

## Chapter 8

# BBC Schools beyond the TV Set: Educational Media Convergence in the Classroom

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### ABSTRACT

*The results here presented are part of a wider enquiry<sup>1</sup> into how educational television and related websites converge in an era in which the boundaries between different media are disappearing.*

*This chapter focuses on media convergence of educational content particularly intended for television and the internet at the phase of its use in the classroom. The case that best reflects the convergence of educational TV-Web contents is BBC Schools in the United Kingdom, which includes television series and corresponding websites.*

### INTRODUCTION

The history of educational media has been a succession of technologies, where film and radio gave their place to television and now CD-ROMS and educational software have been displaced by the Web and videogames. Probably the book has been the most resilient of all technologies, but that is also changing since the eruption of digital books. Each

new medium, at present the internet, is heralded as the one that will revolutionise education. Each new medium is seen as promising to extend the range and depth of access, while, simultaneously, shifting the emphasis from teaching to learning, claiming to give the learner direct access to content, without, presumably, the teacher's mediation.

Even the newest medium of all, the internet, has undergone its own path of evolution from *support material* (regarding educational TV) to

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a *stand alone* model and more recently to a *rich media* conception, where televisual, audio, internet and gaming resources are combined and delivered online (Zorrilla, 2008). This online media mix has received several names, *convergence* is one of them. For Jenkins (2006, p. 282) *media convergence* refers to a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them.

Building around the concept of *convergence*, the aim of this work is to explore how educational media *converge* in the basic school classroom in the United Kingdom: the challenges and opportunities that the integrated use of media presents for educational purposes.

## **CONVERGENCE: A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

*Convergence* is an essential concept for this chapter. It is a term that has been widely used in referring to different ideas, although most of its applications within Cultural, Media and New Media Studies are related to the confluence of two or more media. There are two main understandings of media convergence: a) *platform integration* in the transmission-reception phases, which are possibilities based on technological development, such as online streaming video, webcasting, podcasting, PCTV, mobile television, interactive television, etc.; and b) *content integration* in the production and consumption phases, which refers to cultural practices and conceptions, such as simultaneous and collaborative TV-web production, transmedia storytelling and models for sharing and generating users' content.<sup>2</sup>

These two main understandings—technological and cultural convergence—might oversimplify the complex scenario of media convergence which is characterised by multiple levels and manifestations: media industries merge; media texts are marketed across several platforms; technological

devices, gadgets and services are brought together by an increasing connectivity and the magic of digitalization; viewers interact with content and choose to consume from a variety of delivery options; professional roles converge in merged media and non-merged media companies; and producers and consumers join in the creation of new forms of content.

Media convergence is also related to earlier concepts such as *multimedia* (McCormick, 1986; Schnotz 2005), *unimedia* (Lévy, 1997; Inglis et al., 1999) and *multimodal* (Lévy, 1997; Kress, 2003), which are later discussed at the light of some findings of this project.

However, as pointed out by Freedman (2006, p. 288) convergence "...is not the multimedia convergence long predicted by technologists and futurologists but media compatibility that points to the emergence of a new, varied and complex media environment co-habited by offline and online, mobile and fixed, visual and text-based technologies".

Henry Jenkins has a similar perception of the discourse around technological convergence, which he defines as the Black Box Fallacy:

*Much contemporary discourse about convergence starts and ends with what I call the Black Box Fallacy. Sooner or later, the argument goes, all media content is going to flow through a single black box into our living rooms (or, in the mobile scenario, through black boxes we carry around with us everywhere we go) [...] Part of what makes the black box concept a fallacy is that it reduces media change to technological change and strips aside the cultural levels. (Jenkins, 2006, p. 14)*

Jenkins focuses his analysis on the cultural dimension of convergence – the *convergence culture* – which "does not occur through media appliances, however sophisticated they may become" (2006, p. 3); from his point of view, convergence occurs within the brains of individual

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