

Media Education: Starting Young

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In the UK we have a long tradition of media education, dating from at least as far back as the 1930s (Bolas, 2009). However, the central focus of this tradition has not been on young children. Since the 1970s, the best-known aspect of media education in the UK has been the fact that we have a number of specialist media courses for 14-18 year olds, leading to qualifications that can help students to gain access to university. However, these courses are all optional, and, although they are taken by over 100,000 candidates annually, this is only about 7% of the age group.

The courses are quite demanding in comparison with others at this level: they require an extensive mastery of different critical theories, a wide understanding of the media industries, and some sophisticated practical work. They are academic courses: in other words they are definitely not intended as a route into employment in the media industries: this only happens in even more specialist courses at postgraduate level. However, media courses are widely derided in public discourse and regarded with suspicion by middle-class parents wanting to get their offspring into prestigious universities, even though they are not necessarily a barrier to this.

The prejudice against media courses has been one of the factors that have made it hard to establish a case for making media education available to everyone, starting with much younger children. Another factor is that, despite the prejudice in society at large, the rapid growth in the number of candidates for these courses has encouraged educators to see media education as something rather specialist and therefore not appropriate for learners under the age of 14. I want to challenge this mind-set. In this chapter I shall set out the case for recognising the very early media learning that takes place informally, long before children start school. This should lead to the further recognition that media education should be offered to every child as part of their basic education, and should be seen as a normal part of becoming “literate” in the 21st century.

Most current research that is relevant to media education tends to be on the 21st century media of games, social networking and creative software, rather than in the 20th century media of film, TV and radio. The work of Americans such as Henry Jenkins¹ and James Paul

1 www.henryjenkins.org

Gee² is widely known; in the UK some of the noted researchers are Stephen Heppell³, Jackie Marsh at the University of Sheffield who led an important study on children's experiences with digital media from birth to age 6,⁴ and the team at Futurelab.⁵ But not surprisingly, this kind of work is still at the stage of grappling with rapidly changing realities and with the development of theory. It can tell us to be adventurous in the classroom, but it does not yet tell us what it may mean to be literate in the wider sense of being knowledgeable, critical and creative with all forms of media.

This is hardly surprising, given that we have still not established what it means to be literate in the 20th century media of film, radio and TV. But we are a little further down that road than we were, say, 10 years ago. A useful reality check here is the "audit" that the UK media regulator Ofcom has regularly carried out into what it calls the "media literacy" of children and of adults. The skills and awareness these audits look for are pretty basic, so we should beware of thinking that they can really tell us how media literate the UK population is, but they do give us a useful set of indicators over time. Despite a marked increase amongst very young children in the use of tablet computers to play games, Ofcom's 2013 report shows that "television continues to be the most popular regular media activity among children of all ages" (2013)

The data show that, when "asked to choose from a list of eight media activities which, if any, they did regularly (defined in this research as "almost every day"), 96% of the five to seven year olds identified "watching TV" as the activity they did most often, and 51% mentioned watching DVDs or videos. While many in this age-group also clearly like using the internet or going online (37%) and playing video or computer games (52%), the balance between these activities and the viewing of moving-image media has hardly changed, for this age-group, over the five years of Ofcom's surveys (pp 39-40). Public excitement and moral panics about digital technologies tend to overlook the continued and specific importance of the moving image (ie TV and films) in children's formative years.

In the face of this evidence, it's hard to make the case for confining media literacy education to 21st century media. Children's very earliest media experiences are with moving-image media. They are likely to be placed in front of televisions from around 3 months old. If we

2 www.jamespaulgee.com

3 www.heppell.net

4 www.digitalbeginnings.shef.ac.uk

5 www.futurelab.org.uk

can detach ourselves from judgments about whether or not this is a good thing, we ought to be able to perceive the remarkable fact that, even if children are hardly ever shown stories in books, they still learn to follow them in films and TV by their third year of life – and this is learning that is largely unmediated by adults. In contrast, children’s computer-based learning is likely to come a little later and, although very young children like to experiment with touch-screen techniques to make devices do things, their more elaborated computer-learning comes a little later and is likely to be mediated by an adult or older sibling. Obviously computer-learning is important but, as Lev Manovich has argued, it is not the technology that really matters but the software, and almost all software relies on much older systems such as writing, still images, audio and film (Manovich, 2001). The complex rhetorical system of the moving image underpins not only films and TV but also much of the content that children encounter on websites and in games.

The rhetorical system of the moving image is often summed up as “sound and images”, but it is a lot more complicated than that. The image mode can include sub-modes such as framing, movement, mise-en-scène, lighting, colour, graphics and animation style. The sound track can be composed of voice, music, sound effects and silence, each of which can be broken down again into a multiplicity of modes, as can the sub-modes of “performance” such as expression, movement, speech, song, appearance and costume. All these sub-modes are in themselves immensely complex and important. A vitally important mode which is almost always overlooked is time, which includes duration, rhythm, sequence and transitions. Time in films and TV is different from the time required to read a book or scan through a website, which is under our control. Time in moving-image media is an essential part of the repertoire of creative choices available to the filmmaker, in the same way that it is essential to composers of music: changing the duration of a shot or a transition, or altering the sequence of shots, affects meaning just as much as changing the tempo of a piece of music or changing a crochet to a minim. It is because the study of this system has been so systematically neglected by educators, despite its increasing importance in children’s early learning, that I want to concentrate on it in this chapter, and to argue that the study of moving-image media is a key starting-point for media education.

By the time they start school, most children will have been watching TV and films for at least five years. 59% of children have started watching TV by the age of six months; over 70% of children can turn on the TV by themselves by age 2, and by age 5 most children have their own DVD collections and keep replaying their favourite bits (Marsh et al., 2005). We can’t really know what’s going on when they do this, but we can infer that they are learning

something when they are doing it, because curiosity and learning are what drives everything a toddler does.

What does this learning look like and how can we know that it does take place? Public debate about children and television (and film to a much lesser extent), and in some cases actual policy (2008) are all too often reliant on so-called “common sense” and prejudice rather than on research, but where research is used it tends to be from developmental psychology, which for many years has dominated the huge mass of Anglophone research in this area: for example Pecora et al cite over 2000 studies (Pecora et al., 2007). But research on children and television from this perspective has not been much informed by educational theory: it has assumed that the key issues in children’s relationships with media must be concerned either with “risks” or with “benefits” (Bazalgette, 2013). Many recent studies continue to argue about which end of this continuum ought to be considered dominant (Pempek et al., 2011, Nathanson and Rasmussen, 2011, Skouteris et al., 2010, Lee et al., 2009, Kirkorian et al., 2009, Schmidt et al., 2008, Kirkorian et al., 2008, Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006, Christakis et al., 2004). But the actual accounts of the television the children are watching in these studies tend to be extremely limited, by comparison with the kinds of analysis undertaken by moving-image theorists with an interest in discovering what it is that motivates the viewer to invest time in attention to the screen (Branigan, 1992, Keathley, 2005). In addition, developmental psychologists tend to favour experimental, lab-based studies and large-scale surveys (usually of parents) over smaller-scale, longitudinal, home-based studies. Moses has succinctly pointed out the shortcomings of this literature in her literature review and suggests that there is a need for “an in-depth, longitudinal investigation [that] might reveal connections between children’s interactions with different media and their literacy activities and learning across a variety of contexts” (Moses, 2008)

My own concern with the lack of such studies and their potential importance for our understanding of, and planning for, children’s later learning, led me to my current research, in which I have observed two children over a two and a half year period, from the age of 13 months to three and a half. They are non-identical twins (girl and boy) but this was not a twin study: it was simply useful to me to be able to observe two children of the same age but different genders growing up in the same media environment. They are also my grandchildren, so I brought a wealth of incidental family knowledge to the study. Of course I doubtless also brought prejudices and assumptions, which I did my best to recognise and allow for. Every mode of study has its disadvantages, but I believe that in this case they are outweighed by the extraordinary opportunities I had to bring my media and pedagogical knowledge to bear on the daily media experiences of such young children. My observations

and data analyses have generated some lines of argument that I believe could challenge the risk-benefit paradigm and broaden the range of factors that need to be taken account in planning children's early learning – not only about media, but across the curriculum.

Children's attention to moving-image media has, rightly, been a focus for many researchers. Research by Anderson et al in the late 1970s proposed the notion of "attentional inertia" (Anderson et al., 1979), a concept taken up by other researchers and expanded in Bryant and Anderson's major collection of work on attention and comprehension (Bryant and Anderson, 1983). The attentional inertia theory is a way of accounting for the fact that children sometimes go on looking at material longer than they had been expected to, given their limited level of understanding. Based on a probability analysis of the duration of "looks" in their observations, Anderson and Lorch found, essentially, that the longer children looked at a programme, the more they were likely to go on looking at it:

Attentional inertia allows the child to keep processing a stimulus even when it is not completely understandable. Attentional inertia thus sometimes produces a dynamic tension with program comprehensibility: although in general the young child stops paying attention when the program becomes incomprehensible, attentional inertia serves to maintain attention further than it might otherwise go ... [and] may thus occasionally provide the child the means by which he or she ventures into unknown cognitive territory, occasionally leading to new cognitive discoveries. (Anderson and Lorch, 1983, p25).

Anderson and his colleagues were keen to demolish older theories which did not see attention to television as evidence of comprehension, but as a passive surrender to its brightness, movement and sounds (Singer, 1977). In contrast, Anderson and Lorch argued that attention "is actively under the control of the viewer, and is in the service of the viewer's efforts to understand the television program and to deploy attention efficiently between the television and other aspects of the viewing environment". I have some sympathy with this statement, but found some notable differences between my own observations from fieldwork and Anderson and Lorch's accounts of "the viewing environment". They assert that children (both in laboratories and in videos of home viewing) view television from a distance and that "only in the most extreme cases do young children sit [sic] so close to the screen that successive eye movements might be necessary for identification of scenes" (p 6). Secondly, their central thesis – that visual attention to television is "active, selective and strategically guided by learned comprehension schemata" (p 21) – depends upon their observations that attention to television depended in part at least on "what else is available to do/look at in the viewing environment" (p 7). Thirdly, they dismiss somewhat contemptuously any "qualitative, anecdotal descriptions of children staring intently at the television, invulnerable to distraction", on the grounds that such "anecdotes virtually never derive from systematic

observation and may describe only exceptional circumstances” (pp 10-11). All three of these assertions are contradicted by my own findings so far and by other studies that have observed family behaviours in the home (Collett and Lamb, 1986).



Figure 1

Figure 1 shows Dora and Sam, aged two and a half, watching for the first time a short animated film, not made specifically for children, which illustrates a number of different animation styles through the familiar basic format of a cat chasing a mouse.⁶ They walked up to the TV set as soon as it began, stood immobile for the five and a half minutes of the film, scanning the screen intently, and immediately asked for a re-viewing as

soon as it was over. This was typical behaviour for any new viewing experience, although asking for a repeat did not always happen, and sometimes they would emphatically reject any offers of a repeat show, or of continued viewing of a longer programme or film that they had decided they did not like. Social media searches indicate that intent television/DVD watching and demands for repeat viewings is not unusual.⁷

Of course this does demonstrate changes in viewing culture between 1983 and the present: when Anderson and Lorch were writing, video (and therefore viewing on demand and repeat viewing) was not strongly established, especially in the US, and large flat-screen televisions did not yet exist. The age difference between my sample and most of theirs is also a factor: I found that by the time they were three and a half, Dora and Sam preferred to sit and watch TV from a distance rather than standing close to the set. But the close attention to some moving-image material has remained a characteristic of their viewing from a very early age: I have one video of Dora at 22 months watching a whole 20-minute programme⁸ without moving, standing close to the set. While this was happening, Sam glanced only intermittently at the screen and played elsewhere in the room: the TV set clearly did not have an

6 *Animatou*, Claude Luyet, Switzerland 2007

7 http://www.babycenter.com/400_my-toddler-is-a-video-junkie-what-should-i-do_500387_1.bc;
http://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/behaviour_development/a1639036-I-feel-guilty-my-17-month-old-loves-tv-so-much

8 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/shows/mr-blooms-nursery>

automatically mesmeric effect (Sigman, 2007) and each child was making a decision about whether to watch or not. Some of the more recent research on infants and toddlers has also found longer attention-spans (Courage and Setliff, 2010) but has not offered explanations for this that are radically different from Anderson and Lorch, despite Doubleday and Droege's comment that "much needs to be answered about the nature of attentional inertia and its relation to comprehension, memory and other attentional phenomena" (Doubleday and Droege, 1993).

A key weakness in the attentional inertia theory is that it is based on the assumption that attention is linked to the comprehension of content: it assumes that children's visual attention to television "is maintained by [their] ability and need to answer questions posed by [their] comprehension schemata" (Anderson and Lorch, 1983). While schema theory offers interesting and helpful insights on the ways in which experienced viewers make sense of moving-image texts, it does rely upon "an arrangement of knowledge already possessed by a perceiver that is used to predict and classify new sensory data" (Branigan, 1992). It is therefore heavily dependent on memory and on our ability to draw upon our life experiences. But then we have to account for the fact that even babies can be highly attentive to moving-image material, as illustrated by Dora aged three months, straining to see the TV screen behind her (Figure 2).



Figure 2

Discussion about what children learn from TV and other moving image media is usually limited to the content: the information and stories they may or may not understand. Obviously this is important. But there has to be another dimension to this learning, because otherwise they would not be able to access that content. Children must be learning and internalising the rhetoric of moving images: devices such as framing, shot/reverse shot, cutaways, transitions and non-diegetic sound, in order to make sense of what they are watching. Just because toddlers cannot articulate terms like these, does not mean they cannot learn to understand these conventions – after all, they are quite easy to learn. We tend not to think of them

as learned conventions because they seem so obvious and natural, but of course they are all strategies that have been invented over the years by filmmakers and they are meaningful: they are used for specific purposes in all moving image media. Although much modern film theory is extremely abstruse and difficult for non-specialists to understand, and is based

upon adults' viewing experiences, I believe that it has much to offer to debates about young children and media, by unpacking the extraordinary complexity of all moving-image material. In Bordwell's magisterial account of narration in film, he points out that "every film trains its spectator" and that the process of watching a film, in contrast to everyday perception, "puts an extra strain on the spectator's memory and inferential processes" (Bordwell, 1985). Film theory can offer us ways of considering what rewards a baby or toddler may gain from the major investment in time that they allocate to moving-image media.

Once we see moving-image media as a cultural construct whose rules have to be learned, babies' and toddlers' behaviour in front of the screen starts to look very different. For one thing, we can start to change the kind of language we use to describe it. Parents and carers commonly use the language of affect when talking about their children and television or films: they "love" and "adore" certain programmes or films; they may be "fascinated" or "entranced" and they have "favourites"; or they may "hate" others. But if they have anxieties about this, they may use quasi-medical⁹ terms like "addiction", "fixated" and "mesmerised" and to refer to children's "exposure to" television rather than simply "watching". All of these terms carry a heavy load of connotation and tend to guide our thinking and assumptions about what the children are doing.

Over the period of my data I periodically interviewed my daughter and son-in-law about the children's behaviour with television on a day-to-day basis (since I was only able to observe them on one day a week). Initially my daughter used the language of affect to describe this: "Favourites are: *Something Special*, top of the list, er ... *Show Me Show Me*, *Zingzillas*. They're watching *The Tweenies* at the moment actually, that's on instead of *Zingzillas* ... which they don't .. love, but they will watch it..."¹⁰ Later, when the twins started to talk and could express preferences, and had a grasp of the affordances of the technology, she noticed that the twins would move on from one "favourite" to another and that periods of interest in a programme – usually something on the CBeebies channel – would typically last for anything between a couple of weeks and a month or more:

...they've got control over it, so they've been saying, "Oh I don't like this one" or, I dunno, or "I want to watch this one" like with *Meg and Mog* they want to watch the baby octopus one, and with *Peppa Pig* they like the ice-skating one, or ... so they've got a lot more control over what they watch, and they know that – they understand now that with a DVD, they can watch it again. And also they can just request *Mr Tumble* at any time, and I can call it up on Catch-Up. There are certain things on

9 See also <http://harvardmagazine.com/2009/04/medicalization-of-our-culture>

10 Interview with Grace, 13th October 2011.

CBeebies, like *Baby Jake*, that they call for. There are three things, basically, Mr Tumble, *Mr Maker*, and *Baby Jake*. Those there the three things that they want to watch on CBeebies and the rest of the stuff, they'll watch, but you know, they'll never watch *In the Night Garden* any more.¹¹

She also started to speculate about what was going on when they watched, and to note that they would often reject a programme or film for reasons she couldn't identify, and for which she was not using affective terms:

...well it's like what I was saying they're just very focused on it, and they're talking about it, and interacting with it, and you know really ... then they're enjoying it as far as I'm concerned. They're getting something out of it. So like with *Babar*, they were looking at it very intently for kind of ten minutes and then they were like "don't like this, turn it off". They give it a chance, like "ok, what's it going to do?" it's not like kind of two seconds "no I don't like it", they will watch something for a good 10 to 15 minutes and then "no this isn't going anywhere that I like, turn it off now"¹²

Six months later she was still observing this phenomenon but starting to find different metaphors to describe it: "*Rubberdubbers* was a big hit for a while, before *The Gruffalo*, that was the one. And they, they just kind of they love it for a few weeks and then – it's gone. And then they'll love it again – and it's gone, you know. It's like eating so much of one food –"¹³ From this, in an informal conversation, she hit upon a term that seemed useful and meaningful to both of us: "using it up". The implied theory here is that the children are in a sense **at work** when watching a programme or film: it places learning demands upon them (as Bordwell would say) which they need to return to until they have achieved the learning challenges that the programme presents: that is, until they have "used it up". The further implication would be that they are then keen to find something else that presents new challenges, through which they can achieve further satisfaction as they overcome them. An important – and intriguing aspect – would be that this learning is unmediated by adults, as well as being facilitated by the technology – whether analogue (as in video) or digital (as in DVD or online) – that enables access and replay at will.

So far, this account of toddlers' engagements with the moving-image is largely driven by speculation: when a child cannot talk much, if at all, it is very hard to know what may be going on as they watch, and observations of behaviour can only take us so far. Laboratory experiments may offer some clues (Barr and Wyss, 2008, Hofer et al., 2007) but are, in my view, largely compromised by the artificial conditions they involve. A different approach was suggested to me by an early phenomenon in the children's viewing, when they presented

¹¹ Interview with Grace, 15th April 2012.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Interview with Grace, 21st September 2012.

fearful responses to material that, to a seasoned older viewer, would have seemed innocuous, even funny.

When Sam and Dora were 13 months old, I observed them watching an episode of the BBC/Ragdoll programme *In the Night Garden*, entitled “Mr Pontipine’s Moustache Flies Away”. They were familiar with this episode and had watched it many times on DVD. But this time they evinced terror when the bushy black moustache on one of the characters suddenly detached itself from his face, fluttered up into the air and settled on a chimney stack. Despite the reassuring voice-over whose tone communicated amusement and jollity, Sam was rigid with fright and Dora scrambled away behind the sofa, screaming loudly. Despite my daughter’s attempts to comfort them, they continued to be fearful as the moustache flew to various other locations before being restored to its rightful owner, whereupon they clapped and settled down to watch the rest of the programme.

Nine months later when the twins were nearly two, I observed a similarly “inappropriate” response, this time to the *Peppa Pig* episode “Sports Day” (Astley Baker Davies Ltd / Entertainment One Ltd), in which Peppa Pig and her friends take part in various sporting events such as the relay race and the high jump. Daddy Pig is also there: Peppa constantly wastes time talking to him and thus keeps on failing to win any prizes. The last event of the day is the tug-of-war: all the characters line up on two sides and start to pull on the rope. A close-up on the rope shows it starting to fray and the voice-over warns that they are tugging so hard that the rope may break. It does break with a twang, and the characters all fall over, laughing. Each time the twins watched the programme, Dora collapsed in wild crying when the rope broke, and although they subsequently watched the episode many times, she reacted similarly each time – to the extent that, eventually, it seemed as though she was consciously preparing her flamboyant response. A couple of months later, Grace happened to observe Dora watching the episode by herself, and discovered that by then, or at least in that context without an audience, Dora did not cry but simply sighed deeply when the rope broke, and bit her own hand (typical, for her, as an expression of distress or disapproval).

Sam also showed fearful reactions to certain material, but usually through tension and clinging to a parent, which was more typical fearful behaviour, for him. One notable response was to a different *In the Night Garden* episode where a little bicycle-like vehicle, the “Og Pog,” rolled away downhill out of control and had to be chased by the other characters. Sam was deeply distressed at this and clung tightly to Grace until the Og Pog was retrieved.

All three of the responses I have described were markedly different from the twins' behaviour at other times during the same periods, when they were watching TV programmes or films. Something different, and probably important, was happening in these events. The elements in the programmes which generated these responses are not meant to be distressing or frightening, so there was in a sense some "mistake" in the way the children responded: they did not hear, or they ignored, the cheerful voice-overs; they ignored the fact that no character showed fear or distress; they took no notice of the happy laughter after the rope breaks in "Sports Day". They were therefore at this stage unable to categorise the programmes generically, so could not use predictability to contain their anxieties.

It is however noticeable that each of the programme elements that affected Sam and Dora in this way constituted a disruption to the status quo (Todorov, 1966), generating in each case a question: will the moustache be recovered? Will the Og-Pog be caught? Will the rope break? So from the point of view of narrative theory, the twins' responses were accurate in some sense, because they did focus on the disruption which sets up some anxiety or at least concern in the viewer, who then wants to find out what happens next. The twins' responses are merely exaggerated in scale: their anxiety, particularly in Dora's case, seems uncontrollable. Two inferences could be made on this basis. Firstly, it is possible that these responses do indicate at least a momentary perception of the story's central "narrative enigma", which is an important precondition for following and enjoying narratives. Mr Pontipine is doing the sorts of things he always does with his family, when suddenly he is bereft of his moustache. The Og-Pog is expected to stay reliably where it is, but it does not. Peppa Pig and the other children are confidently depending on the rope to support them, when suddenly it lets them down – or perhaps, the children are rashly pulling on a rope that cannot support them (as shown by the fraying, which they ought to have noticed) so it is their fault that it breaks.

If this was what generated Dora and Sam's distress, then they must have perceived the narrative disruption and therefore, perhaps, entered into the suspense scenario that it initiates. But a further inference, which could explain Dora's excessive responses, is that at this stage of their development the twins merely grasped the fact of the disruption: they were incapable, so far, of anticipating or even looking for a resolution: each disruption might have presented, to them, an unmitigated disaster that could not be resolved. However, I cannot entirely dismiss their powers of prediction, given that in several cases when they re-viewed a programme, they were clearly able to remember what was coming next. Perhaps they were beginning to develop expectations about story structure and hoped each time that, perhaps on this occasion, the rope might not break? This is not as foolish as it sounds: adults

watching a familiar story such as *Romeo and Juliet* are still riveted by the anguish of suspense: we know perfectly well that Juliet won't really wake up in time to prevent Romeo's suicide but we nevertheless cannot stop ourselves hoping that she will. If we were not capable of willingly suspending our disbelief and surrendering to suspense in this way, we could not enjoy revisiting familiar texts, or watching films or plays that follow conventional generic rules. This capability is deeply embedded in human cultures: religious rituals have always depended on generating and re-generating, and then assuaging, the fear that perhaps this time the sun may not return, or sins may not be forgiven.

To turn to interpretations offered by psychological researchers of early childhood, it is clearly important to note that the common feature in all of the events that seem to have provoked negative responses is one of things breaking or separating. There is a range of research literature on toddlers' interest in this, much of which follows the Freudian tradition of linking it to the fear of separation from loved ones (Bowlby, 1975, Winnicott, 1960). Arnold refers to young children becoming absorbed in "connecting and disconnecting" when she explores the same theme, (Arnold, 2009) but also cites Piaget and Inhelder and their wider exploration of how children explore their physical environment (Piaget and Inhelder, 1956). Phillips explains 12-26-month-old children's interest in organising objects from an educational perspective as "the beginning of the motor record of bringing things together and placing them apart which is the basis for later symbolic understanding of adding and subtracting and of words such as "and" or "separate" (Phillips, 1984). These theories may help to explain why the children focused upon the events that they did when they exhibited fearful responses, but do not affect the inferences that I would like to make: that these "mistakes" indicate the presence of an ongoing learning process and thus can be seen as evidence that this is an essential precursor to fuller understanding of moving-image media.

If this is the case, what are the implications for children's further learning, whether specifically about media, or in terms of their wider education? Paul Van den Broek and colleagues have made a persuasive case for considering television watching skills as a key indicator of later reading skills (van den Broek, 2001) and a number of UK teachers have taken on this argument in introducing moving-image education for very young children in early learning settings, with dramatic results (Bearne and Bazalgette, 2010, Bearne and Marsh, 2008, Whitney, 2010). Recent research indicates that very young children's abilities to achieve the following "literacy tasks" may be developed from their film and TV viewing at least alongside, if not before, they learn them from books:

- Making inferences from clues in the text

- Making narrative predictions
- Considering authorial intent
- Identifying character type
- Recognising a genre
- Recognising a specific point of view
- Understanding compressed or extended time-frames

This research also shows that older children aged five and six can

- consider how a sound track relates to visuals;
- position a camera and frame an object or scene/analyse how this has been done;
- decide to use a close-up/consider why a close-up has been used;
- choose music to convey a specific mood/try out different kinds of music with the same images;
- add sound effects to convey a sense of place and time;
- decide exactly where to cut a visual or audio track;
- compose, or analyse, an audio and/or visual montage to tell a story or express a state of mind.

Unfortunately, only a relatively small amount of UK research has focused on this kind of learning (Bearne and Bazalgette, 2010, Marsh and Bearne, 2008); the “Persistence of Vision” project¹⁴ and a study on media literacy and learning progression by David Buckingham, Andrew Burn and their team at the Institute of Education, London: “Developing Media Literacy: towards a Model of Learning Progression”.¹⁵

At the time of writing (autumn 2013) the political climate in the UK is not sympathetic to research findings of this kind. But the policy wheel will no doubt revolve again, and when it does a careful distinction needs to be made for policy-makers, between the easy option of regarding children’s early media learning as merely a helpful precursor to the “proper learning” of print literacy, and the more challenging option of recognising the value of early media learning as an important achievement in its own right: one that needs to be extended and enhanced. If children’s later media behaviours could be seen, not as “obsessive” or “addictive”, but as a continued search for the learning challenges they experienced when they were little, educators might see the value of providing children with a wider and more diverse range of media experiences and helping them to develop the critical tools and vocabulary they need in order to express their preferences and responses. Such learning could be viewed as complementing, rather than competing with, the priorities of 20th-century curricula.

14 <http://thema.org/pov/volume-3-issue-2/persistence-of-vision/>

15 www.ioe.ac.uk/research/4689.html

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