CARY BAZALGETTE
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INTERVIEWER: DEE MORGENTHALER

(QUOTE*)*

We have a serious lack of good evidence about teaching and learning and an excess of optimistic assertion about what people have done in classrooms and what effect they think it has had. Until we gather better, more objective and more sustained evidence about media teaching and learning, we can't make judgments about what movement is going on or in what direction...

I believe, however, that the biggest challenge that faces us is how to establish media education as a normal part of schooling for every child from the very beginning of schooling. I see the way to achieving this as being through the transformation of the literacy curriculum so that all children learn about books, films, broadcasting, photography, computer games, social networking, and whatever other media forms may evolve, as an everyday part of their schooling.

BIOGRAPHY OF CARY BAZALGETTE

Cary Bazalgette is a freelance writer, researcher and consultant specializing in media education and media education research. She is the Chair of the Media Education Association, a member of the European Commission's Media Literacy Experts Group, a Fellow of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), and a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Education, University of London. She worked at the British Film Institute from 1979 to 2007, including eight years (1999-2006) as Head of Education.

INTERVIEW TEXT

Selected Questions:

Can you tell me about the start of your involvement in media education?

What inspired the beginning of your journey?

Were there specific scholars or texts that you were reading at the time that inspired your work?

Did you encounter any obstacles?

What are you pleased about having achieved?

Do you think we are moving in the right direction? What would you like to see happen?

DM: *Can you tell me about the start of your involvement in media education? What inspired the beginning of your journey?*

CB: As a teenager in the 1950s I was interested in film, probably in the first place as part of a general teenage resistance against the mainstream and the status quo. I was also interested in American culture more than the cultural values presented to me at school. At age 19, I discovered the University Film Society and saw a lot of what we now regard as the "classics" – the early cinema then. And when I moved to London I started watching films at the National Film Theatre – the national cintematheque run by the British Film Institute (BFI).

In 1967, I started teaching in London. The curriculum was very open in England at the time: we had no national curriculum. The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA -- the "school board" for the London area) encouraged teachers to show films in the classroom through its free loan service for schools, which made available short films and "study extracts" from classic films that the BFI distributed. So we were able to show different films on 16mm every week if we wanted to. I became interested in teaching filmmaking and, again supported by the ILEA, took courses in 16mm film production, so that I could teach filmmaking with young people in a North London secondary school. I also took a BFI evening course in film criticism and began to get involved with other teachers who were developing critical approaches to film. I think a lot of us in the media education discipline followed similar routes. Margaret Thatcher ultimately got rid of the ILEA – a democratically elected institution -- because it was too "leftist," so a lot of that kind of support to schools disappeared.

After my own children were born in 1974 and 1976, I did a bit more teaching but moved to work at the BFI in 1979. This was when video-recording technologies began to become widely available. It became easy to record TV programs off-air and use them in the classroom, so I became interested in developing media education about television. I believe that teachers are best at teaching what they are interested in and are passionate about. I did not think of TV as a "bad thing" or become interested in teaching media criticism in order to dissuade people from watching TV. Like many of my colleagues, I thought it was important for children to be able to analyze and discuss media that they knew about and enjoyed. They might end up rejecting some of it, but they should also be able to articulate and argue for what they valued.

I also wanted to work with younger children, having observed my own children's early encounters with TV. But in my first few years at the BFI, I was discouraged from developing media education with younger children: the focus was on trying to establish media education in secondary schools. In 1983, the government commissioned a group of teachers to examine the relationship between popular TV and schoolchildren. Their report was written up by James Learmonth, one of the Inspectors of Schools, who included an argument for the importance of teaching *all* children about television. This was a very politically important document because it opened the way – if only temporarily – for at least some schools to develop policies and practice in media education. It was this report – and my later work with James – that convinced me of

the importance of advocating media education for every child, not just as optional courses for a few.

DM: *Were there specific scholars or texts that you were reading at the time that inspired your work?*

CM: I was inspired by the people I was working with at the time. As well as James Learmonth there was Philip Simpson (Head of the Education Department at the BFI) and my colleagues David Lusted, Jim Cook and, later on, Manuel Alvarado. Writers who were influential on my thinking were Bob Hodge and David Tripp who wrote *Children and Television* (1986), Kevin Durkin's *Television, Sex Roles and Children* (1985), and of course the major cultural studies writers at that time, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall.

The BFI summer schools that ran throughout the '70s and '80s were also very pivotal in terms of forming the field as well as in providing me with the support of academic education in media criticism that I wouldn't have had otherwise. The summer schools were week-long intensive residential courses that brought together scholars and teachers and anyone interested in developing critical analysis of film and/or television. A lot of original research went into planning these schools. Delegates paid a fee to attend but effectively they were also subsidized by the tax payer, eventually at a rate of about 800 pounds per person, so as funding got tighter, in the end the schools were discontinued in the late 1980s.

In terms of classroom pedagogy, many of us started off by using a paper produced by Jean-Pierre Golay (of the CMC in Lausanne, Switzerland) about their work on image analysis with children. I think it is important for people to remember that, prior to the mid to late 1990s, media education was over-dependent on the visual image because it was so difficult, in pre-digital days, to analyze the whole "audio-visual" text and to take account of the audio track and the processes of editing. I feel that this emphasis has continued to dominate film and media teaching, despite the easier access we now have to other analytic techniques.

DM: *Did you encounter any obstacles?*

CM: There were and still are negative attitudes amongst educators towards non-print media. The view was that "literacy" was only concerned with the written word. Also, technology itself was an obstacle because you had to work with what was available. There was quite a time-lapse between the point where we began to see the real potential of digital technologies and the point when they actually became widely available, cheap, and reliable.

1993 was the darkest time for media education in the UK when it looked like the government was going to remove all references to media education in the new national curriculum. We (at the BFI) ran a "Commission of Inquiry into English and Media in the National Curriculum." We put together a panel of distinguished people who were very "middle of the road" politically, who took evidence from a range of people about what was happening in media and English teaching in schools. The resultant report may have helped keep media education from disappearing because the panel didn't have much political baggage, but they nevertheless endorsed the importance of media education as something of general value in children's education, not as a

prophylactic against indoctrination and certainly not as a total waste of time, which was the view the government were trying to impose.

Another issue, not so much an obstacle as a difference of opinion, was the importance I wanted to attach to the cultural aspects of media.   This was partly due to my role in a cultural institution dedicated to moving image media, but it was also a personal belief that education should never only address what learners are already familiar with, but should also extend their range of experiences and introduce them to new material. Although I was as enthusiastic as any other media educator about the importance of children studying the popular cultural forms they already enjoyed and knew something about, I also argued that teachers had a responsibility to introduce children to films (and, if possible, TV) from other cultures around the world, from non-mainstream production sources, and from the past. Some media educators, notably Len Masterman, attacked this as "elitist" for reasons I could never really figure out. (Read Bazalgette's "Open Letter to Len Masterman" here). I don't see any contradictions or difficulties about media education including the study of both mainstream and non-mainstream forms, or about it being concerned with developing and articulating critical approaches that enable learners to make positive as well as negative judgments about media.

DM: *What are you pleased about having achieved?*

CM: I think I'm most proud of the project we ran in my last seven years at the BFI. When the Labor Government came to power in 1997 they set up a national project to raise standards in literacy in primary schools. It was called the National Literacy Strategy. In 1999 the director of the Strategy asked us at the BFI to run a seminar for them on the relationship between print and moving image texts. Although the Strategy later became notorious for centralized, top-down policies that took away teachers' creativity and insisted on mechanical, target-driven teaching, its senior staff had some pretty liberal ideas in the early years and we had a constructive dialogue with them. Out of the seminar came the idea that we should publish collections of short films for classroom study by primary children. In the end we produced seven such collections, aimed at children and young people at various stages of the 3 – 14 age range. More importantly, we set up a program of training provisions aimed at creating "lead practitioners" in teaching about moving image media, who were also supported by their local education authorities to train other teachers and develop "moving image media education" in a number of local schools. In the end we trained such leaders in 61 of England's 147 local authorities, and over the ten years since this initiative began, the BFI has sold over 15,000 resources and probably reached well over a million children, as well as creating sustainable media teaching in many schools and local authorities. What's also interesting about this project is that it was done without any extra subsidy from the taxpayer: it was all achieved on the basis of regular expenditure on our salaries and within the local authorities themselves, who collectively invested some 800,000 pounds in media education over this period. So I'm pretty pleased about that.

DM: *Do you think we are moving in the right direction? What would you like to see happen?*

CB: In the UK right now we are holding our breath to see what will happen next. The new government is undertaking a comprehensive review of all its expenditure which is likely to result

in enormous cuts to public services. A lot of people will be losing their jobs and the immediate future for education and the economy in general is looking very bleak. In this context it is impossible to describe the development of media education as moving in any direction at all, let alone the right one. But even at the best of times, here and pretty much everywhere in the world, the development of media education has been, and continues to be, patchy and is seriously hampered by any shared sense of what the desirable learning outcomes are and what learning progression looks like. We have a serious lack of good evidence about teaching and learning and an excess of optimistic assertion about what people have done in classrooms and what effect they think it has had. Until we gather better, more objective and more sustained evidence about media teaching and learning, we can't make judgments about what movement is going on or in what direction. Until we gather better, more objective and more sustained evidence about media teaching and learning, we can't make judgments about what movement is going on or in what direction.

For myself, I am very glad to not be working in public service any more. I am happy working voluntarily for the Media Education Association, which is an independent subject association for media teachers in England, run by its members. We aren't accountable to anyone except the teachers and the children that our members teach. We are working hard trying to ensure that the association survives. We get together annually at a conference and we have a new website based on social networking principles (at www.themea.org) which enables anyone to join us for nothing.

Nevertheless, there *is* a growing interest in the idea of media literacy; in other words, in the outcomes of media education. We do now have a government-funded body (Ofcom, our media regulator) that has a statutory responsibility for media literacy, which at least places it on the political agenda, although associating media literacy with a regulator does create problems for us because it links media literacy with the protection of children rather than with their general literacy competence.

An important factor for us in the UK is also that we have long-established specialist courses in media and in film that are offered in many schools as options to young people between the ages of 14 and 19. Each year over 100,000 students take examinations at the end of these courses, which means that there is a substantial sector of teachers in the UK who do have real expertise and experience in teaching young people about media, and a large and growing body of teaching resources produced by commercial publishers. Despite the fact that some sectors of the media and politics are contemptuous of these courses, they are in fact extremely demanding of both teachers and students, and it is hard to get high grades in the examinations.

I believe, however, that the biggest challenge that faces us is how to establish media education as a normal part of schooling for every child from the very beginning of schooling. I see the way to achieving this as being through the transformation of the literacy curriculum so that all children learn about books, films, broadcasting, photography, computer games, social networking, and whatever other media forms may evolve, as an everyday part of their schooling. It would be nice if I could start to see that happening in my lifetime but I shan't be surprised if it doesn't.