TEACHERS NOTES – Global Topics – Television

Origin and development

1. In 1956 TV was launched in Australia and is best remembered from the famous black and white vision of Bruce Gyngell saying “Good evening ladies and gentlemen, welcome to television”. But this well-known footage is not the footage from the original first broadcast. That first broadcast, although sent out live to air, was never recorded and so the announcement of TV that we know today is one that was re-staged and re-recorded at a later time.

This is a fitting story for the birth of television because, just like radio, it is a constructed reality that builds a ‘truth’ for the viewer to experience. A large array of technical and creative devices come together in the medium of broadcast TV to create a believable reality for the viewer that is very often far removed from a factual reality.

Ask students to survey older family and friends who can remember when television began in Australia. When did they first see a TV program? Can they recall what it was, and how they felt at the time? When did they, or their family, first own a TV? Did TV have an immediate mass impact on everyone, or did it take time for people to be able to afford this new technology? What changes has it made to their own and to society’s lifestyle? Students should report back to the class to share their findings.

2. From what students have read and heard about the very first days, weeks and months of television in Australia, they may be able to write a story about someone of their age experiencing television for the very first time, perhaps in a shop window at night, or in the home of a school friend. Students should be as accurate as possible about the facts — the sense of excitement, the programs they see, the colour of the picture, the poor reception, the feelings they now have about their favourite radio programs etc.
The medium

1. Students are to discuss and explore the role of the following in TV production. Ask how each may be used to influence what a viewer feels about the topic, character or person depicted.
   - Lighting (dark, bright, low/high angle, shadows)
   - Editing (quick cuts, long takes, cut-aways, pace)
   - Camera angle (low & high angle perspective, hand-held, close-up, wide-shot)
   - Special effects (titles and graphics, fades and dissolve transitions between shots).

2. The 1970s saw an explosion in the popularity of ‘soaps’ or drama serials, on TV. Have students analyse a typical soap, considering such elements as:
   - Scheduling — when it is shown, and why
   - Structure of episodes — how they are presented as a series of mini-climaxes around advertisement breaks
   - Multiple storylines
   - Characters — realistic or stereotypical
   - Relationships
   - Settings
   - Issues dealt with

Students are to form into small groups. Each group should compare different programs. For example, a comparison of Home and Away with Neighbours is a comparison between a beach youth culture setting and a family-oriented suburban culture. Each group should present and discuss their findings with the class.

For further information refer to:

1970s: Interview Corinne Grant Enter The TV Soapie
       Megan Spencer
       Mac Gudgeon
       Scott Goodings

3. In pairs, students may prepare a teen magazine article or website pages about popular TV soap operas and soap stars of the 1960s and 1970s.

4. Write a short story about a hectic day in the life of a 1960s or 1970s TV personality.

5. Commercial TV exists for profit. Students are to discuss the implications of this for programming.

For further information refer to:

1980s: Interview Mac Gudgeon Ratings War
       Liz Jacka

6. One of the determining factors in television program content is its cost. Local Australian productions cost far more to create than do overseas imports. Students should discuss why this is so, and consider whether regulations are needed to protect Australian content against the importation of cheaper overseas productions.

For further information refer to:

1980s: Interview Liz Jacka Tax Incentives For Investors
       Mac Gudgeon
       Mini-Series Comes Of Age
       Liz Jacka
       Mac Gudgeon
7. In small groups, students may be able to plot and storyboard a sequence of a TV soap opera that immediately precedes an advertisement break, and another that immediately follows it. Maybe it would be possible to write the script fully for these two sequences, and to act them out to the class, or to video-record them, using the storyboard as a guide to the kinds of camera shots required.

8. The 1990s saw one of the most significant technical shifts in media production history — digital video and the proliferation of the home ‘handy-cam’ — which changed how people both made and engaged with TV and the moving image.

In the 1990s *Australia’s Funniest Home Videos* became a major ratings success. The broadcasting of this, and programs such as *Race Around the World* proved that audiences would happily accept the lower quality images without question if the content was engaging. What the broadcasters had previously thought was unacceptable for broadcast, was now top-rating material.

Students are to explore and discuss the traits of hand-held cameras and ‘consumer’ recording formats, and to make a comparative list of the advantages and disadvantages of producing a program in these formats, looking at factors such as cost, size, quality, portability and public perception.

What are the major consumer video recording formats? Ask students to use the internet to research these formats and to place them on a timeline from oldest to most recent. Examples are VHS, VHSc, Standard 8, Hi8, Digital 8, MiniDV, DVDRAM. What trends may be seen in the evolution of these formats? What formats are now rare or no longer used? How long did they last before becoming obsolete? What problems does this cause for the storing and archiving of video for future generations?
Influence on identity
1. Students are to discuss whether Australians need their own programs — in drama, music, children’s shows, current affairs and comedy — more than overseas content. Do people really want as wide a variety of TV programs as they have at present, which means accepting commercial stations such as Channels 7, 9 and 10, reliant on advertising, popularity ratings and appealing to popular tastes, or should they have locally produced and televised information and TV programming, which means far less variety?

2. Some of the move to local TV production in the 1960s was supported by the use of quotas — the requirement that a certain percentage of programs broadcast had to be Australian-made. Students may discuss whether this is an appropriate restriction for a society.

For further information refer to:

1960s: Interview Liz Jacka Addressing Australian Content
Mac Gudgeon Drama
Stuart Cunningham
Scott Goodings
Tim Bowden Current Affairs
Corinne Grant TV For Kids
Tim Bowden Corinne Grant The Mavis Bramston Show

1980s: Interview Liz Jacka Tax Incentives For Investors
Mac Gudgeon Mini Series Comes Of Age
Liz Jacka
Mac Gudgeon
Stuart Cunningham

3. TV programming is often aimed or targeted at specific groups based on age, gender, lifestyle, personal interests, desires, education, cultural values and life goals. Students are to discuss who benefits from this segmentation of the market audience.

For further information refer to:

1980s: Interview Liz Jacka Languages Other Than English
Mac Gudgeon SBS Charter
Megan Spencer CAAMA Indigenous Broadcasting
Christine Spurgeon
Mac Gudgeon Imparja Indigenous Television

4. Separate the class into two groups. One group is to imagine that there is only Australian broadcast content in their lives; the other is to imagine that there is only overseas content. What would be the result of either? After discussing this question in groups, pool the responses of both groups.

For further information refer to:

1960s: Interview Mac Gudgeon Drama

(learning@filmaustralia)
Stuart Cunningham
Tim Bowden  Current Affairs
Corinne Grant  TV For Kids

1970s: Interview  Scott Goodings  Enter The TV Soapie
Impacts on audience

1. TV was a huge technological innovation within Australian society. But did it change people’s lives? Students are to brainstorm a list of possible changes that TV may have had on people’s lives in Australia in the 1950s, then create a series of interview questions about this topic, and have as many people as possible who can remember the 1950s answer them. Are the findings of the interviews similar to or different from the brainstormed ideas?

   For further information refer to:

   **1950s:**
   - **Interview**
   - Liz Jacka
   - Tim Bowden
   - Megan Spencer
   - **Video clip**
   - Factory Makes Radio
   - Valves By The Million
   - **A Momentous Launch**

2. One of the claims made about the role of TV in a community is that it helps to create a sense of shared knowledge and experiences, that it crosses class, political and economic lines to bring very different people together. Students are to discuss whether this claim has any truth or not. Are there other examples of ‘social cement’, such as sport, in Australian society?

   For further information refer to:

   **1960s:**
   - **Video clip**
   - Sydney
   - Public Interest

   **1970s:**
   - **Interview**
   - Corinne Grant
   - Megan Spencer
   - Mac Gudgeon
   - **Enter The Soapie**

3. Plan a colour television advertising campaign for the kind of product that will be advertised specifically to accompany particular programs at particular times of the day or evening. To carry this out, students may need to research the activities of advertising agencies.

4. Write a letter of complaint or praise to the manager of a commercial TV station about the types of programs currently being screened — or not being screened — and whether you are happy with the way you feel the TV station is serving the viewing public.
Technology

1. Development in the technology of cameras is especially noticeable when it comes to televising sports events. Each sport has its own particular traits and demands for an effective broadcast. Students are to create a tally list of the particular technical effects, camera types and angles specific to the broadcast of different sports. Examples are:
   - Swimming (underwater camera, superimposed world-record line)
   - Motor racing (race cam, driver cam, hand-held camera in the pits)
   - Cricket (stump cam, on-field microphones, third umpire)
   - Football (commentators’ electronic pen, on-screen illustration, mobile overhead camera angle)
   - Basketball (hoop cam, slow-motion replays)
   - Cycling/Triathlon (helicopter cameras, motorbike cam)
   - Tennis (line cam, overhead cam)
   - Surfing (water cameras)

How have these technologies changed audience connection with the sport? How does the technology change or alter the perceived pace of the sport? What technologies make some sports more watchable on TV than they would otherwise have been? What sports have been changed to become more suited to broadcast media? How might audience viewing and participation alter with the influx of digital broadcasts, where the viewer can change the angle, or switch cameras at will?

The increased programming of live sport has an impact on society. Separate students into groups and ask them to research the following questions, then report back to the class for further discussion.
- Does live broadcasting of sport affect participation in sports in country areas?
- Does live broadcasting of sport affect young people’s health and fitness by reducing their participation in sport?
- Does the availability of international live broadcasts of sport dilute national identity?
- Does an emphasis on sport by the broadcast media create unsuitable role models from among well-known sportspeople?
- Does the intrusiveness of the media create unwanted scrutiny of young elite sports people?

For further information refer to:

Section 3  Interview  Stuart Cunningham  Sport As A Driver Of Technology

2. Imagine you are a TV sports producer who has been told to prepare a live telecast of either a bowls, synchronised swimming, golf, billiards or archery competition. Plan and write a report of how you would attempt to make this an interesting and even exciting telecast, designed to attract ratings.

3. The 1970s brought an economic revolution to the TV broadcast industry in the form of videotape. Until this time TV programs were shot on celluloid film, which involved costly and time-consuming developing and production processes before it could be aired. Videotape was of a lesser visual quality to film, but it required no processing, it was immediate and most importantly, it was very cheap. Not everything, however, was shot on videotape. Even today TV programs are shot in a variety of formats depending on their topic, style, genre, audience and budget.

Given that the positive traits of videotape are speed of production and cost, students should examine and discuss which of the following types of programs would most likely be shot on videotape, and which ones would not.
- Police drama
- Soap opera
- 6:00 News
- History documentary
4. One of the most significant changes in the capture of moving images has been the development of the ‘camcorder’, or home video camera. Since the 1980s the take-up of this technology by the wider community, and the increasingly small camera size and high quality of the images they produce, have changed not just how we make media but also how we watch it.

Students are to discuss how owning and using a video camera changes how people might watch TV. That is, has there been a shift away from home consumer to home use of TV? Discuss whether people’s experiences of owning and using a video camera could increase their awareness of what they see in TV programs and films.

Does owning and using a video camera make you in any sense a ‘professional’ media producer, or is there still a difference between the home user and someone working within the profession? Would a training course in the use of this kind of media technology be of benefit to the home user, or be considered irrelevant and unnecessary?

Have TV studios and movie producers changed the ways they make programs and films due to an increased knowledge and awareness of the media by the general public, particularly those who own and use products such as home video recorders?

5. One of the most significant developments in filmmaking in recent years has been the widespread use of non-linear and non-destructive editing systems for putting together TV and movie sequences.

Non-linear editing simply means that, rather than working in-order from the first scene of a filmed story or documentary, through to the last scene, as the editor would when cutting film or analog videotape, any scene can be edited at any time, and freely moved to any part of the narrative at will.

Even more importantly, non-destructive editing means that any changes – camera cuts, fades, filters, titles and effects – that are applied to scenes or segments do not affect the original source. These remain untouched and, with a keyboard or computer mouse stroke, a cut, fade or effect can be undone and the editor can return to the original, untouched segment.

Ask students to consider and discuss the advantages of non-linear and non-destructive editing in editing a movie or TV program. Are there any disadvantages? Discuss whether there are other technologies that may be considered as non-linear and non-destructive. What professions, other than film and TV media production itself, might take advantage of this kind of technology to advance their own causes? Examples may be music composers, artists, architects.

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Future

1. Students are to read the description of the TV program, Fat Cow Motel, then discuss how the program worked. Was it a popular and successful experiment? Have there been other programs like it?

For further information refer to:

2000s: Interview Liz Jacka Fat Cow Motel

2. The first decade of the new millennium sees the full immersion of media into the digital environment. Increasing amounts of TV are broadcast in digital format simultaneously with analog. Analog TV broadcasts will cease in 2008. This process of digitisation (the conversion of an analog source to a digital output) is an important technical concept that increasingly governs all work with media forms.

An analog signal is essentially one that is based on waves. A vinyl record when turning causes the needle to pulsate, producing wave vibrations. Those vibrations are then amplified to create soundwaves that we hear. Digitising this sound recording is a form of encoding where the vibrations are transferred to a precise code of zeros and ones, known as a binary code, which can then be turned back into vibrations and soundwaves that we are able to hear.

The key difference between an analog signal and a digital one is the difference in signal flexibility. A digital binary code doesn’t vibrate, it is exact, it has only two positions; zero and one, on and off. But an analog signal vibrates, moving back and forth between two points, meaning that the signal has a range of positions. Because of this range, analog signals can deteriorate and be interfered with more easily than can digital signals, producing a substandard image or sound.

The best example of the difference between analog and digital is the difference between handwriting and Morse code. If a message was written and copied in English by hand the style of lettering can vary widely from person to person. With a handwritten message being copied and passed on there is great possibility for error, and the final written message would not only be different in the way it looks but its ability to be read may also have changed. But if the same message were passed on in Morse code, which is a form of binary, where only ‘dots’ and ‘dashes’ are used, there is no room for variation; a dot and a dash should be recognisable no matter who writes them.

Carry out the following experiment with your students to better understand the process and advantages of digital formats: give the class a message to be passed from person to person in a form of Chinese whispers. Separate the class into two groups and give the message in written letters to the first person in the group and the same message in Morse code to the other. Each person in the group must copy the message and pass it on to the next person who must also copy the message and pass the copy on until the end.

Examine the results. Which method was more efficient? Which one resulted in more accurate copies? Which method had the least room for error? Are students able to find where the errors, if any, took place in the chain of communication, and the reason for the errors?

For further information refer to:

2000s: Interview Christine Spurgeon The Digital Realm

3. The digital video format was originally intended by its developers to be an improved consumer format for mums and dads to make home and holiday movies. The new DV format, introduced in 1995, was quickly taken up by professional and amateur media-
makers alike. Suddenly TV stations were happily broadcasting DV, much of it shot by amateurs.

By 2000 the editing of high-quality video on a home computer was an accessible and affordable reality. Those with an internet connection were now able to broadcast to a potentially huge international audience via a website and streaming media.

Students are to discuss the impact these developments have had on how we view the news, where the ‘news’ may come from a home or interest-group computer. Can this alter our perception of ‘trust’ and ‘truth’ in the news, or does it indicate that it is possible to view news as no longer being constructed and distributed by traditional sources of ownership?

Ask students to find a contemporary news event that has been reported by or in a variety of media – radio, TV, newspapers, internet sites, online magazines, personal web pages, blogs, Australian-based and international. Compare the different versions of the same event. How is the story different for each of the media forms? What is the difference between the presentation style of the traditional media forms (TV, radio, newspapers) and new media forms such as websites? Is one medium more formal than another, more opinionated or personalised, more accurate, reliable, or censored?

For further information refer to:

Section 3 Interview Stuart Cunningham (1-3) Megan Spencer Tim Bowden

Key Idea 3 – The Rise And Future Of Local Content

4. The flexibility of media production, especially now that complex effects and processing are possible on a home computer, has created a media environment wide open for the possibility of highly plausible hoaxes and visual deception.

In the 21st century news coverage relies more and more on home-users and amateur video for nightly news content. It can be costly and expensive to have many cameras and journalists in the field. But with the high proliferation of handycams in family households, amateur footage has become a staple of news reporting. For example, a great deal of footage of the terrorist attacks on New York on 11 September 2001 was shot on home video, then screened around the world.

Moreover, web footage, mobile phone images and very poor quality images have become acceptable for broadcast, particularly from war zones. It is now not unheard of for TV studios to dub-down video footage of a dramatic event (generally a war event) to lower quality and a shaky image because of the perception of it being amateur and therefore more dangerous or exciting, with a heightened sense of drama.

Ask students to bring into class VHS tape of news shot by amateurs that has been broadcast on TV, such as natural disasters, war stories or traffic accidents. By viewing this footage side by side with video shot by professional camera crew, what are the main aesthetic differences students may notice? What are the main characteristics that allow us to identify amateur from professional footage? Which footage seems more exciting, more real?

Ask students to discuss such ethical issues as the ‘doctoring’ of news footage, and whether this practice should be censored. How should we react to hoaxes that appear to be genuine but are allowed to circulate in the media as truth?

For further information refer to:
5. Write a short story about someone who uses modern media technology to perpetrate some kind of hoax on the community. It may be a serious breach of trust and truth, or it may be something minor, an April Fools’ Day joke. Write the story from the point of view of the hoaxter. Is the hoaxter exposed, captured, punished or not?