascinating for these age groups, but more surprisingly, they engaged enthusiastically in discussions on topics such as stereotypes, aggression and commercials. However, it should be noted that the third graders tended to define character preferences by superficial features, having difficulty in identifying the underlying characteristics that comprise personality. Furthermore, they could recognise undesirable features without losing admiration for that "television hero" (ibid p.91).

The overwhelming number of children in *both* schools knew realism from fantasy in terms of genre, and *both* sometimes confused realistic characters with the actor/actress behind the persona (ibid p.90). In other words, some concepts appear to be age/developmentally related and are not amenable to instruction.

Finally, children's viewing habits were significantly predicted by family background. "Heavy viewers tended to be male, to have parents who both watched a lot of television, and to have no parentally imposed limit on television viewing" (ibid p.90).

Violence viewing was linked with intensity of viewing, maleness,and having a father who watched action and/or violence. These variables were far more influential than other expected predictors such as the parents' educational levels, employment status or children's IQs. The parents in the study did not generally see television as a problem for *their* child and were

therefore reluctant to participate in the program themselves. In terms of pupil change, this could provide a lesson for future programs.

A subsequent study by the same team of researchers adapted this curriculum for use with children in kindergarten to second grade. With these younger children the lesson structure avoided "lectures" and concentrated on clips from real shows. Class activities concentrated on concrete experiences, play activities and games.

On almost all "knowledge" measures, children's understanding of television was enhanced by the curriculum. Again, some aspects seemed immune to teaching and the extent to which children benefited from the course was a function of their grade level. For example, the ability to discriminate between actors and their roles did not markedly improve for any grade level, with the youngest children showing most confusion (Singer et al 1982, p.51). As well, some concepts appeared to be totally out of reach of children in this age range - for example "are commercials supposed to tell the truth?" The program failed to hasten the development of understanding of key, abstract concepts.

These two studies reveal some information about the conceptual development question but little about the subjects' capacities to make judgements about programs or about attitude change.

Aimee Dorr and associates, working from Harvard University, set out to identify critical evaluation skills for young children, to teach these skills, and to evaluate the extent to which children used the curriculum content to mediate the effects of television. Three alternative curriculum models were used - an "industry curriculum" which focussed on television production and economics; a "process curriculum" using a range of compared information sources; and a "social reasoning curriculum" (Dorr et al 1983, p.73).

Predictably, children's results mirrored the emphases of their particular curriculum. Clear age differences emerged in terms of remembering and using the information presented. Girls scored higher on social reasoning measures and lower on the process curriculum. The broad social reasoning curriculum was least effective in judging television situations such as discriminating between "real" and "pretend".

"The results showed that young children can, in as short a time as six hours, learn much about alternative sources of information and can apply that information when asked to reason about the reality of television content" (ibid, p.80). Such learning did not, however, seem to mediate television's impact on social attitudes. While the researchers suggest that this may have been due to insufficient time on the curriculum or insufficiently sensitive measures, other

explanations are equally possible. Attitude change is a long-term process that must take into account all of the elements that have contributed to the child's initial attitude such as family values, self-concept and life experiences. It is unlikely that a few classroom activities will impact, especially if they make no connection with other contexts in the child's life. It is certainly possible that some concepts must await maturation, and that some kinds of knowledge lend themselves more than others to classroom instruction. Within these limits, and benefiting from overseas and interstate experiences, it does seem profitable to consider the kind of "media study" that might be suited to children in the first years of primary schooling in Tasmania.

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The chart shows the concepts relevant to each core area of study at primary school

Learning Level	Media Language	Purposes	Form and Content	Media in Society	Development of the media
	Visual grammar	Consumerism	Advertising Bias	Communication Media origins	Projection Magnifying and focussing
	Sequencing Sound effects Special effects	Advertising	Animation	Mass communication	Persistence of vision Mechanical process
	Stereotypes Sound effects Animation Visual grammar	Values Advertising	Stereotypes Program elements	Values	Magnifying and focussing Mechanical process
	Visual grammar Special effects	Advertising Visuals and meaning	Program elements	Values Programming	Properties of film stock Chemical process
	Visual grammar Animation	Values Program intention communication	Program elements programming	Viewing patterns	Mechanical process Film sound-tracks Animation
	Visual grammar Sequencing	Advertising Values	Program elements programming	Media usage	Transmission Radio reception Media pioneers Persistence of video
	Media production	Advertising Bias	Programming	Values Media ownership	Persistence of vision Media pioneers TV transmission TV production

The Nature of the Product
"What are the attitudes, values and ideas conveyed in the media product?"

Media products are not value free. Words, sounds and images in media products have connotations, and these reflect the attitudes, values and ideas of the society which created the media product.

Techniques
"How has the media product been put together"

In order to create a product, the producers of media products use a variety of skills, equipment, personnel and technology. The decisions about the type of equipment and techniques used will affect the meaning of the product being created.

Audiences
"What is the relationship between the media product and the audience?"

Individuals bring a variety of past experiences and preconceived ideas to their interaction with a media product. Membership of an audience grouping affects how and why people consume different media products. Audiences derive pleasure from the recognition and prediction of the formal features of a program. They also use the content of media product to make sense of their personal and social world.

Agents
"Who created this media product and what influences affected its creation?"

The people who finance, produce and market a mass media product are subject to a multiplicity of motivations, controls and constraints. These agents of the mass media are, therefore, subject to, as well as reflective of, many influences. These considerations will effect the mass media product which they produce.

All of these variables interact. It is by studying their interaction that we can make an analysis of the realities being created by the mass media. This analytical framework leads to the development of Mass Media Studies skills and understandings.

Chapter 5
Appendix 2
Mass Media Education K-12
NSW Department of Education, 1983 p13.

A PRECIS OF THE KEY CONCEPTS OF MEDIA LITERACY

1. All media Products are Constructions:

Although the products of media frequently appear to be seamless extensions of reality, they are, in fact, carefully crafted constructions, the results of countless decisions, conscious and unconscious. Meaning and impact are created through selection, context and juxtaposition, as well as formal elements such as shape, colour, light, composition.

2. The Media Construct Reality:

Everyone has a reality construct - a sense of what the world is and how it works. The media, must, like humans, shape raw sensory data into coherent representations of reality.

3. Audiences Negotiate meaning:

What a reader makes of a "text" depends on the reader's past experiences, skill in reading, and current state of mind.

4. The Commercial Implications:

All media products have commercial implications which shape both their content and their form.

5. Idealogy and Values:

All media products contain, usually implicity, value messages and assumed "truths" about the nature of the world and its inhabitants.

6. Social and Political Implications:

The media have the potential to affect social and political behaviour in a variety of ways.

7. The Relationship of Form and Content:

Different media "codify" reality in different ways : the medium shapes the message.

8. Media Aesthetics:

The media have aesthetic dimensions; greater understanding can lead to greater appreciation.

CHAPTER 6

CURRICULUM CONSIDERATIONS: TO BE OR NOT TO BE

Schools are being encouraged to take two kinds of seemingly contradictory action in relation to television and its impact on their pupils' lives. In the first instance it is suggested that schools should concentrate on the kinds of aesthetic experiences, information, and intellectual challenges that television does not provide.

On the other hand there is the suggestion that schools should devise television - specific, curricula, with a view to altering children's approach to viewing. **Both** seem possible and worthwhile and the two aspects of the role of the school shall be examined in turn, beginning with the notion of a "balanced", "alternative to television" curriculum.

Quality literature offers depths of intellectual and emotional experience not *currently* inherent in television's content. The act of reading itself engages children's minds and imaginations in ways that film, because of its different processes of delivery and reception, cannot. It follows that it is especially important for teachers to share with modern children the best of our culture's crafted fictions, both for the insights they provide and as the motivation for students to develop the skills and the habits of reading for pleasure and information. Less competent readers, it seems, turn more to television, and competent readers, as was noted earlier, are more discriminating viewers and gain more information from their viewing. The development of skilled and enthusiastic readers should therefore remain one of the key goals of primary education. Children, after all, operate in a world that requires both the interpretation of print and non-print messages if life is to be lived in a successful and satisfying way!

Television watching for many children, much of time, is a *relatively* sedentary pastime. School learning experiences should therefore emphasize the active, interactive and creative. The arts - visual art, music and drama - offer an ideal vehicle both for the expression and processing of the impressions of television, and for children to think, plan and enact imaginatively. In the process children also practice social, co-operative and decision-making skills. Literature and the arts offer both the inspiration and the opportunity to reflect on, and to bring order to, the flux of life experience.

"Science", taught as inquiry and problem-solving, can capitalise on young children's curiosity and offer ways of learning through direct interaction with the physical world that television experience can never emulate. (Quality television programs can initiate such an investigation and provide perspectives on the environment that are not available through direct experience.) Play, make-believe and socio-dramatic, is the natural mode young children use to make sense of and to accommodate experience. Opportunities should therefore be provided for young children to use play, in its purest sense, during the school day.

Lonely and underconfident children appear to be the most reliant on television for company and entertainment. Teachers and parents working together can help to promote children's sense of self-worth, encourage friendships, and broaden their field of interests. Many children lack the conversation of a trusted adult with whom they can discuss the issues and questions that confuse or concern them. Teachers may need to establish such a relationship and to provide opportunities for discussion about issues of personal and societal importance.

It is part of the communication and co-operation role of the school to discuss with parents the positive and negative potential of children's current television viewing, and the value of co-viewing and discussion between adult and child. Parents need to talk with their child about television, about what the child likes and why the parent may object to it; they need to talk about potentially negative aspects, explaining that violence in real life hurts people and that advertisements are made to sell things. They need to keep in touch with the content of "children's programs" and to watch for inadequacies that require balancing comment. Many parents are doing this. It is the role of the school to reinforce effective parenting practices. There is a need for families to establish their own rules and monitoring procedures in relation to viewing, keeping in mind that *child-responsibility* is the ultimate aim.

On this basis, the school is already intervening in children's media experience. However, there is a persuasive rationale for more explicit educational intervention. Television is a powerful story telling, image-making and information-conveying force. It is an important component in the life experience of almost all children and fills the waking hours of some youngsters to a significant extent. For some of these children, television is potentially a major source of ethics and values, if not of behavioural models. The social reality television conveys is usually of doubtful value in the development of a positive, egalitarian life view. Children are not "sponges", but they lack the knowledge and the life experience to judge television's fare accurately. It is not the role of the school to pre-judge or to direct children's tastes. However, there is a responsibility to inform children and to develop their evaluative schema and judgemental skill over time so that they can come to make considered and responsible decisions for themselves. There appears then, to be a need for a media education focus within the

primary curriculum in Tasmanian schools, although I am unconvinced that an entirely separate curriculum is necessary or desirable.

A number of beliefs and theoretical assumptions should underpin any media education program or curriculum strand. Children develop at different rates and therefore instruction should be matched to the developmental needs and capacities of individuals. There is a discernible pattern of cognitive development which affects the nature of the concepts that can be presented, the timing of their introduction and strategies for their successful teaching.

Detached, objective, critical and evaluative skills for example, appear to be inappropriate teaching objectives for children in the four to seven year age range. Children in the seven to nine year age range are capable of developing critical thinking and inferential skills and some children with rich conversational and fictional background, may reach this stage earlier. The gradual development of understanding during a K-6/K-8 or K-10 timescale should therefore be the aim of media education rather than "mastery" of individual pieces of knowledge at any one stage or grade. The New South Wales cyclical process of building on and reinforcing concepts, has much merit.

Other areas of the existing curriculum offer avenues for processing media-derived information and for the development of skills which can then be applied to media products. The integration rather than separation of curriculum areas would therefore be beneficial, particularly at a time when there is intense and widespread antipathy to perceived "curriculum overload". What is known about literacy-learning and learning in general, should be applied to the study of media products and processes.

Because media experiences occur primarily outside of schools it is vital that parental involvement in any media education focus, is explicitly sought.

In planning to incorporate a media focus, teachers need to recognise that meanings - whether from sound, print or film - are personally and culturally mediated. We cannot assume that viewing television is a universally undifferentiated act; whether or not an action is violent, for example, depends on the context, genre and the codes and values the viewer uses to decode the televisual messages. In film, as in literature, it is essential to discover what meaning the child is making so that teaching can build on children's existing perspectives, understandings and values rather than impose one interpretation or judgement. Such a "curriculum" would clearly equate to Anderson's Cultural Understanding Construct and, because of the strong connections with current literacy teaching, incorporate elements of his Visual Literacy Construct.

A media education framework for young children would need to take into account the relationship between what we know of young learners, the nature of the subject matter of the focus area, and what we understand to be effective learning processes and teaching strategies. Developmental age or stage descriptions are potentially limiting and misleading if over-generalised. There is however, general agreement that children perceive the world in ways radically different to the way that adults do, and that this perception changes with maturity and with experience (Furth, 1970). Perhaps rather than describe what young children have often been said *not* to be able to do, it is more helpful to describe what they appear to do and think and feel, and to identify the implications of these perspectives for teaching.

The term "egocentric" is much mis-understood but there is little doubt that children beginning school, consider the world primarily as it affects them. They gradually come to care about what others think about the world and about them and only later recognise that others may have an entirely different set of perceptions and feelings. This is not to suggest that children cannot feel sympathy in real life or empathy in terms of a story but that "egocentrism" is their basis for thinking about the world and interpreting its events. Kieran Egan (1986) is right. Young children are capable of understanding some abstractions within a story frame, but it is also true that they may be unmotivated or unable to articulate these understandings and to apply them to real life situations. They may understand "courage" and "loyalty" in **The Ugly Duckling**, but still choose friends, "cause they're nice to me" and admire a television hero, "because he's tough".

Children in the first years of school have a gradually refining notion of "reality" and "fantasy", but the more "realistic" the representation, the more difficult they find the differentiation and the more the impact of a film experience may carry over into their lives. It is less the notion that "the person on the screen may hurt me", than the reasonable concern that "if it can happen to that boy, it may happen to me, in real life". Under fives are more likely to think that television characters have an existence independent of the screen, although, as previously noted, even third graders (and some adults) find it difficult to distinguish between an actor's *realistic* persona and his real-life character (Noble, 1975, op. cit.).

Cognitive psychologists tend to agree that children's thinking follows some pattern roughly similar to that proposed by Bruner et al (Turner, J 1977). Initial contact with the environment is primarily at the physical and sensory motor level, later at the level of imagery (the Ikonic Stage) and finally at the abstract or symbolic level. In terms of interpreting television experience, this means that the younger the children, the more they accept the evidences of their senses, even

when it defies adult logic - people who look villainous are bad, those who don't are not. Once characters are defined as "good" or "bad", all their actions are likely to be evaluated on this basis; greed, violence, even cruelty, may be acceptable or even admirable to the child (Cupit, 1987 p.28).

Even six and seven year old characteristically concentrate on incidents rather than major plot development, and they may fail to grasp the gestalt of a film statement (Noble, ibid).

Inferential, embedded, or symbolic meaning is therefore unlikely to be retrieved by children, even by age eight, without adult help.

Cause and effect logic, the basis both for interpreting the physical world and for making moral judgements and decisions, develops only slowly (Piaget, 1971).

Five to seven year olds are likely to explain events intuitively - "someone made it happen", eight to ten year olds can identify a cause, but are less likely to be able to deal with many possible causes. Children in our focus age group of four to eight years, are therefore less likely to reverse their thinking in the light of new information, or to abstract a common idea from a number of different examples (Cupit, ibid p 45). The question of children's moral development is clearly pertinent both to their ability to accurately judge the ethical messages of television and their capacity to make judgements about these messages which they might apply to everyday situations. Kohlberg's theory of moral development (in Rest, 1979) is best known and will serve as a useful frame for this discussion. Naturally, his stage descriptions have much in common with Piaget's stages of cognitive development, since making moral judgements has both a cognitive and social dimension. One needs both the understanding of reasons for acting rightly and the motivation to act rightly; one may have the reasoning, but choose not to use it. In general, the stages of moral development tend to lag slightly behind cognitive development (Noble, 1975, op. cit.). Kohlberg's stages have been criticised (as Piaget's have) for their inflexibility and their failure to take account of sex and cultural differences.

Nevertheless, with certain provisos, Kohlberg's broad categories of moral reasoning - Pre-conventional, Conventional and Post-conventional - offer a guide to reasonable expectations of children's development. Children up to nine years of age appear to move mainly through the first stage and by the end, they begin to see things in terms of the first level of the second stage (Appendix 1, Hersh, 1979, pp. 58-61).

The younger the child, the more likely they are to see "good" and "bad" as absolutes and to behave "rightly" because of avoidance of punishment and the superior power of authorities. Older children in this age group are developing a more relative sense of "right". They may be aware of fairness, the rules of agreement and the needs of the group but they are still not likely to be responsive to moral principles or to consider a system or societal perspective.

This view of development needs to be tempered by the application of two principles. Firstly, the stages are sequential in the sense that one may choose to act at a stage below that reached, but not at a stage above, *but* that one may operate at different stages in relation to different subject matter and in different contexts. Secondly, that development is affected by education and experience and not simply tied to age. I believe that similar provisos should be built in to an interpretation of Piaget's stages of cognitive development.

What we know about young children's preferences in television viewing also carries some messages for the content and teaching requirements of a media education program or curriculum strand.

We know that children beginning school most enjoy cartoons and that boys still tend to prefer them when girls may have moved on to social comedy and drama (Palmer, 1986, pp 39—46). These youngest children seem to know, in some sense, that cartoons are "not real" although a few may attempt to replicate the more dangerous exploits of television heroes. There is no evidence that they are frightened by the content of these programs, but considerable evidence that factual material worries them (Murray, in Burns et al pp. 107-115).

As they mature, children become more interested in how things work, they are fascinated by slapstick humour for example, and in drama they require increasing authenticity in settings, characters and events. These children of eight and nine become involved in language games, jokes and riddles, but are still more interested in fact - "How did it happen?", than opinion - "President Reagan said today . . ." (Cupit, op. cit.).

It is during the 7-10 year age period that children also begin to evaluate themselves through the eyes of others. Television's image-conveying aspects are therefore potentially influential in the development of self-image. Children in this group are increasingly aware of physical differences and often have an excessive fear of illness, injury and death.

Given this kind of background information, the four areas of study outlined in the New South Wales curriculum would receive differential emphasis at different stages in children's schooling. "The Nature of the Product" and "Audience" for example, would be the focus for

younger children. In teaching about these two concepts, the teacher would concentrate not on the abstract notions, but on the relationship between television and the child. Starting from "what do you watch and why?" teachers of very young children would help them to recognise media products in their world, identify their favourite programs, discuss non-verbal components such as colour, sound and gesture and to clearly distinguish between "real" and "not real" in relation to film content. The experience of a Victorian preparatory grade teacher suggests that even five year olds can compare television's descriptions of what men and women do all day, with the lives of their important adults (Persson, 1987).

At age six and seven the concept of "Product" would be becoming more refined with children able to classify programs into different types, and their notion of "Audience" would be broadening as they become interested in comparisons of their television preferences with those of their peers. Their interest in how things work suggests that "Techniques" would be a very fruitful area for study at this stage. Children of this age are generally aware that literature, for example, is created by authors and illustrators and produced by publishers. A sense of the "Agents" behind television-production is similarly possible although the more abstract issues of the motivation and value systems of these agents, are less likely to hold children's interest. By age eight and nine, children naturally begin to discern the particular messages of television and could be encouraged to compare the "accuracy" of these messages to the real world - "Do all mothers/fathers/boys/girls behave in these ways?" They are capable of debating alternative points of view and of developing and criticising generalisations, providing the issue is of sufficient importance to them and the discussion begins with their current beliefs and understandings. Throughout this period, children, with the support of their teachers and parents, could gradually assume greater responsibility for their home viewing - making and justifying their selections within reasonable constraints.

The New South Wales curriculum identified seven principles underlying teaching and learning activities in media education. The text of these is included in full in Appendix 2. In summary, these are as follows:

- starting with what the child knows about the media is the best basis for further inquiry;
- learners' participation in practical processes of media production is the precursor to analysis of products;
- learners need to develop hypotheses about media products which they test for accuracy and generalisability;
- media studies should draw together students' in-school and out-of-school media experiences gradually deepening their understanding of media's potential influence on their lives;

- students should experience and analyse a wide range of media products rather than be trained to resist the media;
- the responsibility of students for their learning and for their media choices is the ultimate aim of the program; and
- a positive image of oneself as a person and as a learner is the best basis for learning and decision-making.

These principles offer a valuable guide to a general teaching approach for media education and imply the kinds of activities that would best promote students' learning. The creation of media products, (print and film), the viewing and analysis of film material at school, the directed, critical viewing of favourite programs at home and the charting of individual and group viewing patterns, are all implied activities.

The establishment of regular discussion sessions with students about material viewed in the home is also an obvious way into media analysis. Kohlberg's "hypotheticals" and moral dilemma games (in Hersh, 1979 pp 46-50) offer a structure for these sessions which could have television-inspired questions as their focus. These discussions about moral alternatives are best suited to children in the second and third stages (7-11 years). Guidance towards moral judgements should be related to children's next level of operation - "Do you think he'd get into trouble for that?"/"Do you think that's fair?", rather then "Do you think that's the right thing to do?" Broadening the group to include children who are operating at a slightly higher level of reasoning is likely to facilitate the development of less mature reasoners. Moral growth depends on interaction and participation in social roles and interpersonal relationships. Without such experiences, people are likely to remain at lower levels in the moral development sequence (Noble, 1975 op. cit.).

Kohlberg sees "role-taking" as the roots of moral judgement, suggesting that "children are unable to be considerate until they are able to put themselves in another's place" (p. 48). The Singers (1973) and others, suggest that opportunities for make-believe and socio-dramatic play, provide this experience in "being someone else", encourage introspection on past and planned action and promote the capacity to decentre. They remind us that "disadvantaged children" may lack the space and privacy to engage in make-believe play at home and that this may also result in a less clear delineation of reality/ fantasy. However, just providing the space and time for play and dramatic activities at school may be insufficient. Television-inspired play is likely to be imaginatively limited. The teacher might profitably work with children to establish hero "roles" rather than just "characters" and to expand the repertoire of possible actions and motivations. Television, in this way, could become a positive, rather than

negative, fictional force. Children's story writing similarly, can begin with television experience, but need not be tied to its tired plots and one dimensional people. The astute teacher, in conference with children, can provide and provoke challenging questions and encourage children to draw together real-life, television and other, richer, fictional experiences.

The role of the teacher is implied by much that has already been said of the learner, the medium and the learning processes and activities. Obviously, the teacher in discussion is to be a "neutral chairperson", initiating questions on important issues, canvassing a range of options, modelling rational debate and valuing alternative points of view. In relation to children's television experiences, the teacher also has a role in helping young children to make sense of what they see.

Television, as we have noted, does not always display the consequences of actions within the story frame, or it may do so elliptically. Similarly, "goodness" may not always be seen to be rewarded or "badness" punished, yet we are told that this principle is the cornerstone of young children's reasoning. The teacher may need to resolve any residual confusions and fears resulting from television, helping children to make connections between cause and effect, action and consequence. The character of a hero model may need to be critically analysed without rejecting the child's own opinion.

In general terms, the teacher facilitates concept development, accepting, but setting up challenges to, children's existing framework of understanding - in short, creating cognitive disequilibrium, the basis of all learning.

Since what appears on the screen is largely "magic" to all of us, first and second-hand experiences in the construction of media products are clearly prerequisite to understanding their meanings and impact.

We have suggested that teachers need to give children the strategies, the language and the *need* to consider more abstract questions. Many media education programs are based on the premise that knowledge *about* media production will of itself promote critical debate. I believe the language of debate and the opportunity to practice it, are at least as crucial as the terminology applied to technology. It would appear that the children in the Singer and Dorr experiments knew how to distinguish between a close-up and a flash-back, but did not discriminate between a limited characterisation and a complex one, a stereotyped image and a representational one.

Perhaps the key is in the kind of open-ended questions that teachers model and the encouragement they give for children to formulate their own questions, in their own terms, for their own purposes.

The New South Wales Curriculum again provides valuable information about the learning processes that students would be engaged in during a study of mass media. These include observing, perceiving, responding, organising, manipulating, communicating and experiencing (Appendix 3).

These processes suggest not only the activities that a media education program should provide, but a framework for the assessment of student competence and the evaluation of program effectiveness. As has been stated previously, such assessment of students in primary schooling would be in terms of a growth of understanding, the development of reasoning and more refined attitudes and values, rather than simple mastery of skills or knowledge.

Some of the problems that teachers have experienced in designing a media studies program for *young* children have been due to misconceptions about knowledge and achievement. If objectives are specified in narrow skill terms, then teachers find they have to break down information into fragmented and trivial, but teachable units.

The heavy emphasis in trial curicula such as Singer's (1980) and Dorr's (1980) on "knowledge" and "information processing" has been demonstrated to have limited impact on more important learning. A focus on personal and social goals is more likely to lead students to the self-directed, responsible approach to television which is the ultimate aim of most media curricula.

Young children are capable of dealing with important and complex concepts such as "the mass media create realities" (NSW, 1983), *in their own ways* and at their own level. Children can themselves "construct" by communicating using image, sound and language and "deconstruct" by analysing media products. Their understanding of the media will only grow if teachers foreground for them the cues to "reading" the media. This implies that teachers have a depth of understanding about how the mass media create meaning.

The foregoing discussion has been predicated on the belief that some sort of media education is necessary to prepare children to function adequately in the modern world. The New South Wales curriculum writers (1983) firmly espoused the notion that mass media studies had to be a separate entity in the curriculum for the integrity and sequential nature of its subject matter to receive due recognition. Yet, in a time of diminishing resources and "back to basics"

pressures, when teachers already feel their skills and curriculum "space" are over-stretched, the introduction of an entirely new curriculum focus is unlikely to gain enthusiasm and commitment. The logical approach, in this climate of opinion, is to remind teachers of their expressed concerns about the media and to highlight the relationship between "media studies" and the existing curriculum. Teacher awareness on its own, tends to have its learning and modelling effect. If nothing else, conversations about the media are encouraged where formerly they were discouraged.

In Tasmania, the new Health Education framework is currently receiving a major proportion of teacher time and attention. It is heavily resourced and calls for significant new learning by professionals. The Social Studies Guidelines (1985) have yet to impact dramatically on the curriculum experienced by students. This document also propounded an entirely new approach to the study of our history and culture. Literacy teaching in the past ten years has undergone a revolution. Most teachers now espouse the basic principles of the Language Guidelines (1982-85), but are still struggling, naturally, to implement these ideas in their daily work. These three curriculum areas offer opportunities to develop skills of common relevance, incorporating a "media studies" focus where appropriate.

Health Education for example, emphasizes the development of students' knowledge of themselves, sensitivity to others and the ability to make decisions, to communicate and relate, to appreciate the power of the peer group and to analyse and justify one's personal values. The framework suggests the use of "hypothetical" moral dilemma situations and discussions.

Media issues could obviously be among those debated along the road to personal autonomy. The competencies developed through Health Education - acquiring information, applying logical processes and making judgements - could be applied to students' approach to television in their lives.

The three major areas of **Social Studies** inquiry - People, Environment and Resources; People and Change; People and Culture; - similarly offer contexts for the consideration of the Media as a cultural construct, its products, ideas and producer's intentions. For older children, a consideration of the economic, political and social implications of media products and ownership, would link beneficially with these Social Studies areas of concept development. The content of television programs, reciprocally, at its best, can contribute to children's knowledge about the world and its people. The comparison of different information sources, such as that employed in computer-based "Reporter" projects, provides learning experiences of relevance to Social Studies, critical literacy and general evaluative skill development.

Literacy teaching today tends to be based on principles such as those outlined in Dr Cambourne's "model of natural learning". Cambourne identified seven key conditions - Immersion, Demonstration, Expectation, Responsibility, Use, Approximation and Response (Appendix 4).

These principles, normally applied to listening, speaking, reading and writing, can equally be applied to students' interactions with their film environment.

For example:

- students develop discrimination through "immersion" in a range of film products;
- they benefit from "demonstration" of the skills of analysing these constructs;
- they need to develop "responsibility" for their learning and decision-making;
- they need practice in the "use" of media technology; and
- they benefit from "response" or feedback on the accuracy of the understandings they have reached about how the mass media create meaning.

Film has special visual and sound effects and children need help in recognising, employing and interpreting its syntactic and semantic conventions. However, we have learned that to teach the grammar of print as isolated skills, does not lead to the use of those skills in children's own writing. Similarly, film conventions would be best taught in the context of real products, in response to queries children naturally raise about "how it is done". Teachers, recognising children's interest and growing need for understanding about techniques and devices, can initiate and plan such enquiries.

A number of concepts and skills are relevant to both print and film.

The concepts of author, narrative voice and point of view and the ability to understand plot, character and motivation, to interpret picture and text (literally and non-literally), to recognise bias and to weigh fact and opinion can all be developed through guided experience of the two forms of communication. Drawing children's attention to common elements and to differences builds a literacy framework with which children can deal with fiction and non-fiction wherever they find it. Television is therefore not regarded as a "competitor" with literature; the two are recognised as "messages to be unpacked" and "meanings to be made". Experience with one can contribute to a growth of skill in analysing the other.

Narrative should be a key area of study in relation to both written and television texts. Both contain content and form and both what we say and how we say it carries meaning. The meaning each individual derives arises in the interaction between text, audience and the society in which it is read or viewed. These aspects of context, co-text and intertext are suitable for secondary school study. Primary school children are, however, perfectly capable of clarifying the meaning they are making, reviewing the processes by which meaning is made, and reflecting on their own responses.

The popularity of the two terms "media studies" and "media education", has waxed and waned over the past decade. "Media Studies" is the current terminology used in most Australian states. Yet this seems to denote a discrete area for examination, analysis and criticism. It seems clinical and compartmentalised. "Media Education", on the other hand, can encompass both education about the media, and education for a media-filled world. This latter definition allows for the appreciation of the joys and satisfactions of the informational and entertainment functions of the media, *and* a recognition of their persuasive powers and current narrative limitations.

Media products are deceptively transparent. It is tempting to believe that they are representations of reality, and often they are experienced as reality. This presents an obstacle to understanding the media and their role in our lives. The primary aim of media education is therefore to develop students' understanding of the notion that media products are constructs. Media education should be about understanding and demystification, not about making things more complex and jargon-ridden.

In Tasmania, the approach to media education should be child-centred in the sense of starting with the child's interests and understanding. It should be investigatory and inductive, deriving concepts and generalisations from the analysis of real products.

The areas of investigation could include:

- discourse - its narrative elements, meanings and representations;
- audiences, contexts and understandings;
- agents, creators and purposes; and
- techniques, processes and technology.

Have we, by suggesting that schools should encompass aspects of television in their curriculum, succumbed to Postman's "Technological Determinist" stance (1983, A), deriving our agenda from the demands of technology? Have we "joined them because we couldn't beat them?" Perhaps, but that seems preferable to being "Technological Somnambulists" (ibid).

The curriculum I propose values the skills and knowledge of the past, but recognises too, that an education system with children at its heart, has to adapt to the changing world they inhabit. With the invention of the printing press, it became our duty to "make them literate"; with the introduction of television and video, it is incumbent upon us to give children the skills to maintain control of their learning from the new media.

I do not see television, by its very nature, as a threatening ogre, but I agree with Postman, (ibid) that television's **content** constitutes a kind of completing curriculum. Television does carry messages capable of influencing personality, attitude and belief, but not through a simplistic, stimulus/response process. Television, like other crafted fictions in our culture, offers children particular images to conjure with, ideas and pictures of themselves and others with which children fashion their personal daydreams. Television's content, at the explicit and implicit level, matters a great deal, and adults must strive to improve its quality.

To some extent, schools do have to remain bastions of "High Culture", providing an alternative to the slick, the glib and the transient. We do not want our children to attach themselves to simplistic parables, to venerate the fads of the present and the values of short-term gain, or to limit their own life aspirations.

But schools also need to get in touch with the child's world, to know what children are watching, listening to, playing with and reading. They should do this, not with the purpose of "inoculating" children against it, but to understand the raw material children may use to shape their lives. Early childhood teachers have always claimed that they employ children's interests to assist learning. Television and other media experiences hold a fascination for children which should not be ignored.

Is childhood itself, as Postman (ibid, 1983, B) suggests, in danger of annihilation? Postman's notion of childhood is a falsely romantic, nostalgic one. The *experience* of childhood has been constantly and inevitably changing over centuries. Children adapt with extraordinary resilience to the changing world around them. Ignorance has never been a protector of childhood, and in an information-filled world, to suggest it, has a curiously ostrich-like quality. It is true that adults still have a special duty of care for young children, but this does not imply that we should patronise them. Instead, educators in the 1980s should look at what children bring to television and how they already "read" it in a positive, active way. Children already make decisions about when to watch, for how long and how intensively. To do this, they use their knowledge of television's cueing systems and also their cognitive, social and emotional skills. Schools should promote and build on these skills, providing children with the kind of knowledge that makes discernment and autonomous decision-making possible.

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TABLE 1

THE SIX STAGES OF MORAL JUDGEMENT

	Content of Stage		
Level and Stage	What is Right	Reasons for doing right	Social Perspective of Stage
Level I: Preconventional Stage 1: Heteronomous Morality	Sticking to rules backed by punishment; obedience for its own sake; avoiding physical damage to persons and property.	Avoidance of punishment, superior power of authorities.	*Egocentric point of view.* Doesn't consider the interests of others or recognise that they differ from the actor's; doesn't relate two points of view. Actions considered physically rather than in terms of psychological interests of others. Confusion of authority's perspective with one's own.
Stage 2: Individualism, Instrumental Purpose, and Exchange	Following rules only when in one's immediate interest; acting to meet one's own interests and needs and letting others do the same. Right is also what is fair or what is an equal exchange, deal, agreement.	To serve one's own needs or interests in a world where one has to recognise that other people also have interests.	*Concrete individualistic perspective.* Aware that everybody has interests to pursue and that these can conflict; right is relative (in the concrete individualistic sense).
Level II: Conventional Stage 3: Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships, and Interpersonal Conformity	Living up to what is expected by people close to you or what people generally expect of a good son, brother, friend, etc. "Being good" is important and means having good motives, showing concern for	The need to be a good person in your own eyes and those of others; caring for others; belief in the Golden Rule; desire to maintain rules and authority that support stereotypical good behaviour.	*Perspective of the individual in relationships with other individuals.* Aware of shared feelings, agreements, and expectations which take primacy over individual interests. Relates points of view through the concrete Golden Rule, putting

	others. It also means keeping mutual relationships such as trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude.		oneself in the other guy's shoes. Does not yet consider generalised system perspective.
ge 4: Social stem and nscience	Fulfilling duties to which you have agreed; laws to be up-held except in extreme cases where they conflict with other fixed social duties. Right is also contributing to the society, group or institution.	To keep the institution going as a whole and avoid a breakdown in the system "if everyone did it"; imperative of conscience to meet one's defined obligations. (Easily confused with stage 3 belief in rules and authority.)	*Differentiates societal point of view from interpersonal agreement or motives.* Takes the point of view of the system that defines roles and rules; considers individual relations in terms of place in the system.

SEVEN PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING TEACHING/LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Learning principle:

Learning best takes place when students' existing competencies are recognised and endorsed.

Teaching implication:

Students' interests and capacities are taken as a starting point for enquiry. Emphasis is placed on acknowledging, endorsing and building on the students' own media experiences and media competencies.

Learning principle:

Learning takes place through the learners' participation in practical processes.

Teaching implication:

Classroom experience should be a continuous interaction of analysis and practical work to achieve a balance of understanding and skill, both critical and creative. Practical work is the starting point and the means by which students reach analytical understandings.

Learning principle:

Learning involves working from the known to the unknown.

Teaching implication:

The teaching approach to Mass Media Studies should be inductive and student-centred: students should begin with direct experience of the media product and the production processes. From this knowledge and experience, learners develop hypotheses which they test for accuracy and generality of application.

Learning principle:

The most effective learning takes place when classroom activity reflects students' everyday experience.

Teaching implication:

Mass Media Studies teaching should draw together students' in-school and out-of-school media experiences to deepen students' understanding of the persuasive and pervasive nature of the media and its significance in their total lives.

Learning principle:
Learning about the media involves the experience and analysis of a wide range of media products.

Teaching implication:

Teachers should avoid imposition of values and judgements. Students should be encouraged to analyse and understand the media within a broad societal context rather than be trained to resist the media.

Learning principle:

Learning involves learners acting and thinking for themselves.

Teaching implication:

The teacher's role is as a non-authoritarian facilitator of classroom learning. The teacher's role is to enrich and deepen students' experience by bringing about awareness of the media as a set of processes. Teachers should aim to have students assume increasing responsibility for their learning as their experience of Media Studies progresses.

Learning principle:

A positive self-concept about oneself as a person and as a learner is conducive to successful learning.

Teaching principle:

The teacher needs to provide learning experiences which provide a balance of support and challenge to the learner.

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Appendix 2
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Mass media education should be continuing and sequential to suit the developmental needs of students as individuals, kindergarten to Year 12.

Mass media education K-12 involves various combinations of basic learning processes. Teachers and students work together to plan and develop learning experiences involving these processes.

Observing
- mass media products in a variety of situations
- agents of mass media construction
- patterns in mass media products

Perceiving
- interpreting and gaining an understanding of aural and visual imagery
- reading
- listening
- looking
- decoding
- identifying meanings, patterns, formats and stereotypes

Responding
- writing
- discussing
- adapting to a particular context
- adapting materials
- creating
- drawing, painting, etc
- imitating
- dramatising
- using

Organising
- selecting
- sorting
- sequencing
- structuring
- ordering
- co-operating
- negotiating
- compromising

Manipulating
- altering, modifying, adjusting, changing, controlling
- influencing, persuading, by omission, emphasis, framing sequencing, cropping and so on
- the techniques involved in the production of mass media products can manipulate meaning

Communicating
- co-operating
- negotiating
- compromising
- speaking
- writing
- drawing etc. in order to communicate
- information
- messages
- ideas
- attitudes
- values

Experiencing   - feelings involved in the process eg. stress, frustration,
                     tension from time restraints etc.
                   - fulfilment
                   - achievement or non-achievement of aims
                   - sharing

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THE CONDITIONS OF LEARNING

Learners need to be immersed in a wide range of texts - surrounded by them and attracted to their production and use.

Immersion

Learners benefit from demonstrations - that is, from explanations and models that enable them to see how texts are conceived, constructed and used.

Demonstration

Learners are influenced - either stimulated or inhibited - by the expectations of those around them, mainly by adults or peers they respect.

Expectation

Learners grow in self-reliance if allowed to make their own decisions about the when-how-what of their learning tasks.

Responsibility

Learners must have time and opportunities, in realistic situations, to practice or use their developing control over what they are learning.

Use

Learners work confidently when assured that learning is not copied "correctness" but "approximation", the process of striving by trial-error-improvement.

Approximation

Learners are upheld in their efforts - acknowledged and supported - when those around them respond with interest to their words and work.

Response

Engagement

These conditions contribute to active learning, not mechanically, but as factors in the interaction between students and a teacher who likes the subject, the children and teaching itself.

Engagement occurs when the learner feels:

"These texts, these demonstrations make me want to have a go myself!"

"Doing so, I'm learning and preparing for the life ahead of me."

"I'm happy learning here, where nobody's condemned when they're not fully correct."

The Brian Cambourne Model of Literacy Learning.

Chapter 6
Appendix 4
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