Digital Literacies in the Making: Schools Producing News with the BBC

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English abstract

Each year BBC News School Report events support teams of British pupils in producing authentic news outputs. Some items are broadcast on radio or television, and all are made available online. Conducting the independent national evaluation in 2009, we found positive results in terms of learning outcomes and attitudes towards current affairs and media production. Here we focus on aspects of digital literacies, analysing processes and outcomes through a multiliteracies framework. Implications for teachers, supporters and the BBC are considered.

Keywords: Digital literacies, media, multimodality, multiliteracies pedagogy.
Introduction

A regional evaluation (Passey, 2008) and a national evaluation (Passey & Gillen, 2009) of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News School Report project identified a wide range of learning outcomes about and from, and shifts in attitudes towards, news production processes. A further key research question to consider is - does evidence indicate that this project has supported key pedagogical demands required to develop digital literacies practices? In this paper we consider a range of findings from our evaluations of the BBC News School Report projects from a digital literacy perspective. Selecting a multiliteracies framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) through which to view pedagogies concerned with digital literacy development and practices, we highlight and analyse ways that teachers and learners have been involved in these pedagogical practices, and draw conclusions about wider developments of school-based digital literacies practices.

BBC News School Report – a project introduction

The BBC is a publicly-funded broadcaster in the United Kingdom (UK). Since its establishment under Royal Charter in 1927, it has pursued public service values, maintaining national and regional television (TV) and radio stations. It is a particularly trusted media outlet (Media Newsline, 2009) and has an extremely extensive website. According to Alexa (2010), the BBC site is currently the 5th most popular in the UK and 41st in the world, a notable achievement when many of those in higher positions are search engines.

Nevertheless, in the twenty-first century, it is clear that the BBC has concerns, in common with other organisations and some researchers, about a lack of interest in the news among young people, more broadly reflecting disengagement from aspects of participation in civic society. Buckingham (2000, pp. 218-219) suggested:

By and large, young people are not defined by society as political subjects, let alone as political agents. Even in the areas of social life that affect and concern them to a much greater extent than adults – most notably education – political debate is conducted almost entirely 'over their heads'.

Conscious of the longer term dangers of this situation for civic society, and of course for their projected audience profiles, BBC News developed an exciting initiative. In 2007 they launched the BBC News School Report project, giving 11 to 14 year old pupils in the UK the opportunity to make their own news reports for a real audience. A key feature of the exercise is an annual ‘News Day’ which culminates in an upload of produced materials by a 2pm deadline. The project has grown each year, with over 25,000 pupils involved in 2010. The project involves:

- Initial training of teachers, at introductory events run by the BBC;
- A succession of online ‘lessons’, designed to systematically build up skills and knowledge towards the News Day, including a ‘Practice Day’;
- Some direct support from a member of BBC staff (in some cases, and most likely when a school undertakes the project for the first time), often a practising news journalist, and email liaison from the co-ordinating team.

Teams of pupils are typically around 12 in number, and a team may be made up of pupils from across the age range, or within a specific year group. They may be involved in production trials or activities in after-school groups or in lessons put aside by specific teachers (and teachers may come
from quite different subject disciplines). However, as explored and reported within the initial
evaluation study (Passey, 2008), it is the young people themselves that select stories, undertake
activities, and produce final outcomes (with only a very few exceptions reported in our evaluations).
Teachers, BBC supporters and supporters from other external centres such as City Learning
Centres\(^1\) (CLCs) help to frame, challenge and facilitate the work of the pupil teams. Individuals
within teams take on a news production role, such as news researcher, interviewer, video editor, or
broadcaster. Final products may be audiovisual (emulating TV news bulletins), audio (emulating
radio news bulletins) or occasionally using software such as graphic texts. Some elements are
broadcast on BBC channels, usually incorporated as short segments into regional, local or even
national TV and radio news bulletins. Major democratic institutions are knowledgeable and
supportive of the initiative. In 2010, involved politicians included the leader or deputy leader of the
three major Westminster political parties, the First Minister of Scotland, a panel of Welsh Assembly
members and two members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. All schools are encouraged by the
BBC to feature a good mixture of different kinds of items, to include international, national, local
and even school-based stories, and to gain a balance between serious and more light-hearted tones.
Presenting and editing to professional standards, or as close as possible, is viewed as extremely
important. All reports are produced in digital form and almost all are then made accessible online,
initially via the school’s website and then often linked from the BBC’s dedicated website (see BBC

Digital literacies: a multiliteracies approach

Practice-oriented notions of ‘new literacies’ and ‘digital literacies’ have moved far beyond a narrow
focus on skills, to embrace notions including criticality, multimodality and design (see Lankshear
& Knobel, 2008; Gillen & Barton, 2010 for discussions of this evolution). The term ‘digital
literacies’ captures an arena of rapidly developing practices, as humans interact with technologies in
new ways and for innovative purposes. Thomas (2010) defines digital literacies as “an umbrella term
that defines the various social, discursive and textual practices (with a multimodal view of textuality)
which occur within communities using digital technology.” Recognising this view of literacies as a
social practice (Barton, 2007) we adopt here as a definition of digital literacies: “the constantly
changing practices through which people make traceable meanings using digital technologies”
(Gillen & Barton, 2010, p. 9). This focus on practices enables us to avoid conflating advances in
technologies with assumptions of automatic benefits or dangers, just as Jenkins et al.’s (2006) notion
of participatory culture focuses on people’s collaborative, purposeful endeavours employing
technologies. Jenkins et al. (2006) follow Gee in arguing that the most exciting learning
opportunities for young people in the 21st century occur in online collaborative environments
dubbed ‘affinity spaces’ by Gee (2004). They present powerful arguments that, far removed from
the classroom, these can offer opportunities for learning that: can dissolve age/stage demarcations;
offer differential experiences according to levels of expertise; develop competencies through peer-
to-peer contingent sharing; and, most of all, be extremely motivating. It is difficult for education in
the formal environment of classrooms to provide such pedagogic experiences. Lessons are organised
in the vast majority of cases with groups of pupils of the same age, almost wholly taking place within
classroom walls. The need to satisfy specified curricula and assessment targets makes the provision
of differentiated learning experiences difficult and potentially threatening. Since the curricula are
imposed externally, rather than arising from pupils’ own interests, it is not often that a pupil can be
cast in the role of ‘expert’. In such circumstances it is extremely difficult for UK secondary schools
to provide the important opportunities identified as participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2006) or
affinity spaces (Gee, 2004).
In contrast to many everyday school experiences, the BBC News School Report project does provide such opportunities. The project works with teachers – and some others – in classroom or CLC contexts (with some exceptions), who are (with some exceptions) generally concerned with simultaneously pursuing curriculum goals and taking the opportunity to work with pupils on a digital literacies project, characterised by many of the features of Jenkins et al.’s (2006) participatory culture. As our extensive evaluation (Passey & Gillen, 2009) showed through the application of a number of quantitative and qualitative methods, the project was well designed to provide a distinct, well thought-through structure to facilitate successful engagement yet also provide sufficient flexibility to allow for locally contextualised approaches. In this paper we endeavour to illustrate aspects of what was achieved, using a specific lens that we shall now turn to.

An influential and useful way to connect conceptions of different pedagogies and how these might relate to new social realities including technological developments was proposed by the New London Group in 2000 - a multiliteracies framework. ‘Multi’ refers to two key dimensions: the multiple ways of being in a diverse, changing world; and the multiple methods of representation made possible with globalisation. One summary of the multiliteracies framework appears in Figure 1.

Situated Practice, draws on the experience of meaning-making in everyday life, the public realm and workplaces

Overt Instruction, through which pupils develop an explicit metalanguage of design

Critical Framing, interprets the social context and purpose of designs of meaning

Transformed Practice, in which pupils, as meaning-makers, become designers of social futures. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 7)

Figure 1. Four components of multiliteracies pedagogy proposed by the New London Group

Since we take this as our organising framework, before turning to introducing our research approach, we will first expand on our interpretation of this and particularly the four components of pedagogy. Note that, as proposed by Cope & Kalantzis (2000), we use ‘pedagogy’ here in a broader sense than psychological processes of teaching and learning. While concerned centrally with knowledge processes, “effective pedagogy carefully calibrates the distance between the learner’s known lifeworld and the transformational possibilities of the to-be-known” (Kalantzis, Cope et al., 2005, p. 71). In this view, pedagogy embraces elements of the design of education, including the relating of experiences of formal learning and those removed in time and space – including the world outside the school and the projected futures of the children. There is therefore a strong connection with the broad and rich conceptualisations of digital literacies discussed above. (Pedagogic practices and digital literacies in these senses are both strongly conceptualised through a social constructivist paradigm - pedagogies and digital literacies intertwined through social practices and interactions.)

Taking the four components, the first emphasis on ‘situated practice’ reinforces the notion that learning is always connected to specific domains of activity – the settings, participants, discourses and dynamics of participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learners themselves may make connections between experiences even if the borders between domains seem to be highly demarcated, as, for example with home and school; and, indeed, it can be fruitful to pay attention to such motivational bridges (Barron, 2006). The second emphasis is on the place of ‘overt instruction’ making the sensible point that however learner-centred a philosophy of education may be, however informal learning might become, teaching is essential in the imparting of useful frameworks for thinking and understanding. The New London Group’s conception of ‘critical framing’ recognises the importance...
of power relationships in communication and that they are rarely symmetrical. The notion of ‘design’
embraces a richer and more active understanding of semiotic meaning-making than many
traditional metaphors of learning centred upon transmission and acquisition (Kress, 2003). The
notion of ‘transformed practice’ recognises an aspiration that pupils remain not merely recipients
of validated frameworks of knowledge transmitted to them, but rather that they become active,
informed and skilled citizens who can make effective contributions to their social worlds.

In this paper we reanalyse a subset of our data according to the multiliteracies framework, finding
this appropriate to illuminate the specific pedagogy and indeed successes of the project. We now
turn to three aspects of our methodology: elucidating the dataset; our approach to analysis; and a
particular decision with regard to ethical ways of reporting participatory research.

Methodology

The data

The authors gathered evidence about the BBC News School Report project over a three year period.
Don Passey conducted an initial regional independent evaluation (Passey, 2008), while both authors
conducted a national independent evaluation (Passey & Gillen, 2009). On the 2010 News Day,
Julia Gillen observed at a participating school for the full day, no longer as part of the evaluation
process, but with the knowledge of the BBC.

For the published national evaluation (Passey & Gillen, 2009) we made use of online questionnaires
pre and post the News Day, to conduct a quantitative investigation of learning interactions and
gains, as perceived by pupils themselves and their teachers. Although we draw upon those findings,
for this paper we focus on a dataset compiled by the first author:

- Field notes and photographs recorded while observing “St Hilda’s” school on News Day 2009.
- The final uploaded video made by Abbey Grange School, Leeds in 2009.
- Field notes, photographs and screen grabs of webpages recorded while observing in Abbey Grange
  School on News Day 2010.
- The final uploaded video made by Abbey Grange School in 2010 (copied and made accessible
  online for one year).
- Interviews with pupils and staff shortly after News Day 2009 from 9 schools, 8 in England and
  1 in Wales. A total of 32 boys, 43 girls and 10 teachers or other adults who had been involved
  with the project were interviewed. These were selected by the schools, generally comprising
  whoever from the project was available at the time the interviewer visited. The format for
  interviewing was agreed with the teachers: most often students were interviewed in pairs, however
  one school insisted on a group interview of 9 pupils together and in the special school catering
  for pupils with severe disabilities then each child was interviewed separately, with the assistance
  of the teacher. A semi-structured protocol (see Passey & Gillen, 2009, p. 92) was used for the
  interviews; this was adapted for the special school. An average interview took around 20 minutes.
  Four students were interviewed by video conference due to accessibility issues. It should be noted
  that since there were pair and group interviews, it was sometimes not possible to capture
afterwards the gender of each speaker; therefore this information is only occasionally included below when quoting from students.

- Notes supplemental to the interviews relating to school size, location (urban or rural), history of participation in the project and roles and title of the teacher and adults involved in the interviews, plus any notes taken of informal conversations with other relevant adults while at the school.

As will become evident from the remainder of this paper, we draw also on material from the BBC News School Report website and the BBC website more widely; however, given the wealth of materials accessible to us, we have not sampled these in any systematic way related to the issues explored here.

**Approach to analysis**

The data were organised and entered into Atlas-ti, an application well designed for handling multimodal data. Inspired by the approach of Kerin (2009), we applied the components of Cope and Kalantzis’ (2000) multiliteracies framework to these data. Accordingly, codes were created, corresponding to the four multiliteracies components, defined in Figure 1. Coding of all the data was completed by labelling each ‘turn’ (i.e. one person’s utterance, if in face to face talk) according to whether a single code applied, or whether for some more than one code applied; in other cases a turn received no coding. A ‘turn’ was in some cases less than a sentence in length, while in others it was more. Every mention of the BBC was also coded, in order to analyse views of its role by participants. Codes were applied across the diverse modes, and connections were mapped. As Kerin (2009) found, there were some elements where more than one code applied. For example, the final quotation that appears under ‘Critical framing’ in the discussion below might also be chosen to exemplify ‘Transformed practice’ if one takes into account the individual pupil’s account of what she gained from the project in conjunction with the teacher’s description. Deciding that different qualitative coding systems are appropriate for different purposes, it was felt that for this paper there needed to be less focus on delineation (ensuring a high degree of inter-reliability between coders) and more focus on final agreement between the authors on the validity of interpretations presented here as properly reflecting the evidence. Accordingly, the following analysis represents our decisions after discussion, reflecting a striving for ecological validity, appreciating the situated and contingent nature of such research.

**Notes on anonymity and reporting**

In the project evaluation report (Passey & Gillen, 2009) we preserved the anonymity of pupils and teachers. Clearly, we wanted to ensure they could make their online responses to the questionnaires in confidence, since ours was an independent evaluation. Similarly, we reported the results of the interviews with pupils and staff anonymously, including at school level.

In this paper, in consultation with one school, we are partially lifting this anonymity, identifying Abbey Grange School, Leeds for the following reasons:

(a) All broadcasts were put into the public domain, via school websites which in turn were linked from the BBC.

(b) It does not always repay a school’s generosity in participating in research, or reflect their achievements most appropriately, to extend anonymity where a project is felt by all concerned to
have been successful. It can be more appropriate to credit the school and participants transparently and publicly, not least to then allow the school in its turn to make use of the research outputs for its own purposes.

Findings and discussion

In this section we outline our findings in terms of the elements of the multiliteracies framework. We include exemplifying quotations; these are specific to the individual concerned, although in our framing comments we indicate the degree to which opinions expressed can be generalised in terms of the dataset. Consonant with normal practice in linguistics, we render quotes exactly as produced, inserting paralinguistic descriptions or other relevant clarifying detail in brackets.

At this point it is worth stating that the decision to use Atlas.ti coding was to help identify clear examples of statements relating to the four components in the multiliteracies framework. The coding and results were not used quantitatively, but to identify statements that matched the components of the multiliteracies framework.

The four multiliteracies components were originally identified as focal elements that should be integrated in activities and practices concerned with effective multiliteracies outcomes. The Atlas.ti coding identified clear statements relating to each of these four components. As will be shown in the sub-sections following, the presence of these components implies, from the ways they are reported, that they were integrated within pedagogical practice, as project activities were undertaken. Although these components were integrated into the practices studied, there are implications for teachers and educational practices more widely; these are discussed in the conclusions.

Situated practice

The BBC News School Report project required all teams to draw on the experience of meaning-making in everyday life, the public realm and workplaces. News reports produced by teams of pupils were created around real events happening or being newsworthy on the day of the news report, whether locally, regionally, or nationally. They often involve interviews with local people, and capture key points and events through audio, text or imagery (a wide range of reported topics is listed in Passey, 2008; Passey & Gillen, 2009). The essence of the project was to involve pupils actively in the creation of products that transcended school boundaries; this is of course not characteristic of all learning in school as one pupil in School D described:

> Although you learn about things at school, to be active is different. I went to Tynemouth to do the weather. On the practice day on the day I was out there [points to a hill] with an umbrella in the snow. I was active not just sitting about reading the board, I was active and learning at the same time. You have to be active which helps, you really want to do it.

Engaging in productive, focussed dialogues with people beyond their normal associates within school were essential to the project. Pupils with multiple disabilities who went to a CLC to participate in the project enjoyed an opportunity in this learning environment to interact with pupils from other schools on the News Day as well as the CLC staff in producing their video report. Participating in the project gave many pupils opportunities to make contacts with people they would not usually interact with; one pupil from a school in an area with high deprivation cited arranging an interview with the local MP as a highlight for him. Many met people from backgrounds or occupations new
to them. One pupil from School B later reflected on how talking to somebody from a very different country led to a realisation of the scale of challenges pupils elsewhere could face:

It was fantastic meeting the teacher from Zimbabwe even beyond the interview it was fantastic to learn about his experiences - e.g. with spies in England; hearing about experiences of children going to school in Zimbabwe - made us realise how lucky we are to take water for granted, travelling to school easily etc.

Some schools spent more time going beyond the school walls for stories than others; some teachers decided that in the future they would use the project to make more external connections to people and institutions. Abbey Grange had already used experiences gained through the BBC project in earlier years to set up other projects that involved external visitors coming in. Many reports indicated that the project offered a different environment for learning from the ‘ordinary school set-up’. As one teacher commented:

School is a false place in many ways with its segmented tasks, everything divided up into lessons: in the world of work you get a task with a deadline.

The process of investigating news in the local community occasionally gave rise to students explicitly reflecting on their locality; this girl from School H was exceptional in the connections she made:

[The project] made us think about where we lived; learning about the local area - things we didn’t know before e.g. how the school might be moving and the bypass issue.

Crossing boundaries from school practices brought about some challenges too, in the shape of facing obstacles that might be unexpected in the course of an ordinary school day, such as coping with the withdrawal of an interviewee the night before. The challenge of meeting a deadline was very often commented on by those involved in the project: school students, staff, mentors and BBC staff. As our observations of the News Day confirmed, this was a major key characteristic of authenticity in the project. It contributed to an amount of stress alluded to by many, but was at the same time exciting, stimulating and a key component of the authenticity that was the project’s hallmark. We are reminded that Argyle (1989) found that people describing their leisure activities as challenging and even stressful were more likely to be absorbed and satisfied by them.

Overt instruction

The BBC News School Report project involved teachers and learners in a series of events, building their understandings of how news reports are put together, the people involved and their roles, and the processes through which they work. The national evaluation (Passey & Gillen, 2009) showed the shifts in ways that teachers and learners became not only more aware of the metalanguage of design required for this project, but became more involved in working in ways that paralleled the working of news reporting teams generally. Teams developed ideas and concepts that allowed teachers and learners to relate to each other in terms of the needs of news gathering and reporting. The teachers and others involved in running the project in schools and CLCs were supported by a combination of resources such as teaching plans on the BBC website and some training events. Although some teachers did, naturally enough, modify the lesson plans to their own needs, a few did, very occasionally, ignore them altogether (for example by a teacher with a very strong media background running the project in the context of teaching a media qualification).
In terms of ‘overt instruction’ in the context of ‘pupils learning the metalanguage of design’, it was evident that pupils did acquire a new discourse (Gee, 1996) relating to media production. The interviews with pupils were characterised by considerable diversity in terms of the aspects of the process of news production mentioned, but it is notable that these aspects were named with precision:

- writing up a story into a script (Pupil in Abbey Grange)
- film, story board, edit (Pupil in School B)
- we used different programmes e.g. audacity, wav files for the first time (Pupil in School C)

Recalled difficulties were also described with a measure of accuracy that has to reflect a degree of attentiveness:

- filming … outside it was difficult with the wind (Pupil in School B)
- being able to read off the autocue without getting it wrong, dealing with its speed (Pupil in School D)

The discourses of the materials provided by the BBC contributed, of course, to learning appropriate discourses, as did BBC mentors or other involved professionals who contributed salient advice. At the Abbey Grange News Day in 2010, the BBC mentor contributed much valued advice, for example suggesting to teams going out (of the base room) to film new stories:

- For each story there is a need to sum up for the presenter, you need to write a script for presenter - summarise the story but make the beginning different. … get close enough for your pictures and for the sake of the sound quality but try to stand somewhere interesting.

These instructions built upon a pre-existing shared knowledge base during the preparation period and, in particular, the Practice Day, a simulated day of preparation of media outputs without the actual final uploading of the News Day itself.

All pupils and staff reflected that through participation they learned a considerable amount about the process of news production; they became more informed viewers through this experience. In Gee’s (1996) framework, participating in the ‘little d’ discourses of required terminology and organising frameworks is vital to accessing the ‘big D’ media discourses.

**Critical framing**

The BBC News School Report project required teams of learners to interpret the social context of their chosen topics, to identify key points, to summarise events and instances so that others could understand what was happening and why they were considered to be of importance. Learners were taken through processes and practice events that encouraged them to refine their abilities in these respects, so that they could critically frame events in ways that allowed meaning to be presented to others. As noted above, critical framing entails the increase of awareness of power relations as instantiated in purposes and contexts of meaning-making processes. Becoming more informed viewers is not just a matter of improved technical knowledge about media production. Many pupils reflected on their growth of interest and criticality as news consumers after participation in the project and it must be emphasised that there was no evident correlation with pre-existing strong interest in the media or belonging to a ‘top stream’ class. The teacher interviewed from the Special School F (for pupils with multiple disabilities) explained that two groups had been involved in TV broadcasting. One produced a story about research on video games claiming they can be linked with...
enhancing intelligence. They compared another story claiming the opposite from nine years previously, and parents’ and children’s views on the issue. The other group considered the fall out in the media and society following a recent celebrity’s funeral. Speaking just over a week after News Day, the teacher said:

Giving them this experience opened up a new medium for them: they can now do things for themselves.

They wouldn’t have thought of turning on the news channel before…. and now they talk about the news immediately take an interest in it on TV. It also gets them thinking about what’s going on in this area. Some people didn’t realise there was a difference between regional and national news. There have been occasions when people have said, “I’m going to write a news story” all they wanted to do is write about something they’ve heard – they didn’t grasp difference between gossip, opinions and so on. Now they realise there has to be facts behind it.

Evidence from interviewing pupils at the same school supported his view:

[I’m] more interested in news - all of it. I used to hate watching it!

Pupils from mainstream schools reflected increased understanding about news production in diverse ways, taking an interest in the processes of selection and production. Asked whether participating was likely to have any long term impact on her, one girl in Abbey Grange responded:

It makes me think more about the news, how much effort goes into even one story it doesn’t just come to you.

Writing stories to the standards the BBC expected in this project entailed an understanding of balance that could be translated into a conscious expansion of endeavours to understand others’ points of view. Teachers often mentioned this as a gain from the project:

They can reflect on two sides of a story and consider the scientific angle e.g. they became more critical of the MMR story [in the UK a long running medical science controversy] and how it was presented in the media overall with the lack of scientific discipline applied etc. (Science specialism co-ordinator in School D)

The following was an unusually clear reflection of developing recognition of diverse viewpoints from a pupil in School C:

[Participating in the project] helped us to understand different teachers’ points of view on issues such as the head teacher on local educational issues: there’s a potential merger of primaries being discussed

A common, almost ubiquitous reflection on the project expressed by pupils and staff was a greater appreciation and recognition of the role of teamwork in media production and of professional practice in general. This was gained through the activity of working in groups, with individuals taking specific roles and remits. Pupil comments on what they had learned from participating in the project included many comments similar to the following:

You might not agree on what story to do. You have to learn how to deal with a disagreement and come up with something everything is happy with. (School C)

You have to work as a team to get ahead of schedule. (School B)

Working together as a team to accomplish a common goal entails an acceptance of differing qualities, levels of experience and knowledge. A very small minority of pupils said they had worked on their
own and not really participated in groups or learnt anything about group work. Most pupils and teachers volunteered more positive opinions: that the project had created an environment in which individuals flourished when working together. One pupil explained:

_I got to know everyone a bit better which is nice - I didn’t realise X and Y were so good at computers, how Z was really good at editing. I didn’t realise before what people could do, people have hidden talents that the project brought out - also who was good under pressure and who wasn’t._ (School B)

One teacher in School D identified as the most important gain from the project the way in which it:

_Engages them to use collaborative skills, working with adults. They are putting forward reasoned arguments e.g. who is going to do what and why. The editor did a smashing job on the day - she was given the opportunity to lead. “I like that story I’m not so sure about that one” and nobody took it personally. She was calm and didn’t get flustered - I did!_

**Transformed practice**

The BBC News School Report project was shown to be transforming practice, in terms of the ways that teachers and learners operated, and how they produced outcomes designed for audiences that were different from those associated with more traditional classroom activities (see Passey & Gillen, 2009). The project enabled learners to demonstrate their abilities to present events in ways for other audiences, so that these audiences could understand the purpose and detail of presentations and reports, as well as interpretations and findings. For some, the project was clearly offering them an insight into ways that they might become involved in sharing meaning making, and, as a consequence, becoming potential designers of social futures.

The most often mentioned way in which pupils were described to have changed, through their own eyes and those of their teachers, was increased confidence. So, the quotation from the teacher in School D above, explaining how students were enabled to take the lead in the project, fruitfully disrupting the usual power dynamics of classroom interactions, might just as easily have been included in this section. The benefits of increased confidence were described many times, sometimes in respect of specific qualities such as talking to an audience, standing up for a particular point of view, or interacting with fellow pupils or teachers. Of course, our evaluation activity concentrated mostly on the immediate evidence of participation and thus is not wholly suited to the longitudinal dimension of transformed practice. Nevertheless, we were told on occasions about more lasting impact, in this description by a teacher in School C who describes the project as ‘brilliant’ in terms of its impact on pupils generally and over a period of a school year:

_Last year had a great impact. For example 1 year 10 student was somewhat goofy if you know what I mean, a little awkward. He was not popular, he came from a [high poverty] family out in the sticks. It [his experience of the project] was superb last year and since that experience his marks have improved and because of the increase in confidence he comes to school on his moped - has got a job._

Pupils were asked what they thought the long term impact of the project would be, for example if participation was affecting their thinking about future careers. A few said they were now thinking of a media-related career and displayed relevant knowledge as opposed to a vague sense of aspiration:
It might - I might take up a career in the BBC, maybe researching stories, being on camera or behind the camera. Although I might not work with BBC news I would like to go into the media, newspapers etc and the same research skills would be used. (Boy in School D)

However, this was not a widespread response to participation in the project. Leadbeater & Miller (2004) deploy the notion of a ‘Pro-Am revolution’ to suggest that the lines between professionals and amateurs blur as some expert users of new technologies reach professional standards. While not suggesting that participants in this project were reaching those standards, we would agree with Willet’s (2009) questioning as to whether that line is being blurred. She found that young people’s participation even to an advanced level of competence with a new technology (in her case, video production) does not necessarily translate to a desire to work with it as a future career. In this dataset, most pupils indicated that either it was too early to think about careers or that it was not directly affecting their plans. If pupils did see the project in some way being relevant to their long-term future it was often in the sense of greater confidence in skills and competencies that might be helpful, almost whatever their future goals. As these pupils in School C suggested:

more confidence from interviewing, asking questions it can help you with other work for example blogs and interviews - you can do other things with those skills

Perceptions of the role of the BBC by pupils and teachers

While this project enabled the four multiliteracies components, the fact that the origins and structuring of the project were located in the BBC was seen as a centrally important feature. In most schools visited it was the BBC connection that made it an event worthy of focus. The prestige and importance of the BBC was perceived by pupils and staff to enhance the status of the project and its memorability. Many pupils made claims similar to the ones articulated by these two boys:

I'll always know how to do the things I learnt, the scale and the fact it was BBC means I will remember it more. (Pupil in Abbey Grange)

It's something to say to people: “Hah! I’m doing stuff for the BBC” and they’re like, “Hooray!” (Pupil in School C)

Many pupils acknowledged an association of the BBC with respected values in terms of news production; often this was explored in more depth by teachers, as for example this Abbey Grange teacher in 2009:

BBC gives them an engaging stimulus, it’s the most recognised TV company. The name of the BBC is very positive, associated with reliability in news production – the first port of call for news. Although probably kids don’t know that as much. Having Huw Edwards talking directly to the kids from the newsroom – the fact he is in his studio – it’s all very official – makes them feel part of this exciting institution.

In this project, therefore, this element, the perception of the worth afforded by the BBC, was a constituent alongside and entwined with the four multiliteracies components. Teachers, supporters and pupils were all aware of their involvement with the BBC; the BBC News was acting as an external driver of participation, as well as externally driving a transforming of practice.
Conclusions

It is difficult for educators and institutions such as schools, focused on the development of individual knowledge and skills in ways that are open to being monitored and measured, to keep up with contemporary developments. As Robinson & Mackey (2006, p. 213) noted, “There is a serious risk of a continuing and widening schism between the work of the school and the world of life outside.” The BBC News School Report project, according to the many reports we have from pupils and teachers, embodies a cluster of, for them, exciting possibilities in terms of bringing these domains (the work of the school, and the world of the life outside) together in ways that actively benefit individuals in the communities involved.

However, if we revisit the four components proposed by the New London Group, and add a fifth component (perception of worth afforded by the BBC News), we can begin to see that while outcomes from this project are reported as highly worthy (see the outcomes reported in Passey & Gillen, 2009, and in Passey, 2008), teachers are likely to experience challenges pedagogically:

- Situated Practice, means they need to identify activities that draw on the experience of meaning-making in everyday life, the public realm and workplaces;
- Overt Instruction, means teachers need to either be able to, or depend on supporters who will help them to, develop an explicit metalanguage of design;
- Critical Framing, means they need to be involved in activities where there is a need to interpret the social context and the purpose of designs of meaning;
- Transformed Practice, means teachers need to allow and facilitate activities in which pupils, as meaning-makers, become designers of social futures.

As the BBC Chairman, Michael Lyons (2010) states, the BBC endeavours to ‘contribute to a genuine public space, free from political and commercial influence’. Fostering an audience of engaged, critical viewers and listeners is important in view of safeguarding such a space. Buckingham (2006, p. 263) cited Eco’s (1979) well-known aphorism: ‘If you want to use television to teach somebody, you must first teach them how to use television.’ Buckingham himself makes use of this call to critical media literacy to argue:

*Education about the media should be seen as an indispensable prerequisite for education with or through the media.* (Buckingham, 2006, p. 263)

It seems to us that these endeavours can be successfully achieved together; that one need not precede the others. However, success arising from this project has required teachers to adopt pedagogical practices that are not necessarily easy to find or deploy. Each of the four multiliteracies components has been shown to be important in terms of related success; for this project it was important that all four could be accommodated within practices that teachers and others supported. While it is clear that applying these four components to other school practices would not be impossible, it is also clear that this could move many teachers a long way from more traditional classroom methods.
References


\[1\] City Learning Centres are technology centres, shared by schools within a local authority area, supporting technology practices that involve digital and media literacies.