

# Media Studies Education in the UK

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*Media education, then, is one of the few instruments which teachers and students possess for beginning to challenge the great inequalities in knowledge and power which exist between those who manufacture information in their own interests and those who consume it innocently as news or entertainment.*

(Masterman 1985: 11)

## **Introduction**

According to the Oxford English Dictionary it was not until the 1920s that English-speaking people began to refer to ‘the media’ in the general sense with which we are so familiar today. Since that time however, but particularly it seems during the last decade, the media have come to occupy such a central position in our lives that people now talk of contemporary society as a ‘media-saturated’ environment, one in which the distinction between reality and media-reality is becoming increasingly blurred – even to the point, in the view of some postmodern theorists, of invisibility (Baudrillard, 1991). Given the media’s ubiquity and influence, real or imagined, in the modern world, it is hardly surprising that they should have attracted the critical attention of scholars in various fields. What *is* perhaps surprising, though, is the fact that media studies as an academic subject, not to mention media literacy as a core goal of democratic education, has encountered such difficulty in securing a foothold in the curricula of schools and higher educational institutions in many countries.

However, one country where media studies does now seem to have won a fair degree of popular acceptance and academic respectability is the UK. In British secondary schools, for example, media studies is one of the fastest growing subjects at 16 plus. And undergraduate student numbers for media studies courses rose from around 4,000 in 1995 to 12,000 in 2002. The *Directory of Media and Multimedia Courses* for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, produced jointly by the British Film Institute and Skillset, the national media careers advisory service, contains details of 4717 separate media-related courses, covering the whole range

from vocational and practical training courses to postgraduate research degrees. At the undergraduate level alone, the register of courses compiled by the University and College Admissions Service lists 115 different institutions offering a total of 1000 bachelor degrees in media studies. One reason for the popularity of these courses is that, according to statistics from the Graduate Careers Advisory Service, media studies graduates are more likely to find jobs than those with social science or humanities degrees: nearly three-quarters of them obtain employment within six months of graduating, compared to the overall figure for UK graduates of two-thirds. This is in turn partly because the media industries in Britain are booming as a result of de-regulation, but also because media studies graduates are regarded favourably by employers who see them as being well-trained, flexible and equipped with useful transferable skills.

In marked contrast to this wealth of provision and popularity in the UK however, media studies appears to have failed to make even the smallest impression on the educational system in Japan. The little research that has been conducted suggests that the media have a major and frequently malign influence on the public sphere in Japan and that greater public understanding of the media is an urgent social priority (see for example Gamble and Watanabe 2004; Pharr and Krauss 1999). And yet despite this, and the fact that Japan is without doubt one of the most media-saturated societies in the world, with several of the world's largest media companies and one of the most literate populations, very few universities in Japan offer degrees in media studies and media literacy finds no place on the officially designated high school curriculum. An investigation into why Japanese media studies education should lag so far behind that of other comparable nations will form the subject of a later essay. To begin with, however, I should like here to provide an outline of the history and current status of media studies education in the UK in the hope that such a study may provide some insights for educators in Japan regarding the way in which media studies might more effectively be developed in this country.

### **The history of media studies in the UK**

Arguably the history of mass-mediated communication in Britain may be said to have begun in 1476 when William Caxton printed the first English book. The first daily newspaper in England, *The Daily Courant*, began in 1702 and the first issue of *The Times* appeared (as *The Daily Universal Register*) in 1785. In 1805, news of the famous naval victory at the Battle of Trafalgar and the death of Admiral Lord Nelson

took two weeks to reach Britain and a further day before appearing as a notice in *The Times* where it would have been read by at most a few thousand people. These days, one of the most startling features of digital communication networks, most notably the Internet, is the possibility they offer for individual citizens, anywhere in the world, to transmit information instantly, independently and *interactively* to a potential global audience of billions. If the contrast between then and now is dramatic, the contrast between what we may regard as the earliest days of media studies in the UK and the picture today is scarcely less so. In this section I shall outline this history and, in the next, the salient features of current theory and practice.

The first book that could be regarded as addressing the study of media products in the modern sense was F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson's *Culture and Environment*, published in 1933. This practical textbook made a huge impression on contemporary educators as a call to resistance against the corrupting effects of the media. In its elitist (or perhaps, more fairly, minoritarian) view of the mass media as a debasing and dangerous influence on the working classes it reflected the broader *Scrutiny* project of Leavis with respect to the civilizing role of art and literature, a project which can itself be traced back at least to Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1889; see Eagleton 1996, for a discussion of this tradition). The key word for Leavis and Thompson was 'discrimination': they argued that, 'pupils must be taught to discriminate and resist' the easy gratifications and cheap emotions encouraged by the media. The book's high-minded and censorious attitude to the mass media has been highly influential. A measure of the influence of Leavis and Thompson's view of education as 'inoculation' is that it formed an essential strand of two major government reports on education during the next thirty years, the Spens Report of 1938 and the Crowther Report of 1959. And despite the considerable progress that has been made in the field subsequently it continues to have a good deal of influence today. From the point of view of progressive educators, one particularly unhelpful aspect of this influence is what Len Masterman refers to as the 'repression of politics' in media education.<sup>1</sup> In concluding his discussion of this issue Masterman writes:

In spiriting politics away from the processes of signification Leavisian discourse forestalled, for 40 years, ideological investigations of the media, and of their function as consciousness industries. What it put in its place was a theory of literary value, and in particular an emphasis upon the importance of critical *discrimination* ('the sense that this is worth more than that') as a way of keeping alive 'the consciousness of the race', which persists as an

underpinning concept in many discussions of the media down to the present day. (Masterman 1985: 49)

Yet despite or perhaps because of this culturally elitist aspect of Leavis' legacy, what tends to be forgotten in the frequently critical discussion of his work today is that, as Masterman reminds us, there are many radical aspects from which media educators may still learn, including, 'its anti-utilitarian spirit; its emphasis upon critical reading; its anti-capitalism and rejection of market values; its challenging of cultural and social orthodoxies, and its pugnacious educational politics and rejection of a notion of education designed to reproduce the prevailing order,' (46). Moreover, and notwithstanding its antipathy to the mass media, *Culture and Environment* set a valuable precedent for media studies pedagogy, firstly because it contained many textual examples from newspapers, magazines and advertisements, and secondly because it made the study of popular texts an intellectually respectable activity for the first time. In this sense the book paved the way for later work by teachers who took a more positive attitude to the media. Thus when, during the 1950s and 1960s, a generation of teachers who actually enjoyed at least some forms of popular culture began using such materials in their classrooms they did so with an inherited sense of Leavis' moral purpose. The difference was that these teachers saw discrimination as something to be exercised *within* the media and their products not simply against them.

In 1960 a major conference was organized by the National Union of Teachers on the theme of *Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility*. The conference was distinguished by a tension between old and new attitudes towards the mass media. On the one hand, there was much anxiety and hostility to such new media forms as commercial television, which had begun in 1955 and which seemed to some teachers not only to be corrupting the nation's youth but even to herald the end of Western civilization as they knew it. On the other hand, more progressive voices were to be heard too and one of the most significant results of the conference was the eventual production of the book *Discrimination and Popular Culture* (1964) edited by Thompson. This made the case for seeing value in the media and attempted to create evaluative criteria to distinguish between worthwhile and trivial products of popular culture. This progressive movement that emerged from the 1960 conference also found official expression in the 1963 Newsom Report on education, which talked of the need for schools to provide a 'counterbalancing assistance' to popular

culture:

We need to train children to look critically and discriminate between what is good and bad in what they see. They must learn to realise that many makers of films and of television programmes present false or distorted views of people, relationships, and experience in general, besides producing much trivial and worthless stuff made according to stock patterns.

By presenting examples of films selected for the integrity of their treatment of human values, and the craftsmanship with which they were made, alongside others of mixed or poor quality, we can not only build up a way of evaluating but also lead pupils to an understanding of film as a unique and potentially valuable art form in its own right as capable of communicating depth of experience as any other art form. (HMSO 1963: paras. 475-6)

Another important sign of the growing awareness of the value of studying the media was the publication in 1964 of Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's *The Popular Arts*, which contained some excellent analyses of popular culture genres and encouraged teachers to look for cultural value within the products of the mass media. Unfortunately, Hall and Whannel's tastes were decidedly high-brow and wide-screen, preferring Bergman and Buñuel to Ford and Hawkes and dismissing television as merely an inferior form of cinema. The gap which their book exposed in the classroom between the educated tastes of middle-class teachers and the more genuinely popular tastes of their pupils gave rise to considerable pedagogical difficulties. Two subsequent attempts to overcome this problem were Nicolas Tucker's *Understanding the Mass Media* (1966) and Brian Firth's *Mass Media in the Classroom* (1968). These works tried to take more account of pupils' tastes but both were hampered by the lack of any coherent critical theory of how media products should be evaluated.

Writing in 1985 of the 'failure', as he saw it, of the popular arts movement, Masterman observed that during the 17 years since Firth's book had been published, no other full-length classroom-oriented book on media education had been published in Britain (58). In discussing the reasons for this failure, Masterman presents six arguments against the discriminatory approach to the media. First, that it is 'an essentially middle-class and deeply paternalistic movement, unjustifiably confident in the assertion of its own standards of judgement, and largely contemptuous of, and bent upon "improving" the tastes of students,' (59). Second, that there has not been enough theoretical work done to establish criteria for evaluating the media

and thus that any judgements made had merely a spurious authority.<sup>2</sup> Third, that the very appropriateness of applying aesthetic criteria at all to much media output such as news and advertisements is questionable. Fourth, that these approaches rely on a naively transcendental notion of value which ignores the social and ideological bases of particular interpretations and the assumptions and criteria underpinning assertions of value. Fifth, that in their preoccupation with the careful analysis of texts practitioners neglected the contexts in which they were produced, distributed and consumed. Finally, that there were enormous practical difficulties, particularly following the introduction of comprehensive education in the 1960s, with making discriminatory approaches work in the classroom because the consensus of shared values and assumptions on which they depended no longer existed there.

In addition to the work of individual scholars, the 1960s were notable for important institutional developments, including the creation of the first chair in Film Studies at a British university (London) in 1961, the establishment of the hugely influential Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in 1964 (first under the direction of Richard Hoggart and later, from 1969 to 1979, Stuart Hall) and the Centre for Mass Communication Research at Leicester University in 1966. Such developments reflected and furthered the gradual advance of media studies and cultural studies within the academy, though it is notable that they were all largely oriented towards research and that by the end of the 1960s there were still only two media studies undergraduate courses in the entire country.

In the following decade however, despite all the not inconsiderable problems of theory, practice and institutional support, several valuable contributions were made to media studies teaching in Britain. In 1973 for example, the following three important works appeared: Cohen and Young's *The Manufacture of News*, a popular in-service text for media teachers; Murdoch and Phelp's *Mass Media in the Secondary School*, which examined the gap between teacher and pupil perceptions of the mass media; and Golay's *Introduction to the Language of Image and Sound*, a seminal work on visual literacy, particularly valuable for its ideas on media studies teaching with primary pupils, a group usually neglected in discussions of media education. In 1975 another important official report, the Bullock Report, drew attention to the significance of television viewing to children's experience of the world and urged teachers to make use of this experience in teaching about the media (HMSO 1975). And in the following year the first of the Glasgow University Media Group's famous studies, *Bad News*, created a storm of controversy through its exposure of bias in

mainstream television's reporting of industrial news.

But with the benefit of hindsight it appears that in many respects the most significant event of the 1970s was the introduction by the Open University of its first ever course dealing with the media, *Mass Communication and Society*, in 1977. Appropriately enough for an institution, still then very much on the margins of the academic establishment, teaching principally through the medium of television and radio broadcasts, this course was extremely popular and many of the staff and students involved in it went on to have distinguished careers in media studies throughout the world. It is worth looking at the make-up of the course since it established an approach to the subject that has been widely emulated:

**Block One: The media: contexts of study**

- Unit 1 Issues in the study of mass communication and society
- Unit 2 Mass communication as a social force in history

**Block Two: The study of culture**

- Unit 3 The media and social theory: mass-society theories and conceptions of class
- Unit 4 Popular culture and high culture
- Unit 5 Mass communication in cross-cultural contexts: the case of the Third World
- Unit 6 Messages and meanings

**Block Three: The audience**

- Unit 7 Mass-media effects: a sociological approach
- Unit 8 The political effects of mass communication
- Unit 9 Projects (a) The Open University as a media system. (b) Black music.

**Block Four: Media organisations**

- Unit 10 Patterns of ownership; questions of control
- Unit 11 Organisations and occupations
- Unit 12 Hollywood: a case study

**Block Five: Media and society**

- Unit 13 The media as definers of social reality
- Unit 14 How the media report race
- Unit 15 The power of the media

Several original features may be noted in this course structure. Firstly, the course is framed by locating the media and their products in their social context, rather than focusing on the meaning and value of media texts in their own right. Secondly, this

contextualization stresses the importance of the historical dimension to the media, something which the very up-to-dateness of the subject tends all too often to obscure. Thirdly, the course emphasizes the importance of approaching the media through theoretically informed practice, signalling a clear break with the previously dominant discrimination-based approaches of the Thompson era. Of course, this move was to lead subsequently to charges of theoretical obscurantism, with conservative critics such as Roger Scruton quick to point out the irony of practitioners using impenetrable ‘sub-Marxist gobbledegook’ to discuss the products of popular culture, but at the time the move was seen as daringly radical. Fourthly, reflecting the growing multicultural nature of British society and the global reach of the media, attention is shifted from an exclusive preoccupation with western culture to examine mass communication in less developed countries. Fifthly, a further broadening of focus, and one which has proved extremely fruitful, was the systematic study of media audiences, specifically through the use of practical project work. Finally, and again this is something which I will come back to in my conclusion, the course sought to make explicit the relations between the *power* of the media and social reality.

One other important contribution to media education during the 1970s that should be mentioned here was the publication of *Using the Media* (MacShane 1979). Although intended primarily for workers and community activists as a handbook on how to deal with the press, television and radio, it was also a valuable guide for school groups considering activities with professional media involvement. It thus demonstrated how a critical media studies course might go hand-in-hand with practical involvement in a way that has since become the norm, at least at the secondary school level.

The 1980s opened promisingly with UNESCO producing a report, *Many Voices, One World* (the MacBride Report) on global communication problems (ICSCP 1980). This was followed by an International Symposium on Media Education held in 1982 at Grunwald in the Federal Republic of Germany which produced the UNESCO *Declaration on Media Education*. This declaration stated, in part:

Rather than condemn or endorse the undoubted power of the media, we need to accept their significant impact and penetration throughout the world as an established fact, and also appreciate their importance as an element of culture in today’s world. The role of communication and media in the process of development should not be underestimated, nor the function of media as instruments for the citizen’s active participation in society. Political and educa-



tional systems need to recognize their obligations to promote in their citizens a critical understanding of the phenomena of communication.

The following year further official recognition by the UK government of the need not just for media studies but for media education in general was given by the Department of Education and Science in its report, *Popular TV and Schoolchildren*, which argued that ‘specialist courses in media studies are not enough: all teachers should be involved in examining and discussing television programmes with young people,’ (DES 1983). Around this time, the Open University launched a new course, *Popular Culture*, which was twice as long as the previous course and ran with great success until 1987. Like its predecessor, this course had a considerable influence on a generation of media studies teachers, particularly through the many excellent books of readings that were written to accompany it (e.g. Bennet et al. 1981, in which the Gramscian notion of hegemony was first popularized in English). Of most immediate help to media studies education however was the work that synthesized all of these policy statements and theoretical currents into a practical, progressive pedagogy, namely Masterman’s *Teaching the Media*, first published in 1985 and still regarded by many as the media studies teacher’s bible. This work is significant for the way in which it established certain general principles for teaching across the media (and to all age ranges) and sought to make classroom work more systematic and rigorous.

Regrettably, and in spite of the veritable explosion of interest in the media during the 1990s, there has been a severe instrumentalist retrenching of schooling in the UK. This was driven by the Conservative government’s ‘back to basics’ educational philosophy and embodied in the new National Curriculum which successive Labour governments have done disappointingly little to ameliorate. This has meant that media studies as a subject has had to struggle to maintain its place on the already crowded timetable despite its popularity with students, to say nothing of its importance for democratic education. While the current picture is considerably more encouraging at university level, I regard Masterman’s vision of what media studies education should be like as still the most valuable statement of best practice yet produced and it is worth turning now to a closer examination of its main features.

### **Masterman’s model of media studies education**

In reviewing the halting progress made by media education in Britain up to the 1980s Masterman notes that one major reason for the slow rate of development had been

the formidable intellectual and pedagogical problems that the subject presents. He sums up the main problem succinctly: ‘how is it possible to make any conceptual sense of a field which covers such a wide range and diversity of forms, practices and products?’ (18). However, he recognized that given the connections between the media (including common structures of ownership, common signifying practices, overlapping content, and above all their common and mutually reinforcing function as consciousness industries) they must be studied together. Having in earlier work tried but subsequently abandoned an approach that isolated one medium only, namely television, he gradually evolved a new integrated model that consisted of the following three elements: a theoretical framework; a set of core concepts and principles; and a distinctive mode of enquiry or method of investigation.

**Theoretical framework** This framework derives from what Masterman dubs ‘the first principle’ of media education: ‘*that the media are symbolic (or sign) systems which need to be actively read, and not unproblematic, self-explanatory reflections of external reality,*’ (20, emphasis in original). This principle allows us to link and make conceptual sense of the diverse range of signifying practices employed by each medium. The fundamental realization that media products are representations or constructions of reality leads to four general areas of investigation:

- (i) the sources, origins and determinants of media constructions (media production);
- (ii) the dominant techniques and codings employed by the media to convince us of the truth of their representations (media rhetoric);
- (iii) the nature of the ‘reality’ constructed by the media; the values implicit in media representations (media ideology);
- (iv) the ways in which media constructions are read or received by their audiences (media consumption).

Although these four areas may be distinguished in order to facilitate analysis, in fact they are all related and therefore should be studied dialectically and dynamically as being always in a state of movement and change.

**Core concepts** Teaching media studies *conceptually* appears now to be firmly established as the most appropriate modus operandi, but at the time when Masterman

was proposing this approach it was viewed with considerable suspicion by many teachers. Masterman himself is not dogmatic about the precise composition of the list of core concepts to be taught, but he suggests a list of 26 items as a starting point, including: ideology, genre, rhetoric, realism, selection, denotation/connotation, discourse, deconstruction, audience positioning, myth, mediation, representation, subjectivity, encoding/decoding, narrative structure, pleasure, sign/signification, and participation/access/control.<sup>3</sup> He is firm however in his conviction that developing a conceptual understanding of the media will involve students in both *critical reception of* and *active production through* the media, which leads us to the next element in the framework.

**Mode of enquiry** One of the most important though difficult tasks for the media teacher in Masterman's view is to develop in pupils enough self-confidence and critical maturity to be able to apply critical judgements to the media texts which they will encounter outside of school and in their future lives. Thus, the primary objective is not simply to help children achieve critical awareness but rather critical *autonomy*. Course content, teaching methodology and modes of evaluation must all be organized in terms of this aim. A key feature of Masterman's model is the importance he places on practical work for giving students first-hand experience of the media construction process from the inside. He emphasizes that practical work should not be an end in itself but needs to be linked to analytical activities as a means of developing critical understanding of the media and that it is the teacher's task to ensure that students make these links consciously. He also makes the distinction that the aim of practical work is to subject professional media practices to critical scrutiny, rather than to emulate them, and he warns against allowing practical work to become a form of cultural reproduction in which dominant practices become naturalised: as he notes, 'cultural reproduction is a poor aim for media education. It is uncritical; it enslaves rather than liberates; it produces deference and conformity,' (27). Another argument in favour of practical work is that since most media production involves working with others, there is value in working and negotiating with groups of people who may have different ideas, perspectives, ideologies and motives and in finding out how to work cooperatively as a member of a group.

From the preceding account, it will be evident that Masterman's approach to pedagogy puts him firmly and unapologetically in the so-called 'progressive' camp. Indeed, he states that his approach is closely based on the critical pedagogy of the

Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire which he describes in detail. He argues that teaching effectively about the media ‘*demand*s non-hierarchical teaching modes and a methodology which will produce reflection and critical thinking whilst being as lively, democratic, group-focused and action-oriented’ as the teacher can make it. Since this is very much in line with my own approach to teaching I find this eminently sensible, though progressive teaching is not without its critics, on both the left and the right, the arguments of whom Masterman devotes considerable space to refuting.

In the final chapter of his book, Masterman casts his gaze towards the future for media studies as he then saw it and sketched out two developments that he felt were necessary. First, the expansion of media studies from being a discrete discipline into a form of media education which would inform the teaching of all subjects and indeed continue throughout people’s lives. In this connection, he cites various examples of media studies work across the curriculum including a geography course at Oxford Polytechnic which had as its first objective that ‘students should be able to apply to a film a similar level of critical evaluation that they would expect to apply to a book,’ (Jenkins and Youngs 1983). What such courses seek to do is move away from the view of media as *study aids* to a view of them as *objects of study in their own right*. In the case of geography, for example, this might involve studying how our knowledge of and attitudes towards foreign countries are largely a result of the way the media portrays them, and why it is that the media portrays them in the way that they do rather than in some other way. The second development that Masterman outlined was the evolution of more ‘holistic’ or ‘ecological’ approaches to teaching about the media which would emphasise the importance of partnership between ‘those agencies with a legitimate interest in the field, both inside and outside the school,’ (241). Regarding this second objective, Masterman discusses three areas of possible interaction: between media educators and parents; between media educators and media professionals; and between the training of media professionals and the training of media education teachers. From the point of view of this Graduate School’s Media Professional Course, the second and third of these partnerships are clearly the ones which we ought to make particular efforts to develop. Finally, to promote these kinds of interactions Masterman advocates the setting up of what he calls Media Centres around the country which he suggests might ideally:

- (i) be based within a specific community, rather than within an ‘educational’

- institution;
- (ii) replace the current piece-meal approach to media education by acting as regional focus points for the discussion of media issues, the development of lifelong media education programmes and the integration of those agencies with an involvement in or concern about the media;
  - (iii) develop a resource base for professionals and public, which would include video-tapes and equipment, films and film equipment, media books, teaching materials, periodicals, research papers, etc;
  - (iv) organise seminars and lecture programmes for a wide range of participants. These should be principally, though not exclusively, public events, and some might be linked to accredited school, college and university courses;
  - (v) provide training and facilities for the production of community-based newspapers, video and radio, and provide help with the problems of producing, distributing and circulating information for community-based groups and individuals;
  - (vi) draw into media education much-needed additional funding from central government, local authorities, research foundations, arts associations and television and newspaper companies, (267-8).

Setting aside for the moment the first of these points, this concept of Media Centres suggests a possibly enhanced role for the proposed Media School at Nagoya University which I believe it would be highly worthwhile exploring. Particularly since the recent privatization of this university was motivated in part by the perceived need to promote greater links between it and the wider community of which it is a part, and which one of its functions is to serve, this community-oriented role for the Media School would seem to fit very well with this policy. Moreover, the size and status of Nagoya as the main regional centre between Tokyo and Osaka, and as a city in which a number of major media organizations are based suggests that Nagoya University would be a very suitable location for such a facility.

### **The current status of media studies in the UK**

Having reviewed the history of media studies in the UK and outlined a theoretical 'best practice' model of how the subject should be taught, I would now like to move on to consider how in practice media studies is currently being taught in British schools and universities. However, since an in-depth study of this topic was beyond

the pecuniary and spatio-temporal scope of this work I have confined my attention to an examination of the syllabuses and associated materials for media studies courses taught in secondary schools, particularly those for 14-16 year olds. Likewise, to investigate media studies education at the university level, where such nationally administered and publicly available syllabuses are not utilized, I have drawn on a recent highly-influential survey conducted by *The Guardian* newspaper together with the prospectuses of a number of tertiary institutions. Despite the limitations that this essentially text-based approach entails I believe that it can provide at least some insights into the current aims and approach of UK media studies education.

### **Media studies in secondary education**

In the UK the main qualifications which pupils study for between the ages of 14 and 16 are known as GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education). There are currently four qualification-awarding bodies which offer a GCSE in Media Studies. Since their syllabuses (now referred to as 'specifications') are all very similar I shall discuss just one of these, namely that offered by OCR.<sup>4</sup> Despite the overall similarities however, there are some differences in emphasis that should be borne in mind. In particular, OCR has sought to prioritize production work in its specifications, and has recently adapted its specifications to reduce the textual analysis components in order to distance the Media Studies course from the related English and Film Studies courses which it offers. It has also revised its specification to give more prominence to the study of media audiences and institutions.

The OCR Media Studies GCSE specification is designed to facilitate the following two elements:

- The development of media literacy skills to enable candidates to achieve critical independence in their knowledge, experience and enjoyment of the media;
- The development of technical and creative production skills to encourage imaginative and aesthetic activity in media contexts.

In pursuit of these two objectives, the stated aims of the specification are:

- (i) To develop candidates' own prior knowledge and experience of the media, by learning the key approaches to studying the media, through the assessment of the conceptual framework;
- (ii) To develop candidates' knowledge and understanding of the various economic,

- cultural and ideological ways in which the media function in society and of the associated debates arising from its [sic] functions;
- (iii) To develop candidates [sic] critical awareness of historical contexts of media texts and the relationship between media representation and cultural diversity;
  - (iv) To enable candidates to develop an informed understanding of the factors that influence media production processes, by engaging in the production and evaluation of their own practical media production;
  - (v) To develop practical media production skills, which offer opportunities for creativity, imagination, enjoyment and self-expression;
  - (vi) To enable candidates to utilize ICT opportunities in their media production work.

In the specification's emphasis on 'critical independence' and 'enjoyment' of the media, what is immediately noticeable is the complete lack of Leavisite moral disapprobation of the media. Also remarkable is the degree to which it conforms with Masterman's proposals, reflecting the influence that his work has had on the development of the subject at this level. One difference though is that although practical work is included, it appears to be linked to solely imaginative and creative ends rather than to the goal of increasing critical understanding of the media. However, this link *is* made, at least implicitly, in some of the grade descriptions which OCR provides to give students and teachers a general indication of the standard of achievement expected. For example, the description for the highest grade (A) is as follows:

Candidates will demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of the codes and conventions of a wide range of media texts, alongside an in-depth understanding of how social and cultural messages and values are communicated by a wide range of media texts in historical contexts, through insightful comparative analysis. They will show skill in analyzing and interpreting the ways in which codes and conventions of media texts construct meanings, and the ways in which media texts are categorized. There will be a personal insight through comparative analysis of media texts and informed comment on media producers and their organizational contexts, demonstrating skill at interpreting the influence of media producers, and other agencies, on the texts themselves. There will be skill evident in the analysis of the effects of techniques on texts and audiences, and the ability to use a range of imaginative and appropriate

techniques in researching, planning, producing and evaluating their own media text. Evaluations will show informed personal engagement. Candidates will demonstrate the ability to undertake some independent research and study, and will thoughtfully and appropriately select, present and comment on relevant factual and textual examples as detailed evidence of such study. They will consistently and accurately use media terminology, including a wide range of technical terms, production techniques and conceptual aspects.

Here the statement (underlining added) that the students' evaluations of their own media texts will reflect a personal engagement in the work that is informed (by theoretical analysis) may be taken to imply that the process is not simply one-way but that critical reflection on their experience of producing texts will in turn help students to understand the theoretical components of the course. Concerning these components, the reference in the first aim listed above to the course's 'conceptual framework' draws attention to another facet of the specification. The conceptual framework arises from the interaction of three elements: key conceptual areas (ways of studying texts); objects of study (the texts that are specified for study); and assessment objectives. The specification sets out three key conceptual areas, roughly corresponding to the main contemporary approaches to studying the media: media languages and categories; media messages and values; and media producers and audiences. The objects of study are defined in three media areas: audio/visual media; print-based media; and ICT-based media (including the Internet). The assessment objectives are classified into four skill areas: media knowledge and understanding; media analysis and interpretation; media production and evaluation; and quality of written communication. Not every possible permutation of these elements is catered for in the specifications and indeed schools are permitted a certain degree of choice regarding which units to follow according to the interests and abilities of the teachers and students or the media-related resources available in the school.

In conclusion, this examination of the OCR specification for its Media Studies GCSE suggests that the designers of this course have taken account of many of the educational aims set out by Masterman, albeit without some of the more explicitly Friirian elements. Likewise, this specification incorporates neither of his hopes for the future of media studies as he saw them in 1985, namely the expansion of media studies across the school curriculum or the development of partnerships with other agents and institutions. However, it is important to bear in mind that what is set out in such specifications and what actually occurs in classrooms are two vastly



different matters and so, clearly, further detailed research into this aspect of the topic is needed. Nevertheless, what I believe can be said here though is that this specification which, be it remembered, is designed for use with students from 14 to 16 years of age, sets out a course of study which is as ambitious in its expectations for student learning as it is potentially valuable as a means of furthering critical media literacy and the nurturing of active democratic citizens. Moreover, carefully designed to follow on from this GCSE course, OCR offers further media studies qualifications for the 16 to 18 age group which build on and extend these achievements. The specifications for these courses have not been examined here because in fact they have very similar aims and cover much the same practical and theoretical ground, albeit at a higher conceptual and technical level. They also form a bridge between media studies at the GCSE level and at undergraduate degree level and it is to the latter that I shall now turn.

### **Media studies in tertiary education**

Every year, as a service for final-year secondary school pupils who are choosing their undergraduate courses, *The Guardian* newspaper conducts a survey of British universities and colleges and ranks them in each subject according to various criteria relating to the quality of the educational experience they provide for students.<sup>5</sup> This survey is widely regarded as one of the most authoritative guides to university teaching, partly because of *The Guardian's* reputation as a quality newspaper with close links to academia but more specifically because all the data are derived from officially published sources and the methodology with which the results are computed is open to scrutiny. The table below shows the ranking for the top ten institutions (out of 74 surveyed) offering degrees in media studies in 2004. The criteria shown on the table following the overall total teaching score are, from left to right: (1) the results of official government inspections of teaching quality; (2) the amount of money the institution spends on teaching-related facilities; (3) the student-staff ratio of the institution; (4) the proportion of students who find graduate employment within six months of graduating; (5) the amount of 'value' the institution adds to its students. This compares the academic level of the school pupils they admit as first-year undergraduates with how successful the students are on their degree courses. This measure is used to allow for a fairer comparison between less prestigious universities and elite ones, on the assumption that because elite universities accept elite high school pupils it is only natural that their graduates should obtain higher class degrees;

	Institution	Teaching score /100	Teaching Inspection score/6	Spend score /10	Student: staff ratio score/6	Job prospects score/10	Value added score/6	Entry score /10	Inclusive-ness /6
1	Westminster	83	6	4	6	9	5	9	4
2	UCL	81	5	5	n/a	10	4	10	5
3	London Institute	79	4	8	6	9	4	8	4
4	Royal Holloway	77	6	4	6	7	4	10	2
5	City	76	5	3	6	9	4	9	4
6	Sheffield	76	5	4	5	9	5	10	2
7	Goldsmiths Coll.	75	5	4	5	n/a	5	9	4
8	Sussex	74	5	6	6	4	5	10	2
9	Central England	73	5	4	6	6	5	7	5
10	Loughborough	73	6	3	5	8	4	9	2

(6) a measure of how popular the institution is, based on the average exam grades needed to enter; (7) the numbers of mature, ethnic minority and disabled students at the institution. Note that in calculating the overall teaching score these factors are weighted according to a specific formula rather than being simply added.

As this table shows, the top rated institution was Westminster University in central London, which scored highly in each category except spend score. Indeed, significantly, every one of the top five institutions are located in London. Their proximity to the centre of power in Britain and to the headquarters of many broadcasting and print-based media, advertising and PR organizations is something that all these institutions emphasise in their prospectuses. Doubtless this is a key consideration for many applicants who know the importance of work experience and personal contacts for securing employment in their chosen media field after graduation. Given the large number of institutions offering media studies degrees these days it seems reasonable to infer that there is considerable competition among institutions to attract the most able applicants. Such competition will undoubtedly have a strong influence in pushing the institutions to work hard in terms of establishing well-equipped schools, attracting talented staff and coordinating their teaching and research efforts, making effective links with media industries and above all designing attractive and useful courses for students. In addition to the variation between institutions in terms

of geographical location, there is a fundamental division between the various courses depending on the nature of the department or faculty in which they are located. There are basically three types of course. Some courses are based in social science faculties, with the consequence that they tend to focus on the theory and criticism of media and may include no practical work at all. Other courses are based in arts faculties and are focused on creative and artistic work, including everything from ceramics and fashion design to film-making and drama. The third type of course is based in vocationally-oriented technical faculties, usually at less academically-prestigious institutions, where the focus is on the practical training of media professionals (recording engineers, lighting and cameramen, website designers, journalists, advertising executives etc.). Clearly, from the point of view of applicants' career plans this will be another important factor in choosing which course to apply for.

However, one further factor which complicates the above classification is the trend in British universities these days towards offering combined or 'joint' honours degrees. As noted in the introduction, the University and College Admissions Service lists 115 different institutions offering a total of 1000 bachelor degrees involving media studies. But while these figures are indeed an impressive indication of the popularity and acceptance of media studies in the academy, it is worth noting that to some extent the high number of courses is due to the permutation of the various single honours courses on offer, which may be combined as a joint honours degree or as a combined major/minor subject degree. For example, of the 38 bachelor's degree courses offered by University College Chichester, only one is simply called 'Media Studies'. Other courses include joint honours such as 'Media Studies *and* English Studies'; majors in Media Studies combined with a subsidiary subject such as 'Media Studies *with* English Studies'; and then Media Studies itself can be taken as the subsidiary subject in courses such as 'English Studies *with* Media Studies'. Some courses seem to offer rather a mixed bag, as if designed for the terminally indecisive student: 'Archaeology and Heritage Studies with Media and Cultural Studies' and 'Human Biology with Creative Digital Media' (University College Worcester); 'Theology and Religious Studies with Performance and New Media', and 'Media Studies with Sport Development' (University College Chester). At the other extreme, some courses appear to be highly specialized, such as 'Television Production' (Middlesex University); and 'Design for Interactive Media', 'Digital Animation' and 'New Media Journalism' (Thames Valley University). Among the more unusual combinations one may even take a degree in 'Media Studies with Professional Welsh' (University of Glamorgan);

‘Latin and Media Studies’ (University of Wales at Lampeter); and ‘Intelligent Robotics with Media Studies’ (University of Sunderland).

For this study, rather than survey a wide range of courses I have chosen to focus in depth on just one, namely that offered by Westminster University. Located in purpose-built premises, affiliated institutionally to the Faculty of Art and staffed by leading media scholars and industry professionals, the School of Media, Art and Design (known as MAD) is widely regarded as one of the best media studies centres in Europe. The Westminster Media Studies BA, the longest-established such course in the country, is well-known for the emphasis it places on the notion of ‘education through practice’. In the words of their prospectus, MAD aims to produce ‘reflective critical practitioners’. Specifically, they aim to turn out graduates who are ‘equipped not merely to produce work of the highest standard, but also with the rigour and critical approach to understand the impact of their work on audiences, clients and society’.

Students taking the course must choose one of four possible ‘pathways’: Journalism (comprising print, broadcast and on-line journalism), Television Production, Radio Production, or Public Relations. Whichever pathway chosen the course is divided equally between practice and theory. For their media practice, students receive intensive professional training from active practitioners in the field. Each of the pathways is designed to bring students up to a professional standard of expertise for entry-level employment in their chosen field. The media theory component spans all four pathways. Students are helped to develop a critical understanding of media industries, products and audiences, learn how to analyse media texts, and examine the relationships between media, society and technology. The course lasts three years and is taught in modules. Students take eight modules per year, some of which are compulsory and others optional. Theory modules are one semester long and are assessed by essays and projects. Practical modules are taught intensively in half semester blocks. These modules are assessed through a combination of practical exercises, individual and group projects and logs in which students critically reflect on their work. There are no year-end exams. The three years of the course are organized in the following way.

**Year One** In the first semester all students are introduced to some of the major theoretical approaches to the media, and to the structures of the media industries. In the second semester there are specialist introductions to the theories of news media,

broadcasting and public relations, which students select according to their chosen pathway. As for practical work, the TV and Radio pathways for example start with a six-week general introduction to TV and radio practice. Then students study a range of essential production skills in either radio or TV (or both) such as editing, sound recording, camera operating, lighting and scriptwriting.

**Year Two** All students select four choices from a menu of six theory modules. These cover topics such as globalisation, media consumption, digital technology, and news and public opinion. In the practice modules Radio pathway students learn all the essential aspects of live programme making, make a radio feature programme and experiment with radio drama. TV pathway students take modules in single camera documentary making and multicamera studio production. They also have chances to develop skills in scriptwriting and screen graphics.

**Year Three** In the final year, students produce a major project in their chosen pathway, involving both team and individual work. In Radio, this means producing (as part of the university's student radio station) one live radio programme and a radio feature. TV students work on a studio-based television programme plus a short documentary. In Journalism, students produce a magazine, website or broadcast, plus a commissioned feature article, while in Public Relations students design an original PR campaign. Finally, all students must demonstrate the ability to apply the theory and research skills they have acquired by producing an academic dissertation on a media-related subject of their choice.

In addition to undergraduate courses, Westminster also offers MA degrees in Media Management and Hypermedia Studies. Advanced research is conducted at the Communication and Media Research Institute, one of the oldest media research centres in the UK. Current research focuses on telecommunications policy, convergence, the economics of new media, media and democratic life, ethnicity, and the role of the media in the constitution of the public sphere.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have attempted to describe how media studies evolved as a discipline in the UK and offer some information on how it is currently being pursued in British schools and universities. My aim has been to provide an elementary introduction to

this topic principally for the benefit of Japanese educators who are interested in finding out how the British experience might be of assistance in developing media studies education in this country. Although I have tried to cover, albeit in an all too sketchy manner, the whole field of media studies education, focusing in particular on secondary schools and to a lesser extent the undergraduate university level, my own particular interest concerns the role of media studies at the postgraduate level, particularly as it relates to the training of future and in-service media personnel. I began this paper with a quotation from one of the major thinkers in the field of media studies education. As a way of gesturing forwards to the need for future work in this more specific area, I shall end here by quoting from him once again:

Trainee media workers need to grasp the wider significance of the representations which they produce, and to understand the complex ways in which they may be read and used by audiences. Whilst there are some institutions in which the professional training of photographers, journalists and broadcasters is seen as a critical as well as a practical activity, in many it is not. There is a strong case for urging that the training of media personnel include media education as well as media production if only because, as professionals, they may ultimately be employed in institutions which are indifferent to such concerns.

(Masterman 1985: 267)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Masterman is a seminal figure in the history of media studies education in Britain and other English-speaking countries, particularly regarding the teaching of television. Much of the information in this section of the paper is based on his work and I readily acknowledge my debt to him here.
- <sup>2</sup> In this connection he makes the perceptive comment that ‘Without the existence of some kind of *authority structure*, either within the subject content itself or in the critical approaches adopted to it, media education has not easily been able to survive in most British classrooms.’ This is an issue which remains very much alive today in these post-modern times. However, I believe that recent work on the application of critical realist philosophy and the techniques of critical discourse analysis to critical literacy and media discourse may offer the possibility of a way forward (Fairclough 1995; Sayer 2000).
- <sup>3</sup> It is instructive to compare Masterman’s list with the following roughly contemporary list of ‘core concepts’ proposed by David Lusted, editor of *The Media Studies Handbook* (published in 1991 but largely written in 1986): language, narrative, institution, audience and representation and production (of media artifacts by students). Not only this list, but

also the whole collection of essays closely parallels Masterman's book although it gives greater prominence to semiotics and the social production of meaning.

- <sup>4</sup> The name OCR stands for Oxford and Cambridge and Royal Society of Art Examinations. This specification together with a large amount of related material is available from the OCR website at: [www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk) (accessed 19/10/04).
- <sup>5</sup> Note that this ranking does not relate to an institution's research quality. The whole survey is available online at *The Guardian* website, <http://education.guardian.co.uk> (accessed 19/10/04).

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