LOOK AND READ

BBC SCHOOL BROADCASTING AND LITERACY TEACHING 1957–1979

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Abstract: The BBC began broadcasting school television in 1957. As school television developed in the 1960s, the BBC engaged with educational research and addressed national educational problems. Pedagogy in UK schools was becoming more progressive, and literacy was one of its most important and complex elements. UK Schools had struggled to achieve universal literacy among 7–9-year-olds. The series *Look and Read* and *Words and Pictures* used literacy research, adapted to the best method of presentation by television. The series took advantage of the developing televisual genres of children's drama and animation.

Keywords: Educational Broadcasting, School Broadcasting, BBC, *Look and Read*, *Words and Pictures*, Literacy, Progressivism, Phonics.

1 Introduction

The BBC operated its school broadcasting service in the context of public debates about the methods and goals of school education. The period 1957–1979 began with the UK's first school television broadcasts and encompassed a time of innovation in school curriculum materials (a movement in which the BBC took a leading part) and the increasing orthodoxy of progressivism in education. By the end of the 1970s the BBC was at the height of its school broadcasting provision but this was a time of changing political priorities as the political mood turned away from innovation and progressivism.

The BBC offered audio-visual solutions to educational problems. *Look and Read* was one of the most widely used and long running (1967–2004) school television series. It was originally conceived for 7–9-year-olds who had not attained a normal level of reading ability. *Look and Read* was made up of two segments; a filmed drama serial at either end of each episode, and a 'teaching middle' of studio material with presenters, animations and music. The series was accompanied by a student's book with a printed version of the story, and a teachers' book with guidance and teaching material. Therefore the material was presented in several different forms – text, speech and moving image.

Figure 1. Frame from drama serial portion of *Look and Read: The Boy from Space*.

Figure 2. Frame from drama serial portion of *Look and Read: The Boy from Space*.

Figure 3. Frame from teaching middle section of *Look and Read: The Boy from Space*.

Figure 4. Frame from animation in *Look and Read: The Boy from Space*.

2   The Spinning Compass

Dan and Helen looked at the bright light.
'Is it a meteorite?' said Dan.
'It is very big,' said Helen.
'It is going down over the trees!' said Dan.
'It has gone!' said Helen.
'Let us go and find it!' said Dan.
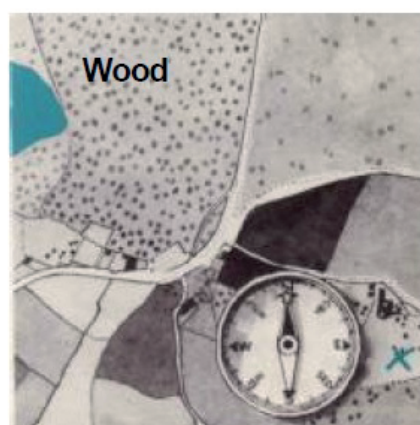'No,' said Helen. 'We will never find it at night.'
'Then let us look for it in the morning,' said Dan.
'Keep the telescope as it is. It will tell us the way to go.'

In the morning they went back to their hut. They had a map with them and Dan had his compass.
They looked in the telescope again and saw the trees.
Dan looked at the map.

'This is what we can see in the telescope,' he said.
Then he made a cross. 'This is the hut,' he said.
He put his compass on the cross. 'The trees are North-West from here. This is where the meteorite fell. We just keep going North-West.'

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Figure 5. Page from *Look and Read: The Boy from Space* Students' Book.

As with other elements of BBC school broadcasting, these literacy series were embedded in debates over educational practice which the BBC as a public service broadcaster negotiated and contributed to. Joyce Morris, a literacy researcher who developed 'phonics,' a systematic method of reading-teaching based on orthography and phonology, advised the BBC on the design of *Look and Read*. The series with its accompanying books was a reading 'primer' – a genre designed to help to learn to read. However, Morris's ideas about literacy teaching were contrary to the mainstream of 'progressive' primary teaching, and part of a debate about whether literacy was a discreet skill of decoding script, or a part of meaning making and communicating in society.

The particularly televisual aspects of *Look and Read* made it a solution to the limitations of printed primers. It used audio-visual material to clarify the phonics content. Yet in addition, the BBC created something entirely new. The BBC was able to employ talented writers who worked with the emerging television genres of fantasy, science fiction and horror.

This article is based on programme analysis, archival research and oral interviews.

2 BBC Educational Broadcasting

BBC staff began planning to use broadcasting for education soon after the founding of the BBC in 1922. Three main issues would determine its history: how the BBC organised itself internally; the form and content of the broadcasts, and the relationship between the BBC and the national education system of schools and teachers.

In the earliest organisational structure of the BBC, the 'Education' division preceded and encompassed both 'Talks' and 'News,'[1] though both were carved off relatively soon as the corporate structure developed. Education was divided into 'Adult' and 'School' departments. Subsequently, the BBC distinguished between generally 'educative' content and specifically 'educational broadcasting.'[2] Potentially any of its general output could be 'educative,' in the broad liberal humanistic conception of education. 'Educational broadcasting' was made by specific departments and had specific characteristics. The corporation assumed that its general public service responsibility implied a relatively comprehensive offering of broadcasts for use in schools, but in fact the BBC's Royal Charter (1927) did not specifically require the BBC to provide educational broadcasting.[3] School Radio began in 1924 and was joined by television in 1957. This service is often referred to collectively as 'BBC Schools.' It was governed by an advisory body with unusually extensive power, including a (diluted) commissioning role, from 1929, called the Central Council for School Broadcasting, and from 1947 the School Broadcasting Council (SBC).[4]

The educative/educational distinction was only made consistently by those in the educational departments. The absence of any government legislation and so any statutory status or requirements meant that the BBC did not have to make the distinction explicit. It suited those in the general departments that the conception of 'educative' be kept vague, as the idea that all BBC programming was educative in the broad liberal sense was partly what legitimated its public funding.[5] BBC Schools staff on the other hand, pressed to define their role by the need to convince teachers and schools to use their programmes, specifically avoided claiming to 'educate,' 'teach' or even 'provide education.' Instead, school broadcasts were described in terms like "a specialised educational service," a "systematic contribution to formal education"[6] or "an aid to teaching."[7] Most often the nature of the role was left undefined and Schools series were simply referred to as being "for schools."[8]

Several characteristics made educational, and especially school, broadcasting different to other broadcasting. BBC Controller of Educational Broadcasting John Scupham contributed to an international committee which decided in 1967 that for broadcasts to be educational:

> Their purpose must be to contribute to the systematic growth of knowledge; they must form part of a continuous provision and be so planned so that their effect is progressive; they must be accompanied by supporting documents; and whether they are received individually or collectively, under supervision or by home listeners or viewers, there must be an active response from the audience, and the impact of the programmes must be supervised and checked.[9]

By "continuous" and "progressive" it was meant that there should be some organisation and systematisation to the material. The requirement for an "active response" echoed the contemporary orthodoxy that learning came from activity. Within these conditions, a wide variety of genres and formats emerged, reflecting the breadth of subject matter in the school curriculum.

The SBC was crucial in ensuring the success of BBC school broadcasting. It was a set of panels based on age-ranges, which commissioned and approved or rejected series proposals. It was made up of members of various eminent educational bodies. It had an arm of Education Officers who carried out research and monitored schools. It had been formed partly in response to early scepticism from some teachers that broadcasts were of value to schools.[10] The SBC was a valuable guidance and feedback mechanism and helped broadcasting to be accepted in schools, as it gave a stamp of approval from some very senior figures in the educational world, which helped the BBC overcome objections from some teachers, including those who saw school broadcasting as inimical to progressive methods. However the SBC was also somewhat limited in that the BBC did not allow it to have real control over the content of school series or to advise over the place of education in the BBC's overall strategy, and it had no statutory power with the main institutions in the education system; teacher training colleges, local education authorities and central government. A similar body existed for the BBC's Further Education output,[11] but not for its Higher Education series, which were controlled by the Open University, with the BBC providing only production expertise.

BBC Schools series were usually accompanied by publications, which were sometimes essential for the series to be used properly. Almost all series had a teacher's book and most also had a student's book. These were written mostly by the series' producers, published by the BBC and sent directly to schools. Unlike broadcasts which were received for free, publications had to be paid for by schools. The BBC aimed to break even on this trade, and while school publications were praised for their quality and good value, the cost could be prohibitive for schools. It was partly because of school publications that the BBC was a relatively large publisher as well as a broadcaster. The number of school publications sold per year increased from 10.02m in 1960/61 to a high of 12.84m in 1965/66. After inflation and price increases during the mid-1970s, this figure declined to 5.96m by 1979/80. In 1955/56 there were around 130 different publications per year, rising to 679 in 1972/73, and then falling to 356 in 1979/80.[12]

The BBC was one of the largest providers of school broadcasting in the world. There were 41 series broadcast per year in 1950/51. By 1980 this had risen to 167.[13] Series ran from 1 to 3 school terms, with around 10–20 episodes per term. In 1955/56, the first year that the total hours of school broadcasting was published, 409 hours were broadcast, around 3% of total BBC network radio hours. This had increased to 487 in 1972/73, though the proportion of total network radio hours had fallen to 1.6%. Television hours rose rapidly from 41 in 1957/58 to 313 in 1963/64, which at that time, just before the launch of BBC2, represented a remarkable 8.9% of total network television hours. By 1979/80 there were 409 hours of television, making up 4.3% of total network television hours.[14][15] Some were repeats, between 31% and 83% per year.[16] Programmes were usually ten to twenty minutes long. In 1951 there were around 8 UK programmes per school day on radio, with another 1 each specifically for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In 1971 there were 10 each for radio and television each school day. In 1957/58, the first year of school television, 1,309 schools received BBC school television, rising to 21,578 by 1967/68, the first year of *Look and Read*. By 1971/72, 30,456 schools used television, around 95% of the total.[17] This remained constant until the 1990s. ITV produced a similar amount of school television, but no radio.[18]

3 The UK School Education System

School broadcasting was unique as a component of BBC broadcasting in that it was designed to be used in an institutional context and relied on a large group of gatekeepers for its exposure. For school broadcasting to be successful and to reach its audience of school children, it required school teachers to agree to use it in schools. By 1944, attendance at school was compulsory for children (to the age of 14, raised gradually to 16 by 1972) during school term weekdays when school broadcasting was scheduled. Therefore, to understand BBC school broadcasting history it is necessary to understand school history. In the post-war era the most important development was the 1944 Education Act which provided free state education for all. It introduced primary (4–11-year-olds) schools as a distinct stage, comprehensively reformed secondary schools (11–15 year olds) and abolished 'elementary' schools (combined primary and secondary schools).

When school broadcasting began, theoretical orthodoxy in the educational world was moving towards progressivism. Progressivism was expressed more in practice than in theory and according to common principles or values rather than codified procedures. Leading theorists included John Dewey, Jean-Ovide Decroly and in the UK, Percy Nunn. Progressive principles included the idea that children learn actively through interaction with the world, not passively from texts or adult authorities. Therefore progressives sought 'child-centred' (opposed to 'subject-centred') learning. Other guiding keywords were 'freedom,' 'individuality,' 'inner-growth,' 'development' and 'self-realisation.'[19] Progressives opposed traditional classroom methods like rote-learning, copying and strict discipline. A theory of learning emerged, described as the 'activity' or 'discovery' method. The government's 1933 Hadow Report recommended that: "the curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored."[20] There was no national school curriculum until 1988, and schools and teachers enjoyed relative freedom over their practices. Progressive teaching was disseminated through certain local education authorities, teacher training colleges, writers and theorists. It spread especially in primary schools between 1945 and 1979.[21]

Education was relatively neglected by the government in the post-war reconstruction period, but gradually expenditure on education by central government was increasing as a proportion of GDP.[22] Access to technology was always a limiting factor on the growth of school broadcasting, but by the 1960s more progress was being made and there were great increases in usage of materials of all kinds in schools. Between 1957–58 and 1963–64 expenditure on books, stationary and materials had increased across all schools on average 38.4% and spending on school books had increased an average of 15%.[23] An ideal situation for school broadcasting, would have been that every classroom had access to a television or radio whenever desired. While most school classrooms had access to a radio at any time by the 1960s, this was never achieved for television. By 1980, 96% of primary schools had TVs, with an average of 1.9 per school. Fewer than half were colour TVs.[24]

4 Literacy in Theory

When BBC Schools entered literacy education, it entered a complex body of theory and a variety of its applications in practice. Lately the term 'literacy' has acquired many prefixes.[25] This article follows the standard historical definition: facility with reading, writing and speaking language. However even for this 'type' of literacy, contemporary scholarship is divided, roughly between those who define it 'narrowly' as a discreet skill of decoding and replicating script, and those who define it 'broadly' as part of meaning making and communicating in society more generally. Consequently, one strand of research, based on empirical research on teaching and learning practices which lead to success at reading attainment, more or less follows the narrow view of literacy. The alternative, 'New' or 'expanded' literacy, sees literacy as "primarily a sociocultural phenomenon, rather than a mental phenomenon"[26] and a "diverse sets of contextualised practices and events."[27] The New literacy view is also prominent among contemporary scholars of educational media and technology.[28]

Although today literacy studies are mainly the preserve of those working in broadly educational research, literacy was a foundational concern of pioneering media scholars such as those in the Toronto School.[29] This body of work treats literacy as a cultural and historical phenomenon, central to the history of communication and media, and with profound effects on human history. The value of the thesis depends on the significance of the difference between 'print' and 'oral' cultures, an as yet unresolved problem. One strand to this has become especially complex and difficult to substantiate: the claim that literacy changed human intellectual culture and possibly the human mind itself. McLuhan applied the theory to the new media of television and film and argued that they would cause a further change in human perception, restoring some of what had been lost from the previous oral culture. The idea that literacy itself has an effect on human mental faculties may be called the essentialist thesis. It has lately been accorded some support from neuroscientific investigation.[30]

Essentialism was challenged by Scribner and Cole,[31] who denied that simply being literate had any meaningful cognitive effects. Arnove and Graff argue that literacy education in history, like education systems in general, has

always served particular political ends like maintaining social order and building the state building.[32] 'New Literacy,' in part a response to essentialism, has been a broad attempt to build a socially grounded theory of literacy education, particularly using sociolinguistics.[33]

5 Literacy Practice in UK Schools

Literacy has a special status within education as it is a core subject of the school curriculum. The history of literacy teaching in the UK in the twentieth century is not a straightforward matter. Again, one useful way of understanding the topic is to distinguish between approaches which apply specifically to learning and teaching processes for acquiring the cognitive 'skill' of literacy, and approaches which place literacy within a broader framework of language use. A corresponding distinction is between 'formal' and 'informal' methods. One's conception of literacy itself influences the choice of approach to literacy education. If literacy is basically a cognitive 'ability,' then formal methods such as phonics are advisable. On the other hand, if literacy is a 'social practice,' it ought to be taught in an informal and holistic way, integrated with broader culture.

Reading pedagogy was in a state of change by 1957. The previous 30 years had seen the development of a debate over methods. Reading had a difficult relationship to progressivism because the essence of progressive pedagogy, discovery methods, were not necessarily conducive to the acquisition of basic skills including reading, yet the Hadow reports, which reflect the official search for a sound reading pedagogy, largely rejected the idea that the solution would be a formal procedure.[34] According to Joyce Morris, in the 1930s:

> the ideas of Decroly, Dewey and Froebel etc. [progressive theorists] began to have an increasing influence on educational practice. Student teachers were advised to consider meaning as almost the only factor in word perception, and reading as an integral, but small part of a child's total growth.[35]

Informal reading teaching methods grew in popularity among many teachers after the war, and appeared to be supported by some research.[36] Books that were popular among progressive teacher trainers such as M.V. Daniel's *Activity in the Primary School* did not contain specific advice on reading teaching, but recommended discovery type measures such as setting up a school library.[37]

Theorists and researchers in the progressive tradition argue that direct methods like phonics fail to capture the complexity of literacy. Barrs et al divide views of reading education into "simple" and "complex."[38] The simple view of reading is of a process of decoding and comprehension. The complex view reading is as "a complex transaction whereby reciprocity is subtly negotiated among text, context and reader." The debate is sometimes reduced to a binary division between 'phonics' or 'direct instruction' on one side, and 'real books,' or 'whole language' on the other.[39] The 'real books' method was associated with the philosophy of language common to late progressivism, emphasising personal expression and motivation, aesthetic pleasure and meaning making. In particular it avoided 'primers' - texts designed to aid learning to read and a key part of reading teaching methods in schools and homes.

6 Reading Research in the 1950s and 1960s and Joyce Morris

The Government's Ministry of Education national studies of reading attainment among school children in 1948 and 1956 produced worrying results.[40] From 1953, Joyce Morris led a major research programme at the National Foundation for Educational Research.[41] The report of 1959 contained shocking findings of attainment among seven-year-olds and was well publicised. 45% had not mastered the mechanics of reading by this age and 19% had barely begun to read at all.[42]

Concerns that informal progressive methods were not working led to a new wave of development in systematic approaches to reading-teaching materials. There were experiments with the modified alphabet of Sir James Pitman, and Caleb Gattegno's 'words in colour.' Another systematic approach, phonics, was the idea that reading can be taught and learned through patterns in the correspondence of written letters (graphemes) to sounds (phonemes). Among teachers in the 1950s, 'phonics' could mean any method which related sound to symbol in a relatively systematic way, but research was beginning to furnish more precise findings.

Initial literacy came in two different types; infants (4–7-year-olds) who were being introduced to reading and juniors (7–11-year-olds) who had not yet learned to read but would no longer receive any reading instruction in school. They were called at the time 'backward' readers (a phrase no longer current).[43] They were not necessarily dyslexic, a condition which was not well understood. Courses in teacher training colleges did not distinguish between reading 'backwardness' and other learning difficulties and did not give instructions on how to teach children who showed signs of the first but not the second. Joyce Morris, who explicitly defined her work as a solution to a national attainment problem, addressed these cases.

Morris used empirical research methods to develop a 'scientific' method of teaching reading. In Morris's view "ongoing investigations… indicated that there was an urgent need for a new kind of phonics based on linguistic scholarship."[44] Morris was aided by Professor DB Fry, Head of the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics at University College London. Morris found "there was a system of sound-symbol correspondence – even though it often seemed very obscure due to what appeared to be many irregularities – which could be abstracted into a learning scheme."[45] The method of teaching and learning to read she devised, later codified and published as *Phonics 44*, involved the phased introduction of word 'families.' It began with simple short vowel sounds as in cat, hen, pig, dog, sun etc. and proceeded to more complex and irregular sounds such as oil, food, and so on. It taught a reader to break a word down into its component graphemes, and repeat them in order to utter the word.

SOUND FAMILIES IN THE STORY
Words are shown where they appear for the first time.
Words in italic indicate the week the word family is referred to in the Teachers' Notes.

Programme	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ar	garden	far				gardener		park		
at	at that			sat		fat hat				
ai			waited	again						
an	*and* ran thank cannot Chinaman		man	stand canal	hand	standing	Dan can	bank		policeman
ch	China Chinaman	*chocolate*	each rich			children	chug chugging			
ck		back				black	*back* lock	o'clock unlocked locked	locks	
ea	eating read	mean means	each	East	eaten	please				
er	after flowers her		*letter* under silver water Robert	better paper over		gardener	dinner number newspaper	perhaps		

Figure 6. Page from Teachers' Notes of *Look and Read*.

7 School Television and the Development of *Look and Read*

When school television began in 1957, educational television of any kind was still new and experimental. BBC school radio had several series for use in general English teaching, whose basis was usually the adaptation of literature of various kinds. None was designed for the teaching and learning of reading and writing in the narrow sense. Educational film was not an obvious guide for several reasons: problems of demand and cost had prevented a large industry from developing in the UK, uptake was low and quality was drastically variable. Films were not designed in series, with little coordination or consistency of format or personnel. The film and television industries were quite separate. School television was made by a committed and pioneering intake of new BBC staff in the 1950s, and its model of planning and distribution from the already large and successful school radio service. It soon eclipsed educational film in production and reception.[46]

During the 1960s, BBC Schools continued to grow in acceptance and popularity among teachers, and the BBC gained the confidence to change the conception of many of its series from 'enrichment' to 'learning resources.' The BBC was part of a new movement of curriculum innovation among educational resource providers. One of the first primary school television series was *Merry-Go-Round*, a 'miscellany' series which could feature any subject matter or format. It offered producers a platform to get new ideas to an audience quickly without the pressure of a full commission and was used for experiments such as sex education for primary schools in the later 1960s.[47] While working temporarily in a primary school in 1962, new school TV producer Claire Chovil found that junior initial literacy was a prominent concern.[48] In 1964 Chovil proposed an experimental reading module for the next series of *Merry-Go-Round.*[49] The proposal features a description of the kind of televisual methods then in consideration:

> …specific words could be shown with the appropriate visual image (where possible), and the resources of television screen could be used to project words in varying sizes, to emphasise words, to make them appear and disappear, and, in short, to do all that is possible to train the eyes and the memory of those children who find it difficult to apply themselves to reading.

Some of these ideas survived into the production of *Look and Read*.

Chovil approached Morris to invite her to consult on the new series in the summer term of 1964. Morris saw an opportunity to expand and publicise her research. She had a clear goal: "an instant and widespread contribution to the necessary speeding-up of improvements in the national reading situation." The new series would "improve the quality of teacher training" by demonstrating phonics methods and "favourably influence children's attitudes to the learning task."[50] In 1965 Morris went on a lecture tour of the USA and visited educational producers in television networks. She found that they were restricted by limited budgets, and "longed for the day when animations and other expensive but more appropriate techniques could be employed." (Morris's visit predated the Children's Television Workshop development of *Sesame Street*.) She reported to Chovil that "the BBC series would be a pioneer project in a wider context than we imagined."[51]

The first experimental unit, *Fishing for Fivers*, was broadcast in spring 1965. The SBC commissioned a report which recommended further experiments.[52] There was considerable interest among schools. A second experimental unit, *Tom, Pat and Friday,* followed, this time with the important addition of a student's book. The next step was a full series – this was *Look and Read.* The programme's format was set by then and would continue throughout the run of the series.

The first full *Look and Read* serial, *Bob and Carol Look for Treasure,* was broadcast in the spring term of 1967. The drama segments were in the style of a normal children's adventure serial yet they were also a component of the series' literacy pedagogy. During the first few series, the scriptwriters were restricted to the most common 200 words encountered by children (nevertheless a wide field of movement), plus a selection of special words needed for the particular story.[53] The student's book which accompanied each series comprised ten chapters which told the story of the drama segments. In effect, the story was presented in several different forms – through written text, spoken language (these were near identical in the accompanying reading books and the scripts of the programmes) and moving image.

Despite the use of the systematic phonics method, the aims of the series did not explicitly include the direct teaching of reading. Publicity for the series emphasised that it was for "stimulating an interest in reading among backward pupils and in bringing about (directly or indirectly) an improvement in their reading skill."[54] Crucially, *Look and Read* was not aimed at all children but only lower-achieving readers. This made it more attractive to teachers who resented interference with their normal practice. However in effect *Look and Read* did use relatively 'direct' teaching methods in the teaching middles, somewhat in the way that *Sesame Street* did later, with on-screen moving text and animations. These animations are the ancestor of contemporary series like *Alphablocks* (2010–2021), a series that continues to be aired on the BBC's younger children's channel Cbeebies.[55]

The series was designed as a televisual response to an educational problem. It proved to fulfil its aims well – almost too well, as teachers quickly realised that whole classes wanted to watch the serials and the series was usually used with confident readers or with beginning readers below the target age.[56] The series continued to be popular, with new productions every two or three years until the early 2000s. It is worth remembering how novel the concept was at the time of its introduction. The Beveridge Report on broadcasting of 1951 had stated that school broadcasting "will never teach reading and writing in the narrowest sense of those words."[57] Yet by the 1960s ambitious and creative producers like Claire Chovil were expanding the possibilities of broadcasting. As a fellow producer remarked: "People said 'Oh of course you can't teach reading on the television.' And she said 'Yes you can.' And that was amazing. She was a very brave woman actually."[58]

8 *Words and Pictures* and *Listening and Reading*

Following the success of *Look and Read*, the BBC Schools produced a similar series for 5–7-year-olds, called *Words and Pictures*, first broadcast in 1970 and also produced by Chovil with Morris advising. It used animation instead of live action for the 'drama' segments. The reading sections also used a phonics basis. There was abundant talent and ability available to the department at the time. The second series, *Sam of Boff's Island,* was written by Michael Rosen, then a staff trainee and later a successful poet, adapted by Smallfilms into a stop-frame animated story and presented by Tony Robinson, later a successful actor.[59] Oliver Postgate and Peter Firmin of Smallfilms had produced stop-motion animated series for BBC Children's, including *The Clangers* (Postgate was also the nephew of the BBC's Controller of Educational Broadcasting Richmond Postgate). Subsequent series of *Words and Pictures*, produced by Moyra Gambleton, featured a mixture of adapted and commissioned stories.
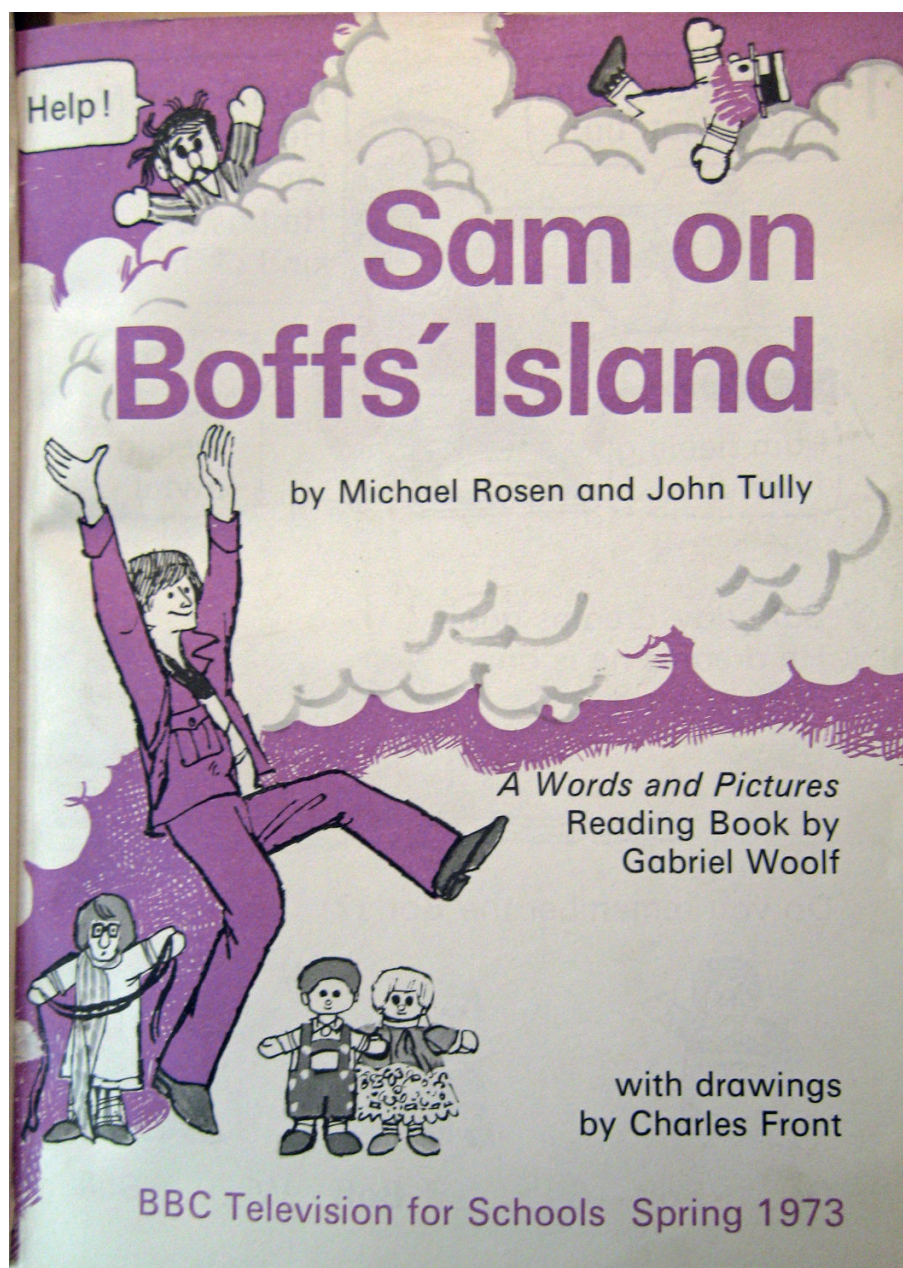
Figure 7. *Words and Pictures: Sam on Boff's Island* Students' Book.

The School Radio department also produced a reading series, called *Listening and Reading.*

The producer, Moira Doolan explained her thinking behind the series in terms which suggests a rejection of systematic methods and an embrace of 'real books':

"education believes that everything must be split up into its component parts and taught piecemeal; letters and words, symbols and concepts. This is a difficult way to learn and a slow way. It separates reading from meaning."[60]

Doolan sought to replicate the experience of children sitting on their parents' knee and hearing a story read to them. Philippa Pearce, who had been a Schools producer and later became a successful children's author and editor (*Tom's Midnight Garden*) was engaged as a consultant, and also wrote some of the stories. Each episode of *Listening and Reading* featured a narrated story, which children could read along (or read later) with the student's book. The student's book, though large sized for ease of page turning, was as much like a 'real book' as possible.
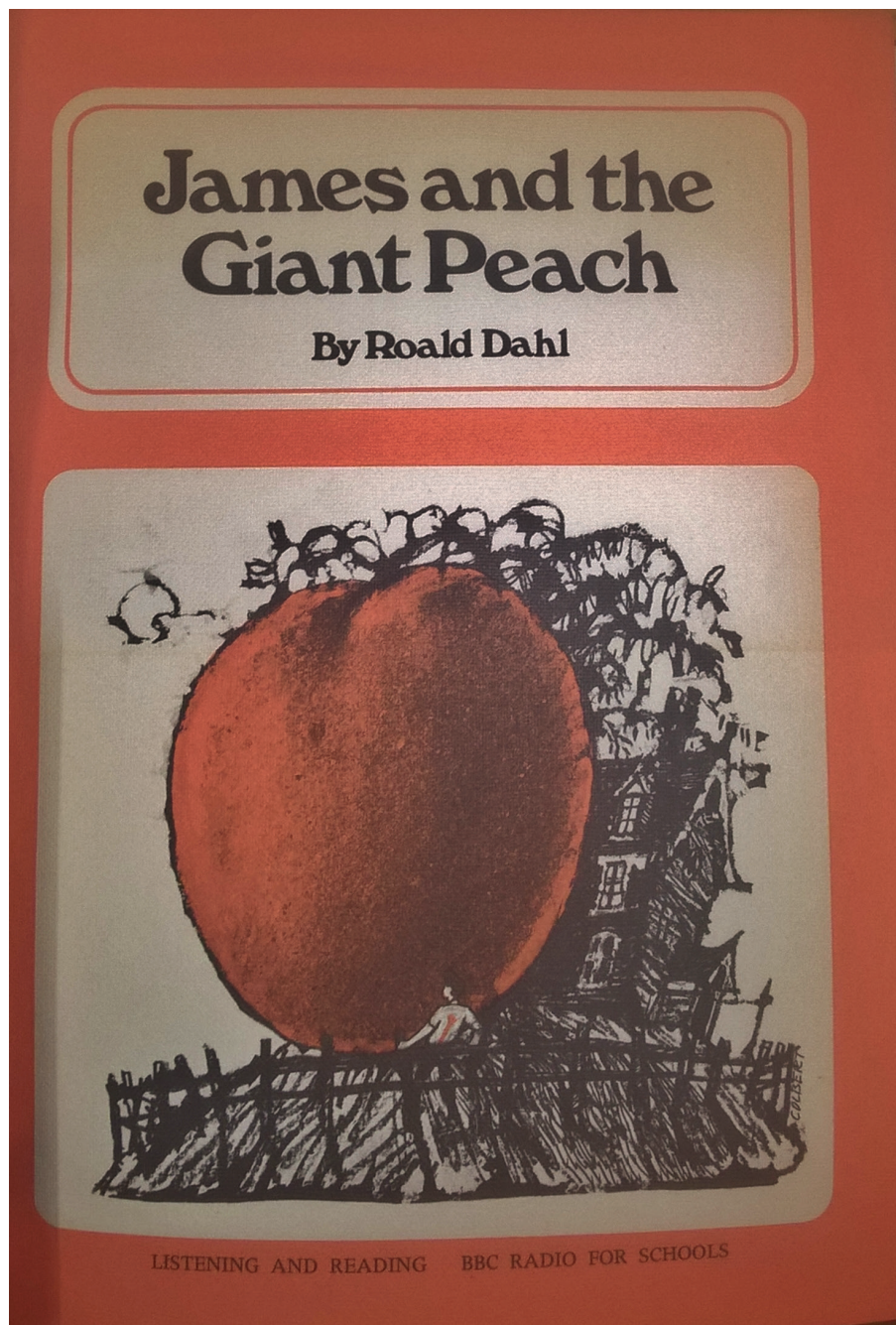

Figure 8. *Listening and Reading* Students' Book.

9 Reading-Teaching Methods in the 1960s and 1970s

The student's books of the BBC's reading series were 'primers' and can be compared with notable contemporary examples such as Ladybird's *Key Words to Reading*,[61] the Schools Council's *Breakthrough to Literacy*,[62] Macmillan's *Nippers* and *Little Nippers*,[63] and Morris's own *Language in Action,* also published by Macmillan.[64] These were often 'graded' reading schemes; sets of books at increasing levels of difficulty.

These primers used differing methods of teaching and learning reading. According to the 'Look and Say' method, children learn how to read by associating printed words with images. The method can be seen in as the first known primer *Orbis Pictus*.[65] The publishing firm Wills and Hepworth, known popularly by their imprint Ladybird, introduced its *Keywords to Reading* scheme in 1964. The books featured the systematic introduction of the most simple, most common 'key words' alongside an illustration of the text.[66] 'Look and say' was limited as a method for three main reasons. Firstly, for more complex words and sentences, if a child encountered a picture they could not identify, the process did not work. Secondly, because images do not have a single definite interpretation into language, a child could not be sure that their interpretation and the picture were the same. Thirdly, it necessitated extensive repetition, often leading to a somewhat dull text.[67] It was possible to use repetition creatively, as in Geisel's *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), but arguably this is not true of the very straightforward activities of siblings Peter and Jane in the *Keywords to Reading* Scheme.
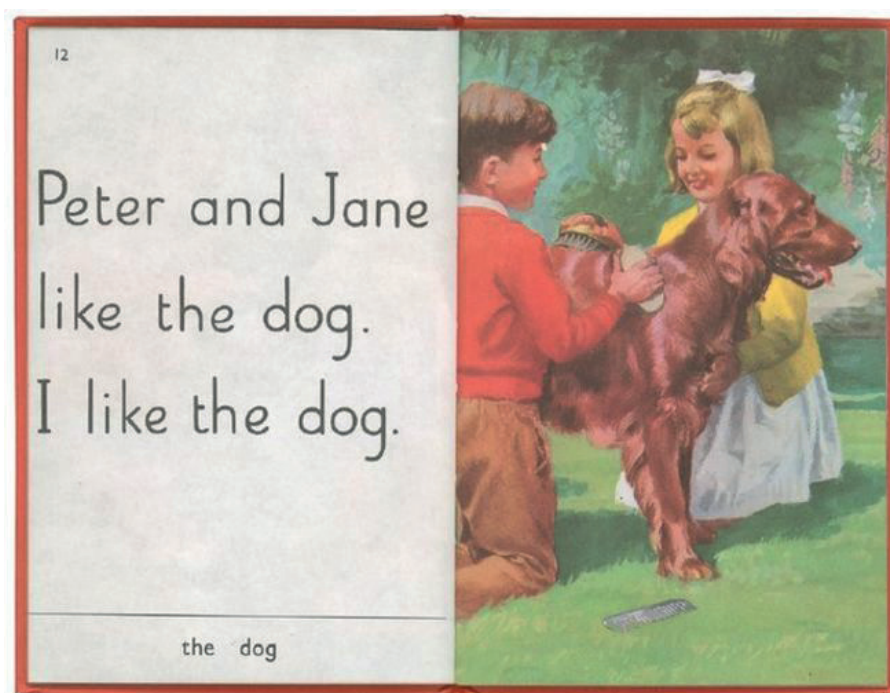

Figure 9. Pages from *Key Words to Reading 1A: Play with Us*.[68]

In the late 1960s, two alternative approaches emerged, both using a 'social' ethos towards language learning. Writer and teacher Leila Berg was dismayed by the overwhelmingly middle class setting of the primer genre and disliked the conformity imposed on children by schools: "with very few exceptions, the children who exist in books are middle-class children… (working class children) see no recognition, no reflection of themselves, nothing that tells them they belong in this world…"[69] Leila Berg's *Nippers* (and *Little Nippers*) series (1969–72) showed a much broader range of social situations and language use.[70]

Meanwhile, a research and development project on the teaching of English in schools was being run by Michael Halliday at University College London at the department of general linguistics, funded by the Nuffield Foundation and the government's Schools Council. It developed a comprehensive new reading teaching method, called *Breakthrough to Literacy*, including sets of primers. Halliday thought that previous techniques, including Look and Say, or systematic methods like phonics "do not derive from any general consideration of what language is, of what it means to learn a language, or… what we do with language, as individuals and as social beings."[71] Halliday and the research team sought to apply sociolinguistic (language as social behaviour) and functional linguistic (language as performing tasks in the world) principles to their new method. It resulted in primers with realistic social themes.
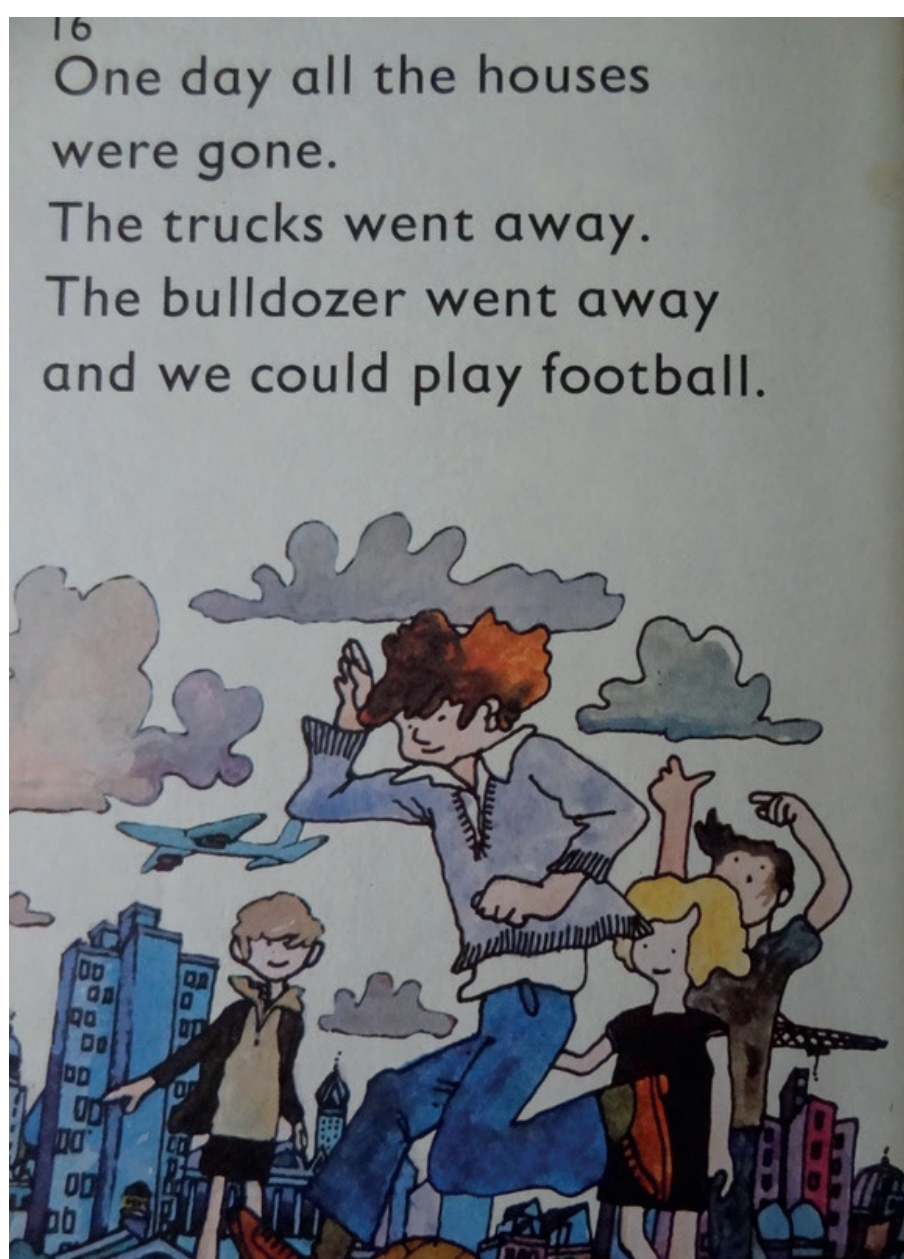

16
One day all the houses
were gone.
The trucks went away.
The bulldozer went away
and we could play football.

Figure 10. Page from *Breakthrough to Literacy: New Houses*.[72]

The strengths of phonics were clear; it was simple to understand and easy to use at the teaching level, it allowed children to make rapid progress and it was an accurate diagnostic tool. Its weaknesses were that it could be inflexible and had little relation to the goals and experience of reading. When translated into reading schemes, phonics tended to result in banal and unnatural sentences and subject matter, an effect parodied by Michael Halliday as "Pick the thick stick off the brick, Chick!'[73]

In 1975 the SBC surveyed the use of reading schemes in 482 primary school classes. This found that 'Ladybird,' (*Keywords to Reading*), was by far the most popular, being used in 40% of all classes. *Breakthrough to Literacy* was the seventh most popular, used in 9% of classes. Leila Berg's *Nippers* series was being used in 5% of classes. *Language in Action* was being used in 3% of classes.[74]

The survey also looked at the use of the BBC's English and reading programmes. It divided this output into three types; seven 'General English' series, five 'Miscellany series' (which included some language content), and five 'Reading series.'[75] The most popular series overall was *Watch!*, a miscellany series used in 64% of classes within its age range and 40% of all classes. *Merry-go-Round* was being used between 19% and 62% (the figure is unclear due to collecting and reporting methods) of classes in its age range and in 33% overall; *Words and Pictures* in 40% of classes within its age range (27% overall) and *Look and Read* in between 19 and 45% (25% overall). *Listening and Reading I* and *II* were less popular, being used in 5% and 4% of all classes overall. Therefore, primary school classes had as much or more exposure to the BBC reading series as they did to many of the print-only schemes. The *Look and Read* student's book sold 307,000 copies in 1972/1973, the first broadcast of the fourth serial.[76] This fell – commensurate with falls in sales of all publications – to 165,000 in 1980/81, the year of the first broadcast of the ninth serial. Viewing remained strong. By 1989/90, *Words and Pictures* was used by 88% of primary schools, with audience of "perhaps two million children and perhaps another 750,000 viewing at home" and 26.2% of all teachers who used school television, (*Look and Read* by 20.8%).[77]

10 *Look and Read* as a Primer

Look and Read offered a huge advantage over print-only schemes by offering the target learning in three ways: text, soundtrack and moving image. It was particularly suited to phonics because it could use the sound of spoken language. Therefore, unlike the printed primers, *Look and Read* scripts and books did not have to be written with a phonics bias. Phonic material was extracted for the teaching materials later. The film offered a detailed and comprehensible visual guide, which allowed the text to be more complex than it would be if the meaning could only be distributed among text and static image.

Children's writers and illustrators were enjoying a renaissance in the 1960s and 1970s, and the BBC used some for its schools publications. However, the contrast between television and illustrated book is not enough to explain the difference between *Look and Read* as a reading teaching resource and contemporary printed primers. The drama segments of *Look and Read* are in the tradition of children's adventure serial, which though it had antecedents in children's printed fiction, was developing as a genre of its own. The *Look and Read* serials and accompanying books were written by screenwriters and designed as normal dramas were – with action, characterisation and plot as the motivating elements, and especially with 'cliff-hanger' endings to each episode. The drama segments of *Look and Read* were 'real' in the same way that the books in the 'real books' method were real.

During the 1960s the depth, complexity and quality of the children's television drama evolved considerably, both on BBC and ITV.[78] Television studio techniques for videotaped drama were steadily improving, while film shooting, normally used for outdoor scenes, was benefitting from an influx of film makers from the declining British film

industry. London Weekend Television (LWT), the ITV franchise holder for London weekends, hired film industry practitioners such as Charles Crichton[79] and Freddie Francis[80] to make their children's drama *The Adventures of Black Beauty* (1971–4), all on colour film, helping make the serial a successful export. One of its writers, Richard Carpenter, who had also written another successful colour film LWT children's drama, *Catweazle* (1969), wrote the third *Look and Read* serial, *The Boy from Space* (1971).[81] The BBC shot the drama segments of *The Boy from Space* on colour film and kept the film elements (as they had not done for the previous two *Look and Read's*, which are now lost). The extant version of *The Boy from Space* is unusual as a *Look and Read* serial because the teaching middles were remade in 1980. The 1971 film segments, as seen below, were reused but newly bookended with short additional scenes.

The Boy from Space departed from the previous two *Look and Read* series by including science fiction, fantasy and horror elements, which some children found frightening.

Video 1. Clip from *Look and Read: The Boy from Space* (1980). This is an excerpt from the drama segment at the end of episode 2.

These developing televisual genres were novel in didactic texts of any kind. The production of the drama segments created a memorably sinister and otherworldly atmosphere through Fangandinni's direction, Paddy Kingsland's music and child actors Sylvestra Le Touzel [*The Thick of It* (2005–2012), *Death of Stalin* (2017)] and Stephen Garlick [(*The Adventures of Black Beauty* (1972–1974)[82] and *The Dark Crystal* (1982)].

Look and Read's teaching middles are completely different to the drama segments, and contain specifically didactic material, though this is 'sugar-coated'[83] as far as possible with jokes, songs and animations. The animation arguably does not compare favourably with its rival, *Sesame Street* (1969-present): this is partly because the budgets available to the Children's Television Workshop were far in excess of what was available to the BBC. One staff member recalled members of the *Sesame Street* production team visiting the BBC School TV offices (around 1980) and being amazed at the minimal staff: "there were 2 people in the office and they said 'Where are all the others?'"[84]

The main difference between the 1971 and 1980 versions of *The Boy from Space* is that the teaching middles were remade in a new style. Reading research had continued to progress and the department revised its approach after Morris retired as consultant. New producer Patricia Farrington, who had been part of the development team for the Open University's *Reading Development* course materials, introduced new techniques into the teaching middles which supplemented pure phonics with psycholinguistic procedures, like context, syntactic and semantic cues. In these strategies the process of understanding and predicting meaning was blended with the process of understanding orthography.[85]

The Boy from Space was judged "the most engaging of the *Look and Read* series to date, both in story content and the choice of reading devices."[86] In 1976 and has been the only *Look and Read* serial (or BBC Schools production of any sort) to have been released on DVD.[87] Later *Look and Read* serials were written by screenwriters who went on to distinguished careers, notably Andrew Davies [(*Dark Towers* (1981)*, House of Cards* (1990)*, Pride and Prejudice* (1995)].

11 Conclusion

By the 1980s, the BBC's literacy series offered ground breaking new methods and were a response to a real educational problem. Both *Words and Pictures* and *Look and Read* were among the most successful and longest running of school broadcasting series, popular with teachers and children. Several factors led to their success. At a time of expansion in television, the department was able to devise an experimental unit and pilot it to large audiences early in its development. The SBC guided practice-based research and feedback. The BBC's reach and cachet as a public service broadcaster allowed it to engage leading researchers, and Chovil's collaboration with Morris brought cutting edge linguistics research into television production. The BBC could also cultivate talented scriptwriters and film makers, leading to high quality drama segments. Most importantly from the point of view of literacy pedagogy, the combined audio-visual and textual method made a powerful alternative to print only methods.

Reading pedagogy had a colourful subsequent history. A long debate ended in a decisive victory for those who advocated systematic methods. Phonics was declared compulsory for all school teaching initial literacy – a move that continues to be controversial among educational researchers.[88] The BBC's pioneering of the method (and other curriculum developments) proved prescient, and almost certainly influenced many teachers at the grassroots level, but this did not translate into official recognition and national influence. When the government legislated for a national curriculum in 1988, the BBC, which was then providing educational resources for all age ranges and almost all subjects, was not part of the consultation process. In fact the Corporation's relationship with the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher had been turbulent in several areas.[89] But the BBC had never been set up to offer curriculum materials in a comprehensive fashion, and the SBC always advised against this. The way the departments were run, with individual producers working on relatively isolated projects, also mitigated against a truly joined-up offer.[90]

BBC School Broadcasting declined after 1990. The new national curriculum left little room for a variation and alternation in educational schemes in general, and the department soon realised that innovation was pointless.[91] Indeed, the strength of BBC Schools had always been 'enrichment', material that while not strictly speaking 'extra-curricular', was nevertheless often tangential to measurable learning outcomes – which came to be central to all educational discourse, much to the disappointment of progressive educationists. Furthermore, the political climate for public service broadcasting declined still further and the BBC's school service (the term 'broadcasting' came to be anachronistic) was curtailed abruptly and drastically when a proposed move to wholesale online provision was largely blocked by the government in 2008, following a successful protest of commercial firms led by publisher Pearson, that this would crowd out a potential growth market.[92] Ironically, the biggest problem that had plagued school broadcasting, its distribution system, was solved (by the spread of broadband internet, the launch of BBC Iplayer and the installation in all school classrooms of interactive whiteboards with projectors) just at the time that the service became politically impossible. The BBC's many school series, including its pioneering and popular literacy series were a tremendous national asset while they survived, but the

conditions that promoted their creation – particularly a public service media corporation with the leeway and commitment to pursue a unique educational project – are now conspicuously absent in the UK's media landscape.

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Biography

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