

Submission
to the
Parliamentary Enquiry into the effects of Television
and Multi-media in Victoria
Friends of the ABC (Victoria)

9 May 2006

Terms of reference: Effect of Current applications and usage levels of multi-media on learning styles and educational achievement within different age groups and curriculum areas

Whether student media literacy needs have changed in recent years, in the context of rapidly increasing availability and use of multi-media by young people.

Reference: Chapter 2 of the Family and Community Development Report, pp 33- 65.

1. As an organisation we thank you for the invitation to make a submission.
2. As an organisation, our prime concern is to keep the “public” in Broadcasting with particular reference to the National Broadcaster.
3. Our expertise in curriculum areas, learning styles and measure of achievement of media “literacy” is limited but our interest in and familiarity with the importance of content and the ever changing delivery systems associated with such content give us the right to, at least, an opinion or two.
4. There seems to be great confusion regarding the use of the term Multimedia. At times it is simply another word for television; at others it implies a variety of technologies. The title of the investigation suggests that television and multimedia are separate animals. No where is Multimedia defined in such a way as to make any form of quantification possible. Because of this confusion the debate that follows really results in a series of observations and recommendations that take up 30 odd pages of print but, in reality, are little more than unrelated statements which provide little or no basis for future action. How one therefore can account for or dare to measure changes based on this report is beyond our imagining.
5. The discussion on that sub-set of multimedia called Television is a jumble of ill assorted quotations from local and overseas reports; a jumble which is further clouded because no real distinction is drawn between broadcast tv –the mass medium – and instructional tv produced specifically as part of a planned learning program.

2.

6. However a submission from the Women's Action Alliance, used in the Report's conclusion, dared to make the statement :

“ - TV/multimedia can only ever be an aid to learning and development.” -(p.59). In essence this one sentence underlined the Report's assumption of the centrality of the teacher in the learning process;

“It is the teacher, not the technology, that possesses a philosophy of education and that has the ability to cultivate in students a hunger for academic and intellectual independence.” (p.60). These words might have been written in the fifties or sixties when any extra visual or sound additive to the learning process was simply described as an audio-visual aid. What seems to be clear is that technology has rather overwhelmed practitioners and the bureaucrats that superintend an education system. More than that, the world of information has changed to an extent that is barely recognisable but is everywhere pervasive not always by its volume but by its selection. It is in this area where an organisation such as the friends of the ABC may have an opinion to offer.

7. The Committee will be well aware of an array of present day situations: A Commonwealth Government, which is increasingly centralist. is in the process of altering Cross -media regulations and using the argument of technology and changing delivery systems to pretend its objective is greater diversity and therefore greater choice.

At the same time the same Government, which does not believe it should be scrutinised (witness the terms of reference for the Cole Inquiry) is denying adequate funding for the National Broadcaster. The ABC's charter is being questioned and at the same time the Internet is draining advertising revenue from both print and TV.

8. The convergence of such developments is starving both the ABC and Commercial interests from developing local programs. Thus the information base of things **Australian made** is shrinking and as economics rules so the constraints on real and reliable information become more powerful. The internet may appear to be an alternative balance to such constraint but, for example, China is already showing how a strong central government can control and limit internet exposure.

9. It is these sorts of developments (listed above, 7 & 8) that have changed the information/education landscape and we would submit that they should be taken into account as the ETC begins its deliberations.

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Prepared by John Collins for Friends of the ABC (Vic) Inc.