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Media Literacy— Concepts, Research and Regulatory Issues

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Executive summary

What is media literacy?

While there is almost universal agreement that media literacy is a good thing, there is no universal agreement on what it is. At its most general, media literacy has been defined as the ability to access, understand and create media content. However, this general definition has been contested in various ways. Running through alternative definitions and approaches to media literacy are different assumptions about the nature and role of media and what media users are capable of. In turn, these assumptions come from different disciplinary and theoretical frameworks, that operate in different cultural contexts, and that have changed with media developments.

In Part 1 of this report we consider the diversity and the dissension surrounding the idea of media literacy. In reviewing this diversity, it became apparent that media literacy is inevitably offered as a solution to a problem. It is how that problem is conceived that determines what media literacy is taken to be. We identified two major problem clusters.

The first cluster describes the problem in terms of the mass media having undesirable effects on audiences: the media has a powerful influence on audiences; it threatens civilization as we know it; or it manipulates audiences. Given this view, it has been argued that we need to promote media literacy as the means for developing the skills people need to protect themselves from the effects of the media. This form of promotion has been labelled as protectionist.

Within this first broad problem cluster, two models of media literacy have been developed, with school children specifically in mind. The ‘inoculation’ model proposes that students need to be trained in powers of discrimination and critical awareness so that they are ‘inoculated’, as it were, against the harmful effects of the mass media. The later ‘demystification’ model laid out an array of conceptual tools that students could use to expose hidden ideologies of media content and demystify the potential effects of media messages.

The second problem cluster has arisen only in this decade in response to the newer developments in digital media and to the accumulation of evidence that does not support the phenomenon of direct media effects. Given the newness, the dust hasn’t quite settled into clear-cut models of media literacy yet. We could, however, discern three important themes regarding new media literacies. There has been a shift from talking about literacy to that of multi-literacies in order to highlight not only that media literacy relies on a number of different modalities or channels (e.g. verbal, visual) but also draws on many different types of skills. There is far greater recognition that media are an integral part of the texture of our

everyday lives and thus, that media literacy needs to be seen as a socially situated practice. More recent work has also placed emphasis on the creative and collaborative dimensions of digital media and thus the need to consider that media consumers are also media creators. With these types of new recognitions, media literacy is now being promoted as the means to provide preparatory experiences. In other words, it is argued that media literacy should prepare students for working competently with a range of media in different contexts of everyday life. The thrust here is to prepare young people to make informed media-related decisions on their own behalf, rather than rely solely on external protection.

There is no doubt that the idea of media literacy has changed over time and with media developments, and will continue to do so. However, the overriding goal may not. Educators and researchers alike are, in the main, concerned with media literacy because they take it as important to being an engaged participant in society or, more broadly speaking, a competent citizen. The debates over literacy, then, are in fact debates about the manner and purpose of public participation.

What does the research tell us?

In Part 2 of this report we consider the research evidence as it relates to more traditional broadcast media data for broadcast and newer digital media. We note two important things about this research: there is a dearth of relevant Australian research on media literacy and there is a limited empirical base to draw on for the newer digital media.

ACCESS AND BASIC USE

The bulk of the research has been concerned with issues of media access and basic use, sometimes referred to as functional literacy. From the most recent Australian surveys we can conclude that there is universal access to broadcast media and almost universal access to digital media in the form of computer and mobile phones. This is similar to the pattern in the UK, Canada and the US.

Other Australian data indicate that digital access will rapidly become universal. Currently 92 per cent of children between 5 and 14 years of age use computers, with 90 per cent of 13 year olds now accessing the internet (ABS, 2006a). However, these percentages can only increase, with children starting to use computer and mobile phones at younger and younger ages and using the internet more at school. In all, Australian children seem to have a high degree of functional literacy when it comes to digital media.

The international evidence shows that children in other English-speaking countries have the same high degree of functional literacy as Australian children. In general, children have the skills and competencies to gain access to media content and to use the different technologies and associated software. The level of functional literacy in adults, however, is not as high as for children. As might be expected, adult functional digital literacy decreases with age.

Data from the Office of Communication's (Ofcom) media literacy audit is also considered. Again this shows that almost all adults and children have access to broadcast media and the majority to digital media. Over 65s have significantly lower levels of media literacy than the rest of the population and children are mainly savvy users of the new technology. The vast majority of parents had rules about broadcast and digital media use and around half of those families with internet access had some kind of access block in place.

DOING THINGS WITH THE MEDIA

The value of considering more complex uses of the media became apparent in Australia around the end of the 1980s. It was at this point that the mass of research data on media effects was being weighed and no unequivocal connection could be found between violence on television and behaviour in real life. In other words, the media effects theory was not substantiated. Censorship was no answer and education was the more appropriate response.

Around the same time, Australian researchers were taking a different tack and asking what it is that people do with the media, compared with what does the media do to them. In asking this question, evidence was accumulated to show that both children and adults are active users of the broadcast media, rather than passive recipients. Amongst other things, broadcast media are used to negotiate cultural and personal identities, and offer cultural and ethical choices for consideration. Moreover, the more recent phenomenon of reality TV now provides the opportunity for audiences to contribute to the creation of content—and they actively do so. This appreciation of the active audience often accompanies an interest in forms of critical literacy.

Recent research on the uses of digital media in Australia also shows substantial competencies in specific user groups. Older teenagers use mobile technology to maintain active social presences in the real and the virtual world. Activities on particular web sites (e.g. Flickr) show a rapid uptake of the new technology by a broad base of amateur users who have acquired skills outside of formal teaching. These amateurs are all contributing to ‘social media’—a convergence of social networks, online communities and consumer-created creative content.

International research matches the broad pattern of complex uses of media described above for Australia. In particular, the research on children shows that there is ample evidence that children and young people develop media literacy relatively ‘spontaneously’, and this applies to broadcast and digital media. Adult users of broadcast media also have, comparatively speaking, high levels of media literacy, although less so for digital media and especially in terms of critical literacy.

OUTSTANDING ISSUES

We identified three key issues from the research literature that are relevant to a consideration of media literacy—digital divide, the new participatory culture and cybersafety—and that point to the need for future research.

The concept of a digital divide took on importance because of the economic and social handicap that is seen to follow from not having the latest technology. When it comes to media literacy, it would seem apparent that such literacy cannot develop in the absence of the relevant media. However, while there is evidence that such a divide may have existed in Australia and elsewhere, that gap is closing. Moreover, further research suggests that a more complex view is warranted. Rather than a simple dichotomy of those who own or have access to media and those who do not, there is a need to consider differences along a dimension and/or in different dimensions.

The idea of the new participatory culture also puts a different slant on the ‘divide’ issue. Colin Stewart, an Australian textbook and curriculum writer in the area of media literacy, believes that the most significant movement in the conception of media literacy in the past twenty years has been towards a greater focus on participation in media creation. Evidence

suggests that well over half of American teenagers are part of this participatory, creative culture and by extrapolation we argue that just as many Australian teenagers are likely to be part of this culture as well. There is a growing body of scholarship pointing to significant benefits arising from being in this new culture as well as growing concerns about a new divide, or participation gap. However, the developments in this area are new and we have no substantive evidence to back the claims.

The third issue of concern relates to the potential risks, especially to children, of using computers with internet access. There has been a great deal of concern expressed about such risks as viewing pornographic material, meeting on-line stalkers or predators, giving away personal information, and cyberbullying. These risks and how to deal with them are well documented on the NetAlert web site. The research evidence also shows that the majority of children in Australia have had experiences on line that had risk potential. However, most of these children acted sensibly in response to the experience. Overseas data also shows that while risky or negative experiences do occur with internet use, there is also a high awareness of personal safety issues and a high degree of media literacy demonstrated in handling/avoiding the issues. The research evidence to date suggests there is no need for a great deal of alarm about cybersafety issues related to children using the internet. However, further evidence is warranted as is the need to consider further promotion of media education in this regard.

The promotion of media literacy

In Part 3 of this report we identify various contemporary practices promoting media literacy. Overall, media literacy is taught within the school curriculum of the UK, Canada, Australia and the US. It was well beyond the scope of this paper to review the various forms and guises this takes across countries and between states. Media literacy is also promoted across developed countries in the world and at all levels of government.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

UNESCO issued a declaration on media education in 1982. Since then it has continued to promote media education with activities geared towards fostering the preparation of children and youth for using media critically. This, for UNESCO, is a pre-requisite of citizenship. Their promotional activities include major conferences, development of global strategies, promoting media partnerships with schools and NGOs, training media teachers and data clearinghouses.

The European Commission promotes media education with workshops and the financial sponsoring of media education projects. It also sponsors a website designed to develop an independent and responsible attitude in children and adolescents when using the internet.

The European Charter for Media Literacy promotes media literacy amongst government and NGO groups as well as individuals concerned with media literacy. It does this by offering a website for discussion and debate.

OTHER COUNTRIES

In the UK, the promotion of media literacy is a chartered duty of the Office of Communications (Ofcom). In the four years since it was established it has commissioned major reviews of the international literature on media literacy and undertaking a nationwide media literacy audit. It has also established a portal on its website that links and signposts

media literacy organisations and activities and it has investigated how viewers would prefer to be told about challenging media content. Media literacy is also promoted by non-profit organisations, such as MediaEd, that offer resource support for teachers and students and by industry organisations, such as the advertisers' and broadcasters' support of Media Smart.

Canada has been actively involved in the promotion of media literacy for more than twenty years. It has a major Association for Media Literacy that produces resources for schools and runs a clearinghouse web site. It also has a major non-profit organisation, Media Awareness Network, which produces programs, works with organisations across Canada and undertakes research. In addition, Concerned Children's Advertisers run a media literacy programme.

In the USA, the two major promotional organisations are the Alliance for a Media Literate America, which has industry involvement, and the Action Coalition for Media Education, which eschews industry involvement and encourages activism. The Centre for Media Literacy offers teaching resources and the New Media Literacies project specifically offers resources for digital media. Various industry bodies also promote media literacy, such as the National Telemedia Council and The Newspaper Association of America Foundation.

AUSTRALIA

In Australia, media literacy is actively promoted within the primary and secondary curriculum in all states. In some states it is dealt with under the guise of English and, in others, it is offered within an Arts framework. In the later years of high school in some states, Media Studies is offered as a stand-alone option. However, the primary focus still appears to be on broadcast media, rather the newer digital media.

There are also non-profit organisations especially concerned with promoting children's media literacy in Australia. These include the Australian Teachers of Media association, Young Media Australia and the Australian Children's Television Foundation. At the federal level in Australia, the only body explicitly concerned with promoting media literacy is NetAlert—the Internet Safety Advisory Board.¹

Implications and recommendations

In Part 4 of this report, we consider the implications of our media literacy review for ACMA. First, we note the aptness of the title of ACMA Chairman Chris Chapman's opening address to the 2006 Communications Policy Forum, 'Between two worlds'. From the literature and promotional activities described in this report there clearly are two worlds with different conceptions of media users in each world and different understandings of what it means to be literate. So, at this moment, we are between worlds conceptually, as well as technically. However, the very convergent nature of the second technological world will bring about the demise of the first. For this reason, we recommend that the greatest attention needs to be placed on the challenges arising from the convergent world of digital media.

In considering the implications for ACMA as a regulator, we observe that among European regulators, at least, the move is decisively away from censorship as a form of protection and towards the provision of consumer advice and/or advocacy of media literacy. The latter turn in direction is decidedly in favour of the preparatory stance we identified in Part 1.

¹ The education functions previously performed by NetAlert were incorporated into the ACMA in 2007.

Because of the nature of the new evolving digital media they are actually more difficult to control and regulatory efforts to restrict access will pose significant challenges. We also note that the evolution in our understanding of how people, especially young people, interact with the media call for a reconsideration of the extent, and nature, of protection needed.

In promoting media literacy for the convergent, digital world, we believe that the catch-all definition of media literacy—to be able to access, understand and create—captures little of what really matters. That idea of media literacy is defined so generally that it loses its import, especially in relation to such media literacy activities as redressing a participation gap.

Instead of using an overly general definition to guide activity, we recommend that following three key questions may provide a more useful guide to promoting digital literacy from a preparatory stance:

1. How can we help to prepare people to participate in the new convergent culture?
2. How can we help them see how the media are shaping their understandings?
3. How can we help them make informed value judgements about their digital practices?

When it comes to fostering digital literacy in the convergent culture the challenges are many and exciting. It is only an emergent culture, but one that is changing rapidly. To stay abreast we recommend that ACMA actively monitor developments and cultivate an evidence-base derived from actual media experiences.

Introduction

The broad purpose of this report is to inform ACMA of existing research, policy and educational activity that promotes and supports media literacy in Australia and internationally. On the surface, this appears to be a straightforward goal. The execution, however, proved otherwise.

The idea and promotion of media literacy crosses disciplines and conceptual frameworks. The idea also changes with the media and the historical/political context. And to further complicate matters, the term media literacy has been used quite haphazardly. In short, media literacy is not a notion to be approached lightly or easily.

As the literature review progressed and the complexities unfolded—more like layers of entangled net than smooth silk—it became apparent that certain limits had to be set.

First, we set limits on the time frame. Arguments about media literacy extend over almost 80 years, but for the purposes of this review primary focus was placed on the last 10 years of research and promotional activities.

Second, we put priority on identifying Australian material. We had two reasons for this emphasis on Australian material. We knew there were cultural differences in the treatment of media literacy and our concern is with material relevant for Australian society. We also knew there were two major reviews of the international literature (Livingstone, van Couvering & Thumin, 2005; Buckingham, 2005) undertaken on behalf of the UK Office of Communication (Ofcom) and we had no need to duplicate that effort. In each of the Parts in this report, we keep the Australian material separate.

Third, we separated out two major strands in the academic literature: a) academic work arguing for the importance and role of media literacy and b) research work that contributes to an evidence-base about media literacy. These two major strands are captured in Parts 1 and 2 of this report.

Given the limits, we make no claims that the material used in this report is from an exhaustive review of the literature. Instead, the material is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the key issues, highlighting the dissensions and new directions of concern. The detailed literature search parameters are given in Appendix 1 of this report.

In undertaking the review and in writing this report, we have also found it necessary to keep issues to do with ‘old’ and ‘new’ media separate. ‘Old’ media we refer to as the electronic broadcast media of television and radio. We do not cover issues to do with print. ‘New’ media we refer to as digital media and include all forms of computer-based applications and mobile technologies—those in convergence.

The distinction between old and new media is made for practical and conceptual reasons. Practically, media research has tended to focus on one or the other. For example, research on audience effects has only been conducted with broadcast audiences. We have no understanding of what audience effects there may be with new media. As such, it is needful for purposes of clarity to keep research findings for old and new media separate.

There are also important conceptual reasons for keeping new and old media separate. First, as we noted on the previous page, ideas about media literacy changed with the media because of the different things that could be done with the old and new media. Second, as we also noted earlier, there have been changes in conceptualisations of the media over time. These changes have occurred as a result of the growing body of research and more sophisticated theoretical developments in media and communication studies. As such, much of the early concepts about, and research on, media are linked with old media, whereas the later developments are more directly linked with the newer media.

The distinction between old (broadcast) and new (digital) media is maintained throughout the report and is particularly pertinent when it comes to a consideration of the implications for ACMA in Part 4. However, at the same time, we would like to acknowledge that the distinction is a useful fiction. While there are major differences, there is no radical break between old and new media.

1. What is the problem?

Framing the issue

At the *AoIR 7.0: Internet convergences* conference last year, an Australian media researcher, Jean Burgess (2006, p.1), observed ‘that literacy is among the most contested, multivalent and possibly over-used concept in our repertoire’. We can only concur.

In our review of the literature we found many different definitions of media literacy along with ready acknowledgment that there was much dissension in the ranks. In the US, Bob McCannon, a leader of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project described it thus: ‘whenever media literacy educators get together, they always circle the wagons—and shoot in!’ (Hobbs, 1998, p.16). That was a decade ago, and they are still shooting in.

At the time McCannon made his remarks, the *Journal of Communication* published a special edition devoted to media literacy. The articles in that edition represented the state of play in the media literacy field in the US and in the UK. Christ & Potter (1998) provided an overview of the articles in that edition and in their overview they capture the gamut of the diversity and dissension. They begin their review by noting that both ‘literacy’ and ‘media’ are contested terms.

Christ & Potter (1998) suggest that in contesting the term ‘media’, there is the question of which medium should be privileged. The range has included the ability to use oral and written language, still and moving images, television, computers, or multimedia and is reflected in arguments regarding the varying importance of visual literacy, computer literacy, information literacy and textual literacy. There is also the question of precisely what we mean by ‘media’. In the same volume of the special journal issue, Meyrowitz (1998) distinguishes three different meanings of the term media—media as conduits, as languages and as environments. He then shows how each of those different definitions leads to a different view of media literacy.

In contesting the term ‘literacy’, questions have been raised about how broadly it should be conceptualised. Should it be seen as a skill, as an accumulation of knowledge, or as a perspective on the world? Depending on where the line is drawn, media literacy has been treated as a public policy issue, a critical cultural issue, a set of pedagogical tools for teachers, McLuhanesque speculation, or a topic of scholarly inquiry from a physiological, cognitive or anthropological tradition (Christ & Potter, 1998).

Amidst this profusion of diversity, there have been attempts to reach a consensus. In the US in 1992, a national conference of media scholars agreed that media literacy was the ability ‘to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms’ (Aufderheide, 1993, p.57). This definition continues to be used with minor modification. For example, the

US Centre for Media Literacy defines media literacy as the ability ‘to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms’ (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p.17). This definition is also similar to the one adopted by the UK Office of Communications (Ofcom, n.d.): ‘the ability to access, understand, and create communications in a variety of contexts’.

As Livingstone (2007) notes, the definition adopted by Ofcom and the similar consensual ones from the US are ‘useful’—useful in that they offer a relatively neutral, skills-based approach. They are also useful in that they offer a broad, ‘catch-all’ approach (Stewart, 2007). However, it is interesting to observe that such a catch-all definition has proved most useful to public authorities or to the plenary sessions of conferences (see the 1992 conference above), but not to scholars in the field.

Despite the attempt to establish a consensual definition and despite the apparent usefulness of that general, skills-based approach, it has not been adopted by scholars in either the field of communication and media studies or the pedagogical field. Instead, the notion of media literacy continues to be hotly contested. The reasons for this will unfold in the ensuing discussion but suffice to say here, the definition is too general and it neglects a number of social and institutional contextual issues.

Our review of the more recent literature, over the past decade, shows the same diversity in definitions of media literacy as that described by Christ & Potter in 1998, albeit with some new developments to accommodate the newer media (see Appendix 1 for the scope of the literature review). Running through the different definitions and approaches are different assumptions about the nature and role of media and what media users are capable of. In turn, these assumptions are generated from different disciplinary and theoretical frameworks that operate in different cultural contexts and that have changed over time with changing media developments. But at the heart of the differences is a challenge over what we take culture and communication to be and, by implication, our humanity.

We shall return to the ‘heart’ of the issue later in this Part. For now, it is of some use in understanding the latest round of definitional challenges and claims if we recognise that media literacy is inevitably offered as a solution to a problem. And it is how that problem is conceived that makes a difference to what media literacy is taken to be.

Below we consider different ways in which the problem—to which media literacy is the solution—has been conceived. In portraying the differences, we acknowledge that we have simplified the issues and the positions to some extent. We have done this in order to offer an overview of the differences still extant today.

A consideration of the different ways in which the problem has been presented also has practical consequences. How the problem is presented has important implications for what is taught or promoted, and what is in turn expected to be accomplished (Christ & Potter, 1998). The relationship between problem presentation and promotion will be discussed in Part 3. For now, we need to set up the differences.

Protecting ... from the mass media

Whenever new media are introduced into society, there are always members of that society who express alarm about what may be lost or changed. This fear is, to use a cliché, as old as time itself. Consider, for example, the fear of Socrates and Plato that writing would interfere with memory (Schwartz, 2005a). Given that memory was very much an oral-based one at the time, this fear was not unreasonable. But as we’ve seen over the centuries, we have learnt to

develop memory in other ways—both internally in our minds and externally in hard storage devices.

In the twentieth century, it was the advent of the broadcast media—radio and television—that brought about another round of alarm about the impact of mass media. At the time, television, in particular, was conceptualised as having a direct and powerful effect on people. People were believed to constitute a passive audience who, with no control of their own, were inculcated with the media messages. In the mass communication field of the day, the relation between audience and medium was conceived metaphorically as if the medium was a ‘hypodermic needle’ directly ‘injecting’ meaning and, by inference, manipulating the audience.

While most media scholars no longer advocate such a blatant ‘hypodermic’ model of the mass media, the idea of media directly affecting audiences has not left the popular psyche. Nor has that idea left the pedagogical field, as we shall see below.

THE ‘INOCULATION’ MODEL

In more contemporary media literacy literature, this hypodermic needle metaphor has morphed into what is now called an ‘inoculation’ model of media literacy (Masterman, 1980; Buckingham, 1998; Schwarz, 2005b). At the heart of this model is the need to train students in discrimination and critical awareness so that they are ‘inoculated’, as it were, against the harmful effects of the mass media.

The start of this ‘inoculation’ model can be traced back to the arguments of the literary critic, Leavis, in the 1930s. Leavis was a champion of English literature as the primary source of moral enlightenment and training in good taste. Like many other intellectuals of the time in Britain and Europe, Leavis considered the mass media (radio broadcasting and films) to be a pernicious threat to civilization (Turnbull, 2006). As such, the primary concern was to teach against the popular media so as to ‘inoculate’ students against the penetration of low or popular culture. The aim was to develop critical students that would cleave to the forms of high culture (Buckingham, 1998).

Buckingham (1998) observes that direct links can be drawn between the Leavisite tradition and those of the early stages of the British cultural studies movement up to the 1960s. In both approaches, the argument was that students needed to develop a critical cultural awareness to manage or cope with both high and/or popular culture (Buckingham, 1998). The only major difference between the Leavisite tradition and that of the early cultural studies movement was the favouring of popular culture by the latter and high culture by the former.

In the US, concern about the mass media centred more on the potential harmful impact of the mass media on behaviour, especially the behaviour of children. This concern led to an extensive research programme into the effects of mass media that continued over decades. The most extensive and notable was the US Surgeon’s General Inquiry into the effects of television violence on children. By the early 1970s, the fear of these impacts heightened the call for the introduction of media literacy into the US curricula. The response was the introduction of critical viewing skills, with the main objective being to protect children from TV ‘junk’ (Schwarz, 2005a).

The belief that mass media can harm and that, therefore, we need media literacy to protect is waning in popularity. This can be directly attributable to the accumulating research evidence

that does not support direct media effects. Despite decades of research into mass media effects, especially the effects of television violence on children, there is ‘no unequivocal connection between levels or types of violent content, audiences’ consumption of television, and measurable increases in societal violence has been established’ (Cunningham, 1992, p.139). The collected essays by Barker & Petley (2001) provide an extensive account of why the seemingly obvious—media effects—cannot be substantiated by research.

Despite the lack of evidence the belief in direct and powerful media effects still lingers, especially in the US. For example, Cortés (2005) conceives of the media as having the power to present information, organise ideas, disseminate values, create and reinforce expectations and provide behavioural models. As such, he argues that media literacy must be an essential part of schooling to, at a minimum, enhance critical awareness. Similarly, Kubey & Hobbs (2000) advocate media literacy approaches to health education in order to counteract exposure to harmful health messages. Hobbs, in particular, sees media literacy as the process for empowering audiences to control the effects of the media on themselves (Hobbs, 1998). Further, Heins & Cho (2003) argue that media literacy education is important as a form of protection and a form far superior to internet filters, indecency laws or other regulatory efforts to censor the media.

DEMYSTIFICATION

Newer theoretical developments in Media Studies and Cultural Studies provide an alternative set of conceptual tools to those used in the ‘inoculation’ approach. These newer theoretical developments include semiotics, structuralism and Marxist theories of ideology; all approaches that lend themselves to political analyses. Using critical skills derived from these approaches, it is expected that students can expose the hidden ideologies of media texts, demystify the potential effects of mass media message, and thereby free themselves from media effects (Buckingham, 1998).

Underlying this demystification approach was the belief that it would help ‘recipients of mass communication become active, free participants in the process rather than static, passive, and subservient, to the images and values communicated’ (Brown, 1998, p.47). In other words, rather than inoculating against the media, the aim of demystification was to expose its politics instead and thereby free—as Brown would have it—the audience from media influence.

The writings of Frechette (2002, 2005) illustrate this ‘demystification’ position. She argues for the need for critically engaged citizens, where critical is ‘the process of keeping a watchful eye on the mass media by using learned media literacy skills to detect bias, biased representations, inaccurate statements and falsities, and/or the value messages of a text’ (2002, p.24). Similarly, Alvermann & Hagood, (2000) emphasise the pedagogical implications of helping students experience the pleasures of popular culture, while simultaneously uncovering the codes and practices that work to silence or disempower them as readers or viewers. It is the emphasis on critical media literacy or critical pedagogy that signifies the demystification stance (e.g. Arthur, 2001; Lewis & Jhally, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2005).

The Association for Media Literacy (n.d.) in Canada advocates a critical media literacy stance. The association defines media literacy on their website as ‘education that aims to increase student’s understanding and enjoyment of how the media work, how they produce meaning, how they are organised and how they construct reality’.

Preparing for ... the new media

In the late 1990s there emerged ‘a tenuous consensus that literacy is an historically provisional construct, [and] a dynamic and situated social practice’ (Luke, 2001, p.90). In other words, many of the media literacy scholars agreed that what counted as media literacy was a function of the historical circumstances and arose out of the social practices of the time.

But, just as this tenuous consensus was being reached, the new information technologies shook the foundations of the consensus. Indeed, as Alvermann & Hagood (2000) observe, ‘[l]iteracy is on the verge of reinventing itself’ (p.193). Given the recognition that media literacy is an historically provisional construct, this ‘reinventing’ should not be surprising.

It is the more obvious interactivity and the continuing convergence of the new digital technologies that seriously challenges the ‘tenuous consensus’ and the dust hasn’t settled yet—nor is it likely to, given the rate of development in digital technologies. In Australia, a major research symposium was held to explore these new challenges—*Digital Literacy & Creative Innovation in a Knowledge Economy*, Brisbane, March 2007. From that symposium it was clear that the participants were reinventing media literacy into digital literacy. However, it was also clear that there was uncertainty about how this idea of digital literacy may unfold. For example, Goggin (2007) is convinced that we do not have a strong understanding yet of what is at stake with the idea of digital literacy. Similarly, Gibson (2007) observed that in the light of the new digital technologies, literacy could be seen as a concept in crisis. Although, given our brief overview here of the concept, when has it not been in crisis?

In the more recent writings and debates, we can discern three themes regarding new media literacy. These themes are not mutually exclusive but act to highlight a set of concerns that were not apparent, or as strong, in earlier debates about media literacy for the broadcast media.

MULTI-SKILLED, MULTI-MODAL

One change in the literacy debate is the shift from talking about media literacy to that of multi-literacies. The introduction of this notion has been linked to the New London Group (1997) who used the idea of multi-literacies to extend the argument for literacy beyond just that of reading and writing. They argued that the ‘multiplicity of communications channels’ along with greater cultural and linguistic diversity calls for a much broader view of literacy than traditionally portrayed. The Australian Children’s Television Foundation (2005) advocates the use of this multi-literacies approach to teaching in the national curriculum.

Many others have taken up this term multi-literacies and adopted it in various ways. Amongst recent Australian arguments, Unsworth (2002) points to the multi-modality of the new media that call for multi-literacies. By this, Unsworth is calling attention to the different communication channels or modes, including the verbal and the visual, which are involved in being media literate. Bright, Schirato & Yell (2000) have included media literacy, computer literacy, visual literacy and information literacy amongst their pantheon of multi-literacies. In contrast, Fehring (2005)—also in Australia—uses the term multi-literacies to cover different types of conceptual skills: critical, analytical and reflective. And Luke, (2001) points to the need to join computer literacy education with media literacy education.

Out of all of these various calls for multi-literacies, Hobbs & Frost (2003) identify two major strands. One strand is based on technologies as tools—e.g. computer literacy and technology literacy. The second strand is concerned with what Hobbs and Frost call ‘representation’—e.g. information literacy, media literacy and visual literacy.

There is no resolved position on this multi-literate proposition, but it does serve to highlight the importance of recognising the multi-faceted nature of our mediated environment. It also serves to highlight not only that media literacy relies on a number of different modalities, or channels, but also draws on different types of skills.

CREATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE

The increasing interactivity of the newer computer-based media not only means that different, or multi, literacies are required, but the ways in which we understand media and audiences also need to shift (Luke, 2001). With broadcast media it has been relatively easy to construe audiences as consumers, and passive ones at that, and media organisations as producers, and powerful ones at that. With the newer, interactive media in particular, it is much harder to sustain this picture. As Green (2000), amongst others, has noted, internet audiences are very different from broadcast audiences: in particular, internet audiences can create as they consume.

The blurring of the distinction between message production and consumption within the context of computer-based media is the latest challenge in the media literacy debate. It also heralds the growth of a new type of user.

Brun (2007a & b) and Brun, Cobcroft, Smith, & Towers (2007) refer to this new user as Generation C (c for content). Generation C are a significant new social force that favour communal creation and communal use of knowledge. The work of Generation C has resulted in such things as Web 2.0 tools, blog networks and Wikipedia. With convergence, one can only expect this activity and the numbers of people involved to grow.

A significant characteristic of Generation C is the extent to which its members occupy a hybrid, consumer-and-producer position. They both consume internet content and can be active producers of that content. These ‘producers’ call on a different set of literacies than previously described or proposed. For Brun (e.g. Brun 2007a & b), to be a good producer requires creative, collaborative, critical and communicative capacities. In a similar vein, Burgess (2006), a colleague of Brun’s at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), describes the new literacies as requiring continuous participation in content creation, networked individualism, interactive accretive media use, pro-active discovery, and tweaking and controlling. These competencies are strikingly different from those discussed in educational circles or for broadcast media.

SOCIALLY SITUATED PRACTICES

While media have always been part of our lives, the newer media and especially the digital technologies, make it more transparently and extensively so. In the 21st century, media of all forms are an integral part of the texture of our daily lives and of the society in which we live. The new forms of media force us, in a sense, to attend far more to their socially situated nature.

Hartley (2002) argues that literacy is not, nor ever has been, merely an individual attribute or skill to be acquired. Literacy is immersed in a social world in which it can be used as a means of control or as a means of social emancipation. Livingstone (2007) builds on this

idea to argue that a skills-based notion of literacy is not sufficient: it is necessary to account for ‘the knowledge arrangements of society’ (p.11). In other words, she argues that any notion of media literacy must take into account the social and institutional uses as well the individual, and this is what catch-all, skills-based definitions, like Ofcom’s, do not do.

Buckingham (2003) also argues that literacy cannot be considered separately from the social and institutional structures in which it is situated. For Buckingham this social approach dispenses with a singular notion of literacy and replaces it with a plurality of literacies. This social approach also dispenses with a strictly cognitive approach that takes literacy to be the acquisition of a set of cognitive abilities. Instead, he argues, that acquiring literacy makes possible particular forms of social action. It enables people to do things in their work, in their private lives, and in civil society. In these different contexts, people have different media literacies and these will be displayed in different ways.

In recognising the socially situated nature of literacy practices, Buckingham (2003) argues that we need to move beyond the idea of protection as the role for media literacy. Instead we need to be considering how we can best *prepare* people for developing a range of socially situated competent practices.

This newer, preparatory approach to media literacy does not aim to shield people, especially young people, from the influence of the media but to enable them to make informed decisions on their own behalf. In broad terms, a preparatory stance aims to develop young people’s understanding of, and participation in, the media culture that surrounds them (Bazalgette, 1989). Evidence to be discussed in Part 2, especially that concerned with the active audience, supports this newer preparatory turn over the older protectionist one.

Literacy for? ... participation

In the brief overview above, we have highlighted the key issues of the media literacy debate and demonstrated the nature of the dissension. We have also shown that the idea of media literacy has shifted over time. In part, this is because the nature of the media keeps on shifting and most of the definitions are linked directly to a particular conception. The accumulating research evidence has also played a part. Given this, we can only expect that whatever contemporary understanding of media literacy we espouse, it will change and continue to do so as media continue to evolve and research evidence continues to accumulate.

Lumby (2007) suggests that as an alternative, or perhaps as a way to refresh the debates, we could start by asking what literacy is for, rather than what it is. This approach at least allows us to step around the direct link to specific media and ask, regardless of media, what do we want people to be literate for?

When the media literacy literature is reconsidered with Lumby’s question in mind, the most common answer would be that we want people to be literate in order to facilitate and/or ensure their participation in society. Educators and researchers alike are, in the main, concerned with media literacy because they take it as important to being an engaged participant in society or, more broadly speaking, a competent citizen.

Unfortunately, the above observation does not necessarily simplify things; rather it takes us into another set of debates. As Livingstone (2004) observes, ‘Debates over literacy are, in short, debates about the manner and purposes of public participation in society’ (p.20). We don’t wish to enter such a debate fully here. However, it is important to recognise that any

arguments regarding the importance of media literacy, or any form of literacy, to participating in society need to deal with what it actually means do so. What manner of participation is sufficient? What manner of participation is best? In other words, we need to consider the nature of the participatory process as part of our consideration of the role of media literacy.

It is the more recent discussions arising from considerations of digital technologies that are the most relevant to contemporary issues relating to literacy, the process of participation and citizenship. The new media are, in fact, challenging what it means to be human through their increasing importance in our information and communication infrastructure and, as such, as crucial components in our social life, both public and private (Silverstone, 2004). We can no longer believe that we can untangle our ‘interaction’ with media from our interaction with people in our everyday social life: so much of that latter interaction is done through and with media.

It is the open and collaborative nature of activities in/on the new media that serve to both emphasise and reinforce the link with public participation in society. Burgess, Foth & Klaebe (2006) argue that the new digital media open up opportunities for the greater visibility and community-building potential of what they call ‘cultural citizenship’. According to this notion of cultural citizenship, ‘bone fide citizenship is practiced as much through everyday life, leisure, critical consumption and popular entertainment as it is through debate and engagement with capital ‘P’ politics’ (Burgess, et al., 2006, p.1). These arguments of Burgess et al. (2006) are in keeping with other contemporary arguments about the enabling role the new digital technologies can play in furthering a participatory public culture (e.g. Deuze, 2006).

There is a problem, however, with linking notions of cultural citizenship or participatory public culture directly with the new digital technologies. In the first instance, it suggests that the new technologies are the essential platform for a participatory public culture and this is simply not the case. We have, and have had, participatory public cultures well before the new technologies. These technologies simply open new venues and means for that participation.

Second, linking citizenship directly with the new digital technologies, obscures the role of the ‘old’ broadcast media in public participatory processes. The critical consumer of broadcast media is as able to draw on that critical consumption to publicly participate in society, as is the creative consumer able to draw on the digital media. Moreover, the critical consumer using broadcast media can, at the same time, be the creative participant with the digital.

In sum

Whichever way we turn in a consideration of what media literacy can mean, we enter a debate. There is debate surrounding what we take media to be; what we take to be the problem with media; what we take literacy to be and how it relates to media. These debates are inevitable given the importance of the issue. But, more significantly, they will not, and should not, go away.

In the end, debates about media literacy are, as we said earlier in this Part, debates about what it means to be human and to live in a social world. If we adopt the protectionist argument for media literacy then we are assuming some fragility in humans and that the less

‘fragile’ have to set up the means to protect the more ‘fragile’. If, on the other hand, we take humans to be active agents in their social worlds, then the idea of preparing them for that world and encouraging participation is more tenable.

The important point about these types of debates is that they cannot be resolved empirically because they reflect, to no small degree, a range of different and competing moral perspectives. By ‘moral’ here, we simply mean a framework of understanding that contains a set of values about what is good and right. Silverstone (2004) recognises the importance of this moral core to the media literacy debates and has argued that it is neither avoidable nor undesirable. In other words, there is nothing wrong with the idea of media literacy being subject to continual debate. It is right that we do continually challenge such ideas in an ever-changing world.

On the other hand, a perpetually open-ended stance is not necessarily productive; nor is it useful in guiding policy or practice. In this first part we have aimed to capture the issues and to indicate what is at stake. In Part 2, we shall consider what the research evidence has to offer and, in Part 4, how this evidence may enlighten the debate and inform promotional activities.

2. What does the evidence tell us?

Framing the evidence

Any research on media literacy will reflect a particular definitional stance. For example, if the researcher's view of media literacy is that it is a set of cognitive skills that can be used to protect media recipients, then it will be cognitive skills that will be investigated.

Alternatively, if the researcher's view of media literacy is that it is a socially situated practice, then the social practices and their contexts will be investigated.

This link between conceptual framework and research evidence provides a challenge to our bi-, or multi-, partisan approach here. This is especially so because a significant amount of the research has been conducted using the catch-all definition involving the ability to access, understand and create (e.g. Ofcom, n.d.). We did not want to fall into the 'catch-all' trap, yet it is hard to avoid. In our discussion in this part we have manoeuvred through this trap in two ways.

First, we provide a broad-sweep review of the main research findings. To do this we have divided the research evidence into data about access and basic use and then into data about the range of things people are able to do with the media (including understanding and creating). In this first part of Part 2, we make distinctions between broadcast and digital media and between Australian and international data. The latter international comparisons rely heavily on the recent media literacy reviews undertaken on behalf of Ofcom by Buckingham (2005) and Livingstone et al. (2005).

Second, we conduct an in-depth consideration of three key issues in the contemporary media literacy literature. Again, we consider both Australian and overseas evidence, placing primary focus on Australian data wherever possible.

In both the broad-sweep and in-depth considerations two things need noting about the research. First, there is dearth of relevant Australian research on media literacy. Second, while the newer digital media are capturing the research imagination, there is a limited empirical base to draw on. On the other hand, there is a substantial empirical base for the broadcast media, but little contemporary work. In other words, much of the research on broadcast media will be dated.

It should also be noted that recent research commissioned by ACMA, but not yet available at the time of writing, will add further to our knowledge base. This research project, *Media and Communications in Australian Families 2007*, aims to understand the long-term psychological effect of the media on children, families and society. It will include an

evidence-based investigation of children and young people's consumption of media and of how families with children negotiate electronic media and communications in everyday life.²

Access and basic use

AUSTRALIAN DATA

Broadcast media

The most recent data on the use of the broadcast media is contained in ACMA's Communication Report for 2005–06. The key data from that report are:

- almost everyone (94 per cent) watches commercial television and close to two-thirds of the Australian population view for two or more hours per day
- almost everyone (95 per cent) listens to radio—national, community and/or commercial

In addition, an ABS (2006a) survey from the same year provides specific data for children between 5 and 14 years of age:

- 97 per cent of children had watched TV, videos or DVDs in the two weeks prior to the survey
- there was no difference between boys' and girls' viewing rates
- children spent an average of 20 hours viewing over the two week period and this was greater than for any other leisure activity (skateboarding or rollerblading, bike riding, playing electronic games, art and craft, reading for pleasure, homework or other study).

Broadcast media are clearly a part of almost everyone's life and are used as a significant leisure activity by younger people in Australia.

Digital media

The most recent statistical data on access and use of information technology is from the ABS (2006b). Their household use of information technology survey shows:

- 70 per cent of Australian households had access to a home computer
- 60 per cent had internet access and almost half of those households were connected to broadband
- home is the most common site for internet use and the greatest use was classified as personal or private
- almost half of those without home internet access had 'no use' or 'no interest' in the internet

The ABS's Cultural and Leisure Activities survey (2006a) also showed that, of the 2.7m children aged 5 to 14 years:

- 92 per cent used a computer
- they used the computer primarily for school or educational activities

² *Media and Communications in Australian Families 2007* was published by ACMA on 17 December 2007. See http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_310893.

- the percentage of children using the computer or the internet had not changed from 2003 to 2006

The age of the child is an important factor in the way in which computers are used (ABS, 2006a):

- accessing the internet increases with age, ranging from 19 per cent of 5 year olds to 90 per cent for 13 year olds
- for 5–8 year olds, playing games was the most common activity but this decreased with age
- rates of computer use for education and internet-based activities were substantially higher for 12–14 year olds than 5–8 year olds
- 12–14 year olds used the computer for emailing or messaging far more than the younger groups
- frequency of use of the internet at home increases with age of child (ABS 2006b)

Like the broadcast media, digital media are also a part of almost everyone's life in Australia and the more so if they are children. It is also interesting to note the early age at which some children are using a computer. The report by Netratings (2005) also suggests that children are increasingly accessing the internet at an earlier age and increasingly using mobile telephones. This increasing use at increasingly earlier ages is to be expected as digital technologies continue to permeate our everyday life.

Mobile phone usage in Australia is also very high, with 79 per cent of people aged 14 and over owning or using a mobile phone. Ownership is highest amongst the 24–34 year olds but even 74 per cent of 14–17 year olds use or own a mobile phone. Seventy-three per cent of all users use their phone for regular calls and text messaging, and over a quarter for taking photos and playing games (ACMA, 2006). The report by Netratings (2005) suggests that these percentages will only increase over time, as children are increasingly using mobile telephones at an earlier age.

The Parliament of Victoria (2006) report into multimedia found that most Victorian students are living in 'technology-rich households'. Children have access to multiple television sets, computers, interactive game consoles, mobile phones, and MP3 players. Together these technologies have changed the social and educational landscape within which young people live. These young people are now frequently referred to as the Net Generation (e.g. Parliament of Victoria, 2006; Huijser, 2005) or as the iGeneration (e.g. Hardey, 2007).

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Broadcast

In the Ofcom commissioned reviews of the media literacy of children and young people (Buckingham, 2005) and adults (Livingstone et al., 2005) it was noted that access to terrestrial television and analogue radio in the UK was just about universal. Much the same can be said for Australia. Livingstone et al. (2005) also reviewed evidence that suggests ownership, access to, and use of broadcast media by adults is a complex mix of gender, generation and class.

Further basic data on UK broadcast usage can be found in Ofcom's audit reports on adult (2006a) and child (2006b) media literacy discussed collectively at the end of this section on *International comparisons*.

Digital

The ABS (2006b) has compared 2004–05 Australian data with equivalent data from the OECD to show that the percentage of households with access to a home computer ranged from 89 per cent (Iceland) to 18 per cent (Mexico), with Australia's level of 70 per cent being in the upper end of the range. This was the same as the UK and greater than the US (61.8 per cent).

In his review for Ofcom, Buckingham (2005) cites evidence from the UK that shows that young people with access to the internet from home are more likely to be daily users, while those with school access only are more likely to be weekly users. Furthermore, the more frequently the internet is accessed, the greater the number of sites visited and the greater the degree of confidence in their computer skills.

Buckingham (2005) also cites evidence showing that children and young people in the UK have extensive access to mobile phones. Although most of the research he cites has focused on teenagers, Buckingham (2005) describes one study that reports children as young as two and a half are aware of text messaging and know when a text has arrived on a mobile phone. Overall, the research shows that young people have a high degree of 'functional' literacy when it comes to mobile phones: they are fluent at SMSing, retrieving messages, playing games, checking call history, downloading ring tones and using their address book.

Buckingham (2005) concludes in his Ofcom review that children and young people already possess quite high levels of functional literacy. They have the skills and competencies needed to gain access to media content, using the various available technologies and associated software. He also makes an important point that we shall return to later: children develop media literacy even in the absence of explicit attempts to encourage and promote it. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that children are much more autonomous and critical media users than they are conventionally assumed to be (Buckingham, 2001, 2003). Work to be described below and in the next section under Australian research further supports this claim.

A comprehensive study of digital media use by school children in Canada paints a similar picture to Buckingham's. The findings are summarised as follows: 'Overall, the story is very positive. The majority of young Canadians have integrated the Net into mainstream activities which strengthen their connections to their real world communities and enrich their social interactions with their peers' (Media Awareness Network, 2005, p.1).

However, the level of functional media literacy in adults is not as high as that for children. In Livingstone et al. Ofcom's (2005) review of the international research literature on adult media literacy, they cite data showing that only 38 per cent of 16–65 year olds were able to use standard features of word and spreadsheet programmes and even less (9 per cent) could use search engines and data bases for information search and assessment.

Ofcom's audit

As part of their remit to promote media literacy, Ofcom undertook two major audits: one of adult media literacy (2006a) and one of child media literacy (2006b).

For each of the different media—television, radio, computer/internet, mobile phone—adult survey participants were asked about ownership, patterns of use, capacity to use certain features (e.g. blocking spam, recording a programme), intentions regarding new developments (e.g. digital TV or broadband), what concerns they may have, how the media are funded and about regulatory issues. The highlights of Ofcom’s (2006a) audit of adult literacy are:

- high levels of knowledge of the television ‘watershed’ (before which programs unsuitable for children cannot be shown) and how channels are funded
- although television is still mainly used for its ‘traditional’ viewing function, some 30 per cent of those with digital television say they interacted with it
- major reasons for internet access are to get information and to email
- levels of concern about internet content are higher than for other platforms, especially about entering personal details
- interest and competence among internet users is generally high
- mobiles are an ubiquitous medium for 16–24 year olds
- age is significant in media literacy, with over 65s having significantly lower levels

For each of the different media—television, radio, computer/internet, mobile phone—parents were asked about rules of use and then children in the 8–11 and 12–15 year age groups were asked about their media usage, and understanding of family rules. Children were also asked about any ‘nasty’ experiences with the internet, how they understood fact and fiction on TV, and whether they had used any of the media creatively. Some highlights of Ofcom’s (2006a) audit of child media literacy are:

- nearly three quarters of all children 8–15 have a TV in their bedroom, with this being more common for boys than girls and 19 per cent of 8–11s and 28 per cent of 12–15s mostly watch television alone
- 78 per cent of children aged 12–15 believe news programmes are true or almost always true and 76 per cent say the same thing about nature programmes—most of the balance don’t watch that type of programme at all
- 73 per cent of parents have rules about their child’s TV video and DVD viewing although fewer 12–15 year olds acknowledge those rules than 8–11 year olds
- 48 per cent of 8–11 year olds and 65 per cent of 12–15 year olds use the internet at home
- 91 per cent of parents of 8–11 year olds and 78 per cent of parents of 12–15 year olds have internet rules, mainly relating to content
- around half of all parents with internet access had some kind of access block in place
- across all children who use the internet, 16 per cent have come across anything nasty or of concern to them
- 65 per cent of children aged 8–15 have a mobile phone

Ofcom come to no conclusions about levels of media literacy or any issues of concern in their audit. Overall, the data indicate that older adults in general have lower media literacy levels and that children are mainly savvy users of the new technology. In addition, the vast

majority of homes have rules in place for the use of the different media, especially in order to manage content.

It is also of interest to note that Ofcom translated their definition of media literacy into quantifiable elements that could be measured in a survey. The end effect was a much greater emphasis on access, than on understanding and creativity. Understanding was limited to asking about how content is created, funded and regulated and creativity to certain specified media creative acts (setting up a website, downloading ring tones) engaged in by children only. Overall, the Ofcom audit tells us a lot about access issues but far less about what people actually do with the media: what understandings do they take from their media interaction, how do they use these understandings, and the media, in their everyday lives, and how could they use them better?

Doing things with the media

AUSTRALIAN

Broadcast media

As we discussed in Part 1, the advent of broadcast media in the twentieth century brought with it a degree of alarm about the potential harmful effects of the media on an audience which was usually imagined to be passive. The major focus of that concern was on television violence and children. And, as we noted early in Part 1, the outcome of a decades long research tradition into media effects was that no unequivocal evidence could be found.

In Australia, the concern about the potential impact of television violence on children culminated in a major inquiry by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal in 1990. A major research project was commissioned and over 1100 submissions considered. Cunningham (1992) summarises the major recommendations of this inquiry as follows:

- the answer to the problem of violence on television is not censorship
- there is a need for a nationwide education programme
- the Australian Education Council should consider a major upgrading of TV studies programs.

The ABT recommendations are clearly of direct import for the current considerations regarding media literacy. But they also need to be considered in the light of research undertaken just prior to and after the inquiry.

While the largely negative, causal effects tradition of research in the US has had some influence on Australian research, other critical approaches have been more influential. Two books about children and television published in 1986 illustrate what has come to be the dominant approach within Australian audience research.

Patricia Palmer's (1986), *The Lively Audience*, drew on a uses and gratification approach to show how audiences used media. Bob Hodges and David Tripp's, *Children and Television: A Semiotic Approach*, considered how children decode television 'creating and using meanings in their own lives, for their own purposes' (1986, p.3). In both cases, the authors were keen to point out that their empirical research clearly demonstrated that children were not a passive audience. On the contrary, the children were active indeed, making television a part of their play in many creative and imaginative ways.

It is this idea, that audiences do things with the media, which became incorporated into the next round of audience research in Australia. A significant branch of research developed on this understanding of doing has been concerned with the role of the broadcast media in migrant communities. For example, Kolar-Panov's (1997) research showed the important role that videos from 'home' played in cultural maintenance within communities of former Yugoslavians in Western Australia. Similarly, Cunningham & Sinclair (2001) showed the role of different media in the negotiation of cultural identity within a number of diasporic audience groups in Australia.

The above studies continue to advance the understanding that far from being passive and unreflective users of the broadcast media, audiences do a great many things with the media in order to achieve a great variety of ends. As Hartley (1999) argues in his book, *Uses of Television*, television does not teach audiences what to think or tell them how to behave; rather television opens up realms of possible identities, political positions, and cultural and ethical choices with which the audience can interact.

Hartley's point is well illustrated in Lumby's (2003) research, where she found that one of the key pleasures teenage girls derive from watching Big Brother is making judgments about whether contestants are 'being themselves' or simply performing for the cameras. A further part of the appeal of reality TV programmes for these teenage girls was that they dealt directly with ethical dilemmas confronting young women. In other words, these reality TV programmes open up realms of possibilities with which the girls can interact.

For Ross & Nightingale, the phenomenon of Big Brother marks a watershed in our understanding of the active media audience: '*being* an audience now extends well beyond viewing, listening or reading' (2003, p.4). With Big Brother, the audience's relationship with the media has extended from consumption to production. The audience is contributing to the creation of media content in much the same way that we will show for digital media, in the section below.

When you consider how we can use media to make meanings in our own lives, from conversational topic to identity negotiation, and to directly create meanings in the media, it is easy to appreciate that sophisticated levels of media literacy exist in our society today.

Digital media

The recent work in Australia on digital media has focused on the ways in which users develop their social networks and create media 'texts'. Hardey (2007) conducted in-depth interviews with first year university students about their use of mobile technology, including phones, laptops and digital software that enable communication. The key for this group of people was to be constantly 'switched on' and, therefore, always available for other people. There is a substantial competency involved in all this. Members of the iGeneration have to maintain two active and dynamic social presences, one that is in the 'real' world and one in the virtual. Hardey (2007) found that the students were not even conscious of this split between worlds and they moved seamlessly across them. She also found that they use their digital media as a means of getting to know people before meeting them face-to-face and there is already a well-developed set of social rules or digital etiquette in their use.

Members of the Creative Industry Faculty at QUT have recently been documenting a number of different features of internet use. From Burgess's (2006) case study of the Flickr website, she describes a set of competencies that are necessary to use the site constructively and that are shared by site users that do not necessarily have tertiary or technical qualifications. Other

case studies in Burgess, Foth & Klæbe (2006) also show that there has been a rapid uptake of digital technology by a broad base of amateur users. These amateurs have acquired the new media literacy skills outside of formal education and they are all contributing to what is being called ‘social media’—a convergence of social networks, online communities and consumer-created creative content.

Yell (2002) raises an important issue that is of relevance to the above findings as well as to her own research. She develops an argument that new media do not revolutionise communication; rather new practices are reshaped from old practices. She considered this proposal by investigating the role of email in the work environment and concludes that email practices are characterised as much by continuity as by rupture with prior practices such as speech and writing. This same characterisation can be seen in the findings on mobile technology and social media use. In both of those contexts, old practices of social networking and community building are continued into new media. As such, old competencies or ‘literacies’ are also extended into new arenas.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Adults

In the review for Ofcom, Livingstone et al. (2005) draw on a vast array of audience research literature to assess what we know about adult capacities to understand and critique media of various forms. When it comes to understanding broadcast media, the research evidence is divided. It variously portrays a creative, sophisticated audience and one that is confused, biased or inattentive. In part, this difference can be attributed to the sophistication needed for different types of content and for being able to make sense of changing ‘genres’. Much research raises concerns that audiences lack more complex skills for dealing with sophisticated construction of media messages, for example, those that blur reality and drama, and those required for critically evaluating the news.

In the Ofcom review, Livingstone et al. (2005) also point to the dearth of research on adult understanding and critiquing of online content. What work has been done suggests that adults are often unaware of the provenance of online information and they lack the skills to take into account the point of view of the information presented. On the other hand, they also note that media literacy does not rest solely with the public but also depends on the quality of the content and the site. Media literacy cannot overcome poor information interfaces.

It needs to be borne in mind here, that any research with adult users of digital media that generates across-the-board statistics is likely to be masking inter-group differences. For example, it is known that those over 65 are far less likely to have digital literacy (Ofcom, 2006b) and one could well expect that those who work in office environments will have a higher literacy than those who do not.

Some small-scale research suggests that if adult media users were involved in creating media content it could contribute to a more critical capacity, but very few adults have the capabilities to engage in this creative process (Livingstone et al., 2005). This applies to broadcast and digital media.

Children

In his Ofcom review, Buckingham (2005) notes the same imbalance in the international literature for children as Livingstone et al. (2005) does for adults. There is an extensive

literature on children's critical understanding of analogue television, but little on internet use or any other medium.

From the television research, it is clear that children's basic understanding of the 'language' of television develops at an early age. By the age of four or five, children understand the basic visual conventions relating to camera movements and positions, shot transitions and editing conventions. Between the ages of five and eleven they acquire further skills such that they can predict likely outcomes, assess characters, make judgments about what is and is not realistic. These are all critical skills.

Children's understandings of the basic principles of representation also begin at a very early age. By the age of two, children understand that television is a medium that represents events and that it is not a 'magic' window to the 'real world'. By about age five children are also able to make an assessment of the degree of 'realness' being portrayed on television. By the age of eleven or twelve upwards, children begin to speculate about the ideological impact of what they are seeing and the potential effects of positive or negative images on audiences. They are also alert to the possibility of bias or misrepresentation when it comes to television news. In his Ofcom review, Buckingham (2005) also cites evidence showing that children learn to cope with potentially unwanted or upsetting emotional responses, and to make critical judgements about such things as media violence, by using forms of media literacy.

What little research Buckingham (2005) could find on computer/internet use suggests that children may be less inclined to be critical, especially about the credibility of information found on the net. In the main, children are also unaware of the commercial or persuasive strategies at work on websites. Other research cited by Buckingham (2005) in his Ofcom review, suggests that there is considerable potential for newer media to be used in creative ways as means of self-expression and communication and that creative involvement in media production can make an important contribution to the development of critical media literacy.

Research on children's internet use in Canada (Media Awareness Network, 2005) adds to the picture painted by Buckingham (2005) above. The Canadian survey found that school children are active users of the new digital technologies: 86 per cent of all students have email accounts, 86 per cent of Grade 11 students use instant messaging daily, and by Grade 8 77 per cent of children are using their computer to download and listen to music. Outside of schoolwork, the major use of the internet is to extend the children's social networks and develop new ones within their community. Interestingly, though, chat rooms rank last out of preferred ways to socialize online. Data from this survey also show that Canadian children are sensitive to issues of information credibility: 68 per cent wanted to learn more about how to tell if the information you find on the net is true or not.

Just as the internet has penetrated the everyday lives of children, so too have mobile phones. Campbell (2005) has reviewed the international literature on the role of mobile phones in young people's lives and describes how mobile phones play a complex role in their social world. For the majority of adolescent users, the most important use of the mobile phone was to talk and text with friends. It is a tool that adolescents competently use to maintain and expand their social network, although there appears to be a gendered dimension to this. Young women are more likely to make the most of the freedoms offered with the mobile phone and young men to emphasize the constraints (Henderson, Taylor & Thomas, 2002).

An important point made by Buckingham in his Ofcom review of children's media literacy research is that 'there is ample evidence to show that children and young people develop media literacy relatively "spontaneously"' (2005, p.33). Media literacy develops as part of a

broader developmental process in children and as a result of children's experiences of the real world and of the media themselves. Just as children learn to talk without any formal education, so too do they learn to use the media and make use of them. Media literacy is achievable without any kind of formal intervention (Turnbull, 2006).

Key issues

DIGITAL DIVIDE ... HOW DIVIDED?

The concept of the 'digital divide' refers to the perceived gap between those who have access to the latest information technologies and those who do not. The concept has taken on importance because of the economic and social handicap that is presumed to follow from not having access to the latest technology. The existence of a digital divide is also seen as an important issue for media literacy. Put simply, if you do not have access to the latest media, then you cannot use it and you cannot develop media literacy.

However, in reviewing the literature it became apparent that the concept of a digital divide and the importance attached to it has changed over the past decade or so. In the 1990s and the early 2000s, the idea of the digital divide was sparked by the perceived inequities in access to information and communication technologies. In Australia, most of the concerns about inequities focused on the problems of non-metropolitan areas ('the bush'). However, there is some research to suggest that disparities in access also exist within metropolitan areas and are a function of age, income and employment status (Holloway, 2002).

Other Australian data collected at the beginning of the 2000s from financially disadvantaged students and families in the Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program also supports the notion of a digital divide (McLaren & Zappala, 2002). Families in the program were generally below the national average on computer and internet access, and those families who were Indigenous, one-parent and in receipt of welfare payments were even less likely to have a computer and internet access. However, it was education that was the key driver; those with tertiary qualifications were far more likely to own a computer and have internet access regardless of other factors.

In Compaine's (2001) edited collection from the US, evidence is presented in support of a digital divide in the 1990s along racial, economic, ethnic and educational lines. This evidence matches that from Australia described above. However, evidence is also presented in the US that by 2000 the gaps were rapidly closing and that this was happening without any substantive policy initiatives or public spending. This research collection suggests that those on the 'other side' of the divide have simply taken more time to purchase/use the new technologies.

In a special edition of the *Electronic Journal of Communication*, van Dijk (2002) discusses a number of limitations of the concept of a digital divide: it relies on shallow demographics, lack of longitudinal data, limited to material access and ignores access in terms of skills and usability (literacy). Others have developed similar critiques (e.g. Selwyn, 2004; Gunkel, 2003). In two of the special journal edition papers, attention is paid not just to access but to use and skills. Both papers provide evidence to suggest that despite wide distribution of information technologies in the Netherlands (de Haan & Rijken, 2002) and South Korea (Park, 2002), the skills needed to use them and the opportunities for use are lagging behind possession. In other words, while there is no 'material' divide, there may be a literate one.

Livingstone et al. (2005), in their Ofcom review of adult media literacy, describes research that shows social class, gender, age and region as key variables that differentiate between those that own various media and those that do not—as did the earlier Australian papers. But in line with comments in the previous paragraph, Livingstone et al. also note that a more complex view of the ‘digital divide’ is warranted: one that goes beyond a simple dichotomy of have and have-nots and one that re-conceptualises the issue along a continuum or as a number of different divides (e.g. material and literate).

Overall, the literature would suggest the need for caution in making simplistic assumptions about the ‘digital divide’. Later research from the Smith Family supports this need for caution in Australia. As Muir (2004) notes: ‘while the digital divide remains a populist term, it has begun to lose relevance’ (p.4). Amongst other things, the simple two-way split between haves and have-nots is not tenable. As an alternative, in her work, she refers to the idea of ‘technology for social inclusion’. With such a phrase she is intending to turn our view of technology as an end—having a computer/internet access is the goal—to technology as a means—using the computer to achieve other things. Within this framework she advocates the use of Community Technology Learning Centres as the means whereby technology can be used to achieve social inclusion. She presents evidence in support of the valuable role these Centres can play and the success factors that are likely to lead to positive social outcomes for the participants.

In sum, there is evidence to suggest that there had been a digital divide, when this was defined in purely material terms. However, as that divide has closed, other issues have emerged. In particular, it would seem that the use of a simple dichotomy of have and have-nots is no longer relevant and that a more complex range of other factors needs consideration. Issues surrounding the newer participation culture to be discussed below play a role in these re-considerations.

PARTICIPATION ... WITH WHAT CONSEQUENCES?

Colin Stewart (2007), an Australian textbook and curriculum writer in the area of media literacy, has observed that the most significant movement in the conception of media literacy in the past twenty years has been towards a greater focus on participation in media creation. We raised the conceptual issue of participation in Part 1. Here, we want to pursue what evidence there may be to indicate the nature of this participation and what it may say about media literacy.

According to a 2005 study conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life project (Lenhart & Madden, 2005) over half of American teenagers could be considered content creators. They have created a blog or web page, posted original artwork, photography stories or videos online or remixed online content into their own creations. These teenagers are actively involved in what Jenkins (2007) calls a participatory culture.

Jenkins (2007) also observes that, if anything, the Pew study underestimates the number of American teenagers who are embracing the new participatory culture. The Pew study did not consider newer forms of expression such as podcasting, game modding or machinima, nor other widespread practices such as computer or video gaming. All of these latter practices also require some form of creation. And, it is of interest to note that the Ofcom audit also did not consider these forms of creativity.

Some recent case studies in Australia on digital storytelling, creative practices with social media and online games indicates that at least some Australian youth and adults are active in

this participatory culture (Burgess, 2006; Hartley, McWilliam, Burgess & Banks, 2007). How widespread this is, however, we simply do not know.

Given that much of the newer participatory possibilities are very new indeed, it is understandable that there is so little research. However, we can extrapolate from the US research mentioned above (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). All of the participatory opportunities mentioned above are available over the internet and our teenagers have greater access than those from the US (70 per cent vs 62 per cent of respective populations), so it stands to reason that more than half of our teenagers could be part of the participatory culture as well. It also stands to reason that because participatory opportunities abound on the internet, an increasing number of people will be taking advantage of them.

How these participatory opportunities are taken up and with what consequences is the latest in an ongoing round of media literacy challenges. There are two particular sets of interlocking issues that have already been mooted in this regard, and to which we need to pay attention: the potential for a new ‘divide’ and the possibility of broader benefits to be derived from participation.

There is a growing body of scholarship arguing for a number of potential benefits arising from a participatory culture. Benefits include opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, a changed attitude to intellectual property, the diversification of cultural expression, and a more empowered concept of citizenship (e.g. Brun, 2007a&b; Brun et al., 2007; Burgess et al., 2006; Jenkins, 2007). Whether these benefits eventuate and what particular forms they take in practice is yet to be seen.

However, some writers are already expressing concern that these benefits may not be available to all and thus a new inequality will be brought about. For example, Ivey & Tepper, writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2006) suggest that those who have the education, skills, financial resources and time required to navigate through all the new participatory opportunities online will, in the end, create a new cultural elite—and a new cultural underclass.

Jenkins (2007), in discussing the participatory culture, argues that we need to shift the conversation about the digital divide from questions of technological access to those of opportunities to participate and to develop the cultural competencies and social skills that are necessary in this newer participatory culture. In other words, he is suggesting that we need to be concerned about a ‘participation gap’ rather than a material digital divide. This is in keeping with the issues we raised earlier in this part, in talking about the digital-divide: that access/ownership is not the sole basis for a divide and that other types of ‘divide’, such as a participation one, may be more important.

We could find no evidence in support of these claims and concerns. Nevertheless, they reflect a key issue emerging from the advent of the newer digital technologies and what they make possible. They are issues of importance awaiting an evidence-base.

CYBERSAFETY ... HOW DANGEROUS?

The Parliament of Victoria enquiry into *Education in the Net Age* (2006) devoted a significant part of its report to issues of ‘cybersafety’. The report identified five major risks to children and young people in using computers on-line: encountering inappropriate content (notably pornographic material), meeting on-line stalkers or predators in chat rooms and the

like, web authoring activities involving personal information and images, cyber-bullying, and scams and identity theft.

The risks identified above are all genuine risks and are well documented on the NetAlert website.³ However, it is important to consider the evidence for these risks with care in order to separate out warranted concern from the natural alarm that often accompanies the introduction of new media. We discussed this normal alarm that accompanies the introduction of new media in Part 1 and in Part 2 showed that the earlier concerns regarding harmful effects of televised violence on children were not supported by the research evidence. So the issue at stake here is how much are the concerns warranted?

Netratings (2005) conducted Australian research on cybersafety on behalf of the ABA and NetAlert. That research showed that there was a substantial discrepancy between reported concerns about cybersafety and actual potentially risky experiences. While 92 per cent of parents and 89 per cent of children interviewed mentioned at least one issue of concern, two-thirds of parents reported that their children had had no negative online experiences. On the other hand, 60 per cent of children reported they actually had had a negative experience online—negative here being described as experiencing something that had a risky potential.

The Netratings (2005) report details the nature of the various negative things experienced by children aged 8 to 13 years old. The most common negative experience was accidentally finding a website they knew their parents would not like them to see. This was followed by being contacted or sent messages by people they did not know or communicating with people they did not know in real life. In all instances, it was the 12–13 year age group who reported more of these experiences than the younger age groups. Children also reported that the most common cause of accidental exposure to inappropriate content was pop-up windows, followed by going to sites suggested from a list of search results.

Children's responses to the negative experiences documented in the Netratings (2005) report were interesting. Of the 293 children who had a negative experience online, 23 per cent told their parents, 26 per cent avoided the cause and 25 per cent didn't do anything (although doing nothing included exiting the site). Younger children were more likely to tell their parents if something negative happened. Overall, these responses seem sensible. In the main, the children knew not to repeat negative experiences, knew how to avoid the situation so it would not happen again, and the younger ones knew to tell their parents. However, it must be borne in mind that all these are reported results, not observed ones. It could well be the case that children's reports of what they have done reflect what they think adults want to hear, not what they actually did do.

In the Canadian survey of school children's net use (Media Awareness Network, 2005), harassment, bullying and giving away personal information were three of the risks identified. Nine per cent of students reported being bullied and 8 per cent being sexually harassed on the internet. There was no information on how this was handled by the children. However, two-thirds of them did say they wanted to know more about how to protect their privacy on the internet—suggesting perhaps they did not have the knowledge to currently do so.

Interestingly, data from the UK shows a much higher rate of online harassment than that documented for Canada. Livingstone & Magdalena (2005) found that 31 per cent of

³ See <http://www.netalert.gov.au/>

9–19 year old daily and weekly internet users had received unwanted sexual comments and 33 per cent nasty comments online or by text message.

On the other hand, in Buckingham's (2005) Ofcom review of children's media literacy, he documents UK studies that show there is a high awareness of personal safety issues connected with internet use and a high degree of media literacy demonstrated in handling/avoiding the issues. However, Buckingham (2005) notes further that the awareness of risks extends only to those most frequently promoted by moral campaigners. He could find no research on awareness of financial risk or online marketing risks, or technical risks and nor could we, directly. However, the Canadian data (Media Awareness Network, 2005) suggest that there may be such risk issues at stake. For example, it was found that three-quarters of the children who played product-centred games thought they were 'just games', not 'mainly advertisements'. In other words, many of the children did not understand the marketing link in the games.

Overall, the research available suggests that children and young people do take some risks in their on-line activity. But, when it comes to young people, and especially adolescents, it must be accepted that the taking of risks is part of 'growing up'. Moreover, as Livingstone reminds us: 'the link between risks, incidents, and actual harm is genuinely tenuous: not all risks taken result in worrying incidents, not all worrying incidents result in actual or lasting harm' (2003, p.157).

Holloway, Green & Quinn's (2004) study of internet use in Australian families also suggests that the actual degree of online risk, let alone harm, may be exaggerated. Their research shows that parents of school-aged children are less concerned about 'cybersafety' issues than they are about the actual amount of time spent on the net and not outdoors or engaged in other activities. They also found that many parents in their study were placing more importance on openness, consultation and discussion with their children about the 'texts' they encounter on the net, rather than imposing restrictions and regulations. They conclude that the public concerns over children's possible access to online pornography is not reflected within everyday family practices around the internet.

In all, children are taking risks and there are genuine concerns about them doing so. But the evidence to date does not appear to warrant undue alarm. The issues regarding risks and safety on the internet are the same issues and risks that children experience in growing up in everyday life. The internet and other digital technologies simply offer alternative venues; albeit ones that can offer easier access than most.

In considering how best to manage these risks, Buckingham (2005), in his Ofcom review, argues that protecting children from exposure to such things as unwanted content through the use of filtering software may not be the best way of dealing with the potential problem. As he argues, 'an exaggerated preoccupation with risk could well function as a barrier to the development of media literacy' (Buckingham, 2005, p.13). In addition, there is the need to consider the earlier ABT inquiry response to concerns about the effects of television. After due consideration, the tribunal recommended an educational approach rather than censorship as the most appropriate way of proceeding. When considering cybersafety, a similar response may be appropriate. However, further evidence is also warranted.

3. How is media literacy promoted?

Setting the frame

In Part 1 of this report we identified two major thrusts in the conception and perceived purpose of media literacy. Historically, media literacy was proposed as a defensive enterprise with the aim of protecting children against the perceived dangers of the media (Buckingham, 2001). This protectionist stance arose from the perception that media could manipulate and otherwise directly affect people, especially children, in undesirable ways.

However, with the accumulation of evidence, changing conceptual frameworks and new media developments, the problem has changed. Rather than proposing media literacy as a means for dealing with potential harmful effects, more recent proposals have focused on it as a means of addressing the pervasiveness of media in our everyday lives. This evolution of the idea of media education, puts emphasis on empowering children to prepare them to participate in the media culture.

Although the concept of media literacy has evolved to more of a preparatory stance than a protectionist one in the academic arena, this is not the case outside of it. Both of these approaches—protectionist and preparation—can be discerned in contemporary approaches to promoting media literacy and, where possible, we identify them in the discussion below.

It should also be noted that outside the academy, the phrase ‘media literacy’ is primarily used in the US, while the phrase ‘media education’ is more likely to be used in the UK. Ofcom is the one major exception in the UK as it uses the term media literacy. Both phrases are being used in similar ways to mean helping people with their understanding and use of the media.

In canvassing the types of promotional practices around the English-speaking world, we have deliberately sidestepped specific curricula issues in the various countries. Suffice to say that the UK, Canada and the USA all have some form of media literacy taught at the primary to high school level. Given this, our primary concern was to identify the public promotional activities outside of the curricula. We do, however, briefly canvas the teaching of media literacy within Australian schools.

International promotion practices

UNITED NATIONS

In 1982, UNESCO prepared a declaration on media education. This was endorsed by 19 nations attending the UNESCO International Symposium on Media Education and is now known as the Grunwald Declaration. That declaration argued that the media are an

increasingly significant and powerful force in society and, as such, a coherent and systematic form of education about the media must be a prerequisite of citizenship. The Grunwald Declaration conceived of media education as being concerned with the full range of media; with teaching and learning about the media; and with developing both critical understanding and active participation in creating media products (Buckingham, 2001).

Since the Grunwald Declaration, UNESCO has held further international conferences on media education—in Toulouse in 1990 and Vienna in 2000—and supported the work of the International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the screen. It has commissioned David Buckingham to develop a global strategy for fostering media education (Buckingham, 2001). And, in 2002, it held a further Youth Media Education Conference in Seville. A number of recommendations arose from that conference that covered research platforms, training for teachers, media partnerships with schools and NGOs, networking for all practitioners, and consolidating and promoting the public sphere (Seville Recommendations, 2002)

A recent search of the UNESCO (n.d.) site shows that they continue to run a Media Education Programme and to support a range of promotional activities. These activities include hosting or supporting local/regional media education conferences, and promoting supporting kits and books. Given, the influence of the Cultural Studies tradition in Europe and the direct contributions of David Buckingham to the UN media education strategy, the UN's promotional activities are geared to fostering the preparation of children and youth for using media critically—a prerequisite of citizenship. In other words, the UN adopts a primarily preparatory approach to media education.

EUROPEAN

Since 2000, the European Commission (n.d.) has organised three workshops on media literacy and provided financial support to some 30 projects that have helped create networks, analysed media representations and values, encouraged the production of media literacy content, and stimulated the use of media in improving social participation. In 2006, the Commission (2006) began a public media literacy consultation on best practices in cultivating and improving media literacy in a digital age.

The European Commission also sponsors Educaunet (n.d.). This is a web based media education programme for young people which aims to teach them about the internet and the possible risks linked to its use. Educaunet focuses on risks such as exposure to harmful content, fraud, false identities and viruses. The Educaunet programme is based on the following understanding of media education: 'It develops an independent and responsible attitude in children and adolescents when using the Internet. This complete approach sometimes questions the usefulness of the filtering, sorting and protective devices, whose existence never fully guarantees protection. These tools need to be skilfully interpreted by their users and these skills can be best developed by an educational approach'. In general, it adopts an approach that prepares children and adolescents rather than one based on protectionism.

The European Charter for Media Literacy (n.d.) also operates a website that engages in various media literacy promotional activities. This charter was developed out of an initiative of the UK Film Council and the British Film Institute and now consists of a number of government and NGO groups from Europe. Its aim is to foster greater clarity and wider consensus in Europe on what media literacy and media education mean, and to encourage

the development of a permanent and voluntary network of media educators. It does this by encouraging debate and discussion on their web site and by listing those who are charter signatories.

UNITED KINGDOM

Ofcom is the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries, with responsibilities across television, radio, telecommunications and wireless communications services (Ofcom, n.d.). As part of the Communications Act (2003) that gave rise to Ofcom, it has a chartered duty to promote media literacy. Ofcom's initial focus on media literacy is threefold: to research the levels of media literacy in all sections of society; to add value to existing work by connecting, partnering and signposting related initiatives; and to investigate how viewers prefer to receive information about challenging content. In meeting these threefold aims it has conducted an audit of media literacy levels in the UK, and commissioned major reviews of research on adult media literacy (Livingstone et al. 2005) and media literacy of children and young people (Buckingham, 2005)—the reviews used in Part 2. It has also developed a number of links and signposts to other initiatives—available on the website—and it has completed the investigation into labelling for challenging content.

MediaEd (n.d.) offers a major resource site for teachers, students and anyone else who is interested in media education. It offers teaching resources, an online forum, student advice, and links. The MediaEd site is sponsored by the British Film Institute—the same organisation that initiated the European Charter for Media Literacy.

Media literacy is also being promoted in the UK by industry organisations. Media Smart is a new initiative from advertisers and broadcasters developed to support the education of children to be responsible and critical consumers. The advertising industry has developed this initiative as part of their self-regulatory system, demonstrating their belief that 'we should educate, not regulate' (Jackson, 2003, p.47). The Media Smart programme is designed to run in both the home and the school and offers a website for downloading resource material (Media Smart, n.d.).

CANADA

The media literacy initiative of Media Smart described above is broadly based on a model developed in Canada by Concerned Children's Advertisers (n.d.). The Canadian programme has been running successfully since 1990 and has received praise for its handling of delicate issues such as bullying and substance abuse (Jackson, 2003).

Canada has also been actively involved in other aspects of the promotion of media literacy/education over a number of decades (Pungente, Duncan & Andersen, 2005). It has a major Association for Media Literacy (AML) that has produced a *Media Education Resource Guide* for teachers and runs a clearinghouse on their website. This clearinghouse informs members of news, lists new publications and publishes articles of relevance (AML, n.d.).

In addition, Canada has a major non-profit organisation, the Media Awareness Network (MNet), that produces online programs and resources, works in partnership with Canadian and international organisations, and speaks to audiences across Canada and the world. MNet claims to be home to one of the world's most comprehensive collections of media education

and internet literacy resources (MNet, n.d.). MNet also conducts research on media literacy. We referred to their school children's internet use study in Part 2.

USA

There are numerous organisations promoting media literacy in the USA and yet, as many promoters will acknowledge, the United States is still behind countries like Britain, Canada and Australia (Tugend, 2003). This has, in part, been attributed to the several splits that have occurred in the media literacy movement in the US. These splits pivot around the issue of industry involvement in media literacy promotion and the degree to which activism is to be encouraged.

The Alliance for a Media Literate America (n.d.) was formed to promote literacy in all forms of media, popular or otherwise. This is an umbrella organisation for many independent media literacy membership organisations. It acts as a major clearinghouse, runs conferences for media educators and publishes a newsletter.

However, not all could agree with this Alliance because its founding sponsors were AOL, Time Warner, the Discovery Channel and the Sesame Workshop (Tugend, 2003). As an alternative, the Action Coalition for Media Education (n.d.) was established. This coalition rejects any ties to corporate media and encourages teachers to be critical of the media and to promote activism. In a similar vein, the Media Education Foundation (n.d.) produces documentary films and other educational resources to inspire critical reflection on the impact of mass media and to promote activism.

On the other hand, the National Telemedia Council disagrees with the activism mentioned above. The council is a national non-profit organisation that works towards a media-wise, literate society. From the beginning they 'have taken a positive, non-judgemental attitude and embraced a philosophy that values reflective judgement and cooperation rather than confrontation with the media industry' (National Telemedia Council, n.d.).

Other promotional groups have their links in academe rather than school teaching. For example, the New Media Literacies (n.d.) project is a consortium of media literacy and education scholars compiling resources for scholars and developing teaching materials for the new digital media for K–12 students for use in or out of school. Similarly, the Centre for Social Media (n.d.) running out of American University showcases and analyses strategies for using media as creative tools for public knowledge and action. They provide resources, a newsletter and blog sites.

There are also industry organisations directly promoting media literacy. For example, the Newspaper Association of America Foundation has developed what they call the 'High Five' project. It is an integrated language arts and journalism curriculum that teaches media literacy, journalism and newspaper production to middle-school children. It aims to help improve reading, introduce the students to journalism and help them appreciate the importance of free speech (NAAF, 2005).

Finally, the Centre for Media Literacy (n.d.) runs a major website offering a range of resources for media education teachers. Of significance is their *Overview and Orientation Guide to Media Literacy Education* (Thoman & Jolls, 2005). This centre is affiliated with the Alliance for a Media Literate America.

The range of organisations in the US means that there are a range of promotional philosophies. At the extremes, those organisations advocating activism reflect a protectionist

stance and those developing new materials for use with digital media reflect a preparatory stance.

Australian practices

WITHIN THE CURRICULUM

In Australia, media education has a role in the primary and secondary school curriculum of all states; albeit more visible in some states than others. At the primary level, media literacy issues are addressed in general arts programs (NT, QLD), in English (QLD) and in skills programs (e.g. reading and viewing in NSW).

Western Australia was the first state to introduce media studies into the secondary school curriculum as a full subject. This occurred in 1974. However, it was not introduced as a means of improving media literacy. Rather it was to meet the needs of a growing number of students remaining until Year 12 but not necessarily academically inclined. In effect, Media Studies offered accessibility and relevance (Quinn, 2006). The current website for the Western Australian Department of Education and Training (n.d.) shows that media literacy and education continues to be a visible part of the curricula and teachers are supported with a number of resources available from the website.

Queensland also offers a well-developed and supported media education curriculum to high school students. The syllabus was influenced primarily by the works of Australian and British cultural studies theorists and continues to be responsive to new developments (Stewart, 2007). The syllabi are supported by an extensive array of resource material on the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts (n.d.) website.

Victoria has had Media as a subject on the secondary curriculum since the late 1980s and it can be taken as a Year 12 subject. The same holds true for South Australia and for the ACT. NSW does offer media education but under the guise of English and the Northern Territory offers it as part of a Multi Arts curriculum.

OUTSIDE THE CURRICULUM

Outside the curriculum itself, there are two major types of promotional groups in Australia: those that support the teaching of media literacy and those aimed more directly at promoting it with parents and children.

Supporting teaching

The Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM, n.d.) is the professional association for teachers of media. This group publishes *Metro Magazine* and *Australian Screen Education* that provide study guides and educational kits for feature films, documentaries, television programmes and exhibitions.

Enhance TV (n.d.), an arm of Screenrights (copyright agency), helps teachers locate film, television and radio resources for their teaching. They also promote media literacy through sponsoring awards with ATOM and the Australian School Library Association. In addition, the Curriculum Corporation (n.d.) offers some media literacy resources.

We could find no reference to organisations or activities that explicitly support teachers or the curricula in teaching about digital media.

Supporting parents/society

Young Media Australia (n.d.) is a national non-profit community organisation whose members share a strong commitment to the promotion of the healthy development of Australian children. Their particular interest and expertise is in the role that media experiences play in that development and they are committed to promoting better choices and providing stronger voices in children's media. Young Media Australia offers movie reviews, a national helpline, listings of appropriate reference materials, and information on current media issues (e.g. media and obesity)—all primarily aimed to inform parents in their dealings with their children's media use.

The Australian Children's Television Foundation (n.d.) is a national non-profit organisation with the over-riding goal of providing Australian children with entertaining media made especially for them, and which makes an enduring contribution to their cultural and educational experience. As part of this, the ACTF have created multi-media learning tools, they run a learning centre with lesson ideas and study guides, and they engage in debate on issues to do with children and television, including media literacy (ACTF, 2005).

NetAlert (n.d.) is the Australian Government's internet safety initiative.⁴ NetAlert provides 'practical advice on internet safety, parental control and filters for the protection of children, students and families'. NetAlert promotes cybersafety with specific advice on a range of risks including chatting online, cyber bullying, online predators, offensive content, cyber stalking and internet addiction. It also runs a helpline, a web newsletter and distributes filters.

The peak industry body, Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (n.d.), runs a website dedicated to helping young people with their use of mobile phones. It includes advice on preventing and responding to bullying via mobile phones.

In all, the promotional activities in support of media literacy outside the curricula seem to be operating along a continuum, from a protectionist stance to a preparatory one. In addition, the promotion within the curricula especially, is still primarily in terms of the broadcast media.

⁴ Since 2007 NetAlert responsibilities have been divided between the (now) Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, and the ACMA.

4. What are the implications?

Between two worlds

The main title of ACMA Chairman Chris Chapman’s opening address to the 2006 Communications Policy Research Forum, ‘Between two worlds’, captures a central issue in the literature and promotional activities reviewed for this report. On the one hand we have, as Chapman describes it, a world of discrete platforms and services that we know as radio, television and telephone. On the other hand, there is the world of digital connectivity in which the traditional boundaries are blurring into non-existence.

From the literature and activities described here, the same two worlds not only exist, they also have different implications for our understanding of media and of media literacy. Throughout our report we have kept arguments and evidence about broadcast media—the world of discrete platforms and services—separate from those about the new digital media—the converging world.

In Part 1 of the report, we discussed the diversity of understandings associated with the idea of media literacy. There we noted that the different understandings had some link with the different types of media, along with historical shifts in understanding about the role of media in society. With the broadcast media of radio and television, it has been relatively easy to conceive of them having an active influence on a passive audience. Given that conception, the problem becomes one of protecting audiences from undue or unsavoury influence. Media literacy has been offered as the solution to this problem. However, it is media literacy of a particular sort: it is a literacy aimed at either ‘inoculating’ people against the effects of the media or of demystifying what the media does and thereby freeing the audience from media influence.

The new media developments in the world of digital connectivity have shaken the understandings of what media do and what media literacy is for. The more obvious interactivity and the continuing convergence challenge the idea of media being active influencers of passive audiences. The diversity of the new media also challenges the idea of a single literacy. The current understandings are emphasising the need to consider multi-literacies rather than one; that media form part of our everyday situated social practices; and that the new media blur any distinction between production and consumption—new media users create as they consume. With the new, digital media, media literacy is seen as an important solution for preparing users so that they can take full advantage of the new ‘participatory’ culture (Jenkins 2007).

We also observed in Part 1 that there is a second, historical thread running through arguments about the need for media literacy. This second thread is the response to the

introduction of new media into society. Whenever new media are introduced, there are always members of society who express concern or alarm about what might be lost or changed. With the advent of broadcast media that alarm was associated with the loss of ‘high’ culture and the broad scale impact of the media on behaviour. In Part 2 we showed that in terms of media impact, at least, the level of alarm was not really warranted.

The same natural alarm has been raised about the new digital technologies, especially related to use of the internet. There are genuine concerns about children’s exposure to pornography, cyber stalking and the like and there is no doubt that risks exist. However, the data to date on internet use and experiences give no basis for broad scale alarm about exposure to risk. Instead, developments should be actively monitored and an evidence-base derived from actual media experiences cultivated.

There is an important lesson to be taken from the history of the development of ideas about media literacy. Our understanding of what it means to be media literate will change as the media and the opportunities those media afford change. So at this moment we are between two worlds, not just technologically but also conceptually. We have a broad set of understandings, and well-developed curricula, about media literacy when it comes to the broadcast media. On the other hand we have an emergent set of understandings and many new challenges when it comes to what it can mean to be media literate with the digital media.

In the end, though, the appearance of two worlds will change. The very convergent nature of the second technological world will bring about the demise of the first. For this reason we argue that the greatest attention needs to be placed on the challenges arising from the converging world; challenges which, from the point of view of media literacy, are challenges of preparation for the new media world. As such, the following sections of this fourth part pay greatest attention to these new digital challenges. Although, in doing so, we also recognise that the nature of media will continue to change beyond any of our conceptions here.

Stance as a regulator

ACMA, along with other media and communication regulatory authorities, in standing between two worlds, is also standing between different approaches to regulation: to shield and protect or to prepare people to ‘self-regulate’ through media education. Among European regulators, at least, the move is decisively away from censorship as a form of protection and towards the provision of ‘consumer advice’ and/or the advocacy of media literacy (Buckingham, 2001). Similar arguments for a change in the regulatory focus have been run in the US. For example, Heins & Cho (2002) argue that media literacy is a far more appropriate and effective approach when compared with censorship, filter software and the like. Silverstone (2004) also argues that literacy is a far more favourable alternative to the use of media regulation.

In some ways, the very nature of the new media forces a reconsideration of the different regulatory stances. In the first instance, access to the new media is more and more difficult to control and any regulatory attempt to restrict access will be an increasingly impossible task (Buckingham, 2001). Second, it is not just that access is more difficult to control or contain, but the new digital media are in a current state of flux. The technologies driving the new media are still unfolding and the consumers who are using the new media are still creating and changing it. And there is every reason to believe that new technologies, and thus new

media, will continue to unfold ad infinitum. It is not possible to control such a rapidly evolving arena.

Not only does the evolution (or should it be revolution) in media require a reconsideration of the regulatory stance, but so too does the evolution in our understanding of how people, especially young people interact with the media. From the research described in Part 2, it is clear that we have developed a much more complex view of the ways in which young people make judgments about the media and use the media to help form their own identities. The evidence indicates that children are a much more autonomous and critical audience than previously assumed. This recognition of their capacities ameliorates, to some extent, the need to shield, although clearly not altogether.

In a recent academic consideration of these issues (Bragg, Buckingham & Turnbull, 2006) there was some questioning of the purpose underlying the promotion of media literacy. It could be seen as just ‘passing the buck’, for when a government steps back from regulation, every consumer has to, in effect, become their own regulator. On the other hand, it could also be seen as a genuinely democratising move and empowering citizens in the so doing. With some deliberation, the favour fell on the democratising move. Nevertheless, it has also been argued that while the development of a media literate populace is to the benefit of society at large, there still may be circumstances in which regulation should play a role (Silverstone, 2004; O’Brien, 2002).

Promotion issues

THE WHAT

In general, the literature and international practices are in favour of the promotion of media literacy as a means of enhancing participation in society and as an alternative to direct regulation of the censoring form. However, there are still outstanding issues as to exactly what is to be promoted.

The first point that needs to be taken into account here is that media literacy may be achievable without any formal intervention whatsoever (Turnbull, 2006). Buckingham (2005) made this point in his Ofcom review of the media literacy literature on children: children already have high levels of functional literacy and they can develop this even in the absence of explicit attempts to encourage and promote it. This observation holds as much for digital media literacy as it does for broadcast media literacy. For example, Hartley et al. (2007) demonstrate that digital literacy in their case studies was not the result of formal skills teaching, but the by-product of playful and creative use by citizen consumers.

Jenkins (2006, 2007) has also observed that people are learning how to use digital media outside of any formal educational setting. However, he argues there is still the need for policy and pedagogical interventions. He identifies three concerns that suggest this need for intervention (Jenkins, 2007).

First there is the participation gap, where there is unequal access to opportunities, experiences and knowledge that will prepare youth for full participation in their future world. We identified this as an upcoming issue in Part 2 and suggested that these types of access issues have supplanted the simpler one of material access to media—i.e. the digital divide. In addressing this participation gap, the promotional or policy key is access to a range of

opportunities to participate. Out of these opportunities comes experience and knowledge; without the opportunities there is nothing.

Second, Jenkins (2007) identifies a transparency problem that young people face in learning to see clearly the ways that media shape our perceptions. This transparency problem has been addressed in earlier critical approaches to media education (e.g. see Buckingham, 2003) and is one that is clearly important to any form of media literacy promotion. When it comes to digital media, children themselves have identified an element of this problem. In Part 2 we described how many children want to be able to understand how to check the veracity of what they find on the internet: how and what should they believe, and why?

Third, Jenkins (2007) identifies an ethical challenge that has occurred because of the breakdown of traditional forms of professional training (e.g. say as a journalist) that might prepare young people for their increasingly public role as media makers and community participants. We are not so certain that there has been a significant breakdown of traditional forms of professional training in Australia. Nevertheless, there remains the need for some critical facility with understanding values and making judgements, especially for those media users who are also creators and/or participate in on-line communities. It is clearly not the provenance of a regulatory authority to promote any particular ethical framework but it could be the provenance of one to promote the idea that ethics are at stake.

These proposals of Jenkins (2007) lead us to a markedly different definitional space than that laid out by the catch-all definition of media literacy—to be able to access, understand and create communications (Ofcom, n.d.). The literature reviewed for this report would suggest that this catch-all definition actually captures little of what really matters. The idea of media literacy is defined so generally that it loses its import. On the other hand, saying that there is a participation gap to traverse, a transparency problem to resolve, and an ethical challenge to be met, lays out the directions for improvement far more precisely. These directions are also supported by the latest theoretical and empirical literature. Moreover, the three points expound quite neatly on what it means to prepare people for their participation in a digital society.

THE HOW

In Part 3 of this report we described the main media literacy promotional activities taking place in Europe and the English-speaking world. The major types of promotional activities were:

- sponsoring/hosting of media education conferences
- provision of web-based media education programmes for students
- provision of media resource materials for use by teachers
- provision of advocacy materials to support media literacy promotion
- provision of web-based advisory and help-line services for parents
- promulgating the outcomes of empirical research
- acting as links or portals to relevant organisations and research materials
- sponsoring research

ACMA could consider any or all of these activities. However, we would like to draw attention to two issues that need specific consideration. First, in considering what type of

activities, it is important to bear in mind that students are currently being taught media education in all Australian states. On the other hand, this media education is still very much broadcast focussed. So if, there were to be any promotional activity in support of a media curriculum at schools, it could well be best addressed in support of a critical understanding of the evolving digital media rather than the broadcast.

Second, the evidence and the arguments lean towards a stance that prepares people for participating with the media in a self-regulatory fashion, rather than simply protecting them from it. We have noted that there are circumstances in which regulation, in the form of shielding, has a role to play. However, we have also pointed to research evidence and evolving understandings of how people interact with media that suggest effort could well be invested in the promotion of activities that prepare people to get the best out of their media interaction.

The challenges ahead

Welcome to convergence culture, where the old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways. Convergence culture is the future, but it is taking shape now. (Jenkins, 2006, p.259)

Whatever we once took media to be, or even media literacy, is changing. In this review of media literacy we have covered the old ground and pointed to issues in the new. But, more than anything else, we have not provided closure. As Jenkins says, the future is taking shape now, and there are more challenges than comfortable answers.

We have tried to capture the future outlines as we see them at this particular historical point. In particular, we have indicated a number of challenges arising from the new digital media. How ACMA responds to these challenges will contribute to the shape that the future takes in Australian culture.

Specifically, we have indicated the need to adopt a preparatory stance in looking at these challenges. In doing so, we believe these are the three questions that could guide future ACMA activity:

- how can we help prepare people to participate in this new culture?
- how can we help them see how the media is shaping their understandings of the world?
- how can we help them make informed value judgements about their digital practices?

Research will play an important role in facing these challenges. Too often in this arena, fears and hype have driven the agenda. What we need is an evidence-based approach that draws on the actual lived experiences of media users. We emphasise the importance of evidence that is based in the actual experience of users, because a significant proportion of the research evidence we documented earlier did not. Most of the data on internet experiences draws on reports of the experience, not observations of them. There are credibility issues when using such reported data. Buckingham (2005) makes the same cautionary note in his review of the research on children's media literacy.

In conclusion, we think these are exciting times—rather than just interesting ones—and there is a critical need to monitor the unfolding of events of the convergent cultures. With an empirical understanding of what is happening, ACMA is more able to be appropriately responsive.

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Appendix

Literature search method

Below is a list of sites/sources, search years and the search term used:

COMABSTRACTS FROM 2007 TO 1981

- media literacy
- critical literacy
- new literacies
- digital literacy
- digital divide
- media education
- technologies

QUESTIA ON-LINE ELECTRONIC LIBRARY FROM 1998 TO 2007

- digital literacy
- new literacies
- media literacy
- critical literacy
- digital divide
- Australian media research
- Australian audience research

GOOGLE

- media literacy
- Australia and media literacy

VIVISIMO (A MORE SOPHISTICATED CLUSTERING SEARCH ENGINE)

- media literacy and research
- media literacy and promotion
- media literacy and education

PROQUEST DATABASE FROM 2000 TO 2006

- media and culture
- media and children and youth

GOVERNMENT SITES IN AUSTRALIA

- DEST
- Education departments by states

AUSTRALIAN COMMUNICATION JOURNALS FROM 2000 TO 2007

- Media International Australia
- Australian Journal of Communication
- M/C Journal

There is a new journal, *Children and Media*, which started in 2007. Advance publicity notice indicates that this could be a very useful journal for ACMA and the first issue at least contains articles of relevance to this report. We were unable to obtain a copy of it.