Apologies for Cross Posting: A Keynote Exchange

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Fig. 1: wordle, Steve Dixon

This edition of *MERJ* publishes articles developed from research presented at two conferences in 2010. The Media Education Summit took place in September, convened by the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice and hosted by Birmingham City University with a contribution from Newman University College. The Media Literacy Conference was held in London in November, convened by the Media Education Association in association with the Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media at the Institute of Education, London University and in partnership with OFCOM. Cary Bazalgette, chair of the MEA, was a plenary panel member at the former and the main organiser of the latter. Keynote presentations came from Marc Prensky at the summit and from David Buckingham and Henry Jenkins at MLC.

   MERJ was present at both conferences, running research seminars to support new researchers and inviting speakers to write up their research for our journal. In addition, we invited the four speakers above to contribute to this editorial in the form of a summary of their work – framed around key issues for media educators in 2011 – and an exchange of

views. What follows is a fascinating set of ideas – four summaries of research undertaken and the key emerging ideas that might inform our practice; followed by a dialogue – a discourse on 'participation' between Henry Jenkins and Cary Bazalgette. Similar themes are taken up in the 'review exchange' between David Gauntlett and readers of his new book which closes this edition and we will take these discussions further in our next edition – a themed issue on 'Media Studies 2.0 – a retrospective'. We hope readers of *MERJ* will find plenty here to challenge, inspire and provoke but – vitally – to inform our work with students in such testing times for the credibility of media education.

Speakers' corner
First up, we asked each participant to sum up their recent research and the ideas they presented at the conference.

David Buckingham:

My contributions to the conference were on two main themes. The first was to do with a report I was asked to lead for the UK government, about 'the impact of the commercial world on children's well being'. I chaired a panel of ten academic researchers, and we produced a substantial report that came out at the end of 2009.

This is a very polarised debate. On the one hand, many campaigners argue very strongly that the commercial world - by which they primarily mean advertising and marketing - is a bad influence on children in all sorts of ways. On the other, the marketers typically insist that they are very responsible, and that they follow the rules. There are so many emotional issues at stake in this debate that it is quite hard to get the participants to talk in a measured way about it.

Our review found that there are a lot of claims that advertising or marketing cause obesity or 'sexualisation' or 'materialistic' attitudes, but not a lot of hard evidence to support them. Of course, the same is true of arguments about positive effects. Obviously, that's not to say that advertising has no effect, but there are often other, more substantial factors at stake.

These kinds of debates often get into a ritualistic 'media blaming' mode. We start with undesirable things - childhood obesity, the sexualisation of children, materialism - and look for a single cause. Blaming the media is much easier than addressing some

of the more complex causes of these kinds of phenomena. Media blaming also tends to encourage governments to opt for symbolic responses that don't really make any difference to the problem.

One of the key aims of the report is to take a broader view of what we mean by 'the commercial world'. Advertising is a very small part of a much bigger phenomenon, although it tends to be the main focus of the debate. The report tried to shift the agenda, looking at advertising but also at the balance between the public and the private in other areas of children's lives. For example, there is a chapter on public service television, which is becoming increasingly commercialised; and another one about the ways in which children's play spaces have also become increasingly commercial spaces.

However, the most problematic issue from the government's point of view was education itself. Commercial companies are now involved in education at all sorts of levels, in ways that are not necessarily visible to many people. This isn't just about marketing to schools, but also about companies being involved in the management of schools and in providing educational services.

The key question for the conference was about the implications of these kinds of debates (along with others about internet safety and about the 'sexualisation' of children). Education is often presented in this context as an alternative to government regulation – and it's one that (for obvious reasons) the marketers tend to prefer. In my view, this should not be an either/or choice: there is a need for regulation in certain areas, as well as for education – each does not make the other unnecessary.

However, this particular framing of the issue tends to result in education being seen as a form of protection – a defensive or prophylactic approach to media education that we have largely moved beyond. So while media educators may see opportunities to make their case here, they need to engage critically with these debates rather than accepting them on their own terms.

The other presentation I did was about another piece of research we're currently doing, for an ESRC-funded project called 'Developing Media Literacy'. My colleagues on this project are Andrew Burn, Becky Parry and Mandy Powell. Although I have done a good deal of classroom-based research over the years, this is the first opportunity I've had to do something big and systematic in this area.

We're looking at what and how kids might learn about media, across the age range. When I've done research in this area before it's mainly been with older students in secondary schools. One of the things that people (like Cary Bazalgette) have found doing work with younger kids is that they are capable of a lot more than we might imagine: many of the things we have tended to see as more suited to fourteen to sixteen year olds can

actually be achieved by much younger children.

For example, video editing is something teachers are now doing with fourteen year olds, and often that would be their first experience of it. But actually much younger children are capable of learning how to put a coherent narrative together in moving images, and are able to use editing tools to do that. They're also capable of reflecting and developing a critical understanding of what they've done. So that would suggest then that we need to have a serious look at how progression happens - how learning happens across the age range.

We're operating here with a sort of spiral curriculum model - taking each of the established Media Studies 'key concepts' and looking at how you would teach them to seven year olds, ten year olds, twelve year olds, and so on. We're working with a couple of specialist media schools in very contrasting locations, and with some of their feeder primary schools.

Our presentation at the conference talked about a large-scale survey we did of the teachers and kids in these schools. Our findings here question the oft-repeated claim that there is an enormous gap between children's media experiences and those of teachers – the 'digital natives versus digital immigrants' argument. We also talked about a few of the teaching activities we've done - a couple of early 'diagnostic' activities designed to get at what the children already know, and then one of the more sustained classroom activities around film narrative.

We're still in the middle of the fieldwork for this project, so it's far too early to have much in the way of definitive findings. For me, some of the most eye-opening things are emerging from the contrast between the two locations: it should not be such a surprise, but media education means something very different for children from different social class backgrounds, with very different kinds of cultural capital, and this is something that hasn't been looked at very much, or very systematically, before.

While our aim is to develop a body of research evidence that will inform and extend current practice in media education, we are also looking at some of the absences and the contradictions. I have always felt that media education suffers from an excess of grandiose rhetoric – stories about how we can change the world, save democracy or empower the powerless. While it can be morale-boosting in the short term, I don't think that kind of rhetoric serves teachers very well: we need to cast a more dispassionate eye on what really happens in the classroom, however awkward or even painful that might feel.

Henry Jenkins:

I have been using the concept of participatory culture for more than twenty years to describe a context where significant numbers of everyday people are actively shaping the culture around them through their active role in the production, circulation, and appraisal of media content. I first used the concept in *Textual Poachers* to contrast the active, generative culture of fans to more traditional models of spectatorship and consumption. Since that time, I've adopted a more expansive understanding of this concept to include a wide array of different sites of cultural production and circulation which are shaping the digital environment. More than sixty percent of American teens have produced media and a high percentage of them have also shared the media they've produced with a much larger public via some online platform. Some of these did so through school. Many others have done so through their informal involvement in a range of popular and folk culture practices outside of school through what Mimi Ito would call 'interest driven networks' or James Paul Gee would called 'affinity spaces. I prefer 'participatory culture', because it connects these new practices to a larger history of efforts by citizens to participate in the creation of their culture. This historical perspective also allows us to challenge the language and practices of web 2.0 which refers to a business strategy for courting and capitalising on all of this grassroots media production. No matter how you cut it, many of us are creating and sharing more media than ever before and this citizen-created (rather than user-created) media is having a much larger impact on our society than ever before.

The communities involved in the practices of participatory culture are often rich sites of informal learning, places where people acquire skills and produce new knowledge through their collaborations with each other. Seymor Papert has described the 'Samba Schools' of Brazil, for example, as sites where meaningful participation and learning occur between veterans and newcomers, outside of the fixed hierarchies of formal education. I see many of the same patterns in online communities around the writing of Harry Potter fan fiction, say. But many kids lack access to these communities and their practices outside of schools, blocked both by the digital divide (limited access to technologies) and the participation gap (limited access to skills). So, it becomes important to integrate some of these practices into school, though the differences in the informal practices of creative communities and the formalised practices of conventional education make doing

so a challenge. We've been doing workshops with teachers to try to work through how to make the classroom a more participatory learning environment, one where students learn from each other as much as they learn from teachers, one which encourages creative experimentation.

At the (Media Literacy) conference, I spoke about the work we've done around reading in a participatory culture, which centrally is designed to get students to reflect on remix – not simply as a contemporary cultural practice but also as something which has shaped many of the works which constitute the literary canon. Our goal is to better understand how authors like Herman Melville or Charles Dickens built on the culture around them and how their works in turn have been taken up by later creative artists and reshaped towards new expressive ends. We teach active reading to give students the vocabulary they need to be able to not only critique and interpret literary works but to use them as raw materials for their own cultural productions. And we encourage each student to take ownership over specific parts of the text – individual units of the writing, specific topics of interest, specific characters – which they get to share with their classmates, creating a space of shared expertise and collective intelligence.

Marc Prensky:

We live in an era of accelerating change. The world, especially the world of young people, is going to evolve much faster and further than almost anyone imagines. Already today, successful new media and technologies can reach over a billion people in less than a year: this will only get faster. In their lifetimes, today's students will see technology's power increase by a factor of one trillion. Tools will increasingly come fast, and disappear fast. Observers are often behind the curve. Today much research and many analyses are out of date before they are posted or published.

A useful way to reconcile the wisdom of the past with the tools of the future is by thinking in terms of verbs and nouns. All our tools, from PowerPoint, to video, to computers, to Wikipedia, to the Internet are 'nouns'. But they are nouns for doing (or learning or perfecting, or practicing) various useful skills, or 'verbs', e.g. communicating effectively, thinking critically, calculating accurately, learning, persuading, etc. In the 21st century these important verbs (i.e. skills) will, for the most part, stay the same as they have always been (communicating, analysing etc remain important), but the nouns (tools) to do

them will change rapidly. We should be helping our students use the best, most up-to-date nouns for each verb they are trying to master.

Some important questions for Media Studies:

- By starting with, and focusing on nouns (eg cinema, internet, multimedia, story) rather than verbs, are the Media Studies people looking at the educational part backwards?

- Is the emphasis so often placed on 'story' outdated? What comes after story, especially in an era of compression and limited time? I do not think we are spending enough time thinking about this, and about what short forms (aphorism, haiku, pictures, short video, +++) are most effective and appropriate for 21st century communication of ideas, thoughts and emotions, as time for the often redundant and over-padded longer forms disappears. Do we still require the fable of The tortoise and the hare, or will Slow and steady wins the race do?

- Are we being overly protective of form (story, physical books, etc.) over content? My sense is that many are holding too tightly to old (and even to not-so-old) artifacts. I believe the printing of new physical books will disappear in one generation or two, as electronics take over.

- I observe that, for the non-intellectual classes (perhaps 80 percent of our people), text, both reading and writing, is already on the way out. Most of these people get their information from video and rarely read or write, on or off the job. What little textual work that they do is being quickly taken over by technologies that turn text to speech, speech to text and can read any text a camera is pointed at (e.g. a road sign) in any language. Already today one does not need to know how to read and write to be literate on a functional level. So while universal literacy may still be our goal, does it have to mean textual literacy? How long will that be true? In many ways video is the 'new text' (as consultant Mark Anderson says). The long-term importance of You Tube and its spinoffs has been greatly underestimated.

- Finally, the most under-appreciated, and least taught and known media literacy is programming, in the larger sense of being able to make our increasingly complex machines do what we want. Today, we have returned in some ways to the middle ages, in that if a person (even an important, well-educated one) wants to write a programme he or she generally has to hire a scribe (i.e. a programmer) to do the job for them. Yet almost everything we do requires some programming. Should universal literacy in programming be in our future? How do we accomplish this? At what levels, and with what tools? As Tyson Gill says: 'Programming is not essentially a technological challenge. It's a communications challenge.' When will students be required to submit

programs as evidence of their progress? How long until we see the first PhD thesis written entirely as a computer program?

Cary Bazalgette:

My main preoccupation for about 25 years has been, firstly, with the proposition of media education as an entitlement for all, and what that entails in terms of policy and advocacy, and, as a corollary, with looking at how and where media education begins – which has led me to an interest in how babies and very young children start to learn about media. Is this going to be one of those conversations where the men talk about technology and the woman talks about babies? I hope not.

I'm an ex-classroom teacher and professionally what I used to call, in self-deprecating tones, an arts bureaucrat. So I have always been struggling with the problem of how to keep all the key elements on the policy table, and to counteract what seems to be the innate tendency of institutions, ideological formations and academic disciplines to barricade themselves inside sectors of knowledge and defend them against all comers. Hence my formulation of the 'three Cs' mantra: the argument that media education must include cultural, critical and creative elements and my interest in ensuring that the Media Literacy Conference should combine teacher training workshops with research presentations, and that it should include primary education professionals and classroom teachers.

I devised the "3Cs" formulation at a meeting of the UK's Task Force on Media Literacy. I was trying to get the task force members to understand that media literacy was more than just 'creativity'. I argued for cultural learning because learners need to broaden their experience of different kinds of cultures, contemporary and historical; for critical learning because learners need to acquire a whole range of critical tools with which to analyse texts, debate them and make judgments about them; and for creative learning because learners need to acquire the disciplines of making meaning with the tools that are to hand, and in the context of their cultural and critical knowledge.

Exchanges: Action and Scale

Next, we asked for some further precision on the key issue of 'participation' and, crucially, whether we are really seeing anything particularly new in the so-called (by some, but nobody in this conversation) 'media 2.0' era, specifically with regard to fan behaviour.

Are these types of participatory cultural practices likely to increase? The word 'fan' does come from 'fanatic', after all, and there has always been a fairly small constituency more involved in their media consumption than others. Aren't we really just seeing the latest generation of this type of thing? Or will it go from being quite niche to more large-scale, and therefore presumably mainstream? Henry responded thus:

HJ: A key argument in *Convergence Culture* is that the category of the fan has shifted from something on the margins of the culture, someone still living in their parents' basement in the stereotypes, to something much more central to the way the culture is now operating. Some of this has to do with a shift in the ways that digital media has made fan practices much more visible and has impacted the shape, scale, and scope of fan participations. It is hard to get accurate measures of what has been and remains, to a degree, a decentralised and underground mode of grassroots production and participation. But all signs are that the number of people participating in fan like activities exploded with the rise of the internet. Anecdotally, I can say that when I first started writing about fandom, very few of my students knew anything about fan fiction. Now, most of my students know about it, a high percentage have read it, and some portion have written it, suggesting it is much more available to them as a cultural option. A second factor, though, has been the fragmentation of the audience which the explosion of media options has represented. Media producers now actively seek out fans as the most loyal and visible segment of their audience and are coming to fans on new terms. And as other institutions – from politics to the church – recognise a value of participation, they are embracing practices which were once the realm of fandom. Keep in mind, though, that the arguments for a more participatory culture do not rest on fans alone, but include a range of different subcultures which also stress the active participation in the culture through the production and sharing of media. As this occurs, fan practices may seem a bit less subversive and a bit more mainstream than before, but there are very real conflicts in the interests of these grassroots participants and those producing and distributing media on a commercial basis.

CB: Although I am very sympathetic to, and excited by, what Henry was presenting at the conference, I find myself asking questions that are mainly generated by the 'critical' strand of learning and which are primarily seeking some 'what next' information. To start with some simple points, when Henry says 'significant numbers of everyday people are actively shaping the culture around them through

their active role in the production, circulation, and appraisal of media content', then I want to know what 'significant numbers' means. How these have been added up, and by whom, and for what purpose? I want to know how 'actively shaping' is defined and what counts as an 'active role' in producing, circulating and appraising, and the extent to which this can be teased out from the 'web 2.0' business model. My understanding has been that there's a smallish core of people to whom it would be appropriate to apply these descriptions, and a huge periphery of relatively superficial engagement. I'm not saying that's not significant as well, but it's different from what Henry seems to be saying. I very much agree about integrating some of these practices into schools.   But I'm concerned about the focus on what seems to me a fairly idyllic scenario of 'creative experimentation', 'collective intelligence' and teachers and kids learning from one another, where there's no imperative to also learn ABOUT the web 2.0 business model - about how the systems they're all using are financed and regulated. Where's the political learning? Where might it come from?

In addition I, along with several other people in the audience with some background or experience in primary schooling and especially in early years, took exception to Henry's formulation that opposes the 'active, generative culture of fans to more traditional models of spectatorship and consumption'. There's another way of seeing this kind of opposition: why not contrast the 'active, generative culture of small children's play' with the 'more adult models of spectatorship and consumption'? This introduces a much more radical argument, I think, about the assumptions we are making about learning, development, pedagogy and the power structures in education. I'd suggest that those young people who really are 'actively shaping the culture around them' are simply re-asserting their right to play and experiment that we all tend to lose when the 'shades of the prison-house' close around us. Who builds the prison-house and whose interests are served by maintaining it?
[Editors' note – at this point, Marc Prensky left the discussion.]

HJ: There are many ways we have of identifying and calculating the amount of active participation in our culture. For my own work, I tend to rely on the various studies done by the Pew Center for the Internet and American Life - especially their recurring estimates of the number of young people who have produced and shared media. Their 2005 report showed that 57 per cent of American teens had produced

media content for the internet; by 2007, those numbers had grown to 64 per cent and they have reportedly continued to grow since. These numbers, of course, differ from one national context to the next, but they suggest a significant shift in levels of production and participation from the pre-digital era. The Pew study may undercount the roles that internet users play not in producing original content but mobilizing existing content - curating, commenting, critiquing, circulating content produced by others (whether commercial, nonprofit, or amateur produced media.) In some ways this is the most banal form of participation, yet my forthcoming book on *Spreadable Media* will argue that shifts on this level are having real impact on the production, distribution, and consumption of culture.

Now, looking at those numbers we can see two things: first, there is a significant number of people who have not yet made the first step towards more active participation in the culture, either because they lack access and resources (the digital divide) or because they lack the skills and sense of empowerment (the participation gap) - roughly 36 per cent based on the 2007 numbers. The research of David Buckingham and Sonia Livingstone, among others, open up a second challenge – that young people may be participating in ways that are less than fully engaging and meaningful for them. This is why it becomes important to have interventions at the level of education.

The Digital Youth Project coming at this issue ethnographically identifies three genres of participation - hanging out, messing around, and geeking out. Mimi Ito estimates that roughly ten per cent of the young people they encountered in their qualitative work were involved in forms of geeking out - that is, participation in interest driven networks, which are the kinds of groups most often cited in research on participatory culture. Joe Kahne found roughly similar numbers in his quantitative work trying to identify involvement with different kinds of online networks. My working hypothesis then is that in the US context, the percentage of young people actively involved in some form of participatory culture is somewhere between ten (too low given the other form of participation through friendship networks) and 64 per cent (too high since it includes many failed or frustrating attempts to participate), depending on what we count as participatory culture, that a significantly larger percentage have had some access to culture produced by grassroots participants, and that there has been a steady and substantive growth in the numbers of people creating and sharing media over the past decade.

To me, this represents a fundamentally different culture than one where media production and circulation is almost entirely professionalised. And in many cases, we are seeing what educational theorists describe as legitimate peripheral participation - that is, they are actively watching how culture gets produced with the recognition that they can engage and join the process when they feel ready. As we make the production of culture more transparent, as people see culture of varying degrees of professional quality, then there is often greater support for people to make bad media, get feedback, and grow as content creators. And this points to a place where the incorporation of some of these activities and as importantly the skills and mental models associated with them through media education can make a real difference.

The distribution of these skills and experiences does follow some predictable class, gender, and race lines. The Pew research finds that these activities are spread more or less evenly along rural, urban, and suburban lines, with slightly more participation among urban students. It finds that boys and girls engage in different kinds of cultural production but they are not that far apart in their ability to participate. Where the skills and experiences are introduced to lower income communities, there seems to be an eagerness to participate and a creative impulse which pulls the media in new directions, which suggests that the divides have much to do with lack of access to both resources and skills.

What I am calling participatory culture has a long history. Many of the groups which are most actively involved in producing and sharing media pre-exist the internet, though all of them have experienced dramatic growths in activity since they have moved online. In the case of the fan communities which have been the primary focus of my research, we can trace a 150 year history of grassroots media production and circulation across a range of new and emerging technologies - printing presses in the 19th century, amateur radio in the early 20th century, photocopiers in the mid-century, and digital media by the end of the century and beyond. These groups have been early adopters of podcasting, MP3s, blogs and journals, and social networking tools, often taking very active roles in passing those skills along to others in their community. Rarely have these groups been seen as professional media makers, rather they have existed on the fringes of the culture, responding to media created by others, participating in folk and subcultural practices, but now their work has gained much greater visibility than before and

circulates much further beyond the borders of their own communities.

For that reason, I do not think it appropriate to collapse these forms of cultural production into the business models associated with web 2.0. Web 2.0 companies have generated platforms which are often shared sites of cultural distribution across a range of these communities and they have helped to create tools which are more easily used by casual participants. They have at the same time exploited the creative energies of groups which have long sought ways to expand the production and circulation of culture. So, there are strong links to be drawn between technological, business, and cultural developments here, but only if we maintain some clarity about the history of each.

And I certainly think preserving the distinction is key if we are to critically and politically engage with the corporate strategies which are shaping who gets to participate and how. In our white paper, we identify three key obstacles which media education needs to address, having to do with the capacity to participate (the participation gap), with the development of ethical frameworks for thinking about participation (the ethics challenge), and with the development of a critical vocabulary for understanding the terms of our participation (the transparency problem). Our curricular materials, to varying degrees, try to address each of these three challenges.

Are these participatory culture practices tied to particular class experiences? There are several ways we might address that question. First, one might argue that these skills represent a new digital variation on the old 'hidden curriculum.' Just as in the 1960s kids from homes where there were opera records and encyclopedias, trips to museums and dinner table conversations about books and politics, performed better in school than kids who lacked access to these resources and experiences, kids today who have a broad range of participatory experiences seem to perform better in schools than those who didn't. We can argue that the schools respect some of the skills emerging from these practices because they fit the school habitus, but we also have to acknowledge that those with these skills are going to enjoy expanded opportunities when compared to those being left behind.

Second, whether we use my participatory culture or James Paul Gee's 'affinity spaces' or a range of other models of how such communities work, the evidence

suggests that they create many different opportunities for participation and many forms of contributions which members can make. The Wikipedia community talks about systemic bias to talk about how the current content the project generate reflects those groups currently participating in its production: so the entry on Isaac Asimov is longer than the entry on Woodrow Wilson and both dwarf the entry on Caesar Chavez, to use just some obvious markers of different groups. As we broaden who has access to the skills and resources, we can expect both new kinds of communities with their own norms and cultures and new forms of participation in the existing communities depending on what young people bring to the table from their previous cultural lives.

Of course, these communities are not always idylically supportive for their members. You Tube, for example, has notoriously harsh commentators who are hostile to diversity and thus can exhibit a chilling impact on people who want to enter these spaces for the first time. That said, Patricia Lange's work on video bloggers show that the community has compensatory mechanisms for encouraging and sustaining participation. The fan fiction world has historically been more welcoming, with a solid system in place for providing mentorship for new contributors. So, some of the politics around participatory culture is a politics of inclusion. It is vital to broaden who gets to engage in these practices which are having an impact on young people's chances of success in school and the quality of their economic, political, and creative lives. At the same time, we need to be agnostic about whether our current accounts of the skills associated with these practices are complete when we are seeing continuing waves of diversification within participatory culture as more and more groups are asserting their presence in the online world. Whatever we see as the current level of participation, I would see expanding, broadening, diversifying participation as an important goal - a key struggle for social justice.

To respond to Cary's other concerns, my own work has grown out of a larger trajectory of investigating fan cultures, but fandom is only one potential point of entry into understanding participatory culture. James Paul Gee, say, comes at this from a focus on gaming cultures, Sasha Costanza-Chocks from the study of activism, others from the study of citizen journalism or from youth subcultures.

When I talked about fandom offering us a different picture from dominant 'models', I meant models as in ways we conceptualize spectatorship, and not

necessarily the actual practices of spectatorship, which I am convinced are more active, critical, and creative than most people have imagined. In many ways, the rise of digital media is making this grassroots creativity more visible than before, though in making it more visible, it has increased the connections between once isolated practices. Cary wonders whether these experiences might be better linked to childhood. This is part of what we had in mind when we made play one of the first on our list of new media literacy skills and asserted its continued importance into adulthood. We share your concern that schools often strip away the capacity to play and with it we lose a prime motivation for and process of learning. And we are finding that play is perhaps the skill most eagerly embraced by the teachers we work with and many of them see it as fundamental to the other skills we've identified. I have always like my former MIT colleague Mitch Resnick's concept of 'Lifelong Kindergarten'.

That said, I would express two concerns:

- First, there can be a tendency to over-romanticize the playful child as a noble savage who is not yet tainted by adult civilization, and it can be hard to prevent such assumptions from creeping into our work. It's a powerful myth and one which has an affective force we may want to tap, but we also need to maintain some scepticism.

- Second, I do not want to reduce all adult and youth forms of cultural participation to a continuation of childhood play. Fans are often described negatively as suffering from ''arrested development' because they continue to engage with play and fantasy, the negative version of the romantic notion of childhood and adulthood. And many of them would insist that they have acquired and developed skills at cultural production, not to mention the capacity for deeper reflection through their work, which far surpass what one could do in early childhood. This argues for the importance of learning and acquiring skills as we grow older, even if those skills get layered onto foundation from our earliest childhood. This also suggests the importance of early interventions to protect and strengthen the childhood imagination and link it in meaningful ways to participatory culture.

[Editors' note – at this point, David Buckingham left the discussion.]

CB: While I acknowledge that the challenge for all educators who accept a learner-centred model is to judge when, how and with what to intervene and also of course how to assess progress I am wondering whether Henry is primarily using the term 'play' as a provocation rather than as a fully-considered analysis of learning processes, and in doing so, is necessarily invoking conventional, post-romantic views of 'play' that link it to fantasy and imagination, and oppose it to work and to the 'harder' learning that is involved in the acquisition of more sophisticated knowledge. This is an ideological construct, deeply bound up with nineteenth century views of childhood (and, by extension, the childlike savage and the idealised 'child-wife'). We don[1]t have to see it that way. I prefer to see it as, essentially, self-directed learning. It involves practicing and refining skills, testing hypotheses, rehearsing scenarios, devising metaphors and constructing narratives: not usually as solitary activities, but in the company of others (such as, initially, parents and older siblings) who are likely to encourage reflection and the deliberate acquisition of new skills (eg eating with a spoon, becoming toilet-trained, thinking of oneself as 'a big girl now' or as 'a brave boy who doesn't cry').

Therefore I think it IS important to hold on to the concept of play-as-learning (note that I am NOT saying 'play that helps you to learn') in considering what educators ought to be doing in response to the participatory culture that Henry describes. We are confronted with a huge amount of learning and activity by children and young people that has taken place without adult intervention. I see lots of parallels here with my own arguments about the interpretative skills that young children have acquired from moving image media before they learn to read, or even to speak, and how this ought to substantially change the ways we approach early learning in school. So for me, it's not enough to describe and analyse what kids are doing with media important though that is, of course. My focus tends to be on how education policymakers can be made to see that kids' non-school media learning is an opportunity rather than a threat.

HJ: The working definitions and discussions of play in the white paper are remarkably similar to the wording you use here, Cary. Here's part of what we wrote:

"Play, as psychologists and anthropologists have long recognized, is key in shaping children's relationship to their bodies, tools, communities, surroundings and knowledge. Most of children's earliest learning comes through playing with the

materials at hand. Through play, children try on roles, experiment with culturally central processes, manipulate core resources, and explore their immediate environments. As they grow older, play can motivate other forms of learning.... Some have expressed scepticism that schools should or could teach young people how to play. This resistance reflects the confusion between play as a source of fun and play as a form of engagement. Play in the context argued here is a mode of active engagement, one that encourages experimentation and risk-taking, one that views the process of solving a problem as important as finding the answer, one that offers clearly defined goals and roles that encourage strong identifications and emotional investments."

We try very hard to separate this more social/cognitive understanding of play from more romantic concepts, though in practice, I am certain that those concepts, which are so pervasive in our culture, spill over and shape how teachers and students understand these concepts and what gives them such emotional resonance with the educators we work with. I think the more we both talk, we are on the same page here, just warily sniffing out each other because of the many ways our culture uses and abuses some of these concepts.

CB: I certainly think we're generally very much on the same ground! It's interesting though to tease out slight differences of emphasis. I think you're more concerned with achieving a richer and more precise account of what's going on in learners' creative and participatory activities, while I keep turning towards a critique of what teachers get ordered to do in classrooms, or think they are compelled to do. It's very encouraging that you and others are focusing on play and are providing a more differentiated account of the activities that currently get lumped together in popular discourse as "play". To my mind it's the use of the term 'play' that can be the problem, precisely because it contains these multiple meanings. For you, I think the focus is more on older learners and how to describe and analyse what they are doing in ways that include relating it back to what children do; for me, the focus is on how we can describe what babies and very young children do in ways that can be seen to link up with later behaviours that don't count as 'play'. Some fascinating examples of this emerged in a recent film education research project I was involved in, where teachers of seven to ten year olds encountered the kinds of pedagogy employed by teachers of three to five year olds and began a real re-think of their practice as they came to recognise that a lot of what the younger children were

talking about and doing demonstrated that they were already engaging with concepts that weren't 'supposed' to be taught until they were much older. They were shocked to realise how rarely they actually listened to what children had to say, and had underestimated what kinds of ideas they might be able to handle in the context of learning about film.

"Going Forward"

To finish, we asked Henry and Cary to offer some key themes for the *MERJ* readership – who we see as a broad church of teachers and researchers with a shared passion for media education pedagogy (the social practice of media literacy - as opposed to abstracted content, competences and skills) – what are the most important issues for media teachers in 2011 and what kinds of research should we be doing?

CB: I hope the MERJ readership includes people who teach with or research media education with people younger than sixteen but my impression is that it doesn't. However, pedagogy ought not to be that different whatever the age group, even though, sadly, it often is. Essentially there are and always have been two types of pedagogy: learner-centred and teacher-centred. Learners usually need a bit of both. In recent years - in the UK at least - school teaching has become markedly more teacher-centred. Media teaching should require a higher level of learner-centred activity given that learners are likely to have acquired quite a lot of knowledge of the subject outside the classroom and this at least needs to be assessed.

None of the following is essentially new, even if some of the technologies used might be (and you can teach about media without massive technological investment).

I **emphasise** to teachers that they should use open questions, be prepared to listen to what children have to say, to ask follow-up or subsidiary questions that encourage further reflection, and to plan their further teaching in ways that take account of the critical capabilities and interests that the children present. Most teachers in primary and mainstream secondary schools find this pretty difficult, as it goes against their training.

I also **encourage** them to get children to work creatively with extremely basic tools and modest ambitions because these constraints should encourage their creativity,

and in class management and budgetary terms are more likely to allow for repeated opportunities to undertake creative work: it is only in the second and third attempts at creative activity that children really start to progress in their creative thinking. I encourage them to focus on editing (whatever the medium).

 I **believe** that teachers have a responsibility to introduce learners to texts (in any medium) that they may have not encountered before, as well as offering them ways of considering in a new light the types of text they already know. I also believe that teachers ought to encourage learners to move to and fro between different media (eg social media and novels, poetry and short films) in order to explore their commonalities and specificities. In doing so they should be developing awareness of and capabilities with critical concepts common to all media: narrative, genre, representation, audience, modality.

In classroom management terms teachers need to ensure that learners get to work in different size groups and individually, and can get individual attention from a teacher from time to time, because all these contexts favour different kinds of learning. Assessment should include self-assessment by the learner.

All this is pretty standard stuff in progressive education and has been for as long as formal education has existed (say 3000 years?). Unfortunately much of it has been demonised in the UK in the last fifteen to twenty years so a whole generation of teachers find it all very new - though I'm glad to say a lot of them find it liberating.

As educators, we need less focus on what people are doing with media (interesting though that is, lots of other people are doing it) and more focus on questions like "did anybody learn anything? and if so, what?" and in particular, in learning progression. Obviously this doesn't mean completely deserting the descriptive work but it does mean looking at what kids learn and how (both self-directed and in the classroom). I've always liked the idea of a research project that gets new parents to keep a diary of their one to four year olds' media encounters and their (apparent?) media learning. I wish I'd been able to keep track of my grandson (now aged nine), who was one of the last of the analogue generations. My twin grandchildren, now aged one, are growing up in a completely digital media environment, and I've lost the opportunity to compare the two experiences. Has anyone done this?

To relate this to the previous discussion: I think these assumptions underlie much of my exchanges with Henry, and I imagine that we'd probably agree that media education does make a rethink of pedagogy more urgent. I used to resist this argument but now I don't.

HJ: American educator Rene Hobbes tells us that media literacy should foster scepticism and not cynicism. What we need to avoid in discussing participatory culture is the aura of inevitability which can lead to complacency on the one hand and cynicism on the other. I believe that there are robust communities of interest on the web which are great models for how informal learning works, but if we do not learn from those models and apply them through formal education, there will be great inequalities in who has access to the technology and the skills needed to participate in the rapidly evolving media landscape. This is precisely why my ideas about participatory culture have led me towards being an advocate for media literacy.

To be clear, for me, participatory culture is not something we have already accomplished. It is a relative term, suggesting that our culture is more participatory than it used to be, less participatory that it should be. For me, participatory culture is in Pierre Levy's sense 'an achievable utopia', a set of ideals against which we measure our progress, a goal we are fighting towards. My mentor John Fiske told us in the 1980s that new media represent new opportunities to struggle, that they shift the terms of conflict, may allow us ways to think past conceptual impacts, but they are no substitute for struggle itself. And so for me, the push towards a more participatory culture is a flag that we should rally behind because it identifies what we are fighting for and not just what we are fighting against.

Why does participatory culture matter? Well, why does democracy matter? Why does diversity matter? Why does economic opportunity matter? In each case, these goals which have long motivated work in education seem bound up with expanding the communication capacities (technical, social, culture) of everyday people. I see participatory culture as the first step towards progress on any of these fronts. It is not that computers will set us free, which is a naïve technological determinist idea, but that we will forge new relationships, grasp new power, and transform the cultural resources to which we have access to if we are able to expand who has access to the means of production and distribution of information, culture, and knowledge.

Skeptics have much to contribute by identifying those challenges we need to work together to overcome. But we do not fight battles we do not believe we can win and so the cynic does little to change the society. As academics, we are bad at accepting partial victories, but at the moment, participatory culture is a partial victory in so far as a significant number of people (although we don't agree on how to count them) have made a transition in their communicative power over the last decade through hard won battles to broaden participation.

What does this mean for classroom teachers? Project New Media Literacies has been doing extensive work with professional development over the past four years. We've built a range of resources which model how an approach based on participatory culture might change how we teach basic school projects, hence our work on reading in a participatory culture. We've developed an online community to support teachers who want to think creatively about these challenges, including resources which allow them to learn more about each of the skills we associate with participatory culture. And we are building a platform which will allow teachers to share and remix 'challenges', which allow students to work with all kinds of media materials as they learn to navigate these new forms of culture and knowledge production and as they begin to put the skills into practice.

We are promoting what we call "participatory learning," which consists for us in:

- A learning ecosystem which integrates what happens in school into what happens elsewhere in the students lives, which especially incorporates their online lives into the educational process.
- Co-created expertise, where each participant in the classroom takes ownership over the process of knowledge production and is respected for what they have to contribute to the group's collective learning.
- The use of authentic learning materials, which allow students to engage with and critique elements of their real world environment, including chunks of media they are already consuming outside the school hours.
- A greater focus on motivation and engagement in the classroom, much as a good game has clearly articulated goals and roles which push the player to perform at the outer limits of their capacity.
- The encouragement of play and creativity as part of the learning process, so that critique leads to other forms of expressive activity rather than being an end unto itself.

These are the principles which shaped our curriculum on Learning in a Participatory Culture. This is not a one-size-fits-all solution. We know that some schools have a vast array of resources, though many schools have locked down the channels through which young people are engaging with participatory culture out of fear and ignorance. We know that other schools have almost no resources though there are ways that the skills can still be taught abstracted from the specific tools and platforms with which they are most actively associated today. One of my students taught a new media literacy class last summer in Senegal in a school where the power generator had broken and she had no access to electricity for most of the term. She did so because the new media literacies are not simply technical skills; they are habits of mind, ways of processing information, which are technology agnostic and can be applied under a range of circumstances.

We actively encourage teachers to develop low tech activities which put more emphasis on the social and cultural dimensions of participatory culture. At the end of the day, you need to suspend your disbelief long enough to identify the battle we need to fight and the means through which we can make progress in that struggle.

Editors' Closing Remarks

A challenging end to a rich dialogue between two key participants in our community of practice. We hope that this discussion, along with the earlier detail provided by Prensky and Buckingham respectively, will be not only provide intellectual interest but also some more direct political recharging for the 'interesting times' and 'tough decisions' ahead. Responding to the challenge that we have been 'looking at the educational part backwards' (Prensky) might well require a rethink of pedagogy (Bazalgette) towards a greater focus on motivation and engagement in the classroom (Jenkins). Equally, research evidence is making a compelling case for paying more attention to the determining presence of class and cultural capital in how media literacy is distributed and practiced (Buckingham).

We want *MERJ* to offer a number of connections – between primary, secondary, further and higher media educators, between teaching and research and between what might sometimes look like lofty 'ivory tower' ideas from big name academics, policy-making and what we do on a Monday morning in kindergarten, with year 9, in prison education or in a postgraduate seminar. The keynotes struck by this exchange ought to resonate across these spaces.

Richard Berger and Julian McDougall

May 2011

Editorial Postscript

We are on a learning curve as journal editors, trying to balance support for our contributors with the rigour of peer review, which can be tricky when the 'mission' is to bridge the gaps and facilitate a dialogue between hitherto discrete sectors. We were excited by the prospect of this email discussion, drawing together in a 'big conversation' some people who we think are important contributors to, and champions for, our community of practice, and we are grateful to all of the participants who gave freely of their time and expertise. We are certainly very pleased with the outcomes, as we hope our readers will be. But it was a tough job, and if you found the transcription a little disjointed, this was due to the substantial edit we were obliged to perform to take account of retrospective changes that were asked for and the withdrawal of two contributors at the second stage of the discussion. We have indicated in the text where these departures happened, but we are not able to publish the exchanges (in the second phase) that led to these exits, so we ask you to appreciate that what you have read is not a 'director's cut'. We hadn't expected any of this and so we share it firstly to explain the strange structure of this published version and secondly in the spirit of learning from our mistakes. If others intend to replicate some of the affordances of 'participatory culture' with strong characters who don't see eye-to-eye, then some protocols and a clear agenda are essential criteria for the task in hand. In the end, though, we all want the same thing and the 'project' (of developing a research-informed community to talk about media education pedagogy) is more important than individuals - and we include ourselves. So on we go.

Further Reading (recent work by contributors)

Bazalgette, C, Harland, J and James, C, 2008. *Lifeblood of Democracy? Learning about Broadcast News* (with Harland, J. and James, C. London: OFCOM; available at http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/media-literacy/medlitpub/lifeblood/

Bazalgette, C (ed), 2009. *Teaching Media in Primary Schools*. London: Sage.

Buckingham, D, 2010. 'Do we really need media education 2.0? Teaching media in the age of participatory culture' in Drotner, K and Schroder, K (eds) *Digital Content Creation*. New York: Peter Lang.

Buckingham, D, 2009. 'The future of media literacy in the digital age: challenges for policy and practice' in *Euromeduc: Media Literacy in Europe*; available at www.euromeduc.eu/IMG/pdf/Euromeduc_ENG.pdf;

Jenkins, H, 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York UP.

Prensky, M, 2010. *Teaching Digital Natives: Partnering for Real Learning*. CA: Corwin Press.

In addition, some of the participants' latest ideas can be found in their contribution to the *Media Education Manifesto and CEMP Conversations*, both hosted at www.cemp.ac.uk