

1-1-2001

## A socio-historical study of the construction of knowledge in secondary media education in Western Australia - whose knowledge?

Robyn Quin  
*Edith Cowan University*

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**A SOCIO-HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE IN SECONDARY  
MEDIA EDUCATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA -  
WHOSE KNOWLEDGE?**

by

Robyn Quin

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy,**

Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences

Edith Cowan University

2001

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the history of the construction of knowledge in the school subject media studies using the Western Australian experience as the case for the study. It seeks to explain why the subject media studies looks and sounds the way it does today through the production of a genealogy of the subject. The problems addressed are first, why was this subject introduced into the curriculum in the 1970s. Secondly, how has knowledge in the subject been defined and contested, how and why has it changed in the course of the subject's history. Thirdly, which knowledge attains the status of truth and becomes the accepted definition of what the subject is about.

The theoretical perspective adopted in this study draws from both postmodernist critiques and sociologies of subject knowledge. It presents a critical sociology of knowledge that draws insights from both social historians of school subjects and the work of Michel Foucault. The study develops an analytical framework based on a distinction between knowledge as defined by formal educational authorities (articulated in syllabuses) and knowledge defined by those practising the subject (teachers and curriculum advisors). The method of investigation comprises a survey of what others have described as the roots of media studies in schools followed by a detailed analysis of the genealogy of media studies in Western Australia. The genealogy traces the relations of power in the struggle to define subject knowledge.

The first conclusion reached is that the reasons for the introduction of media studies into the curriculum lie outside its object of study, the mass media. The

second conclusion is that subject knowledge is the outcome of complex power relations which cannot be reduced to issues of domination and subordination.

The study revealed that different groups have attempted to define subject knowledge through the application of tactics of power but have consistently met effective resistance. Furthermore changes in subject knowledge are more likely to be the result of changes in the context of the subject rather than advances in the discipline. Finally, the study reflects upon the question of progress in the subject, the possibility of its demise and makes some recommendations for the future.

## **DECLARATION**

*I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:*

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;*
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or*
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.*

Signature

A black rectangular box redacting the signature.

Date

15 February 2021.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To my supervisor, Bill Loudon, I am grateful for his advice, support and friendship. To Edith Cowan University my appreciation for sponsoring my doctoral studies through the provision of study leave. To Professor Millicent Poole my thanks for her leadership, encouragement and unrelentless demand that I complete the task.

To the media studies community of Western Australia my thanks.



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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **QUESTIONS OF HISTORY**

### **The problem**

This work is a history of the present. It asks the questions: What is this school subject called media studies and how does this particular subject come to look and sound the way it does today? It attempts to answer these questions through the construction of a genealogy of the subject. First, the study enquires into the processes and principles of reasoning by which the subject came into being. This is followed by an historical examination of the curriculum over a thirty-year period in which I chart the relations of forces determining the nature of subject knowledge. The study concludes with a discussion of the implications of the genealogy for the future of the subject, syllabus development, assessment procedures, teacher training and professional associations. The work is offered in the hope of making a strategic contribution to the on-going struggle to define appropriate content in school subjects by illuminating the forces and power relations which have determined subject knowledge in the case of media studies.

The decision to trace the genealogy of media studies was motivated by certain observations at some international media education conferences coupled with a steadily growing sense that the relevant literature in the field did not account for what I saw to be happening in media studies classrooms currently. (The reader will probably note that a new term, media education, has been introduced. In order to avoid later confusion the distinction between media studies and media education

needs to be made clear. Media studies will be the term used to refer to the specific school subject characterised by a formal syllabus, a designated place on the timetable and specialist teachers. Media education will be used to describe cross disciplinary, non-subject specific teaching about the mass media.) Together, the conferences, the literature and my experiences of classroom practice prompted me to ask questions about the origins, nature and purpose of a school subject, definitions of subject knowledge and the power to define such knowledge. I turn now to the ecology of my own experience in order to tease out the problems which stimulated this research.

An initial stimulus for this study occurred in Toulouse, France in 1990. It was the occasion of the first international media education conference, organised by the British Film Institute, the Centre de Liaison de l'Enseignement et des Moyens d'Information, the Council of Europe and UNESCO. For part of the time each day participants in the conference were allocated to one of three commissions:

- The Role of the Professional Media in Media Education,
- Strategies for Media Education in Different Countries, and
- Media Education and Developing Countries.

The task of each commission was to develop recommendations for submission to the plenary session of the conference. The third commission, dealing with media education in developing countries, was restricted to participants from those countries in which media education was restricted to non-school situations. It comprised people from south and central America, Africa, India and eastern bloc countries. This commission developed a definition of media studies that said:

Media education is an educational process/practice that seeks to enable members of a community creatively and critically to participate (at levels of production, distribution and exhibition) in the use of the technological and traditional media for the development and liberation of themselves and the community, as well as for the democratisation of communication. (Kumar, 1991, p. 23)

However the “official” definition of media education published in the proceedings of the Toulouse conference, reproduced below, made no mention of development, liberation or democracy as the aims of media education.

Media education aims to stimulate and increase the critical intelligence of individuals (young and old) in relation to media such as radio, television, cinema, video, photography and computers, as well as the more traditional media of information and communication such as the press. Such education tries to answer the questions: How do media work? How do they make sense? How are they organised? How do audiences perceive them? How can consumers be helped to make the best use of the media in different socio-cultural contexts? (Bazalgette, Bevort and Savino, 1992, p. 56)

In fact this definition is an almost direct quote from the definition of media education produced and circulated by the British Film Institute (see Bowker, 1991, pp. 2-3). However, the official definition did not satisfy all the conference delegates. An Indian participant, reviewing the conference, complained that:

Alternative definitions of media education drawn up by participants at Toulouse from Asia, Africa and Latin America did not merit even a casual mention in the final report and recommendations of the colloquy. (Kumar, 1991, p. 22)<sup>1</sup>

Kumar’s complaint about the European, specifically British, dominance of descriptions of the aims and purposes of media education was echoed some years

---

<sup>1</sup> One of the UNESCO organisers of the Toulouse conference later confirmed that the structure “meant that the South spoke only to the South, the North to the North, and their voices were not heard mutually across the boundaries” (Gonda, 1999, p. 13).

later by Spanish and Latin American delegates at the first World Meeting on Media Education in Spain in 1995. It surfaced once more at the second World Meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1998, again at the UNESCO sponsored meeting of media educators in Vienna in 1999 and most recently at the Summit 2000 conference in Toronto. The latter conference provoked a series of angry mailings to the Internet Media Listserve from Spanish speakers. They complained about the lack of Spanish speaking keynote presenters, the arrogance behind the decision to translate into English only and the organisation of workshops according to the language of presentation. A Spanish speaking conference participant complained that “there was no opportunity to mix together people of different cultures (sic)” (R. Aparici, personal communication, June 6, 2000). The grievances stem from both a conviction that the practices and histories of English speaking media education are presented as universal and that non-British and non-North American experiences are actively ignored. This same point has been made previously by Aparici (1993, p. 15) and Piette and Giroux (1997, p. 96).

These perceptions are not without foundation. Although a comprehensive history of media education has yet to be written those works which discuss the evolution of the subject area do so from a largely unacknowledged British perspective. I say unacknowledged because in the published studies of the introduction and development of media education there is to be found a consistent pattern of ex-nomination.

Ex-nomination is the term coined by Barthes (1973) to show how the economic determinants of a society are absent from representations of that society – they are literally un-named. He demonstrated how capitalism, while easily named in

the economic discourses of western societies, remains un-named in the political and ideological discourses of those same societies. The concept of ex-nomination can be extended to encompass other aspects of modern culture. For example when we speak of Australians, we do not usually say “white” Australians because the “white” is taken for granted, there is no need to name the attribute. As O’Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders and Fiske (1983) put it: “wherever a qualifying adjective seems redundant we are in the process of ex-nomination” (p.87).

And so it is with the story of the development of media education. The best known and most frequently cited works touching upon the history of media education fail to include the qualifying words *British* or *English* in their title yet *Teaching About Television* (Masterman, 1980) is in fact about teaching British television in English schools. Likewise *Teaching the Media* (Masterman, 1985) and *Learning the Media* (Alvarado, Gutch and Wollen, 1987) focus on British newspapers, films and television. Similarly *Understanding the Media* (Hart, 1991) and *Secondary Media Education* (Bowker, 1991) cite only English experiences.

Turner (1990) has aired previously this issue of the ex-nomination of the English in relation to media and cultural theory. He makes the point of including the word *British* in the title of his work on the roots and trajectories of cultural studies. Frankovits, complaining about the parochialism of the journal *Screen* says:

...there is a uniquely ‘British’ feeling about a certain way of insisting upon race/class/gender which assumes that British experiences of these things can be the model for understanding racism/capitalism/sexism everywhere in the Western world. Other places just have local variations (e.g. of ‘The Left’), and so the British way of talking about them makes sense everywhere. But it isn’t so, and it doesn’t work. (1987, p. 123)



Curran and Park (2000) argue that Western media theory is self-absorbed and parochial, dominated by United States and United Kingdom based academics who view the rest of the world as “a forgotten understudy”. They say:

It has become routine for universalistic observations about the media to be advanced in English-language books on the basis of evidence derived from a tiny handful of countries. Whether it be middle-range generalization about, for example, the influence of news sources on reporting, or grand theory about the media’s relationship to postmodernity, the same few countries keep recurring as if they are a stand-in for the rest of the world. (Curran and Park, 2000, p. 3)

While Curran and Park are speaking of media theory not media education their observations could apply to both equally. First, the statements about the roots of the subject emanate from highly developed western nations and have been recorded in English speaking publications. Secondly, they are based on reflection rather than historical research. None of the writers who speak of the evolution of the subject claim to have conducted research into its history.

Although presumably not the intention, and certainly not the fault, of the authors of works on media education, their descriptions of the origins and progress of media studies in England have become the received wisdom about the causes and patterns of development of the subject generally. For example, Robert Kubey, an American academic and editor of *Media Literacy in the Information Age* (1997), describes Len Masterman, author of *Teaching About Television* and *Teaching the Media* as the “single most influential media educator in the English speaking world” (p. 1). Kubey advises that Masterman’s description of “how media education developed in the 1980s will help readers gain their bearings” (p.1). What he does not say is that Len Masterman is describing how *English* media education developed.

Masterman described the roots of media education in his 1980 book and in subsequent publications. He said that:

[Media education] had its origins in a deep seated distrust of the media themselves, which were often viewed as agents of cultural decline and seducers of the innocent. In particular it arose out of a concern that children were watching too much television and that much of what they were watching was mindnumbingly trivial and perhaps even dangerous. (Masterman, 1991, p. 3)

Collins (1976) offers a similar account of the causes of the subject in English schools. He argues that the conservative critique of culture in *Scrutiny* and in particular the work of Leavis and Thompson entered education as an “inoculation of pupils against the guiles, blandishments and false consciousness of mass culture” ( p. 167).

So pervasive in media education circles is this English history that it has been reiterated by others as a universal, self-evident truth about the roots of the subject by both English and non-English writers (Alvarado et al, 1987; Rivoltella, 2000; Rother, 2000; Tufte, 1999; Tyner, 1998)<sup>2</sup> Masterman’s insistence that media education grew out of widespread concern with the media itself has been repeated consistently.

Tyner, an American media educator, asserts a parallel between Masterman’s history of media education and the experience of the critical viewing movement in the United States which she describes as based on a protectionist or “inoculationist” rationale (Tyner, 1998, p. 6). Morgan (1996) in his discussion of the roots of media education in Ontario, Canada, argues that Canadian teachers were motivated to teach

about the media through fear of its effects. According to Morgan, the teachers spoke a “vocabulary of ‘media manipulation’, ‘media effects’ and ‘students programmed to consume’”(p. 15). He is supported by Rother (2000) who says that in Canada films “were used primarily as a means to teach through the media utilizing an inoculatory approach” (p. 115). With reference to the Scandinavian experience Dahl (1981) says the goal of media education in Norway was “the cultivation of a critical attitude toward the mass media” (p.184). He is supported by Tufte, a Dane, who claims that European media education emerged from a perception of the media as “very influential and mainly bad for children and youngsters” and its purpose was to “inoculate the pupils against the media” (Tufte, 1999, p. 206). Geretschlaeger (1995) writing about the genesis of media education in Germany says “at that time [media education] used to be a more or less negative approach to media outlets ...its object was to criticise the ideology of a message” (p. 1).

In fairness to the English writers it must be acknowledged that while they offer histories of sorts, none of them claim to be writing a universal history of either media education or the subject media studies. That the works, in particular those of Masterman, have been assumed by others to speak for media education in general points to first, a paucity of geographically and culturally specific histories of the school subject. This work, focussing as it does on the development of media studies in a particular place, will address this lack. Secondly, the readiness with which American and Canadian media educators adopt findings developed in a British context suggests that there has been some degree of common development in

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<sup>2</sup> One of the few writers to identify his English perspective is David Buckingham in “Media Education in the UK: Moving Beyond Protectionism” *Journal of Communication*, 48 (1), 1998, 33-43.

Anglophone countries. Hart's examination of contemporary models of media education in KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Ireland, Toronto, Massachusetts and Western Australia supports an argument that similar basic paradigms do indeed underpin the variety of forms and practices of media education in these different locations (Hart, 1998, p. 169). He argues that the case studies presented in *Teaching the Media* reveal the presence of all three of the paradigms of media education described by Masterman in his chapter on media education in Europe (Masterman and Mariet, 1994. These paradigms can be summarised as:

“inoculatory” by which media education seeks to develop discrimination against certain kinds of media;

“popular arts” by which media education seeks to encourage discrimination between media and;

“representational” by which media education seeks to address issues of ideology, power and the politics of representation (Hart, 1998, pp.181-182). But whereas Masterman presents these paradigms as primarily sequential whereby a new one replaced the former Hart argues that all three remain operational in each of the contexts examined in the study.

However, Hart is concerned with presenting a snapshot of current practices and does not concern himself with an investigation of the genesis of media education. Other literature from the English speaking world, which touches upon the motivations for the introduction of some form of media education, views its roots as lying in a concern with the effects of the media on those who consume it. The literature falls into two types. There is the body of work which argues that media studies was originally a defensive response to the threat posed by the media to high

cultural values (Masterman, 1994; Buckingham, 1998). Within this conception it is argued that the subject was initially aimed at inoculating or protecting students against the supposed negative effects of the mass media on their ability to develop good taste and aesthetic values. Sharing the same view of the purposes of the subject but coming from a different view of effects is another body of work which argues that media studies emerged as a counter strategy to the supposed negative effects of the media on children's learning ability and behaviours (Singer, Zuckerman and Singer, 1981b). This perspective is marked by concerns about sex and violence in the media and, in some programs, criticisms of the media's role in fostering consumerism (Anderson, 1980).

As well as sharing an almost identical perspective on the causes of media education – the need to protect children from harmful effects – the literature shares a common concept of what constitutes progress in the discipline. Progress is marked by the movement from the initial “inoculation” educational paradigm through the “popular arts” paradigm and into one which approaches the media as “representational or symbolic systems” (Masterman, 1994, pp. 23-31). Similarly Tufte sees progress in media education as the shift through three positions. The first was one in which “the media were used in the classroom... to teach the children about the bad influence of the media” (Tufte, 1999, p. 206). This position was replaced by one in which it was no longer a question of protecting the children against the media, but of teaching them to choose the ‘good’ films instead of the ‘bad’ entertainment in television. In turn this perspective she sees as having been displaced by one in which “semiotics and ideology were introduced into the classroom” (p. 206). Tyner does not dispute this model of progress but laments that in the United States teachers have not yet realised the goal of asking “students to

investigate critically and to question all forms of media in a way that leads to independent thinking” (Tyner, 1998, p. 148).

Are these claims evidence that media education and its expression in the form of the subject media studies did indeed evolve from the public’s fear of the effects of the media? On what basis are such claims made? Is the history of media education a universal story of progress from teaching against the media to teaching about the media as these writers suggest?

Of course any assumption of a universal history necessarily involves excluding other instances and silencing other voices. It was resentment about just such exclusions that surfaced at the Toulouse Colloquy and subsequent international gatherings. The participants from India, Spain, Latin America and Australia saw their exclusion as a political issue. But it is also an intellectual problem because totalising accounts of the history of media education such as those produced by Masterman and others form discourses which are understood as “a regime of truth” that is, the discourse a society or group accepts and makes function as true (Foucault, 1980, p.131). This is, in fact, the problem with all histories which look from the outside in at the motivations, actions and things said by others: details are lost, contradictions erased, conflicts expunged and small or unsuccessful efforts at resistance are ignored. Such histories tend to favour similarities over differences, convergences over divergences, continuities over discontinuities in the effort to represent the past as a story of seamless progress. In the case of media education such histories imply a teleology, a steady casting off of inadequate, misguided views in favour of new and better ideas. They impose a lineage and unity on the subject which needs to be tested against empirical evidence.

As stated earlier this work takes the form of a genealogy of the subject media studies and is modelled on the work of Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977a) and his first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1981). As with Foucault's genealogies the components are knitted together in the manner of a narrative but the narrative is non-teleological. Thus the study challenges the conventional wisdom surrounding the origins, development and progress of media studies. The analysis of the case study presented in Chapters Four through Seven debunks the traditional, liberal versions of the history of media education that view the evolution of the subject as a story of progress from unenlightened views on the need to inoculate children against the effects of the media to the supposedly enlightened position of today. Hopefully, this is not a destructive but rather a transgressive impulse. My intention is to recover the historical contingencies that gave rise to the apparently timeless, authorless and obvious subject that we call media studies and in so doing open a space in which advocates of the subject might challenge its taken-for-granted assumptions about what is to be taught and why.

Along with my experiences at international conferences and my reading of the media studies literature another event prompted this study of the history and content of media studies. It happened in my own state of Western Australia. In 1996 I was conducting research for an international project led by Andrew Hart at the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom and subsequently published in *Teaching the Media* (Hart, 1998). This project has already been mentioned briefly above in relation to the similarities of models of media education in various English speaking countries. The aim of the project was to produce detailed case studies of current media education paradigms and practices in different countries. My section of the study required that I interview a dozen or so teachers of English and media

studies about their personal philosophies of teaching, their goals in teaching about the media and their practices in media education, and conduct a series of classroom observations (Quin, 1998).

In the interviews the media studies teachers described themselves as “competent”, “well prepared”, “confident”, and “efficient”. None of the teachers expressed concerns about their ability to prepare a teaching program or confessed to difficulties in deciding what to teach and yet fewer than half of the teachers interviewed had read the syllabus. But in their responses they did not frame their lack of concern with the syllabus as resistance to the dictates of the educational bureaucracy. Rather they were confident in their ability to decide the content and organise the effective delivery of a program of media education. The teachers’ responses raised one obvious question: if the syllabus was not the authority which guided their decisions about what students needed to learn about the mass media then exactly what did determine what was taught or not taught? Who determined what was seen to be worthwhile knowledge in media studies? This started me thinking about knowledge and the relationship between power and knowledge in media studies. I knew from reading, experience and information gleaned from earlier interviews with teachers that knowledge in media studies is constructed in a multiplicity of sites including, but not limited to, the academic, the bureaucratic, the informal and the classroom. What I did not know was the relative influence of these various sites on the construction of knowledge and whether it changed over time. The second aim of this study is to trace the processes by which subject knowledge evolves and changes over time.



It was the experience of talking to media teachers about what they taught, and why, that prompted the specific research questions which guide this study. These questions are:

- Why media studies?
- What counts as knowledge in media studies?
- By what processes is knowledge in media studies constructed?
- How do changes in knowledge come about?
- Are *knowledges* evident in different domains – academia, the syllabus, and the classroom – the same or different?
- Has the relative influence of the various sites changed over the history of the subject?
- If they are different which knowledge wins, in the sense, of being the one taught in the classroom?

The method by which I might seek answers to these questions was determined by the sense of exclusion I felt while reading histories of media studies which did not gel with my own experience. I decided to write a different kind of history, one that was faithful to the specifics of the situation and escaped the totalising desire to tell a story of seamless progress from “inoculation” to “critical literacy”. In short, I wished to write a genealogy rather than a history of the development of media studies in Western Australia. Genealogy, as practised by Michel Foucault, presented a method by which I could tell a small story of the birth

and life of the subject without claiming a universal history. Genealogy is “effective” history. “Effective history,” not just accepts but “actively seeks teeming facts, multiple intentions, the accidents, the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us...” (Foucault, 1977b, p. 146). The genealogical method then demands attention to the “teeming facts”, the small details and the specifics, the acknowledgement of contradictions and the recognition of discontinuities. Thus it requires access to multiple and plentiful sources of data. A case study, limited in scope but rich in data, seemed to be the design best suited to meeting these requirements. It permits the researcher to concentrate on the detail, on the local, on “documents that have been scratched over and re-copied many times” (Foucault, 1977b, p. 139), and offers access to the voices of the actors in the story. This work then is a case study of the history of the school subject media studies investigated through questions of the construction of subject knowledge in a particular place over a period of thirty years.

## **A school subject: problems of definition**

To say one will write a genealogy of a school subject invites questions as to what is meant by the term *school subject*. Goodson cites Hirst who speaks of school subjects as “indisputably logically cohesive disciplines” (Goodson, 1983, p. 4). In this model of school subject definition it is implied that the intellectual discipline is created outside the school, presumably in a university, and then translated for use as a school subject. However, media studies is not a cohesive discipline at the academic level and, in many places, the school subject preceded the introduction of the study of the media at the university level. Young (1971) says that school subjects are “no more than the socio-historical constructs of a particular time” (p. 23). Certainly a school subject is a title in a curriculum document, a named slot on a timetable and a category by which staff are allocated to schools, all of which are highly unstable and subject to change. But a school subject is also a convention by which knowledge is named, delimited and circulated. This study treats the school subject media studies as a not necessarily cohesive or stable body of knowledge, articulated in a syllabus and realised in a classroom. It is subject knowledge, its production, its negotiation and its changes which will be the focus of this genealogy of media studies.

## **Purpose of the study**

This study provides another perspective on the history of media education. The story behind the invention and introduction of media studies in the site of the case study, Western Australia, together with the history of its development and the analysis of its epistemological regimes should invite a reconsideration of the prevailing, taken-for-granted assumptions about the subject’s foundations, purposes and achievements. In addition, an understanding of the historical and social contexts

of a subject should enable teachers, students, scholars and teacher educators to exploit such knowledge as a resource for practice.

Secondly, this study reveals the micro-processes of curriculum development and the failure of the educational authorities to control what is taught and learned in the media studies classroom. The case study highlights the frequent mismatch between the syllabus (the formal prescribed framework of the subject) and the curriculum (the ways in which the syllabus is interpreted and operationalised by practitioners in the classroom). It identifies contradictions and confusions between the various theoretical positions underpinning the syllabuses and shows how such contradictions come about. Thus it has implications for future syllabus and curriculum development practices in media education.

Thirdly, the study will have implications for pre- and in-service professional development. Perhaps more significant than the theoretical ambiguities of the syllabus is the fact that teachers do not recognise them. This suggests that teaching practice in media education does not reflect contemporary research and theory about the nature and function of the mass media. Those responsible for the provision of teacher education may use my analysis of the various syllabuses to identify gaps in teacher knowledge.

While the study treats Western Australia as a specific case in the development and implementation of media education its implications for educators and critics are broader than the case itself. Issues raised in the study such as emancipatory pedagogy, epistemology, the role of textual analysis and media production, the influence of subject English and the turn to outcomes-based education should inform debates at the international level.

Finally the thesis will contribute further to an understanding of the relationship between knowledge and power and its application in school education. The study will demonstrate the ways in which education continually invents, employs and applies technologies of power in the name of emancipation.

### **A select review of literature**

Before embarking on a discussion of the specific form this study takes it is necessary to review what others have said about the central concerns of this study: subject knowledge and subject histories. The purpose of the review is to provide the background which will allow the reader to locate this specific investigation of the genealogy of subject knowledge in relation to previous work in the field.

### **Knowledge**

Knowledge is not something that can be taken for granted but is in need of explanation. This task has been at the centre of the work of sociologists of knowledge such as Michael Young (1971), Basil Bernstein (1971), Michael Apple (1979, 1982), Pusey and Young (1979) and Henry Giroux (1981, 1983, 1992), who have explored the institutional and ideological processes by which the curriculum acquires its form. While recognising their immense value in opening up the field of the sociology of knowledge I do not, however, accept all the arguments of the sociologists of knowledge and nor do I elect to use these arguments as assumptions within this study. Bernstein contends that “how a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control” (Bernstein, 1971, p. 47). Similarly, Young argues that those in positions of power are responsible for the assumptions that underlie the selection and organisation of

knowledge in society. He says that school subjects, or more precisely what passes for a school subject at any point in time, are the product of previous conflicts between dominant interest groups that sought to define the subject in a particular way (1971, p. 20). Both Bernstein and Young adopt top-down and essentially disempowering (for teachers and students) conceptions of the regulation of school knowledge. Likewise, Pusey and Young argue that knowledge is never free of interest. They take the position that knowledge is always implicated in the establishment, maintenance and reproduction of relationships of domination and submission (Pusey and Young, 1979, p. 1).

My experiences as a teacher, a curriculum development officer and later as a researcher lead me to suggest that the processes which determine school knowledge, at least in a marginalised subject like media studies, are very different and in fact work both ways – top-down and bottom-up. This observation steers me once again in the direction of Foucault and his notion of the “micro-physics of power” through which he offers a more complex and ultimately more liberating model of power and its relationship to knowledge than do the sociologists of knowledge. In contrast to the 1970s sociology of educational knowledge which assumed global mechanisms of social control, my concern in this study is with how knowledge is generated, modified and shaped at the micro levels of the bureaucracy, the syllabus, the professional association and in the routines of the classroom.

Following the publication of *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education* (Young, 1971), research into school knowledge has been labelled the “new sociology of education” (Hammersley and Hargreaves, 1983, p. 3). Some of the research trajectories in the new sociology of education have been the

social history of school subjects (Ball, 1985; Goodson, 1985, 1988a, 1988b, 1997; Goodson and Marsh, 1996; Willinsky, 1991; Green, 1993), the nature of curricular knowledge in the classroom (Esland, 1971) and constraints on curriculum innovation (Whitty, 1976). This study attempts to make a small contribution to the first two of these domains: the history of a school subject and the nature of curricula knowledge in the classroom. In its production of the former it draws upon the work of those who have written histories of school subjects such as Goodson and Ball. In the case of the latter it draws heavily on the ideas of Michel Foucault especially his genealogical studies and his conceptualisation of power/knowledge.

### **Subject knowledge in media studies – theoretical roots**

The first point to be made is that most of the literature dealing with descriptions or prescriptions of subject knowledge in media education/media studies lacks an empirical base. The literature tends to discuss subject knowledge in media studies in one of two ways. One approach assumes a direct relationship between theoretical conceptions of the role and function of the mass media within academia and what actually happens in the classroom (Alvarado et al, 1987; Buckingham, 1998; Masterman, 1983, 1994). An alternative approach is to start with school textbooks and instructional programs and from that information infer their theoretical underpinnings and assume what is taught in schools. The first approach is adopted by Masterman, Alvarado et al, and Buckingham, all of whom make a direct link between issues of what is taught in media studies and shifting theories of the mass media circulating in the domain of academia and research. It must be noted that although Masterman and Alvarado speak in general terms they are referring specifically to the British experience. The second approach is demonstrated in the

work of Piette and Giroux (1997) who examine a number of media education programs developed in the United States and Europe in the late seventies and early eighties and argue that each reflects a different theoretical foundation.

Masterman (1982, 1991), Alvarado et al (1987) and Buckingham (1988) all argue that the first proposals for a form of media education were a response to the conception of the media as a force alien to culture. This view of the mass media they link with the names of literary critics F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson who in *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* (1933) said:

...those who in school are offered (perhaps) the beginnings of education in taste are exposed, out of the school, to the competing exploitation of the cheapest emotional responses: films, newspapers, publicity in all its forms, commercially-catered fiction – all offer satisfaction at the lowest level, and inculcate the choosing of the most immediate pleasures, got with the least effort... We cannot, as we might in a healthy state of culture, leave the citizen to be formed unconsciously by his environment; if anything like a worthy idea of satisfactory living is to be saved he must be trained to discriminate and resist. (Leavis and Thompson, 1933, pp. 3-4)

Their work, which focussed on training in the techniques of literary criticism, contained classroom exercises using extracts from journalism, popular fiction and advertisements. Subject knowledge in this instance was aimed at encouraging discrimination and good taste on the part of the students (Alvarado et al, 1987, p. 15; Masterman, 1994, p. 21; Buckingham and Sefton-Greene, 1987, p. 288). The role of the teacher was to demonstrate the triviality and lack of cultural worth of popular media texts.

Masterman argues that in the 1960s theoretical developments in film theory, particularly the writing in the *Cahiers du Cinema*, had a profound effect upon what was taught in schools (Masterman and Mariet, 1994, pp. 24-25). The 'new' theory of



film developed by Bazin, Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer and Rivette and articulated through the *Cahiers du Cinema* hinged on two crucial oppositions. The first was that of individual authorship in cinema; the second was genre, of creative conventions in film language (Cook, 1985, p. 40). In Masterman's view this theoretical paradigm largely, although not entirely, displaced that of Leavis in the production of media education curricula: "Educational practice was very much following in the wake of exciting developments in both film-making and film theory..." (Masterman and Mariet, 1994, p. 25). As evidence he cites the growth of film studies courses in schools and describes them as "a distinct step forward from previous practice" (p. 25). Subject knowledge was film theory and appreciation applied to the works of European 'art film' directors such as Bergman, Fellini, Godard and Truffaut and American auteurs such as Hawks, Hitchcock, Siegal and Aldrich (p. 24). Masterman argues that developments in film theory were reflected (positively in his view) in changes in the classroom practice of media education. But his assumption that the integration of complex cinematic theory into the classroom was a change for the better must be questioned. The educational incorporation of the concept of film directors as individual producers or auteurs of complex cinematic works could be seen as a logical extension of the Leavisite position which viewed literature as the organic expression of the individual sensibility. In other words perhaps film theory had little or no influence on what happened in schools. Media education simply shifted its content to accommodate the dominant discourse of English at the time.

According to Alvarado et al (1987); Masterman (1985), Masterman and Mariet, (1994) and Buckingham (1998) another and later academic theory of the media to impact upon school media education was developed within the framework

of cultural studies. The cultural studies paradigm was marked by a concern with the social and cultural circumstances of the working class, with redefining traditional elitist notions of education and with defining a “common culture” expansive enough to include popular or mass mediated culture. The mass media in the cultural studies perspective is a tool of egalitarianism: “the mass media must, whether consciously or not, work towards a culturally classless society” (Hoggart, 1970, p. 33) if for no other reason than that their viability depends on their ability to appeal to a mass audience. This theoretical position was disseminated to schools through Hall and Whannel (1964) in *The Popular Arts*. This book offered an extensive range of suggestions for ways to teach about the media but the emphasis was on British and European films and the focus on discriminating between “what is good and worthwhile and what is shoddy and debased” (Hall and Whannel, 1964, p. 15).

A decade later the popular arts paradigm in schools was displaced by a concern with teaching about language, ideology and representation (Buckingham, 1998, p. 35). This approach drew from developments in semiotics, structuralism, Marxism and psychoanalytic theory. It is articulated most clearly in Masterman’s *Teaching The Media* (1985) and in Alvarado et al.’s *Learning the Media* (1987) both of which require students to perform systematic analyses aimed at revealing the hidden ideologies of the text. The basic premise of both works is that the media do not reflect society but rather operate to promote and sustain the dominant ideology as a means of maintaining social control. Subject knowledge, in this context, was to do with the application of semiotic analysis to selected media texts with the aim of identifying and contesting the dominant ideology (Buckingham, 1998, p. 36). The method of analysis required students to:

- 1.offer an initial, untutored response to a text;
- 2.identify and describe the different elements composing the text;
- 3.identify the common associations and meaning of each of the elements;
- 4.relate these meanings to each other to suggest the dominant ideological meaning of the text;
- 5.compare this meaning with other examples from the same category of texts in order to arrive at a conclusion about their overall ideological function (Buckingham, Fraser and Mayman, 1990).

Although exactly what constitutes the dominant ideology is not defined it can be assumed from the topics of study that it was the values of white, patriarchal, middle class society. This approach to media studies pedagogy reflected the theoretical concerns of the British Cultural Studies movement which as Turner says “consistently addressed itself to the interrogation of society’s structures of domination.” It came from a theoretical tradition “inextricably linked with a critical European Marxism” that sought “to understand how capitalist societies work and how to change them” (Turner, 1990, p. 5).

More recently the content of media education in Britain has moved away from demystification of the text and the explication of its hegemonic tendencies to the teaching and learning of a set of key concepts (Bazalgette, 1989; Bowker, 1991). Concepts such as agency, institutions, audiences and representation are framed not in terms of content or prescribed texts but as a series of questions which can be applied to both media production activities and media texts. This approach has emerged in part from a theoretical reconception of the audience as an active viewer which demanded that children not be assumed to be passive victims of media effects

(Hodge and Tripp, 1986; Buckingham, 1993a, 1993c). Within this approach students are encouraged to explore the ways in which responses to texts differ and identify the factors which contribute to these differences such as gender, race, class, experience and so on.

As the English writers describe the situation, subject knowledge in media education has evolved through a series of defined stages. It has progressed from a situation in which the object of study was to be deplored, through a period in which it was to be interrogated for hidden ideological meanings, to one in which it is accepted as a valuable component of students' culture (Buckingham, 1998).

Media education in Scotland developed much later than it did in England, at the start of the 80s. In 1986 David Butts published a detailed study of media education in ten Scottish schools. His key findings were first, that pupils had difficulty in relating theory to practice and that practical work could be useful in illuminating complex theory. Secondly, he found that media education had more disciplinary coherence when taught by specialist media teachers and less when integrated into multidisciplinary course structures (Butts, 1986, p. 161). The Scottish media studies syllabus adopted a model of analysis which gave equal weight to media texts, audiences and production (Dick, 1990). In this model subject knowledge in media study was a set of topics arising from these three controlling categories:

- Textual analysis required students to learn about denotation, connotation, codes, genre, narrative, ideology and intertextuality.
- Audience studies meant learning about culture, gender, textual competence, psychology, uses and gratification, and active readings.

- Knowledge of media production was to be developed through an examination of codes and practices, ownership and control, finance and distribution, technology and legal frameworks.

Like the English models the Scottish approach required students to analyse media texts in order to identify the rhetorical strategies employed to convey meaning.

An alternative approach to identifying the theoretical knowledge base of the subject is to look at specific programs, syllabus documents and textbooks and is demonstrated by Piette and Giroux (1997). They examine the textbooks, teachers' manual and worksheets produced in the context of four different programs of media education. They argue that each program reflects a different theoretical foundation of knowledge which can be identified by looking at the program's objectives, its view of the media's influence and its view of the audience. They conclude "that there exists a very clear link between the methods used to develop these programs and the prevalent theories of mass communication" (Piette and Giroux, 1997, p. 126). Of especial interest to this study is their finding that media education programs fall into one of two categories: those that are content-oriented and those that are process-oriented. In the former knowledge of the media is knowledge of the distinctive features of each medium. In the latter knowledge refers to knowledge of the role the mass media perform in the social system and the ways in which it shapes the social power structure.

A distinctive media education program developed in France in the mid 1960s. This was the Language Total program developed by the Institut du Language Total of the Catholic University of Lyon. The program was based on a conception of

language as a system of signs through which humans expressed themselves (Faurie-Roudier and Vallet, 1983). The signs were images, sounds and words and the educated person needed to be fluent at the level of comprehension and production in all aspects of language, verbal, visual and written. The pedagogical materials developed by the Institut de Language Total reflected the influence of semiologists such as Roland Barthes and Christian Metz and focussed on the interpretation of visual codes. However for the Language Total group it was neither sufficient nor desirable to watch a film and then discuss it in written or verbal language. It was necessary to be able to express oneself in visual form also.

Dans la perspective du Language Total, connaitre le cinema, c'est etre capable de s'exprimer avec la camera ...l'expression personnelle en etait la cle de voute. (Vallet, 1991, p. 21)

[From the perspective of Total Language to understand the cinema is to be capable of expressing oneself with the camera ... personal expression was the keystone.] (Author's translation)

All these accounts of subject knowledge in media education share one significant failing. They assume that knowledge as it is described, whether in academic works, textbooks or syllabuses, is the same knowledge as that which is taught in schools. They ignore what actually counts for knowledge in the daily practice of the school subject because they have failed to pay due attention to the local issues of power, influence, negotiation and accommodation in curriculum development and implementation. Nor do these accounts acknowledge the influence of student and teacher expectations and desire in the determination of what is taught and how it is taught. One study, which actually draws its data from classroom observation, is that of Hart and Benson (1993). This study involved structured interviews and lesson observations in eleven schools in the southern region of

England and thus it is able to analyse the relationship between what teachers say and what they actually do in teaching about the media. They report on a project established in 1991 aimed at examining the perceptions of English teachers towards media education and how they viewed the task of teaching about the media in relation to their responsibilities as an English teacher. The study explored

... teachers' attitudes to Media Education both as a theoretical discipline and as a classroom subject; their aims for their pupils; the experience they brought to the work; the key concepts with which they felt most confident and the sources from which their understanding of these concepts derived; their favoured resources and the ways in which they are used; and their expectations for the future of Media Education. (Hart and Benson, 1993, p. 1)

Their methodological approach was to collect data through structured interviews and lesson observation. The project provides detailed descriptions of a range of approaches to teaching about the media within English at Key Stage 4 (years 10 and 11) in the Southampton area. The study found that teachers rarely addressed those sites central to the operation of the mass media in capitalist society namely, agency, industry, institutions and production; were uncomfortable with the use of media equipment and made minimal use of class sets of text books.

This study was updated in 1999, following the issuing of new National Curriculum Orders based on the Dearing Review (1995) that repositioned media within English. It used the same research design as the earlier study of 1992-3 (Hart and Hicks, 1999). The most recent study found that the status of media studies within English has been enhanced by its assessment position within the new 1998 GCSE syllabuses. While all the schools included in the study had introduced a media studies policy into their English schemes of work, individual teacher choice was still critical in determining the approach to media within the classroom. Furthermore, the

study found that by positioning the assessment of media within a terminal examination, the new structure has effectively limited the study of media to the printed text, with the emphasis strongly upon written and verbal communication. With regard to subject content the research found media language and representation to be the concepts most frequently addressed by teachers while issues of institutions and agencies were most likely to be ignored.

Both studies were about the teaching of media within the subject English and looked only at the sorts of knowledge about the media being circulated in English (the subject) classrooms. Nevertheless, the Southampton project is of value to this study because its focus is on what teachers actually do and think they are doing when they teach about the media. It touches on the concerns of this thesis in that it looks at teachers' knowledge about the media and the knowledge they consider important to produce in their students.

Buckingham's work is also located in classrooms (1990b, 1993a) but his interest is in learning theory and learning processes rather than in what he thinks students should learn. A long-time critic of Masterman's work, his focus is on children's learning processes and the ways in which their understanding of television's modes and processes evolve. His main criticism of Masterman is that "the possibility that the ideology of the text might be perceived in different ways by different readers is ignored" (Buckingham, 1990b, p. 7). His work offers a rich exploration of student-to-teacher and student-to-student interactions in the classroom in the context of media education. His work concentrates on the learning context and in particular the relationship between children's understanding of the media and teachers' assumptions about that understanding.



The social context of media consumption is his central theme in *Reading Audiences: Young People and the Media* (1993b). The researchers in this edited work watch children watching television, witness their reactions and ask them questions. They then explore the links between the scene, the reactions, the interactions and the cultural context. Of relevance to this study is his finding that students bring a wealth of knowledge to their experience of the media and that teachers need ways of helping students to make their knowledge explicit (p. 209). *Cultural Studies Goes to School* (Buckingham and Sefton-Greene, 1994) discusses issues of media studies pedagogy. In this book the authors criticise the predilection of media studies curricula towards theory, its emphasis on conceptual development and textual analysis (p. 208). They argue for an approach based on media production which would allow students to investigate issues of subjectivity and identity. Of value is Buckingham's re-appraisal of some of the claims made for media education: claims to do with the benefits of group work for children's social development, for learning to work in teams and under pressure, for promoting understanding. Overall, however, Buckingham is more concerned with how children learn than what they are taught in a media studies classroom.

There is no previous research that attempts to analyse the relationship between what a syllabus defines as knowledge about the mass media, what teachers consider to be worthwhile knowledge and what is actually taught in the media studies classroom. This study will make a contribution to filling this gap.

## **Subject knowledge – media production**

An ongoing issue in the literature addressing appropriate content and practice in media studies has been the issue of media production. In fact, the place of media production, or “practical work” as it is commonly known, has long been a subject of debate wherever media education is practised (Collins, 1976; Lorac and Weiss, 1981; Buckingham, 1990b; Ingemann, 1992; Watling, 1998). Writing in 1969 Bob Ferguson promoted the use of practical production work for the opportunity it gave students for creative self-expression (Ferguson, 1969). Greal (1975) argued that practical work was essential to progressive education and was the tool by which media studies could undermine the “normal hierarchical way of teaching” (p. 18). Twelve years later Ferguson argued against his own earlier position on the basis that his own and others’ adoption of practical work was based on misleading notions of creativity and self-expression. He said that media studies should “move away from vague notions of creativity and concentrate on the construction of meaning” (Ferguson, 1981, p. 42) in part because “...many teachers were willing to accept as a film script material at which they would have scoffed had it been in the form of an essay” (p. 44). The situation, he says, was made worse by the introduction of portapak in the mid seventies. Portapak removed the constraint on shooting time and resulted in even more abysmal student productions in which, “...the camera was often ‘squirted’ at its subject and the dizzy, boring and incoherent results thus obtained could be justified as experimentation” (p. 45).

Masterman (1980) describes his experience of classroom production in similar terms:

...an endless wilderness of third-rate imitative ‘pop’ shows, embarrassing video dramas, and derivative documentaries

courageously condemning war or poverty, much of it condoned by teachers to whom technique is all and the medium the only message. (Masterman, 1980, p. 140)

By the time of publication of *Teaching the Media* (1985) Masterman had modified his stance. Here he advocates practical work as essential to a media education course on the grounds that “if students are to understand media texts as constructions, then it will obviously be helpful if they have first hand experience of the construction process from the inside” (Masterman, 1985, p. 26). He does however warn teachers against assuming that all practical work must have a technical base. Masterman’s major concern about students’ practical work is its tendency to imitate and thereby naturalise the dominant practices of the mass media (p.27). This danger had been recognised previously by Collins (1975) who said that “practice is often constructed as an *imitation* of broadcast television” (original italics) (p. 171). Ferguson makes the same point about the dangers of practical work becoming a form of cultural reproduction but also believes that it actively harmed the reputation of the subject because its role was mainly restricted to one of “keeping recalcitrant, apathetic or bored students occupied” (Ferguson, 1981, p. 41).

Alvarado expresses different reservations about practical work which he sees as an outcome of “an unfortunate tendency” in progressivist philosophies of education, including media education, to favour discussion and activity and avoid “direct teaching” (Alvarado, 1981, p. 59). He argues that what students learn “by doing” is mainly “how to do things”. This approach he believes can lead to the exclusion of certain kinds of intellectual work which are vital to an understanding of the media as social institutions.

Notwithstanding the above, neither Masterman nor Ferguson completely reject the idea of practical work as having value in media studies so long as it is approached within a context of critical literacy. Masterman (1985) argues that “practical work is not an end in itself, but a necessary means to developing an autonomous critical understanding of the media” (p. 27).

Other media education theorists argue that the use of practical work in the classroom is an important element in improving students’ cultural competencies (Fuenzalida and Edwards, 1984; de Oliveira Soares, 1995). This view is reflected in much of the literature emerging from South American countries wherein the ability to effectively use the tools of the mass media is valued for its potential political importance (Fuenzalida, 1991).

The development of students’ critical literacy skills has been the pretext for the maintenance of practical work in media studies in Britain (Bazalgette, 1989; Bowker, 1991), Canada (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1989); Australia (Education Department of Western Australia, 1980), and also France, Germany, Netherlands, Scandinavia, Switzerland and Japan (Watling, 1999, p. 12). In the course of this study teachers raised the issue of the purpose and value of practical work again and again and later chapters will discuss the various positions adopted by the teacher participants.

### **The value of social histories of school subjects**

The study of the history of school subjects grew out of and furthered the work of sociologists of knowledge such as Basil Bernstein and Michael Young. Socio-historical studies in curriculum provide the local detail of curriculum

production, change and conflict. Those who engage in studying the history of school subjects make a number of claims for the value of their enterprise. Goodson maintains that “studying school subjects ... provides us with a window on the wider educational and political culture of a country”(Goodson, 1992, p. 25). Hammersley says that historical studies of school subjects can serve the same function as ethnography in “‘making the familiar strange’ ... by documenting the origins of contemporary phenomena whose existence we take for granted as ‘natural’ rather than as the product of history” (Hammersley, 1984, p. 16). Furthermore subject histories enable scholars to elucidate the role disciplines play in the social construction of knowledge, provide critical insights into existing situations and a sensitivity to the values historically embedded in the present reality (Kincheloe, 1997, p. xv; Goodson and Marsh, 1996, p. 3). Kincheloe warns readers that “When the past is forgotten its power over the present is hidden from view” (p. xxxvi). Those who seek curriculum reform value historical studies of the curriculum for their role in revealing “that-which-is has not always been ... and since these things have been made, they can be unmade” (Tyler and Johnson, 1991, p. 2).

During the last twenty years many socio-historical studies of school subjects have been published (Goodson, 1983, 1985, 1988a, 1992, 1997; Goodson and Ball, 1984; Ball, 1985, 1987; Seddon, 1989; Goodson and Marsh, 1996). These histories show that school subjects have always been contested sites, domains in which struggles for the controlling definition of philosophy, content and practice are played out. For example the historical studies of the subject English offered by Mathieson (1975), Ball (1985, 1987), Ball, Kenny and Gardiner (1990), Medway (1990), Willinsky (1991) and the Australian-based studies of Green (1993), Green, Hodgins and Luke (1994), Green and Beavis (1996) paint a similar overall picture. Their

work shows that English has always been discussed in terms of conflicting social and political agendas in which English is subjected to struggles of will between various academic factions over appropriate content and buffeted by institutional struggles over meaning and resources. These forces, they argue, have differentially determined the shape of the subject and the way it has been taught at different points in time.

Other school subjects, besides English, namely biology (Goodson, 1983), science (Layton, 1973; Jenkins, 1992), physics (Woolnough, 1988) and mathematics (Cooper, 1985; Howson, 1982) have received extensive attention in studies. To date however there is no published socio-historical account of the subject media studies. The reasons for this absence can only be guessed at. It might be a reflection of the academic background of those who see themselves as constituting the research community in media studies. Their background is overwhelmingly in the media itself, either as practitioners or critics and they have tended to maintain these foci in their research. For example my own university department of media studies consists of film-makers, journalists, advertising executives, television producers, photographers, scriptwriters and a couple of sociologists. All these people research aspects of the media rather than the teaching of the media. Another contributing reason might be that those whose scholarly work relates directly to media studies do not regard themselves as media studies educators. If they were to accept a label then they would most likely see themselves as sociologists, policy analysts, philosophers or anthropologists. And of those who actually have a background in teaching very few have taught media studies at school level. As will be discussed in a later chapter most of the academics in media studies with teaching backgrounds originally taught English, history or art at secondary school level. A further possible reason for the lack of scholarly interest in media education may reflect the low status of the school

subject and the subsequent lack of research funds in the area. Unlike mathematics, English and science, media studies is a relative newcomer to the school timetable. It is not a tertiary entrance subject in Western Australia and has never been considered a “core” part of the school curriculum.

Regardless of the reasons for the lack of scholarly interest it is timely that such a study be conducted. At this moment media studies teachers (as defined by themselves vis a vis those who see themselves as media/English teachers) feel their subject and themselves to be marginalised, even ignored. This perception is founded in their unhappiness at privations they face as media studies teachers. Specifically, they identify the lack of opportunity for promotion, the lack of tertiary entrance status for the subject and the disappearance of subject boundaries with the recent incorporation of film and television studies within English. Such a study as that undertaken here might demonstrate for teachers that things as they are are not immutable and can be changed. Furthermore, as with any serious study of education, an in-depth study of a school subject should direct attention to important issues, clarify problems, encourage debate and thereby deepen understanding, stimulate alternative ways of thinking and promote flexibility and adaptation to changing situations. On a more pragmatic level the subject media studies is almost forty years old in Western Australia and the voices of those who were in at the birth will soon be lost. Already the Education Department of Western Australia has shredded its archival material on media studies.

It is my intention, then, in this thesis, to augment the work of those who have made socio-historical examinations of school subjects by addressing the local history of the subject of media studies. While there is no single work that claims to present a

definitive history of the subject there are many that discuss its origins and development (Masterman, 1980, 1983, 1984; Alvarado et al., 1987; Halloran and Jones, 1985; Pungente, 1985; Masterman and Mariet, 1994; Buckingham, 1998; Tyner, 1998). These accounts share similar inadequacies. They are Anglocentric in that they mostly focus on the British experience and assume this to be a universal one. They lack an empirical basis and base their accounts on hearsay, secondary sources and limited personal experiences of classroom teaching. They are distant accounts pieced together from what others have written or said. All are totalising narratives which ignore or downplay contradictions and disruptions in the history of the subject in favour of a goal-oriented interpretation which imposes a telos on the past. Together, these works have contributed to the construction of a universal history of media education in which the history of the subject is a story of intellectual progress from an unenlightened position of inoculation against the media to one of enlightened critical reading of the media. This work challenges this metanarrative through the production of an “effective history” in the fashion of Foucault and traces the changing definitions and conceptions of what has constituted appropriate knowledge in media studies.

Green and Beavis identify two different methods for studying the history of a school subject (1996, p. 10). The first is associated with the work of Ivor Goodson and Stephen Ball in England and, here in Australia, with Richard Selleck and Terry Seddon, and is sociological in orientation. The second approach is characterised as postmodernist and is evident in the work of Ian Hunter, Annette Patterson, David Kirk and Bob Morgan. Green and Beavis present these two approaches as being almost entirely divorced from each other saying that “mostly they have proceeded along parallel trajectories, with little systematic association and articulation” (p. 10).



This study attempts to make such an association by investigating the historical construction of the school subject media studies within a postmodernist theoretical framework. The next chapter introduces some key concepts drawn from postmodernism and in particular the work of Foucault.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **A POSTMODERNIST FRAMEWORK**

“ I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1991, p xxiv).

There is no unified postmodern theory and it is not the task of this work to attempt one. I prefer to say simply that this study adopts some of the positions associated with postmodernism in that its enquiry tries not to be totalising and prefers the analysis of micropolitics (Lyotard, 1991) and the “microphysics of power” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 26). It rejects a modern assumption of social coherence with its assumption of a logic of consistency and notions of causality in favour of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation and indeterminacy. It does not treat media studies as a subject about which facts are to be discovered but as a discursive environment in which both knowledge and cultural subjects are formed.

A postmodern approach recognises that theories at best provide only a partial perspective on their objects. Furthermore, in the act of writing, in the production of an inevitably selective representation of the world, the work is historically and linguistically mediated. The theory then cannot deliver truth, it can merely provide a conceptual map which in turn will privilege some features of the field while obscuring others. In this sense the theory delimits the field; through structured presences and absences it determines what will and will not be considered pertinent to the research questions. In this chapter I introduce those concepts that postmodernist theory suggests will be of relevance to the study.

Since my focus is on the disciplinary production of knowledge I draw on the work of Michel Foucault for assistance in devising an appropriate theoretical framework. Foucauldian theory demands that the researcher not simply seek to describe the dominant discourses of media education in any historical period but to ask new questions about how the discourses came to be and to examine the patterns of 'force' that make possible particular thoughts and actions. In his attempt to "... show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so called evidence can be criticised and destroyed" (Foucault, 1988c, p. 10) Foucault challenged some of the key assumptions underpinning sociological criticism such as:

- That universal truths can be pursued and recovered and hidden meanings revealed. Traditional history's search for origins in great moral truths is entirely misguided; everything is subject to history's disintegrating gaze. There are no absolutes. The historian cannot access the past, only 'discursive formations', that is evidence of how contemporaries recorded and understood their own times. Furthermore, Foucault demonstrates that particular conceptions of truth about the state of the world prevail over others not because they are somehow 'more' truthful. Rather it is because of the peculiarities of time, place and social conditions that provide the rules that specify truth and the economic and political role it plays (Couzens Hoy, 1986, p. 138).
- That the history of knowledge is a history of progress (Cousins and Hussain, 1984, p. 264; Smart, 1985). The "traditional history of ideas" assumes that knowledge follows a line of progress, new knowledge is accumulated and new

theories absorbed. Foucault rejects this idea of growth and advancement and argues that history “is a profusion of events” irreducible to “a final meaning” or “final value” (Foucault, 1977b, pp. 154-155).

- That identifiable, dominant social groups hold power. Power is not the preserve of powerful agents because it is co-constituted by those who support and resist it. Foucault urges his readers not to look for the “headquarters” of power “neither the caste which governs, nor the groups which control the state apparatus, not those who make the most important economic decisions direct the entire network of power that function in a society (and makes it function)” (Foucault, 1981, p. 95).
- That knowledge and power can be separated. “There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 27). Power/knowledge cannot be separated and must be understood as situated and contextualised. In other words there is a need for specificity if one is to understand the nature of power and its realisation through the production and marshalling of knowledge (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1997, p. 295).

These Foucauldian tenets invite a different way of looking at the construction of knowledge in a school subject because the target of analysis is “not institutions, theories or ideology – but practices – with the aim of grasping the conditions which make them acceptable at a given moment” (Foucault, 1991, p. 76). No longer does the researcher have to seek a totalising theory which will explain how things come to be as they are but rather can account for discontinuities and contradictions through an analysis of local and specific discursive practices.

## **Discursive formations**

A concept borrowed from Foucault for the purposes of this thesis is the idea of discourse and discursive fields. Foucault understood discourses as systems for the production of what can be thought in a particular historical context. In the Foucauldian tradition I use the term discourse to refer not simply to language or social interaction but to bodies of social knowledge and the act of producing social knowledge. Discourse, in Foucault's terms, is a set of statements around a topic which acts to both constrain and enable what we can know about the topic (Foucault, 1973a, 1977b). Discourses are produced by specialists and/or those in a position to make authoritative statements about an object of knowledge and therefore are historically contingent and subject to change (McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 31). Discourses then are about disciplinary knowledge. In this case it is to be expected that those working in the discipline such as academics, teacher trainers, theorists, educational authorities, subject advisers and teachers would all be active in creating the discourses of media education.

Discourses divide up the world in specific ways. For example, it is possible to speak of medical, legal, psychological, educational and scientific discourses. Discourse, argues Foucault, constructs the topic. It defines and produces our objects of knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Equally, discourse rules out, limits and restricts other ways of talking and conducting oneself. Later in the work I will discuss the discourse of media studies and point out how, in the early years it severely restricted both what might be studied and the manner in which it would be taught. For example,

magazines and comics were legitimate objects of study within the subject discourse but books were not. Similarly issues of ownership and control were studied in relation to television and newspaper producers but not book publishing. Equally the discourse of media education in the seventies limited the possible approaches to instruction in media studies to a single method, one based on extensive student media production. But discourses are not fixed and unchanging over time thus the discourse of media education eventually came to include new objects of study such as video games and the internet and new pedagogical approaches like textual analysis.

Furthermore it will be argued that discourse in media education is not a progressive refinement of the discourse which preceded it. Here I draw upon the arguments of Foucault in *The Order of Things* (1973). In this work he argues that the origin of modern thought, its history, is not a gradual linear progression. He argues that when successive orders of thought (epistemes) are contrasted and compared they reveal different and incompatible modes of knowledge (Smart, 1985, p. 33).

Foucault argues that the changing configurations of knowledge from the classical to the modern age cannot be mapped as the progress of reason but rather as a series of transformations. This concept of transformations of knowledge can be usefully applied to the ways in which conceptions of the nature of the mass media and its audiences have changed radically over the last forty years. For example, four decades ago the prevailing conception of an audience was that of a massed body of passive receivers of predetermined media messages. This view has largely been replaced by one which sees audiences as active participants in the construction of textual meaning. Part of my task in this study is to assess the extent to which the syllabus documents and the media studies curriculum exhibit transformations of

knowledge, or accommodation of different modes of knowledge, or discourses in conflict.

In *The Order of Things* the episteme functions as the controller of all discourses in that each age had its unique episteme which was the grounds for all utterances. The problem with this notion is that it makes it impossible to account for changes from one episteme to another. His later works *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* mark a shift from his earlier notion of the episteme as a totalising concept and substitute the concept of a multiplicity of discourses/practices. This allows him to identify changes where they occur and an evolutionary connection across discontinuous phenomena. Thus he can show how the Panopticon system for controlling prisoners was a drastic break with the system of torture used in the past while still incorporating aspects of earlier disciplinary modes previously developed in the military.

The concept of multiple discourses allows one to see groups and individuals as subject to competing discourses which they negotiate in order to serve perceived needs within specific contexts. The idea of multiple and contending discourses is critical to understanding the day-to-day practices of teachers in schools. Take for example one of the teachers interviewed for this study. She was teaching both English and media studies in a private but not wealthy school. She considered the school principal to be progressive but regarded the English department as very conservative. Some of her students came from disadvantaged backgrounds and a large number from Eastern European ethnic groups. She spoke of her frustration with the job and others' expectations of her:

I have to teach one of my media classes in an English classroom.  
Every time we have to spend ten minutes at the start of the lesson

moving the furniture out of the way and the last ten minutes putting them back again. All hell breaks loose if the person coming in after me doesn't find the desks in neat rows. ... I would like to do more practical work, in fact I think my students are disadvantaged by the Common Assessment Tasks because we don't have the sort of equipment they have at some other schools. We don't have the fancy digital editing gear and stuff so the students' work never looks as good as it could. We just have to make do. ... I showed *My Beautiful Laundrette* last year to the Year 11s. One of the parents complained. I got no support from the English head, just none. (Lea, interviewed December 8, 1998)

Although she did not speak in these terms this teacher was working within the educational, economic and religious discourses of her particular school in her decisions about curriculum and practices of teaching. The frustration came from the fact that these discourses are sometimes in conflict. I will argue that teachers are subjected almost daily to multiple discourses, often conflicting ones, which they must somehow accommodate, negotiate or resist.

Thus I will use Foucault's theories of discourse to:

- identify key elements of discourses and understand their effects. My purpose here is to establish the "regime" or rules "of truth" of the discourse as well as the rational principles it establishes for the regime; to look for what can be said within the truth established by the discourse; and to analyse their discursive effects. What do they produce as the proper object of study? What knowledge does the discourse mandate as appropriate to the subject area? Who do these discourses produce as authorised to teach and to learn? What knowledge, bodies and ways of teaching are consigned through omission or derogation to outside the domain of the discourse?



- analyse the outcomes of the interaction of the discourses in an attempt to understand the specific (and changing) nature of media studies over the last thirty years.
- understand their conditions of obduracy and mutability in the face of resistance. Here I will be looking for repetition and retention, elements retained in the same or similar forms over time. But in addition I am looking for discontinuities and contradictions which might account for the cessation or transformation of specific discourses. The subjugation of some knowledges and the rendering of others as truth raises the issue of power. By what processes do some knowledges attain truth status?

### **Power/knowledge**

A major aim of this research is to identify those networks and relations of power which determine what is taught in media education and the way in which it is taught. The relationship between power and knowledge is central to Foucault's later post-structuralist writings. He saw knowledge as inextricably enmeshed in relations of power because it was always being applied to the regulation of social conduct in practice. Education is a tool of social regulation. As Foucault notes:

[Education] ...in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, ...follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and powers it carries with it (quoted in Eribon, 1991, p. 226).

Knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of "the truth" but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has real effects and in that sense at least becomes true.

Specifically, my interest is in the network of power relations which produce knowledge in the subject media studies. The focus is on the relations between the sites in which knowledge about the mass media and ways to teach it are produced and circulated: academia, bureaucracies, teacher networks and classrooms. The work will explain how, historically, discursive and institutional practices interact to construct the school subject of media studies in the selected site of Western Australia. As will be discussed in the next chapter the investigation involves an examination of multiple historical texts associated with media education: syllabuses, academic journals, newsletters, programs, student work, textbooks, interview transcripts and notes from lesson observations. In this manner I will trace the various discourses of power and knowledge in media education over time. In doing so I will foreground arguments central to this thesis. They are first that knowledge in media education has been, and continues to be, a site of contest. Secondly that knowledge, rather than being received from above, is constructed through a complex web of power relations. Finally, that that which is taught in the classroom is a product of not always principled negotiation, accommodation and compromise. That which has constituted knowledge at various times and in various locations within media education will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters which present a history of a school subject.

According to Foucault what we think we “know” in a particular period about, for example, crime will affect how we regulate, control and punish criminals. Knowledge is put to work through certain technologies and strategies of application, in specific situations, historical contexts and institutional regimes. If I apply this concept to my analysis of media studies then I can say that to understand the topic I need to study how the combination of discourse and power or power/knowledge has

produced certain conceptions of the media, of the child audience and of education which have had real effects upon what and how the subject is taught in historically specific periods.

Foucault speaks elusively about this key concept of his work. In order to clarify the way in which I use Foucault's notion of power in this thesis I will treat the concept in two ways. First I will outline my understanding of what Foucault says power is *not*, during which I will compare Foucauldian views with alternative theoretical conceptions of power in order to point to the specificities of the Foucauldian concepts. Secondly I will attempt to outline my understanding of what Foucault means by power.

Power, according to Foucault, is not properly understood as juridical law which is a repressive and prohibitive agency which transgression (or revolution) might overcome. By power, then, he is not referring to the coercion based on police power by which a ruling class suppresses other classes. The use of legislation to strip one group of citizens of their rights as the Nazi government did to the Jews, or the Australian government did to the Aborigines, is not power in the Foucauldian sense. Nor is a school's use of repressive or punitive measures such as time-out rooms, suspension or the withdrawal of privileges power in the Foucauldian sense. These are instances of the sordid, point-to-point *employment* of power but are not what Foucault meant by power.

Power in the sense used by Foucault does not refer to the vulgar Marxist conception whereby certain sets of ideas and practices are privileged over others thus constituting a dominant ideology. Marx argues that the ruling class which has the means of material production at its disposal also

has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that in consequence the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are, in general subject to it... Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the whole extent of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in their whole range and thus, among other things, rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age. (Marx and Engels, quoted in Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott, 1982, p. 22)

The traditional, economic, “scientific” Marxism encapsulated in the above represents a science of society with its own laws of social statistics and dynamics, structurally analogous to the physical sciences. It gives clear priority to the economic base and if applied to education would assert a deterministic correspondence between the structures of the educational system and the demands of the labour market (Bowles and Gintis, 1977). Post-structuralism rejects such determinism. It contends that an adequate analysis of the production and contestation of the social relations of power must look to the often unarticulated controls on discourse whose effect at any given time is “for permitting certain facts, opinions and ideas to be uttered while forbidding others” (Sturrock, 1986, p. 67).

By power Foucault is not referring to Gramscian notions of cultural hegemony, which involves the use of the law and the legitimating authority of public institutions, such as schools, to inculcate in suppressed groups the belief that they are not suppressed or that their suppression is in their own interest. Nor does Foucault understand power to be the cultural capability of the ruling classes to impose cultural norms on subject people, such as convincing the working classes that suppression of the libido was morally desirable or that homosexuality is abnormal. Foucault did not deny such examples of the blatant exercise of power but was more concerned with the positive aspects of power, its capacity to create new forms of behaviour and new codes of meaning.

Power in Foucauldian terms, might share some similarities but is not identical to, John Fiske's concept of two distinct forms of power: imperialising and localising power (Fiske, 1993). According to Fiske, imperialising power is the strong, top-down form of power which attempts to spread its influence as far as possible. Localising power is the weak, bottom up form of power which seeks to control the immediate space around it, including an individual's thoughts, feelings and sense of personal identity in the face of imperialising power. Foucault does not conceive of power as hierarchical, as flowing, or necessarily attempting to flow, from the top down. Although Foucault emphasises that power is local he does not conceive of it as a response to top-down power as does Fiske.

I will turn now to what power is in Foucault's understanding and why it is of relevance to this study. First, he says power is dynamic. It is not something that is owned nor can it be "acquired, seized or shared" (Foucault, 1981, p. 94). Nor is it a property of the dominant class or state, nor an institution but rather a relation of forces (Foucault, 1986). To view power as a property to be wielded by a person or persons is to adopt what Foucault calls a sovereign notion of power. The sovereign notion of power underpins much of the work in educational sociology which attempts to identify the ways in which the interests of particular social groups are served by educational policies, reforms, practices and curriculum (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1997, p. 302). A central premise of such studies is that society is composed of historically formed groups whose practices dominate, repress or exclude other groups. Thus, it is argued that school reform policies in fact perpetuate inequalities between classes, races and genders. The limitation of this view of power, with its inherent oppressor/oppressed dichotomy, is that it does not take into account the fact that social groups are not homogenous and that members will have multiple

identities, of which their group membership is only one. A sovereign notion of power masks the subtleties of the way in which power operates in multiple sites, acting as it does through a multiplicity of relations between various groups with multiple and sometimes conflicting agendas.

The sovereign notion of power, argues Foucault, is not applicable to society today because power in the modern era operates in a different way. He says:

Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix – no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depth of the social body. One must suppose rather that the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole. (Foucault, 1981, p. 94)

Power then is not a property but a relation of forces. This concept is particularly useful for this study of relations between the academic, bureaucratic and everyday sites having an impact on media studies. Its value is it does not assume that there is a fixed hierarchy of power by which, for example, the educational bureaucracy constantly exerts power over teachers. In Foucault's understanding, for the bureaucracy to exercise power then teachers must act or be prepared to act in response to its demand. If teachers do not act, then power has not been exercised. Similarly if the bureaucracy and teachers do not embrace a new academic theory and incorporate it into the syllabus or teaching then academia has not exercised power over education. The converse is also true. It is possible that an agent, say an academic, may exercise power unbeknown to his or her self if other agents (teachers) modify or change their practices in response to a particular theory of the academic. In other words power only exists when it is exercised and when power relationships

come into play. The Foucauldian concept of power as relational forces does not presuppose the researcher will look for and find evidence of oppression or repression in the relations between the school, bureaucratic and academic sites.

Secondly, following on from the idea that power is not owned but exercised, Foucault argues that power is dispersed, operating in particular local sites and circumstances. He says:

When I think of power, I think of its capillary form of existence, of the extent to which power seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures, their posture, what they say, how they learn to live and work with other people. (Foucault quoted in Sheridan, 1980, p. 217)

With this point in mind, then, I look not only to central education authorities as the site which like a musical conductor orchestrates movements of power, but also to sites of relative autonomy – the classroom, the professional association, the lower levels of the educational bureaucracy – in order to reveal the particular configurations of power relations. Furthermore, I do not expect to find consistent patterns. Media studies, mainly because it was and remains a small and low status subject, has been continuously engaged in finding itself a home. In different schools and at different times home has been the English department, the art department and in more recent years the design and technology learning area. What media teachers say and, in Foucault's words, how "they learn to live and work with other people" will be contingent upon their site and circumstances. The web of power relations in any site can be expected to be the result of the negotiation or accommodation of conflicting interests.

Thirdly, the networks through which power is exercised are not static. Foucault speaks of power as "something that circulates" (1980, p. 98) which is

“produced from one moment to the next” (1981, p. 93) and “employed and exercised through a net-like organisation” (1980, p. 98). At any time the configuration of power relations will depend upon “the support which force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system, or on the contrary the disjunction and contradictions which isolate them from one another” (Foucault, 1981, p. 92). This concept of dynamic networks of social alignments is useful in understanding the ways in which such diverse groups as university academics, media industry personnel, professional associations and teacher groups were at different times allies and enemies over the last thirty years in the struggle to define what media studies should be.

Finally, according to Foucault, contemporary forms of power work through ‘caring’ institutions such as prisons, hospitals and schools. In these places individuals are objects of knowledge, with their bodies, behaviours and attitudes being observed, classified, judged and recorded. The relevance of this point is twofold. First, the subject of media studies has been characterised by increasing surveillance, a surveillance that appears to have been embraced by many working in the field. There has been a steady but constant move from a position in which students were not subject to public observation, classification and judgement to one, with the introduction of the common assessment framework, where the students (and their teachers) must submit to public scrutiny. In the very early years of the subject, assessment was the responsibility of the teacher whose marks were ratified by the annual visit from a non-expert moderator from the state Board of Secondary Education. This situation changed and the Board employed a media studies expert to moderate not simply the teachers’ marks but the students’ work. In recent years another change to assessment procedures has seen schools across the state being



required to use common assessment tasks and the student outcomes being judged by a team of external subject experts. The normalising practices identified by Foucault of observation, classification, judgement and surveillance have steadily increased.

Foucault's idea of power working through caring institutions has an obscure but relevant significance for this particular study. It connects with the way in which advocates of media education have positioned the study of the mass media as a 'caring activity', as inherently empowering for the student, as being of undeniable worth to the individual. In the interviews a number of respondents juxtaposed what they saw as an uncaring, dehumanised, bureaucratic space occupied by mathematics and sciences with a nurturing, humanist, interested and invested space occupied by media studies. I am interested, therefore, in exploring the production and use of particular formations of knowledge within the context of the rubric that media education is good for students.

Following Foucault, I am concerned with "the how of power" (Foucault, 1980, p. 92). Therefore my examination of how power operates within media studies does not proceed by "starting from its centre" with the aim to discover "the extent to which it permeates into the base" (p. 99). Instead I will

conduct an ascending analysis of power, starting that is, from its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power have been – and continue to be – invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination. (Foucault, 1980 p. 99)

Thus this study will include an examination of the "micro-physics" of power (Foucault, 1977a, p. 26), that is, a study of the "infinitesimal mechanisms" through which knowledge about the media is produced and taught within "its field of

application – where it installs itself and produces its real effects” (Foucault, 1980, p. 97). By locating power at the level of “micro-physics” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 114) a Foucauldian perspective helps to “reveal that which might have been obscured by globalising theories” (Meadmore, 1993, p. 71). The notion of micro-physics then, provides a way of examining the dynamics of media education practices and the effects of power relations. Rather than assuming that teachers in schools are compelled to carry out prescribed practices handed to them via a syllabus I assume that power passes through a matrix of related sites such as administration, professional associations, publications, teachers and students. I want to identify the strategies used to exercise power and then make explicit the way in which power operates within a multiplicity of sites (McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 87).

The study is not an attempt to reveal the ideological and repressive character of official discourse but rather an attempt to examine the constitutive character of discursive practices. I will operate from the premise that Foucault posits: that it is more useful to see relations of power as dynamic, as productive and positive, and to analyse the effects and how they are achieved (Foucault, 1977a, p. 194). This conception of power holds a particular interest for me in that it allows for complexities and variations in flows of influence. I am not adopting a Foucauldian conception of power in order to recover the lost voices of teachers (or students who are also agents in the construction of the curriculum). Rather I am hypothesising that in fact teachers do wield power through their role in the construction of knowledge. I suspect that, in their practice of sometimes ignoring the authorised syllabus in favour of creating their own curriculum, and/or negotiating the curriculum with students, they are exercising tactics of power as described by Foucault.

## **Applications of Foucault to education**

The perspectives and methods of Foucault have been previously applied to education with challenging results. Specifically, the works of Cherryholmes (1988), Ball (1990), Popkewitz (1991) and Gore (1998) inform this current study. Cherryholmes explores Foucault's concept of an author-function (Foucault, 1984b) and shows how, when we use language, it may not be us speaking and nor do we control the meaning of what is said. He finds that teachers do not control their own discourses (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 34). It is the rules of discourse which govern what may be said and what may not be said, of who may speak and who may not. His argument that "truth cannot be spoken in the absence of power and each historical arrangement of power has its own truths" (p. 34) is useful in understanding why so many teachers assumed that first, media studies was the creation of an identifiable individual educator and secondly, that this person's definition of the subject was the correct and true one.

Much of my work is concerned with the analysis of various media studies syllabus documents and Ball (1990) contributed some insights. He makes an analysis of policy texts which he says are "power/knowledge configurations par excellence" because they are authoritative statements about how matters should be (p. 22). In this regard syllabus documents function in a similar manner to policy texts, they are the authoritative statement as to what constitutes the knowledge to be taught in the subject. They are, like policy documents, "textual interventions into practice" (p. 12) which attempt to delimit teachers' options as to what they might teach within the subject. Ball found that policies have effects but the effects are not always the

expected ones nor are they always in keeping with the intentions of the policy makers. I found something similar in the case of the syllabus documents.

Popkewitz (1991) challenges the assumption that educational reform equates with progress. He argues that reform does not “signify progress, in any absolute sense, but it does entail a consideration of social and power relations” (p. 2). Reform, he says, should be understood as part of the process of social regulation. This understanding resonates with my findings discussed in Chapter Five with respect to the small efforts at a reform of classroom organisation attempted by media studies teachers. Their introduction of contract learning and out-of-class learning did not emancipate students but rather established new forms of social regulation by which individual identities were organised and disciplined.

Gore (1998) tests Foucault’s concept of the micro-physics of power in four pedagogical sites, institutional and non-institutional, radical and mainstream. The sites, a physical education classroom, a first year teacher education cohort, a women’s discussion group and a feminist reading group were chosen to be representative of particular forms of pedagogy across which the normalising practices of education could be expected to vary. She found that specific techniques of power were evident in vastly different settings, even the feminist reading group which was far removed from the institution of schooling and itself informed by critiques of patriarchal power. Furthermore, she confirmed her earlier findings (1993) that radical and mainstream pedagogies might not be as different as is claimed within the radical literature. Her contribution to this study is her demonstration of the method by which the microphysics of power can be examined within specific sites.

## Limitations of Foucault

None of the above represents a wholesale endorsement of Foucault's theories and philosophy. I am aware that many respected critics have questioned the value of his work and I cannot refute all their arguments. His histories have been reproached for their factual inaccuracy (Megill, 1979, p. 451), for their lack of criteria for the selection of data (Marshall, 1990, p. 17); and his arguments for "flying in the face of empirical evidence" (Midelfort, cited in Goldstein, 1994, p. 2). Some historians view Foucault's work not as the development of a new theory of history but rather as an attack on the discipline of history itself, a "dismissal of the intrinsic value of the discipline of history" (Henretta, 1979, p. 129). Some assert that Foucault is not an historian because he does not advance historical causes nor offer a teleological unfolding of reason. "This thesis [*The Order of Things*] is meant to shock. It is a general attack against history, against the historical mentality. Foucault refuses to conceive of intellectual history as 'a process of change'" (Huppert, 1974, p. 192).

Charles Taylor says that Foucault's conception of history is as simplistic as the view it disavows:

The problem is that Foucault tidies it up too much, makes it into a series of hermetically sealed, monolithic truth-regimes, a picture which is as far from reality as the blandest Whig perspective of smoothly broadening freedom. (Taylor, 1986, p. 98)

Certainly, Foucault is not a traditional historian but he does offer historians a new framework for examining the past (knowledge/power), new tools for doing so (archaeology and genealogy) and a new concept of temporality (discontinuity). He does not narrate the evolution of the past and show how the seamless web of the past leads slowly and inexorably into the present. He is a historian of discontinuity rather than continuity. Criticisms, such as those above, would have probably pleased

Foucault given that his project, the historical analysis of discourses, was founded on an explicit objection to the concepts used in the traditional history of ideas. He regarded history (and philosophy) as a discipline: both a highly structured institution for the production of particular bodies of knowledge and an insidious exercise of power in modern society (Foucault, 1977a, pp. 186, 190).

Most of the criticisms of Foucault are in regard to his writing on power, knowledge and resistance. He has been criticised for being deliberately ambiguous and imprecise and offering an inadequate analysis of the source of power (Cousins and Hussain, 1984, p. 225). However he is arguably more concerned with the issue of how power is exercised and effective practices of power rather than from where it emanates. What is important to Foucault is the effects of the exercise of power and not the explanation of why its actions occurred or who occasioned such actions (McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 89). His analysis of power and subjectivity has been criticised on the grounds that it is too nihilistic (Rorty, 1985; Sawicki, 1994) and lacks any guidelines for normative action (Fraser, 1989, p. 32). Rorty sees Foucault as offering nothing to look forward to but:

a remoteness which reminds one of the conservative who pours cold water on hopes for reform, who affects to look at the problems of his fellow citizens with the eye of the future historian...rather than suggest[ing] how our children might inhabit a better world in the future. (Rorty, 1985, p. 172)

Sawicki, too, argues that Foucault presents a bleak vision without hope because he seems at times to evoke a disciplinary power infinitely capable of enlisting forces of resistance in the service of domination. In short, he provides no convincing account of how effective resistance to power is possible (Sawicki, 1994, p. 293).

Fraser's objection is that since Foucault:

...has no basis for distinguishing, for example, forms of power that involve domination from those that do not, he appears to endorse a one-sided, wholesale rejection of modernity as such... Clearly what Foucault needs, and needs desperately, are normative criteria for distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable forms of power. (Fraser, 1989, pp. 32-33)

Skeggs (1991) argues that most postmodern accounts are vacuous and therefore implicitly supportive of social and political inaction, complacency and unhappiness. Certainly, Foucault is less than convincing when he talks about resistance. He maintains that power is not absolute but continually contested in local sites. Wherever there is power there is always resistance (Foucault, 1977b, p. 95). To say that resistance is everywhere appears to be a glib statement rather than a political strategy. If power and resistance are everywhere how are we to evaluate one form of resistance against another? How do we decide which is reactionary and which is progressive? The only way is to introduce value judgements which would entail that we to some extent at least stand outside of power. This is not possible, according to Foucault as "the <sup>prison</sup> carceral network does not cast the unassimilable into a confused hell; there is no outside" (Foucault, 1977a, p. 301). On the other hand he makes it clear in his discussion on reverse discourse in *The History of Sexuality* that we need not stand outside power to disrupt its negative effects on our lives.

O'Regan (1992) defends what some critics see as Foucault's dereliction of political duty in not providing a blueprint for action by arguing that one can use Foucault's close historical descriptions as assembled reminders and resources for critical action and intervention (O'Regan, 1992 cited in McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 19). Foucault himself argued that critique and transformation were necessarily intertwined:

Criticism is a matter of flushing out ... thought and trying to change it; to show that things are not as self-evident as once believed, to see that what is accepted as self evident will no longer be accepted as such....

In these circumstances, criticism (and radical criticism) is absolutely indispensable for any transformation. A transformation that remains within the same mode of thought, a transformation that is only a way of adjusting the same thought more closely to the reality of things can be merely a superficial transformation.

On the other hand, as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible. (Foucault, 1988a, p. 155)

Mindful of these criticisms of Foucauldian method and theory, most especially the charge of negativity, I do not begin with Foucault's assumption that there is no future alternative to current dangers only alternative dangers (Foucault, 1984a, p. 343). While Foucault's work shows the effectiveness of dominant discourses and their techniques of power in both constituting and limiting human possibilities he also makes it clear that resistance is worth pursuing. The first step in building resistance and a platform from which to launch change is the work of this study. By understanding the discourses of media studies, by exposing their provisional status, their dependence on material conditions of a particular time, place and context and on each other, by highlighting their contradictions, fractures and transformations they can be revealed as penetrable and violable.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study, of producing a genealogy, is to "flush out" or unveil ways of thinking about media studies which have, in some cases, taken on a self-evident quality. It does not seek to provide a program or a policy for the future but it may become "an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse



what is” (Foucault quoted in Smart, 1983, p. 135). Thus the study will be a resource which might provoke transformation, a contribution to politics of engagement whereby the academic provides the activist with the necessary analysis to challenge the mechanisms of power.

The application of Foucauldian theories to education has been criticised on the basis that it invariably results in negative and pessimistic critique (Roth, 1992, p. 683). This is not however a necessary outcome of the use of some of Foucault’s ideas in an analytic framework because he directs the analyst/historian to ask not *who* determines what counts as knowledge (in this case in media studies) but *how* such a determination is made. Through an application of concepts drawn from Foucault I hope to get a little closer to understanding the nature of power made present through the production and marshalling of knowledge. In addition, his work can be used to challenge some of the key assumptions that have underpinned media education over the last thirty years. These taken for granted beliefs are that power is wielded only by certain bodies, including but not limited to the mass media and the educational bureaucracy; that the task of media analysis is to reveal hidden meanings; and that the subject continues to improve itself with the passing of time. In our acceptance of these taken-for-granted myths we, as teachers, have tended to exclude or ignore anything that does not confirm these assumptions. We present knowledge as if it were uncontested and uncontestable. Perhaps it is time to have the courage to go beyond what we ourselves and others have already thought. Foucault makes this point most eloquently:

As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity – the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks

to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeable and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks and perceive differently than one sees is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. (Quoted in Eribon, 1991, pp. 329-330).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

Eribon argues that Foucault employs a dual method, that of critical analysis and genealogy:

First the *critical* process to untangle the web of taboos, exclusions and limitations in which discourse found itself confined: then the *genealogical* process to uncover discourse in the very moment it springs up, at the very point where it makes its appearance either despite or with systems of constraint. (Eribon, 1991, p. 221 [emphasis in the original])

In my analysis of the manner by which knowledge has been constructed in media education I employ both processes. Chapter Four begins the critical process with a description and analysis of the discourses of education which made possible the introduction of a new subject called media studies into the Western Australian curriculum in the 1970s. My aim in that chapter is to identify the conditions of possibility out of which the discursive formation of media studies sprang. Therefore, I look not only to “taboos, exclusions and limitations” but also to the inclusions, spaces and openings which are to be found in such diverse and unrelated places as government reports, educational policy documents, film society constitutions, personal letters, conference programs and such like. Subsequent chapters are an application of Foucault’s genealogical process and archaeological method. Foucault’s genealogical approach to history employs archaeology to describe both discursive and non-discursive practices thereby making an essential link between knowledge and power and using this tie to explain changes in

discursive formations (Gutting, 1989, p. 271). Foucault describes genealogy as:

a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty spaces throughout the course of history. (Foucault, 1980, p. 117)

Genealogy, he says, requires “the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allow us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and make use of this knowledge tactically today”(Foucault, 1980, p. 83).

### **Genealogical method**

Despite his concerns with discourses as rule-governed systems for the production of knowledge, Foucault never applied a fixed or formal method in his analyses of systems of thought. He makes statements about his procedures in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), *The Order of Things* (1973a), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973b), *Discipline and Punish* (1977a) and in essays and interviews but does not offer a definitive, extended description of his method. In fact, his statements of method reveal subtle, sometimes gross, shifts and reconfigurations. The one text which does discuss genealogy in detail, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1977b) is more a commentary on Nietzschean genealogy than a statement of Foucault’s method. Thus the researcher who wants to use Foucault’s form of historical practice must piece together a genealogical method from the fragments offered. This is such an attempt.

Genealogy is a form of historical enquiry. It “is gray, meticulous and patiently documentary” (Foucault, 1977b, p. 139) and it “requires patience and a knowledge of details and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material” (p.

140). Genealogy is history written in the light of current concerns and from a perspective that does not assume that the present is a progress from the past. In Foucault's terms it means tracking down the ancestral heritage of influential ideas and social practices. For example, in *Discipline and Punish*, one of the more accessible of his genealogies, he explores the changes in the way society punishes. He opens with a gruesome account of the drawing and quartering of "Damien the regicide" in 1757 in which the reader is given graphic details of his execution and cremation. He goes on to demonstrate that since the eighteenth century our disciplinary practices have been transformed both in terms of the reasons why we punish and the objects upon which force is brought to bear. No longer do we torture the body with racks and thumbscrews. Now we employ various therapeutic techniques "to supervise the individual, to neutralize his dangerous state of mind, to alter his criminal tendencies ..." (Foucault, 1977a, p. 18) through social surveillance and the process of "normalisation". The social aim of punishment is no longer retribution but reform. This change according to Foucault is not evidence of our humanitarianism (Cousins and Hussain, 1984, p. 129). Rather the changes should be understood as the effects of new techniques of power which are constituted through a plethora of interactive social forces.

If Foucault were writing his genealogy of punishment today he might include the introduction of community service orders into the judicial system as another change which has little or nothing to do with progress. Community service orders require offenders to regularly present themselves before a probation officer and provide unpaid labour for selected community bodies. In the presentation of the self to the probation officer the offender takes responsibility for his or her own surveillance. Community service orders, because they supply free labour within a

non-custodial setting, make the offender responsible for the cost of his/her own upkeep (thus saving tax payers' dollars). They do this at the same time as providing for the traditional recipients of the public dollar – parks and gardens, old age homes, care centres for the disabled and so on. Work rather than rehabilitation is now a feature of the way our society metes out punishment but this change is not brought about because society is becoming more humanitarian or seeking more effective ways to reform wrong doers. This feature arises at a time when our prisons are severely overcrowded and welfare and public spending are reduced. The changes in the way in which we punish offenders, from public torture to incarceration to community service, do not mark a point in societal progress from inhumanity to humanity but a change in technologies of power.

The example above elucidates a second feature of Foucault's genealogical enquiry. In the search for an explanation of the present a genealogy pays attention to the precise, the ordinary, the sometimes mundane, historical changes that give the present its shape. This attention to small details is necessary to the purpose of genealogical study which is not to uncover a fundamental pattern that would encompass all human events. Rather history possessed of a genealogical sensitivity is faithful to the uniqueness, peculiarity and scandalous contingency of historical happenings. The intended effects of histories of the present, and this history is no exception, are to make the familiar strange, "to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident" and to "dissipate what is familiar and accepted" (Foucault, 1988b, p. 265).

This study is genealogical in that it begins its analysis from a question posed in the present (Foucault, 1977a, p. 31). The question is what constitutes knowledge

in media studies in this case and by what processes did it come to be? But, as mentioned earlier, the problem for the researcher is that Foucault does not describe his genealogical method nor elaborate its rules of application. At best he can be said to give a demonstration of the method in *Discipline and Punish* although Marshall (1990) argues that section four of the book is not in fact genealogical (p. 22).

Notwithstanding Marshall's criticism, there appear to be three key features of Foucault's genealogical method. First, there is the metaphor of descent taken from Nietzsche (Foucault, 1977b, p. 145). Foucault uses *descent* in the sense that I might claim to be descended from Irish stock meaning that there is a link going back over time. However, he warns that the analysis of descent should not be understood as a search for firm origins and unbroken lines of development:

Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity... its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form to all its vicissitudes. (Foucault, 1977b, p. 146)

Rather, he says, to trace a descent is to "maintain passing events in their proper dispersion" (1977b, p. 146) which I understand to refer to the need to respect specificity and recognise difference and discontinuity. The genealogist must commit to elaborating the uniqueness, the peculiarity and the contingency of historical happenings.

The second feature of the genealogical process is the application of an analytic grid of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1977a, 1981; Marshall, 1990).

Summarising Foucault, Marshall, says that an analysis of power relations can be achieved through:

1. Identification of the systems established by law, traditions, economic conditions, civil laws, and professional rules which bring power relations into play. In this study the existence of a central body with control over curriculum and teachers, the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students and low prestige status of the subject, its teachers and students provide conditions for power relations.
2. Identification of the types of objectives pursued by those who act upon the actions of others when power relations are brought into existence. For example, in a later chapter I discuss the ways in which the pursuit of certain progressive pedagogical objectives in media studies result in power relations through the application of surveillance procedures.
3. Identification of the means of bringing power relations into play. This study highlights a variety of ways in which power relations are activated. These tactics of power include inclusion or exclusion from the “family” of media studies teachers; surveillance and reward processes in which using media equipment is the prize for the good student; compliance with assessment requirements; and constantly and primarily, consent.
4. Identification of forms of institutionalisation. Schools are of course institutions, but the teaching profession is organised along institutional lines also. One aspect to emerge from the study is the tendency of those who are excluded from an institution, even ones as reviled as the central office of the Education Department or the tertiary entrance admission system to seek to be included and institutionalised. Thus the study finds that media advisory staff who prided themselves on their independence from the central authority lobbying to join that



institution. Similarly, media studies teachers, while professing disdain for the tertiary entrance selection system, made repeated attempts to join it.

5. Identification of the rationalisations which legitimate processes for the exercise of power. Subject knowledge, it will be seen, is a key rationalisation. Claims to subject knowledge at times constituted certain individuals or groups as authorities on the subject and became the rationale for their power to determine what constitutes legitimate knowledge in media studies. (Marshall, 1990, p. 24)

The third feature of genealogy in Foucault's application is his rejection of the philosophy of consciousness which argues that the actor makes history. Foucault de-centres the subject: "One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself ... to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework" (Foucault, 1980, p. 117). Within Foucault's method the focus of enquiry is on systems of ideas as historical practices rather than on the intentions of actors who might have been seeking to change their world. This requirement of the genealogical method is potentially problematic in relation to this thesis for a couple of reasons. The first problem is evident in the responses from past teachers gathered through interviews for the study. Almost without exception the respondents discussed their experience of the subject media studies in terms of the influence of a couple of key people, including myself, whom they regarded as personally responsible for the establishment and development of the subject area. Their narratives invariably named the Senior Media Studies Education Officer (1976-1987), Barrie McMahon, as the person primarily responsible for determining the content and shape of media studies from its inception. As will become evident in later chapters this individual is a central figure in the genealogy.

The second problem is my own role as an actor in the field along with my own memories of what it was I was trying to do in developing the subject media studies. The challenge will be to map a history of knowledge that is not a series of biographical and autobiographical vignettes and in which change can be accounted for in ways not reducible to the intents and purposes of individuals. Bill Green's study of English (1995) is of value in this respect. In his exploration of the reform of the subject English he traces both the way in which discourses around English are mobilised in professional and public arenas, and the role of key individuals in the construction of discourse.

In terms of method, in addition to *Discipline and Punish*, the work of Ian Hunter is of especial value. In *Culture and Government* Hunter presents genealogies of English and cultural criticism. In this work he argues that literary education is an apparatus of moral supervision and criticism a form of "aesthetic practice of the self" (Hunter, 1988, p. ix) with origins in German Romanticism. Cultural studies and other oppositional movements in criticism, he argues, are variant forms of the ethic of the aesthetic in that in their rejection of traditional criteria of taste the critical movements have continued to cultivate an aesthetic elitism. In *Rethinking the School* Hunter presents a genealogy of schooling which focuses on the "contingent circumstances in which the school system came into being, and on the available cultural techniques, institutions and modes of reflection from which it was assembled" (Hunter, 1994, p. xvii). He argues that the institution of the school is a product of administrative programs directed at resolving historically specific problems through the pragmatic use of practices and disciplines available.

For too long now the school system has been dwarfed by the wealth of expectation invested in it. This book offers an account of the

school not as the flawed realisation of a principle but as an improvised reality, assembled from the available moral and governmental ‘technologies’, as means of coping with historical contingency. (Hunter, 1994, p. 3)

This research tries to do something similar to that of Hunter. It does not seek to provide an account of media studies as an expression of a deep tendency or the manifestation of an underlying principle or of personal agency. Rather, it tries to offer an account of a subject which explains why it looks and sounds the way it does. In the next section I explain the background to my interest in the research question.

### **Background to the study**

My interest in what constitutes knowledge in media education and who gets to decide what counts as knowledge is neither a recent nor a selfless one. During the latter part of the seventies, early in my career, I was a teacher of media studies and English. Admittedly, Foucault discouraged biographical questions saying that he was “not at all interesting” (quoted in Eribon, 1991, dustjacket). Many times he challenged the notion of the author thereby effectively dismissing the possibility of biographical or autobiographical writing. I am not very interesting either but like Foucault (who certainly functioned like an author – he wrote articles about his own work, gave interviews and engaged in debate) I will engage in self-reflexive comment. This is not a retreat into explanatory autobiography or a partial attempt at autoethnography but an attempt to explain where my always subjective interest in subject knowledge is situated.

I took up my first teaching appointment as an English teacher in 1976 at a large suburban high school. The school streamed the English classes according to ability levels. My teaching timetable included one high ability class, and two low

ability classes. The low ability classes mainly consisted of boys with behavioural problems and my life, as an inexperienced young teacher, was miserable. In that same year the school introduced media studies as an option in lower school. The media studies classes were very public, not least because for the first three months of the year they were conducted on the verandah while part of the boys' toilet was renovated to become a darkroom. I had a lot of opportunity to observe the classes and envy the media studies teacher. His classes were smaller than mine were. He never complained about preparation or marking loads. He had no control problems, he did not yell, he did not threaten. His classes were not constrained by four walls nor his pupils confined to rows of desks. His students could wander around the school taking photographs and making videos. To me the students appeared happy and relaxed yet busy. It was a very different scene in my classes where I was required to teach literature to boys who could barely read and force them into group discussions about such uplifting themes as war, love and poverty. I wanted to escape and teach media studies. From a distance I had succumbed to the seduction of a subject that looked like a lot of fun. Fun was then, and remains today, at the forefront of public images of media studies.

My opportunity to transform myself into a media studies teacher came when the English department required a volunteer to attend a five day in-service course on media education. I was not deterred by the fact that I did not own a camera, I knew nothing about the mass media and my undergraduate majors had been in history and English. I wanted a way out of teaching compulsory English to boys who detested reading.

At the course I spent each day learning how to use a piece of media equipment. At the completion of the in-service I was a media studies teacher. On my return to school I announced that next year I would take some media studies classes. No-one questioned either my decision or my obvious lack of expertise, because after all, in the words of the Head of English “media studies was not a tertiary entrance subject”. At that stage I did not realise that the lack of concern on the part of the head of the department was a reflection of an educational discourse which positioned media studies at the bottom of the subject hierarchy, as of marginal importance in a student’s program of study and of insufficient import to warrant tight control of staffing by the central bureaucracy. At that time the issue of what to teach in media studies did not trouble me unduly. I could teach what I had been taught at the in-service and borrow the teaching programs of others. For me, subject appropriate knowledge was what those more experienced in teaching than I deigned to share with me.

My next career move, five years later, was into advisory work in media education for the Education Department of Western Australia. In this position I was responsible for curriculum and professional development. The idea of “knowledge” in media education soon became a problem. It was my task to develop curriculum materials and in-service programs in support of the syllabuses in media studies and to a lesser extent English. The problem was that the syllabuses were theoretically unsound and out of sync with the concerns of media and English teachers. They articulated a technologically determinist model of the mass media based loosely on Marshall McLuhan’s concept of the primacy of form over content (McLuhan, 1964), and yet it was issues of content which consumed teachers and students. The documents included such confusing contradictions as “it [the course] hopes to foster

active involvement as a receiver” (Board of Secondary Education, 1977, p. 244) while “the mass media environment is so powerful, so persuasive, that its effects in shaping lives and values is unprecedented in human history” (BSE, 1977, p. 241). The contradictory elements of the syllabus were becoming increasingly apparent to me, a revelation fuelled by my postgraduate studies in the field.

In the early eighties both central office media advisors, Barrie McMahon and I, had returned to part time study. Both of us were completing Master’s degrees under the tutelage of academics working in the field of semiotics and cultural studies. Although our studies were located within a university English department it was cultural studies rather than literary studies which dominated the curriculum. Through our studies we were exposed to the writings of Raymond Williams, Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, Stuart Hall and the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). In the 1970s under the directorship of Stuart Hall the Centre had moved towards the analysis of the ideological function of the media. In the view of the Centre the media were a “major cultural and ideological force ...standing in a dominant position with respect to the way in which social relations and political problems were defined and the production and transformation of popular ideologies in the audience addressed” (Hall, 1980a, p. 117). Many of the articles in the subject newsletter and handouts prepared for in-services during this period were based on the assignments we had completed in our studies. In a 1982 edition of *Little Aidem*, in what now seems to be an excruciatingly embarrassing move, we offered teachers copies of our essays on the basis that they were “extremely useful references for teachers with specific areas they need to investigate” (*Little Aidem*, 1982(1), p. 21). In early 1983 McMahon in *Proposals for the 1983-85 Triennium* proposed the “use of the academic research of the Senior

Education Officer in order to satisfy some of the immediate needs of upper school media studies and Tertiary English” (McMahon, 1983a, p. 6). This offer was rejected by the Education Department because they refused McMahon’s demand that his authorship be acknowledged. Subsequently, the work was published commercially in the form of two textbooks co-authored by Barrie McMahon and myself: *Exploring Images* (1984) and *Real Images* (1986) both of which used semiotics and cultural studies as their theoretical base.

These texts presented a model of analysis which rested on the identification of specific elements of the text grouped according to whether they referred to visual, aural or technical aspects. (See Appendixes A and B for copies of the models). The model required identification to precede “interpretation”. Interpretation was the act of identifying the symbolic or metaphoric meaning of each element identified. Teachers initially found them of value because they provided an accessible methodology for teaching textual analysis of visuals. Unfortunately the methodology often overwhelmed the purpose and students would open their written analyses with “The director uses the four codes quite well”. One of the English examiners interviewed for this study spoke scathingly of “that ubiquitous pop group – the four codes”.

The purpose of this lengthy diversion into personal history is to point out that I have at different times been the recipient of “received knowledge” in media education via the programs of others and the donor of “knowledge” through the production of curriculum materials and textbooks. In neither role have I solved the problem of what is knowledge about the mass media and what is the best way to teach it to students.

My interest in the issue of who decides what to teach about the media was further sparked in the early eighties when a media strand was introduced into the subject English in the early eighties. The policy decision to include non-print texts in the upper school English syllabus provoked extreme reactions from both media studies and English teachers. Some of the former saw it as a victory, an acknowledgement of the importance of media education made public through its inclusion in the high status and compulsory subject English. Others saw it as a defeat, a dissolution of media studies and a forced incorporation into the mainstream. For some English teachers the incorporation of non-print texts into the syllabus was simply official recognition of an existing part of their program but for others it was an imposition to be resisted. Part of my professional responsibilities was to provide in-service training on the teaching of non-print texts for teachers of English. My dilemma was over content. What was appropriate to the study of the media in English and what knowledge should be specific to media studies? How was media studies to be differentiated from English?

Thus the problem of subject knowledge, of what to teach about the media, is not a new or recent one. This study explores the problem of knowledge over the course of the subject's history through a qualitative case study.

### **Qualitative case study**

My teaching and research background is in communication, media and cultural studies and I was drawn to qualitative research for its ability to help the researcher understand people and the social and cultural contexts in which they live. In the field of media and communications I have previously conducted both qualitative and quantitative research (see Quin and McMahon, 1993). However, this



study is the first instance in which the research has been specifically oriented to education. Originally, I intended to extract a clear statement of the nature and purpose of qualitative research in education from the literature. The field proved itself to be so diverse that such an objective proved impossible. Amongst the numerous published examples of qualitative research in education the differences in topic, theory and methodology were far more numerous than the similarities. Various they described themselves as symbolic interactionist, phenomenological, action research, interpretive, ethnomethodological, descriptive, case study, critical, semiotic or narrative, depending upon whether the description referred to their philosophical perspective, research method, data sources or mode of analysis (Dey, 1993; Lancy, 1993). This cornucopia of paradigms and methods was comforting in one sense. It encouraged me to make connections between my interest in the work of Michel Foucault and my previous research experience in communications at the same time as allowing me the freedom to design a study which would best suit my objective of exploring the construction of knowledge in media education. Thus I do not begin with a definitive description of qualitative research in education but simply support the observation of Glesne and Peshkin (1992) that: “Qualitative research is an umbrella term for various philosophical orientations to interpretive research” (p. 9). Following this tradition the research draws on multiple perspectives and modes of analyses all of which can be loosely termed qualitative.

### **A case study**

This thesis presents a case study of the construction of knowledge in the subject media studies over the last thirty years. A case study is a detailed, empirical examination of one setting or a single subject or set of subjects within its real life

context (Yin, 1984). Its object of study is a specific, unique and bounded system (Stake, 2000, p. 436). This inquiry focuses on a single setting, that of Western Australia during the period from the late sixties up to the present day. The case of Western Australia has been adopted for a number of reasons. Obviously, it is the case I know best having lived and worked in the state most of my adult life. However, it is also interesting for other reasons. First, the state has been an acknowledged leader in practice and curriculum development for many years having introduced media studies as a school subject in the mid seventies and maintained the subject since that time (Pungente, 1985, p. 34; Piette and Giroux, 1997, p. 91; Kubey, 1997, p. 7; Tyner, 1998, pp. 93, 114; Rother, 2000, p. 109). Arguably a study of a leading site will be of interest to those practising and researching in the field. Secondly, this particular case is the one most likely to result in maximum data collection a vital condition of both genealogy and case study research (Schloss and Smith, 1999, p. 87). The location provides me with the opportunity to access multiple sources of data in order to provide a thick description of what has constituted knowledge in media studies (and to a lesser extent in the broader field of media education) over the last three decades in Western Australia. Through a combination of years of hoarding materials and raiding the files of friends and colleagues I have been able to collect not just official documents, but also scores of teachers' programs and notes, favoured teaching resources, newsletters, letters, and some student work dating back to the early seventies. Thirdly, while another location might offer some of these data sources it would not present the chance to use my local knowledge. As one of the very early teachers of media studies in this state I know who was involved in the subject in its early days and I include in this study interviews with some teachers who have long since left the teaching service.

A case study is both a process of enquiry about the case and the product of that enquiry (Stake, 2000, p. 436). In the next section I discuss the process while I deal with the product in the concluding chapter. The theoretical framework in part determined the process of enquiry adopted. In order to construct a genealogy of media studies in the manner discussed in the previous chapter I needed a research method which would focus on small details, allow for specificity and for which I could collect the “vast accumulation of source material” demanded by Foucault (Foucault, 1977b, p. 140). By limiting myself to a case study I was able to delimit the field of enquiry and thus able to be precise about the sort of data I needed to collect. I knew from the outset the types of documents required, their sources and the people who would need to be contacted for interviews. This I felt, and it has largely proved true, would help me to avoid too many blind alleys and fruitless months collecting irrelevant data. The case study approach has proved to be a useful methodology when an in-depth investigation is required (Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg, 1991; Stake, 2000). It is a method which demands the use of multiple sources of data, an important point for this study because I wanted to use human respondents, along with contemporary and archival sources. It is not assumed that the case of Western Australia represents other cases but it does aim to challenge generalisations about the origins of the subject media studies and insights into the issues of subject knowledge.

There have been a limited number of case studies in media education but they have made a significant contribution to definitions of best practice (Learmonth and Sayer, 1996), learning theory (Buckingham, 1990, 1993a, 1993b), and teachers’ perspectives on their work (Hart, 1998; Hart and Hicks, 1999). These studies employed such techniques as classroom observation, the recording and analysis of

classroom talk, participant interviews and focus groups. None of these case studies however has the historical dimension of this one. Therefore, although this study employs some of these modes of enquiry, it is supplemented by archival material because it is a study of change over time.

### **Scope and design**

Following Yin (1984) and Stake (1995) I began by identifying six primary sources of data which pertained to media studies in Western Australia during the period under study. Not all sources have a historical dimension because obviously direct and participant observations were limited to the present. The sources were:

- Documents – these include syllabus committee agendas and minutes, syllabus documents, annual reports, commissioned reports, official memoranda to schools on common assessment tasks.
- Archival materials from three decades of media education – teachers' programs, lesson notes, duplicated hand out material, test and examination papers, personal letters, professional association newsletters and textbooks.
- Physical artefacts - teaching resources including video and audiotapes, tape slide presentations, films, student work samples.
- Interviews - with teachers both in recorded interview situations and informally with teachers at professional association meetings and social gatherings. In addition I interviewed teacher educators, past and present, Education Department officials and media studies advisory personnel and Heads of Departments.

- Direct observation - I observed teachers giving lessons in media studies on six occasions. At other times I simply observed teachers in informal discussion about their own teaching practices without imposing questions which might guide the discussion.
- Participant observation – In order to understand teachers' views on current developments in the subject area I attended some meetings of both the Media Studies Syllabus Committee of the state Curriculum Council and the executive of the professional association as a participant observer. Participant observation provided the opportunity to share the perspective of teachers and observe their reactions to an ongoing issue such as the establishment of curriculum pathways. In addition, I used the opportunity of my own involvement as an instructor in media education professional development programs to listen to teachers' talk and question them about their responses to issues relevant to the study.

The choice of sources is not without consequences. Criticisms levelled at this type of research, particularly the use of unstructured interviews, have related to claims to truth described "as the elevation of the experiential as the authentic" (Silverman, 2000, p. 823), the same technique that makes television talk-shows so popular. In this study I do not assume that interview responses index some external reality of either facts or feelings. In the postmodernist tradition I accept that there are multiple mediations (including my own) in the creation of the text which is the interview and the challenge is to expose them, rather than hide them or pretend that they are not there. Therefore, following Silverman, I invoke more modest goals and treat the interview responses, not as truth claims, but as narratives through which people describe, and at the same time, construct their world. Thus, I use the

interviews not as evidence for a fact but as an illustration of how individuals perceived their situation, their own role and that of others. In many instances, then, I include excerpts from multiple interviews which sometimes stand in contradiction to each other. Furthermore, I do not attempt to evaluate the responses in terms of accuracy/inaccuracy or truth/falsehood but include them all on the basis that they constitute a part of the respondents' sense of self and personal history. I was acutely aware of this last point, that in some instances I was dealing, perhaps even threatening through investigation, people's life histories. Such an undertaking inevitably privileges the researcher and introduces power relations because both I, the interviewer, and the respondent knew that it was I as the author who had control over the final production of a text about someone else's life. This leads me into another issue raised by this type of research- the question of how one speaks of the other?

Often referred to as the crisis of representation the problem of how researchers represent 'others' has been a source of concern in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 1050) and postmodern theory (Tierney, 2000, p. 539). At issue here is whether a researcher can speak authentically of the experience of an other, or many others. If not, how does the researcher avoid relegating the other to being simply an object of study or a category for colonisation? Tierney provides some guidelines compatible with a postmodern perspective. First, he says, we have to work from the premise that the data collected are constructed (p. 547). Data are not simply 'out there', complete, objective and waiting to be captured by the researcher. In the acts of choosing categories, selecting the material and converting personal experiences into initially speech and then writing the researcher is shaping and producing the data. The second requirement is that the voice of the author/researcher

be heard in the work and that the voice be allowed vulnerability. Without vulnerability, he argues, “we hold on to a unified voice which is power laden and dominant” (p. 549). The third condition relates to why we write what we write. Here, he says he breaks with some strands of postmodernism because he argues that what we write must be impelled by a desire to “change the more oppressive aspects of life that silence and marginalise some and privilege others” (p. 549). Tierney’s position is not, in my view incommensurate with postmodernism. As I argued in Chapter Two, Foucault saw the task of criticism as a transformative one, “a matter of flushing out thought and trying to change it”. Postmodernist research and critique can offer people a new understanding of the conditions by which they live and work and thus the possibility of reconfiguring their lives.

Accordingly, as a postmodernist researcher I do not pretend to be either an objective observer removed from the subjects of study or a neutral interpreter of data. Of course many writers do exactly that and employ techniques such as the third person passive voice to give their work a spurious sense of objective description. In this work the problem of authorial voice is complicated further by my history of involvement with the topic and the subjects of the study. Therefore, I have chosen to speak in the first person rather than the third person voice of the analyst critic. This strategy, I hope, will emphasise my inevitable intervention, constructed interpretation and manipulation of the material. Vulnerability, in a study of this kind does not have to be assumed, it is intrinsic to the work. I am embedded in the study, as a teacher of media studies, as a curriculum adviser and now as its genealogist. My hope is that the human interactions together with the extensive archive provide a comprehensive, contextually rich, historically representative and detailed corpus of data which I and others may use for transformative purposes.

## **Data analysis procedures**

As discussed in the previous chapter the conceptual framework for analysis was based on Foucault's interpretive analytics, specifically his idea of discursive formations. Fairclough, in his application of Foucault's notion of discourse, says:

The order of discourse of some social domain is the totality of discursive practices, and the relationships (of complementarity, inclusion/exclusion, opposition) between them – for instance in schools, the discursive practices of the classroom, of assessed work, of the playground, of the staff-room). (Fairclough, 1993, p. 135)

My aim was to examine the discursive practices at work in constructing the subject media studies, and its actors, media studies teachers. In the collection, review and analysis of the data I was searching for the operating discourses. In constructing an approach to discourse analysis and a method for managing the thousands of pages of data from the archives and interview transcriptions I developed categories for the analysis of the data. The process I used was an iterative one. Initially, I developed a tentative set of categories (or topics) from an analysis of the archival data, academic journals, syllabuses and the literature review. The initial set of topics – media violence, media influence, popular culture, practical work, media theory, radical practice, assessment, critical literacy, relations with English - were established prior to the interview phase of the data collection. I framed interview questions in such a way that I would invite participants' responses to the topic. If the subject held no interest for them I did not pursue it but allowed them to determine the direction of the conversation. In this manner I used the first interview as a tool to verify the categories previously constructed. Some topics proved to be of little value, such as media violence, and I eventually discarded them while others proved themselves germane to teachers' interests. During the first round of interviews some new issues,



such as the importance of pleasure, the subject's lack of academic status, leadership in the discipline, which had not figured in my initial set of categories were raised again and again by participants. Thus as the data collection progressed I added new categories based on the participants' responses. At the completion of the interview phase I then read and re-read all the data to check for recurring topics that had not been included in the categories developed up to that time. For the second round of interviews I expanded my original set of categories and the final data analysis has been organised according to the revised set of categories.

### **Presentation of results**

Using the categories generated from the literature and the interviews I marked up the transcripts accordingly. Each mention of a topic was coded which allowed me to call up, for example, the complete range of responses to the question about course aims or each mention of the topic of practical work or make a comparison between individuals' definitions of critical autonomy. I experimented with a topical structure but in the end decided to organise the study as a history rather an analysis of discursive categories. Thus the following chapters are chronological and the key issues outlined above are treated in the manner of recurring tropes. Practical work, for example, is discussed in the context of the rationale for media studies emerging in the mid seventies, again in relation to the growth in textual analysis in the eighties and once more in relation to the introduction of common assessment tasks. I felt that in this form of organisation the reader would be better able to see the changes in discourses over time and their contribution to what constitutes knowledge in media studies at different times.

Verbal data from the interviews are presented verbatim from the transcripts made from the recorded tapes. Although this practice sometimes results in ungrammatical and even incoherent quotations it has been maintained because

Actual words people use can be of considerable analytic importance. The situated vocabularies employed provide us with valuable information about the way in which members of a particular culture organise their perceptions of the world, and so engage in the social construction of the reality. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 153)

Omissions in verbatim comments are indicated by ellipses. Omissions have occurred when inclusion would identify the speaker, might be considered libellous or the speaker was inaudible. Neither teachers nor students are identified but where their location or background related to the data or my interpretation of responses I have provided the contextual information. In cases where the respondent was a person in a formal position of authority he or she is identified by title such as Superintendent of English, Senior Media Studies Education Officer. Where names have previously been published, as in minutes, reports, letters and the like I have kept them on the basis that the information is already in the public domain.

The writing up of the research is not a value free activity. Language produces meaning, it creates but does not reflect social reality (Saussure, 1960). It follows that in the act of writing down my findings I am constructing the object of my investigation (Lather, 1994). Different languages and different discourses within a language divide up the world and give it meaning in different ways. These ways are not reducible to one another and therefore this study, written within a postmodernist framework, will construct the subject media studies differently from a study working within, for example, a positivist frame of understanding. No approach has privileged status. However, the freedom offered by a postmodernist perspective is that it allows

“us to know ‘something’ without claiming to know everything” (Richardson, 2000, p. 928). Having a partial, local, situated, historical knowledge is still knowing.

In the process of writing up the study I experimented with different ways of acknowledging my presence in some of the events and situations described while being conscious of not writing an autobiography. Some writers argue that this problem of self-investment in the subject can be overcome by bracketing. Bracketing is the setting aside of the researcher’s knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, and experiences in order to prevent personal bias interfering with the experience as described by the subjects (Lackey, 1992). Such an approach relies on a belief in the possibility of objectivity which runs counter to the Foucauldian philosophy in which this study is grounded. Other researchers argue for the use of textual strategies to make obvious the presence of the researcher. For example, Lather (1994) argues for the use of a sub-text across the bottom of each page, “a continuously running commentary” (p. 51) regarding the researcher’s own experience. Early in the writing up phase I experimented with this technique but eventually discarded it as too intrusive and self-absorbed. Finally, I settled on making my own role in events apparent when it seemed appropriate or provided further illumination of the data. This technique is modelled on Tony Bennett’s practice in his discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Open University’s cultural studies course which he had written twenty years previously (Bennett, 1998). Like Bennett I acknowledge my experience, accept that it must influence my interpretation and strive to make it a strength of the study.

In summary, the data generated through the case study method have been treated as text and discourse to which I have applied analytic approaches informed

by theoretical work of Foucault. The outcome is neither a history of the role of specific individuals in the development of media education nor a description of seminal moments in the development of a school subject. My aim has been to give an account of the way in which various discourses, those of academia, the bureaucracy and teachers compete and complement to construct that which we call media studies. The following chapters offer a qualitative, historical narrative which is partial. It may be contradicted by other and subsequent narratives.

## **Procedures**

### ***Data collection 1: Archival material***

Over a two-year period I collected a body of local historical material concerned with teaching about the media in both media studies and English. The intention in gathering the material was to analyse both official (generated by the educational authorities) and unofficial discourses about media education. Thus I distinguish between two sets of materials.

The first set of data is what I call the official data and spans the years 1972 to 1999. It is data generated by authoritative educational bodies such as the Education Department, the Board of Secondary Education, the Secondary Education Authority and the current Curriculum Council. The archive includes the Western Australian syllabus documents for media studies from 1974, 1976, 1981, 1983 and 1986. It also includes the English syllabuses from 1984 when a “non-print” or media section was included in both the lower and the upper school English syllabuses for the first time and the English Tertiary Entrance examinations from 1990 onwards (the date when the intertextual section was introduced) and back copies of *Backchat* (the Education

Department newsletter for English teachers).<sup>3</sup> Other components of the archive are the submissions seeking university entrance accreditation of 1977, 1981, 1991 and 1994; syllabus committee minutes dealing with the issue of tertiary entrance status; the annual reports from the education officer responsible for media studies from 1974-1987 (the position of Senior Education Officer media studies was abolished in 1987); and the common assessment framework and guidelines for 1996-8. These documents have been selected for inclusion in this study for the insight they give into changes in authoritative definitions of knowledge about the mass media over the last thirty or so years.

The “unofficial” curriculum archive consists of the everyday texts produced by teachers, professional development course leaders, students and the professional association of media teachers. It includes teachers’ programs, lesson notes, newsletters produced by the media advisory staff, Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) (WA) newsletters, teacher and student textbooks, student work samples, video and audiotapes from the mid seventies to the mid nineties. These materials have been collected from current teachers, ex-teachers, students, colleagues and my own personal collection. It is a motley collection based on availability and breadth of use. For example the Thames Television *Viewpoint* series of videotapes is included because many teachers mentioned the value of the resource to them in their own teaching. Other resources mentioned as of value to only one or two teachers have not been included. In collecting this material I was interested in artefacts which teachers described themselves as actually using in the course of their teaching and which they

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<sup>3</sup> The English examination included a section called Intertextual comment. This section required students to compare two texts from different media. For the most part teachers treated it as a requirement to compare a book and film.

identified as being “radical” and/or as having “worked” particularly well for them. In making such choices I was attempting to explore the specificities of the practices of media studies teaching.

The two sets of data, together with the teacher interviews and limited classroom observations, permit a consideration of the consistencies and contradictions between what is said at the official level of the curriculum and practiced at the classroom level. By reading these sets of data with and against each other I explore the history of the often contradictory nature of curriculum knowledge in media education.

### ***Data collection 2: Personal responses***

The second set of data comprises the transcripts of interviews with teachers and focus groups. Such data sources are not without their problems. Interviews and focus groups are constructed situations involving differential power relations between researcher and subject and, in most cases, an unspoken but implicit agreement about what can be said, who can be spoken of and in what terms. In this study I knew from the outset that these issues would be of great importance in the interview situation. First, I was known to all the participants, although not equally well to all, through my personal history of involvement in media education in Western Australia as an educational consultant and author of textbooks. Secondly, a key figure in the development of media education, Barrie McMahon, is still working within the state Education Department in a senior position, albeit not in media studies. In order to allay the potential fears of the interviewees I tried to give them as much information as possible via the Australian Teachers of Media (WA) newsletter and a personal letter about the research project, its methods and aims and the

function of the interviews in the final work. Similarly, I began each interview with a short explanation of my purpose: “I am exploring the ways in which knowledge about the mass media is produced in media studies/English. I am interested in your views about why you think media education is important, about what you think it is important to teach, and your own experiences of teaching media education.” The actual interviews were unstructured and varied in length and the breadth of discussion. With the exception of four individuals all teachers were interviewed twice. The first interview was used to assess their interest in a tentative list of topics and expand or contract the range of issues according to their responses. The second interview focussed on those topics which emerged from the first round of interviews as being important to the teachers and topics they were eager to discuss. The topics are discussed below in the section called data analysis procedures.

The table below summarises the categories of teachers initially selected for interview. I sought to conduct one-on-one interviews with teachers involved in the teaching of media education in the early years of the subject as well as current media studies teachers and therefore made length of experience a criterion for selection. As explained below this was not, in the end, a useful distinction.

**Table 1. Criteria for the selection of participants in the study.**

	Participants	Criteria
1	Experienced	More than 10 years teachers of upper school media studies
2	Experienced	More than 10 years teachers of upper school English.
3	New to teaching	Less than 5 years teachers of upper school media studies
4	New to teaching	Less than 5 years teaching of upper school English

The teachers interviewed were selected in two ways. I began by writing a short description of the project for the Australian Teachers of Media (WA) (ATOM) newsletter (see Appendix C for a copy of the published description). The article concluded with an invitation to teachers to contact me if they were interested in participating. This method of selecting the cohort meant that although there was no structural bias in the selection procedure there was a strong element of selectivity. Although virtually any media studies teacher was free to participate only a couple of dozen chose to do so. Those who responded provided a representative group in that they came from a wide range of schools and sites (government and private schools, Catholic and independent, mixed and single sex, middle and working class, city and rural). However this method of choosing participants was not adequate in that it limited the cohort to people currently teaching and I wanted an historical perspective. Furthermore the majority of teachers who replied had begun their teaching careers after the mid eighties and I needed to talk with some of the early pioneers in media education.

I then made personal contact, initially by telephone followed by a letter, with a small group of six teachers who began teaching media studies in the mid seventies (see Appendix D for a copy of the letter to teachers). Only three of these teachers are still involved in media education, all the others having either left teaching or moved into a different discipline area. For this reason some of the teachers interviewed although active in the seventies do not fall into any of the categories identified in the table above. They were neither new to teaching nor did they have more than ten years experience in upper school teaching. The final group of teacher respondents numbered twenty-five and ranged in seniority from a woman in her first year of teaching to a number who had been teaching for more than twenty years and some of



whom were currently holding positions as Heads of Department. The interviews were held at their convenience and generally lasted about forty minutes.

My initial criterion for determining the appropriate sample size was to sample to the point at which continued enquiry offered no new data. Because I recorded the interviews and analysed the transcripts at a later date the point of redundancy was probably reached long before I realised it. It was not until I came to analyse the transcripts that I realised that the last half dozen interviews generated no new information although this in itself was useful in confirming the universality of the issues raised in the twenty preceding interviews.

In addition to interviews with teachers I talked on at least half a dozen occasions with teacher educators past and present, past subject superintendents, past and current curriculum development officers and ex-media studies advisory personnel from the Education Department of WA. I chose to conduct in depth interviews because I was seeking a "thick interpretation ... of how social realities and constructions themselves are interpreted by their members" (Tulloch, 1989, p. 200).

As well as one-to-one interviews I conducted two focus groups, one of six and one of eight people. Like interviews focus groups enable the researcher to have access to the opinions, viewpoints, attitudes and experiences of others. But one-to-one interviews involve unequal power relations. Focus groups have proved useful to postmodernist researchers who wish to minimise the distance between themselves and their research participants. The thinking behind the move to the use of focus groups is that the group situation may reduce the influence and power of the interviewer and shift the balance of power towards the group (Madriz, 2000, p. 838).

The methodological literature makes a number of claims for the value of focus groups. Because they emphasize the collective, rather than the individual, they are seen to foster the free expression of ideas (Denzin, 1986; Frey and Fontana, 1993). Secondly, the literature suggests that potentially insightful communications occur in focus groups as a result of participant interaction. It argues that participants will often expand on experiences recounted earlier, add new information, and/or give the experience a new and sometimes different interpretation (Williams, Rice and Rogers, 1988, p. 38). Thirdly, an analysis of the interaction in a focus group can reveal the shared language on the topic; the taken-for-granted beliefs and attitudes; the sources of information people call upon to justify their views and the types of information which stimulated changes of opinion or reinterpretation of experiences. These were my purposes in holding focus groups in which I acted as a participant observer but not all were achieved.

In fact the groups were affinity groups in that the members knew each other more or less well prior to the focus group experience. Given the size of the media teaching population in Western Australia it would have been impossible to structure a focus group that was not an affinity group. Affinity groups offer certain advantages over focus groups which employ strangers. In an affinity group the participants do not spend most of the research time trying to get to know each other, establishing some sort of pecking order or laying claim to a specific role. I was able to observe the participants sharing ideas and concerns, comparing experiences and sometimes debating with each other. On the other hand, in practice, the use of an affinity groups raised other problems. A number of the participants already knew, or pretended to know, the views of some of the other members and were not receptive to hearing them again. Occasionally some participants were dismissive of the views of others

and even when nothing was actually said the negative body language conveyed the message. Although the influence of the power relations between the researcher and the participants may have diminished other power hierarchies were quickly established within the group. The older and more experienced teachers dominated the discussion and this appeared to constrain the contributions of the younger and less experienced teachers. A final and minor point is that the transcripts were difficult to work with in that the speakers often left sentences unfinished because someone else interrupted and took the conversation off in a different direction.

As with interviews, the status of what is said by participants in focus groups is always problematic and I treated the responses in the same way as I treated the interviews. I pushed aside questions of the accuracy and truth of recollections and accepted the subjectivity and selectivity of statements. The material gathered in interviews and the focus groups reveals memories to be suspect (or at least different from mine) and stories to be incoherent and often contradictory but nevertheless valuable in illuminating points at which differences arise between official versions of the subject media studies and what teachers (and educational bureaucrats) think constitutes appropriate subject knowledge.

Throughout this phase of the data collection I kept a journal (see Appendix E for excerpt). One of the dangers of participant observation is that the researcher may cease to think of herself in that role and begin to adopt the perspective of the group under study (Denzin, 1978, p. 185). This possibility was of especial concern to me given my own history of involvement in the subject area and the fact that much of the time I spent in the teachers' meetings was spent devoted to discussion of survival tactics for the subject. The journal served as a means by which I could distance

myself from the participants in the study and reflect upon my own experiences of the interviews, the classroom observations, the syllabus committee and the professional association meetings. After every interview and meeting I wrote up a brief description of the participants and their reactions during the course of the interview, notes on aspects of the session that I found particularly interesting or perplexing and prompts for issues that I wanted to follow up with other participants. With so many transcripts to work through and the time lapse between the interviews and the analysis of data I knew that I would forget the “flavour” of the individual interactions.

### ***Data collection 3: Academic discourses***

One aspect of this research is to ascertain whether knowledge in the subject media studies reflects academic knowledge and research about the mass media. To answer this question I needed to identify sources of academic knowledge which were stable and verifiable. The sources selected were the journals *Screen Education* and its parent journal, *Screen*, published by the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT) in the United Kingdom. *Screen* aimed to “introduce and develop a coherent and systematic theory of film” (Alvarado, 1977, p. 49). *Screen Education* had “the professed aim of relating film theory, educational theory and the actual process of teaching film and television” and was concerned with “the concrete practice of conveying knowledge to (often reluctant) learners” (p. 49). Both journals aimed to investigate the discourse of both writing about film (and later television and other forms of media) and teaching about it, to uncover the relationships within each between theory and practice, and to relate this to the wider concerns of a progressive or radical politics.

Writing about the cinema and teaching about it ought to be thought through together. Teachers needed to be clear about what it was they were teaching and why. Theorists in turn...needed a meaningful social context for the knowledge they produced. (Alvarado, Buscombe and Collins, 1993, p. 3)

*Screen Education* consistently espoused the need for media study in schools on the basis that it offered “contradictory possibilities” to those of the academic curriculum (Collins, 1976, p. 170). Media studies was to be a tool by which radical educators could challenge the conservative constructions of school knowledge and authoritarian classroom relations. This was possible because media studies used and valued out-of-school knowledge: “The subject as a closed system of knowledge can be undermined by the stress laid by media studies on the continuity between what the pupils study in the classroom, and what they watch and use out of school” (Greal, 1975, p. 18). The choice of *Screen* and *Screen Education* as the benchmarks for disciplinary knowledge and theory is justified first on the basis that these are two journals published in English which theorise both education and study of the media. Secondly, in the preliminary interviews conducted with teacher educators of the seventies and eighties *Screen* and *Screen Education* figured prominently in their discussion of how they approached the training of teachers of media studies. So while the *English Magazine* and journals of the National Association of Teachers of English (all British publications) met the first criteria they were not influential in Australian circles.

My objective in identifying the broad concerns of the discipline is to determine whether the authorised syllabuses and the curriculum as practised in media studies reflected, lagged behind or moved ahead of academic theory at various times over the last thirty years.

#### ***Data collection 4: Classroom observations***

The data sources described above consisted almost entirely of educational authority figures – syllabus committees, consultants, academics, commercial publishers and teachers. I was mindful of Connell’s proposition that students engaged in the teaching and learning process are key actors in the education process (Connell, 1985, p. 30) and Measor’s point that we need to include student viewpoints because they are after all the “‘consumers’ of curriculum knowledge” (Measor, 1984, p. 201). I did not want to discount the role of the student in influencing what is actually taught in the classroom and I initially intended to use classroom observations and interviews with students in the study. In this manner I hoped to provide a limited account of the ways in which students influence the construction of knowledge about the mass media in the classroom. Although I conducted the classroom observations and interviewed some students during the data collection phase of the study I have not used this material in the final analysis. It was a difficult decision to make. On one hand, the observations were rich in the detail of everyday life in the classroom, personally rewarding and gave me an insight into the values and expectations of a group of seventeen year-olds in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the other hand, however, they presented incomparable data in that I had no systematic observations from earlier periods with which to compare and contrast the material. Although I had been in team teaching situations in the seventies and eighties and therefore seen other media teachers in action, I could not with honesty, call these experiences observations. Similarly, the interviews with current students provided me with isolated information but I had nothing with which to compare it. There were no extant interviews with media studies students from previous times and the current students could not even reflect on their own past experiences in the subject given

that most of them had only been studying media studies for one or two years. In the end, I decided that to include the classroom observations as a data source would dangerously skew the study and compromise its integrity. Of course, I have not forgotten what I saw while conducting the observations and I do make passing reference to teachers' classroom behaviours in Chapter Seven. However I restrict myself to comparisons with behaviours I can confidently assert that I have observed in myself and others in earlier years. It is to be hoped that future research in this field might plan for longitudinal observations.

## **Doubts**

At the core of postmodernist thinking is doubt – doubt that any method, theory, tradition, genre or discourse can claim to be a “right” or privileged form of authoritative knowledge (Richardson, 2000, p. 928). This is not to say, however, that all ways of knowing and telling are false, it simply says that they are partial. In the case of this study what knowledge I come to through the research act is not only partial but local, historical, specific, situated and incomplete. It is knowledge of media studies in Western Australia, over a relatively short historical period, produced by someone writing from a particular position at a specific time. The research is necessarily incomplete by virtue of its bounded archive, its restricted number of participants, its lack of classroom data and its cessation at the precise point at which media studies stands at the crossroads in terms of its future as a school subject.

Absences are always significant. The reader will note the lack of discussion of those mainstays of media studies: class, gender and race. It was not that such issues were unimportant in media studies. The analysis of the media in terms of its

representation of class, gender and race has been central to the subject since the early eighties. In the context of this study issues of class, gender and race represent a route considered but not, in the end, explored. They offer fruitful possibilities for further research. For example, a case could be made for arguing that media studies in government schools was a subject for the working class in that it was largely these students who enrolled in subjects, such as media studies, which did not qualify them for university entrance. Issues of gender equality and equity of access are never far from the surface in a subject in which production is so central. Personal experience and observation suggests that in the media studies classroom access to, and control over, the media equipment was and remains a gendered struggle. Aboriginal education and Aboriginal student participation in media studies is, unfortunately but of necessity, not addressed in this study because the focus of the study is on media studies in the post-compulsory years of schooling. According to Down (1997) in 1960 there was one Aboriginal student in Year 11 and one in Year 12 in Western Australia (p. 158). In 1985 there were 249 Aboriginal students in Year 11 and 61 students in Year 12. By 1993 the numbers had grown to 470 in Year 11 and 226 in Year 12 (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994, p. 65). However, in 1993 Aboriginal students represented only 0.4 per cent of the year 11 cohort and 0.76 per cent of the Year 12 cohort (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1995, p. 43). So although much was written and said in media studies classrooms about the representation of Aboriginal people (and to a lesser extent the development of indigenous media) it was done in their absence.

A second tenet of the postmodernist endeavour is the requirement for reflexivity, the need to know the self. Although painful at times, this study has been the site and subject of discursive struggles for identity, both of my own and others



with an investment in media studies. This struggle is not and never will be over because we remain individuals subject to competing discourses in many realms and so our subjectivity is always shifting and contradictory. And of course, our experiences, memories and interpretations will always be open to contradictory interpretations governed by other interests and other discourses.

Notwithstanding these doubts however, we are, as Richardson says “fortunate, now, to be working in a postmodern climate” because we are freed from the need to try “to write a single text in which we say everything to everyone” (p. 928). Accordingly this study is limited to an investigation of the construction of knowledge in media studies in a single site, Western Australia, from the time of the inception of the subject to the present day. Using a qualitative case study method together with Foucauldian interpretative analytics I examine questions of knowledge and power in the curriculum. The work is structured as a genealogy of the subject media studies. The next chapter commences the genealogical process in that it examines those discursive formations which enabled the introduction of a new school subject, media studies, in Western Australia in the 1970s.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY

The genealogy of media studies in Western Australia commences with this chapter. A genealogy, or as Foucault described it in his later writings, “an eventalised analysis” posits the singularity of the phenomenon, its radical contingency and the possibility it could be otherwise (Foucault 1991, p. 77). In the Foucauldian sense “events” include practices and statements. An event he says:

... is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked ‘other’. (Foucault, 1977b, p. 154)

The genealogical method requires that the conditions of possibility of the phenomenon under examination be identified. These conditions are manifested through discursive formations and relations (Foucault, 1972, pp. 31-35). The first part of this chapter examines those discursive formations which made the introduction of a new subject possible and, while not absolutely determining what that subject might be nor its specific character, marked certain boundaries. I argue that these discourses created a condition in which the “masked other”, a new subject, could gain entry. Taking the first proposal for the introduction of media studies as my starting point I trace key terms in the document back to the discourses which gave rise to it. The second part of the chapter identifies discourses operating outside the boundaries of formal education and schooling which contributed to a condition in which media studies might be accepted as a valid addition to the school curriculum by teachers, bureaucrats and the public. The latter, I suggest, were formed “at the

level of tiny local events where battles are unwittingly enacted by players who don't know what they are doing" (Hacking, 1986, p. 28). The historical analysis of the discursive formations of the early seventies reveals the play of power relations and the application of mechanisms of power behind the introduction and characterisation of a new school subject. The final section compares the findings of the first part with the traditional arguments concerning the roots of media studies discussed in Chapter One.

In a postmodernist tradition this chapter offers multiple lines of explanation through the description and examination of a dispersion of events and thereby deliberately sets out to challenge the idea of a grand narrative underpinning the origins and development of the subject.

A discursive formation in Foucault's understanding is a dispersion of (not necessarily linguistic) statements at different levels which can be identified as a unity if one can delimit the conditions and rules which govern that dispersion:

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statements, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity...we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation. (Foucault, 1972, p. 38)

This concept then permits the analyst to identify as discursive formations sets of statements which may or may not refer to the same object, or be enunciated in the same manner, or share a constancy of concept or support a common theme as long as one can discern a regularity. This regularity might be:

an order in their successive appearance, correlations in their simultaneity, assignable positions in a common space, a reciprocal functioning, linked and hierarchised transformations. (Foucault, 1972, p. 37)

The value of this concept of discursive formations for this study is the freedom it offers the analyst. It not only allows but also encourages me to explore relations between discourses which on the surface might seem unrelated. Thus in this chapter I explore the discursive relations between such diverse fields and sources as education, leisure, population growth, examination policies, social justice and pedagogical innovation. However before engaging in a historical analysis of discourses surrounding the emergence of media studies it is necessary, because this chapter deals with the past, to raise some issues of history and historical method.

Foucault distinguished between two types of history. Traditional history or “total history” is a process of discovering unities and principles. It supposes that “history itself may be articulated into great units – stages or phases – which contain within themselves their own principles of cohesion” (Foucault, 1972, p. 10). Its method is to uncover realms of commonly recognised facts and dated events, the documents of history, and its task is to put them in relation to each other in order that the past can be reconstituted to form a totality (p. 7). In this understanding of the writing of history the historian is a bit like the player with the jigsaw: he collects all the pieces, groups them according to colour or shading and then fits them together so they form a complete picture.

“General history” (or effective history as Foucault calls it in his genealogical studies) abandons the project of reconstruction and unification. It is “without constants” (Foucault, 1977b, p. 153). The object of analysis in this form of history is the “population of events in the space of discourse in general” (Foucault, 1973a, p. 27) and its focus is on the mutual relations between systems of truth and modalities of power. In this conception the writing of history is the analysis of discursive

formations which produce truth claims. In the context of this study it is the investigation of those discursive formations which contributed to particular definitions of what constituted media studies at any point in time. This task of producing an effective history of media studies begins with an examination of discursive formations which anteceded the actual introduction of the subject. Multiple sources of data have been examined for evidence of the discourses of the period. One source of data is government and educational reports preceding the introduction of the subject. Another source is the recollections, gathered through interview, of people teaching in the sixties and early seventies in Western Australia.

In 1973 the recipient of the 1972 Education Department Overseas Study Fellowship, Barrie McMahon, circulated a document calling for the introduction of a new subject into the Western Australian curriculum (McMahon, 1973a). In the report McMahon described the aims of this new subject, media studies, as:

- (i) to promote an understanding of media and an awareness of its (sic) impact upon the individual and society.
- (ii) to develop the ability of the student to use the media:
  - as a tool
  - as a means of communication in understanding educational material
  - as a means of self expression
  - as a facilitator for group activity
  - as a means of re-examining the conclusions that emerge from more conventional starting points

- (iii) to promote aesthetic awareness of the meaning of the emerging art form in media. (pp. 1-2)

He stressed that the subject should have “fundamentally a student involvement approach” (p. 3) and that the “traditional format of teacher dominated classrooms with passive students in desks is impractical” (p. 7). He pointed to recent changes in the education system as providing a space for a new subject:

The abolition of an examination system to the third year level, should allow for greater flexibility in the use of educational tools by the students, timetabling across age subject and ability levels, and structure of courses. (McMahon 1973a, p. 2)

Although commencing the genealogy of media studies with this document, I am not suggesting that McMahon’s report caused the introduction of the subject. Rather I am using it to point to the discursive formations around politics, economics and education circulating in the 1970s and harnessed in a small way in McMahon’s proposal in such key terms as flexibility, relevance, aesthetics and student involvement.

### **Discourses of emancipation**

McMahon’s proposal for the introduction of media studies refers to the abolition of an examination system. Public examinations in Western Australia date from 1895 when the independent schools entered their students into the University of Adelaide entrance examinations (Education Department of Western Australia, 1978a, p. 171). In 1913 the inaugural university, the University of Western Australia, enrolled its first students and in 1915 the Public Examinations Board was

established<sup>4</sup>. It consisted of the Vice Chancellor of the University of Western Australia, seven professorial representatives from that university, three Education Department members and five independent school representatives (White, 1975, p. 65).

The list of subjects set for public examinations and hence for study in schools in the 1960s was, with the exception of the amalgamation of history and geography into social studies, little different from that of the 1920s (Education Department of Western Australia, 1969, p. 35). Despite massive changes in the nature of the society, the conception of what constituted worthwhile knowledge had changed little in the intervening fifty years. The Schools Commission, two decades later, described highly valued knowledge in the 1960s as:

knowledge which is the province exclusively of the mind; divided by its own logic into the boundaries of disciplines, represented by subjects in the school curriculum and by faculties in school organisation; having an existence independent of the knower: the preserve of a select few, for whose membership there must be competition; acquired by instruction, its acquisition assessed by norm-referenced testing. (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987, pp. 19-20)

While inclusion in the public examination system was the determinant of worthwhile knowledge there was a clear hierarchical division between the knowledge contained within the high prestige academic subjects and that within the low prestige pre-vocational ones. While subjects such as woodwork and typing were examined for the Junior Certificate they were clearly marked out as being of a different order to subjects such as English, mathematics and science. The difference

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<sup>4</sup> The Public Examinations Board was responsible for setting and marking two secondary school examinations. The Junior Examination was held at the end of the tenth year of schooling and the Leaving Examination on completion of the twelfth year.

was signified by their exclusion from the list of subjects examined for the Leaving Certificate at the end of Year 12 and the streaming practices of schools. By the second year of high school students were normally divided into those undertaking an academic course of study and those undertaking a “general” one, more usually called the “technical” course for boys and the “commercial” course for girls. While the timetable for students in the general course substituted pre-vocational subjects for some of the more difficult academic ones, the students were still required to study many of the same subjects as their more academic peers. The outcome was that the knowledge constructed in Western Australian schools until 1970 was worthwhile only if it was examined and it was examined only if it could be slotted into the existing definitions of the academic or the pre-vocational.

A series of official reports, prompted by concerns about the social and financial cost of the public examination system, were published between 1963 and 1969. The number of students sitting the public examinations increased markedly in the 1960s. In the seven-year period 1957-1963 the number of public examination candidates rose from 7,566 to 16,138 (Petch, 1965, p. v). High numbers of failures (the actual rate remained constant) came with the increase in the number of students sitting the examinations (Gentilli, 1963, p. 40). Failure in the Junior Certificate had a significant impact on future employment prospects because children who did not have a Junior Certificate were ineligible for permanent employment in the State Public Service, banks or insurance companies (Down, 1997, p. 36). As early as 1957 the Public Examinations Board had expressed its concerns with the system and its ability to cope with the influx of candidates. It was worried about the availability of suitable examiners, the costs, the lack of administrative staff and the desirability of having a body with autonomy relating to matters of secondary education (cited in



Down, 1997, (p. 37) quoting from a letter from the Chairman of the Public Examination Board Professor C. Sanders to the Vice Chancellor of UWA in 1957).

During the sixties the educational value of the public examination system came under mounting criticism. Most of the complaints were focussed on the level of control the examination system exerted over what was taught in schools. At a conference in Perth in September 1960 the Superintendents of Secondary Education expressed their dissatisfaction with the restrictions imposed on the curriculum by external examinations and argued for the introduction of a broad liberal education (Down, 1997, p. 37). The evident dissatisfaction with the current system led to a series of reports into secondary education which were to have far reaching effects on schools and schooling in Western Australia. With the exception of the Petch Report, they recommended abolition of the external examination system for fifteen-year-olds and a broadening of the secondary curriculum.

### **The Robertson Report: The Committee of Inquiry into Secondary Education 1962-63**

The Education Department's initial response to concerns with the curriculum and the number of failing students (Education Department of Western Australia, 1969, p. 34) was to commission what became known as the Robertson Report (1963). The Report affirmed the principle of secondary education for all regardless of ability and in this context addressed the issue of public examinations. The discontent felt by teachers and administrators with the external examination system was outlined in the report:

The requirements of public examinations have tended to dominate courses for all secondary students, both academic and non-academic, which means that the majority of secondary students are studying courses, many of which are unsuited to their needs since they were designed for the small percentage proceeding to the

Leaving Certificate and the University. (Quoted in Education Department of Western Australia, 1969, p. 33 from The Secondary Schools' Curriculum Committee (1957-58), Chairman Dr. T.L. Robertson)

The Robertson Report recommended that “a research project involving a limited number of Government and independent schools be carried out to assess the practical implications of a cumulative assessment scheme” (Education Department of Western Australia, 1963, p. 23). Specifically the Report recommended that the Junior Certificate, be replaced with a cumulative record of achievement controlled by the school. In 1964 the Cumulative Certificate Research Project was initiated in four government secondary schools - Applecross SHS, Bunbury SHS, Busselton SHS and John Forrest SHS. In 1966 the name changed to Achievement Certificate.

The significance of the Robertson Report to the proposal for the introduction of media studies is in its identification of the need for relevance in a curriculum currently “unsuited” to the needs of the “majority of secondary students”. Some years later media studies was to be discussed in terms of its fit to the needs of the non-academic student.

### **The Petch Report: A Report on the Public Examination System in Western Australia (1965)**

Shortly after the publication of the Robertson Report the Petch Report (1965) was released. The University of Western Australia, on the advice of the Public Examinations Board, had commissioned this report. Petch was secretary to the Joint Matriculation Board of the Universities of Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham and visited Western Australia for six weeks in 1964 at the invitation of the University of Western Australia. Not surprisingly, given his role in Britain, Petch recommended the retention of external examinations. In the preamble

to his report he says: "In considering the present examination system of Western Australia I have consistently looked at it with a view to possible modification only, never with a view to its abolition" (Petch, 1965, p. 1). The current examination system he argued was "the only reliable bulwark against privilege and patronage" (Petch, 1965, p. 1). He did however argue for a more extensive examination system which would serve two purposes. It would enable certification of a minimum level of achievement and function as a selection device for higher education.

The Petch report warned specifically against the type of curriculum reform recommended in the Robertson Report:

Many of the subject syllabuses authorised by the Public Examinations Board are presented in great detail, indicating not only what is to be taught but also the order teaching should follow. ... School teachers in Western Australia generally seem to me to be sensible of the extravagance of the claim that, by the very fact of his teaching in a school, each teacher is fully competent to design a syllabus ideally suitable for each group of his pupils, to teach by those syllabuses and to evaluate the consequences of his teaching by himself examining his pupils on what they have learnt under his instruction and guidance. (Petch, 1965, p. 3)

White (1975) describes the Petch Report as the turning point in the movement to revise public examination policies (p. 64). The Petch Report reflected the tradition of elitist attitudes towards university entry which had dominated the Western Australian education system but it was a tradition in its death throes.

The Petch Report is discussed here because it foreshadowed the significant changes to the upper secondary English syllabus to be made some years later. He urged that the Junior Examination be modified so as to examine English Literature and English Expression separately (Petch, 1965, pp. 9-10) and that the Leaving Examination should follow suit.

In the Leaving Examination the division of the present subject English into two separate subjects, English Expression and English Literature, is even more desirable than it is at the Junior level.

...But no-one can justify the claim that all students in a high school, arts or science or technology or professional students alike, should be called upon to grapple successfully with the specialising methodology and jargon of English Literature as a subject of academic, or near academic, standard. (Petch, 1965, pp. 14-15)

In fact English was split into two subjects at year 12 level: English expression and English literature. The existence of the discrete subject of English literature was to ensure that English in the Western Australian education system was never the scene of major battles between the traditionalists and the reformers. Those who wanted to retain the literary canon were secure in literature while those who wanted introduce popular literature and non-print media could find a space in English.

### **The Neal Report: The Secondary School Curriculum (1964)**

The Neal Report was requested by the Education Department of Western Australia but was prefaced by the rider that the report did not represent the views of the Education Department. The report described the fundamental deficiencies of the Junior Examination system and argued that the examination was no longer relevant to the needs of contemporary society. The Report listed the deficiencies as first an emphasis on academic subjects to the detriment of so called non-academic subjects. Secondly, it argued that the system forced students to make a choice of subjects too early in their schooling and it failed to provide sufficient detail on a child's performance at school. The Report concluded that the public examination system went against established findings in the field of educational learning (Education Department of Western Australia 1964, pp. 15-17). In support of the Robertson Report, Neal advocated a restructuring of the first three years of secondary education

and the introduction of cumulative internal assessment. These recommendations were to be supported by yet another report five years later, widely known as the Dettman Report (1969).

Of significance in the Neal Report was its concern that non-academic subjects (the label under which media studies was to be later introduced) should not disappear from the curriculum. The Report expressed concerns that the Junior Certificate's requirement that students study a narrow range of academic subjects was in danger of pushing non-academic subjects out of the curriculum.

### **The Dettman Report: Secondary Education in Western Australia (1969)**

The Education Department of Western Australia commissioned the Dettman Report. Its tone was challenging and progressive.

Secondary schools freed from the restraints of external examinations should be able to concentrate on the broad aims of education directed towards the promotion of each student's intellectual development. (Education Department of Western Australia, 1969, p. 1)

The report identifies these "broad aims" as integration into society, physical and mental health, economic competence and emotional and spiritual growth (p. 1).

In a similar vein to the Robertson Report six years previously the Dettman Report criticised the domination of the Public Examination system. The Report charged that such a system exalted written skills over speaking skills and promoted memorisation and factual mastery at the expense of understanding (Education Department of Western Australia, 1969, p. 103). The examinations, it said, had become the end in themselves:

Secondary education in Western Australia has long been dominated by the requirements of external examinations. Indeed it could be stated that the basic aim of secondary schools has been to enable students to pass the examinations conducted by the Public Examinations Board and so qualify for the Junior and Leaving Certificates. (Education Department of Western Australia, 1969, p. 1)

The control exerted by the external examination system over the secondary curriculum is attested to by teachers from that era. A retired Superintendent of English recalls teaching in the sixties:

The Junior Exam was the syllabus. Education was product not process. Teachers studied the Junior Exam to find out what they had to teach in order to get the kids to pass. I've had eminent and highly respected teachers tell me that our job was to get as many kids as we could through the Junior and you could see that in a sense they were right. That was what gave them their best chance in life. (Interview with P. Gunning, July 10, 1999)

The Report went on to recommend the discontinuation of the public examinations and their replacement by a system of continuous assessment conducted by the schools.

Because of their fallibility and the restraints which they place on curricula and teaching methods, external examinations should be discontinued and replaced by internal school assessments. The last Junior Examinations should be conducted in 1971 and the last Leaving Examination in 1973. (Education Department of Western Australia, 1969, p. 104)

Other recommendations in the Report which were to radically change lower secondary education were:

- the differentiation of courses in secondary schools according to student ability to enable all students to experience challenge and success to the greatest extent possible (p. 67).

- the establishment of a Board of Secondary Education to exercise a general overview of the secondary curriculum and to be responsible for the award of certificates of secondary education based on internal school assessments (p. 107).
- the provision of standardised tests and the appointment of moderators to ensure comparability between schools (p. 109).
- the expansion of optional subjects and the production of curriculum suited to the educational needs of the students. The recommendation was supported by the observation that:

Secondary schools contribute to the achievement of the aims of education through appropriate courses of study. There are probably many courses through which the aims could be implemented and it is not our intention to specify one course which all schools would be required to follow. However, there are certain basic principles to be derived from our knowledge of child development, the process of learning and the nature of society which we would believe would be a feature of all courses of study. Within this framework, schools should be encouraged to design their own courses, or adapt other courses, to suit the particular needs of their students (p. 64).

The Dettman Report was critical in opening up a space in which a subject such as media studies could be imagined. First, in its recommendation that secondary school subjects should be differentiated according to student ability it allowed for the development of subjects targeted specifically at the less able student. Secondly, in its valuation of skills other than those of writing and memorisation it opened the way for subjects like media studies which would neither rely upon, nor promote, traditional literacy skills. Thirdly, and most significantly, the Report shifted the power to construct knowledge in certain subjects from the central bureaucracy to the schools: “schools should be encouraged to design their own courses, or adapt other courses, to suit the particular needs of their students” (Dettman, 1969, p. 64). In

practice the control of subject knowledge in subjects such as mathematics, languages, English, social studies and science remained with the educational bureaucracy. Schools developed their own courses in non-core areas such as vocational studies, human relations, art and health.

Six years after the first report on examinations and with three consensual reports in the interim, the Education Department of Western Australia accepted the Dettman Report and in 1971 external examinations for 15 year olds were abolished. In interview a former subject superintendent said that the delay in implementing the recommendations to abolish the Junior Certificate and implement an Achievement Certificate was the product of the public's lack of trust in teachers. He believed that the public "wouldn't let it go. The public perception was that you couldn't trust teachers. You had to have an exam to show whether they were doing any good or not" (Interview with P. Gunning, July 10, 1999).

The Junior Examination was replaced by a system of cumulative/continual assessment at the school level called the Achievement Certificate. The Board of Secondary Education, which was established early in 1970, administered it. The Achievement Certificate was organised around four compulsory subjects – English, mathematics, science and social studies plus optional subjects. The four core subjects were divided into three discrete levels of Advanced, Intermediate and Basic with the exception of mathematics in which two levels Elementary and Ordinary replaced Intermediate. In reality there was a fourth division in that the Achievement Certificate required that two per cent of the year cohort would receive "no award". Levels were not based on specific criteria for achievement but a state wide normal distribution of abilities of 25 per cent Advanced, 50 per cent Intermediate, 23 per



cent Basic and 2 per cent No Award (Education Department of Western Australia, 1969). The Leaving Certificate was replaced by an external Tertiary Admissions Examination which was controlled by a joint committee from all the Western Australian tertiary institutions.

Public sector research reports tend to be presented by their commissioning agents as the unbiased outcome of a reflective consideration of the question at hand yet they invariably begin from a set of questions or issues provided by the commissioning body and frequently those who must be consulted are nominated by the same body. Thus although the reports discussed above ostensibly discuss the same topic – the ideal form of lower secondary education and assessment – they anchor their mandate differently. The Robertson Report focuses on the needs of students; the Petch report on the needs of a single university; the Neal Report on educational reform; and the Dettman Report on the needs of the sector and students. On the other hand three of these reports, Robertson, Neal and Dettman, originated in the same institution, namely the Education Department of Western Australia. Not surprisingly then, they reflect similar discourses of progressive educational thought to do with catering for students needs, recognising and valuing diversity and limited decentralisation of curriculum control and evaluation.

With the exception of the Petch Report, the other official statements about the external examination system recommended that it be abolished. The reports framed their advice in terms of an urgent need to liberate schooling, and thus students, especially the less academically able, from the restrictive domination of external examinations. They advocated a shift in the power to determine curriculum away from the universities, which set the examinations, and into the schools which

could be expected to know and meet the needs of their particular students (Education Department of Western Australia, 1969, p. 64). Following the introduction of the Achievement Certificate schools were given the freedom to introduce optional subjects, specific to the needs of their students, to complement the core of English, mathematics, science and social studies. Syllabuses were developed at school level and submitted for accreditation to the newly created Board of Secondary Education. Media studies was a subject which fitted the new liberal discourse of education. First, it favoured the practical over the theoretical and was thus seen to be appropriate for the less academically able who had been marginalised within the examination system. Secondly, it presented itself as relevant to the lives of students in that it dealt with contemporary popular culture.

The discursive formations around the liberalisation of the curriculum both enabled and constrained media studies. While the decentralisation of curriculum control made it possible for schools to introduce media studies as an option under the Achievement Certificate and many schools did so it also defined the sort of subject that it must be. Core subjects as defined in the new system were the academic subjects, non-core (with the exception of languages) were non-academic subjects. Thus media studies was from the outset a non-academic subject which, as will be discussed later, constrained the sort of knowledge deemed appropriate to the subject.

The replacement of an “examination” discourse with one that emphasised liberation of the curriculum and flexibility in its design is not an unproblematic case of educational reform and progress. Although the locus of power shifted and the mechanisms changed a little, there was no change in either the application or the purpose of technologies of power. The Junior Examination, the displaced technology

of power, was part of a legal apparatus which distinguished between subjects on the basis of academic outcomes. This structure was abolished and in its place was created a new legal framework with a new technology of power, the Achievement Certificate, a tool by which students could be even more finely distinguished. The Junior Certificate used an outcome measure, the examination, to distinguish between two groups, those who passed and those who failed. The Achievement Certificate used an input measure, a student's ability as measured by previous performance, to divide students into four hierarchical classes (five in the case of mathematics). Wilson (1996) argues that the only significant freedom provided to the Education Department by the Achievement Certificate was "the ability to reconstruct failure" (Wilson, 1996, p. 136). The changes to the structure of lower secondary schooling removed failure by expanding the curriculum downwards to enable the 20% or more of students that previously would have failed the Junior Examination to get the Achievement Certificate at Basic Level. The discursive formation of emancipation then served to obscure but not eradicate technologies of power. This process could conceivably be continued indefinitely through the production of new differences, new ways of distinguishing between students which emancipatory forces would seek to remove. The discourse of emancipation articulated in the various reports and actualised in the Achievement Certificate was not more "true" or progressive than the one it supplanted. It did however have appeal for many in the education sector and thus a greater capacity for circulation and exchange "not only in the economy of discourse, but... in the administration of scarce resources" (Foucault, 1972, p. 120).

## **Discourses of relevance**

I made mention in the discussion above of the substantial increase in the number of students sitting for the public examination in the sixties. This was a direct outcome of markedly increased secondary retention rates. In Western Australia between 1955 and 1965 the retention rate to year 10 in government schools increased from 40 per cent to 75 per cent. In the next 3 years following the raising of the school leaving age in 1964 from 14 to 15, it jumped to almost 90 per cent (Education Department of Western Australia, 1969, p. 32). This had a flow on effect into years 11 and 12. As the table following indicates, student numbers in year 12 doubled between 1960 and 1975.

*Table 2. Year 11 and 12 Course Statistics*

Year	Year 11			Year 12		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
1955	15.5	13.5	14.5	12.4	10.5	11.4
1960	24.8	20.5	22.7	20.3	15.2	17.8
1965	29.9	26.5	28.3	22.1	17.1	19.7
1970	36.0	34.9	35.5	29.9	23.8	26.9
1975	50.8	53.9	52.3	33.7	34.5	34.1
1980	50.7	63.2	56.8	32.0	36.1	34.0
1981	51.3	62.4	56.7	32.6	37.7	35.1
1982	53.8	63.3	58.4	32.9	37.4	35.1
1983	61.3	69.0	65.1	36.6	39.6	38.0
1984	65.3	69.8	67.5	40.0	42.4	41.2
1985	66.4	70.4	68.3	42.0	44.5	43.2
1986	66.7	70.4	68.5	44.6	49.1	46.8
1987	67.8	73.2	70.4	47.6	52.2	49.9
1988	72.8	77.0	74.9	60.7	57.3	53.9
1989	73.0	78.6	75.7	53.9	60.0	56.9
1990	77.0	82.6	79.7	53.7	63.6	58.5

Note. From *Year 11 and 12 Course Statistics*. (p. 120), by Secondary Education Authority, 1990, Perth: SEA.

The increased retention rates had changed the secondary school population.

The narrow, traditional and hierarchical curriculum demanded by the public examination system was inappropriate for the new type of student who was staying at school but not seeking to eventually enter university. McMahon described his frustration with teaching a literary curriculum that was in place in 1969:

totally irrelevant for most of the students in the class. More and more children were staying on at school and yet we were expected to teach them the British-based literature of the last century. It did not interest them and it seemed to both them and me quite irrelevant to their lives. (McMahon quoted in Quin and Quin, 1994, p. 112)

In his 1972 application for an Education Department fellowship to study film and television in Britain he argued the need to establish screen education in Western Australia. His argument was that: "Film and television are potentially, if not already, the most important means of communication, entertainment and art form in our society" (McMahon, 1971). The fact that McMahon's application was successful reinforces my earlier point about the shift in discursive formations. Education Department fellowships were traditionally reserved as a means by which senior bureaucrats bestowed their blessing and public recognition on middle level bureaucrats as potential successors. The granting of a fellowship to a relatively unknown classroom teacher interested in film-making indicated that there was change in the air. Following the publication of the Dettman Report (1969) and the ascendancy of discourses around the emancipation of the curriculum there was a receptivity to new curriculum ideas and especially those which would "soften" the traditional academic curriculum. Screen education was conceivably such a soft area.

The increase in retention rates led to a questioning of the relevance of the traditional curriculum and its teaching methods for all students. The dissatisfaction was with both the contents of the curriculum and the individualistic, deskbound, pen and paper approach to learning which the public examination system fostered (Education Department of Western Australia, 1969, p. 104). As the comment above indicates the existing curriculum was seen as increasingly irrelevant to the real lives of students. Some Western Australian teachers began to search for ways to make the

curriculum and learning methods employed in schools more relevant not only to the “new type” of secondary student but to all students who would live their adult lives in the late twentieth and the first half of the twenty-first century. One of the ways that English teachers sought to broaden their curriculum was through the introduction of film-making.

The use of film-making within English reflected the increasingly widespread adoption of a model of English teaching which was quickly to become the dominant one. Starting in the late sixties the subject English in Western Australian schools changed markedly in response to changes in disciplinary knowledge, educational policy and society. The increased secondary population together with increased retention rates and the education authorities’ promotion of secondary school education for all children meant that pupils of very mixed abilities were staying at school past the compulsory leaving age. English, then as now, was a compulsory subject and teachers searched for ways to cope with the full range of student ability. Changes in English teaching were also partly a response to changes in society. Social and political unrest, which challenged traditional beliefs and values, affected the teaching of English in English-speaking countries (Applebee, 1977). Garth Boomer, an Australian educator, says that English teaching began to reflect a wider social movement marked by a rejection of imperialist policies and a general questioning of the direction of society (Boomer, 1988, p. 19). He sees the introduction of thematic approaches, of the move to exploit literature to illuminate current social issues and the undermining of public examination restrictions as evidence of English teachers’ disillusionment with the old order.

Traditionally English had been the study of literature, grammar and composition. The late sixties saw a shift to the “New English” (Green, 1995, p. 393) or the personal growth model of English (Goodson and Medway, 1990, p. xiii). This idea of English was characterised by a new regard for group work, student talk, for notions of self-expression, spontaneity, creativity and the authentic voice of the student. Film-making was compatible with the dominant pedagogic modes of project work and group work methodology in the new English and provided an additional means by which students could express themselves and exhibit their creativity. The last superintendent of English in the Western Australian Education Department recalls his experiences of using film-making within the new Growth Model English:

I felt that there were many ways to come at this business of developing yourself and you didn't necessarily have to do it through language...one of the tools of expression was pictorial art, another one emerging was what you might do with the media. This was the days [sic] before video cameras and we spent time making Super 8 films. There is probably a Super 8 film out there still on the pop song Slow Talking Jones. And Jones is rescuing the girl tied to the railway tracks and to that three or four minutes of song we had all the visuals to go with it. This was done in the English class because we were looking for ways in which kids could – these were gifted kids who would bowl a Junior [examination] over in no time flat – we were looking for ways to challenge them. The clarion cry we were all reciting was ‘challenge and success’. These are the things that every kid has to experience. He's got to be challenged and he's got to succeed at it. (Interview with P. Gunning, July 10, 1999)

Film-making, and to a lesser extent film study, in schools had some support from the central education authority, the Education Department of Western Australia. In the late 1960s John Bottomley, then the Education Department advisory teacher in drama, had advocated teaching about film and television as distinct from teaching through film and television. He employed Jo O'Sullivan (later to become



the first director of the Perth Institute of Film and Television) as a roving film-making consultant to schools. A small number of teachers took the opportunity to have O'Sullivan along to conduct film workshops for students and McMahon, author of the first proposal to introduce media studies, was one of these teachers. In 1971 O'Sullivan, McMahon, Steve Jodrell (who later became a feature film director) and a small group of teachers formed the short-lived Screen Education Society which aimed to expand the focus on film production to include film criticism and television within an educational framework. The formation of the Screen Education Society marks a significant shift away from a concern simply with amateur film production towards an interest in the wider educational implications of mass media technology.

In 1973 the Education Department of Western Australia funded a "conference" (actually an in-service program for English teachers) on film-making which was opened by the then Director of Secondary Education, Mr Harry Loudon. The extract from the conference program (below) indicates the limited conception of media study incorporated within the school-based film-making movement. The emphasis as demonstrated by the discussion topics was on the mechanics of engaging in film-making with a class.

Extract from Film Making Conference, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1973, Bagot Road, Subiaco.

Film "The Young Directors"

Group Discussion time.

Just how much responsibility should the student director be given and how much should the teacher retain?

Is the art of film making best related to Secondary School English, Secondary School Social Studies, some other subject area or is it best treated as an art form in its own right?

Prepare a list of suggestions for ways in which the Education Department could facilitate treatment of film making in Western Australian Secondary Schools.

List the roles team members of a film making group need to fill. Anticipating that teachers will have more than this number of students discuss ways of keeping a class size group involved in a film making activity.

The significance of the excerpt from the in-service program above lies in its absences. There is no mention made of the study of film either as a cultural practice or of cinema as an institution. Topics and issues such as the analysis of the cinema as an economy based around theatrical exhibition; periods, traditions and genres; auteurs and specific questions of textual analysis which were to become central to the study of film within media studies were largely absent from film study as it was conceived within English. Nevertheless, English provided a space for early attempts to introduce some form of media education into the curriculum albeit in the form of practical film-making. At the time McMahon submitted the proposal to establish media studies, film-making had been established as both a possibility and in many instances, a reality, within English.

### **Discourse of social justice: education**

The most rapidly growing sector of public spending under a Labor government will be education. Education should be the great instrument for the promotion of equality...The Australian Labor Party believes that the Commonwealth should adopt the same methods to assist schools as it has adopted to assist universities and colleges of advanced education...We will establish an Australian Schools Commission to examine and determine the needs of students in government and non-government primary, secondary and technical schools. (Whitlam, quoted in Smart, 1978, p. 103)

Gough Whitlam, leader of the Australian Labor Party, campaigned with a promise to improve equality in education through the implementation of a federally

funded educational program. In 1972 the Whitlam Labor Government was elected with a mandate to increase substantially the level of Commonwealth funds for education.

In fact, the Australian Constitution does not give the federal government powers over education. It does however provide for grants of assistance to the states and it is this section which has allowed the Commonwealth to support education through the provision of specific purpose grants (White, 1987, p. 10). Post World War Two universities had received financial support in this manner. In the mid sixties the demand for schooling exceeded the resources of the states to meet the demand. The Menzies Liberal government provided some support in the form of secondary school scholarships, science facilities and libraries (Smart, 1978). It was however the Australian Labor Party which developed a new style of federal intervention in schools in the early seventies.

Eleven days after assuming office Whitlam announced the terms of reference and membership of an interim committee of the proposed Schools Commission to be chaired by Dr Peter Karmel. The committee submitted its report *Schools in Australia* on 18 May 1973 and a new blueprint for education was produced. The Karmel Report, as it was and continues to be known, embraced a broader definition of the purposes of schooling than mere preparation for life post-school. It said:

The school does not exist to grade students for employers or for institutes of higher learning. Nor should it regard higher education as the only avenue to a life of dignity and worth ... (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, 1973, p. 26).

Schooling is a significant segment of life which for all children ought to be enjoyable and fruitful in itself, not merely a preparation for later life (p. 94).

In its emphasis on education as “enjoyable and fruitful in itself” and schools as “a community where both education and people are valued, and where the influences of the market place do not dictate the price placed upon individual talents” (p. 14) the Karmel Report contributed to a new discourse of education. Academic worth was no longer to be the single criterion for measuring the value of a subject. In fact White (1987) describes the Karmel Report as the “deintellectualisation of community” on the basis that it speaks not of human capital but of human talent, relationships, participation and individuality (p. 72). Media studies, which aimed “to promote an understanding of media and an awareness of its impact upon the individual and society” (McMahon, 1973c, p. 1), was appropriate to the Report’s conception of schools as socialising, as opposed to academic training, institutions. Furthermore, the Report stressed that equality did not equate with sameness and that diversity was to be encouraged.

Better ways will not necessarily be the same for all children or all teachers. This is an important reason for bringing responsibility back to the school and for allowing it to be exercised in ways which enable a hundred flowers to bloom rather than to wither. (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, 1973, p. 12)

The Report opened a space for a subjects like media studies which had no vocational relevance, offered no path to university but promised an enjoyable experience for students.

The Karmel Report made a number of recommendations which were to have significant and far reaching effects on Western Australian education generally and the development of media education in particular. Schools Commission funds were to be directed to a wide variety of programs, the most important of which for this history were Teacher Development, and Special Projects and Innovations. Of equal

importance to this history is the manner in which these funds were to be made available. The Karmel Report sought to devolve control for curriculum development and innovation to the local level. Priority in the allocation of funds was given to projects originating in schools and which emphasised community involvement:

Responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of the pupils whom they teach and, at senior levels, with the students themselves. Its belief in this grass-roots approach to the control of schools reflects a conviction that responsibility will be most effectively discharged where the people entrusted with making decisions are also the people responsible for carrying them out, with an obligation to justify them, and in a position to profit from their experience. (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, 1973, p. 10)

Of particular importance in the context of the development of media studies were the Karmel funds earmarked for professional development. These funds were used to provide a series of live-in professional development workshops (some for as long as ten days) for teachers. In this manner quite significant numbers of experienced teachers from backgrounds in English, art, social studies and science teaching were rapidly “re-trained” as media studies teachers and thus in a position to lobby for the introduction of media studies in their schools. All of the teachers involved in teaching upper school media studies in the first years of its introduction (1976-78) were trained in this way.

The Karmel Report required a significant shift in the existing modes of power and control. First, in its attempt to promote diversity, the decentralisation of control, school based curriculum development and self-management it deliberately shifted power away from the central state education bureaucracies.

Applications for financial support would be invited from individuals and groups, not only of teachers but from the community, so as to provide an opportunity for changes to come from beyond present institutional frameworks. (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, 1973, p. 152)

It was a shift in control not a radical change in the power structure because despite the rhetoric about decentralisation most of the funding was still distributed from central agencies, only now it came from a federal rather than a state body. It did however make a difference. Three of the teachers interviewed for this study were recipients of “Karmel money”, or more correctly Schools Commission funding, which they used to buy media equipment, establish a resource base and run media studies courses for combined parent and teacher groups.

What the above points to is the role of the state in opening the philosophical, political and economic spaces for the introduction of a new subject in the seventies. In the ten years immediately prior to the introduction of media studies there had been major shifts within the discursive frameworks surrounding schooling, curriculum and assessment. Specifically, the above has pointed to changes in conceptions about the purpose of secondary education, changes to traditional ideas about what constituted appropriate subjects of study, and changes in the funding regime for curriculum development. The discourses around the importance of examinations, academic rigour and selection were not entirely replaced but joined by new discourses of emancipation, social justice, relevance and pleasure within which McMahon’s proposal for the introduction of the subject media studies was positioned.

## **Discourse of social justice: the community**

The social justice agenda of the Labor government of the period 1972-1975 included the establishment of community access video centres and Community Education Centres. Such centres were designed to make education available to all sectors of the community and in the case of the former provide a means by which the community could get access to the airwaves.

The election of the Labor government coincided with the introduction of cheap and portable means for recording video images. In Western Australia a video access centre, Frevideo, was established by the Australian Film Institute as a fully federal government funded community body. Although it lobbied for the establishment of a community broadcast station it was essentially a service centre. It loaned video portapaks, provided editing facilities and ran workshops on video production. It did not however offer a facility whereby the productions made by its members could be broadcast. The activities of Frevideo were driven by a belief in the “empowerment possibilities” offered by technology when placed in the hands of the community. A Frevideo Board member recalls those who accessed the services of Frevideo as “making programs about everything from gay rights to flower shows to alumina mining in the Darling Scarp” (Interview with S. Shapter August 20, 1999).

Another Frevideo member who was also an early media studies teacher says of the organisation:

It was a legacy of the hippie era. We thought we could change the world by taking pictures of it. The problem was nobody ever got to see what we made. Occasionally we would screen our work for our friends but we were preaching to the converted. I got one program to air. The first time it was broadcast you couldn't see anything because the technical quality was so bad. The second time it looked better but I have never met anyone who actually saw it. (Interview with N. Leslie, February 12, 1999)

What Frevideo did provide was a facility through which interested people could learn how to use the recently developed portable video machines. A number of teachers took advantage of this resource. The organisation's focus was on the production of television material and not the analysis of such and so those teachers who learned about television through the services of Frevideo learned about video production.

Another federal government initiative was the Princess May Community Education Centre located a kilometre from Frevideo. As its name implies the Centre had an educational focus and ran courses for the community on a wide variety of topics including relaxation therapy, dance, art, photography, television production and film-making. The workshops in media-related areas drew participants mainly from teaching, probably because access to borrowing the equipment was restricted to those who had undergone some training at the Centre. The Centre was fitted out with a television studio and a darkroom which schools or community groups could use for making productions. Like Frevideo however it made no provision for the screening of productions made under its roof.

What Frevideo and the Community Education Centre did was raise the level of community awareness of media technology. They fostered the community's use and application of the technology and made talking and thinking about film and television a reasonable thing to do at a time when the education system was looking



to expand the curriculum. These were not isolated instances of interest in, and support for, screen related activities in Western Australia during the early seventies.

In the next section I argue that there existed in the seventies in Western Australia an identifiable discursive formation around the screen. Using Foucault's test as to whether a domain of knowledge constitutes a discursive formation (Foucault, 1972, p. 37) I look for the formation, correlation or transformation within sets of statements with reference to a common object (p. 31); an identifiable mode of enunciation (p. 33); a constancy of concepts (p. 34); and support for a common theme (p. 35). In such diverse sites as art film societies, university film clubs, rural film groups, teacher associations, film festival committees, adult education groups, community education centres, access video centres and state government authorities I find statements different in form and dispersed in time referring to a common object, the screen. These statements are characterised by a tendency to see film as not only entertainment but also as a cultural force. Constancy of concepts is not to be found. In some of the sites the screen is conceived of as an art form, in others as a tool of empowerment, in yet others as a window on society. Nevertheless, there is traversing these sets of statements, the common theme of the positive value of film dispersed across social, cultural and educational initiatives. I argue that this discursive formation opened a space in which film viewing and film-making could be taken seriously and thus contributed to the condition that saw the introduction of a media studies pilot project in a school in 1974.

## **Discourse of aesthetics**

Perth has long had a reputation as a film loving community. Alongside the casuals who go to the cinema for relaxation and entertainment there have also existed groups who took the cinema very seriously indeed. These were the film buffs, the self-professed film critics who sustained the art house cinemas. By the commencement of the seventies there was a number of such bodies directly and indirectly concerned with promoting a screen culture and, to a lesser extent, a screen industry in Western Australia. Some of these groups had formal connections though funding lines; others were unrelated or, on occasion, even in competition. Some of the groups, some of the time, were vaguely connected by virtue of membership in that the same names crop up in various arenas. The decision to examine the structures, philosophies and concerns of these bodies is not based on an assessment of their unity of purpose or enterprise nor a search for the firm foundations of media studies. They are selected for inclusion in this history because they contributed to, and were constructed by, a discursive formation around the screen.

Although some film societies pre-dated the formation of the Perth Film Society (1964) they were generally short-lived and somewhat ad hoc associations with a small membership. The Perth Film Society had its beginnings in a class organised by Ian Channell in the University of Western Australia Adult Education Board's autumn program in 1964. Channell was a Community Arts tutor who had come to Western Australia from Leeds University. He created a 16mm film society dedicated to showing film classics borrowed mainly from the National Library's Film Lending Collection. In the late sixties leadership of the society passed to John McCracken, an English teacher at Mt Lawley Senior High School, an avid fan of

European cinema and “a prominent figure in the films society movement of the 1960s and 1970s” (O’Regan, 1985, p. 39). At one stage the Society had a membership of 256 people and its best ever attendance figures were for the first screening of Bunuel and Dali’s surrealist *Un Chien Andalou* (O’Regan, 1985, p. 39).

Around the same time film societies were established in some country towns and suburbs. In interview, one of the early pioneers of media education remembers establishing a film society in each of the three country towns in which he taught English:

A guy called John McCracken was my year 11 English teacher and became a mentor in terms of knowledge of film. I was invited to go along to the Perth Film Society and the International Film Festival and various other film events that were happening back in the sixties. I became a sort of advocate for film societies in the country when I went out teaching. None of the towns had a cinema. I started the Northampton, Geraldton and Manjimup film societies and they flourished for the period I was there and some kept going after I left which was really good. I used to screen the films in the local hall. It was always either freezing cold or stinking hot. (Interview with Daniel, August 16, 1999).

The growth in rural film societies is attested to by Little who in 1966 noted the existence of film societies in Albany, Northam, Kalgoorlie, Narrogin, Corrigin, Gibson’s Soak and Collie. In 1964 the WA Federation of Film Societies was established and became the co-ordinating body for these small societies (Little, 1966, p. 1-2). The Federation assembled a collection of films each year and rotated them through the rural film societies. The proliferation of film societies in rural and remote towns probably says more about the lack of commercial cinemas in such places than it does about the communities’ interest in film aesthetics.

In 1965 the International Film Theatre (IFT) was established in Perth and the Perth Film Society merged with it. The IFT was a 35mm film society committed to

the screening of contemporary “foreign films” and earlier releases which had not been previously screened at commercial cinemas. It held weekly screenings over thirty week seasons. Admission was not restricted to members only and the door-sales ensured it remained on a sound financial footing. Both the Perth Film Society and the International Film Theatre were high art groups. The members were mainly university students together with what is commonly referred to as the “Dalkeith set”, comparatively wealthy, highly educated, well travelled people of the upper middle class of Perth. They were fans of European cinema and prepared to watch the sorts of films shunned by the commercial cinema-goers – black and white, non-narrative and with sub-titles.

In the early seventies the University of Western Australia’s Guild of Undergraduates began regular Friday night screenings of 35 mm feature films in the Octagon Theatre. The Guild screenings were a mixture of art house and popular feature film and they attracted packed houses every week. The organiser of the Guild screenings was David Roe who was later to establish the Perth International Film Festival which lasted from 1972 until 1976.

Community interest in film culture was reflected to some extent at the school level. Many schools established film societies in the late sixties and early seventies. A teacher writing in support of school film clubs said: “One of the most interesting and worthwhile extra-curricula activities a teacher can be involved in at all levels of the secondary school is the school Film Society” (Media Message, The school film society, 1976, no page numbers). In the same article the teacher reflects the same concerns with film aesthetics that characterised the community societies:

Films can help broaden a student's sense of the world beyond their immediate horizons; they can sharpen a student's critical sensibilities towards a major 20<sup>th</sup> century art form and by extension to other art forms; film as film is an important art form that should not be ignored...

So Perth in the early seventies had a small but active film culture with an orientation towards international films of quality. It shared a profound belief in the social and aesthetic force of cinema and was characterised by a willingness to embrace the experimental, the avant-garde and the unusual. None of these film societies or festivals had a directly educational objective above the general one of raising public awareness of the social and aesthetic value of film. There were however other groups in existence who combined a love for cinema with overt educational objectives.

The Perth Institute of Film and Television (PIFT) was founded in 1971. It is popularly described as the 'brain child' of Jo O'Sullivan. O'Sullivan had been Director of the Film Unit at the University of Western Australia. The Film Unit was essentially a club, established under the auspices of the Guild of Undergraduates, for film buffs and amateur film-makers. It had no links to the university curriculum because film studies and film-making were not taught at the University of Western Australia. PIFT had four major objectives:

- To promote the development of film and television as an art and as a medium of information, education and entertainment.
- To encourage the development of a Western Australian film industry; and to promote awareness of and interest in film as an art form and a communication medium.

- To provide for and to encourage the delivery and holding of lectures, exhibitions, classes, workshops and conferences designed to advance the theory and practice of film and television production; and in particular to provide facilities for the practical and theoretical training, instruction and advice in the art of film and television.
- To promote the education of the general public in the art of film and television by all means possible. (Constitution of Perth Institute of Film and Television (Inc) Article 2).

Internally PIFT was the site of ongoing struggles between those who saw its primary purpose as the training of film-makers, those who saw its purpose as education and those who wanted the Institute to be a production house. These three different conceptions of the role and purpose of PIFT held sway at different moments but no one view firmly defeated or obliterated another. The training view of PIFT was actualised in the early seventies by a series of comprehensive, advanced film-making courses and workshops, the appointment of film director David Rapsey as the director-in-residence, and the establishment of a Channel 9 funded TV series *Discovery* which featured the work of young film-makers. The production orientation led the organisation into commercial production including a children's television series called *Falcon Island* which all but bankrupted the Institute. The education profile of the Institute was maintained through a series of public seminars which variously covered discussions of the work of a particular director, a chosen film genre or the possibilities of building an Australian film industry (PIFT Annual Report, 1973). David Rapsey, a central figure at PIFT in the early seventies, remembers it as a "time of constant battle between the sociological cum critical view

represented by Barrie McMahon and the rest of us film-makers” (D. Rapsey, personal communication, August 17, 1999).

The use of film in school education was well established by the early seventies in Western Australia. The Education Department of Western Australia had established an Audio-visual Branch in 1948. At that time it operated as a central film library but also had within it a major production component known as the Government Film Unit. In 1961 the adult education film library was separated from the other functions of the Audio-visual Branch and became known as the State Film Centre although staffing remained the responsibility of the Education Department’s Audio-visual Branch until 1976. In 1967 the Government Film Unit was phased out but the Audio-visual Branch retained its production arm. Unable to meet the demand for documentaries and educational films through its own production facilities the Branch became a purchasing agent for films produced interstate and overseas by both educational and commercial production houses. By the 1960s nearly every school owned a 16mm projector and the use of educational film as an aid to teaching and learning was commonplace. Western Australian schools were also early adopters of television as an educational aid. The Australian Broadcasting Commission transmitted educational programs from the very earliest days of television and in the days before video recorders having a class view an off-air program was not uncommon.

These diverse groups – the regular art-house film-goers, the screen organisations, the would-be film-makers, the community video artists, the specific government bodies and the educational film providers contributed to raising the profile of screen related pursuits and contributed to public debate about it. In this

manner they served to legitimate media related activity and thus contributed to the creation of conditions of possibility for the introduction of media studies in schools.

### **Conditions of possibility**

The discursive formations around education, schooling and screen culture opened a space for the introduction of a new subject and for the insertion of screen studies into the curriculum. During the sixties and early seventies changes in political discourses had resulted in a larger and more diverse school cohort, increased funds for curriculum development and more opportunities for school and community-based initiatives. Changes in educational discourses had resulted in a more flexible curriculum and new conceptions of worthwhile knowledge. At the social level the development of a screen discourse created a condition in which film viewing and film-making were viewed as educationally worthwhile activities. These discourses produced a human agent in the figure of Barrie McMahon - a teacher, a film buff and ardent advocate of media education. In turn he deployed these discourses and successfully lobbied the Education Department persuading that body to establish the new subject media studies in the form of a pilot project at North Lake High School. His proposal, excerpts of which opened this chapter, was framed in terms of the dominant discourses of the period. It therefore presented itself as a rational response, not to public demand for media education for indeed there was no such demand, but to the social crisis of the period. The proposal to introduce media studies was presented as part of a larger strategy of educational reform. The relative ease by which a new subject could be introduced into the curriculum was made possible by the highly centralised nature of the state education department.



The key feature of the Western Australian Department of Education in the early 1970s, as it had been since the Department's inception, was centralised control of management and resources, and as a consequence, centralised control of acceptable educational practice. Curriculum development was almost entirely conducted within the confines of the “Head Office” of the Education Department of Western Australia. All teachers were employed and deployed by this central authority. The quality of instruction in the various subjects was assured by a system of “senior masters” and subject superintendents, the latter acting in the role of inspectors of standards. All teacher development was provided and controlled by the Education Department.

As an employee of this body in the seventies I can say that it was an “institutional site”, a site of “constant, coded, systematic observation, run by a differentiated and hierarchised staff” (Foucault, 1972, p. 51). It was from Head Office that “discourse derives its legitimate source and point of application” (p. 51). Under such conditions the freedom to develop new conceptions of worthwhile knowledge was unlikely to be realised in a system where the resources and ideologies of schools were controlled centrally unless the central authority was supportive. All teachers knew and accepted that system-wide change in Western Australian education came from the top, not the bottom. A necessary strategy for any individual or group seeking change was to gain the support of the Education Department bureaucracy. The key to success was to convert bureaucratic control into patronage. The small group of educators lobbying for the introduction of media studies understood this situation and deliberately cultivated Head Office support. This situation is in stark contrast to the educational system in England which was organised into relatively autonomous local education systems. There it was

impossible to introduce a new subject nationwide because each education authority made its own determination.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has constructed the beginnings of a genealogy of media studies. Through the analysis of discursive formations in contemporaneous but otherwise largely unrelated sites it has identified how apparently disparate fields shared some common assumptions about the purpose of schooling and the value of cinema. In doing so I have shown that the introduction of media studies was a contingent phenomenon arising from the intersection of specific discourses within education, politics and culture. At the educational level these discourses formed around the topics of flexible curriculum, student needs and curriculum relevance. At the political level the discourses were produced around issues of social justice, empowerment through video production and devolution of curriculum control. In the realm of culture, an appreciation of film aesthetics was promoted through art cinemas, film clubs and societies.

The effect of these discourses was to open a space for a new subject which would be academically appropriate for a certain sector of the school population, responsive to and reflective of the contemporary, increasingly image-dominated, society. The outcome was media studies: a school subject deemed to be suited to students of low academic ability in that it was applied, potentially creative but did not tax the literacy skills of students. The purpose of the subject was to act as a tool of containment, partially evacuating the less able students from the academic curriculum while shoring up an education system divided according to ability levels. The power of these discourses was both productive, in the establishment of a new

subject, and formative in that they delimited the scope of the subject of media studies.

With respect to the origins of a subject I have attempted to show that detailed attention to the specific conditions in a local site produces a different account of the genesis of a new subject from those canvassed in Chapter One. This chapter reveals an absence of those discourses around fears of the effect of the media on either culture or children's behaviour which had fuelled the demand for media education in England, parts of Europe and North America. The motivations for the introduction of media studies in Western Australia are also dissimilar to those operating in other, non-English speaking, sites. In Latin America media education developed outside the state system of schooling.

...se desarrollan fundamentalmente al margen de los sistemas educativos; se originan en los barrios, en los suburbios, en las comunidades campesinas, y son auspiciados por instituciones y grupos de promoción popular para la educación y la cultura. (Charles Creel and Orozco Gomez, 1990, p. 25)

they developed fundamentally at the margins of the education system; they originated in the neighbourhoods, in the city suburbs, in regional communities and sponsored by institutions and groups concerned to promote education and culture. (Author's translation)

Its major advocates have been the churches, communications research centres, trade unions and adult education centres and their arguments for media education have been based on socio-political, cultural and religious motivations. The arguments for the introduction of media education in Latin American countries can be broadly categorised as:

- media education as ideological resistance and a force for democratisation; and
- media education for the preservation of religious and family values.

In the first orientation, media education aims to create critical awareness in order to resist ideological domination and promote democratic ideals (Fuenzalida, 1991, p. 14). This approach was a direct response to the manipulation and restriction of information practised under the Latin American dictatorships of the sixties, seventies and early eighties and fears of ideological domination by the United States (Fuenzalida, 1990, p. 172). Underpinning this approach to media education is dependency theory which argues that in order to ensure United States economic domination over Latin America it is necessary to have ideological domination which is effected by the mass media (Boyd-Barrett, 1982, p. 174). Zecchetto, an Argentinian, says that education and the mass media are part of a “cultural and educational industry [which acts] as a conveyor belt for the capitalist transnational plan.” (Zecchetto, 1986, p. 56). The purpose of media education in this instance is liberation.

Another purpose behind the introduction of media education in Latin America has been the use of media education to oppose the consumerism encouraged by advertising and the dissemination of anti-Christian values by the media. In 1985 the Bellarmino Foundation (Chile) published a curriculum for teachers. The curriculum, which covered all years of education, aimed to develop in students a critical attitude towards television from the perspective of what the Foundation called the “building of a Civilisation of Love”.

In the case of Western Australia it appears that the circumstances in which media studies became possible were not the result of either popular or academic concerns about the media’s behavioural effects, ideological domination or threat to democracy. Rather, the subject emerges in a “quite different space defined by quite

different historical surfaces” (Hunter, 1988, p. 19). This space was one traversed by forces for change: a new school population; teacher dissatisfaction with the academic curriculum; the shift to cumulative assessment and the demise of the external examination; experiments in English teaching; the progressive leanings of the bureaucracy; the availability of federal money; increased public support for screen culture initiatives and lobbying from a small group of enthusiasts. While these forces shaped the nature of the subject to be introduced – non-academic and practical – they did not determine its knowledge base. The story of subject knowledge in media studies is taken up in the next chapter.

These forces for change reveal the complex workings of and the dispersed locations of power. At the level of the “micro-physics” of power (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 114) it can be seen that the community’s decision to keep their children at school for a longer period was as significant a propellant for change as three government reports. Similarly, teachers in response to the changes in the school cohort, took it upon themselves to make changes to the curriculum independently of curriculum authorities. By chance teachers were supported in curriculum change by a federal authority charged with promoting student equity but which in practice subtly shifted the locus of power away from the central State Education Department to teachers in schools.

Lastly the chapter introduced, in what might be seen to be an un-Foucauldian turn, a human subject in the form of Barrie McMahon. McMahon was to become a central figure in the development of media studies in Western Australia. He became for some years the principal source of statements, in Foucault’s sense of the word, about the study of the media. His centrality to the development of the subject and his

status as its prime spokesperson was an outcome of the highly centralised structure of the Western Australian Education Department. The education bureaucracy employed subject experts who were responsible for advising teachers on what to teach in their particular subject. This structure was critical in the rapid and widespread introduction of a new subject.

Foucault's analyses oppose theories that locate a human actor endowed with specific traits and capacities as the source of social relations (Foucault, 1980, p. 117). But although Foucault denied the existence of "Man" as a kind of transcendent subject or the source of ideas he did not deny the existence of men or women as individual agents nor that they are implicated in the power process. Rather than simply assuming the existence of the acting subject he said we should try to account historically for his or her production and character (Baker, 1994, p. 193). Tactics require tacticians and McMahon becomes a central agent in a political transformation that could have been otherwise or not at all. This point will be developed further in the next chapter which looks at the tactics employed in producing the subject media studies.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE EARLY YEARS**

This chapter continues the genealogy begun in the last chapter. It is the first of three chapters which trace the history of the subject media studies in Western Australia through an analysis of the forms and transformations of subject knowledge. I begin with an analysis of “things said” (Foucault, 1973a, p. 128) in the written syllabus on the basis that this document was the preactive definition of the school subject and set, or supposedly set, the parameters for practice (Goodson and Marsh, 1996, p. 3). This section locates the understandings outlined in the syllabus in their roots in existing discourses of media education which emerged from particular intellectual traditions of study of mass communications and media. But how a syllabus will be acted upon, or what its effect might be, or what room the actors might find for manoeuvre cannot be presumed from a reading of the syllabus. Therefore, I move on to a discussion of media studies practices in schools with an examination of pedagogical routines, classroom resources and the statements of teachers working in the field in the early period of its history. In this manner I illuminate the connections and disconnections between what is said and what is done in schooling.

#### **The production of disciplinary knowledge**

Foucault argues that the appearance and reappearance of forms of knowledge must be identified by reference to specific means (Foucault, 1972, p. 26). The means of producing the disciplinary knowledge embraced by a school subject are multiple. In all school subjects knowledge production happens in such sites as initial teacher

training, in-service and professional development courses, syllabus committees, academic writing, and the curriculum development sections of the educational bureaucracy. All of these sites have a formal and authoritative role in the production of knowledge. However, there exist other, non-authoritative, locations for the production of disciplinary knowledge. These include, but are not limited to, professional associations, the classroom, the staff-room, the casual social encounter and the chance conversation. The knowledge produced in all of these sites is circulated through both formal and informal means: syllabus documents, curriculum resources, academic journals, textbooks, formal and informal teacher networks, subject newsletters and through the exchange of the artifacts of teaching such as programs, lesson notes and the like. For the sake of coherence these multiple sites and sources of data have been grouped for the purposes of analysis. Thus the chapter proceeds initially with an analysis of “official subject knowledge” represented by the upper school syllabuses developed by the Board of Secondary Education. This is followed by an examination of the “unofficial” knowledge articulated in subject newsletters, teaching programs and resources. Integrated into the analysis of both sets of data are the views of the participants (teachers, students and bureaucrats) on what they thought the subject was about. The central aim of the next three chapters is to identify and explain that which has counted as knowledge in media education at different points in time since its inception.

### **The subject media studies – the 1976 curriculum**

In 1967 the Western Australian retention rate from first to final year of high school was 23.5%. By 1976 it was 35.7% (Department of Education, Employment and Training, 1991, p. 28). The increased retention called into question the adequacy



of the educational provision for those students who chose to stay at school but did not wish to pursue university entry. In the early seventies a new form of upper school subject was introduced to cater for such students. These were known as Certificate of Secondary Education subjects and were monitored by the Board of Secondary Education. As is the case in most places the authority to decide what constitutes legitimate and necessary knowledge in a school subject is vested by the state in a specific educational authority. In Western Australia this authority was initially the Board of Secondary Education, later the Secondary Education Authority and now the Curriculum Council. The authority decides the requirements for subject accreditation with respect to content (usually expressed as objectives) and assessment, and publishes these requirements in the form of a syllabus. The actual work of deciding the subject content is devolved to subject committees which comprise representatives from the tertiary institutions, the government, Catholic and independent sectors, and industry.

In the case of media studies the development of the first syllabus occurred differently to the usual system. This syllabus was actually the outcome of an attempt by the Education Department to run a formal evaluation of the media studies pilot project at North Lake High School. The Department had appointed an educational researcher, Dr Tony Ryan, to evaluate the program. In the course of this evaluation, he and a small group of teachers from the pilot school, North Lake Senior High School, developed a “framework of understandings” which they believed should form the basis of a media studies course. This document was the one eventually submitted to the Board of Secondary Education as the proposed upper school syllabus. It should be noted that the first upper school media studies course was based on the experiences and advice of teachers who had never taught the subject at

the upper secondary level. Furthermore the group developing the syllabus did not seek advice from either the relevant academic or industry sectors. In 1976 the Board of Secondary Education approved this syllabus for implementation the following year. The expansion of the subject media studies into the upper school curriculum was the outcome of a government objective to provide alternative fields of study, Certificate of Secondary Education courses, for less academic students. This aspect of the birth of media studies must be emphasised in light of the later struggles on the part of teachers to have the subject recognised in the calculation of a tertiary entrance score.

The course objectives in the first syllabus were organised according to the requirements of the Board under the headings of “knowledge and understandings”, “skills” and “attitudes”. Assessment was cumulative over two years of study. The teachers’ assessments were moderated by a Board of Secondary Education (B.S.E.) approved test administered at the end of year 12. In the early years the moderation instrument was a written test but was later modified to include a practical component.

The first approved upper school media studies syllabus (B.S.E. 1977) was eclectic in its identification of the understandings, skills and attitudes which would constitute a course of study of the media. It included objectives to do with the need for students to comprehend the power of the media, recognise artistic merit in media texts, and to learn moral and aesthetic discrimination. However when the syllabus speaks of the practice of media teaching it is far less embracing and insists that media skills come before concepts. It says that:

Media skills, such as the ability to effectively use still and movie photographic equipment, sound and television equipment, are fundamental skills for students to possess if they are to communicate effectively... Where possible, the student will develop from skills towards concepts, learning by doing... Students will have sufficient minimal competence in essential manipulative processing and presentational skills ... e.g. scripting, shooting, editing and track laying. (B.S.E., 1977, p. 241, 244)

“Learning by doing” had been a recurring catch phrase in written and verbal discussions of media studies since its inception. In a grant application submitted to the Western Australian Education department in 1973 McMahon wrote of a proposed program that would

involve giving students of all ages access to the tools of the electronic age so that they may use them as a means of communication. From this “hands on” approach it is expected that some awareness of the importance and potential of the mass media will develop. (B. McMahon, personal communication, September 25, 1973)

The genesis of the expression “hands on” lies in McMahon’s experiences in Britain and the United States in the period 1972-3. His Education Department Fellowship had been used to enrol in a one-year diploma at the Hornsey College of Art. The diploma course according to the Hornsey Course Information Brochure of 1972 was intensely practical in that “Much of the course is spent on practical work and projects”. Studies included instruction in design, film, television and photography in the context of school education. On completion of the diploma he visited the United States and spent some time at the Mamaroneck Project in New York. The project involved a partnership between a school district and a research and training organisation called The Centre for Understanding the Media. The project aimed to train teachers, community members and school children in media studies. Its first objective was “training teachers in media skills”:

Each teacher involved will be able to operate the equipment they have chosen to use with their classes. The media with which we are working include: 16mm animation, 1/2 inch portable VTR, 1" studio VTR, Super 8mm filmmaking, photography with box cameras and roll film, photography with photograms, photography with instamatic film, slide-tapes, various cameraless activities (including "scratch and doodle" films), storyboarding activities and work with still photographs, filmstrip making and sound. (Laybourne, 1972, p. 23)

The project produced a book *Doing the Media* (1972), a manual of student activities, which as the title suggests, stressed the importance of learning by doing and using the media tools. McMahon brought copies of the title and the "learning by doing" tag back to Australia.

### **The construction of the object of knowledge**

In *Histoire de la Folie* (1972) Foucault argues that the discipline constructs its object of knowledge (pp. 354, 358). He says that while particular forms of knowledge have particular forms of a priori conditions the a priori is itself constructed (Cousins and Hussain, 1984, p. 2). In the context of this study I take these statements to mean that the subject media studies will determine what is knowledge of the media rather than there being, a priori, a body of knowledge out there waiting to be captured by and transmitted through the school subject. In the light of this understanding I will look at how the first media studies syllabus constructed its object of knowledge, the mass media, so that this construction might be compared with that which emerges through classroom practice and, later in the study, with other transformations of knowledge.

The first published syllabus makes a passing nod in the direction of McLuhan's theories of technological determinism (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967). It included the following objectives:

[The student will]

Realise that the choice of medium affects the impact of the message.

Realise that each way of communicating has its own skills and grammar

Understand that in his role as a sender that communication may strike a psychologically responsive chord (B.S.E., 1977, p. 242).

McMahon had been exposed to the work of McLuhan, whom he describes as a “media poet”, during his study leave and his subsequent visit to the United States to observe developments in media education in that country (McMahon and McMahon, 1977, p. 5). Speaking of his 1973 visit, he said “...one of the features noted in the many schools visited in North America was the dichotomy in media education between those teachers with an aesthetic approach to media education and those with a McLuhanistic, learn-by-participating approach” (McMahon and McMahon, 1977, p. 1).

But the majority of the objectives relate to the view of the media outlined in the preamble to the syllabus: “a media environment, an environment so powerful, so persuasive, that its effects in shaping lives and values is unprecedented in human history” (B.S.E. 1977, p. 241).

The related objectives require students to:

Realise the power of the media in forming attitudes in the community

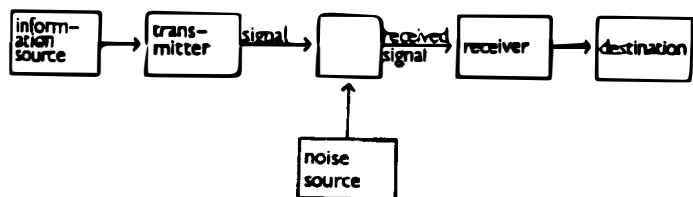
Realise that we are in a mass media-dominated world

Recognise that mass media are dominated by political and economic power support groups (B.S.E., 1977, p. 242).

Other sections speak similarly in terms of media's potential to invade privacy, to "infringe an individual's freedom to choose", to project "established societal values in both an overt and covert sense" (p. 243). The syllabus speaks of the audience as a receiver, as an individual who is acted upon by a potent media. The assumption is that the receiver is the passive recipient of "media messages" transmitted by the powerful sender.

Power and domination are recurring terms in the syllabus objectives: *power* of the media in forming attitudes in a mass media *dominated* world (italics added). Furthermore that the powerful media must have an effect upon those who consume it is presented as uncontestable. This is because the syllabus assumes that an "effect" is an integral part of the communication process. The communication process as represented in the syllabus is a simplified version of the Lasswell (1948) five elements of communication model: sender, message, channel, receiver and effect (p. 37) in the context of Shannon and Weaver's (1949) model of a linear, one-way process of message generation and reception. The syllabus transforms these models into a simple "communication chain" composed of a sender, message, medium, receiver and effects. The relationship between the model of Shannon and Weaver and that adopted by media studies is evident when the two figures below are compared.

**Figure 1. Shannon and Weaver's 1949 model**



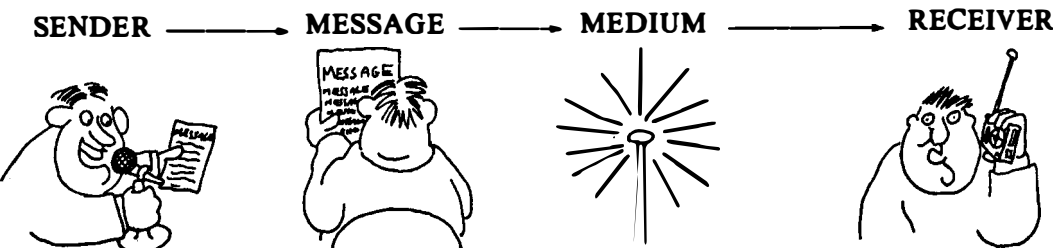
**Figure 2 Shannon and Weaver's model of communication**

Note. From *Introduction to communication studies* (p.7), by Fiske, J. 1982, London: Methuen.

**Figure 2. Communication chain model.**

**MEDIA CONVENTIONS**

The principle convention around which all the others are based, is that of:



Teachers should refer back to this overview constantly when teaching particular conventions within each medium. The chain should be considered by the student from two perspectives. As a sender of messages the student should examine the segments and links in the communication chain. A second perspective is gained if the student adopts the stance of a receiver. The question of the effectiveness of this communication chain as a model could also be posed.

Note. From *Media conventions: A teachers' resource book for secondary media studies* (p. 7), by the Education Department of Western Australia, 1980, Perth: Government Printer.

On the surface this would seem to contradict the findings of the last chapter wherein I argued that the introduction of media studies in Western Australian schools was not a response to community concerns about the effects of the mass media on young people. I contend, however, that the inclusion of a theory and language of “media effects” reveals the desire and power of those holding the pen,

the syllabus writers, to first, write within a specific discourse and secondly, authoritatively impose their own world view on the syllabus. With reference to the first point, the syllabus writers needed to produce a syllabus acceptable to the Board of Secondary Education for implementation in upper secondary schools. Such a syllabus, if it were to be approved, would have to have an intellectual as well as a skills base. The primary writer McMahon, following his time in England, was most familiar with the “dominant ideology” and “ideological effects” theoretical paradigm. This hegemonic approach to media studies pedagogy was articulated in the publications coming out of the London University Institute of Education, the Society for Education in Film and Television (publisher of *Screen* and *Screen Education*) and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. This is not to imply, however, that the writers simply adopted a particular theoretical position for the sake of convenience. The left-of-centre, Marxist-inflected, Labor-oriented values implicit in assumptions about the relationship between the media, power and ideology were the values of the young, liberal, Labor voters who formed the first syllabus committee.

### **Intellectual roots of the first syllabus: resistance**

A syllabus is a textual intervention into practice on the part of the educational authorities. Its purpose is to guide teachers as to what should be taught. The first syllabus required that teachers taught:

- the power of the media to affect attitudes (B.S.E., p. 241);
- the relationship between political and economic power groups and the mass media, (B.S.E., p. 242); and



- moral and aesthetic discrimination (p. 244).

From where did this content spring?

Given that none of the group developing the syllabus, with the exception of McMahon, had any previous education in media studies nor any industry experience, the sources upon which they could draw subject knowledge were limited. As stated above another limitation was the fact that they needed to produce a syllabus which would be acceptable to the Board of Secondary Education which was seeking to introduce a subject for non-university bound students. The content of the Western Australian syllabus articulates, albeit selectively, elements of discourses of media education circulating in other places.

First, in its assumption of media power and its conviction that media studies might act as an antidote to such, the syllabus adopts the political defensiveness evident in many British media programs of the 1960s and 1970s. In Britain in this period media education programs were seen as a means of disabusing students of false beliefs and ideologies (Buckingham, 1998). At that time in Europe the political critique of Herbert Marcuse and the ideological critique of Louis Althusser, together with the semiological studies of Barthes and the publications of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies were offering new perspectives on communication, power, ideology, the power of the audience and the role of the media in culture. In the case being made for media studies in Britain in the same period there is evidence that some of these theories of the relationship between media and culture had trickled down to the level of school education. For example, the British media education lobby reflected the influences of Althusser in its argument that:

Essentially the case for teaching film, TV and general media studies in schools is connected with the fact of the great ideological power of these media within capitalist society. They are, with the school system, of immense importance as ideological apparatuses of the State and a clear knowledge of their functioning among broad masses of the population is a precondition for their popular control. Such control will not come without a mass popular movement but knowledge is a preliminary first step to control. (Grealy, 1975, p. 17)

However, in Western Australia the idea of the subject having such a function had not been raised prior to the introduction of the syllabus. The notion of media studies as a counter to ideology is not to be found in the preliminary proposals for the introduction of the subject, nor in the Education Department's response, nor in the lower school syllabus under which the pilot program at North Lake Senior High School had operated since 1974. This discourse appears to have entered Western Australia as a *raison d'être* for the subject in a number of ways.

One entry point was through the widespread distribution of the bootlegged Thames Television *Viewpoint* series of videotapes. These educational tapes were produced by Douglas Lowndes, a one-time lecturer at Hornsey College. The series' content was a sustained attack on the practices of the British media. The tapes were originally brought to Australia by McMahon and were subsequently copied by local media teachers until the Centre for Educational Technology of the Education Department made loan copies available to teachers. A second entry point was via the local reproduction of the British Film Institute's extracts from "The Semiology of the Image" by Guy Gauthier and the circulation of a few articles from *Screen Education* such as Grealy's "Film Teaching and the Ideology of the Educational System" (1975). It must be remembered that at this time there were only eleven teachers involved in upper school media studies. The group met regularly with the

specific purpose of exchanging resources. In 1976 three schools piloted the upper school course and in 1977 the number expanded to eleven (McMahon, 1977).

A second factor was the adoption by the first Western Australian media syllabus of an effects-based, linear process model of communication (together with the concept of a passive receiver) which relied heavily upon concepts drawn from American media education programs developed as part of the Critical Viewing Movement in the mid 1970s. The Movement began with the efforts of Professors Anderson and Ploghoft from the University of Utah who worked in collaboration with the Broadcast Research Centre and Cooperative Centre for Social Studies at Ohio University. They developed a series of critical viewing curricular packages for U.S. school districts in Eugene, Oregon; Syracuse, New York; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Jacksonville, Florida in the early 1970s (Anderson and Ploghoft, 1981).

Following the publication of the report of the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behaviour (1972), the Ford Foundation's *Television and Children: Priorities for Research* (1975) and the 1978 conference "Television, the Book and the Classroom" co-sponsored by the Office of Education and the library of Congress there was a concerted effort on the part of the United States Office of Education to introduce media education based on the critical viewing of television (Tyner, 1998, p. 135). The Office of Education issued guidelines and called for funding proposals for critical viewing programs in 1978. The guidelines emphasised the study of television to the exclusion of other media and outlined the sorts of understandings that successful programs would promote. In brief the funded programs would help students to understand the psychological effects of commercials, to distinguish fact from fiction, to recognise and appreciate opposing points of view, to develop an understanding of the style and content of

different television genres and to understand the relationship between television programming and the printed word (Brown, 1991, p. 73).

In respect to communication theory the United States-based Critical Viewing Movement had indirect links with the pessimistic cultural theories of Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) and the mass communication theories of Lazarsfeld and Merton (1948). Adorno and his colleagues were Jewish refugees from Germany and saw the freedom that was thought to ensue after the defeat of European fascism in 1945 as illusory because the technology which had facilitated the dictatorship of the masses had slipped into the homes. Everyday life as Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer and other members of the Frankfurt school saw it, comprised buying, working with machines or staying at home to work in isolation. Mass culture offered an escape from the mechanised monotony of industrial work by giving workers the chance to refresh themselves for more labour. According to Adorno this was not happiness but deception. The mass media contributed to the deception by offering momentary pleasures which distracted people from contemplating their own state. "Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering" (Adorno, 1991, p. 9).

Adorno was particularly critical of television which he saw as delivering hidden meanings antithetical to political freedom:

The majority of television shows today aim at producing, or at least reproducing, the very smugness, intellectual passivity and gullibility that seem to fit in with totalitarian creeds even if the surface message of the shows may be anti-totalitarian (Adorno, 1991, p. 142).

The image underlying Adorno's thesis is that of a helplessly passive and compliant "viewer as victim". In his view the viewer is without critical ability or powers of reasoning and must inevitably succumb to the irresistible power of the

culture industry and become mere absorbers of television's messages. Although less pessimistic the 1977 media studies syllabus echoes Adorno's belief in the relative powerlessness of the individual in the face of a "modern mass media [which will] affect his own value judgments, decision making processes and courses of action" (B.S.E., 1977, p. 241).

A similar view of the media consumer to that of Adorno informed the work of Lazarsfeld and Merton, whose research at Columbia University established the basis of media sociology. They shared with Adorno a similar set of concerns about the size and influence of the mass media and their political effects. Lazarsfeld and Merton argued that the mass media served three functions. The first is status conferral by which the prestige of an individual or policy is raised when they command favourable attention in the media. The second function is the enforcement of social norms in that the media, by exposing moral standards, can spur organised action. They saw the final function of the media as a narcotising dysfunction by which the media encourage apathy and inertia.

Mass communications may be included among the most respectable and efficient of social narcotics. They may be so fully effective as to keep the addict from recognising his own malady ...increasing dosages of mass communications may be inadvertently transforming the energies of men from active participation into passive knowledge. (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948, p. 106)

These two different schools of thought, the Frankfurt school and the media sociology school (The Chicago School) shared similar conceptions of a passive viewer manipulated by a powerful media. A strong implication of the views of both Adorno and Lazarsfeld is that television has a deadening impact and inhibits the individual from acting in a positive way. These theories of media influence found

their way into the popular consciousness through such publications as Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (1977) excerpts of which were distributed by McMahon to media teachers. This work strenuously opposes television, presenting it, in the tradition of Adorno and Lasswell, as a powerful narcotising agent acting upon a defenseless and passive viewer. "All technologies should be assumed to be guilty of dangerous effects until proven innocent" (p. 352). He goes on to describe television imagery as a form of "sleep teaching".

Television offers neither rest nor stimulation. Television inhibits your ability to think, but it does not lead to freedom of mind, relaxation or renewal. It leads to a more exhausted mind. You may have time out from prior obsessive thought patterns, but that's as far as television goes. The mind is never empty, the mind is filled. What's worse, it is filled with someone else's obsessive thoughts and images. (p. 214)

While the views of Mander were not shared by all Western Australian media teachers the media studies syllabus used a similar conception of the viewer and the assumption of effects in order to justify the subject. It says that media studies will give the student the opportunity to "be more than a semi-passive receiver of messages" and by the end of the program of study will be "an active receiver" able to "identify the sender's motive" and "evaluate" it " (B.S.E., 1977, p. 241).

While a concern with the effects of the mass media was a widespread and serious motivation for the introduction of media education in various locations and times the understanding of what might constitute an effect was not uniform. At different times and in different places media education programs were introduced to counter perceived detrimental effects on the individual, on his or her social behaviour, on learning ability, on consumer behaviour and on social and familial

relations. Other media education programs aimed to protect students from the pernicious social effects of the media. Such programs focussed on training students to recognise and withstand techniques of mass persuasion, or to identify and reject oppressive ideology and cultural imperialism. The first Western Australian syllabus avoided any mention of specific media effects and the term effect operated as a blank space upon which teachers and others could write their own meanings.

McMahon, the primary designer of the syllabus, denies any theoretical positioning in the syllabus<sup>5</sup>. In this he is supported by another syllabus writer, Warren Daniel, who said “We weren’t trying to adopt any particular theory. We were just trying to focus on what we thought it was important for the students to know” (Interview, February 5, 1998). Nevertheless, both writers agreed that it was written from a perspective which saw the receiver as being at risk from the ideological messages of the media. McMahon said:

We could not possibly have used the word ideology in the syllabus. That was a word associated with communism, with the far left. The Board would never have accepted a syllabus that talked about capitalist ideology but we hinted at it by references to “economic power groups.” (Interview with McMahon, March 8, 1998)

The absence of an articulated theoretical perspective within the syllabus on its object of study was neither unusual nor restricted to media studies. Media studies was designed to be a non-academic subject to be taken by those students not intending to proceed to university studies. Issues of theory would have been seen as inappropriate for such students. Furthermore, in the seventies, even academic

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<sup>5</sup> McMahon in interview said, “At the time I worked on the syllabus I had never read Althusser, Adorno or Lazarsfeld so I don’t see how I could have been influenced by them” (McMahon, March, 1998).

subjects like English eschewed issues of theory in the syllabus and presented its texts and methodology as uncontested outlines of best practice. It must be kept in mind also that those who taught media studies at this time had no formal background in media, communications or cultural studies. Of those media studies ‘pioneers’ who taught the first upper school media studies course in 1976 not one person had formal qualifications or even undergraduate studies in the discipline. They were, in the main, English teachers trained in the Leavisite tradition, but the group also included teachers with backgrounds in art, business studies, social studies and manual arts teaching. None of the teachers of the early period had had the opportunity in their undergraduate training to acquaint themselves with the major theoretical directions within media and cultural studies.

Another reason for the absence from the curriculum of the topics which filled the pages of *Screen Education* in the period such as representation, race, gender, multiculturalism, genre and authorship might be the lack of intellectual rigour in the teacher development program. Although there were many opportunities for teachers to participate in teacher development programs, [“300 teachers were in-serviced in term 1, 1976 alone” (McMahon, 1976, no page numbers)] such programs had a decidedly practical focus. Communication theory, as such, received no attention although most groups were exposed to a session on image analysis based on the Gauthier material. Professional development programs consisted almost entirely of teachers receiving instruction in photography, darkroom techniques, super-8 filmmaking, video portapak use and sound editing.

The final sections of the syllabus, related to moral and aesthetic discrimination, are legacies of media studies’ debt to English. In the Western



Australian syllabus these categories did not refer to the sex and violence fears which dominated much American writing about the media but rather to the individual's autonomy and freedom and their capacity to produce creative and aesthetic media texts.

In summary subject knowledge as defined in the first authorised syllabus in media studies had its antecedents in unacknowledged post-Marxist and process theories of communication. Knowledge of the mass media was to be gained through “learning by doing” in the creation of media artifacts, the outcome of which would be students with the skills to both recognise the potency of the media and counter its assumed effects.

### **Intellectual roots: growth model English**

In the previous chapter reference was made to changes in the teaching of English in the seventies and the introduction of what Green (1995) calls “New English” and Freebody and LoBianco (1997) describe as the “personal growth model”. Key elements of the new, growth model English were the recognition that language serves expressive, transactional and poetic functions (e.g. Britton, 1970, 1975), is organised into oral, written and visual discourse (e.g. Moffett and Wagner, 1976) developed in social contexts. Medway describes the changes to English teaching in these terms:

Students were invited to say and write what they meant and what they wanted to say, and to express thoughts and feelings of their own. The illocutionary force of their language was systematically valued and supported. (Medway, 1989, p. 16)

Prior to the development of Growth Model English (the common term in Western Australia) the English curriculum had exhibited most of the features of high

status knowledge as defined by Young (1971). They were an emphasis on written presentation, individualism, abstractness and unrelatedness to daily life and common experience (Young, 1971, p. 38). In its new emphasis on creative writing, oral and group work Growth Model English represented a broadening of the English curriculum to incorporate previously illegitimate knowledge and abilities.

In Western Australia New English had its greatest impact at the lower secondary level but elements of it are to be found in the upper school curriculum also. Written English was no longer confined to comment on literary texts but was to “be developed over a wide range of forms and purposes including creative writing” (B.S.E., 1980, p. 98). In addition the Year 11 and 12 English Syllabus required that students be given

Practical language experiences in the fields of drama, film and television production, interviewing, participation in seminars and workshop discussion, chairmanship, reporting etc. (B.S.E., 1980, p. 99)

The media studies syllabuses with its emphasis on production, effective communication, personal growth and creativity shared some of the values of New English:

The student will...

Realise that each way of communicating can be developed to a degree of mastery and creativity to an art form...

Understand that communication may involve ...artistic merit...striking a ‘psychologically responsive chord...

Recognise and appreciate the ...aesthetic composition in any media format.

In the course of the programme it is hoped to foster:

Moral discrimination by the individual as a sender or receiver ...

Aesthetic discrimination by the individual as a sender or receiver with respect to: concept, creativity, content, production, presentation.

Active involvement as a sender or receiver...(B.S.E., 1977, pp. 243-244).

The overlap between media studies and English prompted a school principal and member of the Joint Syllabus Committee to say: “Why shouldn’t this just be part of English?” (J. Casey, Principal Melville SHS, Personal communication, 1978).

This was a question which was to dog media studies over the next decade.

The media studies syllabus was a brief document of less than two pages and, although it listed a set of objectives and understandings, it gave little advice on how to teach other than to say that teachers should adopt a “learning by doing approach”. In a sense then a syllabus poses problems for teachers in that it makes certain demands without offering specific instructions as to how these demands might be met. This is the responsibility of the teacher who must solve these problems in the context of their own classroom. It follows then that the extent knowledge as defined by the syllabus actually circulated in the classrooms of the time cannot be known from an analysis of the syllabus alone. To find out what was actually taught we need to look at the curriculum as it was practised in the early years of the subject’s history.

### **The curriculum as practised**

In this section I discuss selected aspects of the form and content of media studies in its early years as it is revealed through archival documents, curriculum resources and teachers’ recollections.

In the years immediately following the introduction of the pilot course in 1974, media studies was rapidly seen as affording utilitarian and pedagogic possibilities as an optional subject at lower school and in the education of non-university bound students in upper school. Hence the take-up of the subject grew considerably in the next five years but it remained the case that most schools employed only one full-time media studies teacher. Most of the teachers who were employed during this early period complained that they found their situation in the school to be a lonely one. Before becoming media studies teachers they had been accustomed previously to the collegiality of a subject department and they found working alone in a subject area to be an alienating experience. Probably for this reason then a significant number of the teachers in the interviews referred to the subject newsletters of the time as “my lifeline”, “my major form of contact with people who thought like me”, “my how-to-do-it handbook”. Accordingly I turn to the newsletters as a primary source of evidence of practice.

The first subject newsletter, *Media Message* was originally published by the Western Australian Secondary Teachers College. In the editorial of the second edition it says that the newsletter had been created as an information forum “for the minority”, those who have “accepted the relevance of all forms of the media” to education. The editorial committee was formed by a small group of teacher educators and their sub agenda, that of getting media studies introduced into secondary teacher training emerges in the editorial:

If we are to maintain our credibility, then media studies teachers must be thoroughly trained. This must start in the training colleges, but must also take in practitioners already in the field. Although courses are slowly becoming available too little encouragement is being given for existing teachers to take part. (Editorial, 1975, inside cover)

*Media Message* ceased publication at the end of 1979. In 1980 *Aidem* (the title being a mirror image of the word media) became the subject newsletter. *Aidem* was produced by the media advisory section of the Curriculum Branch and was largely written by Barrie McMahon, the curriculum advisory teacher, although very few articles actually carry his by-line.

The newsletters, despite their source in the bureaucracy, adopted the style of a subject association newsletter. Their tone was casual, chummy, non-academic and occasionally anti-bureaucratic. They provided, along with advice on what to teach and how to teach it, a bit of gossip about what others in the field were doing. The language addressed the readers as intimates (only first names were used), as enthusiastic and committed teachers of media studies and as unified in their pursuit of enhanced status for the subject. In terms of content the newsletters were mainly devoted to “how to” types of articles, as in how to develop slides, how to make a pin-hole camera, how to thread a video recorder, and so on but also included examples of teaching programs and lesson ideas. In the absence of a textbook or undergraduate teacher training in the field these newsletters served to construct a body of knowledge about the subject.

The second source of information on the media studies curriculum as practised in its early years are the resource booklets compiled by the media studies advisory team in 1978 and distributed to all media studies teachers. One book consists of program outlines, provided by media studies teachers, for years 11 and 12 students. The programs cover newspapers, posters, magazines, comics, film, photography, television and radio. The other book is titled “Supplementary Material” and consists of reproductions of handouts and photocopies from magazines, journals

and equipment manuals. Both sets of material are organised by medium of study: film, photography, print, radio and television. Each of the programs lists the specific course objectives, a brief summary of the concept and content to be taught under each objective, appropriate student tasks categorised as analysis, research and activity and a list of supplementary resources. The extract below is typical of all the programs in the resource.

Concept	Student Activity	Reference
Photography as art – what makes a good photograph	<p>Compile a list of the elements you consider contribute to a good photograph. (Analysis)</p> <p>Choose one element of a good photograph. How do advertisers exploit the particular aspect you have chosen? (Research)</p> <p>Choose one element of a good photograph. Examine this element in detail by taking at least 10 photographs. (Production)</p>	<p>Variety of magazines</p> <p>Kodak slide kit</p>
Photography in advertising	<p>Cut out 40 advertisements from magazines that you consider striking or effective. Analyse them in terms of the importance of the work of the photographer and the graphic artist; the relationship between the effectiveness of the ad and the profitability of the product; the image the ad is trying to sell. (Analysis)</p> <p>Photograph a series of symbols, ranging from obvious universally accepted symbols like a cross to more subtle ones e.g. Cigar in man's hand = success. (Production)</p>	<p>Viewpoint tape 3</p> <p>Semiology slides</p> <p><i>Media She</i></p>

Note. From Media Studies Programs for years 11 and 12 by Curriculum Advisory, Education Department of Western Australia.

The supplementary material provided for the program on photography includes:

- a handout on ideas for what students might take photographs of,
- a rationale for teaching photography extracted from a British journal,
- instructions on how to mix the chemicals needed to make black and white, and brown and white slides,
- a hand drawn picture of the tools needed to teach photography (scissors, masking tape, empty film cassettes, a bulk film loader and a camera),
- a hand drawn diagram of the steps in processing black and white film,
- a hand drawn diagram of the steps in developing a photographic print,
- instructions for processing colour slides,
- examples of ‘doctored’ photographs,
- an article from *The British Journal of Photography* on news photojournalism,
- an extract from McLuhan’s *Understanding Media*.

(See Appendix F for examples of the resource material).

Noteworthy in the sample program is the use of the term “good photograph”. At this time untheorised aesthetics, in the sense that nowhere is a good photograph defined or described, has a central place in the teaching of media studies. A second point is that the programs offer a preponderance of activities that do not require reading or writing skills. For example, it is suggested that students cut out forty

magazine advertisements which they consider “striking or effective”, terms which remain undefined or explained. Similarly students are required to take not one but ten photographs in order to examine a single element of a “good photograph”. It was the focus on such “busy work” (Masterman, 1985, p. 27), which was to ensure that the subject’s reputation as a soft option was consolidated.

### **Practical work as discourse**

Media studies, as it is represented in these newsletters and programs, is mainly about production. From publication of the very first newsletter (prior to the introduction of a syllabus) the newsletters consistently exhibited a strong focus on student practical work. The extract below comes from a 1975 edition of *Media Message* and reveals the priority given to practical media production at all levels of schooling:

Nancy, at Nulsen Primary, had an initial problem of equipment availability, but has scrounged from her boss’s personal equipment: A 16mm camera and some bulk 35 mm film.

At Esperance Primary ... grade 6s are processing their own colour slides. They work in the school store room without any dark-room facilities, and are producing excellent results.

Yakania Primary school has a caravan rigged with a dark room to add media depth to various school excursions.

Howard is running a compulsory media course at Pingelly District High and battling on in a converted washroom. Students recently presented some excellent work at the district’s Agricultural Show, including examples of photography, movie and video.

Tony at Melville and Gordon at Bentley are both using photography to support their social studies programs. Tony’s working in black and white prints and Gordon in colour slides. (McMahon, 1975a, no page numbers)



Thanks to a personal conviction, a co-operative administration and financial assistance via the School's Commission, 1975 brings the introduction of a full time program for one teacher. What have we got? A good sized room set up with a cinema scope screen and projector, some movie, still and video gear, a cloakroom disguised as a darkroom. (Reid, 1975, no page numbers).

During 1975 portapak video tape recorder equipment was purchased under the Disadvantaged Schools program...The dominant use for the portapak is in actual video filming by the students. Interviews, drama, action study and video recording of excursions are popular activities. (McMahon, 1976, no page numbers)

The extracts above are typical of the sort of coverage given to media studies in the newsletters in the early days of the subject. The focus was very much on resources (or the lack of such) related to student production while the tone was almost missionary in its sense of celebration of ingenuity in the face of adversity. The use of language such as "scrounged around" and "battling on" in a "converted washroom" suggests an idealistic picture of a band of dedicated media pathfinders battling bureaucratic lassitude, lack of funds and facilities. Certainly most of the interviewees from this period spoke of themselves as "pioneers" "fighting for recognition" or "constantly arguing for resources" in an atmosphere which was "exciting but exhausting".

Although the upper school teaching programs included sections on analysis and research, the bulk of students' tasks was devoted to production work. Similarly, production oriented material dominated the "Supplementary Resources". Where the programs require students to do tasks other than production they are in the main cutting out images and writing short notes on them, drawing storyboards, viewing and discussing a film or television program and sometimes writing a script.

The emphasis on media production and media equipment was both a reflection and a distortion of the educational philosophy of the head of the Education Department media advisory group, Barrie McMahon<sup>6</sup>. He was a self-proclaimed fan of Marshall McLuhan and, as mentioned earlier, an advocate of the “learning by doing” approach he had seen operating in the United States and Britain (McMahon, 1979, p. 5). Learning by doing is the dominant theme of the 16mm promotional film *Doing the Media* produced by the Western Australian Secondary Teachers’ College in 1975. The film presented McMahon talking about the importance of practical work intercut with scenes of students engaged in photography, sound recording and filmmaking. It was his belief that practice and theory should be necessarily combined. His argument, paraphrased here, is that the practice of learning how to use a video camera, record and interview, prepare a script is the first step in revealing the human construction and the non-transparent nature of the media. In his writing he stressed that:

A media studies approach is a conceptual approach to education that often employs the use of media equipment as an aid to learning in the same way that a science teacher uses beakers and test tubes towards conceptual ends. The pieces of media equipment themselves, are not the approach. (McMahon, 1980a, p. 5)

In an unpublished paper distributed to teachers of media studies in Western Australian schools McMahon wrote:

What is media studies? ... It is the exploration of communication through our senses and the development of our perceptions and skills in communicating by utilising media tools. These tools are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. (McMahon, 1978)

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<sup>6</sup> The Curriculum Branch of the Western Australian Education Department was responsible for the production and implementation of curriculum. One section of the Branch was known as the advisory section. The Department appointed subject advisors whose main task was to visit schools and assist teachers in the implementation of the curriculum.

What is clear from the early documents and the interview transcripts is that “learning by doing” or practical work was the dominant form of activity in the media studies classroom. What is less clear is how much understanding about the media students actually developed in the “learning by doing approach”. In interviews teachers recognised the issue and some saw it as a problem with the subject then and now.

The emphasis at the time I was teaching media studies was that children would learn things if they could do it themselves, so a lot of it was very practically orientated, that was very much the theory at the time, that kids could go out and take photos and experiment in a practical sense. Then the message that you were trying to teach about, bias in camera angles or whatever, would be more clearly understood. (Interview with Sue, an ex-media studies teacher, July 24, 1999, Perth)

Another interviewee remembers being concerned that the students were not learning very much at all about the mass media. She says she tried to solve the problem:

I was worried that they were not learning much so I used to teach the theory separately from the practical work. The students were prepared to sit and listen to me pontificate. The practice was towards developing skills and understandings but it didn't actually make a direct link with theory. (Interview with Jan, a current media studies teacher with 25 years experience, February 16, 1999)

McMahon acknowledges the issue but insists that it was not his theory of learning by doing that was the problem, it was the teachers. He says that:

The problem was what got teachers hooked was the practical stuff and they wanted to spend so much time and energy on that that they lost sight of where it was meant to be leading. (Interview with McMahon, March 6, 1998)

Presumably it was meant to be “leading” to a deeper understanding of the media. Despite some doubts about whether or not practical work does lead to

conceptual understanding media studies teachers remain committed to media production as a central component of the subject. They see it as both a philosophical and a pragmatic decision as these comments from practising teachers illustrate:

I think it [practical work] is fundamental. The more they learn about what they can do the more they understand the media and how they can construct specific points of view. I think that to base media studies in theory at school is going to turn off a tremendous number of kids. (Interview with Duncan, a current media studies teacher with twenty years experience, July 16, 1999)

Practical work is central to media studies. It gives the students an understanding of the way the media operates but just as importantly it gives them a chance to produce something that is all their own creation. (Interview with Jane, a current media studies teacher with three years experience, April, 4, 1999)

...one of the important things about practical work is that it gives them [students] a chance to learn how to manipulate the tools of the media and hopefully there is a crossover there, that if they understand how they have done it, then maybe they'll understand how other people have done it. (Interview with Julia, current media studies teacher with ten years experience, September 15, 1998)

Others agree that practical work is vital in attracting to students to the subject: "it's the thing that attracts them", "it's a drawcard". A few have doubts about its value: "it's just a big, sort of, let's have some fun" but nevertheless see practical work as appropriate to the needs of students:

...it's useful for students who are not as academically able so it gives them some experience at achieving success but I don't see that it helps them understand the way film and narrative are structured. (Interview with Julie, a current media studies teacher with 12 years experience, July 12, 1999)

There were three lasting outcomes of the practice of making production central to the subject. First, in making practical production the core of media studies the subject made a radical break with its roots in the subject English. Film-making had been a regular activity in English classrooms and, as discussed in the last

chapter, was a pre-condition to the introduction of media studies. However, practical production in English had always been an adjunct or enrichment of the traditional ways of demonstrating understanding through written or oral language. Media Studies substituted the production of media artifacts as both the purpose and object of study subject and as the essential, and usually the only, means by which students could express their understanding of a concept.

Secondly, I suggest that there is a causal relation between the emphasis on practical work, the linking of practical work to the needs of the less academically able students and the repeated failure of media studies to gain acceptance as a tertiary entrance subject. To those not directly involved the subject appears to look like a low-status vocational subject with its emphasis on equipment, production of non-written outcomes and student activity. In contrast, high-status academic subjects are characterised by textbooks, reading lists, written outcomes and theoretical knowledge. As has been demonstrated by Layton (1973) and Goodson (1983), knowledge which has a practical orientation, is held to be of lesser value than abstract knowledge. Goodson cites Dodd (1978) as saying that while the word “practical” describes adequately an essential part of the subject it is an emotionally charged word.

Thirdly, and not entirely unrelated to my points above, I suggest that the focus on practical production significantly contributed to the development of a prevailing discourse which rendered the subject as “fun” in the minds of students and teachers. Writing is not considered by most students as being inherently enjoyable and media studies was, in the seventies, a subject which demanded very little writing (or reading).

A final point to be made is that absent from the teachers' remarks about the strengths and weaknesses of practical work are those concerns emerging from the literature and outlined in Chapter One. In that section it was noted that Ferguson (1981) and Masterman (1985) stressed that students' practical work was, in their view unfortunately, culturally reproductive. They argued that student productions invariably mimicked mainstream media production and that the outcome was that dominant media forms and practices came to be seen by the students as normal, natural and desirable. This they said, was in contradiction to a central aim of media studies, which is to challenge rather than embrace dominant media forms and extend students' abilities to produce their own meanings (Watling, 1988, p. 140). None of the teachers interviewed for this study raised this issue and when questioned more closely dismissed the matter as of no concern to them. My own observations of classroom production activity in the early days of the subject confirm that students invariably copied an existing media form in their own productions. The structure of the teaching program made this almost inevitable. The common practice for all teachers was to show examples of a particular media form, for example, excerpts from documentaries or feature films, discuss its form in detail and then require students to produce their own version. Their products were then assessed on the basis of the demonstrated ability to use the formal techniques of the genre. Such techniques of the genre could have been problematised by the teacher and subjected to analysis but they rarely were in my experience.

### **Media studies as ideological study**

In material from the latter seventies and early eighties there is an identifiable concern with the ideological power of the media although this is less prominent than

the learning by doing emphasis. There was a tendency on the part of teachers to believe that the study of the media would somehow liberate the student from ideology. In this aspect the teachers are focussing on those sections of the syllabus that speak of the power and effects of the media.

The study of the mass media is necessary because of the powerful effect that the mass media have upon the student and the society. ... It is important, not only to point out the effects that the mass media are having, but also to create an awareness in students regarding the ways the media operate, thus making it possible for the student to become a decision maker in personal and societal matters, rather than a passive acceptor (sic). (McMahon, 1974)

As pointed out earlier the 1977 syllabus made no mention of ideology per se merely “the power of the media to affect community attitudes”. Nevertheless some teachers from this period remember this concept as being central to their teaching of media studies. One of the interviewees remembers the conceptual basis of his teaching as being:

...pretty much driven by the sort of knee-jerk Marxist position which says, along with the conservatives, that the media are disabling and alienating in the service of the existing power structures... We were getting the kids to think about how they could read media messages but the emphasis was on reading against the grain. It was that ‘spot the ideology at work’ sort of stuff, getting the kids to think about values, getting the kids to think about notions of truth, albeit simplistically, to kind of develop a resistive subjectivity based on a little knowledge. (Interview with Norm, an ex-media studies teacher September 12, 1999,)

Further support for the argument that an understanding of ideology was central to knowledge in media studies is provided by the extensive use of a particular teaching resource made mention of earlier in this chapter. This was the *Viewpoint* series produced by Thames Television. It was developed by Douglas Lowndes, the Head of the Education Department of the British Film Institute, Alan Horrox and Gillian Skirrow both of whom were full time employees of Thames Television. The

series is cited as a key resource in the two sample teaching programs published in *Media Message* and *Aidem*. All of the teachers interviewed from the early years remembered using the series frequently:

I used to use them endlessly and they were fantastic and its about time we had an updated version of those. ...they were really well made, they were entertaining, they appealed to kids of the day and they set up some challenging ideas. (Interview with Rob, current media studies teacher with twenty years experience, August 3, 1999, Perth)

One of the things I liked about Douglas Lowndes was at the end of each program he always said "These are my views – I hope you will question them when the program is finished" and we tended to do that. I still use some of them. Some of the things he says are over the top and sometimes I will run with that line to see if the kids will bite and generally they don't but I would never show it and not discuss it. His examples are fairly sort of pro-Marxist. (Interview with Neil, a current media studies teacher with twenty five years experience, July 12, 1999, Perth)

The *Viewpoint* series stated as its aims:

- To direct the attention of educators and their students towards the mass media.
- To examine from a social viewpoint the relationships between the mass media and philosophy, economics, culture and education. " (*Viewpoint Teachers' Notes*, p. 1)

It treated the media as an agent of social control "it [*Viewpoint*] show's how people's beliefs and ideas are formed through communication and how communication has throughout history been used as a form of control (*Viewpoint Teachers Notes' p. 3*). The educational notes published to accompany the program are explicitly Marxist in their conception of society and the role of the media:



...we do not subscribe to the view that education, communication and audio-visual aids are value free. Therefore in order for the teacher and students to challenge or agree with our assumptions we must start by stating our view of society. This view, which incorporates an attitude to all social phenomena including the mass media, has three central concepts: ideology, material conditions, and consciousness. (*Viewpoint Teachers Notes*, p. 5)

The programs cover the issues of communication in society, mediation and structures. The series emphasises the industrial nature of the production processes and routine practices of the mass media and demonstrate through examples how these operations reinforce values and beliefs specific to a capitalist society. The programs offer sophisticated ways of relating texts and the conditions of their production to patterns of social consumption and the circulation of ideologies of gender, race and nation. The political strategy adopted in the programs is a demonstration of the ways in which cultural forms such as the news, documentaries, advertisements and soap operas are sites of ideology and unequal relations of power. This is not to say however that either students or their teachers understood the situation in this way. In my personal experience the students reacted more to the form of the program which was pleasurable than to the content which was complex. The series employed all the techniques more usually associated with entertainment than education – popular music, comedy, special effects and a racy style. Teachers' reactions varied. Some, like the students, valued the series for its style rather than its content. For others, the series provided examples of, and hence affirmation for, their preconceived belief that the mass media was fundamentally a tool of social control.

So although the concept of ideology was not directly addressed in the syllabus it was strongly represented in the curriculum as practised. While the syllabus spoke vaguely about students' need to understand the media's power to

affect community attitudes in the classrooms this was interpreted as knowledge of the media as an organ of ideological control.

### **Media teaching as radical practice**

In the early years of the subject the idea that by studying the media students could learn to recognise and reject a dominant bourgeois ideology had a flow on effect upon the organisation of the curriculum. One of the teachers interviewed described the dominant discourse within media studies as:

the idea of power being concentrated in very important very influential structures. Those media discourses were seen also to operate within the school. We picked up some of the stuff from England that suggested that if you are going to question power structures in the media then you need to question power structures generally and that included the classroom. This in a sense guided how we structured the curriculum. (Interview with Norm, September, 12, 1999)

In the statement above the teacher makes passing reference to the genealogy of the idea of media studies as a radical practice with “some of the stuff from England”. The “stuff” from England was the work of Alvarado (1977) and Donald (1977) which reached Western Australia in the form of a hand out distributed by McMahon. Both writers argued that the aim of media studies was “the investigation and revelation of ideology in practice” and thus should subject not just the media but the education system itself to theoretical analysis. This need arose because:

both education and media are ideological in that they present their consumers with structured images of themselves in relation to other people and to social institution. They provide fragmented knowledge in well-established (and therefore) comprehensible codes which are crucial in the formation of the individual personality, imagination and belief. They make particular social relations (those that exist here and now) seem natural and normal. They therefore inhibit the tendency to change those relations ...in any radical way. (Donald, 1977, p. 3)

During the pilot school phase in the subject's development (1974-7) a concerted attack was made on the traditional organisation of curricula with its delineation of clear subject divisions and narrowly specialist teachers. The 'radical' media educators viewed subject divisions as being both arbitrary and as discouraging students to seek connections between what were presented as a disparate set of facts, offered by different teachers in different lessons. Such divisions resulted in subjects becoming sets of discrete concerns removed from any understanding of society. It was such a view of the traditional curriculum that prompted the demand that:

any course in media education must be related to the so-called subject content in areas of general study in order to make it educationally relevant... The paradox between the linear structure of the traditional education system and the implosive nature of the electronic media places the teacher in an almost impossible situation, for the media impact is of such magnitude and dominance that immediate involvement cannot be split into subject departments or timetabled into subject slots. (McMahon, 1974)

McMahon appears to be arguing for what Basil Bernstein describes as an integrated curriculum in which there are no boundaries between the components (classified in terms of time or content) (Bernstein, 1971). In fact McMahon was unsuccessful in the attempt to change the organisation of the school timetable to accommodate his views. Having failed to persuade the educational bureaucracy of the need for integration of the curriculum he approached the issue in a different way. He deliberately chose his media studies staff from a diverse range of teaching backgrounds. The media studies staff at the pilot school came from English, drama, science and art backgrounds.

A second radical feature of the early curriculum was the organisation of time and space in the classroom. The media studies classroom was structured differently to other subject areas as the three teachers quoted below point out.

In 1974 I think I started off with two year 10 classes and a year 11 class and it was very much a practical thing at this stage. I can remember teaching photography and not knowing the first thing about it. In my naivete I had asked the principal for one 35mm camera, one enlarger, one movie camera, one tripod, one of everything. And after about two weeks there was such an enormous amount of interest, and it was purely practical at this stage, that I went to the principal and said I have got to have two of everything. I can't cope. That meant that the sorts of things I devised to make this work was to have briefs and students would actually do a film activity, or a photography activity, or an audio activity and we rotated. They would have so many weeks on these different tasks which meant we could accommodate everyone with not very much equipment at all. (Interview with Jan, a current media studies teacher, July 16, 1999)

There was a concerted effort to structure the curriculum differently and throw, in a sense, the responsibility back onto the kids to work independently. You've got to remember that our set up was informed by liberal pinko notions of student centred learning, a kind of resistive attitude to the structures of school and institutions generally. (Interview with Norm, ex-media studies teacher September 12, 1999)

Our media classes used to operate in three different locations. The darkroom was a converted section of the boys' washroom. Filmmaking and animation used to happen in a classroom about 50 metres along the corridor from the darkroom. The television stuff was located in small room alongside the classroom. Groups would be allocated to each space and I used to move continually between them. In the main classroom the contracts for each group were pinned up on the noticeboard. Each group had three sessions in which to complete their contract and then they moved on to the next activity. (Interview with Rick, an ex-media studies teacher, June 16, 1998)

The chronic lack of equipment together with the need to ensure that all students were actively engaged in an activity meant that groups of students worked concurrently on different tasks using different media. The introduction to the Western Australian teachers' resource book stated the problem most succinctly: "The challenge in media teaching is to find a way to divide 30 children into one camera" (Education Department of WA, 1980, p. 4). Within the small cohort of

media studies teachers this form of organisation was called the “contract system”. Essentially it described a teaching method which involved small groups of students simultaneously studying different aspects of the course subject matter, some were engaged in small group interaction with the teacher, other groups were working independently of the teacher. Some of the groups were in the classroom others outside perhaps making a film or interviewing each other.

The outcome of the contract system was a classroom that was not organised in the traditional mono-vocal format in which the teacher delivers a lesson, the students ask some questions and then apply their knowledge in writing. Some of the teachers interviewed in the study believed the contract system to be a great strength in media studies and described it as “student centred learning” or as “building independent learning skills”. Others saw it as simply a convenient way of organising scarce resources and a system which brought its own problems in terms of discipline and the negative responses of school authorities. As one respondent said:

I used a contract system because I had to but it made it really difficult to supervise the whole class. I used to have to run in and out of the darkroom to check on the film and audio groups outside. It was impossible to keep all the groups on task all of the time and some of them just slacked off. (Interview with John, an ex-media studies teacher May 10, 1998)

Having lots of groups working on different activities was OK for me but a lot of the other teachers did not like it. They thought the students were just mucking around, not working. I was forever having to justify myself. (Interview with Warren, a current media studies teacher, August 16, 1998,)

At first glance this form of structuring of space and time in the classroom appears to be a long way from the “micro-technologies” which Foucault argues serve to discipline the body. These micro-technologies – the organisation of space and time along ordered lines so as to ensure constant surveillance, the division of labour,

hierarchical observation and normalizing judgement (Foucault, 1977, p. 170) appear to be absent from the loosely controlled, multi-faceted media studies classroom. On closer examination however it will be seen that this was a not altogether new but certainly different form of classroom power relations. It precipitated on a small scale a new field of power/knowledge whose most characteristic expression can be represented by the term organisation and whose most characteristic effect was self-regulation.

The key to effective implementation of the contract system was organisation. It required a large deal of preparation of detailed contracts which were in reality sets of instructions for students. An outline of the contract system is provided in a 1975 edition of the newsletter for teachers *Media Message*:

Each term a student has a contract of work to complete. The information supplied to the student includes the number of periods per term, the degree of difficulty of the exercise, the size of the working group, the number of periods the exercise is expected to take. Initially the student has no choice in the exercises he contracts to cover, but as the skills progress so the choice increases. (p. 4)

In terms of this genealogy the contract system had three outcomes of interest. One effect was to make the students responsible for their own surveillance. In the traditional classroom the physical structure facilitated hierarchical observation. Students sit at desks, usually in rows and facing towards the front of the room. The teacher is in front of and at a higher level than the students. In the media studies distributed style of classroom the front of the room style of observation was not possible. The contract system introduced a different form of surveillance in which the students were required to present themselves to the teacher for the purpose of observation and evaluation. All the contracts required the students to approach the teacher and request that he/she 'check' their work before they could proceed to the

next step (see Appendix G). This checkpoint was almost always at the point of completion of the written preparation, that is, on completion of the script or the storyboard, and prior to the student getting their hands on the equipment.

The second effect was to create a slightly different power-knowledge relation from that found in more traditional classrooms. In the case of the media studies classroom, unlike the traditional teacher dominated classroom, knowledge was not an object to be passed from teacher to student. Rather knowledge was produced by students in the course of their interaction with the tasks required by the contract. Knowledge was an outcome on the part of the student not an input on the part of the teacher. Nevertheless the power to assess the knowledge, to judge it as worthy or unworthy, remained with the teacher because his or her permission needed to be acquired before the student could proceed to the next step.

The third effect of the contract system was to cement the students' use of media tools as a key element in the gratification-punishment system fundamental to discipline (Foucault, 1977, p. 180). The reward for 'good work' assessed by the teacher at a prescribed 'checkpoint' was the opportunity for students to use the tools of the media – the cameras, the tape-recorders etc. The "micro-penalty" (p. 178) for failure to meet the standard required by the teacher was a prohibition on use of the equipment. Practical work then operated not just as a learning method employed by students but also as a reward given or withheld by teachers.

I am not suggesting that teachers used the contract system as a nefarious means of maintaining discipline and classroom control while preaching the values of independent learning. Rather the analysis of the disciplinary technology of the contract system points to the ironic situation whereby a technological apparatus,

student contracts, operates in diametrical opposition to the dominant discourse of progressive education. Furthermore, the example highlights another point which is that although the tactics involved in the operation of power may involve the knowing subject the outcome or overall strategy is non-subjective. As Foucault said: “People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what they do does” (Foucault, quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 187).

The strength and pervasiveness of the learning by doing discourse realised in practical media production and supported by the contract system of classroom organisation is partly explained by the nature of the teaching cohort. They were in the main young, untrained in the subject but seeking a new challenge. Their introduction to the subject had been through workshops organised around the learning of production skills. Demand for the subject was limited and could be met through the appointment of ten to twelve new teachers each year thus the Education Department and the private schools could fill their need for media studies teachers by appropriating workshop trained teachers from other disciplines. It was not until the late seventies that local teacher training institutions introduced media studies as a specific subject area in pre-service training. This meant that during the seventies and into the eighties media studies teachers were recruited through production-based in-service programs organised and led by the media studies advisory team attached to the Curriculum Branch of the Education Department.

### **The discourse of fun**

The attraction of the subject for those teachers who entered media studies in its earliest years appears to have been of two kinds. There were those who were



lured by the alternative media studies posed to traditional chalk/talk, pen/paper teaching and learning. They embraced practical work because they believed it engaged students in a way that reading and writing did not. The answers below were in response to the question “What motivated you to teach media studies?”

I experienced kids daily who were turned off by chalk and talk. I liked the idea of using something other than books and writing implements. (Interview with Gill, an ex-media studies, September 25, 1999)

Media studies offered kids something more than just sitting and listening. They could express themselves in a different way, they could actually produce something. (Interview with Lyn, a current media studies teacher with fifteen years experience, February 19, 1999)

I believed that children needed, no deserved, the opportunity to express themselves through pictures instead of words. And it worked. It was that simple. The students were interested and enthusiastic. (Interview with Carol, an ex-media studies teacher, December 10, 1998)

For some of my students media studies was the only opportunity they had to succeed. They knew before they wrote a word that the best they could hope for was a C for their essay but these same students could shine when it came to producing an animation or a photograph. They loved it. (Interview with Laura, an ex-media studies teacher, July 28, 1999)

The other type of attraction presented by media studies was the potential it held for teacher’s personal pleasure. “Fun” as a motive for becoming a media studies teacher figured prominently in the teachers’ descriptions of their reasons for taking on the subject:

I was always interested in visuals. I had wanted to be an art teacher and I had lots of friends in the media. I loved learning photography. (Interview with Sue, an ex-media studies teacher, July 24, 1999, Perth)

The hands on aspect appealed to me. I liked working with equipment. (Interview with Bob, a current media studies teacher, July 16, 1999, Perth)

I was bored with teaching commercial studies and looking for a change. I started in 1974 with a very practical course ... in every class there would be a group working on a film activity, another on radio, another on a cut and paste activity. (Interview with Jan, a current teacher of media studies, February 16, 1999, Perth)

I did an in-service course and I thought it was a heap of fun. I learnt how to use a camera and develop my own films. I was hooked and could not wait to start a media studies course. (Interview with Peter, an ex-media studies teacher, October 16, 1998)

The “fun” tag attached to media studies was partly promoted by the form and content of in-service adopted in the subject area. In those heady days of Federal funding for teacher development in-services were extended and participants were relatively well treated. Media Studies in-service courses were in the main residential and all meals and accommodation costs were met centrally. Schools willing to release teachers (for as long as ten days) were fully supported by the provision of funding for relief teachers. Participants would live-in at a reasonable although not luxurious hotel and were required to commit themselves for the duration. They would work from nine in the morning until nine at night and then party until the small hours. That teachers could absent themselves from home and responsibilities for twenty-four hours a day, five days a week points to the low average age of teachers in the late seventies relative to today’s average teaching age. As one of the participants in this study said: “Ever since my fifth year out teaching I have been the age of the average teaching age. In 1980 I was 26, now I am 46” (Interview with Head of Department of English, July 2, 2000).

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter the content of the in-service courses was focussed on instruction in using the tools of the media. The “learning by

doing approach” had permeated all levels of media education including professional development in the area. Every aspect of the production process had to be undertaken by the teachers themselves, from rolling off 35mm from bulk loaders into cassettes, to mixing the chemicals, to processing the negatives and finally printing the photographs. Some professional development programs even included instruction on how to develop super 8 film, a messy and time consuming business. The do-it-yourself approach was presented as a way of thumbing one’s nose at the commercial, profit driven multinationals such as Kodak. To be “Mickey Mouse”, to do it yourself without expensive equipment, was celebrated and publicised through the issuing of Mickey Mouse T-shirts to participants. (The T-shirts depicted Mickey Mouse operating a video camera). This emphasis on practical production in media workshops affected the type of teachers who became engaged in the area. In the seventies it was mainly those who saw themselves as having some interest and expertise in technical production who attended the professional development courses. They in turn trained other colleagues in the same skills and all engaged in similar activities with their students.

Fun then, whether it be student or teacher pleasure, became a major element of the discourse of media studies in its early days. The association of media studies with fun was in part inevitable given that its major objects of study – film, television and radio – have themselves the status of fun. As books are associated with serious topics so the media are associated with entertainment. But the fun discourse was further nurtured by those involved in the field and became, for many, the reason to join the media studies ranks (and for others to make a decision not to join). Of the objectives stated in the 1977 syllabus only one, that of communicating through visual media, was mentioned by teachers as his or her motivation for joining media

studies. No responses mentioned such other objectives as understanding media effects, analysis skills, moral or aesthetic discrimination. This suggests that the historian of curriculum cannot rely on syllabus documents as either evidence of a subject's goals or an insight into what was going on in the minds of those supposedly implementing the syllabus.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter describes a situation in which subject knowledge, as defined by the syllabus does not correspond fully to subject knowledge as constructed in the classroom. The syllabus constructed the object of study as a powerful and potential threat to the community. In this orientation it reflected the early British theoretical tradition of a concern with structures of domination embedded in cultural studies and media pedagogy in England. But the conditions in Australia were unlike those in England. In Australia government regulation prohibited television licence holders to two stations in total and no more than one in a given market (O'Regan, 1993, p. 3). Government policy of the time encouraged local ownership, programming and control of television stations. In Western Australia in this period the media environment was characterised by competition between two locally owned (non-network) commercial television broadcasters, foreign content quotas, regulation of advertising and programming and government support for Australian production. The syllabuses' representation of a monolithic all-powerful media did not match the reality of the local condition. Thus it is not surprising that classroom practice in media studies favoured production over the analysis of media power and constructed its object of study as an object of pleasure rather than fear. In the practice of media

studies in the classroom learning how to do the media was given priority over learning about the media.

The mismatch between the syllabus and classroom practice seems to have been largely unrecognised by most of those involved and therefore not regarded by them as a problem. Some, like McMahon recognised it, but were like him, confident that “concepts would follow skills” and thus no struggle emerged over appropriate content or method in this period. However to say that there was no conflict is not to deny that there existed power relations. If power is understood in the Foucauldian sense of social relations in tension and not as an attribute of a subject then the relations between teachers, teachers and students and teachers and the media studies advisory team can be likened to “governmentality”. Foucault defines governmentality as the “contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self” (Foucault, 1988c, p. 19). Technologies of domination “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination” and technologies of the self permit “individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thought, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom ....” (p. 18). I am suggesting that the teachers, students and professional experts were, for different reasons, content with the status quo, satisfied with the circumstances in which they found themselves and assumed themselves to share common goals. In this case governing meant “the right disposition of things” leading to “the common welfare and salvation of all” (Foucault, 1979, p. 12).

This situation can be understood as a product of the framework of discourses and institutional practices together with their effects to which teachers are subject. Media studies teachers are constructed, just like any other teacher, by discursive formations of education and schooling. However the actual discourses framing media studies teaching are not identical to those of other subjects. The significant differences are produced by its position as a subject provided for non-academic students and its consequent lack of university entrance status. As such it therefore engendered expectations in students, teachers, parents and administrators that were not the same as those for other subjects. There was no presumption that this subject should or would teach those skills usually regarded as necessary to tertiary study: critical thinking, problem solving, research and extended writing skills. Neither was there the anticipation that the subject would teach vocational skills because, quite apart from the lack of job opportunities in the field, none of the subject's teachers had any experience or training in the media industries.

The different expectations of the subject are reflected in, and demonstrated by the fact that it was, in its early years, subjected to minimal line management requirements in that it had no superintendent and the subject advisors were in a school rather than Head Office. These institutional arrangements signified the subject's lack of importance relative to other subjects in the curriculum. The lack of expectations of academic or vocational purpose together with its institutional positioning as unimportant opened spaces for teachers to match their instruction to their own and their students' interests. The outcome was the development of discourses around media production and emancipation (i.e. liberation from both ideology and the traditional classroom structure) woven together by a dominant discourse of pleasure.

While the pleasure was real, the emancipation was an illusion. Certainly the media studies classroom was not, unlike more traditional subject classrooms, the site of sovereign power in which the teacher is the highly visible and identifiable representative of power. The media studies classroom employed disciplinary power: light, all pervasive and invisible. The pupil contract system of media studies was designed to give students autonomy but in its application established a new form of surveillance with its own unique punishment/reward system centred on the use of equipment. It had the panoptic effect of creating individuals who were willing, even eager, to make themselves visible, open to scrutiny and controllable. Using Foucault's concept of disciplinary technologies this chapter has shown how a progressive educational strategy aimed at fostering the independent learner can in its application serve to produce the obedient subject.

The next phase in the history of the subject saw a major change in the orientation of the media studies curriculum. The "hands on", "learning by doing" approach was not discarded entirely but textual analysis became a major activity. In the next period of media studies' history knowledge in media studies took on a precision previously lacking. The visual image became subject to new rules of classification and teachers and students alike attempted to describe phenomena that had previously been below the level of the visible and expressible. The eighties was the period of the "science of the text" (Aronwitz and Giroux, 1991, p. 142) in which contemplation of an image became an occasion for a display of methodological skill. This is the subject of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **STRUGGLES WITHIN AND WITHOUT**

Discourse transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault, 1981, p. 101).

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter examined the discursive formations constructing disciplinary knowledge in the early years of the development of media studies. It was argued that the dominant discourses around media studies in that period were those of “learning by doing”, progressive pedagogy, education for empowerment underpinned by a discursive formation most aptly described as fun. This chapter continues the genealogy of media studies and traces the shifts in power and knowledge in media studies in the eighties.

#### **Syllabus changes**

The upper school media studies syllabus underwent major revisions in the 1980s. The four major distinguishing features of the first syllabus were discussed in the previous chapter. They were:

1. the assumption of powerful media that had an effect upon the judgements, decision-making processes and actions of those who consumed it (B.S.E. 1977, p. 241);
2. a conviction of the empowering potential of media education in that a “media enlightened student” would be “able to evaluate and discriminate” and be “better



able to cope with his media environment both in the participating and analytical sense” (B.S.E., 1977, p. 241);

3. a theoretical dependence on the concept of a chain of communication (derived largely from Lasswell but inflected by McLuhan) which involved a sender/message/medium/receiver” (B.S.E., 1977, p. 242); and
4. an insistence that students must “learn by doing” presented as the requirement that a “student will have sufficient minimal competence in essential manipulative processing and presentational skills with respect to working within each of the mass media” (B.S.E., 1977, p. 244).

### **The 1981 and 1983 syllabuses**

Consistent with the Secondary Education Authority’s requirement that Certificate of Secondary Education courses be reviewed every three years the upper school media studies syllabus was revised in 1980. The new syllabus published in 1981 maintained all the key features of the first syllabus but introduced two major changes. In the original syllabus the “attitudes” to be fostered were identified as “moral discrimination”, “aesthetic discrimination” and a commitment to “active involvement” (B.S.E., 1977, p. 244). The revised version deleted the reference to moral discrimination and included a reference under the category of attitudes to the development of “an analytical approach to sending and receiving messages, particularly with regard to the myth of objectivity” (B.S.E., 1982, p. 161). The second change was a new emphasis on the distinctive forms, “skills and grammar of each media” (B.S.E. 1982, p. 161).

The syllabus was again revised in 1983, this time with many more changes. First, the organising categories of “media environment”, “effects on the audience”,

“communication chain” and “techniques” were dropped. In their place was a revised formulation of the communication chain which presented it as

- the Construction of messages (sender)
- the Way that they function (message)
- the Nature of each medium (medium)
- the Effect upon the audience (receiver). (B.S.E., 1984, p. 170).

The 1983 syllabus changes introduced two concepts which had been circulating within media theory since the mid seventies but absent in earlier versions of the syllabus. One was the concept of the media as a cultural agent observable in these extracts:

Students should be able to identify the effects of a particular medium upon existing cultures; effects of existing cultures on a particular medium; pressures within existing cultures and sub-cultures which affect the way in which each medium is used;

Students are expected to understand the mass media's role in the transmission and changing of community attitudes, lifestyles and social patterns. Stereotypes, visual symbols and rituals are some of the vehicles by which these occur.

and,

Students are expected to acquire an understanding that the message is affected by both personal attitudes and cultural values. (B.S.E., 1984, p. 172)

The second major change was to conceive of the audience as composed not simply of individuals but as members of a shared culture or sub-culture:

Students are expected to understand that the receptivity of the audience involves cultural factors such as political, religious, social, ethnic and economic;

and

Students should be able to recognise the limitation of message interpretation imposed by cultural considerations. (B.S.E., 1984, p. 172)

In a limited way, the revision of 1983 marked the turn of media studies towards cultural studies. Prior to the eighties the syllabuses had concentrated on the form of each medium. The changes made in 1983 and published in the 1984 syllabus recognised for the first time theories of cultural production developed in the seventies at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Hall 1975, 1980a) with regard to television and audiences and Barthes (1973) in popular culture. How this occurred is discussed later in the Chapter with reference to the manner in which the subject attempted to adopt a more academic guise in this period. The cultural studies paradigm, as established at the Birmingham Centre represented a significant break with the traditional approaches to the study of mass communication. Stuart Hall identifies key features of the break.

First cultural studies was a break from the behaviourist emphases of those research approaches which saw media influence in terms of a direct stimulus-response mechanism. The Centre saw the media as broad, all-pervasive social and political forces, whose influences were indirect, subtle, even imperceptible (Hall, 1980a, p. 117).

Secondly, British cultural studies challenged the notion of media texts as “transparent” bearers of meaning. In its work the Centre consistently examined the structuring potential of each medium, including language. This is not the same concept as McLuhan’s “medium is the message” because the cultural studies

emphasis was on the sign systems through which mass mediated meanings reach audiences.

The third break was with the traditional conceptions of the audience as a passive and undifferentiated mass and in its place was the conception of the audience as complex, active and contradictory (Hall, 1980a, p. 118).

The 1983 revisions acknowledged these new theories of audience reception. Prior to 1983 the syllabus had conceived of the audience as textual subjects (although this term was not used) who were relatively powerless and inactive in the face of a powerful media. The research of Neale (1977), Willeman (1978), Brunson and Morley (1978) and Brunson (1981), most of which was published in *Screen*, had offered a radical reconceptualisation of the audience. These theorists shared a view of the audience member as a socially constructed subject. In this understanding the social subject has a history, lives in a particular social formation (a mix of class, gender, age, religion, language etc) and is constituted by a complex cultural history that is both social and textual. In terms of media theory the 1983 revision of the syllabus is the first attempt by media studies to move away from a position which assumes that the dominant ideology exerts total influence over the ideology of media output and therefore over the audience. It denotes a shift, albeit a small one, from an earlier North American conception of mass communication as linear and uni-directional, and the audience as powerless and passive to a new conception, influenced by British Cultural Studies, of communication as a reciprocal process in which the audience is active in the process of the production of meaning.

Nevertheless, while the 1983 revision saw a theoretical change in media studies there was no methodological deviation from the 1976 approach. Despite the

adoption of concepts drawn from cultural studies and a new emphasis on “message interpretation” (p. 171) the revised syllabus maintained its previous stance on the role of practical work. Specifically, it said:

Students should study this subject by the “learn by doing” method rather than by the “viewing and analysis method”, although both should be experienced. (B.S.E., 1984, p. 169)

### **1986 syllabus revision**

In 1986 there was a major re-write of the upper school media studies syllabus. Following the recommendations of the Report of the Ministerial Working Party on School Certification and Tertiary Admissions Procedures (1984) (also known as the McGaw Report) the upper school course was split into two - one at Year 11 level and one at Year 12 - the major difference between them being the specific media to be studied. Both courses dropped the central organising concept of a communication chain. Earlier syllabuses had conceived of the mass media in terms of a linear flow of communication and, until 1983, the audience as a passive receiver of predetermined meanings. The outcomes of the 1986 changes were a new conception of the mass media as an agent in the construction of social reality and the audience as an active participant in the construction of textual meaning. The new syllabuses were organised under five key understandings:

- the problematical nature of the mass media;
- media products as constructions;
- methods of construction;
- control of the constructions; and

- value systems of the constructions (S.E.A., 1987a, pp. 177-180; S.E.A. 1987b, pp. 156-158).

The first key understanding, “the problematical nature of the mass media” sought to make complex that which had previously been assumed to be self evident such as what the terms “media” and “mass” might include or rule out as objects of study. It thus allowed for the possibility that computer mediated communication and video games might be included as objects of study along with print, radio, photography, television and film.

The other four key understandings identified in the syllabus are an elaboration of the discursive conventions of its central theme: that the mass media actively construct reality. For example, under the title “Media Products as Constructions” the syllabuses required the study of the concept of realism. Realism is treated as primarily a product of form, and following Barthes (1975), as typically narrative.

Students will have the ability to:

identify the ways in which newspapers reinforce their aura of authenticity and verisimilitude, particularly use of newspaper photographs, style of reporting (quotes, datelines, names and places), layout (headline hierarchy, by-lines, format), repetition and consistency;

identify the way space is used within the frame to suggest a larger world beyond the frame;

identify other techniques used in television to create the illusion of real space;

recognise narrative as the basis for structuring experience;

identify the significant elements of narrative particularly setting, character, conflict, resolution,...identify the extent to which narrative contributes to the illusion of reality; and

recognise [character] actions and motivations bearing a strong resemblance to perceived reality. (S.E.A., 1987a, Year 11, p. 178)

Students will have the ability to:

identify the elements of realism in narrative fictions;

identify the elements of realism in narrative non-fiction;

identify elements of realism in non-narrative forms;

identify the occurrence of narrative in rhetorical forms; and

identify the extent to which narrative contributes to the illusion of reality. (S.E.A., 1987b, Year 12, p. 157)

Specifically, the syllabuses required a study of generic texts (feature films, television programs, advertising, photojournalism etc), the analysis of the codes and conventions of their construction and the representation of social groups in textual presentations. The excerpts below point to the textual orientation of the 1986 changes.

From the year 11 syllabus:

Students will have the ability to:

identify significant elements of a selection of television with particular reference to montage, visual and audio codes, and conventions;

identify the codes and conventions operating in the medium of study, with particular reference to the technical, symbolic, written and audio codes;

(With particular reference to layout and the codes and conventions) apply their knowledge of the selection processes operating in the media to one medium;

identify the codes operating in particular media in the construction of character, conflict, setting and resolution; and

identify the symbols used for particular stereotype typifications (sic). (S.E.A., 1987a, p. 178)

From the year 12 syllabus:

Students will have the ability to:

identify significant elements of selection of film and television with particular reference to montage, ..technical, symbolic, written and audio codes;

assess the function of montage, the visual and audio codes and conventions in particular programs;

identify the specific ways in which the codes are used in a rhetorical form to elicit a specific response (e. g. fast cutting and up tempo music in television advertisements);

identify the codes that establish authority figures (e.g. clothing, performance, voice timbre); and

recognise that stars and authority figures can be “read” as symbol combinations that convey meaning. (S.E.A., 1987b, p. 157)

These objectives require a detailed analysis of individual texts in order to identify individual shots (montage), visual symbols and variations in the musical score. Such analysis was made possible by technical improvements in video recorders, for example the freeze-frame facility of domestic level video machines meant that it was now possible to hold a single image from a film and pore over it at length. Poster (1995) insists on a link between particular technologies, historical change and modes of identity. Such a link is evidenced in the development of the freeze frame, the shift in the syllabus towards textual analysis and the possibilities



thus offered to teachers to apply print-centred skills of practical criticism to moving images.

### **A break with the past**

The syllabus revisions of 1986 mark a significant break with the past. These syllabuses are different from earlier versions in language, concepts, approach and level of difficulty. Whereas earlier versions of the syllabus employed the comparatively simple language of communication theory “sender/message/medium/receiver”, the language of the syllabuses post the 1986 revisions is heteroglot and more complex. In the terms of their specification for the textual study of construction, genre and representation in the media the syllabuses developed in 1986 employ concepts (and to a lesser extent a vocabulary) drawn from structuralism and semiotics. For example, the term code does not appear in any syllabus prior to the one published in 1987 following the revisions of the previous year. It is used in a semiotic sense, in the sense of “a system of meaning common to the members of a culture” (Fiske, 1982, p. 20). Similarly, the concept of representation, together with the idea of representation as a form of cultural myth, were entirely absent from the first syllabus but dominant in the 1987 syllabuses. The language of the syllabuses, too, reflects the influence of semiotics in such expressions as “the function of connotation and myth in representations”, “recognise that stars and authority figures can be *“read”* [italics added] as symbol combinations” (S.E.A., 1987b, p. 158). In their emphasis on the text, narrative and stereotypes together with a simple presentation of narrative as composed of setting, character, conflict and resolution there is exhibited a dependency on concepts drawn

from cultural studies and literary theory entirely absent from earlier versions of the syllabuses.

Conceptually, the syllabuses break with the past in replacing a simple linear model of communication in which the sender delivers a pre-determined message to a receiver upon whom there will be an effect, with a version of the encoding/decoding model developed by Hall (1980b). Briefly, Hall argued that media texts could not determine the meaning the audience would derive but texts would prefer a particular reading. This preferred reading would fit with the dominant ideology.

Readers/viewers whose social situation aligned them with the dominant ideology would produce preferred readings of a text, that is, that is they would accept the preferred meaning of the text. Viewers whose social situation placed them in opposition to the dominant ideology would oppose the preferred meaning of the text and produce an oppositional reading. The majority of viewers, argued Hall, would not be in a fixed position of conformity or opposition to the dominant ideology and these readers/viewers would produce negotiated readings: readings which inflect the meanings preferred by the dominant ideology in terms of their specific situation (Hall, 1980b, pp. 130-139). The syllabus objectives below reflect Hall in their assumption of the existence of a dominant ideology together with sub-cultural ideologies.

Students will have the ability to:

recognise that stars are vehicles for reinforcing and re-defining the dominant cultural values;

recognise that membership of particular sub-cultures affects a “reading” of a star and the values that the star represents; and

identify some of the factors that qualify an individual for membership of a subculture. (S.E.A., Year 12, 1987b, p. 158)

The teaching and learning approach articulated in the 1987 syllabuses is less dogmatic about the “learning by doing” approach than preceding syllabuses. Both the year 11 and year 12 syllabuses say, “The aim is to teach the understandings outlined in the course. Student activity, whether production or analysis orientated, is a valid method of achieving this aim” (S.E.A. 1987a, p. 177; S.E.A. 1987b, p. 158). This is followed by the warning that “teachers are cautioned against engaging in activity programmes merely for their own sake ...skills should reveal mastery of understandings. Mastery of technology is only a means towards this end” (S.E.A. 1987a, p. 177; S.E.A. 1987b, p. 158).

The final point to be made about the changes made in 1986 is to do with the level of difficulty. First, the Year 12 1987 syllabus required, unlike any earlier version, that students be cognisant with both “Theories of Media Analysis” and “significant developments in Australian history that have affected the media being studied” (S.E.A. 1987b, p. 158). Secondly, as discussed above, both syllabuses required students to understand relatively complex concepts of realism, genre, authorship and representation, none of which were mentioned in the original 1976 syllabus. Lastly the 1987 syllabus introduced a more sophisticated and difficult vocabulary related to these concepts. The extent and impact of the changes from 1976 to 1986 are neatly captured in the words of one teacher:

there has been an alarming tendency away from “hands-on” as the theoretical content of our media courses has expanded to include such (unheard of in 1976) concepts as narrative, rhetoric, myth and metonymy. (J. McMahon, 1986, p. 3)

The 1986 syllabus revisions represented more than a new synthesis of knowledge. They can be seen as an attempt to redefine the subject in more theoretical terms, to make it more intellectually rigorous and less practical. For the

first time authorised knowledge in media studies took on a precision that it had not previously had. The visual text was no longer an ephemeral phenomenon. It had become an object which could be captured, held motionless, subjected to meticulous attention and then mapped in terms of its codes: symbolic, technical and audio. The content and form of images had become subject to new rules of classification: realist/non-realist, narrative/non-narrative. The syllabuses, with their inclusion of more complex theories and language of visual images, constructed media studies as a special world with its own specialist content and vocabulary. Young (1976) argues that such a representation of the subject is a characteristic of high status subjects which seek to emphasise their abstractness from everyday life (pp. 53-54).

These changes in syllabus-defined subject knowledge can be compared in some respects with the changes in medical knowledge Foucault charts in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973). In this work Foucault describes the emergence of modern medicine as involving a set of transformations of knowledge. He identifies a transformation in the classification of diseases and the hypotheses about the relationship between diseases and symptoms; a change in the style of medical discourse from the deciphering of hidden essences to description and lastly a change in the conception of death (Cousins and Hussain, 1984, p. 143). With the exception of the last point, similar changes can be identified in the manner in which knowledge in the subject media studies was represented. First, there can be seen a transformation in the classification of its objects of study in the metamorphosis of the media studies syllabus between 1976 and 1986. Initially the object of study was the communication process, which over time was replaced by the study of the techniques of construction of the media text. Secondly, in the eighties, the relationship between the object of study and the student learner changed. It

transmuted from one of effects to one which was constructed at the moment of reading and therefore variable, context-dependent and non-determined. Thirdly the discourse of media studies changed significantly between 1976 and 1986. In its early form the syllabus promoted the purpose of study as the detection of hidden (oppressive) meanings but by 1986 the objective had become the identification and description of textual strategies working to produce meaning in the first place.

What then motivated this transformation? What pressures were at work to push the subject away from the prevailing discourses of ideological domination, media effects and student engagement which characterised media studies syllabuses in the seventies and towards more academic and critical discourses? The next section traces the forces impacting upon the subject which culminated, at the level of the syllabus, in new definitions of what constitutes knowledge in media studies.

### **Academisation of media studies**

Ivor Goodson makes the point that the evolution of a school subject from a utilitarian or pedagogic version to an academic version is not an uncommon route. He argues that subject teachers and administrators use curriculum change as a way to increase the material or symbolic resources available to them. It was, he says, the course adopted by both geography and biology in England (Goodson, 1983, p. 192) and commercial studies in Ontario, Canada (Anstead and Goodson, 1993, p. 459). In the years following their introduction into the British curriculum biology and geography were not high status subjects in that they were not externally examined and attracted fewer resources than other subjects. In his 1983 case study Goodson traces the actions by which teachers and promoters of the subjects strove to attain academic respectability. This, he says, involves having their subject included in the

body of externally examinable subjects and ensuring the employment of only specialist teachers trained in the discipline at university level. The case of commercial education in London, Ontario was different. Anstead and Goodson argue that commercial studies suffered a decline in status in the early 1920s when it was transferred out of a college and into a technical school. According to the authors the subject teachers saw the decline in the subject's (and their own) status as due largely to the increase in enrolments of females and working class students. Their response was to change the curriculum and introduce two new courses differentiated from the previous course by gender and vocational orientation.

According to Goodson the motivation behind moves to academicise a school subject are to do with the self-investment of those teaching within the subject. Drawing upon Byrne's study of resource allocation within schools (Byrne, 1974) he argues that there is a close connection between the academic status of the subject and the resources allocated to it. He argues that academic subjects (defined as those subject to external examination) are characterised by better staffing ratios, higher salaries, higher capitation allowances and better career prospects than non-academic subjects. Such a relationship, he says, is fundamental to the education system (Goodson, 1997, p. 105). Thus he argues teachers will seek academic status for their subject out of material self-interest (p. 106).

Goodson bases his argument on the English education system and it is not a sufficient explanation for the efforts to academicise media studies in Western Australia. Media studies has always enjoyed better staffing ratios than academic subjects such as English, mathematics and science. Media teachers like all other teachers in the system have always been paid according to their level and length of

experience not their teaching area. The capitation allowance per student varies from school to school but in general is higher for media studies than that afforded to academic subjects. Nevertheless, it is true that in Western Australia teachers of academic subjects such as mathematics, English and science have always had better career prospects in terms of promotional opportunities than teachers of media studies have had. This is to be expected in that the usual career path is through appointment to the position of head of a subject department and media studies, partly because it was not an examinable subject, never grew large enough in any one school to warrant the establishment of a department. But other non-externally examinable subjects generated a student load sufficient to warrant enough staff to be classified as a department. (During the eighties most large high schools would have included departments of manual arts, home economics and physical education none of which could be called academic subjects by Goodson's standards). Material self-interest on the part of teachers, then, does not explain the push to re-define media studies as a more academic discipline in the eighties. It is necessary to look elsewhere in order to understand the motivations behind the production of an academic version of media studies in the 1986 syllabus.

In fact the development of media studies in Western Australia challenges Goodson's understanding of the evolution of a school subject because in this case it was not marked by a linear progression but rather by simultaneity. In Western Australia in the eighties competing pedagogic and academic versions of the subject co-existed. Whereas in the seventies there was general consensus amongst teachers, and some consistency between the syllabus and common practice as to what constituted knowledge in media education, in the eighties it varied from site to site.

## **Issues of status**

Status was an important issue for some in the field. The perception that media studies lacked status vis a vis other school subjects had concerned the central advisory personnel (which I joined in 1981) and some teachers since the introduction of upper school media studies courses in 1976. This lack of status was directly linked in the minds of the players with lack of recognition of the subject for the purposes of university entrance. In this respect media studies does follow the tradition traced by Goodson (1983) in which:

Interest groups promoting new subjects have focussed since 1917 [in England] on the pursuit of high-status examinations and qualifications. Subjects like art, woodwork and metalwork, technical studies, book-keeping, typewriting and needlework, domestic science and physical education, have consistently pursued status improvement by arguing for enhanced academic examinations and qualifications. (Goodson, 1983, p. 32)

As early as 1977 McMahon argued that “tertiary entrance approval is necessary to complete” the process of the broad implementation of media studies. In the same document he contended that:

At present teachers of media education suffer an inferior status to that of their colleagues in other subject areas in that:

- a) a teacher ex-college cannot have a teaching certificate confirmed as a full-time media teacher,
- b) no promotional opportunity exists for full-time media teachers,
- c) there has been no recognisable structure for media practising teachers to refer to with a view to appointments, funds, trouble shooting. (McMahon and McMahon, 1977, p. 31)

The lack of tertiary entrance status for the subject media studies was raised again in a report to the Director of Educational Services in 1977. This time,



McMahon (then an Education Officer operating from the North Lake Media Studies Centre) couched his concerns in terms of student opportunity:

Lack of Tertiary Admissions approval ...is a significant limiting factor in the further development of media studies at upper school level... the majority of students who wish to study media at this level are prevented from doing so because of TAE requirements. (McMahon, B., 1977)

Two years later he raised the matter again, this time in the context of the status of the subject and its teachers. He said "Media studies has inferior status to other areas of education in the following ways" and includes in his list the evidence that:

there is no identifiable department of media studies...;

there is no promotional opportunity for high school teachers who opt to seek a predominantly media studies career; and

at upper secondary school level media studies does not enjoy Tertiary admissions status, although the discipline has high credibility amongst students and educators. In a period when students wish to cover all options in their quest for employment, lack of status is affecting a large number of students who wish to undertake media studies but feel that they cannot afford to. (McMahon, B., 1979)

This view of media studies as the poor relation in the school subject family was widely held by teachers practising in this period. One former media teacher's comment was:

I always had the feeling that there was always a need to justify ourselves, very much with the administration of the school and very much with other teachers. We were trying to justify our own existence by trying to get some sort of tertiary recognition of the course so there was a lot of rigour in our examination of the theoretical basis of media studies. (Interview with Warren, one of the first media teachers in Western Australia, August 16, 1999)

Other interviewees who taught media studies in the 1980s described themselves as “battling every year for a slot on the timetable” or “totally ignored by the administration until they wanted some glossy pictures to show at speech night”, and media studies as a “dumping ground”. This last point was made in different and more politic ways by a number of teachers interviewed for this study. They felt that, as the ones who taught the less academically able students, they were not held in the same regard by the administration or their colleagues as those who taught the brighter students. All of the respondents interviewed for this study seemed to have forgotten that media studies had its origins in the belief of senior educational policy makers that less academically able students deserved a curriculum which suited their needs. Not one person accounted for the subject’s lack of status in terms of the reasons for its introduction into the curriculum in the first place.

Submissions were made for tertiary entrance status for the subject in 1977 and again in 1983. On both occasions the Tertiary Admissions Examinations Committee (TAEC) rejected the proposals. In 1977 the stated reason for the rejection was concern about:

the costs of the examinations with ever increasing numbers of subjects, some possibly of only marginal interest to tertiary institutions. (Board of Secondary Education. TAEC minutes 1977, quoted in TAEC minutes 26 August 1983)

In 1983 the universities, through their representatives on the Tertiary Admissions Examinations Committee, again rejected the submission for tertiary entrance status. The argument from the University of Western Australia was that:

The University considers that the present CSE Media Studies syllabus overlaps with the proposed revised English syllabus, except in areas where technical expertise is being aimed at, and in this latter area, these activities do not seem appropriate in a T.A.E. syllabus.

At the same meeting the committee noted that:

If media studies was to become a T.A.E. subject, then that course should be reviewed by an appropriate committee which would ascertain its suitability for students with T.A.E. aspirations and make recommendations to modify or adapt the course as necessary. (Board of Secondary Education, TAEC minutes, 26 August 1983)

The comments above highlight some issues. First, the influence of the universities on the organisation of school subjects is evident (Chadbourn, 1995, p. 1). Although the McGaw Report (Report of the Ministerial Working Party on School Certification and Tertiary Admissions Procedures, 1984) had led to major changes in university entrance requirements its reforms did not abolish the dual structure in which some school subjects counted for university entrance and others did not. This situation resulted in what Goodson, with reference to the British experience, called “the triple alliance between academic subjects, academic examinations and able pupils” (Goodson, 1985, p. 33). Secondly, the comments imply a certain hierarchy of disciplines to which the universities will not accept a challenge. It is obvious that English is accorded higher importance than media studies and if overlap exists then preference would be given to maintaining English as the tertiary entrance subject at the expense of media studies. Furthermore, there is an irony in the universities’ rejection of a subject as a suitable predictor of university success on the basis that it aimed at technical expertise precisely at a time when a number of the universities represented on the TAEC were developing production oriented film and television courses.

The Committee finally resolved to defer consideration of the proposal to introduce Media Studies as a Tertiary Admissions Examination subject until the after the publication of the McGaw report. The McGaw Report recommended that all

Western Australian upper school courses be divided in to “A” Group courses (externally assessed tertiary entrance subjects) and “B” Group courses (non-tertiary entrance, school assessed subjects). Media Studies was listed as a “B” Group subject (Report of the Ministerial Working Party on School Certification and Tertiary Admissions Procedures, 1984). Of this reaffirmation of the subordinate status of media studies McMahon said: “Our community has “naturalised the examination ritual to the degree that examination subjects are given additional status” (McMahon, 1984, p. 2).

Although the Board of Secondary Education never actually stated such a position, teachers felt that the failures to achieve tertiary entrance status were linked with a public perception that the subject media studies was “Mickey Mouse”. Mickey Mouse, a badge which had been worn proudly in the form of a T shirt in the seventies, had in the space of six years become a term of derision. Amongst the teachers interviewed there was some disagreement as to how the subject might have got such a label. As the comments below reveal some teachers saw it as a problem stemming from the student clientele, others from the subject content:

It was a circular argument. Students did media studies precisely because it was not a tertiary entrance subject but other people saw this as evidence that the subject could not lead to university study. It wasn't academic enough for the students who intended to go on to university. (Interview with Duncan, May 10, 1998)

Of course media studies could not prove itself to be a good indicator of future success at university. The kids doing media did not want to go to university. (Unidentified speaker, focus group, May 29, 1999)

People thought that if kids were having fun, if they were really interested in what they were doing then the work could not really be worthwhile. It's like if it tastes bad it must be good for you, if it tastes good it must be bad for you. (Unidentified speaker, focus group, May 29, 1999)

Part of the reason for not getting tertiary entrance status was our own fault. Because we got the less able kids we kept the work pretty easy and made sure that there was lots of practical work. We could have made the course much more rigorous and in some schools like PLC (Presbyterian Ladies College) they did. (Unidentified speaker, focus group, May 29, 1999)

But not all teachers were in favour of fighting for tertiary entrance status.

Some thought that it might spell the death of the subject in that it would lose its traditional student base:

I have always thought that getting tertiary entrance status might be a way of cutting off our nose to spite our face. We will rule out all the non-university bound students but there is no guarantee that TEE students would prefer to take media studies rather than say, economics. We might end up with no or very few students. The only way it could work is to make media studies an alternative to TEE English. (Interview with Matthew, a media studies teacher with sixteen years experience, July 16, 1999, Perth)

The issue of tertiary entrance status, through the conflicts and compromises it engendered, served to fragment the body of media teachers. Some saw those who opposed the struggle for tertiary status for media studies (as I did) as traitors to the cause. In interview, one respondent stated without rancour: "I will never forgive you for not supporting tertiary admission status" (July 15, 1999). The emergence of a division between those who did and those who did not favour fighting to have media studies included in the list of tertiary entrance accredited subjects in part reflects the fact that teachers are subjected to multiple discourses. Despite being "media studies teachers" they are situated within and responsive to discourses other than those of their subject. One powerful discourse is built around the culture and tradition of the school in which he/she teaches. The comment above came from a teacher in a private school, which by her own admission strongly emphasised academic success. The pressure upon teachers in such schools (and not all such schools are private ones) to

fight for tertiary admission status for the subject was intense. On the other hand some teachers from schools in catchment areas with few university oriented students actively opposed any attempt to secure tertiary entrance status for the subject. Most teachers however were prepared to compromise and change the course content to meet the requirements of tertiary entrance. Their efforts failed and media studies remained a non-tertiary entrance subject. Nevertheless, one effect of making a claim for enhanced status was to produce a more academic version of the subject – the 1986 syllabus revisions and its inclusion of the requirement that students study “Theories of Media Analysis”.

### **Developments at tertiary level**

Another force promoting a more academic version of media studies was developments at the level of tertiary education. From small bases in the mid seventies three out of the four Western Australian Tertiary institutions had sizeable media studies and communications programs by the early eighties (Molloy, 1990, p. 87). A film and television course was established in the School of English at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT) (later to become Curtin University of Technology) in 1972. It was an extremely popular course and has imposed strict quotas on entry since its inception (Shoesmith, 1985, p. 35). This major had a very practical focus in which students studied camera operation, lighting, editing, mixing, directing and sound recording, and most of its graduates sought employment in industry rather than education. In 1981 John Fiske, a British cultural studies theorist, took up a position at WAIT. He and his colleague, Graeme Turner, transformed the English department at WAIT into a cultural studies department. They introduced units in structuralism and semiotics into the English

literature course and a cultural studies major into the institution. Such was the popularity and marketability of this course that the School changed its name to English and Cultural Studies in 1982.

In 1975 Murdoch University and the Western Australian Secondary Teachers College (later to become the Western Australian College of Advanced Education which in turn became Edith Cowan University) introduced media and film studies with both applied and theoretical studies. Murdoch University was the home of John Frow and Michael O'Toole who promoted the study of semiotics and structuralism in the university's School of Human Communications. John Hartley joined the staff of Murdoch University in 1985. Hartley, co-author with Fiske of *Reading Television* (1978) and author of *Understanding News* (1982), was to become Chair of the Media Studies Syllabus Committee in the early 1990s. Structuralism and post-structuralist preoccupations dominated the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* which centred on Fiske at WAIT and Frow at Murdoch. Frankovits in a letter to *Screen* makes the point that in the eighties there were "an inordinate number of Left academics wandering around Australia but talking about Birmingham" (1987, p. 122).

By the mid eighties Western Australia was home to some internationally respected luminaries of media and cultural studies. At WAIT there was Fiske and Turner, at Murdoch there was Frow, Hartley, O'Toole, Hodge and Tripp, all of whom were making significant contributions to the formation of the academic disciplines of media studies and cultural studies. They interacted with media studies (and English) teachers through participation on syllabus committees, presentations at in-service courses and local conferences.

The Western Australian Secondary Teachers' College was the major teacher training institution in the state and it made a number of concrete efforts to promote media studies as a school subject. In 1975 it organised a conference for local teachers, *Media Education: Its Purposes and Directions*, aimed at defining media education and devising strategies for implementing it as a school subject. The outcome of the conference was a "manifesto". It demanded the appointment of a senior officer to the Education Department who would be responsible for media studies; the establishment of a co-ordinating committee for media studies comprised of representatives from all levels of education; the inclusion of purpose built media centres in all new schools; and a fair percentage of budget allocation for media equipment in schools (Shoesmith, 1975). This manifesto was sent to all senior members of the education bureaucracy in the state and its author Shoesmith recalls "being roundly criticised by the then Director General for doing so" (B. Shoesmith, personal communication, February 26, 1999). The following year the College produced a film, *Doing the Media* (1976), which featured the media advisor outlining the rationale for media studies and local teachers involved in media production activities with students.

The approach to media studies adopted at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education was to include both theoretical and practical studies for students intending to become media teachers. Shoesmith remembers that from the beginning:



there was always a tension between theory and practice within the course. I was criticised by McMahon for being too theoretical and training teachers who knew too much theory and not enough practical skills. There were a lot of young active teachers around who wanted to do things rather than think about things. There was an active resistance to thinking about what it all meant. That was a major problem in the seventies and into the eighties. (B. Shoesmith, personal communication, February 26, 1999)

The university and teacher's college programs ensured that graduates entering media studies teaching in the early eighties had a theoretical background in the discipline. Their undergraduate studies typically included a study of communication theory, structuralism, semiotics, political economy and screen theory. Depending upon the institution they attended they may have also had some background in feminist studies and narrative theory. The language of theory was familiar to graduates of the eighties and although they may not have embraced an academic version of the subject the language of the 1987 syllabus was one with which they were familiar.

### **The structure of the bureaucracy**

An event in 1978 laid the ground for some significant changes that were to come into effect in the eighties. The media studies advisory team established in 1975 had been based at North Lake High School, the site of the pilot project in 1974. From there the team made school visits, organised workshops and developed curriculum materials in addition to some teaching duties. At the time it was the only curriculum advisory group located away from the Head Office of the Education Department. In 1978 the Director of Schools of the Education Department moved the advisory team into the Curriculum Branch. For the team this meant assignment to an office space within the Head Office and integration into existing line management structures. Previously the advisory team had been semi autonomous: it was

physically removed from the surveillance of senior management and it had minimal contact with senior Education Department officers. The relocation of the team meant that its freedom of activity, movement and utterance was severely curtailed by this move. School visit schedules and timetables of activities had to be submitted for approval; regulations required staff to account for time spent away from the office; correspondence and publications had to be countersigned by the Superintendent of Curriculum.

Foucault argues that for disciplinary power to be exercised certain conditions must be fulfilled (Sheridan, 1980, p. 150). These conditions relate to the organisation of space, time and tasks. Individuals must be allocated to a designated space in which activities appropriate to that space can be timetabled and observed (Foucault, 1977a). The move of the media advisory team to the central office of the Education Department fulfilled each of these conditions. They were allocated a unit of space in which individuals were graded by seniority which happened to correspond to age with the most senior member getting the desk by the window. Activities were timetabled and monitored by the superintendents of both media studies and curriculum. Furthermore the exercise of disciplinary power constructed the individuals as subjects, that is individuals with a certain identity, in this case, head office personnel, and who, as subjects, could be subjected to the requirements of the position (Marshall, 1995, p. 25). These individuals were both subjects of power and instruments of its exercise. In the move the media studies advisory service had been effectively “disciplined” by locating them in “a space in which one might isolate them and map them” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 144). In the “enclosure” (p. 141) of the team in Head Office, in its “ranking” (p. 145) as under the authority of the

Superintendent and in the subjection of its activities to timetables (p. 149) and schedules, the advisory team was disciplined into a docile body.

Foucault would argue that such disciplining was necessary for productivity. He argued that for the hospital to develop into a “medically useful space” it had to first be “disciplined” and reorganised from an apparatus designed to assist into one designed to examine (Foucault, 1977a, pp. 144, 185). Similarly, the transfer of the advisory group from a school to Head Office meant that its activities could be monitored, quantified and measured. Furthermore, by virtue of its location the advisory group, although not an examining body, became an apparatus of authority. Just as the site from which the doctor spoke was no longer the community but the hospital so the place from which the media advisor spoke was no longer the school but the headquarters of the bureaucracy. The next section examines this phenomenon in greater detail and reveals how “power produces: it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 194).

The first point to be made is that the struggle to make the subject more academic was led from, and largely confined to the centre. In this, there was no change in that the structural power to determine what constituted media studies had been assumed from the outset by the media advisory personnel. During the second half of the seventies the two, on occasion three, media advisory staff of the central administration of the education department had been the people responsible for developing curriculum in media studies. They were the source of in-service training, disciplinary knowledge as disseminated through newsletters and publications, on-going advice and extra resources in the form of equipment and consumables. Esland and Dale (1973) in speaking of subject communities say:

Some members are accredited with the power to make “official statements” – for instance, editors of journals, presidents, chief examiners and inspectors. These are important “significant others” who provide models to new or wavering members of appropriate belief and conduct. (p. 71).

For the media studies teacher, the advisory personnel were “significant others”. However their relationship with classroom teachers was not hierarchical in that they had no line management responsibility for teachers in schools. Rather the relationship was one of co-dependency. The advisory staff required a cohort of dependent teachers in need of on-going “advice” in order to maintain the advisory structure designed by the Education Department. On the teachers’ part there was high demand for advice because as discussed in the last chapter, none of the early media studies teachers had any formal training in the discipline. The remarks below from teachers interviewed for the study sum up the position in the seventies and into the early eighties.

I used to call the media advisory centre all the time. There was a lot of help coming from there in terms of what material was available, what other people were teaching, what was working. (Interview with Sandra, ex-media studies teacher, October 21, 1998)

When I heard about the job I said “What the hell is media studies?” I had no idea, absolutely none, but I was unemployed and I had a sick husband... I began attending every workshop humanly possible, even if Barrie (McMahon) was just casually talking in his loungeroom, I attended that. (Interview with Carmen, current media studies teacher with twenty years experience, July 15, 1999)

The centrality of the media advisory personnel, and in particular the Senior Education Officer, to the definition, implementation and on-going operation of media studies in schools is affirmed by the then superintendent of media studies. In a letter to the Director of Schools she says “the historical establishment and growth of the subject” is “largely a function of the Senior Education Officer” who is “the most

senior person in the Department with specific media studies expertise”. It is he, she wrote, who assumes responsibility for “at once curriculum development and implementation, advisory and resource allocation roles” (M. Nadebaum, personal communication, December 7, 1981).

The re-location of the advisory staff into the authoritative domain of Head Office resulted in the creation of an “expert service” (Johnson, 1993, p. 144).

Johnson, developing the arguments of Larson (1977), says that an expert service depends on the production of a distinctive commodity inextricably bound to the person and personality of the producer who is the expert professional. During the period under discussion the central office staff produced a distinctive commodity, academic knowledge of the media, which was bound by tradition and circumstance (in that he wrote, others read) to the person of the Senior Education Officer.

Publications emanating from the media studies advisory section of the Curriculum Branch took on an increasingly academic tone in the eighties. The subject newsletter *Little Aidem* published a review in 1982 of Fiske’s *Introduction to Communication Studies* (1982).<sup>7</sup> Fiske’s book outlined the major theories of mass communication but dealt in depth with the theory and application of structuralism and semiotics. It was used as a standard text in university media and communication courses during the eighties. McMahon’s review in the newsletter concluded with the comment: “What Fiske has to say is relevant to every teacher but probably warrants closer study by those with a particular brief in the humanities” (McMahon, 1982a, p. 13).

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<sup>7</sup> *Aidem* changed its name to *Little Aidem* when it changed to a smaller format. In 1984 the title changed once again and it became *Little Media*

The following year *Little Aidem* published a lengthy article, together with suggestions for relevant classroom exercises, on Barthes' theories of photography as developed in his book *Camera Lucida* which was published in English in 1981. In this article McMahon acknowledges his own theoretical shift in:

The recent ideas of Barthes contrast markedly with the approach towards photographic analysis that is contained in *Media Conventions* [an early curriculum publication based on the concept of a linear communication chain]. If the reductive approach of conventions is the only approach that is used, there is a danger of compartmentalisation – the parts are understood but the photograph is not perceived as unified communication. (McMahon, 1983b, p. 4)

And for the first time he acknowledges an active role for the audience in the construction of meaning:

Barthes has not discovered a formula that allows us to identify the “good” photograph but, by switching greater attention to the role of the spectator, he has provided a path for further exploration. (McMahon, 1983b, p. 4)

In the period from 1982 until the syllabus re-write in 1986 the media advisory personnel wrote and distributed to teachers a number of articles on cultural theory, representation and media theory either through the Curriculum Branch or the subject association newsletter. During this period there appeared articles on:

- stereotypes and representation (*Little Media* 1984, No. 4)
- race and representation (*Little Media*, 1984, No. 3)
- cultural representation (*Little Media*, 1985, No. 2)
- myth in Australian film and visual coding in music videos (*Little Media*, 1985, No. 5)

- sexism and the media, genre and narrative (*Little Media*, 1985, No. 1)
- sport and racial politics (*Little Media* 1985, No. 3/4 )
- representation and stereotyping (*Little Media*, 1986, No. 5)
- representation of Aborigines (*ATOM News*, 1986, February)
- the semiotics of television wrestling (*ATOM News*, 1986, August).

The final piece of evidence of the attempt to intellectualise media studies in this period is the instance of the inaugural state media studies conference. The subject association newsletter *ATOM News* described the conference as “an indication of the growing importance of media studies in Western Australian education and a recognition of the commitment of media teachers to the growth of their profession” (*ATOM News*, May 1986, p. 1). The keynote speakers – Annette Kuhn, Trevor Barr and John Tulloch – were all media theorists rather than practitioners. Kuhn is a feminist author on cinema, Barr a political economist and expert on new technologies and Tulloch a researcher with an interest in audience studies. Local media studies academics such as Hartley and Fiske gave workshops. The topics were the analysis of television drama and documentary, teaching film genre and studying representation (*ATOM News*, May 1986). Noticeably absent from the offerings were the types of workshops conducted at the National Media Education Conference two years previously in Sydney which had included sessions on how to apply make-up for film, how to simulate movie fights and how to make a class film.

By the time of the 1986 revision of the upper school media studies syllabus the discourses framing the school subject were more closely aligned with academic

discourses than they had been at any moment in the subject's short history. However the academic discourse never achieved hegemonic status and was undermined from both within and without by the traditional discourses of media studies established in the mid-seventies.

## **Resistance**

I maintained above that the publication and dissemination of contemporary academic theories and their articulation in the syllabus revisions of 1986 marked a change in the conception of knowledge within media studies. In this section I contend that, despite the promotion of an academic discourse of media studies by the media advisory personnel, classroom practices and classroom knowledge about the media remained largely unchanged. While teachers appear to have consented to changes in the syllabus there appears to have been no widespread assent for the academic version of the subject. The difference between consent and assent is not merely a game of words. Assent on the part of teachers, if it had happened, would have legitimated the academic discourse and signalled a transfer of the power to control what was taught from themselves to the syllabus. Consent, on the other hand, allowed for continual resistance at the micro-level without the need to engage in open conflict with the bureaucracy.

Resistance to an academic transformation of the subject came from two fronts. One resistant force was the central advisory personnel of which I was a member until 1985. This was the same small group which I argue above was attempting to give the subject a more academic visage. To some extent those media advisory staff responsible for the Departmental publications *Little Aidem* and later *Little Media* could be seen to have undermined their own efforts to change the



discourse of media studies. Notwithstanding the publication of a dozen or so “academic” papers in the early and mid eighties the newsletter devoted most of its pages to lesson notes and ideas for teachers based on a linear conception of communication (see *Little Aidem*, 1983, No.2), advice on the use of media equipment (see *Little Aidem*, 1983, No. 3), promotion of student film festivals, information on available resources, film reviews and numerous advertisements for skills workshops conducted by the Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) (WA). If one were not deliberately looking for different kinds of articles then a casual observer would see little change in the type of material presented in the newsletter between the seventies and eighties.

In the maintenance of an emphasis on equipment and production skills, we (the central office staff) saw ourselves as meeting multiple imperatives. First, there were the needs of a more diverse audience, which following the expansion of media studies in primary schools, now included both elementary and secondary teachers. Primary teachers had no interest in teaching theory but a very definite need for information and instruction on the practical aspects of media studies. Secondly, we sought to keep faith with the founding tenet of media studies as a subject in which students “learned by doing”. Thirdly, we were aware of the strategic value of practical work in attracting students and teachers to the subject. In a review of the first decade of media studies published in 1983 we acknowledged that production work had been mined not simply for its pedagogic value but also for its market appeal:

The hands on operation ...had many advantages. It was immediately popular with the children and the teachers; the thrill of seeing your first print develop or your animation on the screen wins hearts every time. This approach also gave the subject an identity of its own and so in a way acted as a bit of PR. (McMahon and Quin, 1983, pp. 11-12)

The approach, the article concedes, raised other problems “that only emerged with time” in that the:

emphasis on skills tended to shift the focus away from the concepts and it became a worry that students might become quite skilled photographers yet have no understanding of the role of the still image in the mass media. (p. 12)

The article goes on to acknowledge other limitations of the approach – the expense, the time investment, the organisational difficulties – but concludes with a commitment to maintain but re-frame the approach to practical work:

After much soul searching and argument carefully disguised as discussion the decision is to maintain the “hands on” approach *but* (original italics) make the link between activity and concept more observable for both teachers and students. (p. 15)

The actions of the advisory group in promoting a more academic version of media studies while maintaining a commitment to practical work as the subject’s core can be understood as the operation of reciprocal relations of power. While the advisory team exerted non-coercive power over teachers through the provision of advice, moral support, the passing on of knowledge and skills, teachers exerted power over the advisors through their continued demand for production based in-services and their orders for production support services such as equipment and chemicals.

## **The articulation of competing discourses**

The annual Certificate of Secondary Education moderating test in media studies exhibited traces of the two competing discourses about what constitutes knowledge in media studies: production versus theory. In fact the moderation test could be viewed as a vehicle by which an attempt was made to accommodate both discourses. Initially, the moderation test was a written one requiring that students respond in short answer form to questions designed by the Media Studies Syllabus Committee. Teachers' views on this test were varied. Some felt that:

An examination type moderation test is not regarded as the most effective assessment tool available to media studies teachers. (Media Advisory Service, July, 1979, p. 3 quoted in Murphy, 1997, p. 226)

Others considered that the effort to ensure that the test did not simply test a student's writing ability resulted in a simplistic and trivial exercise:

It was not about testing knowledge; it was about trying to guess what answer the teacher had in mind. There were questions like "Identify five changes to radio as a result of the introduction of television?" Like who decided there were five and no more or less than five changes? (Interview June 10, 1998)

On the other hand there were those who liked the test because it mimicked the tertiary entrance examination used in other subjects. "This traditional mode of assessment has a great deal of respectability in schools and the community" (Media Advisory Service, July 1979, p. 3 quoted in Murphy, 1997, p. 226).

In response to these concerns the Syllabus Committee of the Board of Secondary Education introduced a practical component. From 1980 onwards the moderation instrument required that students produce a media product as part of their assessment. The inclusion of a practical component in the moderation task was

consistent with the subject's position that practical work enhanced understanding of the media. However the moderation instrument required also that students provide a short written supplement to their product outlining their objectives, planning and the process of production.

Each year the media advisory service would produce a digest of teachers' views on the previous year's moderating test. The excerpts below point to the ambivalence with which the practical requirement was viewed:

The status problem associated with CSE subjects could be aggravated by an increase in the practical exercise component... If the move to TAE is a desirable one, it is possible that the case is weakened by the introduction of a practical component. (Media Studies Advisory Service, 1980, p. 4 quoted in Murphy, 1997, p. 227)

The TAE exists to identify the potentially successful tertiary student. It could be argued that a practical exercise does not necessarily do this... It would seem unfortunate if CSE course assessment strategies were modified merely to mimic those of TAE subjects. Many would argue that the TAE stranglehold is already too great. (Media Studies Advisory Service, 1980, p. 4 quoted in Murphy, 1997, p. 227)

The 1983 moderation exercise offers a concrete example of what was being attempted, and the limitations thereof, in trying to accommodate practical and theoretical discourses in a single site. In this year, as was the case in every other year, the moderation task required students to produce a product and then point to the manner in which the product illuminated their understanding of a media concept. The 1983 moderation task required students to:

Create a message that reflects a strong personal bias. Examine your completed product and describe the cultural bias it contains. (B.S.E., 1982)

In his review of the exercise the senior moderator, who was also the Senior Media Education Officer in the Education Department, says, with some degree of approbation, that students' practical skills outstripped their conceptual understanding:

Almost all students were able to define a personal bias and indicate the ways in which they achieved it. Most candidates could identify a cultural bias but very few could see how the cultural bias had affected their programme... There has been a marked improvement in practical work over the past two years... The best efforts now have a style that many professionals would be pleased with. (McMahon, 1982b, p. 11)

### **Resistance from without**

Resistance on the part of teachers to the adoption of a more academic version of media studies was not overt, partly because many teachers did not recognise the push in that direction. The subject newsletter had remained largely unchanged, central office continued to supply them with equipment loans and free photographic chemicals, and in the absence of a subject Head of Department who might police their compliance with the syllabus media teachers were able to operate largely as they had always done.

Resistance came in the form of "more of the same", a determination on the part of most teachers to continue doing what they knew and loved. In this resolve the focus and activities of the subject association gave them support. In 1981 a small group of teachers, led by the media advisory personnel established a media studies teachers' association, the Australian Teachers of Media (WA) or ATOM as it is better known. The Association's aim was to promote and expand the teaching of media studies but professional teachers associations also function as mediators of social and political forces acting upon the school subject: "The subject associations

of the teaching profession may be theoretically represented as segments and social movements involved in the negotiation of new alliances and rationales...” (Esland and Dale, 1973, p. 107). In the case of media studies, the subject association was a force for the maintenance of old alliances and rationales, predictably so given its origins.

The method by which the Association executive was established was modelled on that of the Board of the Perth Institute of Film and Television of which both media advisors were members. A small group of teachers representing the private and government, primary and secondary sectors were invited by the central office media staff to establish themselves as a steering committee and act with the powers of an executive. The majority of this group were “pioneer” media studies teachers from the mid seventies, who with the exception of one graduate teacher, had been “trained” in media teaching through advisory service led in-services. The establishment of ATOM in 1981 coincided with the withdrawal of Education Department funds for in-servicing in the area of media studies and the Association immediately sought to fill this gap. Much of its energy was spent in its formative years on conducting skills based workshops for teachers modelled on the in-services of the seventies. The extract below points to the extent to which the Association aimed to reproduce the fun days of the extended, production oriented, live-in workshops of the seventies:

ATOM (WA) has been busy organising and running Media Workshops. The one day workshops in slides and colour printing were well received and the demand for colour printing was so great we are running a repeat workshop late in second term. During the first weekend in May we held a residential workshop at York for teachers interested in starting some Media Studies. Those of you who have ever attended a Media Studies workshop would have recognised the atmosphere instantly. The eyes drooped, the bodies

sagged and the jokes got worst but nevertheless all said they loved it. (*Little Aidem*, 1982, No. 2)

Although ATOM provided a range of services to members including film previews, cinema discounts, newsletters, occasional lectures, a biennial conference and lobbying, skills based workshops continued to be a major feature of its activities for the first half of the eighties. In 1983 and 1984 there were nine workshops including one specifically for English teachers on non-print media; in 1985 there were eight; and in 1986 it had dwindled to four occasioning the comment from the President that:

Workshops have continued, although they do not seem to be as well attended as in the past. This may indicate that they are no longer necessary and perhaps we should consider phasing out activity in this area. (President's Report, "1986 A Year of Expansion" *ATOM News*, 1986, November, p. 3)

Given that all workshops were held on weekends these figures attest to teacher interest in and commitment to developing practical skills in media studies up until the mid eighties. However by 1986 all new secondary media studies teaching positions were being filled by graduates trained in the field and this group had no need of skills training. Still ATOM continued to affirm the value of practical media production by holding a regular festival of student production. In the early eighties it supported, through publicity and labour, the Perth Young Filmmakers Festival. When the festival folded it established a broader festival of its own called "Syncs Sprockets and Stills" which included posters, photography, film and video.

Pointed resistance to the intellectualisation of the subject is evident in the subject association newsletter. In addition to the correspondence quoted previously deploring the "alarming tendency" of media studies to embrace such concepts as myth and metonymy (J.McMahon, 1986, p. 3) the newsletter regularly satirised the

complexity of the concepts of the syllabus and the obscurity of its jargon. The publication, in late 1986, of an “Alternative Media Studies Examination”, reproduced in part below demonstrates this point.

“An understanding of the ideological function of signs is a necessary pre-requisite for any analysis of the products of the capitalist media”. Discuss with reference to the fact that Joan Collins is a Pisces.

Write an essay on either the adaptation of the narrative techniques of the classic realist novel to the films of Eisenstein or how Jane Fonda manages to look so young.

Many people would argue that McLuhan’s prediction of a “global village” has now been achieved. Explain which of the following deserves to be seen as the global village idiot: Ronald Reagan, John Bjerke-Petersen, Prince Andrew, Clive James or George “The Animal” Steele.

“Fat Cat and Friends serves, in conjunction with the modes of production characteristic of late multi-national capitalism, to maintain the ideological hegemony of certain speciesist discourse practices within children’s television viewing, while failing to allow access to the means of communication for those life forms thus discriminated against”. Discuss.

Which is more difficult: trying to understand French semioticians or deciding whether to watch *Sons and Daughters* or *Sale of the Century*?

Write notes on the following: a) the codes and conventions of contemporary French cinema; b) whether George Negus wears a wig.

Account for the lack of reference to contemporary alienation in *Playschool*. (End of Year Examination: Alternative media studies examination 1987, *ATOM News*, November, 1986, p. 18)

The excerpt above shows how the teachers’ professional association highjacked the academic discourse of cultural studies for its own purposes of critique. It demonstrates how “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting



point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault, 1981, p. 101). Undoubtedly, Foucault would have regarded the satire above as effective resistance. He argued that resistance is more effective when directed at a “technique” of power rather than at “power” in general (McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 86). Complexity and jargon were two of the techniques employed in the syllabus to represent the new knowledge which was to be media studies. In the satirical “alternative examination” above the subject association is actively interrogating the tactics of power used in the struggle over knowledge.

That there existed competing discourses around what constituted media education in the eighties and the failure of either of these discourses to attain hegemonic status reflects the reciprocal relations of power within media education in this period. In the seventies, the dominant discourses of media studies were around issues of relevance, progressivism and student empowerment within a meta-discourse of pleasure for both teacher and student. Teachers in that period could either choose to join the discourse by becoming media studies teachers or reject the discourse and remain in their subject area. In that period no-one entered media teaching upon graduation from training. The outcome was that the discourse determined who entered the subject area and effectively denied the space for alternative or competing discourses. Its ubiquity and popular ownership thus ensured its legitimacy. Consequently its status as legitimate “truth” produced what Foucault says is the characteristic outcome of power in the modern, liberal democratic state – not a relationship of domination but the probability that the normalised subject will habitually obey (Johnson, 1993, p. 142). But in the eighties there were changes in staffing practice, subject location and relations with English with a consequent

transformation in power relations which in turn prompted the development and maintenance of competing discourses.

While the subject was small and the number of teachers involved limited to a couple of dozen it was possible for the central office media advisory personnel to maintain a close, face-to-face relationship with media studies teachers in schools. They organised regular meetings of media teachers, made frequent school visits and maintained the sense of a media studies group through the “Around the Schools” section of the subject newsletter. The excerpts below indicate the cosy club atmosphere which pervaded the subject group.

John Ferrell, a graduate of an integrated media studies course in 1978, is now boss at the Boddington District High School. Apart from encouraging a flourishing media option, John is putting some energy into recording the experiences of the region’s early settlers....Andrew Thorpe, formerly at Scarborough has resigned to take up law at UWA. Andrew’s place will be taken by Linda Thoresen, a graduate of the communications course at Nedlands College of Advanced Education. (*Aidem*, 1980, No.3, p. 2)

Norm Leslie, one of the media pioneers, will be commencing a lecturing position at Nedlands College of Advanced Education in 1980. At Nedlands Norm will join a former North Lake Media Centre colleague, Kevin Ballantine.

Several principals of rural schools have expressed concern that shrinking funds for Media Studies may mean decreased rural visits by the media studies caravan and advisors. (*Aidem* 1980, No. 2, p. 6)

The implementation model previously adopted for media studies of “live-in, long duration in-service courses” in which “everyone lived together, ate together and drank together” and through which the advisory staff established “real personal contact with teachers” (McMahon, 1983, p. 13) could not be sustained as the subject grew in size and the advisory staff diminished in number. It became impossible for

them to maintain a one-to-one relationship with teachers. In 1983 McMahon acknowledged this with:

The advisers will need to place more emphasis on planning with the teachers and limit their physical assistance in the classroom. Hopefully if the quality of the planning sessions is high then teachers will be more able to cope alone... (McMahon, 1983a, p. 15)

The growth of enrolments in the subject forced it to take on many of the bureaucratic aspects of other mainstream subjects. Increased student numbers created a market for media studies trained teachers and staffing requirements could no longer be met by having an existing teacher switch disciplines as had happened in the past. New teachers were drawn from a pool of trained graduates who entered the subject with alternative conceptions of what might constitute media studies.

The institutionalisation of media studies occurred in both the central bureaucracy and in schools. The reference above to a policy change in the service to teachers points to the bureaucratic changes taking place in the late seventies and early eighties. Following the 1978 movement of the advisory staff into the central Education Department the organisation of media studies increasingly exhibited the features identified by Weber (1968) as central to a bureaucracy. He identifies:

- the formal division of jurisdictional areas. For example, a superintendent was appointed to the subject area and education officers and advisors were given separate sectoral responsibilities for primary and secondary education;
- the establishment of an office hierarchy. For example, the media studies central office staff were appointed at different levels of seniority and the Senior Education officer was given authority over junior officers;

- the appointment of expert personnel. For example, in this period university graduates of media studies entered the teaching force.
- strict procedural management of people. For example, the education department maintained a rigorous tenure appraisal system in which teachers were regularly observed judged and classified.

At the same time, in the schools, media studies was forging a closer alliance with the much larger and more bureaucratically organised subject of English. The new teachers entering media studies had a background in communication and film theory and were conversant with such theories as semiotics and structuralism. Unlike the “pioneers” who had gone before them when these graduates needed advice it was more likely to be for guidance on how to teach than what to teach. The days of the “philosopher kings”, as the curriculum advisors were described by one interviewee were coming to an end. The sort of advice graduates wanted, on how to teach, was more likely to be sought within the school than without. Although in most schools the early media teachers had been nominally under the control of the Head of the Department of English they tended to “do their own thing”. Being experienced teachers they did not need to seek advice from their Head of Department or departmental colleagues on classroom management, assessment procedures, discipline and so on. A Head of Department remembers: “The media teacher was part of the English department in that she came to meetings but she ran her own show.” On the other hand the younger, inexperienced graduates were more likely to seek the support of a Head of Department and the security provided by departmental colleagues in their initial efforts to establish themselves in a school. Thus in the

schools media studies teachers were being increasingly integrated into the English Department.

### **Integration with English**

This trend towards the structural integration of media studies with English was reinforced by the re-inclusion of media studies within the English superintendency and the requirement that media studies teachers be trained in the teaching of English. In the Western Australian government education system all high school subjects were subordinate at that time to the authority of specific subject superintendents. Superintendents were responsible for subject staffing matters such as allocation of staff, transfers and permanency as well as, in most cases, intellectual leadership of the discipline to the extent that the superintendent would be expected to be knowledgeable about the subject area. In February 1979 the superintendent of the north east metropolitan education region was given responsibility for media studies. By her own admission she had no expertise in the subject. In her letter to her superior regarding the position of the superintendent of media studies she speaks of:

the difficulty of establishing credibility with teachers, personnel in tertiary institutions, media professionals and the public as a subject superintendent in an area in which one has neither taught nor studied to any depth ... The resultant credibility problems are real ones. (M. Nadebaum, personal communication, December 7, 1981)

In the same letter she requests a review of the position of the media studies subject superintendent. The result was that responsibility for media studies was shifted to the English superintendents on the basis, according to a memo from the Director of Schools to the Director General of Education, that "it does appear that Media Studies falls more easily into the whole "Communications' area" (J. Davies, personal communication, December 22, 1981). The subject superintendents of

English were informed of the Department's view that English and media studies "had an obvious relationship" and one which "they should encourage and grow" ( P. Gunning, Superintendent of English, personal communication, June, 1999). In 1982 media studies was placed under the authority of the English superintendency.

The trend was further reinforced in 1984 by the insistence of the English superintendents responsible for staffing that graduates specialising in media studies must also be qualified to teach English. The rationale for this decision was that very few graduates would be likely to find themselves in a school with a full-time media studies load and they would need to teach in another subject which, for ease of staffing, should be English. This requirement coincided with disciplinary blurring of the boundaries between English and media studies following the abolition of the Achievement Certificate, the introduction of unit curriculum resulting from the Beazley Report (Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia, 1984) and the subsequent introduction of media studies units into the English syllabus.

At the upper school level, there had been a gradual but definite blurring of the disciplinary boundaries between English and media studies. Prior to 1982 the upper school English syllabus consisted of:

- "elements of expression" in which students were "required to show understanding of the basic rules of grammar, punctuation, paragraphing and spelling";
- "composition";

- “comprehension and appreciation” of English on the use of English  
...representative of good speech and writing”; and
- “reading a varied selection of works of book length.” (S.E.A., English Syllabus, 1984, pp. 98-99)

In 1983 the syllabus was extensively re-written with an emphasis on language rather than literature. It had the stated aim of giving teachers the “freedom to teach in what they consider the most appropriate ways” (S.E.A. English Syllabus, 1984, p. 106). The most appropriate ways were seen to include activities previously found only in media studies. The revised 1984 syllabus suggested that:

Practical activities such as film-making, producing programmes for television, producing plays, interviewing, writing reports ... offer good opportunities for language development and should also lead to wide reading... The study of radio, television and film might well include the reading, writing and discussion of scripts as practical experience in these media. (S.E.A. English Syllabus, 1984, pp. 106-107)

Furthermore the syllabus required that students be given skills in the production and analysis of verbal texts together with “practical language experiences in the fields of drama, film and television production, interviewing” (S.E.A. English Syllabus, 1984, p. 109). John Fiske, author of *Introduction to Communication Studies*, and Bob Hodge, co-author (with Gunther Kress) of *Language as Ideology* were academics at local universities and were both members of the English Syllabus Committee. Fiske’s expertise lay in media studies and cultural studies and Hodge’s in socio-linguistics. Thus the introduction of the language and media dimension to English was not surprising given that the “most common pattern for defining new “disciplines” of knowledge in the essentially hierarchical education system in England has been through the work of university scholars” (Goodson, 1983, p. 131).

Teachers however were in the short term not required to make modifications to their actual teaching practices because the syllabus changes were not reflected in the Tertiary Admissions Examination. The English curriculum consultant (1988-1990) said of the introduction of non-print media into the English syllabus:

In many classrooms it had absolutely no effect whatsoever, or only a token effect. Although it was in the syllabus a lot of teachers still ignored it because it wasn't in the exams. You did a little bit of advertising or you watched a film and talked about it but you didn't actually embed meaningful content in teaching about the media. (Interview November 26, 1999)

It was the examination that in reality controlled what was taught in the classroom not the syllabus. The situation changed in 1990 when what was called the "non-print section" was introduced into the Tertiary Entrance Examination and students were forced to write on a media text. The introduction of the non-print section into the examination resulted in widespread demand from English teachers for professional development. One of the English examiners of this period described the situation as one of "total panic". This was, he said, because "there was a whole pile of people out there who hadn't been doing 25% of the syllabus and it became quite obvious they had absolutely no skills whatsoever, no knowledge, no understanding." (Interview November 26, 1999)

The changes to the English Tertiary Admissions Examination followed a revision of the upper school syllabuses in 1988 and 1989. According to the authors of the revision the intent was to "put a bit of content into the syllabus because for years and years English had no content. The problem with the exam was that anyone could walk in off the street and do it" (Interview with English Curriculum officers, September 3, 1999). Their approach was to reduce the seventy two objectives of the 1984 syllabus down to nine, delete the objectives relating to the study of oral



language and specify the concepts to be taught in print and non-print media. Because literature was the province of another subject, suitably called English literature, English was not bound by a literary canon and was free to focus on popular culture and popular texts. By the time of the syllabus re-write in the late eighties English had adopted the texts traditionally studied in media studies: films, television programs, newspapers, magazines and advertisements.

While elements of media studies were being appropriated by English, the trade was not all one-way. The subject newsletter for media studies post 1984 exhibits a marked turn away from its earlier orientation towards production and a shift towards textual analysis and cultural studies. In a 1985 article Graeme Turner (an academic from the Western Australian Institute of Technology) demonstrates how video clips “can be used profitably in the classroom as a vehicle for the analysis of visual coding, connotation and inter-textuality” (*Little Media* 1985, No. 5, p. 6). The next year the newsletter is published as a “Special Media in English Issue” (1986, No. 5) focussing on the teaching of the media units within the lower school English unit curriculum. In the editorial for this issue the aims outlined for the media in English unit sound identical to the aims listed in the media studies syllabus:

It is expected that units will develop student understandings about the ways in which the mass media shape our information (both entertainment and factual) and the importance of these “culture industries” in our society. (*Little Media*, 1986, No. 5. p. 2)

Another 1986 article covers “deconstructing film” which directs teachers to the textual examination of setting, costume, characterisation and conflict (*Little Media*, 1986, No. 3. p. 2). The turn towards textual analysis was reinforced by the publication of *Exploring Images* (1984) and *Real Images* (1986) co-authored by Barrie McMahon and myself during our period as co-workers in the Curriculum

Branch of the state Education Department. Both textbooks were based firmly on textual analysis and although aimed at the English teaching market they were widely promoted within media studies (both by the authors cum media advisors and the publishers) and used by media teachers.

Both media studies and English exhibited transformations in disciplinary knowledge in the eighties. The ground work for the intellectualisation of the media studies syllabus lay in a combination of the entry of a new type of media studies teacher, the need for the “expert service” in central office to produce a distinctive commodity and the desire to raise the status of the subject. The failure of these efforts to achieve hegemony and the maintenance of competing discourses of media production point to the diffusion of power and its circulation at the level of the classroom teacher. Ultimately it was they who decided what constituted worthwhile knowledge in media studies. English changed in response to the criticisms leveled at it by the Beazley Report (Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia, 1984), the influence of academics from the fields of media studies and cultural studies and the desire on the part of some sections within English to modernise the discipline through the incorporation of popular and non-print texts.

The exchange of knowledge between English and media studies was mutual but more complex than simple colonisation or appropriation. English took mainly that knowledge – deconstruction, the detailed analysis of representation, the explication of the values of the text – which media studies teachers had shown themselves not too keen to teach in the first instance. Certainly media studies increasingly adopted one of the techniques of English – textual analysis – but the

adoption was not forced or policed. It did not need to be. Once the ruling was made that all teachers of media studies must be trained English teachers their competence in and comfort with textual analysis was assured.

## Reactions

The blurring of the disciplinary boundaries between English and media studies was not well received by all teachers in either subject. The following comments capture some of the fears on both sides of the disciplinary divide. In the extract below a media studies specialist accuses English of robbing media studies of its theoretical core:

Having appropriated the principal theoretical base developed by media studies, subject English will progressively meet the requirements of visual literacy education, at least as far as the bureaucrats are concerned. Where, then does that leave media studies in, say, five years? Is it not possible that the full circle will be complete – having delivered the theories of visual literacy, subject media studies will be a spent force. Once again it will provide space in an increasingly “re-structured” and pragmatic curriculum for those students who are perceived to be “less able”, a convenient manual and therapeutic art. (Moore, 1990, p. 27)

As the extract from a conference paper delivered by a teacher-educator in English demonstrates not all teachers were happy with the emphasis on visual language in the English curriculum.

The visual literacy pendulum, like all pendulums, has swung too far. Certainly there was time when English teachers paid too little attention to the messages of the picture. We needed to have helpful media studies colleagues to teach us the basis of reading pictures. But let's not go overboard on this as seems to have happened when English teachers who feel perfectly confident in approaching *Don's Party* or *The Club* as stage plays, suddenly, apparently, feel incapable of studying those same narratives in film. Pictures add something but they are not that important. Language, that is verbal language, is still king. In a television news story it is language that comes first; with pictures added later. In documentary it is the language of the voiceover that tells us how to read a montage. And

in a film it is dialogue that does the main job of establishing character, theme and plot...The only problems that I have found in teaching film and television arise from the purely practical difficulties of studying something that is visual and so ruthlessly linear. It is so much easier to study when we have something on paper which we can read and re-read. (Monahan, 1992)

Hargreaves (1994) says that questions of pleasure are central to a teacher's desire and willingness to commit to curriculum change and their preparedness to keep teaching the subject. In the previous chapter I argued that pleasure was a central motivation for teachers to switch their subject allegiances and enter media studies in the seventies. Changes to curriculum organisation and subject formations threaten established pleasures and desires as the comments above indicate. Perhaps the desire to reinvent the old tradition of production may account for why media studies teachers were so keen to embrace the Common Assessment Framework together with the Common Assessment Tasks in the next decade.

## **Conclusion**

This phase in the history of media studies demonstrates that to assume a teleological process underlies change in the knowledge base of a subject or top-down causation is to misunderstand the contingent nature of change. This period saw the production of a more theoretically sophisticated syllabus, the professionalisation of the discipline, the adoption of textual analysis as a dominant practice in media studies and the maintenance of media production as the major classroom activity. The generation of an academic discourse at the bureaucratic level and the maintenance of a production discourse at the classroom level and the failure of either to wipe out the other points to the intricacies of the relationship between power and knowledge. Those who have power generate the kind of knowledge they need to

maintain their power. At the same time those who are, or seek to avoid being, subject to this power need their own alternative kinds of knowledge to resist.

This chapter has found resistance and dissent to be complicated, perverse, illogical and non-monolithic. I have tried to map out the different ways that resistance shows itself in order to point to the larger discursive formations it represents. The chapter has described a situation in which the protagonists of change were at the same time the agents of conservatism in the sense that their actions, in their effect, maintained old values and practices. It has traced resistance and dissent across multiple and diverse terrains: the subject association, the assessment mechanisms and classroom practices. In doing so I have tried to show that resistance is more complex and ultimately more productive than cultural studies' tradition of identification of the oppressed and/or voiceless suggests. This has been an archaeological project, a description of "the different spaces of dissension" (Foucault, 1972, p. 152).

While definitions of subject knowledge changed to a marked extent in the syllabuses but also to a degree in practice, there was no ultimate goal or shared vision of the subject's progressive development underpinning these changes. Rather the changes were the contingent outcomes of the convergence of a large number of small, sometimes unrelated factors – ad hoc adjustments to bureaucratic management procedures, the introduction of pre-service training in media studies methodology, the discovery of a new technology in the form of the freeze-frame facility, the availability of cheap technology, repeated failures to infiltrate the academy as represented by the select group of tertiary admissions subjects and the transformation of another subject area. The action of these micro causes led to the maintenance of

some discursive practices, such as practical work and the introduction of new ones such as textual analysis. Thus continuity and change may co-exist:

To say that one discursive formation is substituted for another...is to say that a general transformation of relations has occurred but that does not necessarily alter all the elements; it is to say that statements are governed by new rules of formation, it is not to say that all objects or concepts, all enunciations of theoretical choice disappear...One of these elements – or several of them – may remain identical..., yet belong to very different systems of dispersion, and be governed by distinct laws of formation.  
(Foucault, 1972, p. 173)

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## **CHAPTER 7**

### **THE NINETIES**

This is the final chapter in the genealogy of media studies in Western Australia. It examines changes in the understanding, practice and discourses of media studies in the context of changes in educational policy and the development of a new curriculum framework in Western Australian post-compulsory education in the last decade. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the local context of post-compulsory education which is in many ways markedly different to that of the early eighties. The changes I identify and choose to examine as relevant to this genealogy are those relating to the pressures resulting from a policy decision at the national level to change the goals of school education and the impact of a vastly increased school population. There emerged in this decade a philosophy of education geared to the needs of the workforce and this along with the increase in numbers of the post compulsory student cohort brought in its wake changes in educational policy and the introduction of reform agendas. The policy changes in turn resulted in new bureaucratic structures with concomitant shifts in the authority and responsibility for the development of subject knowledge. In this chapter I examine the ways in which media studies has variously been constrained and enabled by these developments through an analysis of two significant events in the subject's contemporary history. These are first, the most recent unsuccessful attempt to secure tertiary entrance status and secondly, the introduction of a Common Assessment Framework for wholly school accredited courses.

In keeping with the approach adopted in the previous chapters, the first half of the chapter proceeds through a top-down analysis of those policies and institutions exercising power over the construction of disciplinary knowledge. The second part of the chapter inverts the analysis and examines the current situation from the perspective of those supposedly subject to the forces outlined in the first section. In this section I study actual practices of policy implementation and examine how teachers and students constantly negotiate them in the pursuit of their own goals. I attempt an “ascending analysis of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 99) and focus on the exercise of “power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations” - the classrooms (p. 96).

### **The development of a functionalist discourse of education**

In Australia, as in most other developed countries, there has been a shift in the discourse of educational policy away from the desire for a socially just and equitable society (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, 1973) which characterised the period which saw the introduction of media studies into the school curriculum. The new discourse is built around a “vision of an economically competitive and industrially restructured society in which economic imperatives drive the education of all young Australians” (Poole, 1992, p. 2). Dwyer, in support of this interpretation of the current discourse of education, describes the transformation as one in which a belief in education as fulfilling the needs of students for “personal growth and identity has been converted into an instrumental definition of education in terms of the needs of industry and the workforce” (Dwyer, 1995, p. 469).



Two related issues fuelled the change in educational discourse. The first was youth unemployment. Across Australia the number of unemployed youth increased from approximately three per cent in 1968 to 22.5 per cent in 1983 and by 1993 it stood at 35.5 per cent (Eckersley, 1988, p. 28). In Western Australia the youth unemployment rate hit 35.5 per cent in February 1992. There were a number of factors contributing to the rise in youth unemployment: the removal of discriminatory employment practices against married women, the imposition of staff ceilings in the public service, technological change and associated changes in the organisation of work (Freeland, 1986, p. 9).

In response to the high youth unemployment rate a growing number of young people elected to stay on at school and complete Years 11 and 12. The retention to year 12 stood at 45 per cent in 1984 but by 1990 it had risen to 64 per cent Australia-wide (Department of Employment, Education and Training [DEET] 1991, p. 40). The national picture reflects the Western Australian situation. In that state the retention rate between 1984 and 1990 rose from 67.6 per cent to 79.2 per cent (DEET, 1991, p. 28). A study undertaken by the Commission for the Future found that as greater numbers of students stayed on at school post-school educational qualifications became more important in securing a job. As evidence the study cites the intense competition for the limited number of university places. In 1987 almost 20,000 eligible students failed to gain a place in a higher education institution and the figure represents a 22 per cent increase over the 1978 numbers (Eckersley, 1988, p. 36).

Not everybody staying on until the completion of year 12 did so because they were committed to the value of schooling or sought university entry. The nineties

have been referred to as the decade of forced retention (Dwyer, 1994). The federal government's decision to abolish the under 18 unemployment benefit, the extension of AUSTUDY (a cash allowance for those in full-time education) to those in the post-compulsory years of schooling and the decline in the availability of full-time jobs for youth left students with little or no choice other than to remain at school (Dwyer, 1995, p. 469). These changes in government policy have been described as a "cynical move to keep the young unemployed off the streets" (Joshua, 1997, p. 6) but whatever the motivation the outcome has been that large numbers of students are in school until the end of year 12. This trend has not abated significantly and it is conceivable that the goal set by the Finn Report (Australian Education Council, 1991) that by "2001 95 per cent of 19 year olds should have completed year 12, or an initial post-school qualification, or be participating in formally recognised education or training"(p. 48) may be achieved.

At the level of federal and state educational policy the response to high youth unemployment and increased retention was to move to establish a closer relationship between school and work. There was a widespread belief in government and education bureaucracies that greater emphasis on skills, vocational education, careers education and training would enable students to more readily fit into the changing labour market. These views were articulated in the Commonwealth Schools Commission policy statement of 1987 *In the National Interest: Secondary Education and Youth Policy in Australia*. The document stated the aim of secondary schooling was "to create the cultural pre-conditions favourable to economic and technological development" and that schooling should "establish relationships with and create expectations of their students that are similar to those required in the workplace" (p.

9). The statement identified three factors shaping the relationship between the economy and education. They were:

- the knowledge, skills and attitudes that education developed and industry employed;
- the credentials and/or qualifications that education gave students and employers used as the basis of selection; and
- the requirements of the labour market.

In a well-ordered relationship there should be a correspondence between all three factors (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987, pp. 4-5). In Western Australia a similarly purposeful philosophy had underpinned the *Better Schools Report* (1987). The Report argued the need to develop a more flexible and more responsive education system that could contend with the needs of a future which would be shaped by new technologies. The report was framed within a discourse of scientific management: efficiency, flexibility, management, accountability, responsiveness and performance indicators (Down, 1997, p. 115).

A series of Federal reviews of education sought to define and implement such a well-ordered relationship (Australian Education Council, 1991; Australian Education Council, 1992, Carmichael, 1992). For the purposes of this study it is not necessary to examine these reports in depth but certain aspects are relevant to developments in Western Australian curriculum. In the early nineties the Australian Education Council (A.E.C.), representing the state, territory and federal ministers responsible for education, commissioned a series of reports aimed at defining a new relationship between schools and the world of work. The first of these was the Finn

Report, *Young People's Participation in Post Compulsory Education and Training* (Australian Education Council, 1991). It highlighted the need for young people to either complete year 12 education or some other initial post-school qualification, to be multi-skilled, creative and adaptable. It argued that Australia should develop both the quantity and quality of skills and knowledge in the workforce and that in order to do this the roles of schools and training institutions needed to change. The report identified six key areas of competence essential for all students if they were to achieve full participation in work (Australian Education Council, 1991, pp. 57-58)<sup>8</sup>. In response to this report the A.E.C. established the Mayer Committee to advise on the employment-related key competencies for post-compulsory education and training. The Mayer Report, *Putting General Education to Work. The Key Competencies Report* (Australian Education Council, 1992), developed seven key competencies "for effective participation in the emerging patterns of work and work organisation" within a framework that integrated general and vocational education.<sup>9</sup> The Mayer Report highlighted the need to develop an appropriate regime of vocational education and training at the post-compulsory level by the Commonwealth. In response, the Minister of Education requested the Employment and Skills Formation Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training to consider a new training system, employer subsidies, traineeships and

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<sup>8</sup> The Finn Committee identified the six key areas of competency required by young people in their preparation for employment as: language and communication, mathematics, scientific and technological understanding, cultural understanding, problem solving, personal and interpersonal characteristics.

<sup>9</sup> The Mayer work-related competencies were: collecting, analysing and organising information; communicating ideas and information; planning and organising activities; working with others and in teams; using mathematical ideas and techniques; solving problems; using technology.

allowances. The outcome was the Carmichael Report, *The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System* (1992), which proposed an integrated, entry-level national system of vocational education and training, including apprenticeships and traineeships underpinned by competency-based training and assessment.

The reports shared the view that flexibility, adaptability and accessibility should be the hallmarks of post-compulsory education. They introduced a new vocabulary of terms such as pathways, destinations, competencies, employment outcomes and “general vocational education” (Australian Education Council, 1991, p. 7). The purpose of post-compulsory education was just that: it should have a clearly defined purpose which was that it should lead toward an eventual employment outcome (but not a specific occupation). The role of schools should be to provide students with the competencies to enter the work force but not give them “narrow, occupation specific skills” (Australian Education Council, 1991, p. 115). None of the reports advocated a narrow form of vocational training but rather argued that technological change would require new kinds of attitudes and competencies in the labour force.

This view resonates with some of the arguments Foucault makes in “On governmentality” (1979). “Governmentality is concerned with ensuring the right distribution of “things”, arranged so as to lead to an end convenient for each of the things that are to *be* (original italics) governed” (Marshall, 1995, p. 30). For Foucault, governmentality is an enabling category which does not position government and the individual or society as antipathetic. In “On governmentality” Foucault argues that individuals have become increasingly instrumental in preserving and reinforcing the goals of the state. Education, justice, health, welfare

and so on are of value, not just to the individual, but because they increase the strength of the state. Within this view the concept of the needs of the individual are identified and classified in terms of utility scales for the state. As Marshall says, “Investment in health and education are instrumental investments now in the individual, but later to be cashed in by the increased strength of the state” (Marshall, 1995, p. 30). This is not to say that the state’s use of education as a tool to ensure its own survival is necessarily evil or pernicious. In fact all the reports provided a much-needed challenge to the liberal-humanist, academic domination of the secondary school curriculum. I concur with Jamieson who said “real world problems do not fall neatly into academic subject divisions” (1986, p. 37). However, the report did raise questions about the authenticity and value of the traditional goals of liberal education which are the development of knowledge, critical thinking and personal identity.

As will be discussed later it was this conception of post-compulsory education, as subject to the needs of the state, that underpinned the submission for tertiary admission status for media studies in 1994. Before moving on to this topic it is necessary to look at some of the bureaucratic changes within the educational system in Western Australia which transformed the ways in which disciplinary knowledge was developed and circulated within media studies.

### **Re-structuring**

Subject superintendent and subject advisory positions were abolished within the Education Department as a result of the *Better Schools Report* (1987). The report called for a major restructuring of the state education system in line with the management and administrative practices of the corporate world. Within two years

of its release the positions of subject superintendent, curriculum specialist and advisory teacher were removed. Implicit in the Report was the view that subject superintendents were an unnecessary obstruction in the development of self-determining schools (Chadbourne and Quin, 1990, p. 3). The superintendents were seen as having the potential to divide the loyalties of teachers who might be forced to choose between supporting their discipline leader and supporting the school principal. Furthermore, the Report argued that professional support for teachers should be provided mainly within the school rather than by the central bureaucracy as had been the case in the past. Accordingly the Curriculum Branch, up until this time the bureaucratic home of the media advisory service, was dismantled. McMahon, the first media advisor, was transferred at the end of 1987. By 1991 the media studies advisory section was gone.

Following the restructuring the funds for professional development which had been held previously by Head Office were given to the schools. Schools are supposed to allocate these funds in accordance with the goals, objectives and priorities identified in their school development plans. In practice this has meant some schools distribute the money in proportion to the size of the department, some schools require departments to bid for funds on a competitive basis, while other schools may not use their funds on professional development. Regardless of which approach is used the restructuring of professional development has meant that media studies teachers get no professional development in their discipline. This is because to this day in government schools, media studies teachers are usually one individual within an English or arts department and they are never the Head of the Department. While schools may organise in-service courses for the English or art departments

such courses will be focussed on issues pertinent to the discipline of English or art and not media studies.

The absence of curriculum advisory personnel together with the lack of discipline based professional development meant that the traditional sources of knowledge production, regeneration and circulation in the subject no longer existed in the nineties. Reactions to the changed situation varied amongst teachers but the reactions tended to be linked to their personal histories. The longer serving teachers, who saw themselves as having a close and mutually supportive relationship with the advisory section of the Curriculum Branch, resented the changes and feared the potential of the new political situation:

When we had the advisory system there was that drive and energy which excited a lot of people, they got it up and going and it really made a huge impact. The subject lacks energy these days. Maybe it lacks direction or maybe we are all just getting old and tired. (Interview with Andrew, a current media studies teacher with twenty years experience, August 3, 1999)

I don't get the feeling that there is anyone fighting for media studies anymore. We are all isolated in our own schools, we don't have access to any of the decision makers and there is no-one in the centre making sure the subject gets heard. (Interview with Joan, a current media studies teacher with fifteen years experience April, 1998)

If a new, young teacher asked me where to go for intellectual stimulation in media studies I would tell her (sic) to sign up for a university course. Because other than that I really don't know where you would go because I don't know of anything. (Interview with Neil, a current media studies teacher with twenty years experience, July 12, 1999)

On the other hand, teachers who entered the subject in the latter part of the eighties barely registered the change in circumstances and a few who did favoured the change.



I never had much contact with the advisors so I don't know if it made a difference. My main contact was with the technician who used to deliver the equipment I borrowed from central office. (Interview with Anne, a media studies graduate of 1989 and current media studies teacher, July 31, 1999)

I started teaching in 1985 and it seemed to me that Barrie McMahon had too much influence over everything that went on. His replacement tried to control everything even more than he did ...now we have an opportunity for teachers to take more control of the subject and that is a good thing. (Interview with Julie, a media studies graduate, July 28, 1999)

For a while we tried to set up district networks and support each other but that petered out. Everybody is too busy and nobody wants to do the organisation. I guess if that sort of support was needed then someone would do something about it. I don't think teachers need advice, they need time and resources. (Interview with Anna, a graduate with three years experience, August 2, 1999)

### **A shift in discourse**

Following the changes in the bureaucracy the responsibility for syllabus development remained with the media studies syllabus committee of the Secondary Education Authority. This is a relatively unstable group in that the membership changes regularly but it is representative in that it includes government and non-government teachers, a member of the professional organisation (ATOM) and a representative of the tertiary institutions. In the early nineties the syllabus committee made another attempt to secure accreditation for media studies as a tertiary entrance subject but framed the proposal in new terms. Rather than arguing for the validity of the existing subject as a predictor of tertiary success as it had done in the past this time it proposed to abandon the existing structure. The committee proposed to introduce three new courses. The proposals were for a single introductory course at year 11 and two courses at year 12, one a non-tertiary entrance subject and the other a tertiary entrance subject. The former was designed to "cater for students of all

abilities, in particular those with TAFE (technical and further education) ambitions”. The latter would “cater for the more academic student who has tertiary aspirations” (Hall, 1991, p. 13). This is a model similar to that adopted in the English subject area where Senior English is a non-tertiary entrance subject and those wishing to enter university require English or English literature. The submission was rejected in 1992 on the basis that it required further work and elaboration. The reworked proposal formed the Statement of Intent submitted in 1994 to the S.E. A. The new proposal replaced the notion of three courses of study with semester length modules of study incorporating a hierarchy of student outcomes. The Statement of Intent says: “Modules will differ in depth and breadth of content covered, outcomes achieved, types of assessment and relative weightings”. The emphasis “will change according to the defined outcomes and the intended pathways of students” (Media Studies Syllabus Committee, 1994, p. 4). The proposal said that the TAFE/workbound student should be assessed according to less rigorous outcomes than the tertiary bound student. The Statement offers the following example:

Possible outcomes:

The tertiary bound student will critically evaluate codes used in media products in terms of the cultural values they project or reflect.

The student aiming for TAFE/employment will complete a media task demonstrating control of appropriate structures and language. (Media Studies Syllabus Committee, 1994, p. 4)

The proposal is couched in the language of “destinations” and “employment outcomes” developed by the Finn and Mayer reports:

The student population enrolled in post-compulsory schooling is far more diverse than it was ten years ago... They also wish to avail themselves of the grounding that media studies offers for their future employment in the communications industries that are major

employers in the Australian economy... The proposed template structure will allow the selection of modules which will provide a pathway to tertiary entrance, or to TAFE and/or the workplace. (Media Studies Syllabus Committee, 1994, p. 1)

One of the aims of the course was “to develop transferable skills and competencies through writing and media production, reading and viewing, speaking and listening, and analysis of media texts” (Media Studies Syllabus Committee, 1994, p. 2).

There are three notable features of this proposal. To begin with it is the first attempt by media studies teachers to argue for the selective dispensation of knowledge according to a student’s perceived destiny. Prior to this they had argued that media studies, as they practised the subject, was of value to all students. It was precisely this fact, they had argued, that made it imperative that it be available to students seeking to proceed to university. The 1994 proposal dropped this argument entirely and in its place attempted to construct differentiated knowledge through the creation of a binary division of students based upon their intentions post-school. The idea of different knowledge for different ability students was not a new one in education in Western Australia. In the past the subjects of biology, mathematics and English had been partitioned into two, or in some cases three or four, discrete subjects of different levels of difficulty. Biology had been divided into the “easier” human biology and biology, likewise English into English and English Literature with the later addition of Senior English, and mathematics had been divided into four separate subjects to cater for different ability levels. The media studies proposal however did not argue for separate subjects for the more and less academically able but different courses based on the student’s choice of destination.

Secondly, it is the first official statement by media studies advocates claiming a vocational relevance for the subject. Previously published rationales for the subject consistently ignored or denied issues of relevance to the work place: “the media studies course is not vocationally oriented” (McMahon, 1982c, p. 2). Notwithstanding the fact that while media communications industries might be major Australian industries in terms of turnover and profit they are not large-scale employers. The rationale of the proposal represents an attempt to enter the “pathways” discourse which emerged in the Finn report. No longer do the subject’s promoters argue for its study on the basis of its “powerful” and “persuasive” effects in “shaping lives and values” (B.S.E. Syllabus, 1978, p. 267) but rather in terms of its pertinence to post-school destinations. The Statement acknowledges this shift and argues that it is “a considered response to the changing accreditation and certification initiatives of recent years” (Media Studies Syllabus Committee, 1994, p. 1).

The third salient feature of the proposal is its incorporation of traditional literacy skills: writing, reading, speaking and listening, the same as those listed in the English syllabus. Media studies syllabuses had never previously made mention of skills other than image analysis, production and viewing. This proposed variation to the skills base of media studies could be interpreted in a number of ways. It could be taken at face value as an attempt to “reflect the conceptual understandings outlined in the English Curriculum Area Framework document” (Media Studies Syllabus Committee, 1994, p. 6) under which media studies was placed following the division of the curriculum into eight learning areas. This is an entirely reasonable interpretation given that media studies, in the curriculum reforms of the early nineties, had been designated as a subject within the English curriculum area for the

purposes of supervision by the Secondary Education Authority and later the Curriculum Council. On the other hand it could be seen as an attempt to position media studies as an alternative to English in the post-compulsory years. This latter interpretation is supported by the responses of a number of teachers interviewed for this study which I will discuss in more depth later within the context of the development of a discourse of anxiety. The quote below captures the flavour of many of the responses:

Everyone automatically assumes that English could do what media studies does and do it better. But perhaps media studies could do what English does, do it better and make the students a lot happier. (Interview with Alan, a recent graduate with three years experience, November 15, 1999)

These three features of the proposal for inclusion as a tertiary admissions subject – its discrimination between students on the basis of their assumed employment destiny, the claim for vocational relevance and the inclusion of literacy skills – are testimony to the dominance of the functionalist discourse of education. Prior to this proposal, media studies claimed legitimacy through reference to a narrative of emancipation. Media studies, according to the syllabus rationales, would produce the “media enlightened student” (B.S.E., 1978, p. 267), make him or her “better informed as to how the media operate” (B.S.E., 1983, p. 170) and give them “the ability to participate in contemporary society as active citizens, through their awareness of the political, economic, historical and technological implications of the media (S.E.A., 1993, p. 1). The Statement of Intent of 1994 signals a shift in the discourse of media studies, from one of emancipation to one of service in the efficient operation of the social system.

The failure to achieve the sought-after position as a tertiary entrance accredited subject left no option but for media studies to accommodate the Common Assessment Framework introduced in the mid nineties.

### **The common assessment framework**

In WA from 1993 onwards the number of wholly school-assessed (i.e. non-Tertiary Entrance Examination) vocational subjects grew as the system sought to accommodate the needs of students post-compulsory age who were not seeking university entrance. The Secondary Education Authority wanted to “increase the public credibility” of these courses and this was a “major motivating force in the Authority’s consideration of external assessment options for those courses which did not have the T.E.E. [Tertiary Entrance Examination]” (Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 1). The favoured model was a Common Assessment Framework (C.A.F.) based on student outcomes. Such a model had previously been designed for Senior English although in that case the purpose had been the comparability of marks between schools.

The Common Assessment Framework rationale published by the Curriculum Council states that the model was developed in response to:

- the need to cater for the broad range of ability of the expanded upper secondary cohort;
- the requirements of the workforce;
- a desire to increase the public credibility of standards in non-T.E.E. subjects; and

- the Secondary Education Authority's wish to improve the degree of comparability in subjects which do not have statistical moderation. (Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 1)

Furthermore the model facilitated the “explicit inclusion of the Key Competencies” identified by the Mayer Committee (Australian Education Council, 1992). The Common Assessment Framework was to be based on an outcomes model of education. According to the C.A.F. rationale:

It was intended that using course outcomes (instead of objectives and assessment weightings) as the basis of describing course content and assessment requirements would produce several advantages for teaching and learning:

closer alignment with competency-based approaches in the training sector;

the integration of national modules into accredited courses as appropriate;

closer linkage with K-10 profiles; and

greater flexibility of content selection at a school level reducing the need for syllabus changes. (Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 6)

Briefly the C.A.F. comprises learning outcomes, tasks for measuring the performance of students against intended outcomes, criteria for judging performance and ranking and grading procedures. The performance for each outcome is specified through descriptions of very high (V), high (H), satisfactory (S) and Not demonstrated (ND). The comparability of final grades is achieved through school visits by Curriculum Council officers and through consensus meetings of teachers. Information about student achievement for school based assessment may be drawn from tests, assignments, projects, portfolios and examinations. Teachers design common assessment tasks within guidelines prescribed by the syllabus. The tasks

must provide opportunities for students to demonstrate each of the outcomes prescribed by the syllabus. Sample tasks and exemplars are provided by the Curriculum Council and show teachers how to assess the outcomes. All assessment tasks must be completed for each of the subject's outcomes.

The C.A.F. model is a technology of "government" in the Foucauldian sense wherein government is a historically specific, very complex form of (non-sovereign) power. Technologies of government are practices, routines and regulations which "seek to translate thought into the domain of reality", and to establish "in the world of persons and things spaces and devices for acting upon those entities of which they dream and scheme" (Miller and Rose, 1993, p. 82). The C.A.F. model is a tool by which educational authorities act upon teachers and students. It is the mechanism through which the authorities seek to shape, normalise and instrumentalise the thoughts, actions, decisions and conduct of others in order to achieve what they, the authorities, consider to be desirable objectives. First, it shapes the conduct of schools in that the C.A.F. model is linked to specific governmental objectives for education through its inclusion of the Mayer competencies discussed earlier in this chapter. The competencies described in the Mayer Report had been developed earlier in response to problems of national efficiency and productivity and specifically the government's desire to improve the employability of school leavers. The C.A.F. model prioritises these competencies and requires their inclusion in all subject curricula.

Secondly, the C.A.F. model has a normalising function. The linkage between government objectives, the C.A.F. model and what happens in schools depends upon the application of particular instruments of calculation in order to produce statistics.



Statistics, according to Foucault are a tool of discipline (Foucault, 1977a, p. 190). They make it possible to integrate individual data into cumulative systems and conversely ensure that each individual affects the overall calculations. Statistics are a tool by which we can know the subject, compare his or her performance with others and/or with his or her own previous performances and develop norms. Statistics have been indispensable to education for, as Hunter (1993) says, it was the deployment of statistics that first made the social and moral costs of inadequate education calculable and manageable (p. 186). Obviously, the C.A.F. model did not introduce instruments of calculation for the purpose of constructing statistics of education. Prior to the introduction of the C.A.F. model a student's performance in non-tertiary entrance subjects had been measured according to norm referenced criteria. However the model introduced a new form of calculation, the criterion reference assessment, in order that one could know "what a student is capable of" rather than knowing "how well he performs in relation to other students" (Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 8). Although the specific instrument of calculation changed its purpose in the inscription, storage and interrogation of information, its function in producing a corpus of knowledge about individuals remained the same.

Finally, the C.A.F. model instrumentalises the connections between the goals of government and the practices in the classroom through a range of administrative and managerial techniques (Hunter, 1993, p. 186). It uses common assessment tasks, detailed performance criteria, grading procedures, subject consensus meetings and the mandatory submission of work samples as means by which to ensure that classroom practice realises the intentions of government.

Arguing that the Common Assessment Framework model is a technology of government is not to imply the presence of overt state intervention in, or manipulation of, the curriculum. Rather the C.A.F. model constructs a particular way of thinking about certain school subjects, a “specific programmatic intelligibility” into which interested parties might translate their interests (Hunter, 1993). In the next section I explore how media studies sought to translate its interests and re-invent itself in terms of the requirements of the C.A.F. model.

### **Media studies and the common assessment framework**

In the case of media studies two teachers were employed by the Curriculum Council (which replaced the Secondary Education Authority under the Curriculum Council Act 1997) to write the outcomes for the upper school media studies course. Their brief was not to write a new syllabus but to take the existing syllabus (1986) and rewrite it in terms of outcomes. When asked about whether any of the content from the syllabus of 1986 was deleted in the re-write one of the writers said: “I didn’t find that there was anything that needed to be taken out. No, I didn’t at all. We just thought it was quite easy to adapt to what we were asked to do” (J. Keane, personal communication, August, 1999). The content of the 1986 syllabuses for years 11 and 12 was synthesised into a set of outcomes which are presented in the table below. The outcomes together with their amplification describing how a student will demonstrate the outcomes, the assessment framework, the performance criteria, and the rating and grading procedures are the current media studies syllabuses for years 11 and 12.

<b>Year 11 Course Outcomes (DO 12)</b>	<b>Year 12 Course Outcomes (EO 12)</b>
1. Understand the components of mass communication and describe their function in media messages.	Understand the specific characteristics of selected media
2. Understand selection processes and how they create meaning in texts	Understand patterns of construction in a range of media texts
3. Understand patterns of construction in a range of media texts	Understand the effects of selection processes in mass media productions
4. Understand constraints operating in media production	Understand how value systems and contexts construct meaning in media texts
5. Understand how values are presented by the media	Understand external constraints which shape media production
6. Use a range of oral and written strategies to communicate media understandings	Use a range of communication skills to present critical evaluation of media texts
7. Demonstrate understanding of media language and production processes through the production of media messages	Apply practical skills in one medium to demonstrate understanding of media constructs
8. Contribute as a member of a team in media production	Use communication and team skills to construct a media message.

(Curriculum Council, 1999a)

The first point to be made about the latest syllabuses are that six of the “outcomes” are a conflation of the educational objectives established in the 1986 revision of the syllabus. The 1986 objectives were organised according to five domains: the nature of the mass media, media constructions, methods of construction, control of the constructions and value systems which correspond to the outcomes one through five above. Outcome number seven is a rewording of the requirement of the syllabus that students engage in practical work. Despite having been written a decade previously, the objectives of the old syllabus were not subjected to critical review or evaluation before being written into the new syllabus.

The syllabus re-write for the purposes of inclusion in the Curriculum Assessment Framework model represents a recycling of old knowledge in that it took as its reference point for disciplinary knowledge the syllabus it was intended to replace.

The recycling of knowledge was not a necessary outcome of the requirement that the media studies syllabus fit the C.A.F. model. Other options, adopted by some other subjects faced with the same need but not taken by media studies, were to establish an expert working party. The task of such groups was first to develop a comprehensive overview of appropriate subject content and then translate the material into a set of student outcomes. Another option not adopted could have been to co-opt academics from the discipline onto the team responsible for re-writing the syllabus. The decision to use the existing syllabus as the basis for the creation of a new syllabus allied with the Common Assessment Framework Model appears to have been largely one of convenience. One of the teacher-writers said:

Two of us were contracted by the S.E.A. over the Christmas holidays to re-write the syllabus in terms of outcomes. It had to be finished by the start of the next school year so we didn't have long. We were told to convert every objective into an outcome – something that could be measured. We were told to do that before we looked at writing tasks. In the end we wrote ten objectives plus the tasks but the [media studies] syllabus committee cut them down to eight objectives. It was the syllabus committee that changed every outcome into “understanding” which meant that they were really no different from the objectives we had before, just more general and comprehensive. (Interview with Jan, a teacher with over twenty years experience and a member of the Media Studies Syllabus Committee, December 10, 1999)

The second point to be made is that the reliance on available disciplinary knowledge and practices in the creation of new syllabuses has resulted in confusion and internal contradiction. I will explain this point through reference to a single outcome although the same point could be made about many of the syllabus

outcomes. The syllabus includes with every outcome a series of “components” which are intended to “amplify the contexts and meaning of the outcome” and “give comparable interpretations of the outcome” (Curriculum Council, 1999a, p. 6). It is a requirement that “during the course students must be given the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of all components” (p. 3). These sets of components or pointers inform the teacher as to whether the student has achieved the outcome. For Outcome 1 this section of the syllabus reads:

Understand components of mass communication and their function in media messages.

This outcome is demonstrated when the student:

identifies the components of communication ie sender, message, medium, audience;

distinguishes between form and content of a medium;

recognises the complex nature of authorship; and

recognises that audiences are active in creating meaning.  
(Curriculum Council, 1999a, p. 23)

The first two components, based on a linear communication model, have their origins in the first media studies syllabus of 1977 and they reappeared in every subsequent revision. The third pointer regarding the complexity of the concept of authorship is a new addition and had not appeared previously in any syllabus. The fourth pointer is to be found for the first time in the 1987 syllabus having been introduced during the revision in 1986. As a set the components represent statements about conceptual knowledge developed at different points in time over a period of more than forty years. The issue is that the knowledges are incompatible. The first component presupposes the existence of a sender, that such a figure(s) can be

identified and nominated and emerges from a conceptual model of the media developed in relation to issues of effectiveness of transmission of media messages. (These issues were discussed in chapter 5 under references to a linear communication model). The third pointer infers the opposite. It assumes that authorship is not a simple matter of being able to identify a sender. This idea is based on the theories of Althusser, Barthes, Hall and others who conceive of authorship as multiple and variable, a product of legislative, industrial, political and social forces rather than the product of an individual. The fourth component, regarding the active audience emerges from a theorisation of media communication developed by Hall (1980b) and discussed in Chapter 6 as the “encoding/decoding model”. In short, the syllabus says that the outcome that students “Understand components of mass communication and their function in media messages” may be demonstrated in either of two mutually exclusive theoretical paradigms.

The confusion is further compounded by the “Performance Criteria” designated for this particular outcome. The criteria make no mention of what it is that a student must do to demonstrate that they understand the third component, the “complex nature of authorship”. At the higher levels of achievement the criteria relate to an understanding of the relationship between form and content and the influence of target audiences upon such. The issue of authorship, supposedly a core component of the first outcome, is ignored entirely as can be seen below

### **Performance criteria**

Outcome 1: Understand the components of mass communication and describe their function in media messages.

<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Very High</b>
<p>The student identifies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How components of mass communication relate to each other to produce a message</li> <li>• Some characteristics of the medium being studied</li> </ul>	<p>The student explains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the form of a medium affects content and style</li> <li>• How messages are constructed by producers and audiences</li> </ul>	<p>The student analyses and evaluates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How style and content are shaped by the form of the medium and the target audience</li> <li>• How form and content work together to construct meaning</li> </ul>

(Curriculum Council, 1999a, p. 25).

My criticisms of the syllabus are not intended as a rebuke to the educational authorities, the syllabus committee or the writers responsible for its production. They are made in order to demonstrate the role of historical contingency in the production of authorised knowledge. The current syllabuses are a product of an administrative program directed at resolving historically specific problems – standards, comparability and credibility of media studies – through the pragmatic use of practices and disciplines immediately to hand. On hand were the old syllabus and willing teacher-writers happy to make a little extra income over the holidays. Herein lies the value of genealogy in understanding how the subject comes to look the way it does. I have said that the syllabus looks incoherent and contradictory but that is not because any one individual or group contrived to include or exclude certain knowledge. The way it looks is the outcome of a number of small, unreasoned and unrelated contingent circumstances: the availability of cheap labour in the form of teachers on holiday; the reliance on a body of previously authorised knowledge in the form of earlier syllabuses, and the lack of access to professional development for media teachers. In other words the syllabus does not reflect a rational, reasoned decision as to what constitutes, or should constitute knowledge in media studies in the late nineties. Rather it is an improvised adaptation of old pedagogy to the

exigencies of government. This situation calls into question the assumption that “what is truly best for mankind is that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason” (Hunter, 1994, p. 141).

While the current syllabuses may have been written in six weeks they are the outcome of an iterative process spanning thirty years. In this process statements of worthwhile knowledge about the media are repeated and occasionally augmented by new knowledge. The process is a cumulative one in that new knowledge is added to old, new theories supplement but do not replace old theories of communication. The cumulative and accommodatory process of syllabus development then does not reflect changes in the theoretical conception of the discipline which is characterised by ruptures or breaks in belief and cognition (Kuhn, 1970; Foucault, 1972, 1973a, 1973b, 1977; Young, 1990, p. 50). For example in the case of academic media theory the development of theories of semiotics of the image (Barthes, 1967), encoding and decoding (Hall, 1980b) and socially situated audiences (Morley, 1980) marked a complete break with earlier theories based on transmission models of communication (Lasswell, 1948). The current syllabuses however incorporate the two mutually incompatible and contradictory conceptions of the manner in which the mass media communicates and the ways in which audiences understand the communication.

The mismatch between academic knowledge and syllabus knowledge should not be assumed to be the result of ignorance or laziness on the part of teachers active in syllabus development. Rather it is the outcome, probably an inevitable outcome, of the syllabus development process itself. The process tends to be one of revision not invention and in this context those involved look to the past as their starting



point. Thus the existing syllabus becomes the jumping off point in the creation of the new syllabus. It is to be expected that remnants of the old will be sewn into the patchwork of the new.

The curriculum authority, in this instance the Curriculum Council, seeks to make the system function efficiently and according to its criteria of effectiveness. It performs as a modern power “bent on generating forces, making them grow and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them” (Foucault, 1981, p. 136). Its power is both productive and disciplinary: it creates knowledge in the form of the syllabus; it creates categories and norms in the form of performance criteria and identities in the allocation of students to levels. It uses teachers to effect a dispersion of centres from which discourses about knowledge in media studies, effective practice and competent assessment emanate. In Foucault’s terms teachers are both an effect and a vehicle of power:

The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

Foucault speaks of an “economy” of power (Rabinow, 1984, p. 61). Ball applies this concept to education and says there is an economy of power which “runs through four essential circuits within the education system, the four message systems of education: curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and organisation” (Ball, 1994, p. 1). The C.A.F. system imposed itself upon each of these four message systems. It brought with it a new syllabus based on outcomes, a new form of assessment based on performance criteria, and a new way of teaching and organising the subject in the form of tasks. The introduction of the Common Assessment Framework in media

studies with its apparently seamless merging of old and new knowledge and practices brought into play a new economy of power. It constituted a procedure “which allowed the effects of power to circulate in a manner at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted and “individualised”” (Rabinow, 1984, p. 61).

In the next section I examine how teachers and students accommodate and/or resist the demands of a syllabus which I have suggested is internally contradictory. Given that Foucault believed that “...analysis should not concern itself with power at the level of conscious intention or decision” but rather “at the point where its intention, if it has one, is completely invested in real and effective practices” (Foucault, 1980. p. 97) I turn to the lived lives of teachers.

### **The dominance of the task**

Central to the current syllabus within the Common Assessment Framework is the concept of assessment tasks which “measure student demonstration of outcomes” against “well defined performance criteria” (Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 1). The Curriculum Council argues that the advantages of the approach are that:

assessment requirements are clearer, more explicit and fewer than in the past;

assessment is integrated with curriculum thus there is less danger of a reductionist program in which only the tasks are taught;

flexibility can be offered in teaching the syllabus; and

student performance standards and comparability are ensured.  
(Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 2)

The tasks are set out in the Common Assessment Task Booklet for each subject which is “the major working document used by teachers in implementing the Common Assessment Framework” (Curriculum Council, 1999a, p. 4). The number

of tasks, defined in general terms, is set by the document and sample tasks are provided (see Appendix H for examples of tasks).

Teachers' reactions to the Common Assessment Framework's task requirement varied, but in general, they saw the task as a means by which students' conceptual understandings could be developed through contextualised activities. One of the participants in this study said that the new system "has finally empowered students ... they can clearly see what is expected and that's not only in the outcomes but also in the tasks." Another described it as "excellent system for letting students show what they know" and still another said "it's excellent for my type of students. They need a structure and need to be clear about what exactly they have to do". Not all the teachers were so positive. Others described the new system as "written in cement", "too time consuming", "too crowded", "time wasting" and as requiring "too much written work".

Although in interview every teacher said that their point of departure were the outcomes my observation of their classroom practices did not fully bear this out. Each of the teachers observed directed students to the outcome statements but did so in the context of the task to be undertaken. The degree of freedom afforded the students in designing the details of the tasks they were required to undertake varied. In all cases students were furnished with a copy of the task, the outcomes and the performance criteria. The differences between the classes observed lay in the specificity of instructions about what students were to actually do. In some instances students were given a copy of the task together with examples as to how it might be met. In others students were directed as to the sort of product they would produce. The extracts following represent the two approaches:

## Extract 1

### Task 2 PRODUCTION

Demonstrate an understanding of selection processes in film or television, showing how specific meanings can be created through the use of montage, codes and conventions. You may choose to make either a narrative or a non-narrative sequence.

### TASK DESCRIPTION

#### Examples

- Film or television commercial
- Opening sequence or promo for a TV series
- Music clip

#### Task Guidelines

#### You are required to

- Script and plan your production and submit one copy of the script before commencing production
- Work in small groups, delegating specific tasks and roles to ensure that all group members are involved in the production
- Submit your own critical evaluation making clear your understanding of:

#### Form and content

#### Narrative, genre and realism

#### Selection processes

#### Media skills

#### Team skills

## Extract 2

**Task:** Create and construct a media product demonstrating an understanding of technical codes and conventions. Present a critical evaluation of the techniques used.

You will produce **EITHER** the front page of a magazine **OR** a short instructional video on the use of codes and conventions.

**Method:**

- 1 Research the form, content, codes and conventions of the medium you intend to use.
- 2 Decide upon and learn the skills you need to know in order to create your product
- 3 Delegate tasks to group members
- 4 Produce your product
- 5 Focus on:
  - Form
  - Codes and conventions
  - Selection processes
  - Montage, sequencing or layout
  - Meanings created by the technical codes
  - Practical skills

In their discussion of the ways they approached setting up and explaining the requirements of the tasks to the students the teachers revealed an inclination towards what Ball has called the new progressivism (Ball, 1990, p. 136). This he describes as “an emphasis on skills, processes and methods rather than content and to applications and problem solving rather than abstract knowledge” (p. 136). Within the new progressive approach the teacher is a facilitator rather than a pedagogue. Although none of the teachers mentioned progressive education they did speak in

terms of the processes of learning including problem solving and information gathering.

More often than not I set them up in a group with a task and then get them to go and find as much information as they can themselves and then share it in the group, and evaluate it. Half the time I don't know where they are going to go off to, or what they are going to do. They always come back with stuff. (Interview with Julie, a teacher with fifteen years of experience in government schools, May 27, 1999)

I try to think up activities where the students are constantly doing the research posing the questions, learning the theory themselves by using the technology, rather than the teacher standing up there and saying this is what it is, this is what you need to know. (Interview with Andrea, a teacher of two years experience in a Catholic high school, April 4, 1999)

At least one teacher however saw her emphasis on process as a response to student demand.

Students don't want to know about – many of them – don't want to know about the conceptual outcomes. They want to know about the process because it takes them out of the classroom and out of that formal set-up. (Interview with Julia, a teacher in a wealthy, independent girls' school, May 27, 1999)

My classroom observations confirmed that teachers focussed on the task as the means by which students would learn the skills and processes. I saw no evidence of direct teaching of concepts or theories. My observation and interview notes point to a couple of issues. The first is the dominance of the task itself within media studies. The teachers made frequent mention of the amount of time the tasks take and their centrality to what is taught and learnt in the classroom. A second and related point is the lack of focus on outcomes. While the teachers showed themselves to be aware of the prescribed outcomes and usually provided students with a copy of them they did not make explicit the link between the outcome and the task to be undertaken. (See Appendix E for extracts from my journal of a classroom

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observation in which I describe a lesson under the Common Assessment Framework).

The Curriculum Assessment Framework of outcomes, tasks and performance criteria reflects to some extent what Max Weber (1930/1992) termed technocratic rationality. By this he meant a purposeful rationality which geared itself to the most efficient means for attaining goals which were predefined and external to a coherent, systematic and ordered schema. The C.A.F. model fragments learning and teaching into sets of discrete units: outcomes, components, tasks and performance criteria. In the tasks we have the tools through which students will attain the goals, defined as outcomes. In the performance criteria we have the tools which will sort and label the students. The goals have been determined prior to the experience of the student's study of the subject and not by themselves or in negotiation with the teacher, but by an external body. Weber feared that the instrumental concerns of bureaucracies or markets would dominate both inquiry and practice and lead to at best indifference, at worst "mechanised petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance" (Weber, 1930/1992, p. 182). In my view the tasks within the Curriculum Assessment Framework are approaching a state of "convulsive self-importance".

This however is not a concern for teachers. Despite their complaints about the amount of time the task oriented curriculum consumes there is widespread acceptance and, in the majority of cases, approval of the model. Most of the teachers interviewed saw the C.A.F. model as supporting their conception of what media studies should be about.



It suits me because I have always been task oriented in media teaching. I always made sure that the students knew that the aim was to produce something they could be proud of. The C.A.F. system has legitimised what I have always done. (Interview with Mark, a media studies teacher with six years experience November 12, 1999, Perth)

I think the doing, the process of the doing, the actually being involved, the practical component of media studies is not more important than the theory but it is the starting point. The C.A.F. system allows for that. (Interview with Gavin, a media studies teacher with three years experience, February 19, 1999)

The teachers perceived the C.A.F. system as matching their priorities in media studies teaching which were to ensure the students were engaged actively with the subject. Although the tasks require students to write and present oral presentations most of their time is spent in some form of media production. The C.A.F. model I suggest has legitimised the role of practical work in the media studies classroom by making it a central requirement in the method by which student knowledge is assessed. The discourse of production which has permeated media studies since its inception has been, at last, made a central, authoritative and mandated requirement of the curriculum. While the discourse has been retained it has at the same time been transformed in order to accommodate historical pressures. Whereas once practical production was legitimated or, in Foucault's terms inserted into a regime of truth, on the basis that it contributed to learning by making students do equipment based activities it has changed into an outcome of their learning. No longer are students required to learn about the media by performing a task but rather they are now expected to use a task to demonstrate that which they have learned. The change exhibits many features of Foucault's rules of transformation (Foucault, 1978). First, the change is marked by derivation in which a concept previously applied to one object within the discourse – learning, is extended to another – the

evaluation of knowledge. Secondly, the change is a mutation in that the boundaries of the discourse have altered. In the earlier “learning by doing” application of the discourse, process was pre-eminent over product but under the C.A.F. model the product is the goal of the task. Practical work is no longer primarily the means by which students gain an understanding of how the media work but the means by which they produce a media product. Finally, the change in the function, purpose and status of practical work is part of a broader transformation, which Foucault describes as redistribution, in which positions in the discursive hierarchy have changed. During the eighties image analysis was the most relied upon discourse for the study of the media within the subject but by the end of the nineties it has gone into decline and production work has the relatively supreme position.

At the same time as the discourse of media production was undergoing a transformation a new discourse emerged. While teachers were mainly happy with the curriculum framework within which they were required to teach they were very unhappy with other aspects of media teaching. The discourse of fun identified in the discussion of media teaching twenty years ago seems to have been displaced by a discourse of anxiety.

### **Discourse of anxiety**

In the interviews and focus groups held with teachers there was evidence of the growth and maintenance of a discourse of anxiety. Some degree of apprehension and unease have characterised media studies teachers’ attitudes towards their subject and its position in the curriculum since the inception of the subject but the anxiety appears to be more widespread and focussed than previously. Previously teachers’ concerns have centred around the perceived lack of subject status, resources and

relations with the subject English. These concerns were articulated and realised in repeated attempts to gain tertiary entrance status for the subject, in the use of low level technology in production and accommodations over the content of the English syllabus. In recent years however media teachers have begun to worry about the continued survival of their subject.

Currently the discourse of anxiety is marked by worries about the current Curriculum Council proposal to introduce courses of study in place of subjects thus prompting fears of an amalgamation with English and the subsequent abolition of the subject media studies. Evidence of these concerns can be seen in the comments below which were recorded at a meeting of the Media Studies Syllabus Committee at the Curriculum Council of Western Australia November 5, 1999.

There is no recognition that media studies is an entity. The problem with being flexible and interdisciplinary is that one loses one's own identity.

Within the Arts learning area media studies is seen as a parasite. The other areas do something they think is interesting and media studies can just film it.

At my school the students get to choose one lower school subject out of the Arts learning area. That means that they can do a maximum of six months of media studies in lower school. It has an effect in upper school because students have not had the time to develop an interest in the subject.

Media studies always ends up in the passive role. We are always asking where do we fit in?

The attitude of English is that we can take anything of yours that we want.

Validity has always been an issue. We have suffered systemic non-recognition.

Media studies teachers fear that their subject will simply disappear. When asked to explain their fears for the future of the subject teachers tended to repeat what they saw as evidence of a history of non-recognition of the subject – lack of heads of department, prejudicial decisions about timetabling, the dismissive attitude of the senior administration, the absence of curriculum advisors and incursions on content from English. Observation suggests that this is not an apprehension shared by teachers of other subject areas. Although I have collected no empirical evidence in support of my argument, personal experience suggests that teachers of English, mathematics, science, physical education, drama and computing do not share such a foreboding. The fears of media studies teachers may be grounded in reality because there is some evidence to suggest that some sections within the educational establishment see it as a disposable subject. This view is particularly evident amongst English teachers, not because they reject the value of media studies, but because they believe it to fall within the province of English.

Some of the English teachers interviewed for this study claimed that they were already using a media studies approach to teaching non-print texts in English. One teacher described the changes to her teaching of film texts:

I used to teach a whole film, treat it as a single text. I stopped doing that after I marked T.E.E. papers. You could tell which students had simply studied the film as a visual story – *Pretty Woman* was the first offender. It was very apparent that they could only talk about it on a story-telling, interpretation level. They hadn't looked at how the film was constructed at all. Now I start with the specific concepts I want to teach. Say I'm teaching the concept of closure. I will choose several different films and concentrate on just the endings of those films. (Interview with Wendy, an English teacher with more than twenty years experience, February 8, 1999)

Amongst some English teachers there is the view that English should change even further to incorporate more media study:

We need a more unified approach, seeing both literature texts and media texts as equal manifestations of the same sorts of social processes and same sorts of contextual factors. In the longer term English has to have a greater emphasis on the production of media texts. English is still locked into writing extended discursive texts as the main mode of textual production. The next move will be bringing in media textual production as a broader concept of writing. (Interview with Head of Department English, government high school, November 16, 1999)

When questioned as to whether there would be a place for the maintenance of a separate subject of media studies if English were to change in the way he hoped, this Head of English said:

Probably not. What is a subject? A subject is really just a name on the timetable. Subjects, just like areas of knowledge, are totally artificially constructed entities. That doesn't mean that study of the media would not occur but it might be simply part of a broader curriculum in the arts or English or technology.

Another potential threat to the continuation of media studies is its lack of physical substance in schools. My observation of media studies in schools leads me to suggest that, sadly, the subject could be dropped from most schools' timetables with little disruption or financial loss to the schools. With the exception of a handful of schools, most of them independent, media studies has failed to build a substantial physical presence within schools. Computer studies has dedicated computing laboratories, technology studies has workshops, science has science laboratories, English has bookrooms, physical education has large and expensively equipped gymnasiums, drama studies has a theatre but in most schools media studies operates in a converted classroom space with few resources. Unlike universities, very few schools have made a significant capital investment in facilities for media studies. The ability to make do with almost nothing, a source of pride for the early media teachers, has been sustained to their possible detriment. The outcome is a subject that

has the appearance of being possibly a temporary measure which might be replaced any day by something more substantial and permanent.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has pointed to changes in the discourse of education in the nineties. The changes in the discursive formations are articulated in statements concerned with the need for a better-educated workforce, the employability of school graduates and the needs of the workforce and the nation. The new discursive formation was initially both framed by, and articulated in, a series of education related reports commissioned by the federal government. The discourse has been slowly realised through various strategies such as the abolition of unemployment benefits for under eighteen year olds, the introduction of financial support for needy upper secondary students and the introduction of a new curriculum model in upper secondary education. The common assessment framework model I have argued is a technology of government. But it does not impose its will upon subjects and teachers by subordinating them to the authority of the state but rather by offering a limited set of techniques and forms of calculation in which goals and programs can be formulated. The C.A.F. model provides the political a priori which delimits the kinds of knowledge which can form part of the curriculum.

Within this discursive formation media studies has continued to seek and exploit spaces, or conditions of possibility, as they present themselves in order to ensure the survival of the subject. One such possibility, now undoubtedly closed, was tertiary entrance admission status for the subject. Whereas in the eighties teachers had tried to reinvent the subject's content along academic lines in order to demonstrate its intellectual worth, in the nineties they took a different approach

which involved splitting the subject into two streams. The last failed attempt to secure the status of a tertiary entrance subject was based on an argument around the ability of the subject to conform to the needs of the social system. Questions of subject content were of lesser concern in the submission than questions of form: the capacity of the subject to cater for different students based upon the students' perceived destinations, the ability of the subject to provide vocationally relevant skills and the value of the subject in improving literacy skills. Following the failure of the 1994 application for tertiary admissions status media studies regrouped itself and revalidated its practices under the mantle of its metanarrative – production. The introduction of a Curriculum Framework model structured around student tasks made such a re-positioning possible.

Finally, the chapter has revealed how the processes of syllabus review and creation may and do result in confusion and contradiction. The rear gaze of the process, together with the need to accommodate the views of disparate groups in the desire for consensus, has led to the creation of a syllabus which is underpinned by multiple and competing theories of communication. This in itself might not be a problem but the at-times-mutually-exclusive theoretical bases are not articulated either in the syllabus or in the classroom. Problems of theory have been largely displaced by the magnitude of the “tasks” required by the new Curriculum Framework model. The task of teachers is to summarise, simplify, clarify and unify the propositions of the discipline and thus it is perhaps inevitable that they will ignore or exclude anything that is contradictory or disconfirming. And yet highlighting for students dissension in the discipline would serve to “loosen the grip of systematisation and set us both on the road to uncertainty” (Roth, 1992, p. 692).

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

For a rather long period, people have asked me to tell them what will happen and to give them a program for the future ...programs become a tool, an instrument of oppression. My role is to show people they are freer than they feel. (Foucault, 1988c, p. 10)

What does this genealogical analysis of the discursive formations framing the subject media studies lead us to conclude about the questions I raised in introducing the study? How did the subject come to be and what is it? What counts as knowledge in the subject called media studies and by what processes is it constructed? How do changes occur in the knowledge base of the subject? Whose knowledge – the academics', the educational bureaucrats', the teachers' – attains the status of truth within the subject? This chapter attempts to respond to these questions and assess the value of a genealogy in framing the responses.

#### **Overview of the study**

An analysis of the discourses of education, politics and local culture circulating in Western Australia immediately prior to the introduction of media studies in schools revealed a microculture not only ready, but anxious to introduce a certain type of new subject into the school curriculum. Commencing in the 1960s, a significantly increased retention rate had changed the secondary school population in both size and nature. These changes in turn prompted new conceptions of the purpose of secondary education. A series of reports, beginning with the Robertson Report of 1962-3 and finishing with the Dettman Report of 1969, challenged the tradition of external examinations, the narrow academic curriculum and the role of



schools in culling out the less academically able students. By the early 1970s secondary school education was shifting from being a system designed to channel the most able individuals upwards and onwards into university while discarding the rest, into a system designed to embrace all. Such a systemic change required the introduction of new subjects, of the kind that might cater for the wide range of ability levels entering and staying in secondary education. That one of the new subjects to be invented and implemented was media studies was the chance result of the intersection of these new demands on the secondary education system with other forces, both within and without the education sector.

A significant internal force was a change in the conception of English pedagogy which saw this subject introduce such new elements as oral work, group work and a new form of creative expression through film-making. Film-making, as a classroom activity, was made possible by the timely availability of cheap image production technology. Super-8 cameras, originally designed for the domestic home-movie market, were accessible and affordable to cash-strapped English departments. The introduction of black-and-white, reel-to-reel video portapaks in the early seventies further extended schools' access to low end screen production technology. The availability of the technology permitted English teachers to turn to film-making and film study in their efforts to engage students and introduce the new modes of self-expression demanded by Growth Model English. In Western Australia, this change in English teaching occurred in the context of a small, but nevertheless influential, local culture that valued film- and screen-based activity.

It was these forces: the system's need for a new, less academic subject; the increasing use of film within English; and the expansion of screen related activity in

the community following the election of the Labor government that created an environment in which a proposal to introduce the subject media studies into schools was accepted by the educational authorities. No single force determined that media studies must be invented as a school subject but their intersections provided a receptive climate. As Ben-David and Collins (1966) say: “The ideas necessary for the creation [of a new discipline] are usually available over a relatively prolonged period of time in several places” (quoted in Goodson, 1990b, p. 119).

The genealogy reveals that the roots of school-based media studies do not lie in education’s embrace of contemporary theories of communication nor popular concern about the media’s effects. This finding runs contrary to much of the literature discussed in Chapter One dealing with the ostensible causes of the subject elsewhere in the western world. The survey of the literature suggested that media studies and/or media education in Britain, the United States and Europe had its origins in a distrust of the mass media and worries about its effects (Alvarado et al., 1987; Masterman, 1983; Tufte, 1999; Tyner, 1998). However, in the genealogical analysis of media studies in Western Australia I have found the impetus for the subject to have nothing to do with its object of study, the mass media, but much to do with concerns about the need for curriculum reform in the face of a rapid and massive change in the secondary student cohort.

The political and educational discourses of the early 1970s in Australia around social justice and inclusivity were brought to bear upon those students remaining at school in the post-compulsory years. They were realised locally in efforts to liberalise the curriculum and serve the perceived needs of students labelled as non-academic. The discourses of equity and social justice had two effects. First, in

the identification of such students, the discourse constructed a new population – non-academic students – who were to be made subject to the techniques and practices employed by education systems everywhere for the discipline, surveillance, administration and formation of populations of individuals. The second effect, related to the first, was to create a new need – a new subject for the new population of non-academic students. The strategic outcome of these needs was media studies, a new subject which would “soften the traditional academic curriculum” (Quin and Quin, 1994, p. 115) for that population unable or unwilling to meet the demands of more difficult subjects. It was a means by which less academically able students could be administered, organised and kept occupied. From the beginning media studies did not display the organising principles underlying the academic curriculum identified by Young (1971) as an emphasis on the written as opposed to the oral; on the individual rather than the group; and on the abstraction rather than the application of knowledge (p. 38). In schools the subject has never successfully thrown off the label of the “soft option” despite repeated attempts by its supporters to academicise the syllabus and win acceptance as a tertiary entrance subject.

Furthermore, the analysis has shown that the rapid expansion of the subject in the late seventies was not a response to public demand that more young people be exposed to education about the mass media. Unlike the situation in the United States in which media studies was seen as a counter to the supposed detrimental effects of television and other popular media on children’s behaviour and learning ability (Singer et al., 1981a; 1981b p. 76), in Western Australia there was no evidence of the public’s concerns with effects. The growth of the subject was more a result of supply than demand. The widespread take-up of the subject in the years immediately following its introduction was an outcome of the bureaucratic structure of education

in Western Australia. The highly centralised state education system ensured that once a subject secured the approval and support of the central administration then resources would follow. In the case of media studies the resources included the establishment of subject advisors as a section within a central curriculum advisory service, the provision of frequent and widespread in-service courses, and the supply of free consumables and audio-visual equipment to schools. The ready and generous supply of resources effectively eliminated any possible financial constraints on a school's capacity to introduce the subject.

The only limitation faced by any school wishing to introduce media studies was the availability of a teacher willing and able to teach the subject. The subject advisors ensured a supply of teachers. They were active and effective in the identification, training and nurturing of media studies teachers in the early years. Largely through in-service activity they trained teachers of other subjects as media studies teachers. Through regular personal contact, newsletters and group meetings they established and maintained a group of media specialists in the absence of any formal teacher training mechanism. This was a necessary investment on the part of the media advisory personnel because subject growth and ongoing demand for support was critical to the maintenance of the advisors' positions. The outcome of this structure, as I pointed out in Chapter Six, was an idiosyncratic, reciprocal need-and-demand relationship between media teachers and central office media studies personnel which persisted until the dissolution of the advisory system in the early nineties.

## **The Discourses of Media Studies**

Once established, the subject was formed by, and contributed to, specific discourses around its purpose, conduct and goals. These discourses worked through both the process of syllabus development and classroom practice. The genealogical analysis identified a number of influential, but not always continuous, discourses constructing media studies over the past thirty years. The case study has revealed the major discourses to have been emancipation, pleasure and anxiety. Ideological emancipation figured prominently in early versions of the syllabus, while pedagogical emancipation conditioned the practice of the subject. The syllabus was the formal means by which the educational authorities sought to control what was taught under the sign media studies. In its first iteration the upper school media studies reflected a mix of theoretical positions drawn from British and American media education programs which in turn were allied with specific academic schools of thought about studies of the media and mass communications. Thus the first syllabus incorporated aspects of Marxist notions of ideology along with the Frankfurt School's pessimistic concepts of media power and consumer helplessness. The early syllabuses presented the subject as a means by which students would learn to be "more than a semi-passive receiver of message" and thereby be able to resist the oppressive ideologies promulgated by the media (BSE, 1977, p. 241). Later syllabuses reflected the influence of cultural studies on media studies and turned to issues of sub-cultures, stereotypes and star systems with an emphasis on active readings of the texts.

A discourse of emancipation inflected the practice of media studies too. The subject offered an alternative to the repressive and irrelevant curriculum which had

traditionally constrained the post-compulsory years of schooling through the use of such (then) progressive practices as learning contracts, group work and non-classroom based learning. In most schools, during the early years of the subject, the media studies classroom was deliberately constructed to look and feel different to other classrooms. Posters and advertisements adorned the walls; bean bags replaced desks, popular music provided background sound and students moved freely between work areas. Within this discourse of emancipation learning, motivation and satisfaction were assumed to be ends in themselves while the issue of what should be learnt or satisfied remained vague and uncertain.

Alongside the discourse of emancipation there developed a discourse of pleasure which created the subject as a site in which teachers and students could expect to enjoy themselves. The sources of pleasure were in both the content and activity of the learning. Media studies employed and valorised entertainment texts and students' knowledge and understanding of popular culture. Horror films, soap operas, comics and pop music were legitimate objects of study and familiarity with the popular was viewed as a worthwhile attribute in a student. In its routines media studies favoured viewing over reading, and doing over writing. For both teachers and students, the "doing" of media studies, that is the production of media texts, was a primary source of pleasure in the subject. The dominance and enduring nature of this discourse has ensured that practical work has remained central to the subject throughout its history.

In more recent years, satisfaction and fun in the activity of teaching and learning media studies, for its teachers at least, has been inflected by what I have described as a discourse of anxiety. This contemporary discourse is characterised by

media studies teachers' insecurity about the subject's (and thus their own) future in the face of proposals to introduce educational pathways at the expense of discrete subjects. It exhibits itself in territorial battles with English, in complaints of victimisation, in continuing debates over issues of subject status and threats to reject proposals to restructure the upper school curriculum. Anxiety continues to shape the attitude of the media teachers towards their subject, their colleagues and the bureaucracy.

### **Whose knowledge?**

The title of this study includes the question "Whose Knowledge?" which might be thought to imply that the study would identify an individual or group of individuals with the power to determine what counts as knowledge in media studies. Undoubtedly, McMahon sought to define appropriate content in media studies from the inception of the subject and for the first 15 years of the subject's life he was in a highly influential position. He led the initial pilot school project, he was central to the production of the first syllabus, he controlled the agenda of media studies meetings, he decided the content of in-service courses and he wrote and distributed copious material on the subject. But as the interviews with teachers have revealed people do not necessarily do as they are told. They do what they need to do to manage the often contradictory forces impinging upon them. Thus, despite McMahon's insistence that "a media studies approach is a conceptual approach to education" (McMahon, 1980a, p. 5) we find teachers prioritising production because this is what they thought best suited to their situation. They met some resistance. In Chapters Three and Six I discussed the ways in which McMahon and I tried to use our positions as advisory teachers to force teachers to adopt a more academic

curriculum through interventions such as syllabus changes, conferences, publications and in-service training. We too met resistance. In Chapter Six I showed how we were thwarted by both our own need to meet teachers' expectations and their resilient belief in their own versions of the subject. As the individuals involved we were active agents but limited by local conditions and assumptions which set limits upon our agency.

In the end there is no figure to be found, no definitive answer to the question as to whose knowledge determines the form and content of media studies. In tracing the history of the subject over thirty years I have found relations of power to be multiple and reciprocal, impossible to capture in the traditional binary opposites of dominators and dominated, repressors and repressed or experts and tyros. Power manifests itself and makes real its effects in not only the educational bureaucracy but also in the classroom, the syllabus committees, the teachers' association and in informal networks. Power has been shown to be diffuse and lacking a single reference point and this is precisely why it can go "right down into the depths of society" (Foucault, 1977a, p. 27) or in this case, the depths of the subject.

Both advisors and teachers employed tactics in the power game surrounding the issue of subject knowledge. Chapters Five through Seven have revealed how tactics of power are invented and organised at a local level to serve particular needs. One tactic of power employed by the educational bureaucracy was the subject newsletter produced by the central advisory personnel. Through the publication and circulation of lesson notes and teaching programs it was a primary tool by which the curriculum advisors sought to define knowledge in media studies. Their efforts at control met resistance and the same tactic was used against them. Teachers would



submit copies of their own teaching programs or lesson notes for publication in the newsletter and the need for copy along with the need for courtesy meant that the work would be published. Sometimes the content was an active contradiction of editorial direction. Thus McMahon can write that graffiti should not be a topic of study “because I feel it does not achieve much in the education field (sic)” (McMahon, 1980b) but later publishes a “Program on Graffiti” (Webster, 1986).

Sometimes in concert with the bureaucracy and sometimes in opposition, teachers employed exclusionary power tactics designed to preserve a particular type of knowledge as the province of media studies. Their insistence on the centrality of practical work, their rubric of Mickey Mouse media production and the associated requirement for cheap, do-it-yourself production techniques were their tools of prohibition, their means of controlling the discourse of the subject. Those teachers who had embraced the notion of media studies as a practical subject created a discursive barrier around it, designed to exclude all who might want to change or modify the production orientation of the subject. But as Foucault says power “takes back with one hand what it seems to exclude with the other. It is unwilling to waste even what it has decided to disqualify” (1977a, p. 301). Thus although media studies teachers disqualified a non-production-oriented discourse as inappropriate to the subject, the alternative discourse of textual analysis was not wiped out but grew and prospered within English until English began to look like media studies.

The use of tactics of power was not limited to the formal spaces of education. For example, the subject teachers’ association, ATOM, also sought to define the subject through its publications and activities. In the eighties it was a potent force in the maintenance of a focus on media production by virtue of its provision of media

production workshops and its attacks on the jargon of cultural studies. In the nineties it was instrumental in building an equivalence between the subject and entertainment. ATOM shifted its attention away from issues of pedagogy and devoted its energies and funds to expanding its membership base and recruiting teachers who were non-media-studies specialists through the provision of free amusement. The editorial in the first edition of *ATOM News* of 1990 tells readers that in the preceding year they were given free double movie passes to five feature films (p. 2). The editorial for the first edition of 1996 says that members attended screenings of nine free films over the previous twelve months. The technique adopted by the association was to build a relationship with local film distributors and cinema chains. The industry provided the Association with free movie tickets in return for the provision of favourable reviews in the ATOM newsletters and full houses for film previews. The focus of the subject association on entertainment during this last decade has served to maintain the discourse that media studies is about pleasure. Arguably, the focus on entertainment has reinforced the perception in the teaching profession and the educational bureaucracy that the subject lacks the academic rigour necessary to be included amongst those subjects selected as predictors of success in tertiary education.

## **Change**

Questions of subject knowledge have been central to this history of a school subject: what constitutes knowledge at any time and how and why does it change? The study has found first that subject knowledge as it is defined by the syllabus and subject knowledge as it is defined in the classroom are very often not the same thing.

Secondly, I have argued that knowledge changes not because new discoveries are made (for example, audience theory did not discover audiences any more than textual criticism produced texts) but because there is a shift of forces which results in a new appropriation of knowledge and thus a new set of interpretations which become the truth. This study has found changes in the knowledge base of the subject to be contingent upon changes in another subject, in the teaching cohort, in power relations and in the broader educational context.

The effect of changes in one subject on subject knowledge in another is evident in the impact changes in English had upon media studies. Changes to the subject English brought about changes in media studies as it tried to emphasise its difference. The 1984 English syllabus advised that practical activities such as filmmaking and television production offered “good opportunities for language development and should also lead to wide reading” (S.E.A., 1984, p. 106). The current syllabus requires the study of print advertising, television drama, television and/or radio current affairs, news and magazine feature articles, feature films and documentaries (Curriculum Council, 2000-2001, pp. 54-56). It states that students will “examine ... appropriate elements of film language such as music, lighting, camera work, sets, montage and performance” (p. 56). English has, in the space of fifteen years, moved from treating media texts as prompts for reading to a situation whereby they comprise one-third of the program as objects of study in themselves. As the study of visual texts within English has grown, media studies has had little choice but to abandon textual analysis and strengthen production as the critical dissimilarity between the two subjects. The production focus has now been legitimated in the Common Assessment Framework and the state-wide use of common assessment tasks.

Similarly, changes in the teaching force produced changes in subject knowledge. In the beginning media studies teachers had no formal education in the discipline. What they taught was what they had learned at an Education Department in-service and this learning tended to be restricted to production skills. However, beginning in the mid eighties it became increasingly common for media studies teachers to have a pre-service education in communications, media studies and cultural studies. As undergraduates they were exposed to both theoretical and practical studies in the media and these were the knowledge resources they brought into teaching. These teachers could teach what they themselves had been taught at university and thus they brought new and different knowledge into the classroom.

Furthermore, changes in power relations resulted in changes in subject knowledge. Cuts in the staffing of the advisory section of the Curriculum Branch, the influx of trained graduates into the discipline, and the transfer of McMahon changed the power relations between the bureaucracy and teachers. The central advisory office diminished in importance and influence and ultimately closed, while the teachers' association, ATOM, grew in size and influence. This group took over publication of the subject newsletter and secured itself a position on the syllabus committees. The bureaucrats effectively lost control over curriculum development to the subject teachers' association and classroom teachers. The subject teachers' association and the teachers proved themselves to be less dogmatic than the curriculum advisory personnel in their approach to syllabus development and more accepting of different and conflicting points of view. Under this new power structure syllabus development has become a process of accrual and accommodation with the result that no new form of knowledge has completely displaced the old and the syllabuses now articulate incompatible theories of communication.

Schools subjects do not operate in isolation from the social, political and economic forces impacting upon education. As Ball describes it, “education, as a field of discourse and practice, is an arena and an object of struggle” (Ball, 1990, p. 100). This was obvious in the efforts of the national government in the late 1980s and early 1990s to redefine secondary, specifically post-compulsory, education. In the late 1980s the socio-economic climate in Australia was characterised by high levels of youth unemployment, increasing overseas debt and an uncertain economy. Issues of equality and equity, integral to the discursive formations of the 1970s, were submerged by a new discourse marked by a concern with economic growth and the competitiveness of the nation. In Chapter Seven I discussed the rise of a functionalist discourse in this period which sought to align education with the economic needs of the state. Within this discourse education was to become more accountable to employers and to fashion its content to the demands of the labour market and changing technology. Cooper (1988) argues that it was a discourse of the New Right which was effective in diverting public attention “away from many of the root causes of problems experienced within schools and society (p. 282). Kenway too, describes this as a shift “towards an explicitly right-wing position” (1990, p. 167). It might have been thought that such a discourse would be antipathetic to media studies which, as I argued in Chapter Five, had its beginnings in the emancipatory educational culture of the 1970s. The educational culture of that period was characterised by a concern with the individual, a recognition of difference coupled with the belief that education could ensure equitable outcomes for all. By the early nineties this culture had changed markedly into one which had at its core what Lyotard has called the “performativity criterion” for the legitimation of knowledge (1991, p. 48).

Lyotard describes performativity in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984). In this work he argues that knowledge will become a commodity:

Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, and it will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its “use-value.” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 4-5)

The performativity principle is based on an image of society in which political, economic and educational relations are all reduced to their function in “optimising the system’s performance - efficiency” (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). Under the performativity criterion legitimate knowledge, the knowledge which schools are duty bound to transmit, is “the skills that are indispensable to the system” (p. 48). The function of schools under the principle of performativity is to supply “the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions” (p. 48). Lyotard points out the performativity standard brings with it a “certain terror” (p. xxiv) in that those who are not meeting the criteria are likely to be eliminated or threatened with elimination on the grounds of the need to maintain and improve the efficiency of the system. It says: “Adapt your aspirations to our ends – or else” (pp. 63-64).

At the local level media studies appeared to adapt its aspirations and successfully avoided elimination by the emergent functionalist discourse of education. It was certainly under threat: “Alas, schools are becoming increasingly enmeshed in the ‘Mickey Mouse’ curriculum – media studies, so called ‘sex education’ – even women’s studies (why not for men?) – and most recently: peace studies...” (Conway, 1985, p. 6). Salvation for media studies meant refashioning itself in terms of a new discourse of education. Kenway describes this new discourse as marked by a belief that literacy standards must be raised, schools must serve the

needs of the economy, an emphasis on skills and the testing of students' skills competence together with a rejection of progressive education (Kenway, 1990, p. 188-189). Accordingly, the media studies syllabus substituted learning outcomes for teaching objectives, it replaced the teaching of abstract concepts like ideology with the application of skills to tasks and accommodated reading, writing and speaking as core competencies. The media studies community has shown its willingness to accept and operate within the new discourse in its accommodation of traditional literacies and its introduction of public performance criteria against which students would be graded.

The syllabus changes over the last thirty plus years reveal that what counts as knowledge, and its purpose, have changed over the period of the subject's history. The major change is from a position in which knowledge would liberate students from oppressive ideology to one in which the subject knowledge will fit the student for participation in the labour market. But do these changes signify progress?

## **Progress**

The application of a genealogical method in the analysis of the local conditions that brought forth the school subject and in the examination of its development over time has resulted in a different kind of history from the teleological studies of media education discussed in Chapter One. The Foucauldian method privileges detail over generalisation, contradiction over consensus and discontinuity over continuity. In this instance the application of Foucault's tools of historical analysis has produced a subject history marked by contingency, recurrence and contradiction. Those who might have hoped for a seamless narrative of rational thought in action which could be used to assure critics and supporters of continuous

progress will be disappointed by my findings. This is because the analysis of the Western Australian case challenges assertions that media studies in general has changed in particular ways and those changes represent progress (see Buckingham, 1998). This study has found the most striking characteristic of the subject to be not evolution but repetition. Through every iteration of the media studies syllabus from 1976 up to the present day one can identify a refashioning of the original “learning by doing” refrain. For example, the current syllabus requires that four out of the seven required assessment tasks in Year 11 and three of the six at Year 12 be student productions (Curriculum Council, 1999a, p. 25). Equally, classroom practice reveals the same repetition whereby the central concern of teachers and students continues to be with the production of media artifacts. Superficially at least, the activities of a media studies class in 1999 resemble very closely those of a class twenty years earlier. While “tasks” have replaced “contracts” and the equipment is more plentiful little else appears to have changed in media studies teaching in nearly three decades. Classroom observations made for this study confirm that group work is still the favoured organisational structure and production is still the goal of nearly every activity. The lessons are relatively unstructured, with the groups determining what it is they must do to complete the task. The surveillance and discipline regime is still based upon the teacher approving the written work and giving reward in the form of equipment. Punishment for work incomplete or not up to standard is a delay in access to equipment. The early tenets of media studies, such as group work and production, are embedded today as mandatory requirements of the syllabus.

Yet despite the apparent similarities between past and present I have chosen to describe this phenomenon as recurrence rather than continuity. This is because despite a persistent thematic continuity there are singular differences between the



conception and purpose of production work then and now. Where once practical work was thought of as an input, a means by which students would come to understand the workings of the mass media it is now conceived of as an output of the teaching and learning process. Media production nowadays is the way in which students are given “opportunities to apply their understandings” and “demonstrate their performance on a range of subject outcomes” (Curriculum Council, 1999a, p. 23). This statement is not simply as Foucault says “the repetition of what they once might have said” (Foucault, 1973b, p. xv) but a reconceptualisation of the function of practical work within media studies. The prevailing discourse of outcomes-based education has shaped the object of which it speaks.

Alongside contingency and recurrence this study has found contradiction to be present at all times throughout the history of the subject. In the earlier discussion I have pointed to the contradictions between what knowledge about the media was said to be (in the syllabus) and what was done (in the classroom). The study has found that subject knowledge, as defined by the syllabus, does not correspond fully to subject knowledge as constructed in the classroom at any point in time in the subject’s history. In the early years the syllabus constructed its object of study as a powerful industry which posed a potential threat to the community’s values while classroom practice constructed it as an object of pleasure. In the middle phase of its development the syllabus treated the media not as an industry but as a set of texts to be decoded according to specific rules in order to grasp the immanent meaning of the individual text. Meanwhile classroom practice changed very little. Teachers continued to treat media production as the core activity. The mismatch between syllabus knowledge and classroom knowledge resulted from the teachers’ and students’ rejection of conceptual understanding in favour of the production of media

texts. In more recent years, with the introduction of the task-based Common Assessment Framework, the contradiction between the requirements of the syllabus and the practice of the subject has been minimised. The pre-eminence of the task in both the syllabus and the classroom has meant that there is a greater degree of concurrence between them than at any other moment in the subject's history. This, however, is not a product of rational thought leading to syllabus reform. Rather it is the contingent outcome of multiple historical occurrences. Those events were, first, the demise of the subject advisory system which extinguished the power of the subject experts, the advisors, over the syllabus. Secondly, the repeated failures of the subject to secure tertiary entrance status resulting in its relegation to its current position as a wholly school-assessed subject. Thirdly, the public's demand for accountability and comparability to which the education system's response has been to insist upon measurable outcomes in the form of common tasks.

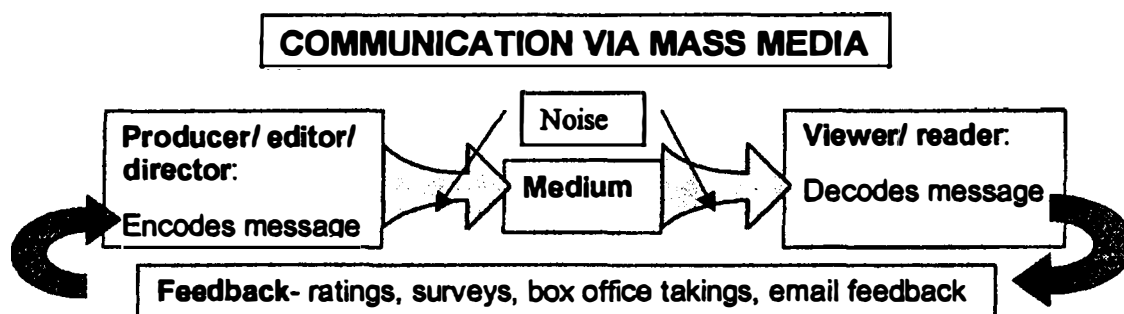
However, contradiction is not entirely absent from the subject even today. In Chapter Seven I pointed to the ways in which the current syllabus presents incommensurate understandings as compatible. The outcomes-based syllabus unproblematically marries theories of singular flow and reciprocal flow communication, active and passive audiences and textually determined and reader determined meanings without reference to either their historical contexts or their application to specific media. The assumption of fit between these incompatible theories is best illustrated by the graphic below. This is taken from the ATOM newsletter of June 2000 which the editorial in the preceding issue announced would be "concerned with providing teachers of Secondary Media Studies (sic) with some resources to help them cope with the now compulsory Common Assessment Frameworks Syllabus" (Dixon, March 2000, p. 3). The graphic used to illustrate the

concept behind the task is derived from the Shannon-Weaver engineering model devised to illustrate telephonic communication. It uses a representation of communication flow almost identical to that produced in the seventies to explain the concept of sender-message-medium-receiver underpinning the first media studies syllabus (see Chapter Five). This is despite advances in communication research and theory, and incorporated into the syllabuses in the eighties, that audiences were active in the construction of the meaning of the text.

*Figure 3. A common assessment task published by the Australian Teachers of Media (WA).*

## CONTENT OUTLINE & Common Assessment Tasks

The Common Assessment Framework for Year 11 requires seven tasks to be undertaken during the year. A journal must be kept for class and task work, and a self-evaluation must be completed for each task.



### TERM 1: ASSIGNMENT 1- Stereotypes & Values: PowerPoint

#### Task 4 Written and Oral Report

##### Specific Outcomes

- Outcome 2:** Understand how selection processes create meaning in media texts.
- Outcome 5:** Understand how values are presented by the media.
- Outcome 6:** Use a range of oral and written strategies to communicate media understandings.

##### Task Description

- Examine how images of men and women are created and represented in either a television news bulletin, a range of advertisements, the news and sports pages of newspapers, television situation comedies, radio programs or computer games. Comment on how the stereotypes are created and what values they represent.

The focus will be on:

- Patterns of representation
- The selection process by which stereotypes are created and reinforced
- The selection of symbols, the use of simplification and repetition
- Cultural values represented in stereotypes.

Note. From *ATOM Newsletter*, (p. 4), June 2000.

Its ability to tolerate contradiction in many forms is a resilient feature of media studies, perhaps its most enduring retention. In its early versions it made a claim to progressive pedagogy and yet employed sophisticated techniques of surveillance and control. It later witnessed its intellectual leadership, in the bodies of curriculum advisors advocating more academic, text-based forms of the subject while their actions reinforced traditionalist discourses around the sovereignty of media production. In the last decade it modified itself by resignifying one of its key concepts – production – from an input to an outcome and thereby preserved its claim to holding to its traditional philosophy.

## **Futures**

To say as I do above that changes in the subject do not equate with progress is not to deny its achievements, although Foucault would probably have me do so. This is because a limitation of the Foucauldian model is that it demands the analyst restrict herself to the history of discourses and ignore questions of the truth, value or worth of those discourses. The genealogical method suspends questions of truth and falsity by insisting on the examination of the institutional site over and through which a discourse attains and assigns power and control. In other words, Foucault's method does not provide a theoretical base for distinguishing between discourses that lead to domination and those that might pave the way for liberation. Nevertheless, in the proliferation of discourses circulating within and around media studies I believe there are some that serve the subject more usefully than others, if viability is the goal.

At this moment the survival of the subject is not assured. The research has highlighted some signs that media studies as an upper school subject may simply

disappear. It has repeatedly failed to achieve a position as a tertiary entrance subject which, in turn, means marginal status for the subject and its students and lack of promotional opportunity for its teachers. It has lost most, if not all, of its theoretical frames of reference to English. Structurally, it has been relocated away from English and into the Arts Learning Area within the Curriculum Framework following *The Review of School Curriculum Development Procedures and Processes in Western Australia* (1995). Unlike the other Arts subjects of dance, drama, music and visual art, it has not achieved any form of special recognition. While the Education Department designates certain schools as “special” art, music, dance or drama schools, media studies has no such status. In most circumstances its advocates have been unable to persuade the authorities to build permanent facilities in schools and so the subject retains an air of impermanence. It is quite possible that, if the more radical proposals of the *Post-Compulsory Education Review* are adopted, then media studies as a school subject might cease to exist.<sup>10</sup> Such a move would have political ramifications and would, no doubt, be fought strenuously by media teachers. However, media studies has previously demonstrated a capacity to reinvent itself in accordance with the needs of the broader educational framework in which it operates. Such an opportunity presents itself currently. Many of the traditional values of media studies have been embedded in the “Overarching Learning Outcomes”

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<sup>10</sup> The Western Australian Post-Compulsory Education Review was released for discussion on 11 October 1999. “The purpose of the Review is to determine the changes required to prepare Western Australian students for citizenship in a dynamic and technological twenty-first century” (p. 1). The discussion paper poses three scenarios for change. Scenario one posits three types of curriculum: tertiary entrance courses, wholly school-assessed courses and vocational education and training courses. Scenario two posits centrally developed courses of study designed in a single curriculum structure. Scenario three gives schools responsibility for designing curriculum within a centrally determined standards framework.

which frame the curriculum in Western Australia. These learning outcomes require that students:

use language to understand, develop and communicate ideas and information and interact with others;

select, use and adapt technologies;

understand and appreciate the... technological world and have the knowledge and skills to make decisions in relation to it;

participate in creative activity of their own and understand and engage with the artistic, cultural and intellectual world of others; and

are self-motivated and confident in their approach to learning and able to work individually and collaboratively. (Curriculum Council, 1998, pp. 18-19)

None of these outcomes is inimical to the goals of media studies.

Furthermore, the specific outcomes for each of the eight learning areas stress the need for students to be producers rather than consumers of texts, readings and knowledge. The new focus is upon what students should be able to do and not upon what they might be taught. Media studies needs to accommodate and respond to the economic, technological and social-demographic shifts occasioned by the information society in a way which it has not hitherto done. The subject needs to adopt an issues or problems orientation rather than a concept- or task-based one. Such an orientation would facilitate a re-thinking of the relationship between conceptual and applied knowledge, a relationship which thus far the subject has failed to sort out. If media studies were to expand its purview, engage with new media, mine its creative potential and embrace the debates over deregulation, digitisation, aggregation and globalisation engendered by new technologies then it

might, in a new guise, become one of the “pathways” by which students proceed through the post-compulsory years of schooling.

At the level of policy, the study has implications for future practices in syllabus development, teacher training and management of professional teacher associations. The revelation of specific contradictions and intellectual confusion between the theoretical positions underpinning the various syllabuses invites further examination and evaluation of our favoured routines and practices of syllabus development. The study’s findings in this context raise questions about who should lead and/or participate in syllabus development, how and by whom decisions as to syllabus content should be made and whether those with an investment in the subject such as teachers, academics, parents and media professionals should have a right to challenge the types of knowledge preferred by the syllabus. The current system is weighted in favour of teachers, relies upon teacher and academic volunteers and reaches decisions through consensus. This does not guarantee expertise nor consistency.

Perhaps of more concern than the theoretical ambiguities and inconsistencies of the syllabus is the fact that teachers do not recognise them. This has implications for the future pre- and in-service professional development of teachers. The lack of recognition of the conceptual contradictions in the syllabuses implies that teachers are insufficiently informed about theory paradigms and contemporary research into the nature and function of the mass media and its audiences. This invites questions about the quality of, and emphasis in, undergraduate teacher training programs for media studies teachers and the appropriate balance between media theory and media production in such programs. For example, within my own institution it is possible



for an aspiring media studies teacher to restrict their study of theory to six units and supplement this with a further 18 units of study in print, film and television production. The seduction of media production is just as powerful at tertiary level as it is in secondary education.

Perhaps the appropriate body to take up these concerns and exercise a watching brief over syllabus development and teacher training programs should be the professional subject association. The association, ATOM, in the case of Western Australia, derived from and supported media studies teachers' conceptions of themselves as a subject community with its own specific goals for members and their discipline. But over time issues of membership numbers and related problems of finances have led the association to function more as a social club than a body concerned with standards in the subject area. The change in focus, from the discipline to the social, has meant that many non-media studies specialists have been recruited into the association which in turn makes it less likely that ATOM will engage with subject-specific issues.

No single study can exhaust all the possibilities and further research is necessary in order to understand how school subject knowledge in media studies is determined. This study has focussed on a narrow range of sites active in the production of subject knowledge – the syllabus, the educational bureaucrats, the subject association, and the teachers. There needs to be further examination of the practices of, and relationships between, other sites of power in school education: subject departments in schools and universities, industry groups, employer groups, parents and students in order to more fully understand the issue of the construction of subject knowledge.

Equally, the findings of this case study need to be tested in other sites and against other school subjects in order that educators might come to better understand the justificatory discourses or “the regimes of truth” which set the parameters of practice in any school subject. The history behind the invention and introduction of media studies in Western Australia, the story of its development and the analysis of its epistemological regimes have challenged assumptions about the subject’s foundations, purposes and achievements. Studies of other subjects in local sites may well offer similar challenges. Of course, questioning the normative, taken-for-granted history and conduct of a school subject does not necessarily mean that a subject will be changed nor, indeed, might it need to change. However, there exists at least the opportunity to bring about change when current practices can be located and understood in terms of historical contingency rather than the more common change and reform rhetoric of curriculum developers. An historical perspective permits one to “know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known” (Foucault, 1985, p. 9). Herein lies the value of genealogy. It interrupts the taken-for-granted, it defamiliarises the familiar by isolating the contingent power relations which make it possible for particular assertions to operate as truths.

### **The value of critique**

Early in this study I promised that I would not write an autobiography but a genealogy of the subject media studies. However I am a media studies teacher and so this story is in some ways, my story. For me, the research has been sometimes painful wherein what looked like a very good idea at one time is revealed through the genealogical analysis to have had unforeseen effects. There are probably many

instances of such but, for example, I suspect that my efforts to introduce greater academic rigour into the curriculum in the eighties served two ends, neither of them intended. I contributed to confusing the syllabus and provided a visible point of resistance for those who thought the subject to be better off without my interference. As the study demonstrates, in not knowing what we do does, I am not alone. For example, McMahon fostered media teachers' dependency on his services while championing their right to autonomy from English departments. ATOM, in its efforts to expand its membership base lost supporters who saw no value in belonging to a social club posing as an educational lobby group. Teachers who complained of the Mickey Mouse tag attached to media studies by their colleagues were insensitive to, or chose to ignore, a culture which demands that students remain inside classrooms and away from public view.

In other ways the research act has been liberating. It has provided insights into the present, an understanding of the constructedness of the reality in which I find myself. I understand now how the subject has come to look and sound the way it does today. I, and I believe others who read the work, will be able to separate out "from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do or think" (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984, p. 46). Such understanding opens up possibilities for transgressing the limits in a future in which nihilism or performativity are not the only options. I hope that I have produced not the known but the unknown by disclosing the subject's partiality and the fragility and insubstantiality of its epistemic presuppositions. This is just the starting point from which we can generate new propositions and create new frameworks for enquiry.

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**Component Identification**  
**Context**



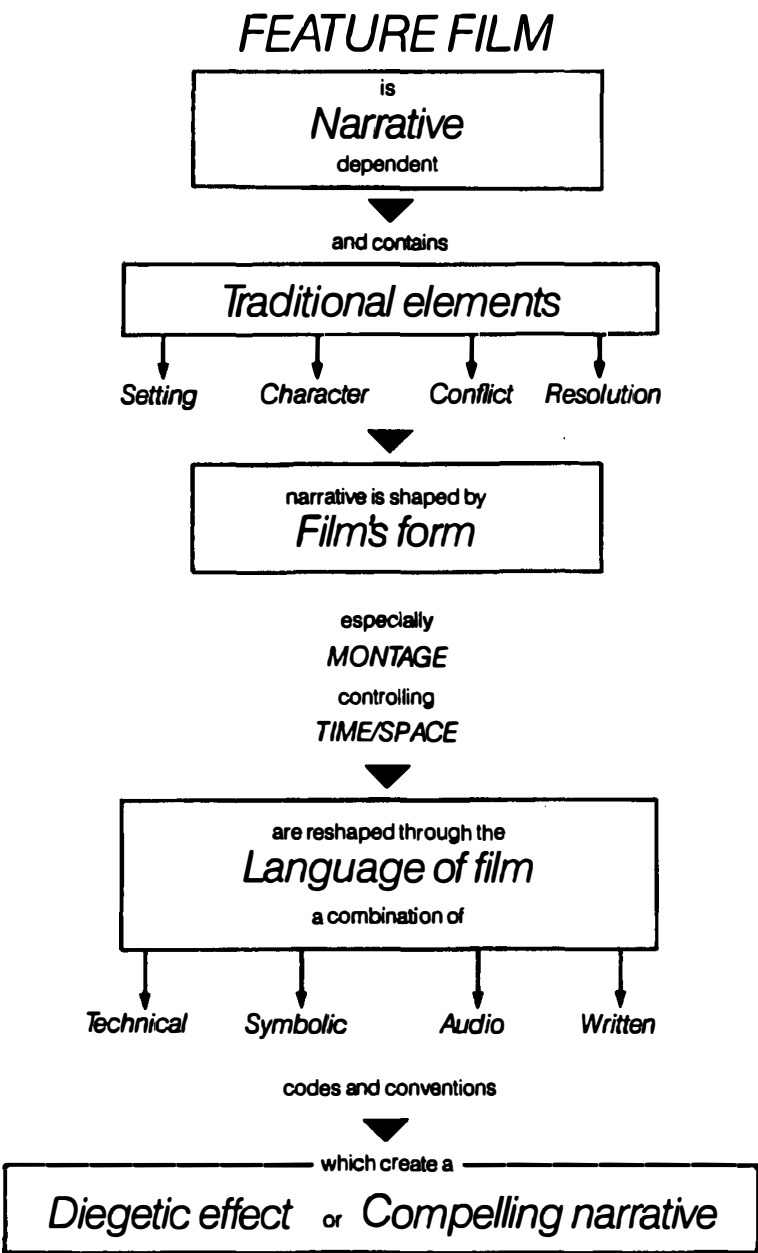
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**ideology**  
**linkage**

APPENDIX B – Model from McMahon, B. & Quin, R. (1986) *Real Images*



## **APPENDIX C – Description of project in ATOM**

Letter printed in ATOM newsletter seeking participants in the study.

Dear Colleagues,

I am currently working on a PhD thesis related to the development of media education in Western Australia. Specifically the thesis will examine the changing conceptions of knowledge within media education over the last thirty years using Western Australia as a case study. Part of the research involves interviews with practising media and English teachers and it is in this regard that I seek your help. I would like to talk to you about your motivation for teaching media studies and/or including viewing skills in English teaching; your preferred approaches to media education, your perceptions of the difficulties of teaching in the area. The interviews will be open ended discussions and should take about half an hour. You will not be required to fill in questionnaires or answer any specific questions. I could interview you at home or at your school depending upon what best suits you.

The interviewees will not be identified by name or school and the identifying information remains confidential. If you are interested and willing to participate please contact Robyn Quin. My contact details are:

Telephone: 9381 1951

Mail: School of Communications and Multimedia, Edith Cowan University, 2 Bradford Street, Mt LAWLEY 6050

Email: [r.quin@cowan.edu.au](mailto:r.quin@cowan.edu.au)

My thanks for your help.

## APPENDIX D – Letter to Teacher

Dear (teacher's name),

Thank you for offering to participate in my study of the construction of knowledge in media education. This study will trace the development of media education in Western Australia and describe the ways in which media studies has been understood and taught at various times over the last thirty years. I hope this study will be of benefit to teachers in that it will provide an overview of the different approaches adopted in media education.

Part of the study requires input from teachers. With your agreement I would like to interview you about your experiences in media studies and/or media education within English. I am particularly interested in how you go about the business of devising a program of study, the resources that you choose to use and what you think it is important for the students to learn. I am keen to know your opinion of what should be taught, the best way of teaching about the media, the resources you consider most valuable and your previous experiences in the field}. I will not be asking you a set list of questions although I may occasionally ask you to respond to a question or an alternative point of view. I hope that you will feel free to introduce topics and issues that you feel are of importance in the field of media education and I will appreciate any information that you can give me. The interview should take no longer than forty minutes.

With your permission I would like to record our discussion on audiotape and take some notes as we talk. No version of the study will identify you by name or school and I will send you a draft copy of the chapter in which your responses appear. Any questions concerning the project *Whose Knowledge – A Socio-historical study of the Construction of Knowledge in Secondary Media Education* can be directed to Associate Professor Robyn Quin of the School of Communications and Multimedia on 93706221. If you have any concerns about the project or would like to talk to an independent person please contact Associate Professor Bill Loudon on 9370 6575. Please sign the consent form attached if you are agreeable to participate.

Thank you again for your time and help.

Regards

## APPENDIX E – Journal Extract

Year 11 mixed class, government suburban high school. Class is arranged around long tables. Each table seats a small group of four or five students working on a project and there are five groups in total. One group has already collected a video camera, tripod and microphone and disappeared outside. Two of the groups are planning a video production. Their task is to “Create and construct a media product demonstrating an understanding of technical codes and conventions. Present a critical evaluation of the techniques used”. (Note: this task is taken directly from the “Common Assessment Tasks” booklet prepared and distributed by the Australian Teachers of Media WA. in 1977). They seem to be writing a sort of rough treatment script – no dialogue, no camera directions just a list of locations and a few sentences on the action in the scene. They have not prepared a list of technical codes or conventions. One of the girls says they don’t need a list, they “just need to show we know them”. That, she says “is the whole point of doing the task”. The groups are required to show the script to the teacher before they are allowed to start shooting. One group is arguing about what costumes the actors in the production should wear. Another group of students is working on a video editing project. They cannot show me their task because none of them has a copy of it. It is something to do with making a compilation documentary from old footage. They are watching old movies. They say they are logging the footage. One of them takes a number of the counter and writes it down occasionally. It is forty minutes into the lesson. The group that left at the beginning has not been back and the teacher has not left the room. One of the groups says they have finished their script and the teacher is checking it. He advises a couple of changes to the scenes and says they can start shooting next period. The group is annoyed, they are anxious to begin immediately. Teacher says there is not enough time. The group breaks up and sits with other groups. The video editing group is still watching old home movie footage. They do not zero the counter when they put a new tape in. How can they log the footage? They still have four more tapes to watch. The period is about to end. The video group returns and are told to put away the equipment. There is no time to watch what they have done. The teacher’s final instructions are to put away the gear and remind the students that they have only four more periods to complete their current tasks.

The tasks seem like a bit of a variation on a theme. I can’t work out how they are different from the contracts we used to use. Why are the groups working on different tasks? It would seem to be easier for the teacher if everyone worked on the same task. Teachers says not enough equipment.



## APPENDIX F – Supplementary Materials Upperschool

# ARGUMENTS FOR THE ELIMINATION OF TELEVISION

Television is not an open window through which all perceptions pass. It is no more a "neutral" technology than a gun.

A former advertising executive attacks the phenomenon of television itself as damaging to society in selections from his forthcoming book,  
"Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television."

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### THE CENTRALIZATION OF EXPERIENCE

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The first moment that I became deeply concerned about television was during the early 1970s, when a shocking burst of figures appeared in newspapers.

It was reported that in the generations since 1945, 99 percent of the homes in the country had acquired at least one television set. On an average evening, more than 80 million people would be watching TV. Thirty million of these would be watching the same program. In special instances 100 million people would be watching the same program at the same time.

The average household had the set going more than six hours a day. If there was a child, the average was more than eight hours. The average person was watching for nearly four hours daily. And so, allowing eight hours for sleep and eight hours for work, roughly half of the adult nonsleeping, nonworking time was spent watching television. Considering that these were average figures, they mean that half of the people in this country were watching television even more than that.

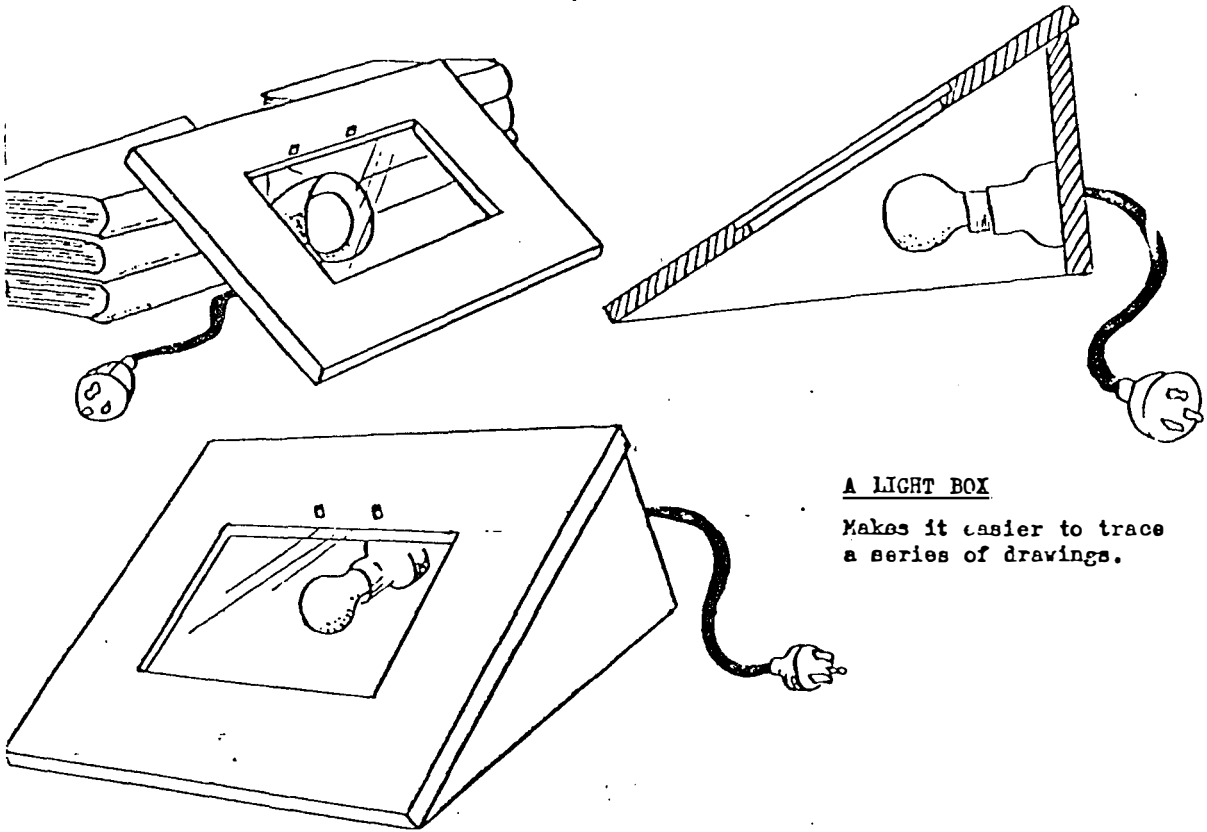
As these numbers sank in, I realized that there had been a strange change in the way people received information, and even more in the way they were experiencing and understanding the world. In one generation, out of hundreds of thousands in human evolution, America had become the first culture to have substituted secondary, mediated versions of experience for direct experience of the world. Interpretations and representations of the world were being accepted as experience, and the difference between the two was obscure to most of us.

I heard many people say, "Television is great; there are so many things on TV that we'd never otherwise experience." People were seeing television images of Borneo forests, European ballets, varieties of family life, distant police actions, current events, or re-creations of historical crises, and they were believing themselves to be experiencing these places, people, and events. Yet the television image of the Borneo forest or the news or historical event was surely not the experience of them and not to be relied upon to the same extent. It was only the experience of sitting in a darkened room, often alone, with the body totally stilled, even the eyes unmoving (television viewing is one of the only experiences in life in which the eyes are scarcely moving): passively staring at flickering light, as if it was a hypnotist's candle, ingesting images that had been edited, cut, rearranged, sped up, slowed

the first time by Stan Eddy

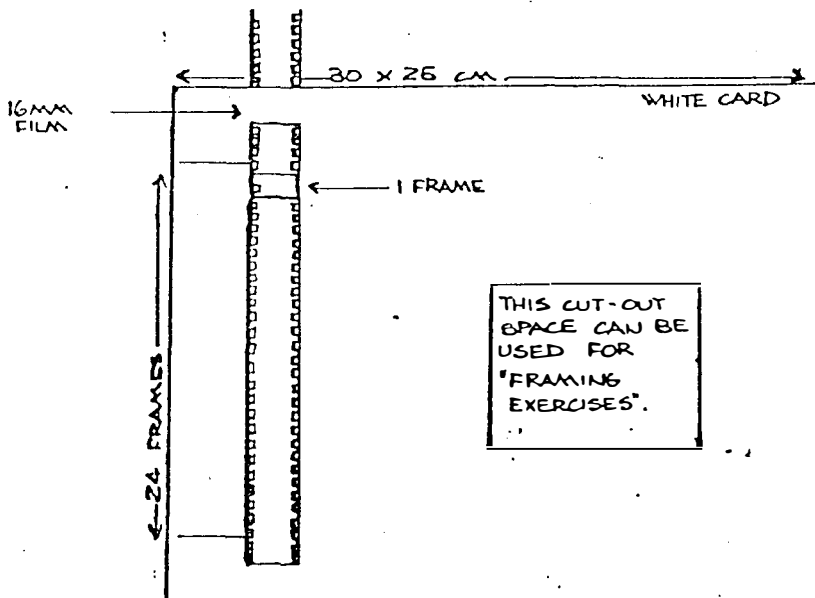
By Jerry Mander

USEFUL EQUIPMENT YOU CAN MAKE YOURSELF



A LIGHT BOX

Makes it easier to trace  
a series of drawings.



A REGISTRATION CARD

For drawing on 16mm. film has: 2 slits to hold film firmly; a rectangle marking one frame, two lines showing 24 frames i.e. 1 second of 16mm. film.

## PHOTOGRAPHY : A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND 'BUTS'

### 'BUT' MY PICTURES NEVER WORK OUT. ANYWAY WE HAVE A PHOTOGRAPHY TEACHER.

You've been conned. The photographers have convinced you that their art is both mysterious and difficult. Not so! Photography is one of the most flexible of all the media tools, available to teachers. There is no reason why it should be ignored or confined to one teacher and a small group of enthusiasts. It is flexible because:

- \*\*effective results can be obtained either in darkroom conditions or in the ordinary classroom,
- \*\*little skill is required to produce effective results,
- \*\*costs can be reduced to a level that makes photography considerably cheaper than most other media, including Super 8 and Video.

### 'BUT' IT'S TOO HARD TO SET UP!

#### Effective Results:

Darkroom - black and white prints - acceptable work can be obtained within a week. There is no boundary beyond that.

Classroom - colour slides are both simple and spectacular. Black and white slides are a little harder but also effective.

### 'BUT' IT'S TOO HARD FOR KIDS!

#### Little Skill:

Students can be photographing within 20 minutes of an introduction to a camera. Simple cameras are just as effective as the enthusiasts' camera, they're just not as flexible. So that students may concentrate upon content and not camera manipulations, the variables on the camera can be preset for early exercises.

### 'BUT' IT COSTS TOO MUCH!

#### Low Cost:

Watch the consumables! Polaroids may have the advantage of instant reply, but they are expensive to run. Similarly, instamatics are easy to load and use, but expensive to run. Cost saving occurs in the 35mm format when you bulk buy then process yourself. Black and white slide processing will reduce the cost per slide below the cost of this piece of paper. Kids can then experiment, not every shot has to be a masterpiece.

### 'BUT' IT'S TIME CONSUMING. HOW DO I FIT IT IN?

That depends on approach. If you want to make the students technical experts before they start, you'll never get to the photo. If you concentrate on content and the lesson goals, then effective results can be obtained in a short time. You will also find that the learning experience is a lot richer than originally conceived, so in terms of time effectiveness, you will be well in front.

### 'BUT' I ONLY HAVE ONE CAMERA FOR 30 KIDS!

Have associated project or picture composition exercises that do not require equipment (see Contract Media).

'BUT' MY KIDS AREN'T OLD ENOUGH!

Grade 1's can take effective photographs. Grade 4's have had no trouble in processing colour slides.

'BUT' IT SOUNDS LIKE A LOT OF ORGANISATION AND HARD WORK!

If you're one of those sort of teachers, why are you still reading this article?

'BUT' THERE'S A LIMIT TO THE PHOTOS THAT CAN BE TAKEN AROUND THE SCHOOL!

Even around the school there are lots of exercises that will enrich the teaching programme. Responsible students can be entrusted to take cameras home, and this is where the most exciting results will occur.

'BUT' WHAT PROJECTS LEND THEMSELVES TO PHOTOGRAPHY?

Try these for starters:

1. Photography as a Creative Medium:

Students take photographs to stretch their imagination and provide an outlet for their creativity.

- (a) A day in the life of ..... - see the world through the eyes of an object or animal.
- (b) Reflections.
- (c) Different textures and patterns in the environment.
- (d) A trip into outer space. Use special effects to gain surreal effects.
- (e) Landscapes - explore landscapes further by varying camera angles, lenses.
- (f) Use mirrors for effective and purposeful distortion.
- (g) Use colour filters, e.g. cellophane, water, tinted glass, to achieve purposeful distortion.

2. A Period in Time:

Some years become historically important, e.g. 1914; 1930; 1939 and obviously lend themselves to research. Others aren't such milestones, but when researched, offer another perspective upon our lives.

e.g. (i) 1910

- (a) Discover in libraries, books, old photo albums, pictures taken circa 1910. Photograph a selection of these (note copyright laws).
- (b) Take pictures of people who were born about 1910. If possible take photographs of earlier photos of them.
- (c) Find objects, machinery, furniture, that would have been manufactured around 1910.
- (d) Cross media - record the memories of people who were alive in 1910.

# B/W PHOTOGRAPHY (2) DEVELOPING FILM

- Extras - slide mounts  
eg Pakon \$70 for 2,500  
eg Agfa color G \$2.39 for 100

- "Black bag"  
for loading film  
into tank \$13

- Measuring  
cylinder \$3.90



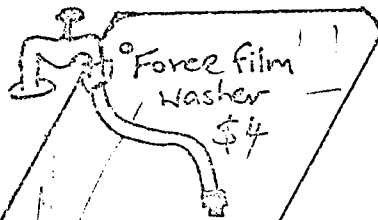
- "Science"-type  
clock



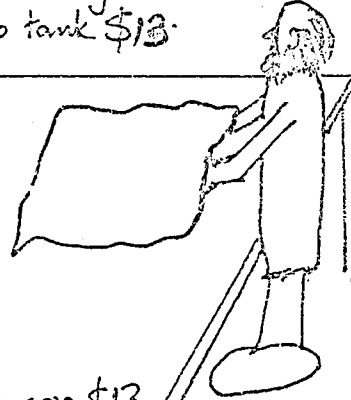
- tank  
eg Paterson \$13  
(including 2  
spirals)



- Photo thermometer  
\$3



- Force film  
washer  
\$4



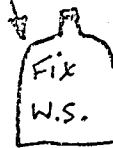
- Developers  
eg Ilford ID11 \$1.90  
(packet - makes 4.5 l stock)  
eg Microphen \$2.10  
(packet - makes 4.5 l stock)  
eg Universal P.Q. 5L \$7.50  
(liquid concentrate)



## Extras:

- Hardener 500ml \$1.60  
(add to fix - hardens  
emulsion)
- Wetting agent  
500ml \$2.00  
(for final rinse - no streak)

- Film fixer.  
eg Ilford Hypam Rapid Fix  
5 litres \$11.50  
(liquid concentrate - makes  
reusable working solution)



TELEVISION : THE TIMID GIANT

Where radio is an extension of the aural sense and photography an extension of the visual sense, TV is, above all, an extension of the sense of touch, which involves interplay of all the senses.

The TV image is visually low in data i.e. it gives little information about objects. It is not a "still" shot, but a ceaselessly forming contour of things created by the scanning finger. It is a mosaic mesh of light and dark spots. It requires the viewer to "close" the space in the mesh.

The TV closeup provides only as much information as a small section of a long-shot on the movie screen. Thus, critics of programme "content" have talked nonsense about "TV violence". If they were aware that in all cases the medium is the source of effects, they would turn to suppression of media as such, instead of seeking content control.

Phonetic writing had the effect of separating and fragmenting the senses. Literacy extended the visual sense. It encouraged analysis, the ability to concentrate on a single incident or aspect, and non-involvement.

The TV image reverses this literate process. The mosaic form of the TV image demands participation and involvement in depth of the whole being, as does the sense of touch.

Young people who have experienced a decade of TV are more involved in depth, and more concerned with NOW, making the remote visual goals of our culture seem irrelevant. This change in attitude has nothing to do with programming in any way. Simply relating to the mosaic TV image has brought about the change. Today's teenager doesn't want a specialist JOB in the future, but a ROBE and a deep commitment to his society.

SOME OTHER EFFECTS OF THE MOSAIC TV IMAGE:

On children's reading: Surveys show that in early grades, the book is held 6½" from the eyes. Children are trying to read print in depth.

On children's viewing: A camera recording eye movement of children watching TV show that their eyes follow the faces of the actors rather than the action, even during scenes of violence i.e. they watch the reaction rather than the action.

On the treatment of issues: Hot issues and sharply defined controversial topics tend to be avoided, being more suited to radio or the newspapers.

On TV personalities: TV rejects the sharp personality and favours the presentation of processes rather than products. A successful TV performer has a low-pressure style. The TV politician does not "incite" - radio is better for this. He is more effective when he allows his audience to feel that they are directly engaged in making political decisions. Castro managed to "cool" Cuba down through his TV style. Kennedy was more successful than Nixon in the 1962 election debates because his image was closer to the TV hero - more nonchalant, less anxious and less clearly defined. (He could have been anything from farmer to grocer to professor). Nixon, on the other hand, had a sharper image, looking more like a lawyer or politician.

On speech: No longer is the "standard" English fostered by literacy the only acceptable form of English. In England, there has been an upsurge of regional dialects, encouraged by TV.

On movies: The American movie has advanced toward maturity, due to the influence on TV.

On Western society: Literate Westerners in the past have tried to bring about race integration by imposing visual uniformity - eradicating individual differences. The electric age, by involving all men in one another, can foster uniqueness and diversity.

There is a new sensitivity to the dance, plastic arts and architecture as well as a demand for the small car, the paperback. There has also been new interest in different foods and wines. Both clothes and the dance underwent a revolution in the first TV decade. A return has been made to non-specialised forms.

On acting: The TV actor does not have to project either his voice or himself. Acting is more intimate, because of the involvement of the viewer, and thus appears more spontaneous and casual. TV tends to be a closeup medium. A dozen faces on a TV tend to be a blur.

On stars: Men and women movie stars, along with the entire star system, have dwindled into more moderate status since TV. Where the movie star was an individual, regardless of the roles he played, the TV star is associated with the role e.g. Fonzie, Callan, Perry Mason etc.

On documentaries: The TV medium lends itself more to the process of process (rather than product) and reaction (rather than action). This has enabled the documentary type of film to come to the fore.

On consumerism: The boom in the movie industry in America accompanied the new age of consumerism in the 1920's. The new TV age questions all the "hot" media values of the pre-TV consumer days. The TV image challenges the values of fame as much as the values of consumer goods. The new TV age has seen new tastes in clothes, in food, in housing, in entertainment and in vehicles.

On individuality: Literacy is indispensable for habits of uniformity at all times and places. It is needed for the workability of price systems and markets. America, the most literate nation, was rewarded by a huge pool of standardized workers and consumers, such as no other culture had ever had before. TV fosters preferences that are far from uniform. Thus, Americans are now seeking oddness and quaintness and new experiences.

On adolescence: Criticisms have been made that TV makes children grow up too quickly. However, prolonged adolescence has only ever been a feature of literate Western society. It has never been the norm in tribal or non-literate societies.

On books: TV has transformed book culture, via the paperback. The paperback did not become acceptable in America until 1953. It is a tactile rather than a visual package, which can be as readily concerned with profound matters as with froth.

On education: A revolution in education has taken place at home. TV has changed our sense-lives and our mental processes. It has created a taste for all experience IN DEPTH, and with the demand for depth, goes the demand for crash-programming. Not only deeper, but further into all knowledge has become the normal popular demand since TV.

AUDIO EXERCISES FOR STUDENTS

Whether audio is being used as a medium in isolation, or in conjunction with another medium (e.g. tape/slide programme), it has the capacity to be a powerful, and often subtle means of communication. In our visually dominant culture the effect of radio, music, records, soundtracks on film and television, can easily be underestimated. The following exercise is designed to introduce students to one of the concepts associated with the Audio medium. The Exercise is geared towards the 11 to 15 age range, but could easily be modified to suit different age groups.



BRIEF INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE:

The major difficulty in teaching students correct interviewing technique is to prepare them for the interesting or unexpected answer. This involves:

- (a) a necessity on the part of the interviewer to listen to the answers to questions.
- (b) quickly think of follow up questions if an interesting line of questioning suggests itself i.e. be prepared for the unexpected.

THE FRIENDLY MARTIAN:

Equipment Needed - Audio Cassette Tape Recorder  
Cassette tape  
Microphone



APPENDIX G – Contract System

contract media

The two key problems in a school media course are lack of equipment and student organisation problems. The organisational method used at the North Lake Media Centre to introduce students to the skills required is the contract system. Each term a student has a contract of work to complete. The information supplied to the student includes the number of periods per term, the degree of difficulty of the exercise, the size of the working group, the number of periods the exercise is expected to take. Initially the student has no choice in the exercises he contracts to cover, but as the skills progress, so the choice

increases. Once a student is organised into a contract, bookings are then made for the scarce equipment. The printed media section allows work to continue when no equipment is available. Here is the contract for year 8 Term 1. At this stage the students have no prior media experience, so the term's work concentrates on skills rather than concepts.

Students keep a record of their media files. They fill in their contract on a duplicated form, reproduced below.

NORTH LAKE MEDIA CENTRE			TERM CONTRACT		
NAME	FORM			DAY & PERIODS	
	SECTION 1	SECTION 2	SECTION 3	SECTION 4	SECTION 5
BRIEF NUMBERS					
PARTNERS					
PERIODS					
CHECKED					TOTAL PERIODS <input type="checkbox"/>

TERM TIMETABLE

WEEK		WEEK	
1		8	
2		9	
3		10	
4		11	
5		12	
6		13	
7		14	

## **APPENDIX H – Examples of Tasks**

Examples of tasks in the Common Assessment Framework. From Curriculum Council Common Assessment Task book. Available from [www.curriculum.wa.edu.au](http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au)

### ***Task 2***

### ***Student Production***

Curriculum Council requirements for this task are outlined below. Evidence must be provided to demonstrate student achievement of each of the specified outcomes.

#### **1. Specific Outcomes**

According to the Common Assessment Framework, this task must measure at least one outcome from Outcomes 1-5 and at least one outcome from Outcomes 6-8. This example of a student production task measures the following outcomes:

**Outcome 1:** Understand components of mass communication and their function in mass media messages.

**Outcome 2:** Understand how selection processes create meaning in media texts.

**Outcome 3:** Understand patterns of construction in a range of media texts.

**Outcome 4:** Understand constraints operating in media production.

**Outcome 7:** Demonstrate understanding of media language and production processes through the production of media messages.

**Outcome 8:\*** Contribute as a member of a team in media production.

*\*If Task 2 is undertaken by an individual student, then Outcome 8 cannot be achieved*

## 2. Task

Plan, script and present a media product targeting a specific audience.

## 3. Task Description

This task applies the skills learned in Task 1. Constraints and controls operating in media production need also to have been covered in class. This task requires students, working individually or in groups, to plan and produce a media product taking into account:

- the target audience
- the style, elements of narrative and narrative structure
- selection processes and their effect on meaning
- constraints that need to be considered.

The focus will be on:

- the characteristics or form of the medium being studied, and the effect of form on content
- elements of genre and narrative - character, setting, conflict, resolution
- narrative structures
- selection processes and their effect on meaning.

#### **4. Task Parameters**

The teacher will be set the parameters of the task ie medium to be used, length of sequence, number of photographs. Students need to delegate tasks within the group.

##### **Examples:**

- front pages of a newspaper or specialist magazine
- the first five minutes of a television news bulletin
- the opening segment of a television series
- a promo for a new television series.

#### **5. Authentication**

The teacher will:

- implement, motivate and monitor the development of the task, particularly group processes
- sight working notes, plans, scripts, layouts
- retain documentation on students' performances.

The student will present all plans, scripts, layouts.

## 6. Performance Criteria

**Outcome 1: Understand the components of mass communication and describe their function in mass media messages.**

Satisfactory	High	Very High
<p>The student identifies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How components of mass communication relate to each other to produce a message</li><li>• Some characteristics of the medium being studied.</li></ul>	<p>The student explains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• how the form of a medium affects content and style</li><li>• how messages are constructed by producers and audiences.</li></ul>	<p>The student analyses and evaluates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• how style and content are shaped by the form of the medium and the target audience</li><li>• how form and content are interdependent and work together in constructing meaning.</li></ul>

**Outcome 2: Understand how selection processes create meaning in media texts.**

Satisfactory	High	Very High
<p>The student identifies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• significant elements of</li></ul>	<p>The student explains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• how selection shapes the</li></ul>	<p>The student analyses and evaluates</p>

<p>selection in the medium being studied such as montage, point of view, layout or structure, codes and conventions.</p>	<p>development of narrative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how surface and deeper meanings are constructed through selections.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the interrelationship between media texts, selection processes, audiences and meaning.</li> </ul>
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**Outcome 3: Understand patterns of construction in a range of media texts.**

Satisfactory	High	Very High
<p>The student identifies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the elements of narrative</li> <li>• some ways in which narrative elements are adapted for different media</li> <li>• various genres and their characteristics</li> <li>• the distinction between fact and fiction in media texts.</li> </ul>	<p>The student explains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how narrative and genre conventions contribute to the construction of meaning</li> <li>• ways in which narrative is constructed in different media</li> <li>• how ‘reality’ can be constructed and manipulated.</li> </ul>	<p>The student analyses and evaluates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the relationship between audience recognition and expectations, genre and narrative</li> <li>• elements of realism and their link to genre and narrative.</li> </ul>

**Outcome 4: Understand constraints operating in the media.**

Satisfactory	High	Very High
<p>The student identifies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• some controls and constraints operating in media production, eg political, economic, past and emerging technologies, moral, legal and ethical considerations.</li></ul>	<p>The student explains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• possible effects of the constraints on media production.</li></ul>	<p>The student analyses and evaluates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the impact of constraints on media production, eg style and content, programming.</li></ul>

**Outcome 7: Demonstrate understanding of media language and production processes through the production of media messages.**

Satisfactory	High	Very High
<p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participates in the production of a practical media task</li> <li>• demonstrates competence in using available media technologies.</li> </ul>	<p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• completes a media task</li> <li>• selects appropriate codes and conventions to create specific meanings</li> <li>• explains the effect of specific choices made during production.</li> </ul>	<p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• completes a media task</li> <li>• selects appropriate structures, codes and conventions to create specific meanings</li> <li>• evaluates the choices made during production</li> <li>• shows proficiency in production processes and an awareness of audience in structuring the message.</li> </ul>



**Outcome 8: Contribute as a member of a team in media production.**

Satisfactory	High	Very High
<p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• contributes to team production, performing allocated tasks satisfactorily</li></ul>	<p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• plays an active role in planning and production processes</li><li>• demonstrates reliability in performing allocated tasks</li><li>• works towards achieving deadlines.</li></ul>	<p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• performs consistently as an active team member, organising time and resources and monitoring performance and achievement</li><li>• suggests strategies and modifications where necessary to achieve team objectives.</li></ul>

Example of a task taken from Common Assessment Tasks for Years 11 and 12 prepared by Australian Teachers of Media (WA) Inc.