Editorial
Media Pedagogy Research: are we there yet?

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This MERJ editorial offers a shorter 'position paper' on what we see as the immediate 'clear and present' priorities for research into media pedagogy.

MERJ readers (and, indeed, authors) will be all too aware of the tendency of our community of practice to 'navel gaze'. Indeed, the pages of this journal, the seminar rooms of the Media Education Summit and the web exchanges around the developing *Manifesto for Media Education* have all been dominated by unresolved questions about our practice – where have we been, where we're going… and are we there yet?

Where we've been

Whilst first time authors have been well supported by *MERJ* – and this is one of our primary objectives, to 'nurture' a community of research informed practice – we have also published articles and discussion papers by or featuring more established 'names' in the field (David Buckingham, David Gauntlett, Sara Bragg, Henry Jenkins, Mark Readman and Dan Laughey). Our editorial articles aim to offer provocation (*Media Education Research in the 21st Century: Touching the Void'*), an overview of contemporary issues for the discipline ('*What is Media Education For?*' and '*Media Studies 2.0: A Retrospective*) or to capture the 'zeitgeist' ('*Doing Wikileaks? New Paradigms and (or?) Ecologies in Media Education'*).

Crucially, *MERJ* is the only journal publishing pedagogic research in the discipline. At the annual Media Education Summit, *MERJ* hosts a 'conversation' strand of 5 panels and a pre-conference seminar with a well known guest speaker, aiming to offer potential authors a safe and supportive context to ask the editors questions about writing for publication and to bridge the gap between the published and the would-be researcher.

As we state on our website and in all of our calls for papers …

MERJ offers a forum for the exchange of academic research into media education and pedagogy conducted by academics, practitioners and teachers situated in all

sectors and contexts for media education. The journal aims to encourage dialogue between the sectors and between media educators from different countries, with the aim to facilitate the transfer of critical, empirical, action and discursive research into the complexity of media education as social practice.

We are, then, 'all about' media pedagogy. All submissions to the journal must focus on media education – as opposed to 'pure' Media Studies. Even our 'Laughey's Canon' series of book reviews reappraises 'classic' academic texts in the field *for the contemporary pedagogic discipline* and all book and resource reviews are required to comment on the value of materials for media teaching. Research reports and full articles are required to include empirical data and wherever appropriate to give voice to students of media.

The titles of our published articles to date bear witness to these concerns - *Dangerous assumptions – what our students have taught us*; *Challenging the School Culture in Brazil*; *Tales of the Classroom: On Making Media in School*; *Moving Image, Shifting Positions, Varying Perspectives: Media Education and Media Industries: Industry, Anxiety and Aspirations Altering the Focus of Teachers*; *We-Thinking the Classroom, Initiating Media Education Through Educational Policy: A Case Study in China* – to list a few.

We also publish developed versions of the seminar papers/conversation pieces aired at the *MERJ* strand of the Media Education Summit. In the first year, we published these from Dave Harte and Vanessa Jackson (on social media pedagogy), Dan Laughey's 'Media Studies 1.0' provocation, Becky Parry and Mandy Powell reporting on ESRC funded research into media literacy in schools and Pete Fraser on his PhD research. In this issue we continue this approach with a 'worked up' version of John Potter's *MERJ* strand seminar from the 2012 summit.

Back to the 'navel-gazing', then. Our editorials hitherto have contributed to this for sure, covering the void in media education research, looking back at Media Studies 2.0 – a debate within a debate – and most recently trying to work out what our purpose is. Like some of the worst excesses of practitioner research more broadly, we've done so much self-regarding we're in danger of reflecting only on our reflections. Here, then, we 'bite the bullet' – admittedly moved to action partly by the obvious dangers posed to our subject by ecological (or ideological, depending on how hegemonic a discourse you want to articulate) drivers, MOOC learning and 'for profit' providers on the one hand and the ultra-essentialist curriculum on the other. Not just a changing landscape, but one shot through with contradiction and confusion. But in any case, an environment in which it's going to be more important than ever to present a shared vision of why our students need us.

Where we are

We've made three very clear statements about our objectives since the inception of *MERJ* so we'll re-state them and stick to them as 'given':

1.   An intelligent response to the place of media education in the 'digital age' must be articulated and developed in terms of pedagogy – *how* we teach ought to change, as well as *what* we teach. Put simply, it's no good teaching our students about transmedia (digital) transformations if we still teach in the same modes and silos. So, when we've written about media education 'after the media' and talked about 'inexpert pedagogy', we're saying that digital media and online exchanges are a catalyst, forcing us to respond to key 'design questions' about how learning relates to teaching, but that these questions were already there – we can merely see them more clearly now.

2.   Media education is *partly* about vocational training and 'employability' – just as all education must relate to its 'exchange value' in a capitalist social and economic order. But in the light of Leveson and the uncertainty surrounding the BBC, along with confusion over the role of social media in a democratic public sphere, it's very important right now that we 'reframe' questions of media, power, citizenship, the economy and the distributed self in media education, to reboot our work as 'redistributional public intervention ' (Curran, Fenton and Freedman, 2012) But, again, this will be achieved only if we think very hard about *how* learning and teaching for this purpose should work – the pedagogy as the 'work', to borrow the language of Arts education. In other words, we need to look hard at the kinds of pedagogy that can work at the intersections across training for employment and critical analysis.

3.   Although we want to preserve our identity and our 'manifesto' to that end, we can only really talk of media education 'under erasure' since our research has shown us time and time again that really an approach to textual pedagogy that removed boundaries between and around mass media, the internet, literature, art, drama, videogames and the cultural layer of technology more broadly is what we'd like. We're not describing a 'cross-curricular' approach to media education here but a more radical 'flattened hierarchy' of textual fields. It won't happen because of the way that power is exercised and you don't have to be a Bourdieu scholar to observe that. But our recent Digital Transformations project for the AHRC revealed a clear distinction between the more 'culturally relaxed' perspective of students and the recourse to 'form' of teachers. John Potter's recent work, which we both publish and review in this issue, sets up a model for digital media learning through a metaphor of

'curation', an idea we've written about for pedagogy also. So as far as the way young people think about what a text is goes, we're pretty sure that the times are a changing; it's just a matter of whether education can, or wants to, respond.

Where we're going

MERJ's 'manifesto', then, is about those three ideas and taking them forward. This does not mean that we will only invite or accept research that fits neatly into these three (overlapping) categories. Our published themes still constitute our calls for articles, inviting *critical, empirical, action and discursive research into the complexity of media education as social practice*. Our contribution continues to work at the level of publishing pedagogic research which, in turn, translates into professional development and then has 'impact' on students' learning and on employers, ideally.

So what should our priorities be, going forward? The following three key themes are pulled together from the views of our editorial board, collated and connected by their relations with the above framing objectives.

Us and 'the media' – what should actually be the meeting point between our critical education and employment in media institutions or various facets of transmedia 'sectors'? Who wants what on either side and how can we develop a pedagogy that is mutually beneficial. Too often the more technical/vocational end of our work is neglected in educational research – if we offer a short course on rendering, then what is an effective pedagogy for such? A theme of keynote speeches at the Media Education Summit is often industry speakers reminding us of our obligations to meet industry halfway and forge meaningful partnerships. But the examples cited too often benefit a handful of privileged students and are not capable of scale or longevity. Research is desperately needed in this area. For example, the currently maligned but invaluable BBC is itself one of the biggest sources of 'training' within British broadcasting. It is also a destination for both work experience and ultimately employment for our graduates. How do/might public institutions like the BBC contribute to media education and what might financial cuts and a change to the nature of public service broadcasting mean to students and new entrants to the industry who are often reliant on the BBC as a destination, not only locally but nationally? Research of this specific nature, though, needs to look at the nature of training/ teaching by media organisations and how a space might be forged for working across what *we* do and what *they* do. The value of this research will be reduced if we only look at the 'product' of the 'skills' outcomes or the end result of employment and not the 'craft' in the design process (of the learning).

Cohort Culture – does the way in which media courses and subjects are taught in schools, colleges and universities, create cohort cultures? Traditionally, media courses have been taught in medium specific, curriculum silos, based on an outdated 20th century view of broadcasting history. It is a model which our students no longer recognise – if they ever did. The problem as we see it is that often this determines the shape and structure of the departments and faculties in which media courses are situated. This top-down policy, further enshrined by media academics organising themselves into medium-specific research clusters for mutual benefit, is in part to blame for the emergence of cohort cultures. The National Student Survey (NSS) introduced in 2005, now forms part of the Key Information Set (KIS) data used to inform many league tables of UK universities. Media students often produce work which they may have a very personal and emotional engagement with – as well as financial investment in – and this can determine how they respond to the NSS's 22 questions; the student voice is increasingly important, but in a deregulated sector, what entitlements do media students feel that they now have?

We now need to focus our efforts on research which will productively compare experiences across types of provision and measure the extent to accreditation from external bodies – how does this shape the student experience and access to resources? Equally, the emergence and sustainability of geographically defined 'creative hubs' might arguably shape the identity formation and learning journeys of students. What importance does geography – and the urban 'mediascape' – hold for our discipline now, compared to other subjects? How does a professional identity' work for our students and are we providing unequal access to the development of such? *MERJ* board members Dan Ashton and Caitriona Noonan's work (forthcoming, 2013) raises a set of questions around this theme which our research should set about answering. Part of all this, which links to our third theme, is the importance of old questions about class and privilege, or at least 'demographics'. Problems of technological inclusion and competence are often cited, with good reason, by skeptical keynote speakers at media conferences seeking to set up (wrongly) Gauntlett, Merrin and Prensky as 'straw men'. But we need some longitudinal and detailed research to explore the difference made to formal media learning by social class difference as well as generational factors. Simply, we need to find out the extent to which new digital media *actually do* help bridge socio-economic differences in access to educational experiences; but if they can do this, what are the 'conditions of possibility' for it?

The Cultural Layer – notwithstanding the questions of access raised above, understanding the educational 'take up' of new digital media as cultural and not technical has been something of a 'broken record' since *MERJ* began and this issue features the

work of editorial board member John Potter, who has provided a framework for thinking this through in his research and subsequent book on the 'new curatorship'. We've done the theory and the debate. So now, straightforward questions need answering. We've started out on some of them but others are open for enquiry – is game development just another form of literacy (Ian Livingstone, author of the *NextGen* report, wants entrants to the sector to take Art, Maths and Physics, but not Media Studies or even Games Studies/Design)?; how does app development relate to the curriculum?; can we really continue to reduce coding to the 'ICT' curriculum but insist at the same time that English beefs up its canonical 'enrichment' work? This does not relate neatly to 'just' media education, of course, but the point is that we need to start sharing our research with other subjects – towards the kind of 'flattened hierarchy' view of studying text we suggest above, rather than only talking to ourselves, preaching to the converted. Again, we should see Potter's current work as a starting point and next use pedagogic research as the evidence base to develop a curriculum and associated pedagogy to 'do this'. Elsewhere (Andrews and McDougall, 2013, forthcoming; Berger and McDougall, 2012), we've turned our attention to some applicable interventions – situating texts as 'events' in the English and Media classrooms, for the purposes of setting up a pedagogy of curation in response to Potter's metaphor for learning. It is our view that we should next join forces in working on an extensive range of research-based strategies for a pedagogy framed by these re-negotiated relations between expertise, apprenticeship and participation. Rather than endlessly debating around a false polarity (all things 2.0 v the same old nasty media), we should work with our students to design new contexts for critical media literacy with and about these new – arguably more active – ways of *doing culture*.

This issue of *MERJ* takes some steps in these directions. John Potter provides a 'write up' of his *MERJ* conversation piece at the most recent Media Education Summit (September 2012), which we supplement with a review of his new book on his aforementioned 'Curatorship' metaphor, for new modes of reflexive learning in and around digital media. Patricia Digón Regueiro shares research from Spain which begins to investigate in more depth the practicalities and 'nuts and bolts' of technology in Spanish classrooms. Lyn Parker, Robin Sloan and Santiago Martinez share with us what happened when they encouraged computer arts students to look further afield into the area of environmental science for inspiration, while Irene McCormick looks closely at outcomes-based assessment, particularly the 'managerialism' of media education.

For our research report in this issue, Michela Carlini and Diana Tanase focus on pedagogic interventions in web design. As always, we provide reviews of texts which raise issues in relation to our published key themes. In this issue we look at books catering for

both ends of the spectrum of educational research – a beginner's guide from Mike Lambert alongside Sarah Pink's latest work on visual methodologies. Pete Bennett both reappraises and 'reimagines' Barthes' 'sacred text' *Mythologies* for our 'Laughey's Canon' series and Donal Beecher considers Toby Miller's call to arms for a 'greening' of our subject.

So, we're done with self-regarding grand narratives and thesis-antithesis for a while, drilling down now toward 'thicker description' of pedagogy and practice. There is no doubt that media education research continues to be a neglected space and so those discussions about where we've been and where we're going have been important. But now the devil will be in the detail.

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