

Department Leaders Meeting: Thursday, February 4, 2016

Neil Anderson opened the meeting by stating that the focus of today's session would be on how to integrate successfully the media strand into the English curriculum. He asked attendees to identify 'compelling experiences' they have had with media, such as blogs, TV shows, books etc. Examples from attendees included Adele's music video for 'Hello', *Friday Night Lights*, *Making a Murderer*, *Mr. Robot*, and Instagram.

Anderson stated that English is 'at the same time the most exciting and interesting subject in school', yet the 'most contested', as people always have opinions on how the subject should be taught. Our focus needs to be on teaching students how 'to be in this world', citing the example of the fact that the biggest taxi company in the world was recently valued at \$65m, but they own no cars.

Anderson then responded to the questions that follow that had been submitted by department leaders:

What PD opportunities are available to help support the teaching of the media strand?

Anderson promoted Marshall McLuhan's 'Coach House' events every Monday.

How can we make the Media Studies course work as an elective when students are focused on pre-requisites for university?

EMS3U could be a partial solution when the curriculum is rewritten. Anderson stated that he would advocate that media literacy is the most important skill and the 'single most important skill to student success to demonstrate learning and success in every course the student is taking'.

How can you effectively balance media literacy and media production in the classroom?

These components need to be treated like reading and writing – they are both essential to the course. We have to consume media and produce media in response. Media production is 'messy' and takes time – the same as writing a 1,000 word essay – so inevitably students consume more media than they produce. Even when the time spent is 50/50, less is produced, in the same way that it's more time-effective to listen than actually read.

How should we scaffold products effectively in MS/SS progress?

Scope and sequence is 'unnatural' as we all learn differently. The key is to connect to other goals and course – e.g. Civics course in grade 10 could include media on citizenship. The spiral curriculum idea is effective; students revisit the same ideas and skills year after year with increasing difficulty.

What are some interesting cross-department projects?

All structures work against cross-curricular endeavours but opportunities include:

- Physical Education – especially with the new sex-ed curriculum which has good media expectations – sexting, cyber bullying etc.

- Science – look at the show on TVO that is shot at the Science Centre.
- School orientation – put UPC/QR codes in different places in the school and have people take their own tours of the buildings.
- Advocacy – all schools have strong value statements on their websites which could be essential to media studies.

How do you effectively incorporate the Harkness Method into Media Studies?

The influence of Britain and Australia meant that Media Studied needed to also incorporate Cultural Studies; the extent to which Cultural Studies works and affects theory. It is vital to stress the fact that the audience becomes the most important thing – it's not 'about the media, it's about the students and how they influence media'. Harkness comes into play here as you can see how differently students respond to the same text.

Can you give us a brief history of Media Studies in the curriculum?

- The 1965 'Screen Education' document was the first mention of anything that wasn't in print (mentioned film).
- 1989: first mention in OSIS guidelines- no mandate.
- In OSS curriculum, Media Studied became a separate strand and was mandated.
- 2006: curriculum was updated.
- Close to revision now. Needs to be a significant look at social media and EMS3U course.

What are your thoughts on current teacher training in the media strand? What is your vision for ideal teacher training in this strand?

Current teacher training is 'very weak'. In the move from one to two year Teacher's Education, three additional qualifications are needed: Special Education, ESL and Media Studies should be mandatory.

Should Media Studies be a separate course in the Middle School?

In 2006, it was suggested that Media Studies should be cut as a course and be integrated into other subjects; the concern was that it would disappear entirely. It is therefore best to integrate it into all curricula in discrete mini lessons – e.g. if you have a class set of iPads, then there could be a mini lesson in photography looking at aesthetics and composition. It is all about looking for teachable moments and being aware of rapid changes in society.

Which areas of media should teachers focus on?

The frustration with media is that it's not a 'neat package' with no correct answers. It can be useful for Harkness Method that allows for discussion of interpretations. It can connect to other learning – e.g. watch new Adele video and look for elements of form. We need to look at teaching media in the same way that we teach writing a paragraph. Teaching thematic units is effective – e.g. an American Dream unit with *The Great Gatsby*, a Jay-Z song, and a Walt Whitman poem. You can transfer ideas more when students are able to make connections to the outside world.

How should Media Studies reflect the diverse communities of our schools?

Media Studies is an ideal subject for diverse learners and those of differing abilities as it is easy to embrace learning difficulties. It is also easy to embrace multiculturalism as the subject invites the study of different types of literature. It is also excellent for values instruction as it inevitably makes people look at the world from different points of view. Media Studies challenges prejudices and can be a tool to open up discussion.

Can I teach literature as media? If so, how?

Literature is media; they are all cultural expressions. It can be taught using the Media Literacy Triangle. You can view literary works as you view TV, movies etc.: “literature is that which society uses to understand itself”. Literature is also a ‘way of carrying on cultural conversations’. Some books ‘resonate certain cultural anxieties’ – e.g. you can look at the history of *The Great Gatsby* and then look at different movie adaptations in the context they were created and compare them.

What are the key shifts in thinking that characterise Media Studies learning?

No one teaches literature as ‘atemporal’. Media Studies acknowledges context and the fact that any piece of expression works if someone is evaluating it. The political positioning of pieces is important.

How can we effectively incorporate documentaries into the English classroom?

We don’t teach enough non-narratives; we need more expository writing and more non-fiction works, with a focus on point of view and argumentation. Good examples cited from YouTube included:

- *Conditioned to be on Call*: Video about students and cell phones and the peer pressure to be available 24/7.
- *Some Conditions May Apply* and *In Search of the Edge*: Use different documentary techniques to explore social justice issues.

Is the Writer’s Craft classroom a place where Media Studies could become a focus?

There are lots of opportunities to explore Media Studies here – publishing techniques, scripts, blogs, fan fiction etc.

Are there opportunities for teachers to get involved in rewriting the curriculum?

There will be focus groups of teachers through the Ministry. Cohort 21 is also a good opportunity to learn how Media Studies goes beyond English courses.

Recommended Reads:

- 1) Danah Boyd, *It's Complicated*
- 2) Cory Doctorow, *Little Brother* (for grades 8-10), *For the Win* (about gaming and social politics), and *Homeland*.
- 3) Alice Kuipers, *Life on the Refrigerator Door* (dialogue through post-it notes on the fridge door between a mum and daughter – written in 2007 – could discuss how conceit falls apart now given new technologies).
- 4) Clive Thomson, *Smarter than you Think* (how technology is changing our minds for the better).
- 5) Ta-Nahisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (focus on difference – compare to the Syrian refugee situation etc.).