Setting the scene for the media literacy debate

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What is media literacy?

Long history (literacy – from oral, print …), but short past (media education – empowerment through vs. defensive of media)

- 'The ability to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms.' (US National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, 1993)
- 'The ability to use, understand and create media and communications.' (Ofcom)
- 'Media literacy relates to the ability to access the media, to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content and to create communications in a variety of contexts.' (EC)

Over the long history, accessing (equality, pedagogy), evaluating (discernment, critique) and creating (writing, expression, participation) were all crucial

All dimensions are equally vital to literacy in a convergent digital age; how will society advance this agenda of empowerment?
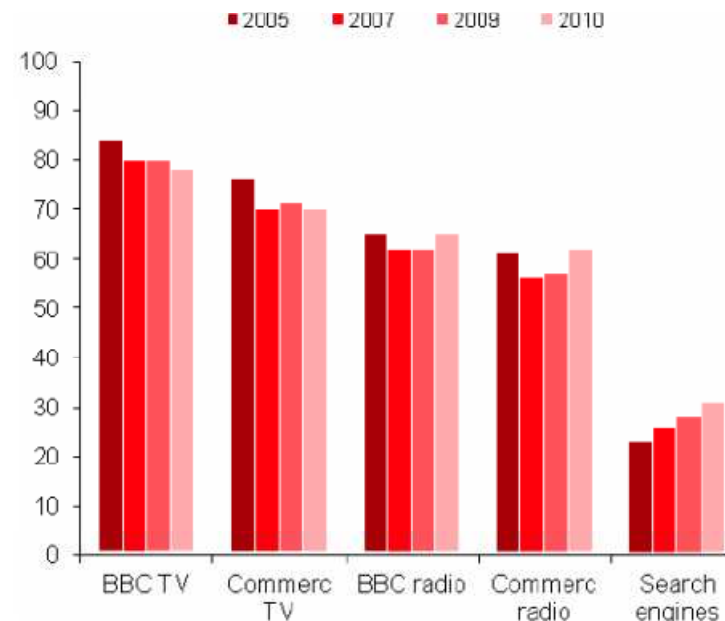
Government support – UK, EC, UNESCO . . .

- UK Communications Act 2003 (Section 11: Duty to promote media literacy)

- Echoed in EC Communication (2007), High Level Expert Group (2008), Recommendation (2009); Digital Agenda (2010); UNESCO initiatives

- 2010 Coalition government cancelled the well-funded National Plan for Digital Participation (previously, National Media Literacy Plan)

- What's the relation to education policy, curriculum, teacher training? And has it worked?

- Measurement poses significant problems for national/international efforts to improve ML – tends to reduce ML to functional indicators, changing targets and unclear aspirations
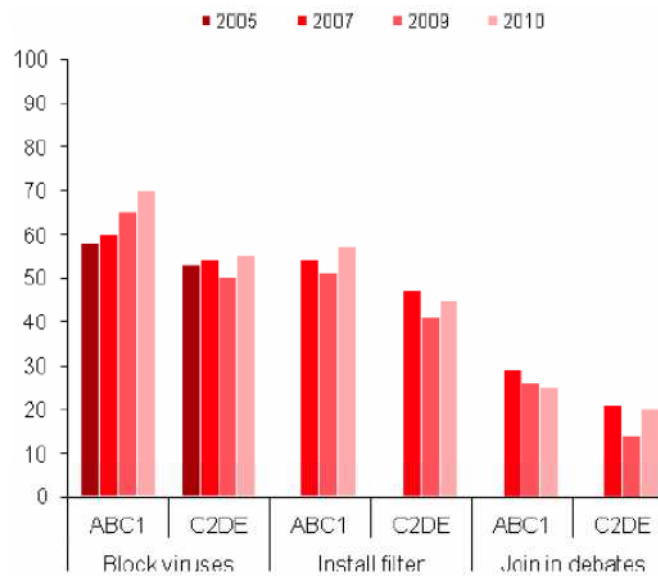
Children and adults who check site reliability when entering a new website from 2005-2010
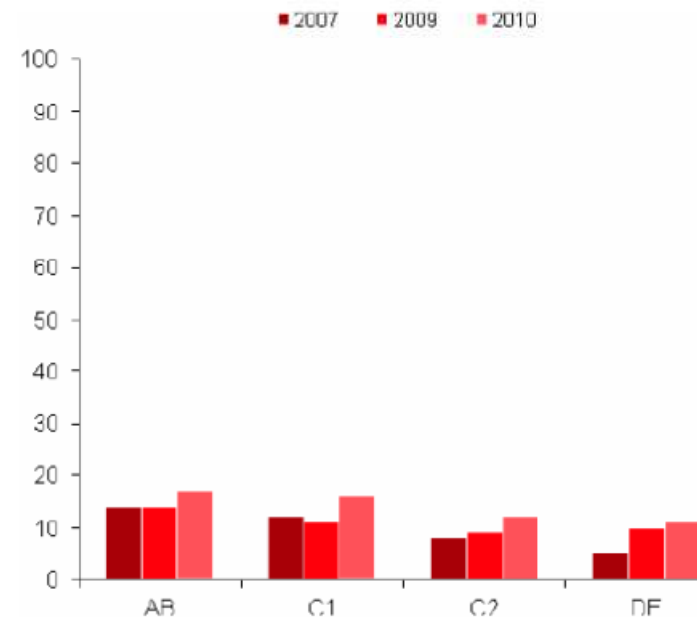
Legend: 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010

Check sites (16+), Check sites (12-15)

Public (16+) understanding of funding sources 2005-10

Legend: 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010

BBC TV, Commerc TV, BBC radio, Commerc radio, Search engines

Digital skills among adults from 2005-2010

Legend: 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010

ABC1, C2DE / Block viruses; ABC1, C2DE / Install filter; ABC1, C2DE / Join in debates

Adults' civic/public use of the internet from 2007-2010

Legend: 2007, 2009, 2010

AB, C1, C2, DE

Source: *Ofcom Adults' Media Literacy Audit 2006-11*

Why is progress in ML stalled?

- Is checking sites stalled because most have got the message (how much is enough?)? How can critical literacy has to get more subtle?

- Knowledge of funding remains low because it isn't promoted (i.e. media literacy is supported selectively)

- Security/safety skills advance are ahead of civic participatory skills because self-interest drives the former but not the latter (insufficient pathways/institutional responsiveness?)

- SES differences persist because any knowledge promotion initiative → knowledge gaps (ML measures correlate with SES at an individual level, with GDP at a national level)

Education policy has done little better

The evidence seems to point to an impact on attainment where ICT is an integral part of the day-to-day learning experiences of pupils, although the weight of evidence is insufficient to draw firm conclusions

(Condie and Munro, 2007, Becta)

A 2007 US report to Congress found that test scores in classrooms using reading and mathematics software for a year were little different from those obtained using traditional teaching methods

The contribution of ICT to students' learning was very dependent upon the type of ICT resource and the subject in which it was being used
(Cox and Marshall, 2007)

In many of the studies showing an advantage for online learning, *the online and classroom conditions differed in terms of time spent, curriculum and pedagogy*. It was the *combination* of elements in the treatment condition (which was likely to have included additional learning time and materials as well as additional opportunities for collaboration) that produced the observed learning advantages

(Means et al 2009, US Dept of Education)

Hence 'digital natives' are often young sceptics

Yeah, it's IT, that's what it's called, and you go, you have about 10 computers in a big computer room and you work in groups to do like stuff on the computer. They let you go on the internet but it has to be educational stuff you look up and all that. That's boring but we don't listen to that and we look up what we want when the teacher's not looking.
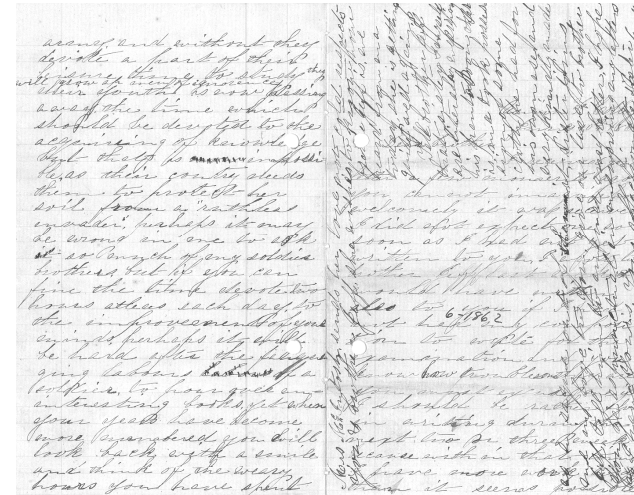
We do have internet at school and we do have IT lessons but they don't really help us. I don't quite know where I've learnt it… I think it's just been fiddling around with it basically.

It's like you don't know who's doing what, whose website it is, who wants what, who wants you to learn what. So you don't know who's put what information there, but … it's reliable – but you don't know who's put it, who wants you to gain what from that information.

To really understand for people of our age group, we don't really use the internet to do like research most of the time. You're just on the internet to look for football news and things like that.

An interactionist approach

- Rather than divorcing audiences/users from their environment, let's recognise the interaction between design and literacy

- The interface on which literacy depends is too often overlooked – is it legible, what are its affordances?

- The less legible the text, the more literacy is demanded of the reader (or, if you improve legibility, literacy will improve with no educational effort)

Beyond individual skills

- The skills agenda is problematic – how much is enough? Who can pay for delivery? Unequal in practice. And in whose interests?

- Setting aside the fascination with novel (if opaque) tools, we should recognise that the verbs of ML – search, navigate, evaluate, create, share, etc. – are not themselves new

- They refer to established social practices, always complexly contextualised, now also complexly digitally mediated, focused on social purposes

Literacy is not and never has been a personal attribute or ideologically inert 'skill' simply to be 'acquired' by individual persons... It is ideologically and politically charged – it can be used as a means of social control or regulation, but also as a progressive weapon in the struggle for emancipation (Hartley, 2002)

Jenkins' 21st century skills – conceived as radical, collective, demanding of providers

- Play – the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving
- Performance – the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery
- Simulation – the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes
- Appropriation – the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content
- Multitasking – the ability to scan one's environment and shift focus as needed to salient details
- Distributed cognition – the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities
- Collective intelligence – the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others towards a common goal
- Judgment – the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources
- Transmedia navigation – the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities
- Networking – the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information
- Negotiation – the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respective multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms

In relation to schools/youth, how radical do we want to be about (digital media) learning?

- Formal   Informal

- Hierarchical   Heterarchical

- Teacher-pupil   Peer-to-peer

- Classroom-based   Home or community-based

- Individualised   Collaborative

- Outcome-oriented   Process-oriented

- Substantial public funding   Uncertain, ad hoc resources

- Institutional infrastructure   Project-based support

- Mixed effects   Largely untested effects

Conclusions

- **More than mere tools, the media are now environmental (infrastructural, embedded, integrating structure and practice, for better and for worse)**

- **So we should not blackbox or individualise media literacy as a property (or lack) in the person**

- **Media literacy should be understood as the outcome of people's interactions with and, especially, through media during the conduct of everyday life**

- **Media literacy policy must/is shifting from learning about media to learning through media – to advance societal goals of education, expression, participation in a mediated society**

- **The challenge is to enable to people to recognise, and benefit from, the ways in which the conduct of their lives depends on processes of mediation**

For more information

See

- Livingstone, S., and Wang, Y. (2011) *Media Literacy and the Communications Act: What has been achieved and what should be done?* LSE Media Policy Project Brief 2. http://www.scribd.com/doc/57742814/Policy-Brief-Progress-in-digital-skills-has-stalled

- Livingstone, S. (2011) Progress in digital skills has stalled. Blog post. *LSE Media Policy Project.* http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2011/06/13/media-literacy/