

NEW LITERACY, NEW DEMOCRACY

Cary Bazalgette

Central Question: what skills, knowledge and understanding do we need in order to participate fully in a global digital society?ⁱ

SECTION A: CHALLENGE AND METHOD

1. The Big Issue

The big issue that we will face in 2017 is how eleven-year-olds entering secondary school will be coping with a concept of literacy that is still dominated by 19th century paradigms of linear, word-based texts, when they have been immersed in practices relating to popular culture and digital media from birth. I have selected the date 2017 because the children who will reach eleven then are now two years old, and are beginning a crucial phase in their development as they start to engage with our culture on their own terms. Between two and three, most children gain the technical competence to operate domestic digital technology and start to identify their favourite films, TV, websites and brands. They are likely to experience their favourite stories and characters through many different media from books to clothing.ⁱⁱ

So in fact, the big issue is not beyond the horizon: it is with us now, and has been for some time. There is no indication that the current Primary Review is asking the central question of this Challenge Outline. In current conventions, this question is always addressed as separate both in nature and status from that of print literacy. This paper contends that it is this fatal schism in educational thinking that may well be contributing to the current failure to meet literacy targets. Change is happening fast: today's eleven-year-olds have lived through the change from analogue to digital in their own lifetimes. To be ready for the future, we first need to catch up.

2. The Challenge: "What are the Foundations of the New Literacy?"

To catch up with where children are now, let alone in 20 years' time, we need to understand the role of children's early media experiences in contributing to the foundations of a new and wider literacy. In this paper I argue that literacy must be seen and understood as unified and coherent, not as "multiple", and therefore that the designations "media literacy" and "digital literacy" should be abandoned, along with the assumption that the term "literacy" can only refer to print. I shall therefore use the term "New Literacy" to refer to the portfolio of skills, knowledge and understanding that everyone needs in order to understand and exploit technology, to participate in society and – above all – to inhabit, enjoy and contribute to national and global cultures.

I am also making a conscious and explicit break with the dominant discourse in debates about new technology and its effects, which is preoccupied with "youth". While addressing the *behaviour* of young people, we have neglected the *learning* that must have taken place in their childhood, establishing and underpinning their later activities with media. This is why this Challenge focuses on early childhood.

The five overarching questions of this Challenge are:

- **What elements of literacy are common to all media forms?**

This question refers to the powerful concepts, such as narrative, genre or modality,ⁱⁱⁱ that enable us to make sense of all kinds of text. As I shall explain in Section B, it seems likely that these concepts are first learned through non-print media.

- What elements of literacy are specific to different kinds of media?**
 This question is premised on an argument (see Sections B1 and 4b) that there are greater continuities between old and new communication forms than is generally imagined. In fact we can identify two main forms – **page-based media**, that carry written words, images and graphics (ie books, press and much of the internet); and **time-based media**, that carry moving images, sounds, music and speech (ie film, radio, TV, games and much of the internet) – in order to address objectively the relationship between print and other major forms of communication. To understand the foundations of literacy, we have to understand the specific and distinctive skills that people need in order to be able to read and compose in both of these major forms. By describing the whole field of communication in this broad way, we escape from the distractions of “digital vs analogue” and stress instead the cultural continuities that literacy must address. Digital competence, though important, is subordinate to the kinds of reading and composition that are enabled by new technologies – many of which are not new at all.
- What are the key insights that young children can acquire through play in home and pre-school settings, that will help to form the basis for the successful development of literacy in the widest sense?**
 This is the key question of the Challenge. It will have to review and debate what we know about early childhood learning, and consider this in relation to the sets of elements that have been defined in response to the first two overarching questions. By starting to look at early childhood learning in these quite new ways, we are likely to uncover profound implications for later learning, which will include important insights about failure and disengagement.
- In what ways can schools assess and build on children’s early literacy skills?**
 If the concept of New Literacy is accepted, then non-print media can no longer be seen merely as adjuncts or stimuli to print literacy but as important components of literacy in their own right. The consequences for pedagogy would be substantial, although it must be recognised that many schools are moving in this direction anyway. The Challenge would need to investigate the extent to which schools would see this as an opportunity or as a new burden, and to consider the likely training, investment and management implications. Ultimately this question could only be answered through new empirical research (see section A6).
- What will longer term learning progression in New Literacy look like?**
 The hypothesis underpinning this Challenge (see Section B3) is that a new approach to literacy would be likely to enhance and accelerate children’s literacy development. New Literacy would not simply add more content to literacy learning, but would introduce a new coherence and would recognise the full range of children’s early learning. Models of learning progression and frameworks for assessment would thus need substantial revision.

In formulating this Challenge and the five overarching questions, I have drawn on thinking and arguments that are somewhat at odds with the brief for this paper. I want to stress the importance of the cultural dimensions of any inquiry into social and technological change, and the continuities between old and new communication technologies – and hence between old and New Literacy. I also draw attention to important work in the media literacy field that is pertinent to this Challenge. I am arguing for a focus on early childhood – I suggest ages 2-6 as the sector for study – because I believe that it is the neglect and misunderstanding of how the changes in our culture have impacted on this age group, that lies behind much of the current “failure” to reach literacy targets and much of the disaffection experienced by children in Key Stages 2 and 3.

All these points are covered more extensively in Section B, and in the end notes. In Section B4 I provide additional comments on the overarching questions, linking them to the points I have raised. In the rest of this section I will continue to address most – but not all – of the requirements given in Annex C of the brief.

3. Fresh thinking about education: why “new” literacy?

Literacy, as both the title and the central question of this paper imply, is what enables us to participate in social and political life. It also enables us to inhabit and contribute to our culture; to understand the past and to imagine the future. The more literate we are, the more fully we can do these things. But when we see literacy like this – as more than a standard kit of instrumental, testable skills – then we have to acknowledge that its foundations are laid very early in life, and are amazingly extensive. Verbal language is obviously a crucial and enormous part of these foundations, but it is not the only part. The semiotic features of our culture – such as gesture, expression, clothing, tools, buildings, meals, vehicles – are also things we have to learn about in order to make sense of the world. Less visible but equally important are the communication conventions of our culture: the structures and generic features of stories; the ways in which “real” and “pretend” are signalled; how we make judgments about what we think is and is not funny, frightening, good or bad; how non-explicit meanings may be inferred; how to predict outcomes. Parents, carers and early years teachers have always known how to help children build these foundations, through games, rituals and play. But the growing role of children’s early experiences of time-based media in contributing to these foundations has tended to remain unacknowledged and is often actually denied. If we want to understand how the changing media landscape may affect what children need to learn in schools, then we need to take a fresh look at where they are starting from.

4. Disciplinary Domains

The ambitions of Beyond Current Horizons will not be met by limiting its disciplinary domains to the sciences, however “cutting edge”. Technologies do not change things by themselves: people do; and it is people’s cultural investments, allegiances and values that drive not only the ways in which they adopt and exploit technologies, but also their social participation^{iv}. This Challenge must therefore include the arts and humanities as well as social sciences. Educational psychologists and specialists in literacy, linguistics and child development will also be able to contribute.

5. Who can develop the challenge?

Most of the key thinking, developmental work and research that is relevant to this Challenge has taken place in the field of media literacy. However, as I have pointed out in Section A2, the central focus of this Challenge is literacy itself. The UK is fortunate in having some of the world’s leading expertise in the development of media literacy (see section B2 and end notes). But the main focus of this community has been on later childhood and teenagers. This Challenge would bring this expertise together with that of researchers in the field of early childhood cognitive development and literacy, and should link up with the Primary Review team. The initial development group of UK researchers should include:

Professor David Buckingham and/or Dr Andrew Burn – Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, Institute of Education, University of London
Professor Jackie Marsh – University of Sheffield
Dr Lydia Plowman, University of Stirling

As I am not an academic and do not have expertise across all the fields I have mentioned, I would leave it to other experts, in consultation with these colleagues, to propose a more extended team.

6. Methods

To make the most of the cross-disciplinarity of this study, a small international symposium in the summer of 2008 would bring together the key UK researchers identified above, with

Henry Jenkins from the MacArthur Foundation-funded project New Media Literacies in the US (<http://www.projectnml.org>), Dr Paul van den Broek of the University of Minnesota (see section B3ii, below) and Dr Stefan Aufenanger of the University of Mainz, Germany, who has been investigating kindergarten-age children's use of digital games and websites. Not more than four people from the other suggested domains should also be invited: it would be important to keep this symposium small and informal in order to maximise full and frank exchange of ideas and to build trust. Its role would be to map out the desk research and consultation required to produce discussion material for a small conference in early 2009.

The purpose of the conference would be to scope out the empirical studies that would be needed to take this enquiry forward. Although such studies fall outside the Beyond Current Horizons terms of reference, it is obvious that the research questions cannot be addressed without such studies. The combined experience of the experts and agencies I have cited should be enough to identify and secure enough new sources of funding to support a longitudinal study on a reasonably large scale, involving perhaps five local authorities over three years.

There seems little point at this stage in outlining a timeline and budget for these tasks, although it should include an allocation for reviewing relevant research reports in other languages, perhaps with the collaboration of the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media at Nordicom, Göteborg University, Sweden.

7. Ensuring credibility

Although the lobby for media literacy as a curricular entitlement has achieved only marginal success over the past 20 years, the climate has changed somewhat since the new media regulator, Ofcom, was given the statutory duty "to work with others to promote media literacy". It is to Ofcom's credit that they are resistant to revisionist versions of media literacy that would reduce it to a checklist of digital competences or to prophylactics against media representations of sex and violence. There are other signs of a changing climate of opinion: in 2007 there was surprisingly little media coverage about Media Studies as an allegedly easy option at GCSE or A Level; and the new Primary Framework not only recognises the importance of generic comprehension skills but also encourages analysis of film as part of literacy learning. Internationally, the signs are even more encouraging, with the European Commission's production of a Communication on media literacy^v and UNESCO renewing the commitment it made to media education in 1982.^{vi}

However, this Challenge would take debates about literacy and media literacy a significant step further by abandoning the comfort zone of separate (and, inevitably, hierarchised) "literacies" and insisting on a more radical approach to literacy as a unified concept, with moving image and hypertext taking their place as essential elements alongside print. The main barriers that would need to be overcome to achieve credibility for this Challenge with ministers and policy-makers are therefore:

- Fear of being perceived as giving up the struggle to maintain "real literacy" standards, letting in the barbarians, etc.
- Failure to understand the subtle and complex ways in which the deep concepts of literacy are common to all media forms; in other words, clinging to the idea that some media are naturally inimical to "real literacy".
- Resistance from the educational technology sector and from broadcasters, whose business is based on the concept of digital media as neutral channels of information, not as objects of critical study.
- Established interests in maintaining existing disciplinary and professional boundaries between cultural, social and technological domains: for example in schools between Literature and Literacy, ICT and media education.
- Systemic inertia at policy level, with media literacy allocated to a regulatory body, the DCMS maintaining divisions between media, film and the arts, and the DCSF apparently failing to perceive the cultural dimensions of technological change.

- The high cost of investment in teacher training, communications and leadership, in order to develop new approaches to literacy from early years.

The need to overcome these barriers underpins the case for empirical research as a subsequent but essential step for this Challenge. If, as this paper argues, standards across the whole of literacy – “old” and “new” – will be raised by treating children’s literacy learning as an integrated field rather than as a set of separate domains, the best argument for this will be hard evidence. There are encouraging signs – as shown in Section B3 – that such evidence would not be very difficult to produce.

The modest scale of the Challenge initiative, as proposed above in Section A 5-6, is also designed to address these barriers: it would be part of the task of the symposium and the conference to clarify the concepts for non-specialists; while the desk research and consultation would have to collect good indicative evidence that would make an empirical study seem highly desirable.

8. New Democracies

Although I believe that new forms of democratic participation are likely to be one important consequence of New Literacy, I feel that the scope and scale of this Challenge is already quite big enough without including any serious investigation into the links between early childhood literacy and increased engagement with the political process, later in life; and in any case, any causal link would be impossible to prove. While it is clearly possible that digital technology can facilitate some key components of democratic participation, by making it easier for people to engage in debate, to publish their own views and to access those of others, we should beware of apocalyptic visions about imminent and dramatic change. We must also recognise that the levels of surveillance and data collection that are already possible make new forms of dictatorship and oppression just as likely as new forms of democracy.

The only thing we can say with any certainty is that whatever the technology does or does not enable, people’s usage of it, and any consequent change in attitudes, will not depend on the technology itself but on the ways it is exploited, not only by commercial entrepreneurs but also by “grass roots” users. New Literacy is only likely to encourage an interest in politics if it builds in a critical dimension, encouraging children to understand the nature of the media they encounter, to interrogate them, and to imagine alternatives.^{vii} The Charter for Media Literacy, which is supported by many hundreds of signatories across Europe, makes clear the “democratic rights and civic responsibilities” inherent in media literacy;^{viii} it would be part of this Challenge to ensure that this dimension was retained in New Literacy.

SECTION B: CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

1. How does New Literacy relate to Old Literacy?

There are important continuities between older and newer media. Much is made of the modish term “multimodality” (getting information through more than one sensory or semiotic system at the same time) as though it were a distinguishing feature of digital media – ignoring the fact that human communication has always been multimodal (ie at minimum combining voice and gesture). What digital media can do is to let us exploit multimodality more fully than other communication technologies can: that is, they can enable us to manipulate auditory modes (eg sounds, music, voice, silence) and visual modes (eg images, movement, gesture, written words, colours and layouts) and to double-code these by applying choices about duration or transitions, all on one machine and, if we want to, within the same text. But this kind of multimodality has been with us, in the form of moving image media, for nearly a century,^{ix} and much longer if we choose to take theatrical performance, or even religious ritual, into account.

In fact, the dominant forms of media use – watching TV, using mobile phones, and using the Internet^x -- all use well-established modes of communication: written or spoken language, moving images (with sound), and still images. The metaphors in common use to describe computer-based activity are all derived from older media (eg page, mail, bookmark, index etc) and many of the commonest icons have ancient antecedents (eg arrow, hand, padlock, house, cogwheel, star, tick, cross, hourglass).

The real discontinuities presented by digital media are not to be found in the actual communication modes used, but in the functionality and hypertextual structures that the software can make available. The richest and most complex exemplars of this are to be found in computer games, where player participation through avatars, multiple choices about narrative sequencing, and the creation of player communities, offer distinctively new possibilities for imaginative play, learning, and the exploration of physical, social and even moral possibilities. At a more mundane level, the construction of even the simplest website requires its designer to imagine a multiplicity of possible visitor choices and questions, and to provide for these through a network of internal and external links. But the content of both types of text – games and websites – may still draw on long-established generic forms, address familiar human dilemmas, and express well-worn ideological positions.

Another aspect of the new functionality offered by digital technology is its capacity to support creative activity, including the construction of multimodal texts as described above, and sharing productions with others. What is new about this is not necessarily the nature of the texts themselves but the extension of creative access and publication to vast numbers of people. We should beware overstating the extent to which these creative opportunities are actually taken up – for the most part people are just continuing to do what they have done for a long time: sharing stories and pictures with friends and family, telling each other about things they have found or seen, and having fun – but nevertheless the possibility of making films, websites, music, audio and image collections, and placing these in the public domain, is in theory available to anyone with access to a computer – and space for storage and retrieval. What is new about this is the democratisation of activities previously limited to small professional groups with access to funding – although we should resist the notion that “everyone” now has such access. What is not new, is the need for creative activity in digital media – as in any other field – to be informed by cultural experience, as well as critical awareness.

New Literacy, therefore, needs to incorporate old literacy. Digital texts – whether a bus timetable, a simulation game or a cosmetics advert – are cultural phenomena, and need to be understood as such.

2. What we already know about New Literacy

To inform educational policy, we need analyses that look at how individuals’ media usage, interests and skills may develop and change over time, and more specifically at the relationship between media use and learning. There is a growing body of reputable research in this field, which has moved on from blaming the media for educational failure, or seeing media merely as aids to instruction, to taking a more objective look at how children and young people use and enjoy media, what kinds of skill, knowledge and understanding they appear to be gaining, and how this can be enhanced and built on through formal education.^{xi}

Many positive and significant findings are emerging, and should be taken into account in any attempt to delineate New Literacy. All these researchers offer convincing evidence that modern media forms – from film to video games – are important study objects in their own right, and that learning about them tends to enhance and extend traditional forms of learning, rather than trivialising or displacing them.

Research in this field is informed by more than 20 years of classroom experience in the development of media education, in which the UK is an international leader, despite lukewarm interest from Government.^{xii} The development and growth of Media Studies

courses in the 14-19 sector is obviously an important contributory factor to this reputation. But there are other factors: small requirements for media education within the national curricula of all four UK nations; the growth of specialist media arts colleges, which has demonstrated the integration of media teaching throughout KS 3 and 4 and across the curriculum; and of course the cohorts of enthusiastic and experienced teachers who have developed new content and pedagogy in this field, including some at KS 1 and 2.^{xiii} This extensive and well-documented development positions the UK very well for a radical evaluation of New Literacy as part of a long term vision for education. It would be essential for the Challenge to take this body of work – both from the academy and from the classroom – into account, rather than assuming, as some recent media literacy rhetoric has done, that the so-called digital revolution presents a total break with the past.

3. What we know about younger children and New Literacy

Unfortunately, most of the research in this field and the bulk of classroom experience relates to teenagers and to secondary schooling. We thus do not know nearly enough about the ways in which children's earliest engagements with media are laying the foundations for later learning. Many studies have also tended to focus on a specific media technology (television, video games, Internet) rather than on looking for more generic skills and aptitudes that may underpin engagement with several technologies.

There are three important exceptions.

(i) The University of Sheffield's study of how young children (0-6 years) use digital media (Jackie Marsh et al, 2005)^{xiv} analysed responses from 1,852 parents and 524 teachers and carers as well as monitoring action research projects in nine early years settings. Their findings are indicative, being based mainly on self-reporting by individuals, but nevertheless they contradict so many popular assumptions about young children and media that it is worth quoting some of them in full:

- Young children are immersed in practices relating to popular culture, media and new technologies from birth. They are growing up in a digital world and develop a wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding of this world from birth. Parents and other family members scaffold this learning, either implicitly or explicitly, and children engage in family social and cultural practices which develop their understanding of the role of media and technology in society.
- Parents report that their young children generally lead well balanced lives, with popular culture, media and new technologies playing an important, but not overwhelming role, in their leisure activities. Engagement with media is generally active, not passive, and promotes play, speaking and listening and reading. In addition, engagement with media and new technologies appears to be a primarily social, not individual, activity, taking place most often with other family members and in shared parts of living spaces.
- The introduction of popular culture, media and/or new technologies into the communications, language and literacy curriculum has a positive effect on the motivation and engagement of children in learning. Practitioners report that it has a positive impact on children's progress in speaking and listening and literacy, although the present study did not include methods which could determine if this was the case.

(ii) The only other recent UK study to address media use by children under the age of 6 is that Lydia Plowman's current study at the University of Stirling, which has yet to report.^{xv} However, a team of researchers at the universities of Minnesota and Kentucky has identified links between the skills children acquire through their pre-school TV viewing, and their later skills in reading, which have important implications for rethinking literacy. Through testing a group of children at age 6 and then at age 8, they have demonstrated

that “comprehension processes needed for reading first emerge in non-print contexts, such as TV viewing and listening to stories, at an earlier age”.^{xvi}

The implications of these findings are considerable. By emphasising the process of comprehension rather than atomised and decontextualised “decoding” techniques, they suggest that many of the skills we need for literacy are not medium-specific. The ability to understand story structure, recognise genre, infer meanings and predict outcomes, is being fostered at least in part by narrative experiences in non-print media. If this is so, then it would make sense for schools to understand this more fully and to build on it in early literacy teaching. It is after all these kinds of comprehension skills that drive enthusiasm for reading.

(iii) These insights formed the basis for an initiative by the British Film Institute, who produced a set of classroom resources to enable children from age three upwards to develop their critical skills in the analysis of short, high quality films. They then worked with the National Primary Strategy to reach 61 local authorities in England who were ready to make a commitment to develop “moving image media literacy” in their primary schools and KS3. This initiative took the Minnesota/Kentucky research a step further in arguing the case for extending the breadth of children’s viewing experiences as well as simply using their media skills to support reading and writing.

The initiative was evaluated by Professor Jackie Marsh at the University of Sheffield and Dr Eve Bearne of the United Kingdom Literacy Association, who state that “In recent years, debates about the nature of literacy in a new media age have been central to the concerns of many educational practitioners. This scheme has enabled practitioners to explore these issues and to engage in leading edge work which will inform the development of educational practice in relation to moving image media education.”^{xvii} Outcomes noted by teachers and literacy advisers emphasised increased motivation and improved quality of writing, but also recognised the value of moving image work per se, as in this comment from a leading literacy teacher in Peterborough:

I found that the children were motivated, engaged and exceedingly attentive right from the beginning. Their descriptive, inferential and predictive skills were extended and they found that they were better at this than they thought because this form of media was familiar to them. The biggest difference in participation and quality of work was from the boys who are not usually enthused by literacy.^{xviii}

Each of these three studies represents tantalising glimpses into what New Literacy learning might involve. They suggest that considerable gains can be achieved in literacy standards generally, by treating children’s media experiences as a continuum rather than as compartmentalised on the basis of cultural status or technologies.

4 Overarching questions: expanded versions

a. What elements of literacy are common to all media forms?

This follows the findings of Kremer et al, which suggest that the “comprehension skills” learned from TV and aural experiences in early childhood transfer naturally to print literacy. But this research pays no attention to the decoding skills that we can infer children may be acquiring at a very early age, in order to make sense of media conventions such as close-up, shot/reverse shot, non-diegetic sound, etc, which do not reproduce real-world informational clues.^{xix} Whether this does happen, and how much it matters, would be part of what this Challenge should tease out. The extent to which the same principles apply to other media such as games and websites needs investigation, and a shared cross-disciplinary framework to describe “elements of literacy” would have to be agreed.

b. What elements of literacy are specific to different media?

I suggest that there are two major media forms or categories: page-based and time-based. Page-based media (carrying both words and images, and not confined to paper pages, since they exist also on screens, and indeed on walls, clothing and even bodies!) are copiable and transportable. Time-based media (carrying moving images and/or sounds) became increasingly copiable and transportable during the 20th century. The dominance of just one aspect of page-based media – print – in literacy curricula is no longer defensible, even though it obviously remains extremely important – not least because time-based media also make use of the written word in many ways. Digital technology enables these forms to overlap and cross-refer in new and interesting ways, but there are still distinctive features to both page-based and time-based media, both in the ways they can be used to generate meaning, and in the ways they are consumed. The Challenge will have to disentangle the distinctive elements in ways that can make sense to non-specialist and potentially unsympathetic audiences.

c. What are the key insights that young children can acquire through play in home and pre-school settings, that will help to form the basis for the successful development of literacy in the widest sense?

Answering this question will mean addressing the practical challenges of investigating what children are learning *about* (not through) media at very early ages, and considering how this may relate to the elements identified through the first two questions. Because much of this learning happens when children are still acquiring spoken language, any empirical study would need to include continuing observational work not only by field workers but also by parents and carers, perhaps on a diary basis. Part of the Challenge task would be to scope out these practicalities.

d. In what ways can schools assess and build on children’s early literacy skills?

Although this question could only be answered fully after empirical research, it should be a Challenge task to consider pedagogies and assessment, and the extent to which these would require significant new management, training and resources, by investigating existing initiatives and studies in the UK and elsewhere. But it must be recognised that substantial changes in current pedagogy would be likely if the full implications of New Literacy were properly recognised. A different relationship between in-school and out-of-school learning would be essential, as would a different and more equal relationship between schools and families. To develop critical and creative skills in New Literacy would require a very much wider range of activities in and out of school. The issue of the “digital divide”, which is being addressed by Lydia Plowman at Stirling University and is also discussed by David Buckingham in his Outline Challenge paper, is clearly very pertinent here also.

e. What will longer term learning progression in New Literacy look like?

The extent to which the Challenge will need to address this question will depend on the study currently being proposed by David Buckingham to the MacArthur Foundation’s New Media Literacies project, which will address learning progression in media literacy. It is likely that there will not be a complete overlap, because the proposed Challenge will address an age-range younger than those currently engaged in almost all media literacy initiatives, and will seek to integrate media literacy with other forms of “old literacy” in order to create a wider and more coherent learning experience for all children.

This document has been commissioned as part of the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families’ Beyond Current Horizons project, led by Futurelab. The views expressed do not represent the policy of any Government or organisation.

END NOTES

ⁱ I have adapted the title given in the brief, changing from “literacies” to “literacy” because I think that the recent trend to invent new forms of literacy (emotional literacy, digital literacy, etc), in implied competition with traditional literacy, is unhelpful. I am arguing that we need to think about literacy in a unified way. Likewise I don’t see why “democracy” shouldn’t be singular: it’s only the ways of participating in it that might change; and in any case I’m afraid I do not give this side of the brief much attention. I have also adapted the suggested central question because education is concerned with knowledge and understanding as well as skills, and to discuss skills on their own sets too narrow a frame for the exploration of literacy. I also felt that the expression “increasingly virtual, visual and complex information societies” begged a number of questions, for example:

- What does “virtual” mean here? Is an e-mail less real than a letter? And “increasingly” seems to mask the reality of a digitally divided society.
- What’s the evidence that *society* is increasingly visual? It can be argued that aural modes of communication are proliferating just as much as visual ones.
- Is society really more complex? Or is it that we just don’t understand the changes that are occurring, particularly as they seem to be so rapid?
- Why the plural “information societies” and what does this over-used term mean anyway? I used “digital” instead because we can at least say confidently that many communication forms *have* switched to digital, with interesting consequences in many spheres, and because the connotations of “information” seem to exclude the cultural dimensions of change. And I added “global” because it seemed both broader and more precise than “societies”.

ⁱⁱ Jackie Marsh, Greg Brooks, Jane Hughes, Louise Ritchie, Samuel Roberts and Katy Wright (2005) *Digital beginnings: Young children’s use of popular culture, media and new technologies*, University of Sheffield; available at <http://www.digitalbeginnings.shef.ac.uk/DigitalBeginningsReport.pdf>. Findings include:

- Over 70% of children turn on TV by themselves by age 2
- 45% of 3 year olds can use a mouse to point and click
- By age six, 34% of children are looking at websites on their own

ⁱⁱⁱ “modality” is a useful over-arching term that refers to the judgments we make about how true or realistic a text is meant to be. So for example News at Ten has “high modality”; Bugs Bunny animations have “low modality” (even though some might find moral or psychological truths as plentiful in Bugs Bunny as in the news).

^{iv} This sentence is adapted from Andrew Burn and James Durran (2007) *Media Literacy in Schools: Practice, Production and Progression*, Paul Chapman Publishing, p 1. Both they and David Buckingham in *Beyond Technology* (see note v), pp 144-145, make a better and more extended argument for understanding digital media as cultural forms, not as technologies. Another important and seminal text here is Brian Winston (1995) *Media, Technology and Society: From the Telegraph to the Internet* (Routledge).

^v “A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment” at http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/docs/com/en.pdf.

^{vi} French National Commission for UNESCO (October 2007) *Media Education: Advances, Obstacles and New Trends since Grünwald: towards a Scale Change?*

^{vii} This argument is presented more fully in Cary Bazalgette, John Harland and Christine James, *Lifeblood of Democracy? Learning about Broadcast News*, Ofcom, at http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/lifeblood/.

^{viii} See Clause 2 of the Charter at <http://www.euromedialiteracy.eu/index.php?Pg=charter>.

^{ix} That is, if we take 1929 as the starting date of “fully multimodal” cinema (ie with sound) – although most films were projected with some form of live sound from 1895 onwards.

^x As indicated in Ofcom (2006) *Media Literacy Audit: Report on Adult Media Literacy*

^{xi} See for example:

David Buckingham (2007) *Beyond Technology: Children's Learning in the Age of Digital Culture*, Polity Press.

Karin Eckström and Birgitte Tufte (eds) (2007) *Children, Media and Consumption: On the Front Edge*, 2007 Yearbook of the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, Nordicom, University of Göteborg.

Henry Jenkins (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press.

Dafna Lemish (ed) (2007) *Children and TV: A Global Perspective*, Blackwell Publishing.

Sonia Livingstone and Moira Bovill (eds) (2001) *Children and their Changing Media Environment: A European Comparative Study*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Sonia Livingstone (2002) *Young People and New Media: Childhood and the Changing Media Environment*, Sage.

Ofcom (2006) *Media Literacy Audit: Report on Adult Media Literacy*

Ofcom (2006) *Media Literacy Audit: Report on Media Literacy Amongst Children*

Teena Willoughby and Eileen Wood (2008) *Children's Learning in a Digital World*, Blackwell Publishing

It will also be useful to see Buckingham et al (2005) *The Media Literacy of Children and Young People: A Review of the Academic Research*, Ofcom.

^{xii} Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona (2007) *Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe*, at http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/studies/index_en.htm. For a quick comparison between countries, see the overview charts in the "country profiles".

^{xiii} Cary Bazalgette (2007) "La education en los medios en el Reino Unido" in *Revista Comunicar* vol XV no 28, March 2007; and "The Development of Media Education in England: A Personal View" in Flood et al (2007) *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy Through the Communicative and Visual Arts*, vol ii, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; both also available (in English) at <http://carybazalgette.net/writing.html>.

^{xiv} Marsh et al, op cit.

^{xv} See <http://www.ioe.stir.ac.uk/research/projects/esociety/index.php>. Marsh et al also refer to the US report *Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers* (Rideout, Vandewater and Wartella, 2003), based on a telephone survey of 1,065 families. Like *Digital Beginnings*, this survey also indicated that many young children's lives are media-rich and that they are developing a wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding of media from birth.

^{xvi} Panayiota Kendeou, Julie S. Lynch, Paul van den Broek, Chris A. Espin, Mary Jane White, and Kathleen E. Kremer (2005) "Developing Successful Readers: Building Early Comprehension Skills through Television Viewing and Listening" in *Early Childhood Education Journal*; also Kathleen E. Kremer, Julie S. Lynch, Panayiota Kendeou, Jason Butler, and Paul van den Broek, University of Minnesota, and Elizabeth Puzles Lorch, University of Kentucky "The Role of Early Narrative Understanding in Predicting Future Reading Comprehension". Summary available at <http://www.ciera.org/library/presos/2002/2002aera/pvdbroekaerapreso.htm>.

^{xvii} Jackie Marsh and Eve Bearne, *BFI Scheme for Lead Practitioners of Moving Image Media Education: Final Evaluation Report* – summary available at <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/mediacentre/2008/955.html>.

^{xviii} British Film Institute, *Revaluing Literacy: an account of the "shorts" initiative* (in press)

^{xix} Paul Messaris (1994) argues that most media conventions are naturally understood, because they are closely analogous to the ways people perceive physical and social realities. *Visual Literacy: Image, Mind and Reality*, Westview Press.