

# To educate and entertain: the pedagogy of television

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# **To educate and entertain: the pedagogy of television**

Ava Laure Parsemain

A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



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Many media scholars agree that television can be used as an informal site of teaching and learning. However, little is known about how television teaches. This thesis explores the pedagogy of television by investigating the processes by which television teaches and viewers learn. It addresses the following questions: how does television teach through production techniques and textual features? How do viewers learn from television?

To investigate televisual pedagogy as a communicative process, this study links producers' discourses, audiovisual textuality and audience responses. By connecting production, text and reception, it shows how teaching and learning interact in the context of televisual communication. Taking into account the distinction between public service and commercial television and the traditional demarcation between programmes that are explicitly produced to educate and those that are produced primarily to entertain, it examines the production, textual features, and reception of two Australian programmes: *Who Do You Think You Are?*, a documentary series broadcast on the public service channel SBS, and *Home and Away*, a soap opera broadcast on the commercial Seven Network.



These two case studies reveal that regardless of conventional labels and categorisations, entertainment plays a crucial role in televisual education. In addition, they highlight the role of authenticity and realism in televisual teaching and learning. Although different programmes use different techniques and generic conventions to achieve this goal, it is argued that television must signify the real and invite referential involvement in order to educate, and that viewers must trust that the programme is authentic, realistic or accurate in order to learn from it.

This thesis contributes new knowledge in two ways. Firstly, it demonstrates that entertainment is not only compatible with education, but that it can serve televisual pedagogy. Secondly, it makes an original contribution to audience research by distinguishing two modalities of response: critical viewing, which is a form of intellectual distance that hinders learning, and critical involvement, which facilitates learning through literate analysis, trust and intellectual proximity with the content.

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## **Dedication**

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“This is the largest classroom in the world, Professor: television.”

TV producer, *Quiz Show* (Robert Redford, 1994)

## **PART ONE**

### **Introduction, Literature Review and Methodology**

## Introduction

### **To inform, educate and entertain**

When the world's first national broadcasting organisation, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), was founded in October 1922, its Director General, John Reith (later Lord Reith), defined the mission of public service broadcasting in three words: to inform, educate and entertain. The phrase was not coined by Reith but by the American broadcasting pioneer David Sarnoff, who wrote in a letter to General Electric in June 1922:

I think that the principal elements of broadcasting service are entertainment, information, and education, with emphasis on the first feature - entertainment - although not underestimating the importance of the other two elements.

Expressed in other words, and considered from its broadest aspect, this means that broadcasting represents a job of entertaining, informing, and educating the nation and should, therefore, be distinctly regarded as a public service. (Sarnoff, 1968, p. 41)

Although Reith appropriated Sarnoff's phrase, his vision of broadcasting was different as it prioritised information and education over entertainment. According to the historian Asa Briggs (1995), Reith and his colleagues were driven by a sense of responsibility and strong moral values; they believed that broadcasting should have a social purpose, serve the public good and, above all, spread knowledge. In his *Memorandum to the Station Directors* (1924b) Reith writes: "our responsibility is to carry into the greatest possible number of homes everything that is best in every department of human knowledge" (p. 34). Unlike Sarnoff, Reith refused to prioritise entertainment, which he considered secondary to information and education:

I think it will be admitted by all that to have exploited so great a scientific invention for the purpose and pursuit of entertainment alone would have been a prostitution of its powers and an insult to the character and intelligence of the people. (Reith, 1924a, p. 17)

Reith and his colleagues considered themselves as "controllers" (Briggs, 1995, p. 6).

They saw themselves as responsible intellectuals serving the public good and they believed that only a supply-led system could allow broadcasters to inform and educate the public. As Thomas Hajkowski (2010) explains, “Reith envisioned British broadcasting as a public service, answerable neither to the government nor to the listeners, but only to a higher cultural ideal” (p. 22). Reith (1924a) himself writes:

It is occasionally indicated to us that we are apparently setting out to give the public what we think they need - and not what they want - but few know what they want and very few what they need... In any case it is better to over-estimate the mentality of the public than to underestimate it. (p. 34)

The goals of informing and educating the public are closely related because they both aim to advance knowledge. Education can be defined as the action of developing human capacities through information (providing facts) or training (developing skills). Entertainment, on the other hand, is usually seen as distinct from information and education because it revolves around pleasure rather than knowledge. As a reception phenomenon, entertainment is an experiential response that involves enjoyment (Dyer, 1992; Gray, 2008; Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004); however, it is not synonymous with hedonistic pleasure or fun as it can also include emotions that are commonly perceived as negative or unpleasant such as sadness, melancholy, fear and horror (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Oliver, 1993; Vorderer, 2001; Vorderer et al., 2004).

Entertainment usually manifests itself through pleasurable responses such as exhilaration and laughter, feelings of curiosity, excitement, thrill and relief, (enjoyable) sadness, melancholy and tenderness, and/or sensory delight. Communication scholars also identify some prerequisites that are crucial for the entertainment experience such as suspension of disbelief, which is the willingness to suspend one’s critical faculties to believe the unbelievable, empathy, which is the ability to imagine what the emotions of others might be and to share those emotions,<sup>1</sup> and parasocial interactions, which are unidirectional interactions with media characters and/or personae (Vorderer et al., 2004).

---

<sup>1</sup> Dolf Zillmann (2006) defines empathy as “an affective state that is mediated by an ability of persons to place themselves, mostly deliberately, but on occasion spontaneously, into observed others’ emotional experiences” (p. 151)



The goal of informing and educating audiences and the goal of entertaining them are often perceived as distinct and separate because of the assumption that some media texts and genres promote knowledge while others provide enjoyment. In its early days, the BBC broadcast radio programmes that aimed to either inform and educate (news, talks, debates and children programmes) or to entertain (jazz, music hall and dramas) (Briggs, 1995). This binarism between media education and media entertainment has since pervaded professional, institutional, academic and popular discourses about broadcasting and television (Gray, 2008; Hinds, 1991; Klein, 2011, 2013). For example, in his seminal book *Television, Technology and Cultural Form*, Raymond Williams (1974) explicitly contrasts television genres that educate (news, current affairs, documentaries, education, arts, children programmes) with television genres that entertain (drama, movies and light entertainment). Lynn Hinds (1991) and more recently Bethany Klein (2011, 2013) note that those assumptions about what informs and educates and what entertains still prevail among audiences and in professional and institutional discourses about television. Hinds formulates those assumptions as follows:

Television [...] cannot be educational in any meaningful way without a concomitant loss in entertainment values. This notion becomes a zero-sum game, which bifurcates television programs into two distinct types: those that entertain and those that teach. Television production proceeds from that either/or assumption; programs are made and consumed either to entertain or to educate. (p. 118)

As Klein points out, some media companies and institutions like the Office of Communications (Ofcom), a regulatory body for the media industry in the United Kingdom, continue to circulate rigid and narrow conceptions of what constitutes information, education and entertainment on television:

If the phrase ['to inform, educate, entertain'] posits the goals as not equally worthy, it also suggests a clear distinction between them [...] Old ideas about what type of programming informs or educates or entertains persist today, both through a common sense that permeates official and unofficial discourse about television and through the industry labels used to classify departments and programmes. (2011, p. 910)

However, those assumptions are challenged by many studies that demonstrate that educational television can entertain and that entertainment television can educate (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Gray, 2008; Hinds, 1991; Lesser, 1975; Lumby & Albury, 2008; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014; McKee, 2012; Morrow, 2006; Noble & Noble, 1979; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal, Rogers, & Brown, 1993; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). As I explore further in my literature review, media scholars have shown that television, whether it is labelled “educational” or “entertainment”, can teach. Taking this idea as a starting point, my research investigates its pedagogy. Based on the notion that part of television’s mission is to educate the public, my thesis asks: *how* does television educate? How does public service, educational television teach? And if, as media scholars have shown, commercial, entertainment programmes can also educate, how do they teach? In what way and by what means does television invite audiences to learn?

## **What is pedagogy?**

Derived from the Greek *pedo* (child) and *agōgos* (leader), the word “pedagogy” traditionally refers to the practice of guiding and teaching children. In Ancient Greece, pedagogues (*paidagōgos*) were slaves who acted as guardians, supervised boys and escorted them to school. More recently, the term “pedagogy” has been applied more broadly to describe the methods and techniques that educators use to teach children as well as adults. In my thesis, I use the word “pedagogy” in its more modern and general sense of the general practice and method of teaching, which also covers andragogy, the teaching of adults. I define pedagogy as how someone or something teaches.

As Dave Lusted (1986) points out, the concept of pedagogy is important because “it draws attention to the *process* through which knowledge is produced. Pedagogy addresses the “how” questions involved not only in the transmission or reproduction of knowledge but also in its production” (pp. 2-3). This emphasis on pedagogy as a process and on the “how” questions (the word “how” being understood as “in what way?” and “by what means?”) underpins my research. In my thesis, these “how” questions concern the pedagogical models, techniques and tools that television programmes and television professionals use to teach.

As Paul Ramsden (2003) explains, education scholars have developed several pedagogical models based on different learning theories. The behaviourist and cognitivist models are unidirectional and transmissive: these models see “teaching as telling”, the teacher “as the source of undistorted information [...] and the mass of students as passive recipients of the wisdom of a single speaker” (p. 108). In unidirectional transmissive pedagogical models (which I label “transmissive” throughout my thesis) the teacher is seen as transmitting knowledge in an authoritative manner while learners passively receive it. As Ramsden writes, transmissive pedagogy “is locked into a notion of teaching as information transmission or skills exposition and it focuses on the actions of the teacher in isolation from the student. The relation between teaching and student learning is taken for granted” (p. 113). In contrast, the humanist, transformative and constructivist models are student-centred and interactive. In these models (which I label “constructivist” in my thesis) teaching is seen as “a process of working cooperatively with learners to help them change their understanding” (p. 110). Constructivist pedagogy assumes that learning is active and that teaching is interactive rather than authoritative and transmissive: “knowing is a process, not a product” (Bruner, 1966, p. 72). As Kristina Gottschall (2011) explains, in the constructivist models, teaching is not considered as the cause but as the context of learning: “knowledge is produced between the teacher and the learner, and thus, knowledge formation is ‘interactive productivity’ as opposed to ‘merely a transmissive act’” (p. 32).

Although the term “pedagogy” mainly refers to how teachers teach, it also concerns what is taught and how learners learn. As Lusted (1986) observes, “how one teaches is therefore of central interest but, through the prism of pedagogy, it becomes inseparable from what is being taught and, crucially, how one learns” (p. 3). When studying pedagogy it is therefore necessary to consider the “what” questions: what do teachers teach? What do learners learn? What is the substance, the content and the outcomes of education, teaching and learning? The most obvious answer to these questions is knowledge. Knowledge is what teachers transmit in transmissive models, and what is being collaboratively constructed by teachers and learners in constructivist models. Declarative knowledge refers to factual knowledge; it means to know of or to know about something. Procedural knowledge denotes knowing how to do something; it

is sometimes referred to as “skills”. For clarity, I refer to declarative knowledge, or factual knowledge, as “knowledge” and to procedural knowledge as “skills” in my thesis.

But education has objectives other than the transmission and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Criticising educators’ focus on scientific knowledge and technological skills in the United States, Martha Nussbaum (2006) argues that other “abilities connected to the ‘humanities’ and the ‘arts’ are crucial to the formation of citizenship. They must be cultivated if democracies are to survive, through educational policies that focus on pedagogy at least as much as content” (p. 388). Nussbaum considers that education should foster three essential capacities: critical thinking, which is the ability to think independently and to question authority; world citizenship, which is the awareness and respect of differences between groups and nations; and narrative imagination, which is the ability to empathise and to imagine a situation from someone else’s perspective. Nussbaum’s view of education is in alignment with Kwame Appiah’s (2006) concept of cosmopolitanism, which involves curiosity about other cultures and “respect for legitimate difference” (p. 15). These concepts - world citizenship, cosmopolitan curiosity and narrative imagination - are all related to otherness and fall under the domain of ethics. Ethics offers guidance about what is right and what is wrong and “how life should be lived, what men and women should be and do” (Berlin, 1992, p. 2). As Nussbaum and Appiah suggest, ethics are and should be an outcome of education. In other words, education should not merely aim to advance factual knowledge and skills; it must also foster and cultivate ethics by increasing awareness and understanding of right and wrong. Although ethical values are mostly culturally specific, “there are some values that are, and should be, universal, just as there are lots of values that are, and must be, local” (Appiah, 2006, p. 21).

To summarise, for the purpose of my research I conceptualise education with the following outcomes: *knowledge*, which I understand as factual knowledge, that is, to know of or about something; *skills*, which refers to procedural knowledge, that is, to know how to do something, and includes both technical skills and cognitive skills (like critical thinking); and *ethics*, which I define as the knowledge and understanding of right and wrong.

In regards to how learners learn, many scholars have shown that education transcends schooling and that knowledge, skills and ethics can be developed outside formal classroom environments (Buckingham, 2003; Collins & Halverson, 2009; Gee, 2004; Gottschall, 2011; Hartley, 1999). James Gee (2004), Allan Collins and Richard Halverson (2009) go as far as claiming that informal learning has become more relevant than schooling. Collins and Halverson argue that education has shifted from an era of school-based instruction to an era in which people learn outside school through different platforms, including the media. According to Gee, informal learning occurs within affinity spaces, which he defines as virtual spaces where people relate to each other through shared interests. For him, affinity spaces are a better learning environment than traditional classrooms because they allow a greater degree of participation and interaction with others and with the content. Gee concludes that unlike traditional classrooms, affinity spaces promote deep learning and multiple forms of knowledge.

Because children learn outside school and adults learn beyond school, the media can play a significant role in education. As David Buckingham (2003) writes, “the media are (...) a kind of informal schooling – and one which most young people perceive as much more pleasurable and engaging than the formal schooling to which they are compulsorily subjected” (p. 190). According to John Hartley (1999), this applies to adults as well. Distinguishing “teaching” from “schooling”, Hartley argues that teaching “doesn’t have to be ‘schoolmasterly’ (authoritarian) or ‘pre-digested’ (infantilized) [...] teaching is (or can be) truly a matter of ‘life-long’ or ‘continuing’ education, and the work done in formal institutions like universities can be part of a larger conversation beyond” (p. 35) because “the audience is taking a permanent ‘teach yourself’ course in life, using resources to hand, such as commercial television” (p. 152). Hartley sees television as the contemporary equivalent of Greek theatre because it functions as a point of convergence between drama, teaching and citizenship: “like ancient plays who taught classical citizenship, television teaches public virtues by means of dramatic entertainment, using song, story, sight and talk rather than ‘book-learning’” (p. 43). My thesis supports and extends Hartley and Buckingham’s argument about television as an informal teacher (of facts, skills, ethics and citizenship) by exploring its pedagogy.

## **What is televisual pedagogy?**

To understand how television teaches, I identify some of the pedagogical models, techniques and tools that it uses to educate viewers and I analyse how these are used in the context of televisual communication. To do so, my thesis addresses the following questions: in what way and by what means do television professionals teach? Do programme makers use transmissive and constructivist pedagogical models? What production techniques do they use as pedagogical tools? What pedagogical models, techniques and tools can be identified in television programmes?

These questions about how television teaches open up further questions about how viewers learn. If television is not the direct cause but the context of learning, do viewers' personal circumstances affect the learning process - and if so, how? How do viewers' "modalities of response" (Briggs, 2010, p. 12), viewing contexts and social interactions affect the learning process? Is there a fit between how and what programme makers think they teach and how and what viewers learn?

Because "through the prism of pedagogy" (Lusted, 1986, p. 3) these "how" questions are inseparable from the "what" questions, my thesis also examines television's educational goals and its educational content (what it teaches) by asking: what do television professionals aim to teach? Does television develop viewers' knowledge, skills, and ethics? Does it foster public virtues and citizenship, as Hartley (1999) claims? What is the relation between what television teaches and how it teaches?

I address these questions from a communication perspective. I define television as a communication medium that allows the circulation of messages between senders (television professionals) and recipients (viewers) and pedagogy as a communication process that allows the circulation of messages between senders (teachers) and recipients (learners). Teaching can be an interpersonal communication process between two individuals, but it can also be mediated by technology (Buckingham, 2000; Collins & Halverson, 2009; Gee, 2004; Hartley, 1999). In both cases, it is a form of communication. As Sonia Livingstone explains in her book *Making Sense of Television: The Psychology of Audience Interpretation* (1998), face-to-face interactions and mediated interactions are similar, because they are communicative and interpretive moments that require decoding: "both face-to-face and mediated interactions can be



seen as providing people with texts to be interpreted, and in both situations, people are the readers” (p. 5). Because it is a communicative and interpretive moment, teaching is inextricably intertwined with learning. The act of teaching does not exist without learners, and pedagogy does not exist without recipients. Therefore, the concept of pedagogy draws attention to the teaching-learning moment. The problem that my thesis addresses concerns the teaching-learning moment and what happens in this communication moment when television is the teacher.

### **Cultural studies and pedagogy: “teaching, not power” (Hartley, 1999)**

To conduct my research I draw on educational concepts while primarily adopting a cultural studies perspective. Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary academic field that critically investigates culture as everyday lived or textual practices to explore issues of power, pleasure and pedagogy. Initially developed by British scholars like Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall in the 1960s and 1970s at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, cultural studies was subsequently adopted and transformed by academics from various backgrounds. According to Hartley (1999) and Livingstone (1998), most cultural studies researchers tend to follow one of two distinct paths: public knowledge or popular culture. Public knowledge culturalists are inclined to analyse news and current affairs media and to focus on issues of power, hegemony, public sphere, information and citizenship, typically from a social sciences perspective. Popular culture culturalists, on the other hand, often prefer to study entertainment formats like dramas and soap operas and to focus on issues of pleasure, agency and taste, usually borrowing their methodological framework from the humanities. For Hartley, “there are two tribes of commentators ranging the terrain of cultural studies, those who analyse power and those who experience pleasure” (p. 48).

But cultural studies is not limited to issues of power or pleasure: it can also address questions of education and pedagogy. Hartley (1999) for instance, claims that “from the beginning, cultural studies was about teaching” (p. 175). His work goes beyond the hegemony/agency debate to analyse television in terms of teaching rather than power: “is television better thought of via ‘Hoggartian’ notions of teaching, population-gathering and cross-demographic communication than via ‘Birminghamite’

notions of power, hegemony and ideology?” (p. 54) In the first appendix of his book *Uses of Television*, he defines cultural studies as follows:

Originally the study of relations of inequality in class societies within the general areas of sense-making and everyday life; the application of theories of power to conditions of ordinariness. Latterly it has evolved somewhat beyond its adversarialist beginnings, returning to a more ‘Hoggartian’ project that addresses the democratization of meaning without necessary recourse to notions of power and struggle. It may be characterized now as an anthropology of the everyday, a semiotic history of ordinariness. (p. 208)

Agreeing with Hartley’s view, Karl Maton and Ruth Wright (2002) write that “cultural studies has tended to focus more on who it hopes to empower or ‘give voice to’ than pedagogic questions of *what* and *how*” (pp. 382-383). Maton and Wright advocate that culturalists should “re-turn the focus of cultural studies to its own educational formations and contexts” (p. 379). Similarly, in his article “Cultural Studies and Academic Stardom”, Joe Moran (1998) observes that “pedagogy has long been a focal concern of cultural studies, one which can be traced back to its British origins in adult and workers’ education” (p. 76). Indeed, Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), one of the seminal works in the development of cultural studies, focuses on adult literacy and education in relation to popular culture. As Hartley points out, Hoggart was interested in understanding the pedagogical role that popular culture plays in contemporary society. Following his footsteps, Hall and Paddy Whannel later published *The Popular Arts* (1964), in which they also examine the relationship between popular culture and education and try to “bridge the gap” (p. 390) between academic debates and schoolteachers’ classroom practices. Rejecting the traditionalist Leavisite view, which considers that popular culture corrupts society (Leavis & Thompson, 1933), they argue that some popular texts are “worthwhile” and have a pedagogical value:

It is here, of course, that the media play a decisive role - an educational role - speaking to the young about what most involves them, catering to their aspirations, offering guides to behaviour and models to be imitated, teaching ways of feeling and thinking. (p. 390)

Here, popular media are clearly defined as *pedo-agogos*, leading young people and providing guidance about the social problems or emotional difficulties they encounter. The early works of Hoggart, Hall and Whannel (and more recently, the work of Hartley) show that cultural studies can reconcile what is often perceived as two separate paths: the study of media in relation to public knowledge, and the study of media in relation to popular culture. Following this pedagogy-oriented tradition of cultural studies, my research integrates questions of knowledge, popular culture and pleasure.

My interdisciplinary background influences the theoretical framework of my thesis: like many scholars whose research straddles the fields of media studies and cultural studies, I use the active audience theory to understand how meanings circulate in everyday life (Ang, 1985; Fiske & Hartley, 1978; Hodge & Tripp, 1986; Morley, 1980; Tulloch, 2000; Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Turner, 2010). The active audience theory, which was initially developed at the CCCS, is based on Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model of communication, in which media messages are encoded with the professional discourse during the production process and decoded in different ways by different interpretive communities during the reception process. According to the active audience theory, media messages are plural and televisual texts are open to interpretation (Fiske, 1987; Harindranath, 2009; Livingstone, 1998). This theory is useful to understand the complex ways in which television teaches and viewers learn because it underlines the polysemy of televisual texts and the interpretive agency of audiences. As Hall argues in *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (1973), it is necessary to take into account viewers' interpretive agency and activity during the decoding process to understand any possible effects or uses of television, including its educational outcomes:

Before this message can have an 'effect' (however defined), satisfy a 'need' or be put to a 'use', it must first be perceived as a meaningful discourse and meaningfully decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings which 'have an effect', influence, entertain, instruct or persuade. (p. 3)

It is therefore crucial to recognise that meanings are constantly appropriated and renegotiated by different social audiences - including television professionals (Tulloch, 2000). From this theoretical standpoint, decoding televisual messages must be

understood as a situated and differential process: “when interpreting a programme, viewers use not only the information in the programme, but also their past experience with the programme, its genre and their own personal and social experiences with the phenomena portrayed” (Livingstone, 1998, p. 21).

It is also crucial to acknowledge that viewers’ interpretive activities are influenced and delimited by certain factors. Decoding televisual messages is an “active meaning construction from within the textual and socio-cultural constraints” (Harindranath, 2009, p. 40). In Hall’s encoding/decoding model, viewers’ responses to the media are influenced by their social circumstances. Viewers’ interpretive activities are partly determined by what Pierre Bourdieu (1984) calls “habitus”, that is, the lifestyle, values, dispositions and tastes that they unconsciously acquire through socialisation. The habitus is created as a social process: people who belong to the same social class usually share common values, dispositions and tastes because they are socialised in a similar manner. Although it does not shape actions in a deterministic manner, the habitus guides people’s thinking and behaviour and influences the way in which audiences engage with television content. The tastes, viewing behaviours and discourses about television of different social audiences (including television professionals) are affected by their habitus and vary according to their socialisation. By using the active audience theory, I recognise that the communication process is dynamic and interactive because viewers actively engage with televisual content and I acknowledge that this interaction with the content is influenced by their environments and personal circumstances.

### **Tracing the circuit of communication**

The active audience theory is useful for my research because it highlights the connection between production and reception, and in the context of my study, between teaching and learning. As John Tulloch notes in the introduction of *Watching Television Audiences: Cultural Theories and Methods* (2000), Hall’s encoding/decoding model emphasises

the ‘determinate moments’ of both television production and reception [...] thus

Hall and others at the CCCS opened out the agenda for an empirical audience research programme which focuses on the different social and discursive positioning of various subcultures as interpretive communities. (p. 6)

Tulloch's work, for example, connects the discursive positions of producers to the interpretive decodings of audiences by combining production ethnography and audience research (Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986).

By adopting an anthropological and sociological perspective to analyse media production and reception, culturalists aim to go beyond the text to understand how texts are produced, circulated and used (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 2013). However, by doing so, culturalists risk overlooking the formal and textual aspects of the media (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, & Newbold, 1998; Rose, 2001; Thompson & Mittell, 2013). As Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell (2013) write:

Television studies emerged as an academic field in the 1980s and 1990s under the rubric of Anglo-American cultural studies, an approach that emphasizes contexts over texts, and thus much of television scholarship is focused on understanding the industrial, regulatory, and reception contexts of the medium more than critical analyses of specific programs. (p. 3)

Similarly, Anders Hansen, Simon Cottle, Ralph Negrine and Chris Newbold (1998) claim that the main limitation of cultural studies and active audience research is to ignore issues of audiovisual textuality. Gillian Rose (2001) observes that audience studies generally pay little attention to the images because most audience researchers consider that the audiences' reactions are the most important element of an image's meaning: "they thus tend, like those studies which privilege the social modality of the site of production of imagery, to use methods that don't address visual imagery directly" (p. 26).

Visual cultural studies, on the other hand, invites researchers to analyse the social conditions in which images are produced, distributed and consumed and their textual dimension (Lister & Wells, 2001; Pink, 2001). From this perspective, moving images are defined both as social processes and material artefacts. As Martin Lister and Liz Wells (2001) explain, the goal of visual culturalists is to analyse images "without separating them from social processes" (p. 64). Because images are produced,

distributed and consumed within social contexts, researchers must approach them “as part of what has been described as the ‘circuit of culture’” (Lister & Wells, 2001, p. 64). The circuit of culture (or circuit of communication) is made of several moments, or sites, that each contributes to meanings (du Gay et al., 1997; Hall, 1973; Lister & Wells, 2001; Rose, 2001). According to Rose (2001), “there are three sites at which the meanings of an image are made: the site of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the site(s) where it is seen by various audiences” (p. 16). Within this circuit of communication, meanings are constantly created, contested and renegotiated. In order to understand these complex meaning-making processes most visual culturalists analyse images “within the cycle of production, circulation and consumption through which their meanings are accumulated and transformed” (Lister & Wells, 2001, p. 64). As Cary Balzagette and Buckingham (2013) explain, it can be valuable for media scholars and culturalists to adopt a formal approach and to use textual analysis as a methodological tool while “also situat[ing] textual analysis within a broader account of the social production of meaning” (p. 101). Using visual cultural studies as a conceptual framework, I connect the different moments of the circuit of communication and analyse televisual pedagogy as communicative and conjunctural process that exists at the intersection between production, text and reception. To do so, I link producers’ discourses, audiovisual textuality and audiences’ interpretive activities. In Hartley’s (1999) words, this conceptual framework “recognizes the complexity, diversity, and even incoherence of the object of study while remaining itself a very simple device” (p. 18).

When investigating the relationship between television and education, it is necessary to look at television producers as teachers. As Hartley (1999) writes:

If TV is teaching, we need to look at the producers of TV as part of the GEM [Government Education Media] ‘knowledge class’ - they too are teachers, and they are thus ‘like us’ (academics and critics) - converging with intellectuals and bringing popular culture and intellectual culture together. (p. 46)

This does not mean that all television professionals identify as educators; rather, what Hartley suggests is that one the roles (or “uses”) of television in society is to function as an informal teacher, even though teaching and learning are not necessarily the professed



intention of producers and audiences:

I am nevertheless arguing that teaching is what TV does; and that this is the *use* of television. This is a social, historical view of television and of usage, seeking to interpret, after the event, what has in fact been done with television in modern/postmodern societies, rather than pretending to describe the intentions of its producers or consumers, much less the ostensible purpose of TV companies and channels. (p. 41)

Although professionals may not explicitly identify as teachers, examining their discourses about teaching is valuable to understand the pedagogy of television. Rather than taking a political economy approach and examining the political and economic structures of the media, I study production through the prism of visual cultural studies and the active audience theory, focusing on producers' discourses, intentions, strategies and constraints (Lister & Wells, 2001; Rose, 2001).

Further, media professionals can be defined as social audiences because they actively interpret the media texts that they produce or distribute (Tulloch, 2000; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). Some active audience researchers investigate professionals' discourses about television in order to understand how messages are constructed and encoded in media texts. Tulloch uses this approach to explain the success of the Australian medical soap opera *A Country Practice* (Tulloch & Moran, 1986) and to understand how different televisual texts educate about AIDS (Tulloch & Lupton, 1997). In their AIDS study, Tulloch and Deborah Lupton (1997) focus specifically on television's discourses of teaching. They show that the production of a television programme usually comprises two stages: first, a stage of "transformation", when an educational message is transcribed into dramatic written pre-text, and second, a stage of "transcodification", when the dramatic pre-text is transformed into audiovisual features. They explain that the educational content of each episode is encoded by writers into the script, or storylines, during the transformation process, and through other production techniques such as lighting, music, sound effects or editing, during the transcodification process. By studying how some professionals talk about the programmes they make, they reveal how educational messages are encoded within televisual texts and highlight different pedagogical approaches and techniques.

Moreover, Tulloch's research shows that television professionals' discourses are multiple and complex because every televisual text is "produced as an industrial process, with many different (sometimes contradictory) idiolects at work. Different social audiences may then invest in a different [...] message according to different subject identifications" (2000, p. 79). Drawing on his approach, I define television professionals as social audiences and investigate their discursive positioning in relation to televisual education.

My thesis also focuses on the site of the image to explain how television professionals' discourses translate into textual features. In other words, my study takes into account television's formal aspects to understand its pedagogy. By using the method of textual analysis, I show how textual features of mise-en-scene, editing and sound invite viewers to learn. Drawing on the active audience theory, I posit that televisual texts can invite learning by using certain pedagogical techniques and tools, although they do not have the power to directly shape thoughts or determine behaviours (Hartley, 1999).

At the end of the circuit of communication, audiences renegotiate and reinterpret the meanings encoded in televisual texts. According to visual cultural studies and to the active audience theory, these interpretive activities are in part determined by social circumstances and viewing contexts (Harindranath, 2009; Lister & Wells, 2001; Livingstone, 1998; Morley, 1980; Morley & Silverstone, 1991; Rose, 2001). To integrate the context of viewing in their analysis researchers must ask where the image is, and how it is encountered. For example: is it in a public or private sphere? Is it at home or elsewhere? Is it in the context of leisure, work or education? Are the viewers' distracted or focused? Why are the viewers watching it? How are they watching it? Is it on a television set, a computer, a mobile device? And who are they watching it with? (Lister & Wells, 2001). Furthermore, viewers' modalities of responses play a significant role in the meaning-making and learning processes. To take into account modalities of response, researchers must ask how viewers decode the image: how does the viewer engage with the programme? What are they feeling while watching it? How do they position themselves in relation to the text? Are they emotionally engaged or intellectually distant? (Ang, 1985; Cohen, 2006; Liebes & Katz, 1986, 1990).

Considering these three sites - production processes, texts, and audiences' interpretive activities – allows me to show how meanings are created and negotiated within television's circuit of communication and to understand what happens in the teaching-learning moment.

## **Overview of the thesis**

To understand televisual pedagogy, I study two Australian programmes: the documentary series *Who Do You Think You Are?* (Tait, 2008-), which is transmitted on the public service channel Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), and the soap opera *Home and Away* (Bateman, 1988-), which is broadcast on the commercial channel Seven Network. By selecting these two programmes as case studies, my intention is to compare a programme that is explicitly produced to educate (*Who Do You Think You Are?*) and a programme that is produced primarily to entertain (*Home and Away*). I analyse both programmes' production processes, textual features and reception. Because television is a medium of life-long, or continuing education (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Hartley, 1999), I selected two programmes that target adult viewers (although *Home and Away* is also designed to appeal to children and young people). To understand the production perspective, I investigate the discourse of teaching as articulated by some professionals working on these programmes: how they talk about television's mission and educational role, whether they aim to teach and if so, what they try to teach and what pedagogical models, techniques and tools they use. In addition, I conduct textual analyses of these programmes to identify their educational content, pedagogical models, techniques and tools. To understand the reception perspective, I analyse what some adult viewers learn from them, how they learn from them and how their modalities of response influence their learning.

This thesis is divided in three parts. The first part (chapters one and two) outlines my research questions and the strategies I use to answer these questions. In chapter one, I situate my thesis in current research and discuss the findings of previous studies that examine the relationship between television and education. Through this literature review, I identify some ongoing debates and I reveal certain contradictions, ambiguities and gaps in knowledge. Chapter two focuses on my research strategies, that

is, the methodology and methods I used to collect and to interpret my data. It explains how my data was generated in terms of participants and procedures, and it demonstrates why conducting two case studies is valuable to answer my research questions. The second part (chapters three and four) presents the findings from my case studies. In chapter three I explore the pedagogy of *Who Do You Think You Are?* In chapter four I investigate the pedagogy of *Home and Away*. In the third part (chapters five and six) I critically discuss those findings. In chapter five, I evaluate my results and I outline my contribution to knowledge and to current debates, as well as the limitations of my study. Chapter six is my conclusion: it highlights the significance of this study as well as possible directions for future research.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I discuss previous studies that explore the relationship between television and education, thus situating my thesis in existing research. Throughout this literature review my intention is to identify the debates and gaps in knowledge that my thesis addresses.

In the first section, I review different areas of scholarship that demonstrate that television can teach and that provide some insight about what it teaches. Although many studies have shown that television can advance knowledge, skills and ethics, some scholars perceive television as a “bad” teacher or as a failed educator. I open up this debate in the first section of this chapter.

Moving beyond the “what” questions, the second and third sections focus more specifically on pedagogy as a process and on the “how” questions. In the second section, I review the empirical studies that investigate televisual education from what I call the “production perspective”, which is the perspective of television professionals. These production-oriented studies are valuable for my project because they show how some producers, writers, directors and other professionals use production techniques to educate their audiences. Those studies also reveal ambiguities in television professionals’ discourses about teaching.

In the final section, I focus on issues of reception (or readership). I discuss different theoretical frameworks that have been used by media scholars to analyse televisual learning: the media effects model, uses and gratifications and the active audience theory. I also review some empirical studies that are useful to understand how viewers learn from television. These reception-oriented studies, which have been conducted by researchers from the field of media studies, cultural studies, childhood studies, education and media literacy, are relevant to my project as they highlight different modalities of response that influence viewers’ learning. However, my review points to certain contradictions within this area of research.

## **What television teaches**

As mentioned in my Introduction, pedagogy refers to how teachers teach and how learners learn, but it also necessarily involves what is taught (Lusted, 1986). In this section I review three areas of the literature that provide some answers about what television teaches. The first area focuses on children and young people and what they learn from television. Because education and pedagogy are commonly associated with childhood, youth and schooling, the majority of studies that investigate the relationship between television and education concern child viewers or young viewers. Although my research does not focus on children and young people, these studies are valuable because they show that both educational and entertainment television can educate viewers by furthering their knowledge, skills and ethics. The second area focuses more specifically on television as a teacher of ethics; it concerns adult viewers and the ethical knowledge they gain from television. Finally, after reviewing the studies that focus on the transmission of knowledge, skills and ethics, I address the issue of television as a teacher of cultural citizenship.

Recurring debates emerge across these three areas of scholarship, which overlap in several ways. One of the main points of contention that pervades the literature and exists across these three areas of scholarship is whether television is a “good” or a “bad” teacher. The idea that television can educate viewers not only by developing their knowledge and skills but also by enhancing their ethical sense and by turning them into good citizens is widely challenged. Some scholars consider television as a corruptive social force promoting violence, immorality, consumerism and apoliticism, or as a poor educator that fails to fulfil its educational potential as informal teacher of ethics and citizenship (Giroux, 1983, 1994; Miller, 2007; Silverstone, 2007). As Hartley (1999) puts it, there are two “schools of thought” that co-exist within television studies: the “fear” school, which sees television as a negative influence leading to cultural decline, and the “desire” school, which sees television as having great educational and “democratic potential” (p. 133). This tension between fear and desire is palpable in the studies that I discuss below.

### **Children and television**

A great number of studies that examine the relationship between television and education focus on children or young people (Buckingham, 2003; Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Fisch, 2005; Hodge & Tripp, 1986; Lesser, 1975; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014; Morrow, 2006; Noble & Noble, 1979; Williams, 1981). Although my research focuses on adults – based on the notion of television as a medium of life-long, or continuing education (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Hartley, 1999) - studies conducted with children and young people provide valuable insights about what television can teach. In regards to children and young people, the fear school of thought considers that television degrades young minds and promotes stupidity, passivity and violence (Fisch, 2005; Williams, 1981). This tradition of denunciation is rooted in a Leavisite view of popular culture as a corrupt teacher (Leavis & Thompson, 1933). In this view, educators must prepare children and young people to discriminate against and resist popular media texts; “good” education, that is, traditional formal teaching, must prepare future citizens against the “bad” teaching of popular culture. This rhetoric about the harmful effects of popular culture on young minds has been influential and has permeated common-sense perceptions and popular discourses, including in media texts and within the media industry (Hartley, 1999).

As Catharine Lumby and Duncan Fine (2006) observe, despite rampant perceptions and frequent moral panics about the destructive effects of the media and popular culture on children and young people, many studies have shown that television can play a positive role in their lives. Television can train children and prepare them for the future by promoting their knowledge, developing their skills and by educating them about ethics (Fisch, 2005; Lesser, 1975; Lumby & Fine, 2006; Morrow, 2006). Some educational programmes explicitly aim to teach academic knowledge and skills. The American children programme *Sesame Street* (Cooney & Morrissey, 1969-), for example, was initially conceived to prepare children for school. Moreover, as the series’ creator, Gerald Lesser, explains in his book *Children and Television: Lessons from Sesame Street* (1975) the programme not only aims to teach formal academic knowledge and skills like reading and counting but also intentionally displays positive social attitudes such as kindness and tolerance to teach children social skills and to provide guidance about right and wrong. In his article “Children's Learning from

Television”, Shalom M. Fisch (2005) argues that television is neither good nor bad, but that its effects on children depend on the content. In his view, children can learn negative lessons from “negative programmes” and positive lessons from “positive programmes” (p. 10).

However, Fisch’s (2005) conception of positive television is narrow because it refers to programmes like *Sesame Street*, which are explicitly designed to educate. Other researchers have challenged this idea by showing that entertainment programmes can also guide children and prepare them for the future by teaching informal knowledge, social skills and ethics (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Noble & Freiberg, 1985; Noble & Noble, 1979). Like school, television has a hidden curriculum, which is “more essentially a form of enculturation than scholastic learning” (Hodge & Tripp, 1986, p. 173), and which is mainly taught through entertainment programmes. For Hartley (1999), “TV is not an extension of school, though it may be a competitor for hearts, minds and methods; historically it is devoted to other things than those for which schooling was invented and is best suited” (p. 42). The lessons that children and young people learn through entertainment media often differ from the academic knowledge and skills they gain from school or educational programmes (Noble & Freiberg, 1985; Noble & Noble, 1979). These televisual lessons usually concern informal knowledge and social skills that relate to experience and can be translated into practical use. Grant Noble and Elizabeth Noble (1979), for example, show that Australian adolescents learn social skills from watching the American sitcom *Happy Days* (Marshall, 1974-1984). Using questionnaires and interviews, they reveal that *Happy Days* teaches young Australians how to relate to their parents, their peers and to the opposite sex. Noble and Noble’s argument is that entertainment television can promote what they call “socialisation” by “making people fit to live in society by being sensitive to the coexistence and demands of others” (p. 18). Interestingly, what Noble and Noble describe as informal knowledge and social skills is linked to ethics since it involves respect for others (Berlin, 1992).

More recent research shows that entertainment television can teach young people how to perform social roles and how to behave, and that it can prompt reflection and discussions about social and ethical issues (Barker, 1998; Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Hill, 2005). In her study of reality television, Annette Hill (2005) claims



that young British viewers learn social skills and behaviours from programmes like the reality game *Big Brother* (de Mol, 2000-2010):

For these young viewers at this stage in their lives, watching the way people behave in social situations is potentially informative because they are still forming their own understanding of socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Although older adults mainly reject the idea of learning from people watching, younger adults have a vested interest in gathering as much knowledge as they can about 'the way people behave' because they are still learning how to conduct themselves in various social situations, in particular situations involving peers. Reality gameshows such as *Big Brother* provide a useful opportunity for young adults to learn about something that matters to them. (p. 104)

Young people also use media entertainment to fill in gaps in formal education, particularly for questions regarding relationships, sexuality and sexual health. As several studies show, children and young people value the media, especially entertainment programmes, which they consider as a key source of knowledge about relationships and sexuality (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Lumby & Albury, 2008; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014; McKee, 2012; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997).

To summarise, despite popular perceptions and moral panics about the harmful effects of television on children and young people, the literature shows that both educational and entertainment television can educate them by developing their academic knowledge and skills as well as their informal knowledge, social skills and ethics. But although these studies provide useful insights into what television can teach, they only give a partial overview of its educational potential since they leave out the different forms of knowledge, skills and ethics that adult viewers gain from television. In the remainder of this chapter, I focus on television as a pedagogue-andragogue that guides and educates not only children, but viewers of all ages.

### **Ethics and morality**

The literature indicates that television can further viewers' knowledge (knowing about), skills (knowing how to) and ethics (knowing what is right and wrong) not only among

children but also among adults (Briggs, 2010; Hawkins, 2001; Lesser, 1975; Lewis, 2008; Lewis, Martin, & Sun, 2012; Noble & Noble, 1979; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993; van Vuuren, Ward, & Coyle, 2013). Arvind Singhal, Everett Rogers and William Brown (1993) for example, claim that some television programmes have the capacity to teach ethics and to encourage good behaviour in adults, both through their content and through the experience of collective viewing. Singhal, Rogers and Brown's research focuses on entertainment-education, a strategy used by some television professionals to educate through entertainment formats or genres such as drama or soap opera. Traditionally, entertainment-education programmes are conceived and produced according to Albert Bandura's (1963) social learning theory, which states that people learn behaviours directly through observation and imitation. The explicit goal of such programmes is to promote ethical behaviour at the individual and at the community level (Klein, 2011; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993).

But television's "ethical turn" (Hawkins, 2001, p. 412) extends beyond entertainment-education programmes. As Gay Hawkins (2001) shows, ethical issues, that is, issues about what is good and bad, right and wrong, or as she writes, "what we should do, how we should be in the world" (p. 417), have permeated mainstream television. Hawkins' argument is supported by other scholars who have investigated the different forms of ethical knowledge that viewers gain from television (Briggs, 2010; Harindranath, 2012; Lewis, 2008, 2013; Lewis et al., 2012; Lewis & Potter, 2011; van Vuuren et al., 2013). Kitty van Vuuren, Susan Ward and Rebecca Coyle (2013), for instance, claim that the Australian soap operas *Neighbours* (Watson, 1985-) and *Home and Away* have the potential to promote environmental awareness and environment-friendly behaviour. Similarly, in her analysis of lifestyle television, Tania Lewis (2008, 2013) argues that lifestyle programmes have a pedagogical role because they educate "the public about everyday ethical concerns and models of citizenship" and teach "ethical consumption and responsible citizenship" (2008, p. 234). She explains that cooking programmes, for instance, present "idealized images of the good life, which are in turn marked by implicit notions of what constitutes good practices of consumption in relation to food" (p. 232). According to Lewis, many lifestyle programmes aim to improve the health and the behaviour of viewers by regulating their consumption (of food, of energy and so on). Although this "bettering [of] the self" (Lewis et al., 2012, p.

541) occurs at the individual level, it is fundamentally linked to social qualities and behaviours valued by the community. As Lewis points out, the educational intention of these programmes is to turn viewers (and participants) into ideal citizens: “while the programme focuses on the agency of consumers, individual change is framed strongly in terms of responsibility to community and duty to the nation” (Lewis, 2008, p. 236). It is therefore possible to see a connection between the pedagogical role of lifestyle television and the advent of governmentality (Lewis, 2013; Lewis et al., 2012). As Lewis, Fran Martin and Wanning Sun (2012) write, “lifestyle gurus fill the gap left by the neoliberal state as it passes on the responsibility for once public concerns like obesity to self-managing consumer-citizens” (Lewis et al., 2012, p. 541). They continue:

Entertainment-oriented formats can be seen to shore up neoliberal models of consumer-citizenship, in which community concerns such as obesity and the global oil crisis are treated as issues that can be dealt with at the level of individual consumer behaviour and self-regulation. (p. 545)

Similarly, in “The Ethics of Television” Hawkins (2001) argues that certain television genres such as lifestyle and infotainment teach self-management, self-formation and self-shaping. For her, this form of personal governance is linked to ethics: “lurking around all that advice about how to live, all those practical instructions on management of the home, pets, self, are assumptions that continually recode the viewer within a variety of wider moral knowledges” (p. 417). In other words, these scholars argue that lifestyle television does not only teach skills (how to cook, garden etc.) but also ethics. By teaching how to do, these programmes teach viewers how to be.

From this perspective, ethics is not simply the knowledge of right and wrong but must be understood as the socio-culturally situated values of a specific community or social class (Harindranath, 2012; Hawkins, 2001; Lewis, 2013; Lewis et al., 2012). By teaching ethics, television “works to promote particular lifestyle choices” (Lewis et al., 2012, p. 541) which are mainly “middle class forms of consumption, taste and style” (p. 544). Hawkins (2001) explains that in lifestyle programmes,

cooking is being linked with certain modes of living and self-cultivations:  
learning how to fillet a fish, or scramble an egg is not just a lifestyle matter, it is

about the production of a particular habitus: an arrangement of personal habits, attitudes and rituals that are informed by ethical values and principles. (pp. 417-418)

Similarly, Lewis (2013) argues that:

The gentler forms of life pedagogy offered up on reality shows such as *MasterChef*,<sup>2</sup> which focus on creative play and the art of everyday life, can also be seen to pedal certain kinds of middle-class taste. The middle-class experts on these shows can be characterized here as crucial ‘cultural intermediaries’, a term drawn from Pierre Bourdieu’s famous account in *Distinction* (1984) of the relations between social distinction, taste, and class in France in the 1960s. In an analysis that remains surprisingly relevant to the contemporary moment, Bourdieu described the emergence of a professional class of symbolic workers or ‘cultural intermediaries’ who acted as mediators between bourgeois culture and a growing petit-bourgeoisie. (p. 408)

To explore this in more depth, it is useful to distinguish ethics from morality. Teaching socio-culturally situated moral values is not so much teaching ethics as teaching morality. As Hawkins explains, morality aims to discipline differences by establishing the superiority of one’s own values whereas ethics is as a form of responsiveness to others and engagement with difference. The ethical knowledge of right and wrong essentially concerns how human beings engage with one another and treat “the other person” (Silverstone, 2007, p. 6). In Isaiah Berlin’s (1992) words, ethics concerns “the relations of human beings to each other, the conceptions, interests and ideals from which human ways of treating one another spring” (p. 1). For Hawkins, television has the potential to teach both morality (moralizing normativity) and ethics (engagement with difference). She claims that genres like lifestyle and infotainment tend to teach morality by promoting certain socio-cultural moral values whereas other genres, such as documentaries, teach ethics as engagement with difference. Hawkins also explains that the programmes that teach ethics usually do so by making viewers understand the experiences of others: “we can also see it in those televisual encounters when we find ourselves unexpectedly moved or unsettled, confronted by difference and aware of how

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<sup>2</sup> *MasterChef* (Roddam, 1990-) is a competitive cooking reality programme.

our response to it can productively disturb our sense of moral and self-certainty” (p. 416). Unlike televisual morality, televisual ethics is not about curbing or disciplining difference but it is about engaging with it in a way that has the potential to open up ethical reflection and to foster personal change and growth. Hawkins’ claim echoes Hartley’s (1999) view, which is that television has the capacity to teach public virtues, neighbourliness and fellow-feeling among citizens of all ages and to prepare “populations for difference, mobility and change; easing the way for communities based on ethnic and sexual difference to be treated with respect” (p. 181).

This optimistic stance is challenged by scholars like Roger Silverstone (2007). In *Media and Morality*, Silverstone acknowledges that the media participate in the formation of ethics because they construct viewers’ connection (and disconnection) to the “other”. Consequently, the way in which the media represent otherness and engage with difference has a crucial impact on the ethical public space. But unlike Hawkins (2001) and Hartley (1999), Silverstone argues that the media fail to teach ethics:

The problem is that while globalized media have lifted the veil [on difference] they have provided few or no resources to understand and respond to that difference, nor do they necessarily represent it adequately. And the consequences of that representation have tended to produce either worldly indifference or hostility, both strategies for denial. If the media are - and they are in a sense by definition - the bridge between private and public worlds, as well as between the social and the personal, then we ought not to be satisfied with their limitations, their narrowness and intransigence. (p. 28)

According to Silverstone, the media represent difference and otherness but fail to do so from a “proper distance”. In his view, current media representations of otherness are either too close or too far: so close that they deny differences (leading to “worldly indifference”) or so distant that they exaggerate, caricature or demonise differences (which leads to “hostility”). This lack of healthy distance, real dialogue and productive engagement with otherness thwarts the possibility of mediated connection or identification between strangers:

It is the connection between individuals who believe only in their sameness that emerge instead. A connection of assimilation, incorporation, a denial of

difference [...] Underlying these generic failures, failures which mark above all global press and broadcasting, is the progressive withdrawal of a genuine commitment to communication, a withdrawal into the bowels of private worlds masquerade as the public. (p. 41)

My study enters this debate by exploring what television teaches and more specifically where ethics and morality fit within televisual pedagogy. Does television merely promote normalising socio-cultural moral values or does it teach ethics in a broader and more positive sense, as engagement with difference? Can television promote ethics by engaging with otherness, making people aware and tolerant of differences and by making them “think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself” (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 391)?

### **Cultural citizenship**

The visibility and the adequate representation of the other in the media is not only an ethical issue; it also concerns pluralism, which is a fundamental aspect of democracy. In order to function properly, democracy requires a plurality of voices to be heard (Silverstone, 2007). Television’s engagement with otherness affects its ability to foster cultural democracy and citizenship. Indeed, citizenship is not only political, economic or social; it is also cultural and mediated (Hartley, 1999; Miller, 2007):

Audiences are understood as ‘citizens of media’ in the sense that it is through the symbolic, virtualized and mediated context of watching television, listening to radio and reading print media that publics participate in the democratic process on a day to day basis. It may be right to go as far as to argue that citizenship, traditionally understood, is impossible without media. (Hartley, 1999, pp. 206-207)

On the relation between television and cultural citizenship too the literature is divided between fear and desire. The fear school of thought - which, as Hartley (1999) points out, overshadows the desire school – argues that television fails to promote cultural citizenship. According to Silverstone (2007), for instance, the media’s lack of pluralism and healthy engagement with difference impairs mediated democracy and cultural

citizenship. Contemporary media are characterised by inequities and exclusions and need to create a “more effective global civil space” (p. 33). Furthermore, the fear school of thought criticises television for addressing viewers as consumers rather than citizens. Hoggart (who, according to Hartley, belongs to the desire school of thought) defines television as “an important primary educator” (1960, p. 41) but also questions the quality and the value of televisual teaching, particularly on commercial channels: “in the present situation the single most powerful attempt to alter attitudes - to educate manners - in Britain is being made through the advertisements on ITV”<sup>3</sup> (p. 43). If advertisers are the teachers, he asks, what is being taught? And what is the educational value of what is being taught? Because of its political economy, television (commercial channels in particular) is accused of promoting childishness and consumerism instead of educating viewers into citizenship (Hoggart, 1960; Williams, 1962).

In his more recent analysis of American television, Toby Miller (2007) makes a similar argument. Based on three examples (news about war and terrorism, food programming and weather television), he demonstrates how American television addresses audiences primarily as consumers and fails to educate about important political issues. For instance, by focusing on foodie trends and lifestyle matters, food television offers a commodified discourse that emphasises consumption instead of informing and educating the public about important agricultural and health issues. Food television, he argues, could and should take a more educational approach by tackling serious problems such as multinational takeovers of family farms, animal rights or eating disorders: “a responsible broadcasting system would require food programming to engage these issues” (p. 139). Similarly, Miller shows how weather television in the United States persistently neglects political issues and silences or ridicules environmentalism instead of informing and educating viewers about climate change and the impact of global warming. He concludes that “something is rotten at the heart of cultural citizenship” (p. 27). According to him, television’s failure to promote cultural citizenship is not due to consumer choices, or consumer sovereignty, but to media’s political economy. For him, American television fails to educate not because audiences only seek escapism but because of deregulation and conglomerate takeovers.

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<sup>3</sup> ITV is a British commercial television network. Launched in 1955 to provide competition to the BBC, it is the oldest commercial TV network in the United Kingdom.

Taking these ideas further, the critical pedagogy scholar Henry Giroux (1983, 1994) claims that television (and popular culture in general) is an oppressive pedagogical site used by capitalist corporations to make profit and reinforce dominant ideologies and regimes of representation, thus reproducing social inequalities. For Giroux, the mission of education is to liberate the public from this oppressive popular pedagogy by applying critical knowledge to cultural texts. His educational goal is to reduce and to resist what he sees as domination and enslavement by promoting self-reflexive and critical knowledge about popular culture.

According to Hartley (1999), this tradition of denunciation has been prevalent in the disciplines of media studies and cultural studies: “this is the textual tradition of TV studies; a passionate dislike for post political fun” (p. 122). Indeed, the main criticism made against television (and popular media) by the fear school of thought is that it promotes consumerism (instead of social change) through entertainment (instead of education). Hartley sees a continuity between Leavis’ (1933) protectionism and more recent cultural studies and media studies research that denounces television as a “bad” teacher:

The ‘textual tradition in TV studies’ turns out to be part of the conspiracy; training audiences to discount their own encounters with television, and to speak *about* it as is they are cultural or social critics still locked into the fears and passions of the 1930s. (p. 125)

Situating his own work in the desire school of thought, Hartley directly challenges this tradition of denunciation and argues that one of the uses of television is to contribute to the formation of cultural citizenship. From his perspective, television is not a corrupt teacher as Giroux (1983, 1994) claims, or a failed educator as Hoggart (1960), Silverstone (2007) and Miller (2007) suggest. Television, Hartley writes, is “not just a teacher but a good one; not just a teacher of ideology, false consciousness and bad habits but a ‘teacher in the best sense’” (p. 32). In his view, television has the potential to increase viewers’ knowledge (by teaching facts), ethics (by teaching moral and ethical principles) and, more importantly, it participates in the development of cultural citizenship. For him, contemporary media is the site where democracy, education and entertainment converge, and television has the ability to teach “public virtues by means



of dramatic entertainment. It's the place of ancient, classical citizenship" (p. 44). More specifically, Hartley claims that through its engagement with identity and difference, television promotes respect and "cultural neighbourliness" (p. 172). Television, he argues, is a pluralistic medium that adequately represents different cultural identities, including gender, ethnic, sexual, regional and other community-based identities, thus promoting "social cohesion based not on sameness but on difference, identity not shared with the whole population but nevertheless shown to them, television teaching populations who the 'others' are" (p. 181). Contrary to Silverstone's (2007) argument, Hartley believes that television engages with difference and otherness and gives visibility to a diverse range of identities.

Although Hartley mentions in *Uses of Television* (1999) that television teaches through "cross demographic communication, visual culture, talk and narrative" (p. 46), his work does not delve into the "how" questions. Because it focuses mainly on questions of (educational) content, this area of scholarship tends to overlook the pedagogical processes by which television teaches and viewers learn. In the following sections, I discuss theories and empirical studies that shed some light on these processes, first from what I call the "production perspective" (which is the perspective of television professionals), then from the "reception perspective" (the perspective of television audiences).

### **How television teaches: the production perspective**

In this section, I review studies that explain how television professionals perceive their role in terms of education. Some of these studies also provide useful insights about how producers, writers and directors teach, that is, by what means they invite viewers to learn. This review thus allows me to identify some production techniques that programme makers use as pedagogical tools. The studies discussed below support the view that television can play an educational role, although they reveal ambiguities in television professionals' discourses about education. Most television professionals have an ambivalent stance about the educational dimension of their work and this ambivalence influences their pedagogy.

### Television professionals' split identities

Television professionals' self-perception and discourses about education are often ambiguous. Based on a series of interviews with British producers working for the public broadcasters BBC and Channel 4, Klein (2011) observes a form of "discomfort within media around its pedagogic function" (p. 910) and concludes that most producers reject the labels "education" or "educators", even those who believe that they have a responsibility to educate. According to Klein, most media professionals are averse to embracing their educational role because they do not want to be perceived as elite intellectuals telling people what to think:

Even if making a difference was considered a crucial motivation, the idea of targeting a specific audience for engagement was understood as 'a bit patronizing' suggesting that the adoption of an educator stance (where lessons are necessarily targeted) may be awkward for media professionals. (p. 917)

As noted in the Introduction, the first BBC executives considered themselves as "controllers" in charge of public education (Briggs, 1995; Hajkowski, 2010). The producers interviewed by Klein, however, refuse to define themselves as responsible intellectuals spreading knowledge and serving the public good. Quoting Nicholas Garnham (2000), Klein argues that most television producers have "split identities": one creative and one instructive. Similarly, the professionals interviewed and observed by Tulloch and Albert Moran (1986) in their study of the Australian medical soap opera *A Country Practice* consider that it is necessary "to strike the right balance between social relevance and entertainment" (Tulloch & Lupton, 1997, p. 100). Describing the programme as halfway between the "ABC-type downer" and the "TEN-type soapy",<sup>4</sup> they define it both as a "quality soap" that educates and as a commodity that entertains. As Tulloch (2000) points out, this split identity is visible in the programme's narrative structure: social issues are addressed through the episodic series format while the entertaining soapy elements contribute to the serialised narrative. Most production choices in *A Country Practice* are motivated both by a desire to educate and by

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<sup>4</sup> Referring to the Australian public service television channel Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the privately-owned Network Ten.

commercial imperatives such as attracting and entertaining viewers to obtain high ratings, selling advertising space or not offending conservative audiences and advertisers. For example, the writers decided to integrate a storyline about AIDS in the episode entitled “Sophie” to raise awareness about this public health issue and out of a sense of social responsibility, but also because they wanted to exploit the popularity of the character of Sophie who obtained high Q scores,<sup>5</sup> and the chemistry between the actress (Katrina Sedgwick) and the actor who played her father (Shane Porteous) (Tulloch & Moran, 1986). Tulloch and Lupton (1997), who subsequently developed this study, acknowledge that the producers have a sense of educational responsibility but conclude that in commercial television “the pedagogic function is secondary to the need to consider budget and timing implications, attract and keep audiences, and please advertisers” (p. 128).

In addition, there can be divergences between the professionals involved in the production of a programme and the network executives involved in its distribution (Tulloch, 2000; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). As Tulloch (2000) points out, each television programme is produced as an industrial, multi-layered process with divergent professional discourses at work. In his and Moran’s (1986) study of *A Country Practice*, the producers and writers talk about their pedagogical intentions, social responsibility and commitment to change attitudes whereas the programmers who work for the broadcaster Seven are not concerned with education and think primarily in terms of entertainment, ratings and commercial success.

### **Indirect teaching**

Television professionals’ discomfort about their educational role influences their pedagogy. Because they are reluctant to define themselves as educators, television professionals often say that they teach indirectly or implicitly. Many television writers and producers tend to avoid what they consider direct or overt teaching, which they associate with the pejoratively connoted terms “lecturing” or “moralising” and prefer instead to teach by illustrating lessons or issues through characters and storylines

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<sup>5</sup> Q scores are a measurement of the familiarity or the appeal of an entertainment product.

(Lesser, 1975; Singhal et al., 1993; Tulloch, 2000; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). In other words, most television professionals teach by “showing rather than telling” (Tulloch & Moran, 1986, p. 181). For example, Tulloch (2000) explains that soap opera writers often choose to present social issues as “entertaining dramatic conflict” (p. 60) because they do not want to appear to be directly teaching lessons or moralising. Using the examples of *A Country Practice* and the British soap opera *EastEnders* (Smith & Holland, 1985-) he explains that these programmes teach by encoding expert knowledge and social issues into the narratives and the personal lives of the characters. Moreover, when tackling social or personal issues, television writers usually prefer to state problems rather than give solutions and often try to present all sides of an issue or a debate, thus contrasting several viewpoints instead of promoting a single message (Lesser, 1975; Tulloch & Moran, 1986).

This penchant for indirect teaching and discomfort about education are linked to television professionals’ perception of what their audience wants and does not want. Indeed, most television professionals believe that viewers do not want to be taught or lectured by television (Klein, 2011; Singhal et al., 1993; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). This is formulated by Lynn Bayonas, one of the producers of *A Country Practice* interviewed by Tulloch and Moran (1986):

It’s a sugar coating, actually, but we feel that if you bash people across the head with a problem they are going to resist. Whereas if you do follow issues through like we do on *A Country Practice*, the audience might gain a different attitude towards the subject by the end of it. (Cited in Tulloch & Moran, 1986, p. 175)

Tulloch and Lupton (1997) claim that this soft packaging approach is favoured by commercial entertainment television professionals whereas educational campaigns that are broadcast on public service television often use more direct, hard-hitting techniques.

However, other studies show that indirect teaching is also used in programmes that are designed primarily and explicitly to educate, including entertainment-education and educational children programmes (Lesser, 1975; Singhal et al., 1993). Although entertainment-education programmes contain clearly defined, pre-established lessons, their producers usually try to ensure that the educational messages are not “too blatant or hard-sell, or the audience will reject such messages” (Singhal et al., 1993, p. 15).

Like most commercial entertainment programmes, entertainment-education dramas and soap operas illustrate their lessons through characters and storylines instead of explicitly stating their educational messages. Similarly, the producers of *Sesame Street* use direct teaching techniques to promote academic knowledge and skills but illustrate their messages through the characters' actions to teach social skills and to encourage ethical behaviours (Lesser, 1975).

The example of *Sesame Street* is noteworthy because it highlights the link between educational goals (what television aims to teach) and pedagogy (how it teaches): in this case, direct teaching is used for formal knowledge (academic knowledge and skills like counting and reading) while indirect teaching is used for informal knowledge like social skills and ethics. This suggests that formal, direct pedagogical techniques are used to develop academic knowledge whereas informal, indirect pedagogical techniques are used to foster informal knowledge. Although his book provides useful information about the curriculum and pedagogy of *Sesame Street*, Lesser (1975) does not explain why the producers make those pedagogical choices. If children do not resist or reject direct and overt teaching techniques, why should the producers of *Sesame Street* use indirect teaching to teach social skills and ethics? For example, why is it more efficient to use stories and characters to promote kindness, politeness and tolerance amongst children, instead of directly telling them to be kind, polite and tolerant? The pedagogical value and significance of indirect and informal teaching techniques (like showing rather than telling), which are frequently used by television professionals both in educational and entertainment programmes, have not been fully explored in the literature.

### **The “laughter and tears” formula**

In terms of specific pedagogical techniques, previous studies reveal that television professionals often aim to teach through emotions because they consider that viewers' emotional engagement results in deeper understanding (Klein, 2011; Morrow, 2006; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). Tulloch and Moran (1986) call this pedagogical technique the “‘laughter and tears’ formula” (p. 272). To invite learning through emotions, television

professionals usually encourage empathy and identification, a process through which the viewer recognises someone else's characteristics as their own or assimilates those characteristics (Cohen, 2006).<sup>6</sup> The production team of *A Country Practice* for example, had an "'audience empathy' policy of linking health issues to major characters" (Tulloch & Lupton, 1997, p. 128) because the producers believed that viewers are more likely to learn about social and health issues if they empathise or identify with the characters. *Sesame Street* relies on similar pedagogical techniques to invite children's learning through emotional involvement, empathy and identification. For instance, children's voices are often used in voiceover narrations to encourage children to relate to the narrators. Similarly, when the programme was first conceived the producers decided that the setting of the studio segments would be a realistic inner city street so that African American children residing in urban areas would be more likely to relate to the characters and, as a consequence, to engage with the programme and to learn from it (Morrow, 2006).

These findings about the role of emotions, empathy and identification in televisual pedagogy are valuable for my project. However, these studies overlook two crucial aspects of televisual pedagogy: how textual features of television programmes invite learning, and how viewers learn from television.

## **How viewers learn: audience research**

Some of the theories and empirical studies that focus on audiences are useful for my research because they highlight aspects of the reception process that have an impact on televisual learning. In the following section I review three theoretical frameworks used by media scholars to investigate the relationship between television and education from the audience's perspective: the media effects model, the uses and gratifications

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of identification with media characters (or personae) as traditionally conceived in media studies is more complex than this definition. The idea that audience members assimilate aspects of the character or that they lose or suspend their sense of self in the process of imagining that they are the character has been debated and challenged (Barker, 2005). In my thesis, I use the term "identification" not to imply a loss of self but to refer to a sense of affinity and perceived similarity with the character or persona, that is, being *like* someone else, or, in Cohen's (2006) words "feeling an affinity toward the character that is so strong that we become absorbed in the text and come to an empathic understanding for the feelings the character experiences, and for his or her motives and goals" (p. 184).

approach and the active audience theory. After examining those theories, I discuss some findings obtained by audience researchers who use the active audience theory to study televisual education. These reception studies highlight three important concepts that impact televisual learning: referential viewing, media literacy and social interactions. Throughout this review, I highlight some gaps and contradictions within this area of the literature.

### **From the social learning theory to the active audience theory**

Some media scholars use media effects theories to explain how viewers learn from television (Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993; van Vuuren et al., 2013; Williams, 1981). As its name suggests, the media effects theoretical model assumes that television has direct effects on viewers' cognition (what they think) and behaviours (what they do). For example, some researchers use Bandura's (1963) social learning theory to demonstrate that viewers' behaviours are directly influenced by what they see on television (Rushton, 1979; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993; Williams, 1981). John Philippe Rushton (1979) and Tannis Macbeth Williams (1981) use this theory to argue that children imitate on-screen actions that are rewarded and avoid those that are punished. In her article "How and What Do Children Learn from Television?", Williams claims that television teaches behaviours directly through modelling. She concludes that television can have a positive or a negative role in children's lives, because it can teach both altruistic and violent behaviours:

The fact that television has been shown to exert an influence in opposite directions, i.e., on both prosocial and aggressive behavior, strengthens the conclusion both that children learn from television and that there is a causal link between television and the viewer's social behaviour. (p. 183)

Similarly, some media scholars who study entertainment-education programmes argue that adult viewers learn behaviours directly by observing and imitating the actions that are rewarded on screen and avoiding those that are punished:

Social learning theory explains how human beings learn social behaviors as a

result of modelling their behavior after that of others with whom they interact, or that they observe in the mass media. Viewers can learn socially desirable behaviors from models depicted in the television series. (Singhal et al., 1993, p. 4)

Christina Holtz-Bacha and Pippa Norris (2001) use a similar theoretical model to demonstrate that adults who watch public service television in Europe are more informed about politics than viewers who watch commercial television:

The media effects hypothesis suggests that because of prior media habits, some people who regularly watch public sector TV in general and public sector TV news in particular thereby learn more about events in Brussels and Strasbourg, hear about the politics of the European Union, and thus become more politically knowledgeable. If citizens get most of their knowledge about politics through the media rather than through personal experience [...] then at least some impact of the media on the level of political knowledge may be expected. In this view, the direction of causality runs from the news media to knowledge, and exposure to public TV news produces a more informed public. (p. 138)

Although it still has currency, the media effects theoretical model is criticised for several reasons. According to Justin Lewis (1992), effects-oriented studies are “inconclusive and confusing” (p. 7) because the underlying assumption that the media can directly influence audiences’ cognition and behaviours is weak and problematic. This criticism is further developed by Livingstone (1998) who explains that in the media effects tradition,

the audience is seen implicitly as an undifferentiated mass, who passively receive the meanings of the media as given, and who are affected by these meanings in a similar fashion to the early ‘powerful media’ model of traditional research, namely as by a ‘hypodermic needle’ [...] Now, however, critical researchers are recognising that audiences are both heterogeneous and selective in their responses to television. (p. 18)

Because contemporary audience research recognises viewers’ activity and selective capabilities, “the possibility of strong and direct effects is reduced” (p. 20). In their study of children and television, Robert Hodge and David Tripp (1986) show that the



relationship between television and audiences is more complex than the media effects model suggests: “the very term ‘effects’ raises problems because most of the so-called ‘effects’ of television, if they exist, are self-evidently not effects of the same kind as that of a bat hitting a ball. Balls don’t think: children do” (p. 2). They argue that televisual meanings are interpreted “by social agents responsible for their action (...) If television affects behaviour it can only do so very indirectly via meanings, beliefs, values” (pp. 2-3). Hodge and Tripp do not deny that television can effect viewers, but they integrate the notion of agency and activity in their understanding of these effects. From this perspective, television viewing is active and meanings are constantly negotiated and reappropriated by audiences:

Children watching television are not zombies. They are learning important and complex structures of meaning, and developing capacities for thinking and judgement that are a necessary part of the process of socialisation. What they learn from television does not enter and remain in their heads as a self-contained and erroneous body of knowledge. (p. 10)

Instead of investigating what the media do to people, researchers who use the uses and gratifications theoretical framework focus on what people do with the media. They assume that the audience is active and that media consumption is goal-oriented. Uses and gratifications research has shown that people use the media to satisfy different needs, such as entertainment, social utility and interpersonal relationships, information-seeking, personal identity and values (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972; Rubin, 1983, 1985). What is significant for the purpose of my research is the notion that television viewers seek out both education and entertainment and actively use television for educational purposes. Using this theoretical framework to explore viewers’ educational uses of television, Noble shows that young people watch entertainment programmes in order to gain informal knowledge and social skills that are not taught in school (Noble & Freiberg, 1985; Noble & Noble, 1979). However, as Lewis (1992) points out, the uses and gratifications framework is limited because it reduces the viewer to a set of needs and the media content to a set of gratifications.

The active audience theory goes beyond the effects model and the uses and gratifications approach by highlighting the complexity and multiplicity of audience

responses and decoding positions. As explained in my Introduction, this theory guides my investigation of televisual pedagogy. The active audience theory does not contradict the idea that television has effects on viewers since, as Matt Briggs (2010) points out, “recognizing that television audiences are active does not render the medium ineffectual” (p. 10). However, unlike the media effects model which supposes that the audience passively receives media messages, the active audience theory assumes audiences are “wide awake” (Harindranath, 2009, p. 31) and actively construct meaning. In this view, television is not the cause but the context of learning: it does not teach by directly influencing viewers’ cognition or behaviour, but can simply invite them to learn. Televisual learning is not a mechanical and predictable response to television content; rather, it is part of and influenced by viewers’ interpretive activities, as I explain further below.

### **Referential viewing**

Active audience research highlights audiences’ interpretive agency in three ways. First, it shows how different interpretive communities can decode the same text in different ways (Morley, 1980). Second, it reveals how different individuals can respond to the same text in distinct ways. And third, it demonstrates that each individual viewer can adopt a variety of decoding positions and modalities of response (Ang, 1985; Briggs, 2010; Buckingham, 1993; Jenkins, 1992; Liebes & Katz, 1986, 1990). For example, some scholars contrast referential and critical responses to televisual content (Briggs, 2010; Buckingham, 1993; Cohen, 2006; Liebes & Katz, 1986, 1990). When viewing a programme referentially, the viewer connects it to real life or accepts its reality. As Briggs (2010) notes, this modality of response often “involves closeness and identification with the characters” (p. 50) and a strong emotional engagement, or involvement, with the content (Ang, 1985; Buckingham, 1993; Jenkins, 1992; Liebes & Katz, 1986, 1990).

Alice Hall (2003) provides useful insights into this modality of response by revealing the different ways in which audiences conceptualise and experience media realism. Based on focus groups conducted with university students in the United States, she shows that audiences’ perceptions and evaluations of media realism can be linked

to: factuality (the knowledge that the events depicted really happened in the profilmic world); plausibility (a sense that the events depicted could have happened in the profilmic world); typicality (the impression that the characters or personae are representative of many people or of ordinary people); and emotional realism (the emotions depicted seem true to life and relatable).

When viewing a programme critically, however, the viewer sees it as removed from reality, contrived or unrealistic and usually identifies, questions or challenges its agenda. Buckingham (1993) describes referential involvement as viewing the televisual text from “inside” whereas critical distance means viewing it from “outside”; Thomas Austin (2005) describes referential viewing as “willing abandonment” and critical viewing as “scepticism”. Jonathan Cohen (2006) formulates the difference as follows:

[Referential viewing] makes the text as an artefact (i.e. its authors, actors, producers, design etc.) invisible and [...] the viewer is engrossed in the world the text creates. In a referential reading, viewers accept the basic assumptions of the producers and imagine the events described in the text as if they were, or could be, real [...] Critical readers, on the other hand, resist the temptation to become involved with the text, and their emotional distance provides them with the ability to critique the show and resists its ideological message. (p. 191)

In her study of the reception of the American soap opera *Dallas* (Jacobs, 1978-1991) by Dutch viewers, Ien Ang (1985) explores these modalities of response. Focusing on questions of pleasure and entertainment, she observes that the viewers who enjoy the programme often imagine the characters as real people or identify with them, and consider the world and events of *Dallas* realistic and “true to life” (p. 44). Thus, Ang links entertainment to referential viewing: “they have to be able to believe that the characters constructed in the text are ‘real people’ [...] such involvement is a necessary condition for the pleasure of *Dallas*” (p. 34). Although most critical viewers experience less enjoyment, Ang observes that critical viewing can contribute to a different kind of pleasure, which involves mockery, irony and subversion.

Investigating these modalities of responses is necessary in order to understand how viewers learn from television. Indeed, many studies indicate that viewers learn through referential involvement (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Hall, 2009; Hinds,

1991; Jenkins, 1992; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014; Noble & Freiberg, 1985; Noble & Noble, 1979; Tulloch, 2000; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986; Turner, 2010). Comparing children who watch the public broadcaster ABC and those who watch commercial television in Australia, Noble and Kate Freiberg (1985) show that those who believe that television portrays reality learn from it. These referential viewers say that television teaches them about Australia and “what it’s like to be grown-up” (p. 31). In contrast, critical viewers are cynical about television and do not perceive it as a reliable source of knowledge. In their study of *Happy Days*, Noble and Noble (1979) also link learning and referential viewing by showing that young viewers learn from the series because they use it as a point of reference, even though it is set in a different period and geographical context.<sup>7</sup> Noble and Noble insist on several aspects of referential involvement: teenagers compare the programme to their own lives; they have an “illusion of intimacy” (p. 17) with the characters and they perceive the programme as “true to life” (p. 19). Their research therefore indicates that it is through referential involvement and not critical distancing that viewers learn from television. Similarly, Tulloch and Lupton’s (1997) reception study of *A Country Practice* shows that young viewers learn about health issues when the storylines involve a long-term character with whom they have a parasocial relationship or identify. Their participants do not feel concerned when the health storylines involve an unfamiliar character. Tulloch and Lupton conclude that empathy and identification with characters facilitate learning and enhance viewers’ awareness about health issues.

More recent studies confirm that the educational value of soap operas, comedies and dramas depends on how realistic and plausible the storylines seem to young viewers (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014). As Maria-Jose Masanet and Buckingham (2014) write, “the educational value (or even the effectiveness) of fiction in this respect might be seen to depend upon the extent to which viewers judge it to be realistic” (p. 3). If the storylines or characters are perceived as not believable or if the constructed nature of the programme is too obvious, young viewers distance themselves from it by criticising its lack of realism and resist its educational content.

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<sup>7</sup> Noble and Noble’s participants lived in Australia in the 1970s whereas the action of *Happy Days* takes place in the American city of Milwaukee in the 1950s.

Research that focuses on factual television also supports this argument. Hall's (2009) study of reality programmes, for example, shows that viewers learn about human nature and behaviour when they believe that cast members are authentic. Similarly, Buckingham and Sara Bragg's (2003, 2004) study with young people in the United Kingdom indicates that talk shows are educational when viewers identify with the guests and emotionally engage with the content. When such programmes address a more ironic and playful viewer and encourage scepticism (by hiring actors as fake guests, for example) viewers are more aware of their constructed nature and adopt a critical, distanced and dispassionate position, which hinders their learning. The programme is then perceived as funny and the host's attempts at teaching are mocked or criticised.

However, some scholars argue that both critical and referential viewing result in learning (Buckingham, 1993; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014). Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1990) - who first introduced the concepts of referential and critical reading - and Buckingham (1993) claim that viewers learn from television by combining critical distance and referential involvement. According to Buckingham, a genre such as soap operas is educational precisely because it enables viewers to shift between modalities of response and viewing positions. For Buckingham, the educational value of such programmes is linked to the variety of decoding positions they offer. His argument is that by shifting between referential involvement and critical distance, viewers become aware of different possible reading strategies, which extends their viewing competences.

As I explain below, media literacy scholars also argue that viewers learn from television by exercising their critical and analytical skills. This conflicts with the idea that viewers learn through referential viewing and that being critical hinders learning.

### **Media literacy**

Defining television as a teacher inevitably raises the issue of media literacy, "the ability to use, understand and create communications" (Ofcom.org.uk), which allows people to understand and to use the media for different purposes including education and democratic participation (Livingstone, 2011). Although the phrase "media literacy" also

refers to basic cognitive skills, scholars tend to emphasise analytical and critical reflection. As Buckingham (2003) explains, “literacy is not seen here merely as a kind of cognitive tool kit”, but is “a form of critical literacy” (p. 38); it involves acquiring a “metalanguage” and “a broader understanding of the social, economic and institutional contexts of communication” (p. 38).

For television to be used as an informal site of teaching and learning, viewers need to be media literate (Brabazon, 2006; Hartley, 1999; Hobbs, 1998). Hartley, who argues that television is a teacher in *Uses of Television* (1999), insists on the importance of literacy, which he defines as “knowledge, critical thinking, and methodical reading or analytical practices” (p. 4). For him, television is comparable to textbooks: like students who need to be literate in order to learn from books, viewers need to be TV literate in order to learn from television. Hartley quotes Umberto Eco (1979) who writes in *Screen Education*: “if you want to use television for teaching somebody something, you have first to teach somebody how to use television” (p. 15). Indeed, for Eco, (televisual) education is fundamentally linked to literacy:

The first duty of a teacher is, if not to say, ‘Don’t trust me’, at least to say, ‘Only trust me within reason’. I think in fact that this attitude is one that every reasonable person takes when watching television. Television is the school book of modern adults, as much as it is the only authoritative school book for our children. Education, real education, doesn’t mean teaching young people to trust school. On the contrary, it consists of training young people to criticise school books. (p. 16)

Tara Brabazon (2006) makes a similar argument about the Internet. In “The Google Effect: Googling, Blogging, Wikis and the Flattening of Expertise”, she questions the assumption that the Internet is a substitute for expert knowledge. Brabazon does not deny that the Internet can be used for educational purposes, but she reminds teachers and students that, unlike academic sources, it offers no guarantee of quality or expertise. Her main argument is that Internet users need Internet literacy in order to “sort the trash from the relevant” (p. 158). This “transparency problem” (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006, p. 14) applies to other media: when defining any communication medium as a teacher, it is important to acknowledge that, unlike

academic institutions such as schools and libraries, most mainstream media texts are informal teachers that offer no guarantee of expertise. Media literacy is therefore crucial if any communication medium is used as a site of teaching or learning.

However, the argument that viewers can only learn if they critically analyse television conflicts with audience studies that suggest that viewers learn through referential involvement (rather than critical viewing). My study aims to explore and resolve this contradiction by examining the role of referential involvement, critical viewing and media literacy in televisual learning.

### **Social interactions**

Finally, active audience research reveals that viewers do not create meaning in isolation but through interpretive communities, networks and interpersonal relationships, and that meaning-making practices are intertwined with social interactions (Briggs, 2010; Buckingham, 2003; Fiske & Hartley, 1978). Moreover, audience studies suggest that interactions between viewers have a pedagogical role. For example, in “Children's Learning from Television”, Fisch (2005) argues that television is pedagogically more efficient when viewers have conversations about the programme with their peers and teachers. Similarly, Buckingham and Bragg (2003, 2004) explain that for children and young people, learning about sex and relationships through the media is often a social process that occurs during informal discussions conducted among peer groups or with parents, during and after viewing.

Audience studies conducted with adults also suggest that television can serve as a forum through which viewers discuss personal, social and political issues and that these conversations have an educational potential (Klein, 2013; Liebes & Katz, 1990). In their study of *Dallas*, for example, Liebes and Katz (1990) show that the programme provokes conversations between viewers who help each other understand, interpret and form opinions about personal and social issues. Similarly, Klein (2013) observes that entertainment television prompts “everyday conversation with friends, family and colleagues” (p. 51) about serious topics. She concludes that “media can open up a space for deliberation of political and social issues” (p. 52). As I explain in the next chapter,

the methodological design of my study takes this idea into account to highlight the role that social interactions and verbal exchanges play in televisual learning.

## **Conclusion**

As my review of the literature shows, there are studies that demonstrate television can teach facts and develop skills. However, the argument that television fosters ethics and enhances cultural citizenship is contested (Giroux, 1983, 1994; Miller, 2007; Silverstone, 2007; Williams, 1962). My analysis of televisual pedagogy enters this fear versus desire debate by asking: what does television teach? Is it a teacher “in the best sense” (Hoggart, 1970, p. 55) as Hartley (1999) and Hawkins (2001) claim? Or is it a corrupt teacher, as Williams (1962), Giroux (1983, 1994), Miller (2007), Silverstone (2007) argue? Does it promote consumerism, childishness and normalising socio-cultural moral values? Or can it foster ethics and cultural citizenship as engagement with otherness and difference? Can television make people aware of the other person and respectful of cultural differences? By analysing how some programmes teach, my thesis explores these questions about what television teaches to further scholarly understanding of its educational role as well as its ethical, social and political potential.

The studies that investigate the relationship between television and education from the production perspective are useful to understand televisual pedagogy for three reasons: first, they show that many television practitioners have an ambivalent stance about education. Second, they indicate that professionals usually prefer to teach indirectly. Third, they reveal that professionals often teach by encouraging emotional responses. However, these studies do not explicitly identify the pedagogical models and tools that practitioners use to educate viewers, nor do they analyse the textual aspects of televisual pedagogy. My research aims to extend these findings in two ways: by analysing the pedagogical models, techniques and tools that some television professionals use to educate and by showing how textual features of mise-en-scene, editing and sound invite learning.

Reception theories and audience research provide answers about how viewers learn from television. Several audience studies suggest that viewers learn through social



interactions and referential involvement. However, some media scholars claim that viewers learn from television by combining referential involvement and critical viewing. Similarly, media literacy scholars argue that viewers need to critically understand and analyse television in order to authentically learn from it (instead of uncritically absorbing its lessons). As mentioned above, the idea that viewers learn through critical and analytical viewing jars with the argument that they learn through referential involvement. My thesis explores this contradiction by examining the role of referential viewing and critical analysis in televisual learning. How do viewers' modalities of responses affect the learning process? Do viewers learn through referential viewing, critical viewing or by combining both modalities/positions? Do viewers learn when they trust televisual content and accept it as "real" or realistic? Or does referential viewing lead viewers to passively and uncritically absorb television's messages? Can viewers only learn through a more distanced, dispassionate and critical positioning? Do viewing contexts and social interactions influence the learning process? If so, how? And is there a fit between what and how programme makers think they teach and what and how viewers learn?

The majority of studies reviewed in this chapter focus either on the production perspective or the reception perspective; few connect production and reception (Klein, 2011, 2013; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986) and none connect production, text and reception. My thesis addresses this gap by tracing the circuit of communication and examining how meanings circulate across production, text and reception. Linking these three sites allows me to connect teaching processes to learning processes and to explain how teaching and learning interact in the context of televisual communication. In other words, this conceptual framework allows me to investigate the teaching-learning moment.

Finally, the studies reviewed in this chapter confirm that both educational and entertainment programmes can teach. But, with the exception of Tulloch and Lupton's (1997) AIDS study, all focus either on educational television or on entertainment television. Drawing on Tulloch and Lupton's strategy, my thesis aims to go further by comparing the pedagogy of an educational programme with the pedagogy of an entertainment programme. Tulloch and Lupton's study reveals one main difference between the educational campaigns about AIDS broadcast on public service television

and “Sophie”, the episode of *A Country Practice* that deals with the same issue: the educational campaigns teach directly and overtly whereas “Sophie” is influenced by entertainment and commercial imperatives and uses indirect and informal teaching techniques. To what extent do Tulloch and Lupton’s findings apply to other educational programmes and other commercial entertainment programmes? Do documentary series like *Who Do You Think You Are?* teach overtly? Do they use direct and formal teaching techniques? Or do they use indirect and informal teaching techniques, like *Sesame Street* and education-entertainment programmes (Lesser, 1975; Singhal et al., 1993)? Does *Home and Away* use indirect teaching techniques, like *A Country Practice*? Are there any other differences - in terms of educational intentions, pedagogical models and tools - between professionals working on educational programmes and those working on entertainment programmes, and between television professionals working for public service channels and those working for commercial channels? Are there any differences between how viewers learn from educational programmes and how they learn from entertainment programmes? If so, what are they? The next chapter describes the methods I use to answer my research questions.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the research strategy I use to answer my research questions and highlights the links between my disciplinary and theoretical frameworks, epistemological stance, methodology, conceptual framework and methods.

The first section introduces my epistemological stance and methodology. It shows how my constructivist stance, which is influenced by my disciplinary and theoretical frameworks, affects my choices of methodology and methods.

The second section focuses on the specific research methods I use to answer my research questions: how do television professionals teach? How do televisual texts invite learning? How do viewers learn? It explains how my findings are generated. More specifically, it describes the methods, instruments and procedures I use to collect, analyse and interpret my data, and how I address methodological limitations.

The last section focuses on my two case studies: it explains the rationale for my case selection, how I recruited my participants and selected audiovisual material for my textual analyses and shows why a case study approach is useful for my project.

### **Qualitative research and methodological bricolage**

From a constructivist perspective, research does not aim to uncover the objective truth but rather, to explore the ways in which different subjectivities construct reality. As I demonstrate throughout this chapter, using qualitative methods and adopting a self-reflexive stance allows me to understand how televisual meanings are generated, constructed and negotiated by different social audiences including the media professionals who produce and distribute television programmes, and myself, the researcher conducting the study.

### **Epistemological stance**

My methodological choices are guided by my constructivist epistemological stance, which is best captured by David Morley and Roger Silverstone (1991):

Research is (...) always a matter of interpreting, indeed constructing, reality from a particular position, rather than a positivist enterprise seeking a ‘correct’ scientific perspective which will finally allow us to achieve the Utopian dream of a world completely known in the form of indisputable facts. (p. 161)

By adopting such a perspective, I assume that “reality” is socially constructed by research participants and researchers and that there is no objective or neutral viewpoint from which researchers can attain or develop theoretical knowledge (Weerakkody, 2008). As I shall explain, this assumption shapes my research strategy.

To answer my research questions, I use qualitative research methods (interviews, textual analysis and discussion groups) because these are useful to understand how meanings are constructed by different social audiences, including media professionals and the researcher him/herself. My aim is not to extract or uncover the objective truth about televisual pedagogy but to interpret and understand socio-culturally situated and subjective meaning-making processes involved in televisual teaching and learning. Quantitative research methods such as ratings, questionnaires or surveys are often used by television professionals to quantify viewership (Turnbull, 2014) and by media effects researchers to measure the effects of television on audiences’ learning (Himmelweit, Oppenheim, & Vince, 1958; Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001; Rushton, 1979). However, qualitative methods are more valuable when the goal is not to measure or quantify effects but to understand televisual communication (Livingstone, 1998). Unlike media effects researchers, culturalists and active audience researchers use qualitative methods to understand the complex ways in which social audiences make sense of the media. To do so, they often rely on ethnographic methods that draw on personal accounts of involvement with media (such as in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus groups) because such methods allow researchers to investigate meaning-making processes (Williams, 2003).

### **Methodological bricolage**

One of the main methodological challenges for culturalists who use qualitative methods is to generalise their findings, or in Tulloch's (2000) words, "to find the 'now here' - the local, partial and fragmentary micro-narrative – and yet to contextualise it also, to interconnect it, to globalise it" (p. 9). Qualitative researchers can address this difficulty by combining several methods or sources of information in order to triangulate and thereby validate their findings. One of the roles of culturalists is to determine "what *combination* of research methods will produce a better and deeper understanding" (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 1). From a cultural studies perspective, the research does not serve a specific method: different methods serve a specific research project. Thus, culturalists can make up a methodological strategy as the project goes along. As Pink (2001) writes: "specific uses should be creatively developed within individual projects" (p. 5). Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary academic field that "appropriates and repurposes elements of theoretical frameworks and methodologies from other disciplines, wherever they seem productive in pursuing its own enquiries" (Lister & Wells, 2001, p. 63). In other words, the discipline of cultural studies is not tied to any particular methodological tradition but is fundamentally eclectic and draws upon multiple disciplines and methods (Frow & Morris, 2000). This methodological eclecticism is referred to as *bricolage*, the French for Do-It-Yourself (DIY) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a; Pink, 2001). As the metaphor of DIY suggests, the strength of cultural studies is that it is not prescriptive about methods but allows researchers to creatively use a variety of tools to build their research projects.

As Lister and Wells (2001) observe: "the methodological eclecticism of cultural studies allows the analyst to attend to the many moments within the cycle of production, circulation and consumption of the image through which meanings accumulate, slip and shift" (p. 90). In the following sections, I show how methodological bricolage allows me to investigate the different sites of the circuit of communication and to understand how meanings circulate through production processes, textual features and reception processes.

## **Data collection and analysis**

One of the aims of my thesis is to connect the different moments of the circuit of communication to analyse televisual pedagogy as conjunctural process that exists at the intersection between production, text and reception. The following section focuses on the research methods I draw on to investigate each site of televisual communication. I first examine the method I use to explore production processes. I then address the method I apply to study textual features. I follow by discussing my methods for investigating reception processes. The final part focuses on the instruments and procedures through which I analyse and interpret my data. This discussion allows me to reflect on my methodological choices and to explain how I address their limitations.

### **Production**

How do television professionals perceive their role and responsibility in terms of education? What do they aim to teach? Do they adopt transmissive pedagogical models, in which learning is conceptualised as passive and teaching as authoritative, or constructivist models, in which learning is active and teaching is interactive? What production techniques do they use as pedagogical tools? Are there any differences between professionals working on educational programmes and those working on entertainment programmes, in terms of pedagogical intentions and tools? Are there any differences between the professionals working for public service and those working for commercial channels? If so, what are they?

To answer these questions, I use semi-structured interviews because it allows me to investigate television professionals' pedagogical discourses. The term "discourse" refers to an abstract construct that shapes collective perceptions. It is traditionally defined as a codified language used in a given field of social practice in order to organise knowledge and ideas. The concept is built upon the dual assumption that language organises the world but is not a transparent window to reality. It suggests that people actively construct the world through verbal interactions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Silverman, 2000). But discourses are not mere words: they are the attitudes and perceptions which give words their meaning. They are "suffused into social practices" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 494) and influence ideologies, attitudes, representations,

and courses of action. According to Tulloch and Lupton (1997), a discourse is a “system of knowledges and practices, including speaking and writing about or visually representing social or material phenomena, that serves to shape and constitute individuals’ perceptions of reality and the self” (p. 10). I use the term “discourse” in my thesis because my aim is not to uncover the objective truth about televisual pedagogy but rather to understand how some professionals construct, perceive and talk about their educational role and their pedagogy. Unlike positivist researchers, who see interviewing as a way to extract information, constructivist and interpretive researchers use it to understand how their participants perceive the world:

Because the ideas of interviewees have priority, participants are able to explore their own thoughts more deeply or exert more control over the interview if they prefer [...] Another benefit of interviews is that the data you collect are situated within their own social context. That is, the responses you derive from interviews are the subjective views of your interviewees. Your evidence, therefore, is based on participants’ interpretations of their experiences and is expressed in their own words, using the jargon and speech styles that are meaningful to them. This contrasts with quantitative surveys, where responses are treated as if they are independent of the contexts that produce them. (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 221)

Christine Daymon and Immy Holloway (2002) argue that “interviews are an appropriate method to use when you wish to understand the constructs that interviewees use as a basis for their opinions and beliefs about a particular situation, product or issue” (p. 222). This argument is further developed by Andrea Fontana, James H. Frey (2000) and David Silverman (2000), who explain that the verbal data gathered during interviews allow socio-cultural constructions and stories to emerge because interviewees actively build knowledge. Fontana and Frey invite qualitative researchers to pay attention not only to the content of the stories which are being told, but also to how these stories are being constructed. By adopting such a narrative approach to interviewing, the researcher “treats interview data as accessing various stories or narratives through which people describe their worlds” (Silverman, 2000, p. 823). Thus, the interviewees’ accounts are not true pictures of reality but must be understood as “collective stories” (p. 824). Furthermore, as Silverman notes, interviewing can reveal how people take on certain

roles and identities: through talk, interviewees construct and perform a specific version of their selves. This is useful for my research because one of my aims is to understand how television professionals perceive and define their role in terms of education. Another methodological advantage of interviewing is that it can reveal multiple perspectives: conducting multiple interviews allows researchers to triangulate individual perspectives (Barbour & Schostak, 2011). In my case studies, I compare the views and attitudes of individual writers, producers and programmers to reveal commonalities (which reinforce some of my findings), as well as divergences and nuances.

Interviews have methodological limitations. For instance, there can be a discrepancy between what interviewees say and what they actually do; therefore, answers cannot be taken at face value (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). However, this is not a problem if the researcher is more interested in the rhetoric and the narratives that interviewees construct than in uncovering the objective truth. Another limitation concerns what Daymon and Holloway (2002) call “the interviewer effect”: “sometimes informants react in particular ways to you as a researcher and modify their answers to please or to appear in a positive light” (p. 239). Similarly, “hearing the data” can be problematic because the research framework can influence the way in which the researcher interprets the answers and because the researcher can misinterpret answers. These issues can be addressed by adopting a self-reflexive stance and acknowledging that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but situated social interactions (Barbour & Schostak, 2011; Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Silverman, 2000). As Rosaline Barbour and John Schostak (2011) explain:

The interview [...] is much more than just a tool, like a drill to screw deeper into the discursive structures that frame the worlds of ‘subjects’. It is as much a way of seeing, or rather a condition for seeing anything at all. (p. 63)

According to Daymon and Holloway:

Being reflexive means to understand the dynamics of the interviewer-interviewee relationship in its particular context and its influence on the data. Being reflexive also refers to looking self-critically at your own assumptions and focus of enquiry because of their influence on the manner in which you carry out interviewing (p. 239)



Self-reflexive awareness means accepting and embracing this situatedness (that is, the fact that interviews are embedded in the context of a particular social interaction) not as a methodological flaw but as a fundamental component of the research process. As Morley and Silverstone (1991) write: “ethnographic accounts are essentially contestable, just as cultural analysis is a necessarily incomplete business of guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses” (p. 157).

Furthermore, researchers can use triangulation to compare interview findings with the data derived from other sources, stages of fieldwork and methods (Morley & Silverstone, 1991; Silverman, 2000). In my study, I triangulate my interview findings with the data I obtained through textual analysis and discussion groups with viewers.

### **Text**

To understand how televisual texts invite learning I use textual analysis. As many film and media scholars have shown, moving images can be analysed as texts because they are made of signs (Metz, 1974; Monaco, 2000; van Leeuwen, 2001). Audiovisual elements of mise-en-scene, editing and sound are connotative, that is, they signify by suggesting. For my textual analysis, I refer to the works of other textual and visual analysts: David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson’s (2001) and James Monaco’s (2000) analyses of cinematic texts, Karen Lury’s (2005) investigation of televisual texts, Hansen, Cottle, Negrine and Newbold’s (1998) study of media texts and Patti Bellantoni’s (2012) research on colour provide a useful toolbox to understand how audiovisual elements in moving images denote and connote meanings. Using these studies as a guide, I examine the textual features of *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Home and Away* in order to understand what they aim to teach and how they invite learning.

One of the aims of my textual analysis is to explain how *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Home and Away* use the codes and conventions of the television documentary and soap opera genres as pedagogical tools. Codes and conventions are an “extended system of signs which operates like a language” (Lister & Wells, 2001, p. 73). Codes are “conventional ways of making meaning that are specific to particular groups of

people” (Rose, 2001, p. 88). According to Monaco (2000), codes are the cultural constructions that are present in a given filmic (or televisual) scene while also existing outside this specific scene. Some codes (for example, those relative to editing, lighting and camera movements) are specifically audiovisual while others (such as photography, kinesics, music and colour codes) are broader cultural codes that exist outside the realm of moving images. Conventions are established practices associated with one type of moving images, for example a particular genre (Hansen et al., 1998). According to Lister and Wells (2001), “in general, the use of conventions [...] is a matter of assimilated ‘know-how’, a trained sense of ‘this is how to do it’ gained ‘on the job’” (p. 75). Conventions are not a universal language but social constructions that “fall below the threshold of conscious attention” but “are nevertheless there” (p. 74). It is also important to note that my textual analysis aims to go beyond cognitive meanings to integrate the sensory and emotional dimension of televisual texts (Barker & Austin, 2000; Hansen et al., 1998; Lister & Wells, 2001; Pink, 2001).

My textual analyses are guided by my disciplinary and conceptual frameworks. By adopting a visual cultural studies framework, I define televisual texts not only as material artefacts, but also as social processes that exist within a circuit of communication. Therefore, my analyses of textual features aim to go beyond notions of signs, codes and conventions to take into account their social lives, histories and contexts (Barker & Austin, 2000; Lister & Wells, 2001; McKee, 2001a, 2014). To do so, I situate individual scenes or sequences within the context of episodes, series and the entirety of the programmes and I examine their paratexts as well as the wider public contexts in which they circulate (McKee, 2001a, 2014). Based on my interview findings, I also integrate the contexts of production in my analysis by explicitly linking textual features to the programme makers’ intentions (Lister & Wells, 2001).

Furthermore, my textual analysis aims to reveal how televisual texts implicitly define and construct the audience and how the implied audience embedded in textual features is part of their pedagogy. Here, the concepts of viewer position and implied audience are particularly useful (Barker & Austin, 2000; Lister & Wells, 2001). The notion of viewer position refers to the value systems constructed via the camera that inform the viewer’s look. It implies that the images tell where the viewer is. For instance, Lister and Wells (2001) contrast two viewer positions: the voyeuristic gaze,

which places the viewer in a position of (masculine) power, looking at an object, and identification, which invites the viewer to look and feel with the character or persona. Thus, textual features can construct and position the viewer as other (for instance, as voyeur) or alternatively, they can invite them to identify with the character or persona. Martin Barker and Austin's (2000) concept of implied audience refers to the role generated by the text and in the text for the viewer. This role, which actual viewers may or may not adopt, is made of cued responses encouraged by textual features. By using the concepts of viewer position and implied audience I show how the textual features of *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Home and Away* address and position viewers and how they encourage certain responses to invite learning. According to Monaco (2000), textual analysis is not a science "but it is a logical, often illuminating system that helps to describe how film does what it does" (p.171). By using this method, my intention is to analyse how television does what it does, in particular how two programmes teach.

As Glen Creeber (2006) notes in "The Joy of Text: Television and Textual Analysis", textual analysis has been criticised for being determinist, silencing the audience, and revealing only one interpretation among many. However, many scholars agree that the aim of textual analysis is not to find the right interpretation since "any text can be viewed from an endless number of different 'reading positions'" (p. 85). Despite the dominant meaning encoded in the text, codes and conventions are complex and audiovisual texts are polysemic (Creeber, 2006; Hall, 1980; Harindranath, 2009; Livingstone, 1998; McKee, 2001a, 2001b, 2014; Thompson & Mittell, 2013; van Leeuwen, 2001). Because audiovisual codes and conventions are not a language with fixed rules, textual analysis is always a subjective act of interpretation:

We can never have the foundational guarantee that we understand what the author understood [...] or what any other reader understands from their interpretation of it. We work with the 'necessary fiction' of the possibility of communication, and get on with the debate and attempts to understand and persuade each other about interpretations. There can never be a final answer. (McKee, 2001b, p. 13)

Similarly, Theo van Leeuwen (2001) reminds visual researchers that connotations are not universal because they are always determined by cultural associations. Textual

analysis is culturally situated because the researcher uses a particular cultural lexicon to interpret images. Therefore, textual analysts must “explicitly recognise the textual plurality and post structuralist ambiguities of meaning” (p. 85). In other words, textual analysis can be used efficiently as long as the researcher acknowledges that textual meanings are situated and context-specific (Creeber, 2006).

Another way to address this limitation is to triangulate the findings. To do so, I draw comparisons between my textual analysis, my interview with television professionals, and the discussion groups I conducted with viewers.

## **Reception**

As noted in my Introduction, the concept of pedagogy also concerns how learners learn; therefore, my study investigates some of the reception processes that affect televisual learning. Rather than silencing the audience by focusing exclusively on production processes or textual features, my aim is to connect production, text and reception. To do so, I conducted two discussion groups with four viewers each.<sup>8</sup> One of the main advantages of this method is that it is intrinsically interactive and allow different voices and perspectives to emerge (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). According to Daymon and Holloway (2002) group interaction:

stimulates thoughts in other respondents within the group; causes participants to take account of a range of different views within the group, some of which challenge their own; encourages greater depth of discussion; reminds individuals of things they may have forgotten; helps other participants to better verbalize and develop their thoughts and opinions; encourages a shift in participants’ attitudes. (pp. 242-243)

Rather than aggregating individual perspectives, collective discussions simulate social relations and interactions (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). Participants may even “collaboratively formulate and revise their perspectives” (Barbour & Schostak, 2011, p. 63).

By stimulating social interactions, discussion groups allow researchers to

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<sup>8</sup> Because of their small sample size, I refer to them as “discussion groups” instead of “focus groups”.

understand the collective meaning-making processes that characterise television viewing and influence televisual learning (Buckingham, 1993; Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Fisch, 2005; Klein, 2013; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). As Peter Lunt and Livingstone (1996) explain, media research is less interested in the psychological effects of the media on the individual than in social processes of communication. From this perspective, verbal communication and social interactions are regarded as valuable empirical data. Taking this idea further, Lewis (1992) recommends that researchers should record viewers' arguments and quarrels because they articulate "the semiotic battles that define the whole activity of television viewing" (p. 43). Liebes and Katz' (1986, 1990) study of *Dallas* illustrates the relevance of this method for active audience research. In their study, focus groups were used to understand how viewers from different socio-cultural backgrounds engage with the programme and to highlight different decoding positions and modalities of response, such as referential viewing and critical viewing.

The main issue when conducting discussion groups concerns unwanted dynamics (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Weerakkody, 2008). The moderator must keep discussion leaders from monopolizing or dominating the conversation and encourage recalcitrant respondents to participate and obtain responses from the entire group. In some cases this can be problematic:

Think too of the pressures that may bear upon a focus group member whose views are clearly out of step with the majority of the group – there is the temptation to conceal those views, or, for some, there may be the temptation to play the radical outsider and give wildly exaggerated opinions. (Barbour & Schostak, 2011, p. 62)

Group consensus can be negative since it leads to "conformity in thinking or convergent answers" (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 255). However, these limitations are also the strength of the method: indeed, all social dynamics are valuable if they are considered as empirical data (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Lewis, 1992).

Another limitation of discussion groups concerns their artificial nature. The accounts produced in such a contrived context can lack the naturalness of everyday conversation (Barbour & Schostak, 2011; Weerakkody, 2008):

Focus groups are not an effective way of measuring attitudes or, even, of eliciting people's 'real views'. This is because they are, fundamentally, a social process through which participants co-produce an account of themselves and their ideas, which is specific to that time and place. (Barbour & Schostak, 2011, p. 63)

Moreover, this method fails to reproduce natural viewing contexts, which are defined by the media ensemble (the surrounding media technologies) and the structure of domestic life within which viewing and social dialogue occur (Morley & Silverstone, 1991). But although researchers cannot access everyday conversation or natural viewing contexts they can ask participants about their everyday uses of the media at home. More importantly, the aim of this method is not to uncover the truth about participants' real media experiences, but to observe how interpretations circulate through interaction, debate and negotiation. A discussion group does not aim to reflect a real-world group but *is* in itself a real-world group (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). As Daymon and Holloway (2002) write, "although individuals taking part in focus groups may be divorced from their natural cultural setting, this does not mean that their conversations are 'unnatural' or distorted" (p. 255).

### **Analysis and interpretation**

After recording the verbal data on audio tapes, I transcribed the interviews and group discussions and stored the transcripts as computer files. Transcribing the data and reading through the transcripts allowed me to get "a sense of the whole database" (Creswell, 1998, p. 143) and to identify emerging patterns and ideas. To analyse the data, I then developed coding categories and subcategories (Barker, Arthurs, & Harindranath, 2001; Creswell, 1994, 1998) using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. The data was classified under primary categories that were based on my research questions. For example, the interview data was coded under three primary categories: "self-perception", which answered the question "how do television professionals perceive their role and responsibility in terms of education?"; "educational goals", which answered "what do television professionals aim to teach?"; and "pedagogy", which answered "how do television professionals teach?" and "what

production techniques do television professionals use as pedagogical tools?” Within each primary category I then developed subcategories. These subcategories were words or phrases that summarised recurring ideas and answered my research questions, and that were refined and revised as the coding progressed. In developing these subcategories, I interpreted what my participants said based on my own understanding and on the literature (Creswell, 1998). I used a similar coding procedure for the discussion group data. NVivo was a valuable tool to retrieve and code the data and to identify predominant subcategories. It also allowed me to use coding reports, which were automatically generated by the software, and which classified and organised all the data under the relevant categories and subcategories. After my interview and discussion group data was classified and organised in these coding reports, I synthesised my findings in writing.

As Creswell (1998) points out, developing subthemes that summarise recurring ideas and answer the research questions is an interpretive act. Similarly, as noted earlier, analysing televisual texts is a socio-culturally situated and subjective act of interpretation. It is therefore important to recognise that my cultural lexicon and individual subjectivity affect my analysis and interpretation of the verbal data and of the televisual texts. From a constructivist perspective, it is not only acceptable but essential to acknowledge that personal experience and subjectivity influence the research process, because the positivist assumption that science can be objective and impersonal is no longer tenable. As the autoethnographers Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000) write: “if you couldn’t eliminate the influence of the observer on the observed, then no theories or findings could ever be completely free of human values. The investigator would always be implicated in the product” (p. 747).

This move toward a more self-reflexive stance can be observed in qualitative research and cultural studies (Angrosino & Perez, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b; Morley & Silverstone, 1991; Tedlock, 2000; Tulloch, 2000). As Barbara Tedlock (2000) shows, ethnographic research has evolved to become progressively more self-reflexive and there has been a shift from participant observation to the observation of one’s own participation. Researchers can embrace subjectivity and emotional involvement since it is possible to reveal the self and the other simultaneously.

Self-reflexivity can enhance the research process because the researcher's "engagement with the social processes that are observable in the field (...) render(s) those processes comprehensible in particular ways" (Atkinson, 2006, p. 401). For example, retracing her own methodological evolution, Jacqueline Mosselson (2010) explains that she went from hiding from subjectivity, to not only acknowledging it but using it to improve her research. She shows how reflecting on her own position and personal experiences resulted in a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that she was studying at the time (refugees' identity). Drawing on this approach, I use self-awareness to enhance my analysis. Embracing my dual positioning as television researcher and as television viewer belonging to the cultural phenomenon under study, I reflect on my personal experience to answer the following questions: what is this programme trying to teach me? How is it trying to teach me? What have I learnt from watching this programme? What could others learn from this programme? This self-reflexive process, along with the literature and my interview findings, nourishes my textual analyses.

## **Case study**

I selected the documentary series broadcast on the public service channel SBS, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, and a soap opera broadcast on the commercial Seven Network, *Home and Away*, as my two case studies to compare a programme that is explicitly produced to educate and a programme that is produced primarily to entertain. As I explain in chapter one, previous studies show that both educational and entertainment programmes can teach. However, with the exception of Tulloch and Lupton's (1997) research on television and AIDS, these studies focus either on educational television or on entertainment television. Drawing on Tulloch and Lupton's strategy, my thesis compares the pedagogy of an educational programme with the pedagogy of an entertainment programme. *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Home and Away* were selected neither for their typicality nor for their uniqueness, but because they present opportunities for learning (Stake, 2000). Following Robert Stake's (2000) recommendation, I selected two programmes that significantly shed light on the phenomenon under study (televisual pedagogy). Although *Who Do You Think You Are?* is not representative of all educational programmes or documentary series, it reveals



how and what educational programmes (that is, programmes that are consciously and explicitly designed to educate) can teach. Similarly, *Home and Away* is not representative of all entertainment programmes or soap operas, but reveals how and what entertainment television can teach. Convenience and accessibility also influenced my case selection process (Stake, 2000). In the following section, I explain how I recruited my interviewees and discussion group participants and how I selected audiovisual material for my textual analysis.

### ***Who Do You Think You Are?***

*Who Do You Think You Are?* is a documentary series in which celebrities go on a journey to retrace their family tree and to learn about their ancestry. Originally broadcast by the BBC in the United Kingdom, it has been adapted in eighteen countries. The Australian version of the franchise, which is produced locally by Artemis International and Serendipity Productions, has been airing on the public service television channel SBS since 2008.

To investigate the production of *Who Do You Think You Are?* I conducted semi-structured interviews with two executive producers (whom I refer to as “Producer 1” and “Producer 2”) and one programmer working for the channel SBS (identified as “SBS Programmer”). Interviewing this programmer allowed me to compare the perspective of the broadcaster and that of the producers. Indeed, the pedagogical discourses, intentions and tools of producers who make a programme can differ from those of the professionals working for the broadcaster (Tulloch, 2000; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). As explained earlier, the aim of my interviews is not to uncover the objective truth about televisual pedagogy but rather to understand how these professionals perceive their educational role and pedagogy and how they talk about it.

To understand how their pedagogical discourses and intentions translate into the televisual text I analysed the eight episodes that constitute the fifth series, transmitted on SBS every Tuesday evening at 7:30 pm between 2 April 2013 and 21 May 2013 (which was the most recent series at the time of the study). This research stage was conducted in two steps. First, through a content analysis, which allowed me to identify the episodes’ educational content and to understand how their textual features of

editing, sound and mise-en-scene (including settings, colours, props, costumes, make-up, hair styling, lighting, performance, camera angles, camera movements, distance, framings, and depth of field) were used as pedagogical tools. I then selected specific scenes that significantly reveal what the programme aims to teach and how it invites learning and conducted detailed shot-by-shot analyses.

To triangulate my interview findings and textual analysis, I examined how some viewers interpret *Who Do You Think You Are?* and how they use it as a source of learning. Conducting two discussion groups allowed me to investigate televisual learning and the interface between teaching and learning. For each groups, I recruited four viewers, “a large enough number to provide a variety of perspectives but small enough not to become disorderly or fragmented” (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 247). Using the snowball sampling method, I recruited pre-existing groups and pairs through an intermediary who contacted them through social media websites. The first group included two pre-existing pairs: siblings Wolfgang and Naomi and friends Marnie and Arya. The second group consisted of four friends: Krista, Ms Goldblum, and Lec and Junior, who are a couple.<sup>9</sup> As Daymon and Holloway (2002) explain, “the advantage of choosing pre-constituted groups is that they are more natural, and therefore participants may be comfortable in each other’s company” (p. 245). Similarly, Barbour and Schostak (2011) argue that pre-existing groups are better because they allow researchers to “get as close as possible to the real life situations where people discuss, formulate and modify their views and make sense of their experiences as in peer groups” (p. 63).

To reinforce this sense of familiarity and comfort, I ensured that each group was homogenous and that the participants shared common characteristics such as age, nationality, socio-cultural background, educational and socio-economic level. As Daymon and Holloway (2002) observe, homogenous groups create an “immediate feeling of rapport”, which “can motivate individuals to contribute enthusiastically to group discussions.” (p. 246). These characteristics are summarised in Table 1 below:

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<sup>9</sup> Their aliases were self-selected.

<u>Group 1</u>	Age	Nationality	Descent	Education	Familiarity with WDYTYA	Familiarity with H/A
<b>Arya</b>	25	Australian	Anglo-Celtic	Tertiary	Regular	Rarely seen
<b>Marnie</b>	26	Australian	Anglo-Celtic	Tertiary	Regular	Rarely seen
<b>Naomi</b>	29	Australian	Anglo-Celtic	Tertiary	Never seen	Occasional (formerly)
<b>Wolfgang</b>	34	Australian	Anglo-Celtic	Tertiary	Never seen	Rarely seen

<u>Group 2</u>	Age	Nationality	Descent	Education	Familiarity with WDYTYA	Familiarity with H/A
<b>Junior</b>	32	Australian	Mexican/ Anglo-Celtic	Tertiary	Occasional	Rarely seen
<b>Krista</b>	33	Australian/ American	Anglo-Celtic	Tertiary	Never seen	Regular (formerly)
<b>Lec</b>	32	Australian	Greek-Cypriot	Tertiary	Regular	Regular (formerly)
<b>Ms Goldblum</b>	27	South African/ Australian	Anglo-Celtic	Tertiary	Never seen	Never seen

**Table 1: Discussion group participants**

As Table 1 shows, half of the participants had seen *Who Do You Think You Are?* whereas the other half had never seen it before. Such diversity was beneficial because it highlighted the different ways in which audiences respond to the programme. Rather than discussing with fans, I selected regular viewers, occasional viewers and viewers who had never seen it, which allowed different perspectives - including negative responses - to emerge. The environment (a large media room on a university campus) was made as informal as possible to ensure a relaxed atmosphere (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996).

The third episode of series five was screened before the discussion as stimulus material to start the conversation. In this episode, the actor Don Hany travels to Europe to learn about his mother's Hungarian heritage and his grandfather who was involved in Cold War history. This episode was selected because my textual analysis revealed that it contains a wide range of pedagogical tools. For practical reasons, only half of the

episode was screened. This proved useful to determine whether the participants were captivated by the story and whether they wished to watch the end. After the screening, I asked them to describe their viewing experience, what they learnt from the episode, what they thought other people could have learnt from it, and if (and why) learning from *Who Do You Think You Are?* was different from classroom-learning or book-learning. Although the discussion focused primarily on *Who Do You Think You Are?* they were encouraged to talk about how they learn from television in general.

To complement these discussions, I later analysed online comments posted by other viewers on the programme's official website, SBS.com.au. This allowed me to situate my findings in a broader context of reception beyond the discussion groups. Furthermore, these online comments written by viewers who are familiar with the series and actively engage with its paratext during and after viewing, provide a point of view that is closer to the perspective of fans (Baym, 2000; Scott, 2013). As I show in my case study chapter, some of those online comments support the discussion group participants' views while others reveal learning outcomes that were not mentioned.

### ***Home and Away***

*Home and Away* is a long-running Australian soap opera that follows the lives of the residents of the fictional coastal town Summer Bay. Created by Alan Bateman in 1988, it has been broadcast every evening of the week on the commercial Seven Network for the last twenty-seven years. To ensure consistency with my case study of *Who Do You Think You Are?* I use the same research strategy.

To explore the production perspective, I conducted semi-structured interviews with two scriptwriters who have worked as writer, story producer and script producer on the programme between 2007 and 2012 (whom I refer to as "Writer 1" and "Writer 2") and with a programmer who was working for Seven during the same period (identified as "Seven Programmer"). Interviewing a programmer allowed me to highlight some divergences between the discourse of writers and the perspective of the broadcaster. Although this individual programmer's perceptions may not be representative of the whole company, it provides some insight into Seven's views about their role and responsibility towards their audience.

To understand how their pedagogical discourses and intentions translate into the televisual text, I analysed the eighteen episodes that were broadcast on Seven between 1 November 2011 and 25 November 2011. This sample was selected because the episodes broadcast during that period were written or produced by the writers whom I interviewed. I first conducted a content analysis of these eighteen episodes to identify their educational content and to understand how their textual features potentially invite learning. I then selected some scenes that significantly reveal what the text aims to teach and how it invites learning and analysed these shot-by-shot.

Because the programme is designed primarily to entertain, determining what constitutes educational content in *Home and Away* proved to be a challenging task. My analysis was informed by educational theories and scholarly understandings of education, knowledge and pedagogy (Appiah, 2006; Bloom, 1956; Nussbaum, 2006), as well as previous studies that reveal what television teaches (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Harindranath, 2012; Hartley, 1999; Hawkins, 2001; Klein, 2011, 2013; Lesser, 1975; Lewis, 2008; Lewis et al., 2012; Morrow, 2006; Noble & Noble, 1979; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986; van Vuuren et al., 2013). Tulloch's (1997; 1986) study of *A Country Practice* and van Vuuren, Ward and Coyle's (2013) work on *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* were particularly useful as they show that some Australian soap operas aim to raise awareness about social and personal issues and to promote ethical values and behaviours. Similarly, Hawkins' (2001), Harindranath's (2012) and Lewis' (2008; 2012) arguments about television as teacher of ethics and/or morality provided useful concepts that guided my textual analysis and helped me identify the programme's educational content.

To examine what and how some viewers learn from *Home and Away*, I conducted two discussion groups. Because one of the aims of my thesis is to compare the pedagogy of *Who Do You Think You Are?* to that of *Home and Away*, I selected the same participants for both case studies. This was beneficial because some of them made explicit comparisons between the programmes. As Table 1 shows, my participants knew *Home and Away* and had seen at least one episode before our discussion, with one exception. This exception can be explained by the fact that Ms Goldblum recently migrated to Australia from South Africa where the programme is not broadcast, whereas the others grew up in Australia and have had more opportunities to watch the

programme. Nevertheless, there were some differences between them in terms of familiarity with the programme: Naomi, Lec and Krista were occasional or regular viewers when they were teenagers whereas Arya, Marnie, Wolfgang and Junior had only seen a couple of episodes. However, although Naomi, Lec and Krista regularly watched the programme when they were younger, none were following it at the time of our discussion.

Episode 5426 was screened before the discussion as stimulus material to start the conversation. This episode, which was first broadcast on 14 November 2011, was selected because the writers whom I interviewed were involved in its production and writing and because my textual analysis revealed that several of its storylines can be interpreted as educational. After the episode was screened, I asked the participants to describe their viewing experience, what they learnt from the episode, what they thought other people could have learnt from it, and if (and why) learning from *Home and Away* was different from classroom-learning or book-learning.

### **Advantages and limitations of case studies**

The main advantage of conducting case studies concerns their depth of enquiry. A case study is a deep, narrow and detailed exploration of a phenomenon that highlights its particular complexities (Chadderton & Torrance, 2005; Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Stake, 2000). By using different methods, investigating several sources of evidence and exploring multiple viewpoints for each programme, I aim to provide a deep and holistic analysis of their pedagogies (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Stake, 2000).

However, as Stake (2000) points out, case study analysis always remains incomplete and can only tell a partial story. Moreover, because a case is only “one among others” (p. 436), generalisation is often problematic. There are different ways to address this problem. First, it can be argued that “generalization should not be emphasized in all research” (p. 439) because it is possible to learn from the particular, and that one case is enough to contribute to new knowledge (Chadderton & Torrance, 2005; Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Stake, 2000). From this perspective, understanding the case is more important than generalisation, and cases are not selected because they are typical or representative of a broader category but because they present

opportunities to further theoretical understandings. As noted earlier, my two cases have not been selected because they represent a broader category (documentary series and soap operas, or educational television and entertainment television) but because they each present significant opportunities for learning about televisual pedagogy. These cases offer valuable insights about the pedagogy of television in general and about the pedagogy of educational programmes and entertainment programmes in particular.

Instead of generalisation, some researchers advocate using the concepts of extendability, or naturalistic generalisation, a process by which the reader applies the case study findings to other situations with which he/she is familiar with, so the case study resonates with his/her own experiences (Chadderton & Torrance, 2005; Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Stake, 2005). The findings of my two case studies can potentially be applied to the reader's personal experience of viewing other educational and entertainment programmes, in particular other documentaries and soap operas. In my discussion chapter, I widen the scope of my study by showing how my findings apply to other television programmes. Daymon and Holloway (2002) suggest that case studies can also be generalised to theory if the researcher uncovers patterns and linkages to theory within the case. Following this suggestion, I aim to link the findings from my case studies to theory.

## **Conclusion**

My thesis examines televisual pedagogy as a communicative and conjunctural process that occurs at the intersection between production, text and reception. In this chapter, I have explained how I explore these three moments of the circuit of communication: I investigate producers' discourses through interviews, textual features through textual analysis, and audiences' interpretive activities through discussion groups. By examining these three sites, my aim is to understand how meanings circulate from production to reception, and how teaching and learning interact in the context of televisual communication. Conducting case studies allows me to provide an in-depth view of two television programmes by investigating several sources of evidence and exploring different perspectives. Selecting *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Home and Away* as my case studies allows me to compare the pedagogy of an educational programme and

the pedagogy of an entertainment programme.

Finally, I acknowledge that my findings are socially and culturally situated and inevitably influenced by my intuition and subjectivity. But embracing the subjectivity, the partiality and the incompleteness of one's work does not prevent researchers to produce new knowledge and to develop theory (Morley & Silverstone, 1991).



## **PART TWO**

### **Case studies**

### **Chapter 3: The Pedagogy of *Who Do You Think You Are?***

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from my case study of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, an Australian-made documentary series broadcast on the public service channel SBS, in which celebrities investigate their ancestry to trace their family tree. As I demonstrate throughout this chapter, the programme has overt educational goals, which include teaching history and promoting multiculturalism. To understand its pedagogy, I analyse the discourses of some professionals involved in its production and distribution, its textual features, and its reception by a small sample of viewers.

The first section focuses on the production perspective. I examine the discourse of three professionals involved in its production and broadcasting: how they talk about televisual education, what they aim to teach and what pedagogical techniques and tools they use.

As I point out in my review of the literature, some scholars have previously investigated the relationship between television and education from the perspective of television professionals, but these studies overlook the textual aspects of televisual pedagogy. In the second section, I address this gap by showing how the mise-en-scene, editing and sound of *Who Do You Think You Are?* invite learning.

The third section considers the programme's reception by a small sample of viewers, which includes regular, occasional and first-time viewers. Based on two discussion groups and on my analysis of online comments posted on the SBS website, I examine some audience responses to determine what viewers learn from the programme, how they learn from it and why some do not learn from it.

#### **Production**

According to the producers and programmer I interviewed, one of the main purposes of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is to teach history by exploring a range of historical eras and events through the celebrities' genealogical investigations. Despite some reluctance

towards the label of “educator”, these professionals consciously aim to inform and educate. Further, teaching Australian history is seen as a way to promote multiculturalism and indirectly, to enhance viewers’ ethical awareness. In terms of pedagogy, one of the main ideas that emerged from my interviews is that in order to engage viewers and to invite them to learn, the producers use entertainment techniques. Although they perceive the programme as educational, they favour informal entertainment techniques over more traditional, formal classroom techniques. This differs from the findings of Tulloch and Lupton’s (1997) AIDS study, which indicate that educational programming broadcast on public television rely on hard-hitting, overt teaching techniques. The pedagogy of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, in contrast, is aligned with the entertainment-education strategy and with the edutainment approach of producers of educational children programmes like *Sesame Street* (Klein, 2011, 2013; Lesser, 1975; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993).<sup>10</sup>

### **To educate and entertain: television professionals’ hybrid identity**

The producers I interviewed explicitly say that they aim to educate viewers. Producer 2 identifies as an educator and explains that they draw on their past experience as a high school teacher to produce the programme.<sup>11</sup> For them, there is a clear parallel between producing *Who Do You Think You Are?* and school-teaching: “I was fifteen years a high school teacher before I went into television. And my way into television was largely through literature. I taught literature and history in high school” (Producer 2, Interview, 10 October 2013). Educating viewers is seen as part of their professional mission because *Who Do You Think You Are?* is broadcast on public service television:

I think shows like *Who Do You Think You Are?* that are being commissioned by public service broadcasters - and that’s the really key point - they have within their DNA and within the guidelines of the broadcaster, within the remit, within the charters, that we have to educate and inform. (Producer 2)

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<sup>10</sup> Edutainment can be defined as the combination of education and entertainment.

<sup>11</sup> I use the pronoun “they” in a singular sense. I avoid using the gendered pronouns “he” or “she” to maintain the identity of my interviewees confidential.

Indeed, the SBS charter states that “the principal function of SBS is to provide multilingual and multicultural radio, television and digital media services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians” (SBS, n.d.). The programmer confirms that the SBS charter is inspired by the BBC’s Reithian remit and that the channel’s main mission is to educate:

For us, it’s educating Australians to understand and respect the differences between nationalities and different people [...] Part of that charter is to expose Australians to diversity, and understand that diversity. And it is about educating Australians. (SBS Programmer, Interview, 22 November 2013)

The other executive producer I interviewed is more reluctant to fully embrace the role of educator. When asked about their role being educational, Producer 1 explains:

It’s not a word we would use...a lot... But personally [laughs] I suppose the reason we make documentaries is partly because they’re educational. I mean, we want to change people’s attitudes towards things, which is part of education. So it’s not something that we set out deliberately to do, oh this is going to be educational. What we try to make is...sort of...entertaining information. But I don’t think that those two are mutually exclusive [laughs]. But it’s not something that’s foremost in our minds when we’re making the programme, you know, this has got to be good for...maybe for...history teachers. But it’s always, you know, it’s great when they come back and say we’re using this programme in schools, we’re using it at university or whatever. So we definitely, we don’t fear the education side [laughs]. (Producer 1, Interview, 29 September 2013)

This quote illustrates what Klein (2011) calls “media intellectuals’ split identities” (p. 918): although this producer wants to educate, they are hesitant to openly embrace this function and oscillate between the role of educator and that of entertainer. This “tug between two roles” (p. 918) is also evident in my interview with the programmer:

SBS at the moment is trying to be much more entertaining, because we feel that you need a lot of light and shade in your schedule. Because if you have too worthy a schedule, your audience veers away from you [...] So what we’ve tried to do is actually flesh it out a little bit so that we’ve got more entertainment so that we can actually grow our audience, so people don’t see us...because there

are negative aspects about being seen as a documentary channel.

According to the programmer, SBS' main mission is to provide educational content to their viewers who "like to be informed". But the comment above suggests that even from the perspective of a public broadcaster, educational programmes alone - that is, education without entertainment - are not sufficient to attract viewers and maintain their interest. SBS also aims to provide entertaining content to obtain high ratings.

In the comment above, the programmer implies that there is a separation between programmes that educate and those that entertain. My study of *Who Do You Think You Are?* challenges this binary view by showing that some programmes aim to educate and entertain at the same time. More specifically, my analysis reveals that some educational programmes aim to teach *through entertainment*. Klein's (2011) phrase "split identity" does not exactly describe professionals' self-perception because it implies an internal division between the role of educator and the role of entertainer, whereas in practice these roles are merged. The phrase hybrid identity fits more precisely what Producer 2 describes:

I think that television is a really good medium to entertain and to inform, and educate [...] we have to educate and inform. We don't always achieve that, but I think that the success of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is because it does that so well, along with engaging the audiences emotionally and entertaining them.

The interviewees see themselves as edutainers: they work under the assumption that education and entertainment are not "mutually exclusive" (Producer 1) and, more importantly, that they can be efficiently combined to create "entertaining information" (Producer 1):

I think what shows like *Who Do You Think You Are?* are doing, which is really special, is grabbing from that tune box that is entertainment but putting it in the context of facts and research. (Producer 2)

In other words, these producers use entertainment as a pedagogical tool. The use of televisual entertainment as pedagogical tool is seen by Producer 2 as "really special" because it differentiates *Who Do You Think You Are?* from commercial entertainment programmes that mainly or exclusively seek to provide enjoyment and escapism. For

example, Producer 2 contrasts *Who Do You Think You Are?* with programmes like the reality weight-loss programme *The Biggest Loser* (Broome, 2004-) and competitive talent shows like *Australia's Got Talent* (Cowell & Warwick, 2007-) and *Dancing With the Stars* (Vardanis & Hopkins, 2004-), which also aim to emotionally engage and to entertain their audience but do not use entertainment techniques for educational purposes.

Moreover, the use of entertainment as pedagogical tool is seen as “really special” because it differentiates *Who Do You Think You Are?* from traditional schooling. When asked how the programme teaches, both producers emphasise the aspects of teaching and learning that distinguish their pedagogy from book-learning and formal classroom pedagogy. They claim that the programme’s lessons are shorter, easier, more compelling and more enjoyable than school lessons: “people enjoy learning about history in bite-size pieces; it’s not a demanding history lesson” (Producer 2). They also believe that its pedagogy is more personal than traditional school-based pedagogy: “this is an easy way and an interesting way to digest Australian and some overseas history, because it’s personalised through that celebrity’s journey” (Producer 1). This edutainment approach is in alignment with the conception of television as an informal teacher (Buckingham, 2003; Hartley, 1999). As noted in the Introduction, media scholars like Hartley (1999) and Buckingham (2003) argue that television is a platform of informal teaching and learning that educates children, young people and adults through entertainment. My study of *Who Do You Think You Are?* supports this argument and extends it by demonstrating how and why some television professionals use entertainment techniques as pedagogical tools.

### **Teaching through entertainment**

Entertainment is an experiential response to media content that is characterised by enjoyment and involves different modalities of response, including high levels of cognitive and/or emotional engagement; interest; exhilaration and laughter; curiosity, excitement, thrill and relief; sadness, melancholy and tenderness; sensory delight; suspension of disbelief; empathy; and/or parasocial interactions with media personae or characters (Bryant & Vorderer, 2006; Vorderer et al., 2004). Entertainment techniques

can be used as pedagogical tools because audience members who are entertained are more engaged and attentive: being entertained increases engagement, which is the “degree to which the individual interacts psychologically with a medium or its message” (Wirth, 2006, p. 201), which in turn enhances attention, memory and learning (Bryant & Vorderer, 2006; Vorderer, 2001; Wirth, 2006). As Peter Vorderer (2001) writes:

Media users who feel entertained are more interested, more attentive, and therefore more eager to select, follow, and to process the information given by a program than those who are not [...] In fact, entertainment appears more and more to be a crucial condition for successful information processing. (p. 250)

For the producers and programmer of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, teaching means engaging viewers through entertainment. This is clearly articulated by the programmer: “It’s important for us to have interesting and engaging programmes. [...] I think education comes if it’s interesting...But again it’s that whole thing about how do you engage someone? And education is about engaging”. The three interviewees mention the words “engage”, “engaging” or “engaged” many times to explain how they teach. For example, when asked about pedagogical tools, Producer 1 says:

We use techniques that are worked-out well before hand. And hopefully when people watch the programme, they’re not actually seeing all of the things behind the programme, they’re actually so engaged in the programme that that’s what carries them along.

From their perspective, education, engagement and entertainment are intertwined, and together constitute the foundation of televisual pedagogy.

Although it contradicts some enduring assumptions about the separation between education and entertainment, the idea that television can entertain to teach has been envisaged previously by media professionals and scholars (Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993). The pedagogical role of entertainment was already acknowledged by some of the BBC’s first directors, for whom “in practice it was difficult, even if desirable, to draw a sharp dividing line between ‘entertainment’ and ‘education’” (Briggs, 1995, p. 228). In his history of the BBC, Briggs explains that J.C. Stobart, the channel’s Director of Education from 1925 to 1932, recognised that its

educational talks were too dull to engage listeners. Stobart, who wished to use broadcasting primarily for educational purposes, also understood the importance of enjoyment and entertainment to successfully inform and educate listeners. However, like Reith, he was committed to education above all, and refused to use broadcasting as a mere vehicle for escapism. Although inviting enjoyment, interest and engagement were acceptable - indeed, necessary - goals, in their view entertainment should not be mistaken for cheap sensationalism:

The ultimate success of broadcasting does not, in my opinion, depend upon the provision of a constant series of thrills and stunts. Appetite grows by what it feeds on. We can easily create an appetite for sensation, but in the long run broadcasting will only be accepted as an integral feature in the life of millions in as far as it can provide a steady supply of enjoyment, entertainment and interest. I think we should be well advised not to risk the substance for the shadow (Stobart's Quarterly Report, 15 Aug. to 10 Oct. 1924. Cited in Briggs, 1995, p. 235)

Stobart's view is in alignment with recent communications studies that distinguish hedonistic entertainment, which centres on fun, pleasure and escapism, and eudaimonic entertainment, which is linked to elaborate thinking, enlightenment and insight (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Oliver & Raney, 2014). As my study demonstrates, the concept of eudaimonic entertainment - that is, the merging of enjoyment and learning, pleasure and knowledge - is key in understanding the pedagogy of public broadcasting and the pedagogy of television.

The use of media entertainment as a pedagogical tool was formally theorised and applied in the 1970s by producers of entertainment-education programmes, who have since used entertainment formats to inform and educate viewers in different parts of the world including Mexico, India and Kenya (Klein, 2011, 2013; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993). Singhal, Rogers and Brown (1993) summarise this approach: "the entertainment media are highly popular with audiences. Multinational corporations promote consumerism through entertainment and governments of the world promote political and economic ideologies through entertainment. Why not education?" (p. 14). Studies conducted with producers of entertainment-education programmes and with



producers of commercial entertainment reveal that many television professionals aim to educate and entertain viewers at the same time and often see themselves as edutainers or responsible entertainers (Klein, 2011; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). As mentioned in chapter one, these studies also reveal that television professionals often encourage viewers' referential involvement and emotional responses to invite learning, an edutainment technique that Tulloch and Moran (1986) label "the laughter and tears formula" (p. 272). My case study supports the view that television can teach through entertainment and it expands this notion by exploring the pedagogical use and value of several entertainment elements including celebrities, storytelling and emotions.

### **Teaching history through storytelling and emotions**

One entertainment technique that the producers use as a pedagogical tool is storytelling. Both producers consider that it is particularly useful to teach history, one of their main educational goals. According to the programmer, this educational goal fits with SBS' identity:

[*Who Do You Think You Are*] looks at history and genealogy. And our audience likes to be informed. They like history, they like that sense of delving deep into someone's past. And that's what it does.

Producer 1 explains that the programme makers "like making history programmes and [...] making a broad range of programmes about history and telling our own Australian stories". Here, the link between teaching history and storytelling is explicit: for the producers, teaching history goes beyond delivering facts; it involves "telling stories" in a way that is engaging and entertaining. As Sarah Kozloff (1992) observes in "Narrative Theory and Television", stories are omnipresent in television, even in programmes and genres that are not primarily designed to entertain: "programs that are not ostensibly fictional entertainments, but rather have other goals such as description, education, or argumentation, tend to use narrative as a means to their ends" (p. 68). In *Who Do You Think You Are?*, historical knowledge is not simply delivered but is wrapped up in narratives:

The way the programme is constructed, it's like a detective journey. So, you

know, the well-worn path to creating interest in people, from books, through movies, through television programmes. Going on a journey and a detective experience, uncovering things as you go along is of interest to people [...] So we actually contrive it in a way that they learn that bit of information, which then leads them to that bit of information, which then leads them... So it's a stepping stone technique in a way, and it's carefully constructed so that hopefully you'll get some emotional response at particular points. And the information just keeps building as you go along. So by the time you get to the end of the story, there might be one or two key questions that have been answered. (Producer 1)

Producer 1 refers to the fact that each episode is presented in the form of a story, that is, as an account of connected events. In the series, these sequential events are the discoveries made by the celebrities about their ancestors. Each story follows a similar narrative structure, starting with a question and ending with a resolution that answers the initial question:

Usually we have the reason, the motivation for the person going on the journey, you know, 'Do I come from a musical family? I've always wanted to know, where did that come from? Do I have musical ancestors or is that just something that's come up with me? None of my brothers and sisters is musical and my parents aren't really musical but I am, so where did that come from?' That might be the motivation for somebody. So they'll go on that journey and probably somewhere along the line, they'll discover 'Oh my great-great-great-grandfather was a famous singer, or a famous actor' or whatever it is. So we try to get answers to their motivation for going on the journey. (Producer 1)

*Who Do You Think You Are?* is an episodic series (each episode is a self-contained story) that uses the detective series' narrative formula as a pedagogical tool. Every episode starts with a mystery (the celebrity's "motivation" to go on the genealogical journey), which is investigated throughout the episode and solved by the end. From a narrative perspective, it can be compared to detective programmes like *Cold Case* (Stiehm, 2003-2010), an American police procedural in which a fictional team of Philadelphia homicide detectives investigate unsolved murder cases. As Margaret McFadden (2014) observes, *Cold Case* is not a mere entertainment "cop show" since it

aims to teach history by showing how historical events and contexts affected the lives of ordinary Americans. As in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, the detective series narrative formula - initial mystery followed by the investigation, followed by the resolution - is both entertaining and pedagogic. The characters not only investigate murders, they investigate the past to reveal certain aspects of American history. McFadden quotes the lead actress Kathryn Morris who explains that *Cold Case* is “much more of a ‘whydunnit,’ as opposed to a ‘whodunnit’” (Cited in McFadden, 2014, p. 140): the goal is not only to find the culprit but to understand the crime in its historical context. *Who Do You Think You Are?* uses the same narrative formula to teach history: the initial mystery triggers an investigation, which allows the detective-learner to uncover truths about the past, and which leads to a final answer that resolves the mystery. The producers use this narrative formula as well as other narrative techniques to create suspense, a state of excitement or anxious uncertainty about what may happen next in the plot (Truffaut, Hitchcock, & Scott, 1967), and to encourage feelings of curiosity, excitement and thrill because they assume that these enjoyable feelings increase viewers’ engagement, attention and interest, thus facilitating their learning. In my textual analysis I further analyse the use of narrative techniques as pedagogical tools.

According to McFadden (2014), *Cold Case* also teaches history by encouraging viewers to empathise with people who lived in the past. She argues that the programme invites “viewers to form prosthetic memories of a variety of periods or events in US history, and to see the experiences of people in the past with empathy” (p. 140). My interviews reveal that the producers of *Who Do You Think You Are?* use the same technique to teach history. In addition to storytelling, they consider that encouraging emotions and empathy is one of their main pedagogical techniques. According to Producer 1, “television is an emotional medium. That’s what it should be for [...] And if you’re emotionally engaged in anything, you’re going to learn something”. Producer 2 agrees:

There are lots of programmes on television where you can learn about history. I think what’s so powerful about this show is that it has a very strong emotional arc. The storytelling is absolutely rooted in it being a personal, emotional journey, and that’s what audiences connect with.

For Producer 2, learning requires “connecting to the subject matter on not just an intellectual level”, and teaching means tapping into the viewers’ emotional and somatic responses:

I came very much to the television medium through the intellectual prism and I learnt the hard way that you can’t just deal in ideas, in the medium that is television. You have to actually engage in many ways [...] That visceral response is something is that I knew in the classroom, when I was teaching kids literature.

Indeed, studies in the fields of neuroscience and education highlight the link between learning and emotions. Cognition, emotion and sensations are intertwined: the cognitive and emotional systems, which are both located in the brain, influence each other, as well as body organs such as the heart, lungs or skin (Gilbert, 2012; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Jensen, 1998; Sylwester, 1994). Therefore, learning is cognitive but it is “not a rational or disembodied process” (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007, p. 4):

The high-level cognitive skills taught in schools, including reasoning, decision making, and processes related to language, reading, and mathematics, do not function as rational, disembodied systems, somehow influenced by but detached from emotion and the body. Instead, these crowning evolutionary achievements are grounded in a long history of emotional functions [...] Any competent teacher recognizes that emotions and feelings affect students’ performance and learning, as does the state of the body. (p. 3)

Similarly, in *Teaching With the Brain in Mind* (1998), Eric Jensen argues that “because emotions give us a more stimulated brain, they help us recall things better and form more explicit memories” (p. 71) and that “good learning doesn’t avoid emotions, it embraces them” (p. 72).

The producers of *Who Do You Think You Are?* link viewers’ emotional engagement to empathy, the ability to feel with or feel for another individual (Zillmann, 1995, 2006). This assumption is supported by Zillmann’s (2006) research, which shows that empathy for media personae or characters increases entertainment and emotional engagement whereas indifference decreases those feelings:

The better these affective dispositions are developed by dramatic events, the stronger will be the emotional involvement with the dramatic presentation [...] the more they will hope for some outcomes and fear others, and the more intensely they will experience empathic distress and pleasure. Ultimately, the more the respondents are emotionally touched and taken in by dramatic events, the more likely it is that they will appraise, in retrospect, the drama experience as positive and enlightening. (p. 48)

The producers invite empathic engagement in two ways: they encourage viewers to share the emotions, feelings and experiences of people who lived in the past, and to share the emotions of the celebrities who participate in the programme. The link between empathy, emotional engagement and enjoyment is explicitly formulated by Producer 1:

When they watch somebody connecting to their family, it's such a strong emotional pull, that I think people actually enjoy that...even though it's not them [laughs]. It's vicarious! [...] They definitely, definitely get the emotional...I mean, we do screenings all the time, and people are in tears and laughing. So they definitely identify with the person going on the journey and they sort of share that emotional journey. As you do in dramas and in any other sort of television that works on an emotional level.

This illustrates the intrinsic connection between how the series teaches and what it teaches. The pedagogical technique of encouraging emotions and empathy is linked to the nature and the content of the history lessons taught in the programme. Indeed, in *Who Do You Think You Are?* (as in *Cold Case*), the history lessons focus on how individuals felt rather than facts about major political events. As Producer 2 explains:

You can learn a lot of dates, and you can pass a test, just on knowing, you know, the year that the Blue Mountains were first crossed or the Magna Carta was signed. But what *Who Do You Think You Are?* does is that it takes you on a journey where you get to really feel the experiences of those people who were fighting the battle or climbing the mast.

Thus, the producers not only aim to teach through emotions, but also about individuals' emotional experiences. Although it provides information about major historical events,

the programme's main educational goal is to teach history in an emotional way by exploring individuals' personal experiences of the past. As Producer 2 implies, this educational goal differentiates the programme's pedagogy from traditional book-learning and classroom pedagogy, which tend to emphasise rote learning and assessment of factual knowledge. This emotional approach to teaching history has been praised by historians like Ann Curthoys (2013) who claims that one of the pedagogical strengths of programmes like *Who Do You Think You Are?* is to combine what she calls "men's history" which is the history of major political events, and "women's history" which she describes as the emotional history of families and relationships.

### **Teaching ethics through empathy**

As noted in the Introduction, I conceptualise education with the following outcomes: knowledge (knowing of or knowing about; sometimes referred to as "declarative knowledge"), skills (knowing how to do something; sometimes called "procedural knowledge") and ethics (the knowledge of right and wrong, particularly in relation to others). Based on my interviews, it is possible to argue that the educational goals of *Who Do You Think You Are?* go beyond teaching historical knowledge to include ethics. The producers say that they "want to change people's attitudes towards things" (Producer 1) by teaching ethical values like respect and tolerance. One of their goals is to foster tolerance by informing and educating viewers about different cultures and by teaching them that cultural and ethnic diversity is part of Australian society. The following quote shows how, in their view, teaching history allows them to promote multiculturalism:

We like making a broad range of programmes about history and telling our own Australian stories and particularly the multicultural basis of our history. It's interesting, and I think that a lot of people know the broad Australian stroke, English, British history but they don't really know as much about the migratory history, and the stories of how...when you look at Australia today, it's not an Anglo country as it was, you know. But people, particularly in that fifty plus demographic, they wouldn't have got that at school. It's a way of saying this is our country now, this is where it came from, here's some stories, which you

might not be aware of, and what's happened to people along the way. (Producer 1)

The mention of the “fifty plus demographic” suggests that one of the aims of the programme is to educate older viewers and to fill in some of the gaps of formal education, which aligns with the conception of the media as informal teacher and platform of lifelong learning (Buckingham, 2003; Collins & Halverson, 2009; Gee, 2004; Hartley, 1999).

Moreover, the goal of educating adult viewers about the multicultural foundations of Australian society aligns with SBS' mission to promote multicultural understanding. The channel's charter states that:

- (1) The principal function of SBS is to provide multilingual and multicultural radio, television and digital media services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society.
- (2) SBS, in performing its principal function, must:
  - (a) contribute to meeting the communications needs of Australia's multicultural society, including ethnic, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and
  - (b) increase awareness of the contribution of a diversity of cultures to the continuing development of Australian society; and
  - (c) promote understanding and acceptance of the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of the Australian people; and
  - (d) contribute to the retention and continuing development of language and other cultural skills. (SBS, n.d.)

In “Inventing SBS: Televising the Foreign”, Hawkins and Ang (2007) note that SBS was originally created as a “special” broadcasting service because its aim was to complement the cultural and linguistic perspectives of other sectors. As they explain, by “discovering foreignness [SBS] created new publics and new uses for television” (p. 4). They also argue that unlike other Australian television channels that give meaning to the world from an Anglo-centric Australian point of view, SBS was created to encourage “a

more cosmopolitan habitus” (p. 6). According to the programmer I interviewed, SBS achieves this in two ways: by engaging with the foreign (outside Australia) and by focusing on the multicultural within Australian society (inside Australia). They confirm that promoting tolerance and multiculturalism is the primary educational goal of the channel:

Part of that charter is to expose Australians to diversity... And understand that diversity [...] It's about difference. I think it's about making people understand difference. And that's why part of NITV [National Indigenous Television] became part of SBS because again, it's about understanding how rich our society is.

For SBS and for the producers of *Who Do You Think You Are?* educating about difference goes beyond promoting multiculturalism or informing viewers about a range of national or regional cultures. The channel's main educational goal is to teach Australians to respect difference in all its forms:

For us, it's educating Australians to understand and respect the differences between nationalities and different people. And not only nationalities, but between people, to respect that sense of, you know, to be non-judgemental. To understand what different cultures have, across genders, and all of that, being more accepting, and understanding that diversity. (SBS Programmer)

Multicultural understanding, respect, tolerance, and sympathy are forms of engagement with difference, which, for many, is the foundation of ethics (Berlin, 1992; Dunn, 1988; Hawkins, 2001; Oatley, 1994; Silverstone, 2007). Interestingly, the producers explain that in addition to teaching history and promoting multicultural understanding, they also aim to promote sympathy:

Hopefully it teaches some sort of compassion towards fellow men. Because people, regardless of which country they come from, or regardless of what their background is [...] there are similarities and they're all human experiences that we may not have had all of them, but we can share a lot of them. (Producer 1)

Thus, my interviews support the claims made by Hartley (1999) and Hawkins (2001) about television as teacher of ethics. Hartley argues that television has the capacity to



teach public virtues, neighbourliness and fellow-feeling among citizens and Hawkins claims that it teaches both morality (which she defines as moralizing normativity) and ethics (engagement with difference). According to Hawkins, genres like documentaries teach ethics as engagement with difference whereas lifestyle television and infotainment tend to teach moralising normativity. This is supported by the case of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, a documentary series that aims to teach ethics rather than morality.

Further, my analysis extends Hartley's (1999) and Hawkins' (2001) argument by showing *how* the programme teaches ethics: to foster ethical values like sympathy, the producers invite empathic engagement. As Producer 1's comment suggests, encouraging viewers to "share" certain "human experiences" is a technique they use not only to provide enjoyment and teach history but also to foster compassion. Therefore, the pedagogy of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is in alignment with Nussbaum (2006) and Appiah's (2006) view of education as vehicle for tolerance and cosmopolitanism. As mentioned in my Introduction, Nussbaum argues that education should foster world citizenship and narrative imagination, the ability to empathise and imagine a situation from someone else's perspective. Similarly, Appiah (2006) argues that education should promote cosmopolitanism, which involves curiosity about other cultures and respect for difference. My interviews show that *Who Do You Think You Are?* encourages emotions, empathy and narrative imagination, not to merely entertain and engage, but as pedagogical tools to promote world citizenship, cosmopolitan curiosity and sympathy.

## **Text**

Which, if any, of the producers' and programmer's intentions are revealed in the text? How do their pedagogical discourses and intentions translate into textual features? What lessons are encoded in the text? Using the works of other textual and visual analysts as a guide, I analyse audiovisual elements of mise-en-scene, editing and sound in *Who Do You Think You Are?* to show how they invite viewers to learn. My textual analysis supports the producers' claims that the programme aims to teach history and to educate about multiculturalism. However, it also reveals that the text conveys possibly erroneous lessons, which were not mentioned during my interviews. To invite learning, the series applies some of the codes and conventions of the documentary genre to

persuade viewers that what they see is authentic and that what is taught is accurate, while also using entertainment techniques like emotions and storytelling as pedagogical tools. In particular, my analysis shows how the programme applies the “whodunnit” narrative formula to arouse interest and increase audience engagement. This section thus demonstrates how the producers’ edutainment approach materialises in the text.

### **History, identity and multiculturalism**

*Who Do You Think You Are?* aims to educate viewers about a wide range of historical events and eras. As the description on the back of the DVD cover explains, in the fifth series:

We meet a fifteenth century Maltese medieval magnate and a seventeenth century British Royal musician. We learn about harrowing tales of Australian nineteenth century mental asylums and child mortality, through to twentieth century Hungarian Cold War politics and families separated by war and racism. We meet bushrangers, artists and soldiers; people who left their mark on Australia and their descendants. (Tait, Beaton, & Bryant, 2013)

The historical topics in series five alone are numerous and diverse: Australian soldiers in the First World War (episodes one and eight); nineteenth century child mortality in Europe (episode one); King George IV of England and the evolution of music instruments in Europe during his reign (episode two); the liberation of Hungary from the Nazis by Russia at the end of the Second World War and the crimes committed by the Russian soldiers at the time; the annexation of Eastern European states into the Soviet union after the Second World War, including cooperative farms, Communist propaganda, and protests against the Communist governments (episode three); the transport industry in Australia during the nineteenth century, bushrangers and the Gold Rush (episode four); the cultural assimilation of Greek migrants after the Second World War (episode five); violent conflicts between Whites and Aboriginals over the Australian land (episode seven); and the history of mental health treatment (episodes six and eight).

But the educational content of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is not limited to

history lessons. As its title suggests, the series also addresses questions of identity. The questions “who were my ancestors?” and “where do I come from?” are explored to answer another question: “who am I?” By constantly drawing parallels between the celebrities and their ancestors, the programme suggests that identity and personality are partly inherited. In every episode, the genealogical investigation reveals alleged similarities between the celebrity and their ancestors, implying that certain personality traits are hardwired and transmitted from generation to generation. For example, in the second episode of the fifth series, actress Asher Keddie discovers that she comes from a long line of artistic performers, including an Australian theatre actress and a nineteenth century British musician; she concludes that “the gene is still strong, very strong” (Peddie [Director], 2013a). In the seventh episode, media presenter Rove McManus, who initially believes that he is the only creative person in his sport-oriented family, discovers that one of his ancestors was a painter and concludes that “it’s just purely in my DNA that I too do little doodles” (Pitt [Director], 2013). Actor Michael Caton, actress Susie Porter and actor John Howard have similar experiences. Although it is not explicitly formulated, the text teaches that personality is hereditary. This claim is questionable and the programme does not provide any scientific evidence that those personality traits are indeed genetically inherited. The notion that personality is hereditary is certainly disputable, but this debate is beyond the scope of my thesis. What is significant for the purpose of my research is that this possibly erroneous idea is linked to viewers’ pleasure: indeed, the producers intentionally link individual identity to lineage because they believe that this sense of belonging is what viewers want. This “lesson” aims to provide enjoyment:

At the moment, there’s less community in our society. And I think people are missing that sense of community. Of course, the core of the community begins with the family, and because so many families are split up or living in different places geographically, I think that people are missing that. So when you watch this programme, it’s about people connecting with their family, with their ancestors, or it might be their parents or grandparents, depending on the story. When they watch somebody connecting to their family [...] I think people actually enjoy that. (Producer 1)

This enjoyable process of connecting with one’s family and identity is described at the

end of the eighth episode by Howard, who admits that after investigating his ancestry he now understands better where his personality “comes from”:

What resonates is an increasing feeling of belonging to a tribe, even though I’ve only found out about part of it. There is a kind of veil being lifted. It’s as though I’m reaching back into my own DNA. It does make one feel like one is a part of a stream of creation. And it makes me feel less selfish, less self-centred. I feel like I belong to that tribe more than I did when I started. (Peddie [Director], 2013b)

This lesson about heredity raises questions about what constitutes televisual teaching and education. If the aim of education is to further knowledge, skills and ethics, is television’s “bad” teaching (that is, its incorrect or possibly unethical lessons) part of televisual pedagogy? I explore this question in my discussion chapter.

In *Who Do You Think You Are?* the notion of community and collective identity goes beyond individuals’ family histories to include national heritage. The programme does not only answer the questions “who am I?”, “where do I come from?” but also “who are *we*, Australians?”, “where do *we*, Australians, come from?” In the last scene of the fourth episode, Caton reflects on what he has learnt from his genealogical journey:

The twenty first century is whizzing up and down there on that main road with probably no idea what transpired here. Probably the story of the twenty first century, in a way. And probably why *Who Do You Think You Are?* takes people back on that journey. To remind us where we came from. (Vines [Director], 2013)

The use of the pronoun “we” in Caton’s last sentence is ambiguous, but this “we” may be understood as the Australian people. By “reminding” Australians where they came from, that is, who their ancestors were and how they lived, the programme aims to teach Australian identity, thus participating in the construction of what Benedict Anderson (1983) calls an “imagined community”. According to Anderson, national communities are “imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). Media texts like *Who Do You Think You Are?*

contribute to the creation of an imagined Australian community by producing and circulating shared images of national identity. For example, Australianness is connoted by the celebrities (who are famous Australians) and by some of the backgrounds and settings.



**Wide shots denoting Australia**

Moreover, the programme explores Australia's past by addressing topics such as convicts and the British colonies (episode five); conflicts between White settlers and Aboriginal peoples over land ownership (episode seven); the role of Australian soldiers during the First World War (episode eight); the White Australia policy (episode one) and so on. After learning that his ancestors were convicts, actor Lex Marinos says that he is proud of this heritage because it is "quintessentially what Australia is about" (Pavlou [Director], 2013), thus underlining the link between collective history and identity.

As the producers explain, the programme also aims to teach that cultural diversity is part of the Australian identity. This is in alignment with SBS' educational objective to "increase awareness of the contribution of a diversity of cultures to the continuing development of Australian society" (SBS, n.d.). On its production company's website, the series is described as follows:

Considering Australia's multicultural background, this is a global story, with each celebrity tracing their ancestors around the world. They travel to the places where their forebears would have lived, loved and died, and learn about the hardships and hurdles their ancestors overcame. This is a fascinating chronicle of the social, ethnic and cultural evolution of Australia's national identity. (Artemisfilms, n.d.)

A close reading of the text confirms that it aims to promote multiculturalism. The

famous Australians who participate in the programme often mention their migrant background or multicultural identity: in episode one, comedian Adam Hills mentions his European and migrant background; at the beginning of episode three, actor Don Hany speaks about his Iraqi and Hungarian heritage; similarly, in the opening sequence of episode five, Marininos talks about his Greek Australian identity: "for me, in terms of identity, I define myself as Greek Australian. I'm born in Australia, I've grown up in Australia, but I come from Greek heritage. That's the culture that I identify with" (Pavlou [Director], 2013). In the series, exploring Australians' cultural heritages necessarily involves learning about migrants and about the history of other countries. In the first three episodes of the fifth series, the celebrities travel overseas to investigate their family history: Hills to Czech Republic and Malta, Keddie to the United Kingdom and Hany to Hungary. In the shots below, foreignness is signified by the background and through the depth of field. The connection between Australia and the rest of the world is suggested by the visual association between the Australian celebrity in the foreground and the foreign setting in the background.



**Australia's multicultural heritage: Keddie in the UK (left) and Hills in Malta (right)**

Most foreign experts in the programme speak English; however some of the people who the celebrities meet overseas speak in their native language. In these sequences, foreign languages are spoken and subtitles or interpreters are used. Although this does not happen in every episode, these sequences expose Australian viewers to languages other than English, which is another aspect of SBS' educational mission, as stated in their charter (Hawkins & Ang, 2007; SBS, n.d.). By highlighting the multicultural dimension of Australia's history and heritage, *Who Do You Think You Are?* aims to inform and educate viewers about other countries' cultures and histories and to teach that cultural diversity is a fundamental component of Australian identity. Although the fifth series does not feature any Aboriginal celebrity, the programme has explored Aboriginal

history in episodes from the first, fourth and sixth series.

In regard to multiculturalism, the programme's repetitive and episodic structure contributes to its pedagogy. It is through the assemblage of different historical journeys and cultural heritages that *Who Do You Think You Are?* "works through" (Ellis, 2000) multiculturalism. The programme does not only educate about multiculturalism in individual episodes but through the accumulation of episodes: it is by juxtaposing stories about different backgrounds and cultures *across* the series that it is able to represent Australia as a multicultural patchwork. As John Ellis (1992) points out, this repetitive and episodic structure distinguishes televisual narratives from cinematic narratives. This is significant because it highlights an aspect of televisual pedagogy that is unique to television (and possibly other serialised media).

### **Teaching by persuading: the rhetoric of the documentary**

How does the text educate about history, identity and multiculturalism? By what means does it invite learning? One of the pedagogical techniques of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is to persuade viewers by using some of the conventions of the documentary. This highlights the textual and generic intricacy of the series, which draws upon seemingly disparate genres. Although the programme uses the "whodunnit" detective series narrative formula as a pedagogical tool (as I explore further below), it also brings into play the conventions of the documentary genre. According to Michael Renov (1993), the persuasive modality, which is linked to documentary's "truth claim", is intrinsic to all documentary forms: "the documentary 'truth claim' (which says, at the very least: 'Believe me, I'm of the world') is the baseline for persuasion for all of nonfiction, from propaganda to rock doc" (p. 30). I next demonstrate that *Who Do You Think You Are?* aims to persuade viewers in two ways: by using some of the conventions of expository documentary and by using some of the conventions of observational documentary (Nichols, 2001). Here, I refer to concepts developed by Bill Nichols in *Introduction to Documentary* (2001). Although Nichols' taxonomy has been criticised by other theorists (Bruzzi, 2000), it provides a useful model for my purpose as it describes two documentaries modes (expository and observational) that overlap in the text and are inherent to its pedagogy.

*Who Do You Think You Are?* uses some of the conventions of the expository documentary as pedagogical tools to inform, explain and persuade viewers. According to Nichols (2001), the expository mode of documentary presents certain viewpoints or arguments and emphasises objectivity and omniscience in order to persuade viewers. In this mode, objectivity and omniscience are usually signified by a so-called Voice-of-God commentary that directly addresses the viewer: “the professional commentator’s official tone, like the authoritative manner of news anchors and reporters, strives to build a sense of credibility from qualities such as distance, neutrality [...] or omniscience” (p. 107). In *Who Do You Think You Are?* the voice of Richard Mellick, the male narrator who provides the commentary in each episode, connotes knowledge and intellectual authority through its elocution, didactic tone and cultivated Australian accent. Moreover, the narrator is heterodiegetic, in that he does not take part in the story world. Anonymous and faceless, he is heard but never shown or identified in the episodes.<sup>12</sup> As Kozloff (1992) explains, heterodiegetic narrators are often used in television to connote authority and objectivity: “the vast majority of television narrators strive for neutrality and self-effacement, as if viewers are supposed to overlook the fact that the story is coming through a mediator and instead believe that they are looking in on reality” (p. 83). Homodiegetic narrators, on the other hand, sound less objective because they are directly involved in the action (Kozloff, 1992). In early episodes of the American version of *Who Do You Think You Are?* (Graham, 2010-), for example, the voiceover narration is at times spoken by an heterodiegetic male narrator and at times by the homodiegetic celebrity who speaks in the first person about his/her genealogical journey. These sequences put more emphasis on the celebrities and on the personal and emotional dimensions of the text whereas the narrator’s voiceover commentary in the Australian version conveys a sense of objectivity, neutrality and authority.

In expository sequences, the narrator provides information about historical events while the archival images illustrate his commentary. In these sequences, it is the narrator’s spoken words that deliver the history lesson while the images only play a supporting role. As Nichols (2001) writes, “expository documentary facilitates generalization and large-scale argumentation. The images can support the basic claims

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Mellick is credited as “narrator” in the closing credits.



of a general argument rather than construct a vivid sense of [...] particularities” (pp. 108-109). The expository mode of documentary is also characterised by evidentiary editing, a style that sacrifices spatial and temporal continuity and privileges explanatory and argumentative logic. Although continuity editing is also used in the programme, evidentiary editing is frequently employed to support the explanatory logic of the spoken commentary.

The following extract from the third episode of the fifth series illustrates how the text uses some of the conventions of the expository documentary as pedagogical tools to inform, explain and persuade. Here, the narrator provides information about the collective farms established in Communist Hungary after the Second World War.



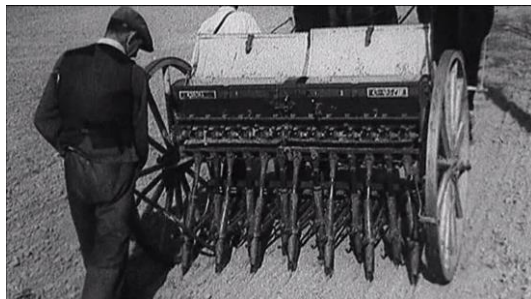
**Shot 1 (image)**

B&W, grainy, archival footage of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century farmer ploughing a field.

**Shot 1 (sound)**

[Voiceover] *Collective farms...*

Bright, folk music with upbeat strings.



**Shot 2 (image)**

Straight cut to archival footage of early 20<sup>th</sup> century farmer walking behind a horse-drawn plough.

**Shot 2 (sound)**

[Voiceover]...*were an early initiative of Hungary's post war...*

Music still playing.






**Shot 3 (image)**

Straight cut to archival footage of a large group of early 20<sup>th</sup> century farmers shaking hands in a field.

**Shot 3 (sound)**

[Voiceover]...*Communist government. All large private properties were...*

Music still playing.

	<p><b>Shot 4 (image)</b></p> <p>Straight cut to archival footage of another group of early 20<sup>th</sup> century farmers standing in a field.</p>	<p><b>Shot 4 (sound)</b></p> <p>[Voiceover]...<i>confiscated and absorbed into the collective.</i></p> <p>Music still playing.</p>
	<p><b>Shot 5 (image)</b></p> <p>Straight cut to B&amp;W, grainy CU of two hands peeling a cob kernel in a field.</p>	<p><b>Shot 5 (sound)</b></p> <p>[Voiceover] <i>All products would be divided up and shared, with twenty five percent...</i></p> <p>Music transitions to a soft clarinet solo.</p>
	<p><b>Shot 6 (image)</b></p> <p>Straight cut to B&amp;W, grainy CU of a hand picking three potatoes in a field.</p>	<p><b>Shot 6 (sound)</b></p> <p>[Voiceover]...<i>going straight to the Soviet Union.</i></p> <p>Clarinet solo finishes.</p>

(Bare [Director], 2013)

The history lesson delivered in this extract is entirely contained by the spoken words. The images, which are subordinate to the commentary, are not used “to construct a vivid sense of particularities” (Nichols, 2001, p. 109) but only to provide a visual support to the general claims made by the narrator. For example, the farmers in shots 1, 2, 3 and 4 are not shown because of their particular, individual stories, but to provide a loose illustration for the narrator’s commentary. As in most expository documentaries, the editing is used to support the narrator’s commentary while sacrificing spatial and temporal continuity.

Another pedagogical technique of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is to signify actuality by using some of the conventions of the observational documentary. One of the features of observational documentaries is that they aim to give the impression that they spontaneously and faithfully record actual events as they happen (Nichols, 2001;

Thompson, 2007). Nichols (2001) compares this mode to Italian Neorealism: “we look in on life as it is lived. Social actors engage with one another, ignoring the filmmakers” (p. 111). In observational scenes, the celebrities and other social actors engage with one another without acknowledging the camera’s presence. In those scenes, various textual features are used to signify actuality: natural sounds, natural light or shaky hand-held camera, for example, often connote the unprepared, unrehearsed recording of real life as it happens. This is usually reinforced by the congruence between the duration of the scene and the diegetic time (that is, the duration of the action that is represented).

Furthermore, the text signifies authenticity by showing famous Australians as ordinary people in ordinary settings or engaging in mundane activities. As the programmer points out:

It shows people that you see as, you know, personalities or stars that you can never get to, and what it does is that it actually shows them as real people and it makes you realise that those people actually, they’re the same as you and I!

Applied to the celebrities in the programme, the word “real” has several meanings: it refers to their actuality, which is the quality of existing in the profilmic world; their typicality which is the quality of being “representative of ‘regular’ people or to a large proportion of a real-world population” (Hall, 2003, p. 632), and their authenticity, which is the quality of being genuine. Celebrities are “real” in the sense that they actually exist in the profilmic world. But in this context showing celebrities “as real people” also means showing them as typical, ordinary individuals whom the audience can relate to and identify with (as the programmer says, “they’re the same as you and I!”) and as behaving genuinely and authentically instead of performing a persona or playing a role. This “engagement with the immediate, intimate and personal as it occurs” (Nichols, 2001, p. 113) is part of the rhetoric of the observational documentary.

Showing celebrities in their private, everyday lives and intimate moments (instead of their public personae) is part of the programme’s entertaining dimension but it is also a technique used to connote the real and the authentic. As Sarah Thomas (2014), Alice Marwich and danah boyd (2011) note, audiences usually perceive celebrities’ personae as tightly controlled and manufactured. Instead of representing stars through their artificial public personae, *Who Do You Think You Are?* offers

glimpses into their “real” lives and authentic selves, thus giving viewers “backstage access to the famous”(Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 144). In this regard, the programme is comparable to other media texts such as celebrealty programmes and social networking services like Twitter and Instagram, which construct more authentic, personal and intimate presentations of celebrities (Ellcessor, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Muntean & Petersen, 2009; Thomas, 2014). Nonetheless, the authentic and intimate celebrity self that is disclosed in such media texts remains a performance and should not be mistaken for “an unmediated form of authentic self-presentation” (Thomas, 2014, p. 246).



**Ordinary people in everyday settings: Hills at home with his family**

Most documentaries aim to give the impression that they authentically represent actual events that happen in the profilmic world (Renov, 1993; Spence & Navarro, 2011). As Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro (2011) write:

Whereas fiction films may allude to actual events, documentaries usually claim that those events did take place in such and such a way, and that the images and sounds on the screen are accurate and reliable [...] Most documentaries - if not all of them – have something to say about the world and, in one way or another, they want to be trusted by their audience. (p. 13)

Similarly, Nichols (2001) writes that, as documentary viewers, “we uphold our belief in the authenticity of the historical world represented on screen [...] we assume that documentary sounds and images have the authenticity of evidence” (pp. 36-37). This is supported by Austin’s (2005) reception study of documentary films in the United Kingdom. Based on a series of questionnaires, he shows that although viewers do not naively accept documentaries as transparent, unmediated reflections of reality, most expect documentaries to give them “access to the real” (p. 11). According to him, these generic expectations about authenticity contribute to documentaries’ authority. Based on

my textual analysis of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, I argue that its implied audience must trust that the programme authentically represents actual events and individuals, and must perceive it as an accurate and reliable source of knowledge about the historical world in order to “attain a meaningful encounter” (Barker & Austin, 2000, p. 48) with it. In order to learn, the implied audience must be persuaded by the rhetoric of the documentary, which “promises information and knowledge, insight and awareness” (Nichols, 2001, p. 40). The implied audience does not predict actual audiences’ responses (which I examine in the “reception” section of this chapter) but it is an important aspect of the programme’s pedagogy. For the text to be read as a “history lesson” (p. 39), viewers must believe that it is an authentic representation and a trustworthy source of knowledge. My discussion groups allow me to test this argument.

### **Teaching through storytelling: the detective investigation**

My textual analysis confirms that *Who Do You Think You Are?* teaches through storytelling, an entertainment technique used to create suspense and arouse feelings of curiosity and thrill. As Producer 1 explains, each episode is constructed as a detective story. Although documentaries and detective series are seemingly dissimilar genres (the former being traditionally associated with education and the latter with entertainment) the “problem-solving” or detective story structure is often used in documentaries (Nichols, 2001). The theme of the detective investigation, which is omnipresent in the text and influences its narrative organisation, is linked to pedagogy. The celebrity, who performs as learner, also acts as a detective. In the text, learning always means investigating: the learner-detective seeks information, inquires, searches, researches, examines and studies.

As noted earlier, the detective investigation follows a specific narrative structure, starting with a question and ending with a resolution. The initial question concerns the celebrity’s ancestry and sometimes one of their personality traits. These opening questions, which are consciously devised by the producers to arouse viewers’ curiosity, set up the narrative. In the seventh episode of the fifth series, the story begins with a question McManus asks about himself:

The one thing I always had as a kid was the ability to draw. And much of what I

do now on a performance level comes from the same place, which is just this sense of imagination. I'd be very interested to see if there is anyone on my bloodline that I can connect with on that level. (Pitt [Director], 2013)

As the story unfolds, McManus, the learner-detective, makes discoveries about his ancestry. However, the initial question remains unanswered for most of the episode:

Voiceover: Rove has found out so much about his grandfather and his great grandfather, but the puzzle is still hasn't cracked is himself. Why has he always felt like a bit of a black sheep?



Rove McManus: My family is a very sports-orientated family [...] I still want to know where this creative element to my personality comes from, because there's not many other members of my family that have it [...] There's this part of me that says what happened? Where did I go wrong? Why do I struggle to kick a football straight?

At the end of the episode, McManus formulates the answer that resolves the narrative and concludes the story: "my great-great-great grandfather is where all of this has come from".

In addition, the text uses other narrative devices to build dramatic tension. For example, the narrator often creates an effect of suspense at the end of a sequence by asking questions such as "what happened? Did the family stay together?" (Vines [Director], 2013) and "but what else remains hidden along that branch of the family tree?" (Pavlou [Director], 2013). As Kozloff (1992) notes, televisual narratives often build suspense and tension by prompting series of questions: "as soon as one question is answered, another, seeming equally critical takes its place" (p. 74). The narrator also builds suspense by foreshadowing what will happen next in the story: "but there was still one remarkable twist in store"; "by looking into Violet's life, Asher will discover uncanny parallels to her own" (Peddie [Director], 2013a), "Susie is about to find out another family secret, and another ancestor whose legacy will stay with her forever" (Wilkins [Director], 2013). These questions and clues are usually followed by a fade-out transition that marks a narrative break, thus reinforcing the suspense by creating a short cliff-hanger effect. These narrative pauses often coincide with advertisement breaks: as in many television narratives, the text is tailored "to fit naturally around

commercial breaks [...] shows build their stories to a high point of interest before each break to ensure that the audience will stay tuned” (Kozloff, 1992, p. 90). From a narrative perspective, *Who Do You Think You Are?* is comparable to episodic series such as detective and action programmes, which “break down into a series of clinches whose motivation is provided by a narrative enigma (a mystery)” (Ellis, 1992, p. 152). Furthermore, as in most episodic detective series, the mystery is resolved at the end of each episode, but there is no narrative development across the series. The same problematic (the celebrity’s identity quest) is repeated in every new episode: as Ellis writes, “the basic problematic of the series [...] is itself a stable state” (p. 156). Finally, as in many fictional and factual television programmes (and films), music is used to underline dramatic tension or creates relief through pace, volume and continuity.

The extract below from the third episode of the fifth series illustrates how these textual features contribute to create dramatic tension. Hany has travelled to Hungary where he has learnt that his grandfather Jozsef, an active member of the Communist Party after the Second World War, who was imprisoned during the 1956 anti-Communist revolution. In this sequence, he is visiting the building where Jozsef was held captive and wonders why his grandfather remained dedicated to the Communist Party:

	<p><b>Shot 1 (image)</b></p> <p>Hany in the building where his grandfather was held captive.</p>	<p><b>Shot 1 (sound)</b></p> <p>[Hany, voiceover] <i>I think he probably thought, it’s worked for me now and that should always work for me.</i></p> <p>Piano solo connoting Eastern European atmosphere.</p>
	<p><b>Shot 2 (image)</b></p> <p>Straight cut to B&amp;W photograph of Hany’s grandfather, Jozsef.</p>	<p><b>Shot 2 (sound)</b></p> <p>[Voiceover] <i>So what became of Jozsef Szabo in later years, once the dust of the uprising had settled?</i></p> <p>Long, high-pitched note on strings (violin) with piano.</p>





**Shot 3 (image)**

Straight cut to Hany sitting outside speaking directly to the camera. Town of Eger (Hungary) in the background.

**Shot 3 (sound)**

[Hany] *I'm interested in learning what happened after Jozsef returned home and whether or not things went back to normal.*

Low-pitched, slow piano.

(Bare [Director], 2013)

In this extract, several textual features create dramatic tension. The question asked by the narrator in shot 2 aims to arouse viewers' curiosity about what may be discovered next, an effect reinforced by Hany's comment in the next shot. The dramatic tension created by the narrator's question in shot 2 is underlined by the long, high-pitched note played on strings (violin) and piano and is then resolved by the low pitched, slower paced piano in shot 3. These techniques are primarily designed to provide an enjoyable sense of curiosity, suspense, thrill and relief, but as the producers and entertainment scholars explain, they also function as pedagogical tools designed to increase viewers' cognitive and emotional engagement with the text (Bryant & Vorderer, 2006; Vorderer, 2001; Wirth, 2006).

Facilitating viewers' emotional engagement is indeed one of the main pedagogical techniques used by the producers. In the final part of my textual analysis, I focus on this particular aspect of the programme's pedagogy to show how the text invites learning by representing and encouraging emotions.

### **Teaching through emotions**

For the producers, the theme of the detective investigation is linked to that of the journey. In the text, learning history is presented both as a detective investigation and as a journey. The celebrities are not simply taught: they learn history experientially. Instead of sitting in a classroom and listening to a teacher telling them about their family history, they learn by doing, experiencing and exploring. The pedagogical journey is both spatial and temporal: the celebrities travel around Australia and overseas as they metaphorically travel back in time to learn about their family history. In every episode, the motif of the spatiotemporal journey is symbolised visually by vehicles,



aircrafts or ships and by walking, as well as camera movements such as panning and tracking shots.



**Hills on his spatiotemporal journey**

This learning journey/detective investigation is not represented as a purely cognitive process, but as a bodily and emotional experience. The pedagogical journey takes the celebrity's body to the physical locations where their ancestors lived, which become experiential sites of learning. Learning involves being physically present in those spaces and seeing or touching certain historical artefacts. For example, in the eighth episode, Howard repeatedly touches the wall of a church that was built by his great-great grandfather saying "it is the first thing that I've been able to touch that connects me with him. A little bit of this country where I can see evidence of one my ancestors' trading" (Peddie [Director], 2013b).



**Physicality: Howard touches a church built by his ancestor in 1865**

In this scene, learning is also represented as an emotional process: Howard is visibly

moved by this experience. Because history is taught through the lens of the personal - and perhaps because it is so deeply intertwined with questions of identity - learning often involves strong emotional responses. Emotion is represented in every episode, as illustrated by the shots below:



**Learning as an emotional and embodied experience**

This draws attention to another link between pedagogy and educational content. Here, how the celebrities learn is influenced by what they learn. They learn through emotions because they are learning about their own family and about the personal, intimate and emotional experiences that their ancestors endured. Instead of teaching history in broad, abstract terms, the history lessons focus on how certain individuals felt and experienced the past.

More specifically, the history of major political events (which Curthoys calls “men’s history”) is taught through the history of families and personal relationships (“women’s history”). The third episode of the fifth series, for instance, explains historical events through the example of Hany’s grandparents’ personal lives. At one point, Hany discovers that his grandfather asked the Communist Party’s local committee to investigate his wife’s alleged infidelity. In one sequence, a black and white montage of archival films shows a series of post-war weddings while the narrator’s voiceover explains:

With religion now banned throughout the Eastern bloc, it was the Communist Party that became the arbiter of all morals and values. In the new Hungary, private lives were public property. The aim was to mould traditionally Catholic Hungarians into model socialist citizens. And it was up to party officials like Jozsef to set a good example. (Bare [Director], 2013)



#### Political history, family history and personal lives

This extract shows how the programme interweaves a particular family history with “men’s history” and “women’s history”. Here, Hany’s grandparents’ private lives (their individual family history) are both the object of the history lesson and the example through which broader history lessons are taught. But these broader lessons do not focus exclusively on major political events: they also aim to educate viewers about the history of families and relationships by showing how major events affected people in their everyday, private and personal lives.

This emphasis on the personal, the private and the emotional relates to what the

celebrities learn, how they learn and, sometimes, who teaches. Although the role of teacher is often assumed in the text by historians and experts, it is sometimes performed by direct witnesses. In these scenes, the witness provides facts or explanations based on their own personal and emotional experience, unlike experts, who provide facts and explanations based on the intellectual knowledge that they have gained from formal education. By representing direct witnesses as teachers, the programme suggests that history is not merely about expert intellectual knowledge, but that it can (and should) be taught by ordinary people who have a direct, personal and emotional experience of the past.



**Witnesses as teachers: war veteran Arthur Leggett teaching McManus about WWI**

The programme thus represents teaching and learning as embodied and emotional processes. But the text goes beyond simply representing emotions: it encourages viewers' emotional responses. Like the celebrities, viewers are invited to learn through emotions. The representation of the celebrities' emotional reactions in the text, for instance, is a pedagogical tool used to encourage viewers' emotional responses through empathy. Indeed, as communication researchers show, empathic reactions are an important aspect of parasocial interactions with media personae (Klimmt, Hartman, & Schramm, 2006).

The example below shows how the programme invites viewers' emotional responses through various textual features and why this can be considered a pedagogical technique. This extract is taken from the second episode of the fifth series, in which Keddie visits a house in Melbourne where her great-great grandmother and her great-great-aunt Violet Varley lived. In this scene, she learns that Violet, with whom she identifies, died when she was twenty three.



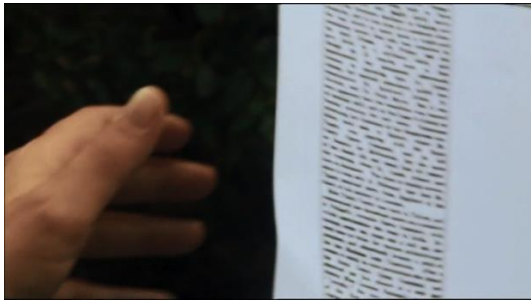


### Shot 1 (image)

CU of Keddie reading the obituaries. Hand-held camera follows the movement of her head.

### Shot 1 (sound)

[Keddie] *Oh* [pauses] *So she* [pauses] *She died at twenty three* [pauses] *What a shock, sorry, I thought we were just at the beginning of her story.*  
Rustling. Distant traffic.



### Shot 2 (image)

Straight cut to CU on obituaries. Keddie grasps it. The camera tilts up to show the top of the document.

### Shot 2 (sound)

[Keddie, off-screen, starts reading Violet's obituary] *"By the lamented death of Violet Varley..."*  
Car horn beeping in the distance.

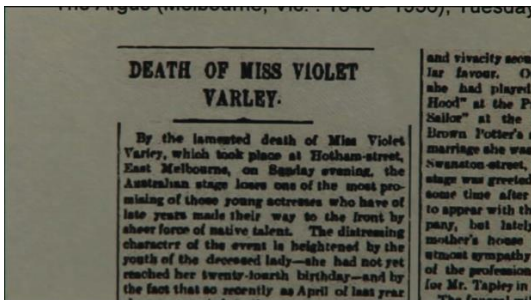


### Shot 3 (image)

Straight cut to CU of Keddie, reading the obituary.

### Shot 3 (sound)

[Keddie, reading the obituary]...*which took place at Hotham Street, East Melbourne, on Sunday...*



### Shot 4 (image)

Straight cut to CU on the obituaries. The text is in sharp focus and big enough to be read by the viewers.

### Shot 4 (sound)

[Keddie, off-screen, reading the obituary]...*evening, the Australian stage loses one of the most promising of those young actresses...*







### Shot 5 (image)

Straight cut to CU of Keddie's face. She touches her chest and hair.

### Shot 5 (sound)

[Keddie]... *who have, of late" ...Sorry I'm really, er, moved by this because I just learnt... oh...*

	<p><b>Shot 6 (image)</b></p> <p>Straight cut to B&amp;W photograph of Keddie's great great aunt, Violet Varley.</p>	<p><b>Shot 6 (sound)</b></p> <p>[Keddie sighs] <i>Oh well.</i></p> <p>A piano solo starts playing a simple, nostalgic melody, supported by a single sustained note played on strings.</p>
	<p><b>Shot 7 (image)</b></p> <p>Straight cut to CU of Keddie, wiping tears, looking away from the camera.</p>	<p><b>Shot 7 (sound)</b></p> <p>[Keddie] <i>It was nice knowing about her... I mean it's been amazing, finding out...</i></p> <p>Music still playing. Sound of birds and traffic in the background.</p>
	<p><b>Shot 8 (image)</b></p> <p>Straight cut to same photograph of Violet Varley as in shot 6. Slow zoom-in on her face.</p>	<p><b>Shot 8 (sound)</b></p> <p>[Keddie, off-screen]: <i>about her. I just felt...like I knew, I knew her, in some, I don't know, I felt like I, I, I...</i></p> <p>Music still playing.</p>
	<p><b>Shot 9 (image)</b></p> <p>Straight cut to CU of Keddie's face, talking to historian Elizabeth Kumm, who is off-screen.</p>	<p><b>Shot 9 (sound)</b></p> <p>[Keddie] <i>I understood where she'd come from is what I'm trynna say. I got it.</i></p> <p>Music still playing. Sound of birds and traffic in the background.</p>

(Peddie [Director], 2013a)

This scene both represents and invites emotional responses. Because she identifies with Violet, Keddie is saddened to learn that she died young. Her sadness is signified by the dialogue and by her facial expressions and gestures: she cries, wipes her tears, touches her chest and hair, nods, looks away, sighs. In shot 5, she tries to read the obituary but interrupts herself because she is overwhelmed by emotion. In shot 1, her emotions are conveyed through her words and silences (the three-second pauses after she says “oh”, “so she” and “she died at twenty three”). This first shot is longer than the other shots (it

lasts about twenty seconds), which creates an impression of authenticity as if the viewer can see real, un-staged emotion as it is happening. Indeed, long takes can be used to stress authenticity and intimacy, particularly in close ups (Monaco, 2000). To focus the viewer's attention on Keddie's emotional responses, her face is filmed straight-on and at eye-level in shots 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9. The use of close ups with a short depth of field means that very few elements are visible in these shots apart from her face. Thus, the cinematography mainly portrays and highlights the celebrity's emotions. It is also worth noting that this scene is taking place in Violet's former home: here, the celebrity learns history by inhabiting a physical space where her ancestors lived. As mentioned earlier, learning is represented as an emotional and corporal experience.

What is important in terms of pedagogy is that the camera distance and movements, editing, music and sounds are used to encourage viewers' empathy and emotional responses. The use of close ups, for instance, gives an impression of physical and emotional proximity with Keddie. As textual and visual analysts have shown, close-ups are often used not only to signify emotions but also to invite empathy and intimate understanding of the persona or character (Hansen et al., 1998; Lury, 2005; Scollon & Scollon, 2003): "a close-up photograph of a person's face signals a close relationship between the person in the photo and the viewer of the photo because the close-up is analogized on the social relationship of intimate and personal distance" (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. xii). In addition, some techniques are used to represent Keddie's point of view, thus inviting viewers' empathy: the camera tilt up in shot 2 simulates her point of view as she grasps the document and starts reading it. This is reinforced in shot 3, where the viewer can read the words that she is reading out loud. In shots 1 to 5, the editing creates spatial and temporal continuity by matching on action through shot/reverse shot and eye-line matching. The use of continuity editing means that the image follows closely the actress' actions and reactions, thus encouraging the viewer to embrace her point of view and to empathise with her (Monaco, 2000). The zoom-in in shot 8, which underlines the intimate connection that Keddie feels with her ancestor, and the sad piano solo supported by strings in shots 6 to 9 further encourage viewers' emotional responses.

Moreover, to provoke emotions in the audience, this extract connotes the real – more specifically, actuality, typicality and authenticity (Hall, 2003). Following the

conventions of the observational documentary, the text signifies actuality through the shaky hand-held camera and the atmospheric sounds of birds and traffic in the background (Nichols, 2001; Thompson, 2007). This sense of realism is also conveyed by the representation of the celebrity. Instead of playing a character or being presented through her usual public persona (a famous, award-winning, television actress) Keddie is shown here as a typical, ordinary woman: she is wearing very little makeup and an unsophisticated ponytail. As Thomas (2014) shows, the depiction of famous women without makeup in the media is part of a longstanding discourse about female celebrities' ordinariness:

Examples include those from both the classical and contemporary era, but all perpetuate the idea that anyone can be a star, and that beneath the surface, the most glamorous stars are still ordinary women. In light of this, the unmade-up faces of prominent female stars become part of a wider discourse around the transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary and back again. (p. 247)

This rhetoric of authenticity is further accentuated by Keddie's emotional display. As E. Doyle McCarthy (2009) explains: "authenticity (...) is a particular *language of the self*, an intensely sentimental (i.e. suffused with emotion) type of discourse" (p. 241). Here, the depiction of Keddie's seemingly real emotions enhances the text's rhetoric of authenticity, which in turn encourages viewers' emotions. I demonstrate earlier that signifying actuality and authenticity is a technique used in documentaries to persuade viewers; this extract shows how it can also be used to encourage emotional responses.

*Who Do You Think You Are?* aims to teach by persuading viewers through the rhetoric of the documentary, by engaging them through storytelling, and by moving them through empathy. The extract above illustrates how the producers' intention to tap into the viewers' emotional and "visceral responses" (Producer 2) translates into textual features. In this extract, the viewer position created by the text and embedded in the text is one of empathy with the celebrity: the implied audience is expected to share Keddie's emotions and, like her, to be touched by Violet's life story. Similar techniques are used repeatedly to encourage viewers to emotionally engage with the stories told and with the lessons taught in the programme.



## **Reception**

To invite learning, *Who Do You Think You Are?* aims to persuade viewers that it is an authentic and accurate source of knowledge by using some of the conventions of the documentary and to engage them by using entertainment techniques such as storytelling and emotions. But neither the producers' intentions nor the textual features guarantee that viewers learn from the programme, nor can they predict what they learn or how they learn from it. Investigating the audience perspective allows me to test the claims made by the producers and the findings of my textual analysis by determining whether actual viewers learn from *Who Do You Think You Are?*, and if so, what they learn and how they learn. Based on two discussion groups conducted with four viewers each and online comments posted on the SBS website, I examine how some viewers interpret the programme and use it as a source of learning. Half of the episode about Hani's ancestry was screened at the beginning of the discussion group sessions as stimulus material, but my participants were also encouraged to talk about other episodes that they had seen previously. This "reception" section is divided in two parts: the first part focuses on viewers who consider that they learn from the programme. In the second part, I analyse the responses of viewers who say that they do not learn to explain why, in some cases, programmes like *Who Do You Think You Are?* fail to teach. My analysis of the viewers' responses reveals that entertainment and referential viewing play a crucial role in televisual learning.

### **Learning from *Who Do You Think You Are*: the emotional viewer**

Most participants in my discussion groups say that they have learnt from *Who Do You Think You Are?* either at home or from the episode screened at the beginning of our session. I first analyse what these participants learn from it, and I highlight their interpretive agency by showing that some learning outcomes were predicted neither by the producers nor by my textual analysis. I then demonstrate that these viewers learn because they are entertained, which confirms the assumptions of the producers and programmer. To demonstrate this, I analyse three modalities of response that are linked to entertainment and influence learning: interest, a prerequisite for entertainment; enjoyment, the core of the entertainment experience (Vorderer et al., 2004); and

referential viewing which is distinct from entertainment but is usually related (Ang, 1985). Finally, I investigate the quality of their learning by considering whether informal learning through televisual entertainment can contribute to what education scholars call “deep learning”.

*What viewers learn: educational outcomes and interpretive agency*

Some of the learning outcomes mentioned by my discussion group participants and by the viewers who post comments online correspond to the producers’ pedagogical intentions and to the lessons encoded in the text. For example, some say that they gain historical knowledge from the programme:

Krista: I found it interesting from a history perspective...

Lec: Yeah.

Junior: Hm.

Krista: ...having studied history and having done Modern History in Year 12 and having studied the Cossacks and different things like that, I found it really interesting [...]

Interviewer: So an episode like this one could potentially teach you about history?

Krista: Oh yeah, for sure!

Junior: Hm [...]

Krista: I thought about history class and studying that, I remembered actually physically being in history class and learning about that.

The discussions also confirm that viewers learn history through the lens of the personal and the emotional rather than facts about major historical and political events:

Marnie: I think the conversations that [Hany] had with his mum and his aunty are certainly the more interesting parts of it. When they’re having their revelations and where he’s finding out and experiencing his family history is obviously the most interesting [...]

Arya: Sometimes people are involved in obscure historical events and that’s

really interesting because with their events, you get a bit of personal history. Like, you might know broad-brush things about Communist Hungary but you might not know about the peasant uprising of 1956.

Marnie: One episode I saw they did manage to find a celebrity who had family members who had been involved in the Jewish holocaust and, as you were saying, Arya, with the personal history that goes with that event. I mean, people know about the big picture of those events but people going and their personal stories and their personal connection with people involved in that is quite interesting [...]

Arya: In this show, it's about personal history [...] It's about a person's experience of these historical events and how they're reacting to the story of someone who went through it. It's emotional, it's like, looking at him and seeing what it means for him.

Here, Marnie and Arya, both regular viewers of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, draw on their knowledge of the series as a whole rather than simply commenting on the episode that was screened. Their responses are in alignment with the producers' pedagogical intention to teach history in an emotional way by exploring individuals' personal experiences. Moreover, Arya's comment about ancestors who were "involved in obscure historical events" suggests that the programme can educate viewers about lesser-known historical events.

The discussions also confirm that the programme has the potential to teach "women's history" (Curthoys, 2013). Lec and Krista, for example, say that they have learnt about the history of family and gender relations from the episode about Hany's ancestry:

Krista: I think I was subconsciously thinking when I was watching it. The relationship with...like, the idea of abuse in the past [...]

Interviewer: So you were saying, the theme of abuse, is that something that people could learn about through watching that? You were saying, you know, 'I want to know more about that'.

Krista: Yeah, like, family systems, like Lec was saying. How families work and

how that has developed, and that has changed and developed over time and how that is in different cultures, for sure. And, and about domestic violence, for sure.

Lec: And it seems like in that particular time period it's not an uncommon theme at all. Like, we probably all got it in the family going back just a couple of generations.

All: Yeah.

Lec: So, I guess it was a bit more accepted then, a bit more common. And the male and female roles that they had, as well. Yeah, with the abuse, I'm like okay, well I guess that was the time period, like [laughs] it didn't faze me as that outrageous.

By explicitly linking the celebrity's family history to her own ("we probably all got it in the family going back just a couple of generations") Lec applies what she has learnt from the programme to her own life: this is noteworthy because it usually signals deep learning, an aspect of televisual learning that I further analyse below (Marton & Säljö, 1976, 1984; Ramsden, 2003).

As explained above, in *Who Do You Think You Are?* learning about history is linked to learning about identity. The question "who were my ancestors?" is tied to the question: "who am I?" While my textual analysis shows that this applies to the celebrities, my analysis of the programme's reception reveals that it can apply to viewers as well. One of the outcomes of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is to trigger interest and/or research into viewers' personal ancestry. Gaining knowledge about one's ancestry and identity can therefore be considered as one of the learning outcomes of the programme. For example, some viewers who post comments on the website say that they have learnt about their own ancestry by watching the programme:

**15 Apr 2013 | 16:47 AEST**

**Jemimah Clegg, Melbourne**

**'Real life' family tree story**

Inspired by many episodes of WDYTUA...I went on my own family history journey

**01 May 2013 | 22:22 AEST**

**Zofia Laba, Wollongong**

**Greek milk bars were in the Illawarra too.**

I always make sure that I watch this show. I loved the last episode. Good on you for taking part in this program. Your family story has made me more motivated to continue my research into the history of the early pioneers/immigrants who came to the Illawarra in 1840s – 1930s from non-English speaking countries. In 1930s among many Italian, German, Chinese, Swedish, Lebanese, French families there were quite few Greek families who owned milk bars in Wollongong and Port Kembla. Regards Zofia

**03 May 2013 | 19:26 AEST**

**Trevor Luchterhand, Brisbane**

**Michael Caton**

Hi Michael My GGG Grand-parents were also Thomas and Mary Ann. I have been tracing my family tree since finding my natural family 2 years ago. My GG Grand-father was Robert Caton. I found your story very interesting as I was able to document all the family tree from your segment. I will continue tracing through documents now to find more family following your story. Would love to catch up at some stage to hear your stories. Regards Trevor

(SBS, 2013)

The idea that the programme triggers viewers' interest in their own family history is supported by the discussion groups:

Arya: I think, definitely, people could learn history from it. But I think what it taps into and what it encourages is people's interest in their own history.

Marnie: Yeah.

- Arya: You see that, whenever you watch it, there's ads for Ancestry.com,<sup>13</sup> every single ad break and it's obviously targeted [...]
- Marnie: Yeah, the times that I've watched it, I've watched it because my mum was watching it, so that's my experience as well [...] A show like this, if you are watching with your family, which is my experience of watching it, is when you hit those ad breaks and they have those Ancestry.com ads and you think, if people could tap into that emotional connection that they are driving through this show, have that ad break as an opportunity to have a chat with their parents and say 'Hang on, is there anyone in our family like that? Have you ever learnt about our family?' I think it prompts conversations about...if people had abusive families, maybe a show like this might prompt a discussion about it, about their history [...] I think generally it promotes discussions about your own family, more than anything else, that's what you would learn from it [...]
- Lec: I haven't actually gone back that far myself. Like, I have met my grandparents that live here, but I don't know a lot about the other ones. And what's happened before that and before that. No idea. Or limited idea.
- Interviewer: So, it made you think about that?
- Lec: It'd be interesting. It's an interesting journey that he's on. I don't know if SBS would fund for me to have the same [laughs]! [...]
- Junior: [I thought about] my great-grandfather or my grandfather's grandfather who got stabbed in a bar at the age of thirty. It must be my great-grandfather, who was also a Negro who married a German woman, so he's quite interesting. He'd be interesting to find stuff about. And up living in the middle of nowhere in Mexico, so he'd be interesting to find out about.

Some of these comments confirm that collective viewing and social interactions between viewers can play a role in the learning process (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003,

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<sup>13</sup> Ancestry.com is a genealogical and historical record website based in the United States.

2004; Klein, 2013; Liebes & Katz, 1990). In particular, social interactions between family members play a pedagogical role in terms of learning about one's ancestry. As Marnie points out, the programme can facilitate learning indirectly, by "prompting conversations" between family members about their own family history.

Some online comments confirm that the programme teaches that personality is hereditary. This is best illustrated by the online posts below, in which viewers comment on the episode about McManus:

**15 May 2013 | 21:18 AEST**

**Debby McGrath, Canberra ACT**

**Linking Ancestral traits**

This was a great episode....I loved it at the end when Rove was able to see where his giftings came from after feeling so at odds within his family and their sporting talents. A few years ago I also discovered through my family tree many of the traits of myself and my children passed down from different ancestors.....tinkering, shooting, art.....was amazing!

**14 May 2013 | 21:03 AEST**

**Kc mordacz, Qld**

**Rove McManus**

Always enjoy this program , so thrilled for rove , to find he gets his creativity from his 3x great grandfather who by the way was married twice with 1st wife passing with no children together, and then marrying a second time and then children. Seems like rove is unconscienciously [sic] following same path!

(SBS, 2013)

These responses are marginal because only two viewers (on the website) and none of my discussion group participants mention this as a learning outcome. However, these two comments are significant because they confirm that the programme may teach incorrect lessons, a problem that I address in my discussion chapter.

Finally, the discussion groups confirm that the programme has the potential to educate viewers about diversity and multiculturalism, which is also in alignment with the producers' pedagogical intentions:

Interviewer: If you're a foreigner, some people watch this in the UK for instance; do you think it teaches foreigners and Australians about this country?

Arya: I suppose the difference would be that there's probably more diverse stories here.

Wolfgang: Yeah, in Australia.

Arya: Yeah, you do get a real mix bag [...]

Marnie: I've noticed in the advertising that they try to select people from a diverse background so that they do get different stories. I think if you watched an episode this week with somebody from Hungary and the next week it was another person from Hungary you would think well maybe they're just going to be repeating the same history. You wouldn't be learning anything else about their culture or their history [...]

Junior: You do learn about the different roots that Australians have, I guess.

Lec: And multicultural partnerships as well [...] I like seeing, they're big prominent Australians, and celebrity Australians and it's nice to see that their backgrounds are just all completely different. I think it's really cool. And I think that if they were to all be Australians who have been in Australia for many, many generations that the story wouldn't be as...exciting? [...]

Krista: It's educational, it's good for people to see how so many people...One of the best things about that type of show, I think, is that it's good for people to see how many people from different backgrounds have come to Australia and where people have come from and it's not this, you know, pure White version of Australia. You know, that we're made up of all different backgrounds and that's what makes Australia Australia [...]

Junior: Yeah a whole bunch of different ethnicities, which they do go back



through.

Krista: It's interesting to see different versions of where people have come from, which isn't the dominant voice in Australia. I guess that's why the show is valuable. I would think one reason why the show is valuable is to see that there are a lot of different cultures in Australia and people come from hard places [...] There are a lot of people who have just an Australian heritage and not from somewhere else, but it's good to always see and remember that there are other voices. There are other experiences.

Nevertheless, some of the learning outcomes mentioned by the viewers were not predicted by my interviews and textual analysis. For example, in addition to learning about history, their own ancestry and multiculturalism, some participants say that they gain knowledge about relationships, human nature and social issues. Lec and Krista, for example, say that they have learnt about "family dynamics", "domestic violence", "human nature" and "the mythification of the past" from the episode about Hany:

Interviewer: So you guys feel like you can learn some historical facts and personal history connected to broader history. Do you think there are any other things that you can learn from a show like that? Apart from history?

Lec: Well, how other families relate to each other. You get some of the historical facts. But also more about how there are some people that hold on to things and relate to or take things differently. Like, one of the mums decided to never talk about it whereas the aunty was more open and wanted to discuss it, so it shows how people deal with things differently. Like, the mum, she left the country, she was out of there, she was gone... So it's interesting to see two people, same situation and a completely different experience and response. It was pretty cool [...]

Krista: Yeah, family systems, like Lec was saying. How families work [...] And how things get shrouded and secret and then because they're kept secret people forget things. So how it's remembered is like this weird thing that happened in the past that is this secret thing that becomes like, you know, this mystery. It can quickly become a type of legend, or myth.

Some viewers also mention that they learn about social issues. In the post below, for example, the viewer praises the programme for promoting awareness about mental health:

**08 May 2013 | 08:24 AEST**

**Angie, West Gippsland**

**Best episode so far**

Last night's show was brilliantly done and incredibly moving - Susie was just gorgeous - the best episode I have seen so far. I, myself, having a mother and a grandmother with a mental illness was moved to tears, but I thought they handled the topic of mental illness in a very respectful and empowering way. Susie's family history was so fascinating, I think they could have done the whole series on her alone! She was very brave for being so open about her own experience of mental illness, and the producer's decision to promote mental health awareness through the airing of this episode was commendable. Well done, SBS!

(SBS, 2013)

The fact that viewers gain forms of knowledge that were predicted neither by my interviews nor by my textual analysis is significant because it illustrates audiences' interpretive agency. It indicates that a single programme or episode can generate a wide range of learning experiences, and more importantly, it shows that what viewers learn is not determined by the programme makers or the text. Viewers' pedagogical interpretations and uses of a programme transcend the educational messages and the desired learning outcomes encoded in the text by television professionals.

#### *How viewers learn: entertainment and referential viewing*

Based on my analysis of the discussions groups and online comments, I argue that viewers learn from the programme (or at least, perceive it as educational) if and when they are entertained, which confirms the assumptions of the producers and programmer. The comment posted by Angie (above) highlights the role that entertainment plays in televisual learning. Angie, who explicitly praises *Who Do You Think You Are?* and the

broadcaster SBS for educating audiences about the history of mental health treatment, was also clearly entertained by the episode. Her responses, which include enjoyment, excitement, sadness, empathy, identification and parasocial interaction with the celebrity, as well as cognitive and emotional engagement, are all part of the entertainment experience (Vorderer et al., 2004). To further demonstrate that entertainment contributes to learning, I next analyse three modalities of response that are linked to entertainment and influence learning: interest, enjoyment and referential viewing.

As Vorderer (2004) explains, pre-existing interest is a prerequisite for entertainment. My analysis shows that it is also a prerequisite for televisual learning. The discussion groups and online comments indicate that viewers are more likely to learn if they have a pre-existing interest in the celebrity, the historical topic, or more generally, in genealogy and history:

Marnie: I don't think it necessarily has to be that it's your family background.  
But perhaps if you have an interest or a knowledge base.

According to Arya, *Who Do You Think You Are?* appeals to older viewers because they are generally more interested in genealogy:

Arya: My mum loves this show. I think when you get to fifty and you start to worry about dying and stuff you get really interested in where you came from. And I think there's a huge interest out there for this sort of stuff.  
Like, it interests me, but I know it will interest me more when I'm older.

Learning and interest are associated with having both "a knowledge base" (Marnie) and a gap in knowledge. For the viewers to perceive television viewing as interesting and as a learning experience they must feel that they are "finding out things that they don't know" (Arya). Thus, learning happens at the intersection between interest and lack of knowledge:

Marnie: A lot of their family experiences are quite different from my family experience. I mean, [Hany's] main concern tracking through his history is about whether or not he's going to display the violent tendencies that he's heard about from his grandfather, and that's not something that I

ever had to worry about tracking through my family. So it's kind of interesting. And I don't know of any European history, particularly Eastern European history in my family and I guess you do get to learn a little bit about the social context historically that all of this is set in [...] I think I find the history of that interesting because it's something that I don't know about. I mean, I'm not someone who growing up was interested in history at all. I was like, stuff happened and it's not affecting me right now, so let's move on with life [...]

Krista: I found it really interesting, yeah, to hear more about, like, I didn't know about the farm co-ops and different things like that.

Wolfgang and Naomi, on the other hand, were not interested and did not learn from the episode because it did not teach them anything new. I further analyse their responses below, in the section that explains why certain viewers do not learn from the programme.

The discussions also confirm that viewers learn through enjoyment. The participants who say that they have learnt from *Who Do You Think You Are?* (Arya, Marnie, Krista, Junior and Lec) express feelings of enjoyment:

Arya: I think it's such good TV [...]

Lec: When I've seen, I've really enjoyed it.

The connection between televisual learning and enjoyment is also apparent in their discussions about other programmes such as the British wildlife documentary *River Monsters* (Revill, 2009-2013) and the American dramas *The Wire* (Simon, 2002-2008) and *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan, 2008-2013):

Interviewer: To what extent do you feel like you learn from watching TV? [...]

Lec: Oh! *River Monsters*!

Junior: *River Monsters*!

Lec: That's entertaining!

Krista: But do you learn? What do you learn? Are you learning anything from that show?

- Junior: Oh you learn a shitload!
- Lec: You learn about different things. Have you not watched it?
- Krista: No, I'm not questioning, I'm getting you to answer the question!
- Lec: You learn about river monsters [laughs]!
- Junior: You sure learn about river monsters! It's amazing!
- Lec: Well, it's shot from a million different parts of the world, wherever that river monster is. So you get the whole experience. And it's entertaining and the chase is on, and you get to see the Amazon or Tibet or wherever.
- Junior: You learn about fishing, chase, how to kill stuff and about history. And it's melodramatic!
- Lec: And these animals! You've never seen these animals before. That's our show of the moment [...]
- Krista: I learn things like, in *The Wire* I learnt about blocks of people, and that a whole block becomes a community and that community gets really addicted to the drug system, and it starts as a young kid and it's a spiral...
- Lec: It's fed from the top.
- Krista: ...and you learn about the cities, and, yeah it's fed from the top, from politics. So, even though it is total escapism for me because it's so far removed and I find it quite entertaining, I learn a lot about...
- Ms Goldblum: Human nature.
- Krista: Human nature and parts of the world where that is a reality, where drug culture is a reality, day in and day out. And so, I feel like I know a lot more about what society is like [...] And in *Breaking Bad*, I learn heaps of stuff about the fact that people even make drugs in caravans and different types of drugs and that it's better for it to be pure and stuff like that. Yeah, you learn heaps. And because it's entertaining.

Despite Krista's categorisation of *The Wire* as "total escapism" the viewing experiences

described here illustrate the concept of eudaimonic entertainment since they involve enjoyment as well as learning, enlightenment and insight (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Oliver & Raney, 2014).

The participants who learn from *Who Do You Think You Are?* say that they feel curiosity and thrill; they are emotionally engaged; they empathise or identify with different personae in the programme; and they often have (positive) parasocial relationships or interactions with the celebrities. As explained above, all these responses are part of the entertainment experience (Vorderer et al., 2004).

First, the participants who say that they learn from the programme express feelings of anticipation, uncertainty, curiosity, anxiety and excitement about what may happen next in the plot. At the time of the discussion, most of them wanted to watch the second half of the episode to learn more about Hany's family history:

Krista: I was like, really intrigued. I was totally enthralled in it [...]

Interviewer: Does this mean you guys wanted to know more about this, watch the rest of the episode?

Krista: Yes!

Lec: Yeah, definitely!

Junior: Yeah because I really like him [Hany].

Lec: Oh just to know about the dad side as well, the Iraqi side.

Junior: I wanted to know about him! What happened to him? Did the dad take off? Did the dad leave him or what happened?

Krista: I wanted to find out more about his grandfather as a person but also as what place he held in history. Because it did seem like there was tension, like, the whole episode is quite tense from what we saw. It was building to something, like something was going to be revealed.

Junior: Ah, yeah! Because they talk about people being killed in the street later on.

Lec: Yeah, and the history as well, I was focusing on that a lot. And I was really excited to see that. I mean, I was in it. I wanted to know what was

going to happen. I wanted to almost wait until they reveal that his grandad lives and clearly he's gone, long gone [...] I would like to see the end.

Krista: I'm going to look up the end to that.

Junior: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'd like to see the end.

Based on my interviews and textual analysis, I show that the programme uses narrative techniques as pedagogical tools because the producers assume that pleasurable feelings of curiosity, excitement and thrill increase viewers' engagement, attention and interest. The discussion above confirms this and indicates that the producers' attempt to engage their audience through storytelling was successful with those viewers. The detective story narrative structure, the narrator's questions, clues and hints, the cliff-hanger effects at the end of the sequences have contributed to enhance their attention and engagement not only with the story, but more importantly, with the history lessons taught in the episode.

Junior's comment above, "Yeah, because I really like him" also highlights the role that parasocial relationships can play in learning. The participants who regularly watch the programme admit that they usually engage more with it if they like the celebrity and if they are interested in knowing more about them:

Junior: I was more invested because of him. But yeah if it's, a lot of other Australian actors, like, Asher Keddie, don't care. Don't care about her.

Krista: It was your connection to him.

As Krista points out, it is through his parasocial relationship with Hany that Junior engaged with the episode, and it is because of this "connection" that he was curious to know more about the actor's background and family history. His positive parasocial relationship with Hany may be explained by the fact that Junior, like Hany (and unlike Keddie) has a multiethnic background (as shown in Table 1), a perceived similarity that perhaps creates a form of identification with the celebrity (Cohen, 2006):

Junior: I just really, really like him as an actor. Because he plays Aboriginals, Lebanese, I've seen him play Anglos, like he's a really diverse character, so I was just, it's more just seeing him. And I didn't know he was from

the Central Coast. I find that interesting that he grew up on the Central Coast being an ethnic person, all that kind of things [...]

Arya: Now I know more about Don Hany, the actor from TV.

Marnie: I've always wondered, watching him playing fictional characters what background he was.

Arya: Yeah, I didn't know he was half Iraqi, half Hungarian.

Marnie also explains that she learns more from the Australian version than from the British version (also broadcast on SBS) because she is more interested in learning about Australian celebrities:

Marnie: I don't generally engage with the European version of this show as much, I think maybe because the Australian version we know the actors and therefore, want to know a bit more about them.

Although celebrities were not mentioned as a pedagogical tool by the producers during our interviews, my analysis of the discussions and online comments indicates that they are one of the entertainment elements that function as a pedagogical tool since they increase viewers' interest and engagement with the content of the programme, and, more importantly, with the lessons it teaches.

The discussions also confirm that emotions can play an important role in televisual learning. The viewers who say that they have learnt are also the most emotionally engaged. As Zillmann (1995) explains, viewers need to empathise with the personae on screen to engage with the content on an emotional level. This is illustrated by the participants' responses to one scene in which Hany's estranged aunt shows him an old photograph of his pregnant mother:

Arya: It's the intimacy of it I find really enjoyable. Like when they're looking at photos. I love looking at photos, I love looking at other people's photos and thinking about, like, especially old photos, and wondering about the people in them. I just think it's really beautiful seeing people experiencing that. And they obviously find it very overwhelming.

Marnie: Yeah, I suppose the photo moment, even if, you know, as I said before, I



don't connect with his family history, but I think we all have that experience of looking at photos of people in our family and hearing the stories and I suppose when you've had that experience of getting teary or emotional looking at photos of your ancestors, then you kind of connect more on an emotional level with that moment in the show.

All:               Hm.

Most participants in the other focus group have a similar response to the same scene:

Lec:               Yeah. I was, I was touched! I was like "aw!"

Ms Goldblum: I didn't buy it.

Krista:           You didn't feel like that, Lec?

Lec:               Not at all! Like, yeah, I got a bit touched.

Junior:           Yeah. And those looked like genuine tears, they weren't crocodile tears.

Ms Goldblum: I didn't think so, there was like a [sniffing] Pause. Pose. Camera moment.

Junior:           I had a little moment when he did...

Krista:           Aw!

Interviewer:    You had a moment?

Junior:           Yeah, there was a little moment there.

Ms Goldblum: Got a little teary?

Lec:               Can you expand on that?

Interviewer:    Was that the photo moment?

Junior:           When he's looking at the photos, yeah. Because I think everyone's done that, gone back and looked through old photos, you know what that feeling is.

Lec:               I was so invested!

Krista:           Yeah! [laughs]

Viewers can also learn through what I label "identification", that is, by recognising

someone's characteristics as one's own characteristics. As Zillmann (1995) points out, identification differs from empathy because it is based on feelings of affinity and perceived similarity whereas empathy is not (Cohen, 2006; McCarthy, 2009). For instance, Marnie's comment, "I don't connect with his family history, but I think we all have that experience of looking at photos of people in our family" shows that she empathises with Hany even though she does not identify with him. According to Marnie, viewers are likely to identify with the celebrities if they have similar family histories and cultural backgrounds, and this process of identification increases interest, entertainment and engagement with the content:

Marnie: Say an episode about people who had ancestors who were convicts and came on a boat to Australia in the late 1700s early 1800s, if you already knew that your family might have a similar history, perhaps that episode might appeal to you. If they had an episode where they were exploring Indigenous Australians' experience and ancestry, perhaps people who were interested in that, or had family experiences like that, might tune into that episode. And people who had Jewish ancestors might have tuned in particularly to the episode about the holocaust, and maybe people who could share the experience about Hungarian and Iraqi migrants might be more interested in this [the episode about Hany], do you know what I mean? Different episodes might appeal to different people because of their family background and they might think 'Oh, look I'm not at all interested in learning about Communist Hungary so I'll skip that episode', the week after 'Oh okay that looks good, I'm interested in that, maybe I'll watch it'.

Cohen (2006) argues that identification with media personae or characters increases viewers' attention and amplifies the effects of television. My study suggests that it not only increases attention and interest, but can also facilitate learning. For example, Lec says that the episode about Hany was educational for her because her own ancestors have had experiences that were comparable to the experiences of his ancestors:

Lec: It's emotional, it's relatable. I guess we've all got grandparents and great grandparents that most of them probably went through not a dissimilar

experience. So we're getting their perspective and how it's affected other families possibly.

Some online comments confirm that identification increases entertainment and contributes to learning. The following example was posted soon after the episode about Hills' ancestry aired:

**02 Apr 2013 | 22:54 AEST**

**Paula, Sydney**

**Adam**

I loved your story tonight and as both of my parents are from the smaller Island of Malta, called Gozo I loved the fact that through you being there you were able to see how beautiful it is, I have been many times with half my family there, and have tried to complete my tree which is not an easy task. I did listen in awe to hear the story about the white Australia policy and know my great, great uncle was on that very ship that was tested and struggle to find out more information. You have inspired me to continue searching for the answers.

(SBS, 2013)

The viewer, Paula, is clearly engaged in the story and in the learning process because she feels that she shares a common cultural heritage with the celebrity, whom she directly addresses in her post. Paula's parasocial connection with Hills, her identification with him and her enjoyment contributed to her desire to learn about history and about her own ancestry and to actively investigate her family tree (which, as noted above, is another learning outcome of the programme). Thus, being entertained and emotionally engaged motivates the viewer herself to become a learner-detective.

Reception studies show that emotional engagement, empathy, identification and parasocial interactions are not only linked to entertainment (that is, pleasure and enjoyment) but also to referential viewing, which is sometimes called "involvement" or "referential involvement" (Ang, 1985; Briggs, 2010; Buckingham, 1993; Cohen, 2006; Hall, 2009; Liebes & Katz, 1986, 1990; Wirth, 2006). As I explain in chapter one, when viewing a programme referentially, the viewer connects it to real life and accepts it as

real, realistic or authentic, and is therefore more likely to emotionally engage with the content and to empathise or identify with the characters or personae. On the other hand, when viewing a programme critically, the viewer sees it as fictional, constructed or inauthentic and through this intellectual distance becomes able to identify, question and challenge its agenda. Referential viewing means accepting things that happen in the programme and viewing it from “inside”; critical viewing on the other hand, means intellectually deconstructing and questioning the content, or viewing it from “outside” (Buckingham, 1993). Participants usually present themselves as critical viewers during focus group discussions by showing that they are aware of the constructed nature of the programme (how it was produced, filmed, edited and so on), and by describing on-screen behaviours or emotions as inauthentic, forced or staged (Buckingham, 1993).

My analysis reveals a correlation between referential viewing and learning, which confirms the findings of previous reception studies conducted with children and young people (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014; Noble & Freiberg, 1985; Noble & Noble, 1979; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997). The viewers who say that they learn from *Who Do You Think You Are?* (Arya, Marnie, Krista, Junior and Lec) present themselves as referential viewers. They describe people and emotions in the programme as authentic:

Krista:           It felt genuine to me.

Lec:               Me also [...]

Marnie:           I felt like he seemed more natural, even with the interpreter there, talking with his aunty. Like, he seemed more himself, he was more emotional [...]

Arya:             I don't think that they're acting. To go outside of this session, I mean, I've seen the show before, and I think it is really genuine because you see people reaching like that.

In my textual analysis, I argue that the implied audience of *Who Do You Think You Are* must trust that it authentically represents actual events and individuals in order to learn from it. My analysis of the reception supports this argument: in order to learn - or at least in order to learn in a way that is in alignment with the producers' intentions and

with the lessons encoded in the text - the viewers must be persuaded by the rhetoric of the documentary, which promises authenticity and information (Nichols, 2001). But as Austin (2005) writes in his reception study of documentary films, what matters from the viewers' perspective is not "the critically scrutinised indexical guarantee of documentary, but rather a less well defined and nebulous sense of qualities such as [...] 'humanity', 'honesty', 'sincerity'" ("Slow Pacing" section, para. 6).

As Austin (2005) observes, referential involvement does not mean that viewers naively believe that documentaries give unmediated access to the truth. Furthermore, "willing abandonment" (referential viewing) can be combined with "scepticism" (critical viewing), as established in reception studies of soap operas (Ang, 1985; Buckingham, 1993; Liebes & Katz, 1990). Marnie's responses to *Who Do You Think You Are?*, for example, show that she oscillates between these two modalities:

Marnie: I suppose there's moments where you're thinking a bit more about how they constructed the show. If something seems quite artificial, it sort of stands out, you start thinking about well, why did they do that? But while they're just sitting down, having a conversation, there's not anything really changing that you have to think about. Obviously all those transition shots, sitting on the rock, opening a letter in the square, they also have, you know, the violins playing and everything in it. Everything builds to feel a bit more contrived, whereas when they're having the conversation, I wasn't aware of the music. Maybe I was listening to what they were saying more. But I think you sort of engage a bit more in listening to what they're saying when they're having a conversation. Whereas the filling, you're not really thinking about his emotions so much as...why is he wearing that shirt?

Interestingly, the sequences that Marnie views with critical distance are the more dramatised sequences that do not use the documentary conventions: "those transition shots, sitting on the rock, opening a letter in the square, they also have, you know, the violins playing". The sequences that she views referentially and during which she emotionally and intellectually engages with the text are the "conversations" sequences, which use the conventions of the observational documentary. Of the eight participants,

Marnie is the only one who clearly sways between referential and critical viewing. As I explore further below, she is also the most ambivalent about the quality of the knowledge she gains from *Who Do You Think You Are?*

*The quality of televisual learning: informal learning and deep learning*

My discussion groups confirm that learning from television is different from classroom-learning and book-learning (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Gee, 2004). Like the producers and programmer, my participants insist on the differences between televisual learning and formal pedagogy. For example, Marnie considers that learning history from programmes like *Who Do You Think You Are?* is an enjoyable alternative to reading books:

Marnie: It is actually interesting to know about the World Wars and what happened and the social consequences of that. I guess I'm a bit more open to knowing about things like that now. So I guess if I missed the boat learning about World War history when I was younger, a show like this, without having to sit down and read a heavy history textbook, I can get little doses and go okay, now I know about Communist Hungary [...] I know that, for myself, I like to learn about history in small doses because things like, you know, Communist history, World War 2 history, it's such a huge, complex thing that trying to swallow all of it at once is a bit overwhelming. So I like learning about little bits and pieces then try to fit that into the bigger picture. That's just the way that I like to learn about it. Whereas I suppose other people would like to learn about it in big chunks or a bit more broadly.

This supports Gee's (2004) and Collins and Halverson' (2009) argument about lifelong learning through informal sites of knowledge; it suggests that informal learning from programmes like *Who Do You Think You Are?* can be easier and more appealing than traditional classroom-learning or book-learning. Most of my participants agree that the programme's pedagogy is more compelling than book-learning because the lessons are taught in a more personal and emotional way:

Arya: A television documentary about something can be so much more compelling for people, and they can retain so much more information from it than reading a big dusty book [...]

Junior: [*Who Do You Think You Are?*] takes people back through their own families' personal journeys and you retrace history at the same time. And you get like a...

Lec: And you remember what you've learnt but from a different perspective.

Ms Goldblum: Yeah, because I think they get you in a more personal way.

Krista: It's always easier to...it makes things more interesting to hear history through personal experiences and encounters...

Ms Goldblum: Than just plain facts, yeah.

Krista: ...rather than, yeah, plain facts or stats or numbers or whatever.

Lec: Yeah, you get a completely different view. You don't get the other stuff, the dates and the stats or whatever. Well they said 1956, but yeah you get a different vibe.

Krista: It's just, I find it a lot more interesting and relatable and easy to remember if the information is connected to some sort of story [...] If you read a textbook it can be quite bland. But if you watch a documentary, I find that a lot easier to remember information [...] And if you connect it to a single story and you tell the story of one person, their journey and you have photos, they're a real person that people can relate to.

Interviewer: And that's something that applies to learning as well?

Krista: Yeah, yeah, that's pretty much like that. It's like seeing the history pages come to life [laugh]!

Lec: That's why they do re-enactments.

Krista: Yeah!

This suggests that edutainment - that is, informal teaching through entertainment

techniques such as storytelling, celebrities, emotions and empathy - can be pedagogically more effective than traditional schooling or book-learning. As Gee (2004) and Collins and Halverson (2009) argue, informal sites of learning can be pedagogically more efficient than traditional forms of teaching: “people today are often exposed outside of school to processes of learning that are deeper and richer than the forms of learning to which they are exposed in schools” (Gee, 2004, p. 107). Gee claims that informal learning is “deeper and richer” than classroom-learning because it occurs within virtual affinity spaces where learners relate to each other through shared interests. My study complements his argument by showing that informal learning through televisual entertainment can be more compelling than formal pedagogy because lessons are taught in a more personal, emotional and entertaining way.

However, saying that a programme’s lessons are “compelling” only means that they are interesting and engaging. Compelling pedagogy is not necessarily synonymous with deep learning. Deep learning means that the learner engages in an active search for meaning and for understanding. It is usually opposed to surface learning, in which the learner simply memorises facts and treats learning as an external imposition. In the surface approach to learning, knowledge is cut off from the learner’s everyday reality (Marton & Säljö, 1976, 1984; Ramsden, 2003):

In the case of surface-level processing the student directs his attention towards learning the text itself (the sign), i.e., he has a ‘reproductive’ conception of learning which means that he is more or less forced to keep to a rote-learning strategy. In the case of deep-level processing, on the other hand, the student is directed towards the intentional content of the learning material (what is signified) i.e., he is directed towards comprehending what the author wants to say. (Marton & Säljö, 1976, pp. 7-8)

These concepts were further developed by Ramsden (2003), who explains that deep learning involves relating new knowledge to previous knowledge and applying it to everyday experiences outside and beyond the learning site. In the deep approach, the emphasis is internal and learning means gaining a better understanding of the world. In the surface approach, knowledge is cut out from the outside world and the emphasis is on external demands like academic assessments. Interestingly, education scholars link



deep learning to interest and enjoyment: interest usually leads to deep learning, which in turn contributes to enjoyment and satisfaction (Marton & Säljö, 1984; Ramsden, 2003).

But can informal learning through televisual entertainment be considered deep learning? Some of my participants imply that the knowledge that they gain from *Who Do You Think You Are?* is superficial:

Arya: In this show, it's about personal history, because you're not really looking at historical events in their context.

Marnie: Yeah. Although they hint at broader historical events that happened, they don't necessarily, like, I don't think I would watch a show like this and then, at the pub in a week's time go 'Oh yeah, I know about Communist Hungary now!' Because I wouldn't feel confident that I had got enough of a picture of the situation and the history there. I would just know little glimmers of it. Which is still interesting to learn about, but it doesn't make me feel as informed as if I'd watched a full documentary that was dedicated to the full history of that country over a ten-year period rather than just the events that happened to coincide with his [Hany's] family's history.

Here, the programme's informal pedagogy and its personal and emotional approach to history are seen as limited because they lack informative depth - even though this informal and personal aspect of the programme's lessons is precisely what makes them compelling. As mentioned earlier, Marnie's responses to *Who Do You Think You Are?* are ambivalent: although she says that she has learnt from the programme, she often questions the quality and the depth of this knowledge (she is also the only participant who oscillates between referential and critical viewing).

However, the type of learning that Marnie describes is not surface learning: it may be quantitatively limited, but it is not externally-focused or cut out from the outside the world. Indeed, the discussions show that informal learning through televisual entertainment can be a form of deep learning. For example, the participants relate the knowledge that they gain from *Who Do You Think You Are?* to their existing knowledge:

- Arya: You might know broad-brush things about Communist Hungary but you might not know about the peasant uprising of 1956.
- Marnie: [...] People know about the big picture of those events but people going and their personal stories and their personal connection with people involved in that is quite interesting [...]
- Krista: Having studied history and having done modern history in Year 12 and having studied the Cossacks and different things like that, I found it really interesting to hear more about...like, I've never, I didn't know about the farm co-ops and different things like that.
- Lec: And you remember what you've learnt, but from a different perspective [...] I was thinking 'Oh, I remember this from high school', but never from the perspective of Hungary. Never looked at it from Hungary before!

Here, the viewers link what they learn from the programme to what they already know: they situate this new knowledge, which they gain from the programme, in the broader context of their existing knowledge. *Who Do You Think You Are?* does not merely replicate the lessons that viewers have learnt in school: it complements them.

Moreover, these viewers explicitly apply what they learn to their own lives and to their personal experiences outside the viewing session, which is another aspect of deep learning. For example, Krista, who feels that she has learnt about history, family dynamics, domestic violence and the mythification of the past from the episode about Hany, explicitly relates this knowledge to her own family history:

- Krista: The idea of abuse in the past, that reminded me of my grandfather, who was quite abusive to my grandma and my dad. So, it sort of reminded me of that [...] And how things get shrouded and secret. And because they're kept secret, then people forget things and then, how it's remembered is like this weird thing that happened in the past that almost is like this secret thing, you know, this mystery. Yeah, so that reminded of that, this sense of the past. It can quickly become a type of legend, or myth.

For these participants, learning from the programme goes beyond absorbing or memorising historical facts that are cut out of from everyday life and from their reality: it can trigger reflection and promote a deeper understanding of the world in which they live. Informal learning from and through televisual entertainment is not only compelling learning but can also be deep learning.

### **Not learning from *Who Do You Think You Are*: the cynical viewer**

Three participants in my discussion groups, Wolfgang, Naomi and Ms Goldblum, say that they have not learnt anything from *Who Do You Think You Are?* or that they only have learnt “on a superficial level” (Ms Goldblum). I next analyse their responses to explain why, in some cases, viewers believe that they do not learn. Although some of these viewers describe the programme as “entertainment, not education”, I demonstrate that these participants do not perceive it or use it as a source of learning because they are not entertained by it, and because they view its content with critical and intellectual distance rather than from a position of referential and emotional involvement.

*“Entertainment, not education”?*

Wolfgang, whose responses to *Who Do You Think You Are?* are the most negative, insists that he has not learnt from the episode about Hany’s ancestry:

Wolfgang: I don’t think they taught much that I didn’t already know in regards to history.

Naomi: Yeah, me neither. But I mean, I guess it was the beginning so maybe as we got deeper into Hungarian Communist history I might, but...

Wolfgang: I don’t reckon that we would.

Naomi: Nothing in particular?

Wolfgang: Like I said before, I don’t think we would.

One of the reasons why Wolfgang did not learn from the programme is because it did not teach him anything new. As I show earlier, learning occurs at the intersection between interest and lack of knowledge. Although Wolfgang is interested in history, the

programme did not teach him anything that he “didn’t already know”. For viewers to consider viewing as a learning experience they must feel that the programme addresses a gap in their existing knowledge.

The participants who learn from the programme define it as “educational”. Wolfgang, however, does not perceive it as education but mainly as entertainment. Other participants interpret the programme as a documentary whereas Wolfgang frequently opposes *Who Do You Think You Are?* to documentaries:

Wolfgang: I don’t watch commercial TV, I can’t stand it. And it’s for that kind of reason, it’s all these contrived ideas. It’s all based on selling something as opposed to looking into this guy’s family history and perhaps learning something from it. Like, it’s entertainment, it’s not educational [...] I mean that’s something that you can get out of a documentary as well. And maybe I’m a big cynic about this, and that’s why I haven’t watched it. But like you were saying, it’s ‘good television’ because it’s kind of this emotionally padded, sort of scripted, prompted kind of thing, that makes it more palatable for people to watch [...] [In documentaries] they’re unashamed of saying ‘Yeah, this is a documentary, we’re telling you history’ as opposed to going ‘This is a story about a guy and his family’, and kind of wrapping it in that. If you’re really interested in learning about that you can go and see a documentary, that’ll give you probably a lot more information in the same time and explain it better.

The viewers who learn from *Who Do You Think You Are?* interpret it as educational despite the use of entertainment techniques; indeed, entertainment elements facilitate their learning. For Wolfgang, however, the text cannot be read as educational because of its reliance on entertainment techniques such as celebrities, storytelling and emotions. From his perspective, there is a clear separation between programmes that inform and explain (documentaries) and programmes that entertain (commercial programmes that tell “stories”). As I explain above, this binarism between televisual education and televisual entertainment endures in academic, institutional and popular discourses (Hinds, 1991; Klein, 2011).

It is also significant that Wolfgang interprets *Who Do You Think You Are?* as

“commercial television [...] based on selling something” even though the programme is broadcast on public television. For him, there is a binarism not only between education and entertainment but between public service education and commercial entertainment, which is seen as being “based on selling something” rather than teaching. In other words, Wolfgang mistakes *Who Do You Think You Are?* for a commercial programme because it uses entertainment techniques. This suggests that the entertainment techniques used by the producers as pedagogical tools can impede learning if viewers have a binary view of television that clashes with their hybrid edutainment approach.

For Wolfgang, televisual education excludes emotions. It is because of the programme’s emotional dimension that he classifies it as entertainment instead of interpreting it as an educational programme or as a documentary:

Wolfgang: It’s totally about the emotional journey, that’s the entertainment value of it.

In his study of the reception of documentary films by White, middle class English professionals and students, Austin (2005) argues that:

Feeling and knowing are two axes of possible viewer engagement, two sets of pleasures, two currencies of value, potentially available to documentary audiences [...] Nevertheless, some commonsensical assumptions about documentary suggest that the form is largely (or even wholly) concerned with delivering information and knowledge, to the exclusion of emotional engagement (Seeing, Feeling, Knowing section, para. 1 )

In other words, some viewers associate emotional engagement with fiction and entertainment. In this view, emotions are not compatible with teaching and learning. For example, one of Austin’s respondents writes that “documentary is rather objective and doesn't show feelings or emotions as being important, just facts.” (Anon., (10), British, white, male, student, age 30) (Cited in Austin, 2005 Seeing, Feeling, Knowing section, para. 2). Similarly, Wolfgang sees documentaries as providing information without emotion: “you’re there to learn about something and just kind of get the facts”.

Therefore, instead of interpreting *Who Do You Think You Are?* as a documentary - as the other participants do - Wolfgang interprets it as reality TV:

Wolfgang: I was listening to the historical facts that were given but it's the whole, like it's the reality TV sort of thing, I just got no interest in it really.

As Nancy Baym (2000) points out, in popular and conventional discourses, emotions are often associated with low taste cultural forms like reality television and soap operas whereas rationality is associated with high taste culture. But although Wolfgang perceives the programme as factual "entertainment", he does not perceive it as entertaining. Indeed, Wolfgang, Naomi and Ms Goldblum do not learn from *Who Do You Think You Are?* because they are not entertained by it, as I demonstrate below.

*Neither educational nor entertaining*

Like Wolfgang and Naomi, Ms Goldblum considers that she has not learnt much from the episode about Hani:

Ms Goldblum: It's interesting but it's on a superficial level. Like, I wouldn't go away and call mum and say 'Oh my god, I just watched the most amazing episode, you got to watch this!' Yeah, I wouldn't put it on a recommended list.

This comment suggests that Ms Goldblum was neither learning nor being entertained. Similarly, Wolfgang and Naomi express dislike toward the programme, which they do not consider enjoyable:

Wolfgang: I don't enjoy it

Naomi: [laughs]

Wolfgang: I mean, I hate, I hate all that. They're constructing a show purely for money, that's all bullshit. That annoys me.

Ms Goldblum explains that she did not feel any excitement or thrill during the screening. She also explicitly expresses dislike toward the celebrity:

Interviewer: Did you feel it was escapism?

Ms Goldblum: No, it was more...

Krista: You felt disconnected.

Ms Goldblum: Where is the... When is the good stuff coming?

Krista: You felt disconnected right?

Ms Goldblum: Hm [...] Could they not get, like, it wasn't that exciting a story for me. It's not that dramatic! Like, you want, I mean, yeah everyone's got a family history but if you're televising it, you want a pretty good hook!

Lec: They were building up!

Ms Goldblum: You want, you know, because I mean, you're going to keep people watching [...] And I just don't like him.

Although these three participants say that they do not learn from *Who Do You Think You Are?* their discussions of other programmes confirm that they learn from television when they feel entertained. Ms Goldblum, who grew up in South Africa, says that she learns from South African genealogy programmes because she feels more "connected" to the South African celebrities and because she is more interested in their family histories. She also explicitly says that she learns from programmes that she finds entertaining like the British comedy panel game programme, *QI* (Lloyd, 2003-):

Ms Goldblum: I love *QI*! Brilliant! Because that show is entertaining but I learn things actually, literally. But I don't have to work for it, you know what I mean? I can take away funny little facts. You know, you just genuinely do. That's a good example. That's a good balance, I think.

Unlike Wolfgang, whose binary view of television conflicts with the notion of edutainment, Ms Goldblum seeks out edutainment. She is aware that she can learn through entertainment and pleasure: "that's a good balance" means that she values learning and being entertained at the same time. Wolfgang's position is more complex. Although he clearly separates televisual entertainment from televisual education, he acknowledges that other viewers may learn from *Who Do You Think You Are?* if they enjoy it and if they emotionally engage with it:

Wolfgang: If you wanted people to learn about history, people who weren't particularly into learning history, but liked reality TV shows or soap operas, then you could probably do that to an extent [...] It's an emotional connection you're getting in this thing. It's not really, well, I

don't know, for me it's not about history but there are some historical things remaining there, so...

Furthermore, Wolfgang's claims that he learns from programmes that he finds enjoyable:

Wolfgang: I love watching documentaries, I'm only watching those. I learn more from reading books, but it's a nice way to kind of relax, to kind of zone out and still kind of learn stuff as well. TV, it's easy, it's not really thinking that much, you can zone out but I think you can learn as well.

This comment highlights the relation between entertainment and learning from Wolfgang's perspective. Although he labels documentaries as "education", not "entertainment", his experience of watching those educational programmes is characterised by enjoyment: the words "love", "nice", "relax", "zone out" all denote pleasure or leisure. Thus, my analysis of these viewers' responses confirms that there is a correlation between entertainment and perceived learning.

However, those convergent responses (being entertained and learning) cannot be determined by the content of a programme or its generic labelling. Whether a programme teaches or entertains is not determined by television professionals, its genre, or the messages encoded in the text. From the audience's point of view, no televisual content is inherently educational or inherently entertaining. As Vorderer (2001) writes:

Media users [...] are free to deal with media offers as they like. Surely, in most cases they will watch a news program more concentrated, more seriously, and less amused, and they will often relate to the characters of a talk show in a primarily affective way and less in order to learn from them, but they do not necessarily have to do so and, in fact, they sometimes don't [...] In other words: it's the users who decide whether they want to entertain themselves with the news, or to learn from the utterances of a talk show guest. Hence, neither media researchers nor TV channels can decide what is entertaining and what is not, but only make an analysis of what the user is doing with a given content. (p. 249)

My discussion groups support this argument. Wolfgang, for example, says that he is entertained by educational documentaries about astronomy, which "a lot of people



would find really boring”. Similarly, Lec finds the Australian media analysis programme *Media Watch* (Buckfield, 1989-) entertaining, even though it is categorized as news by the broadcaster (ABC, n.d.). For her, *Media Watch* is both a source of learning and a source of excitement and thrill:

Lec: For the cynical part of me, *Media Watch*. I’m like ‘Oh they got them good!’ [laughs] But you’re learning. You’re learning what a scam everything is [laughs]! I find it so entertaining [...]

Krista: And you find that fun to watch? [laughs]

Lec: Yeah, I find it fun! I’m just like ‘Oh! I can’t even believe they would do that!’ [...] It’s so entertaining! It only goes for twenty, fifteen minutes. It goes for no time at all, so you’re kind of like ‘I can’t believe it! I can’t believe it! I can’t believe it!’ and then it’s over.

Conversely, some say that they learn from programmes that are usually classified as entertainment, like the American reality programme *Keeping up With the Kardashians* (Seacrest, 2007-) and the dramas *The Wire* and *Game of Thrones* (Benioff & Weiss, 2011-):

Krista: I’m obsessed with that show [*Keeping up With the Kardashians*]! I love reality shows like that. And obviously its target is not for it to be an educational show. It’s pure escapism and indulgence and entertainment. But I learn stuff from it. Like, if you think about it, I learn. I’ve learnt about fashion because they’re so into fashion. I learnt how other people live that have so much money. I’ve learnt about rap, because of Kanye West [...]

Junior: You don’t think about it being educational.

Lec: That’s entertainment.

Junior: But they are, so yeah. Like *The Wire*.

Ms Goldblum: Edutainment!

Junior: Anything by HBO and even *Game of Thrones* is actually educational.

Lec:           Anything on HBO.<sup>14</sup>

These comments highlight viewers' interpretive agency in relation to televisual education and entertainment. Whether a programme teaches or entertains cannot be determined by television professionals, textual features or generic labels: viewers can use any programme for learning or for entertainment purposes. This also raises questions as viewers' understanding of what constitutes learning can be problematic from an educational perspective. If the delimitation of teaching and learning is entirely a matter of subjective interpretation, can anything on television be considered teaching? I address this issue in my discussion chapter.

*"Such a cynic": critical viewing*

Although entertainment facilitates learning (whether from "educational" or "entertainment" television), it is not a sufficient condition. Viewers' referential involvement also plays a crucial role in televisual learning. In my textual analysis, I show that one of the pedagogical techniques of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is to signify the real in various ways in order to persuade viewers. I argue that in order to learn, the implied audience must believe that the text faithfully and accurately represents actual events and that the media personae are genuine. My analysis of the discussion groups supports this argument by showing that the viewers who learn from *Who Do You Think You Are?* view it referentially: they believe that the programme depicts actual events and more importantly, they perceive the people and emotions in the programme as "genuine" (Junior, Krista), "natural" and "being themselves" (Marnie). The viewers who claim that they do not learn from it, however, position themselves as critical viewers. They describe the programme as artificial and the celebrity's emotions as inauthentic:

Naomi:           I kind of look at these shows and think it's a bit contrived [...] Yeah it was weird [...] It's difficult for me to forget that, watching it.

Ms Goldblum: But for me the show is just about, I don't know, they just try and find something to be sentimental and it's not. They try to force it [...] I didn't

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<sup>14</sup> HBO is an American premium cable network launched in 1972.

buy it [...] He gets all teary and I think 'Oh he's an actor he's just putting that shit on, trying to make it look interesting'. Whereas if it were just a normal person, I'd find it more believable. I think the whole premise of the show is they take famous people, like actors and all these people in the spotlight, I think because they put on good shows. I think I would be more interested in someone who wasn't famous. I'd find it more genuine.

One of the techniques the programme uses to emphasise authenticity is to (seemingly) reveal famous people's real selves and to show them as ordinary and typical individuals whom the audience can relate to. Ms Goldblum, however, is not persuaded by this discourse of authenticity: despite the programme's attempt to convey a sense of authenticity and intimacy with famous Australians, she perceives the celebrity's persona as artificial and manufactured and she interprets his behaviour as a staged performance.

As Buckingham (1993) explains, focus group participants often position themselves as critical viewers by displaying their knowledge of production processes. In my discussion groups, Ms Goldblum, Naomi and Wolfgang present themselves as critical viewers by stressing the constructed nature of the programme:

Wolfgang: There are lots of those shots. Like, even on the plane, it's just him, the camera on him, he's just like, he's an actor!

Naomi: [laughs]

Wolfgang: Yeah, so I find it hard to deal with those sorts of TV shows. There's obviously a camera there, they're playing up to it in a certain way even if they're trying not to show it [...] He's just sitting there and they got to fill in, I suppose those are kind of filling shots [...]

Naomi: And they go into the past of these people and they look in their histories and they find one event that's significant or interesting. And then they work back from that. And they kind of plot a path back from that to him. And then they set him on that path and they kind of...

Wolfgang: Prompt him towards...

Naomi: ...yeah, prompt him towards it. I'm conscious of it as I'm watching it.

They've found this that's particularly sensationalist or makes good television. And so they're just focusing on that one bit. It's just, I'm conscious of it.

Wolfgang: It means I don't enjoy it.

Naomi: [laughs]

Wolfgang's last comment echoes the idea that critical viewing and lack of enjoyment are often linked (Ang, 1985). More importantly, this conversation shows that Wolfgang and Naomi are aware and critical of the entertainment techniques used by the producers to invite engagement and learning. As Producer 1 explains, these entertainment techniques, if successful, should not be noticed by viewers: "Hopefully when people watch the programme, they're not actually seeing all of the things behind the programme, they're actually so engaged in the programme that that's what carries them along". Viewers like Wolfgang and Naomi, however, are not engaged by the text as they are able to identify some of the pedagogical techniques "behind" the programme. For instance, Naomi is clearly aware of the hidden "stepping stone" narrative technique used by the producers: in keeping with the observational mode of documentary, the celebrity's genealogical journey seems to spontaneously and organically unfold, as if it were unplanned and unprepared (Nichols, 2001; Thompson, 2007). However, in reality, as Naomi points out, the celebrities' investigation is consciously and meticulously pre-determined by the producers. Her knowledge of these narrative techniques and her critical awareness of the artificial nature of the celebrity's journey indicate that she is not persuaded by the rhetoric of the observational documentary. Similarly, Wolfgang claims to see through the programme's observational scenes, which he perceives as dramatised, staged performances.

Because they are not persuaded by the text's rhetoric of authenticity, these critical viewers do not engage with it emotionally:

Naomi: When I see someone on this show looking at photos, I find it really difficult to stop thinking 'He's got a camera on his face'.

Wolfgang: Yeah.

Naomi: He's looking at photos, and that's a beautiful moment, but there's a

camera right there, looking at him, and I can't help but think that when I see those things. I'm like, that's probably how I would respond looking at old photos and talking to a relative. But there are other people in the room that we don't see and there's a camera that's pointing at him [...]

Ms Goldblum: Watching this, I didn't think once about my family, I didn't think 'Oh, I want a family tree'. I was thinking like, 'What is their target with this?'

These comments show that Naomi and Ms Goldblum view the programme with intellectual distance rather than empathy and emotion. Moreover, Ms Goldblum does not relate Hany's family story to her own life, unlike the other participants in her group (Krista, Lec and Junior). Instead of displaying emotional engagement, these critical viewers express their intellectual distance through mockery and laughter (Buckingham, 1993):

Naomi: Actually, that hug at the beginning was a bit weird!

All: [laugh]

Wolfgang: Yeah.

Naomi: 'Hi Mum!' Hug. [laughs]

Wolfgang: Her not acknowledging the camera made the camera really obvious.

All: [laugh]

Wolfgang: He was looking at that photo of his grandad smiling, kind of lamely, going 'He looks so happy' like he really wants his grandad to be a happy, loving, grandad while he didn't look to be particularly happy [...]

Ms Goldblum: Like, 'Oh, look how happy my grandfather is!' It's like, no, he's not!

Because they present themselves as critical viewers and make fun of the programme, Wolfgang and Ms Goldblum are labelled "cynics":

Junior: You are such a cynic!

Krista: It seems like you're almost seeing it from a sales perspective [...]

Wolfgang: And maybe I'm a big cynic about this, and that's why I haven't watched it, but like you were saying, it's 'good television' because it's kind of

this emotionally padded, sort of scripted, prompted kind of thing that makes it more palatable for people to watch.

Wolfgang's engagement with astronomy documentaries, however, confirms that he learns when viewing a programme referentially instead of positioning himself as critical and cynical:

Wolfgang: There's some documentaries that I like [...] about constellations. I actually really like how some of those know what they're talking about, talking honestly and articulately about a subject that they're passionate about. Especially with science documentaries when you see an American documentary, it's so sensationalist, perhaps to make it more palatable for a wider audience and that kind of, that really annoys me. I prefer to just, you're there to learn about something and just kind of get the facts but presented in a way that illuminates how interesting it is in the first place. As opposed to bright lights and explosions.

Because he perceives these science documentaries as believable, authentic and credible sources of knowledge, Wolfgang trusts them; because he trusts those programmes and "accepts" (Cohen, 2006, p. 191) them as truthful, he learns from them. This highlights an important aspect of referential involvement: referential viewing is not simply linked to the perceived reality or realism of television; "willing abandonment", as Austin (2005) calls it, also involves *trust*, a modality of response that plays a crucial role in televisual learning (particularly learning from documentaries).

Wolfgang's cynicism and scepticism towards *Who Do You Think You Are?* can be linked to his generic labelling of the programme as "reality TV". As Hill (2002, 2005) shows, viewers are usually critical and cynical about the authenticity of reality television (even those who enjoy it). Despite the generic label of "reality", most viewers interpret these programmes as inauthentic (Hall, 2003, 2006, 2009; Hill, 2002, 2005). In *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television*, Hill (2005) contrasts viewers' perceptions of news and documentaries' with their perceptions of reality television:

News and documentary are the two most common genres within factual television where viewers place a great deal of trust in the truth claims of audio-visual documentation [...] With regard to popular factual television, audience

trust in the honesty of the situations portrayed [is] lower than news or documentary, and varie[s] according to different types of reality programming. (p. 59)

Indeed, reality programmes are characterised by display and performance although they adopt some of the conventions of the documentary (Corner, 2002). Hill's research also reveals that viewers often look for moments of authenticity within the unreal context of reality programmes: "the 'game' is to find the 'truth' in the spectacle/performance environment" (2002, p. 337). Interestingly, this describes Naomi and Wolfgang's attitude towards *Who Do You Think You Are?*:

Naomi: The conversation with his mum seemed a bit more relaxed, maybe? Or a bit more, I don't know, I kind of look at these shows and think it's a bit contrived. Whereas that seemed a bit more natural than maybe the rest of it [...]

Wolfgang: I found that when he was chatting to his aunty and he was seeing the photos that he hadn't seen before, when he was child, he was tearing up and stuff, that was quite, that was a memorable moment [...] That's probably the one time that I didn't notice, like, I didn't think about the cameras because I found it quite powerful, when he was tearing up that was a kind of an emotional moment. Him seeing that picture of himself that he had never seen before, his grandparents that he never met. I looked at it and thought it was kind of, that was sort of a nice moment.

The way in which Naomi and Wolfgang engage with *Who Do You Think You Are?* is comparable to the way in which most viewers engage with reality television: they look for moment of authenticity within what they consider to be an inauthentic environment.

According to Austin (2005), middle-class viewers' discourses about the authenticity of documentaries and reality television often serve as markers of taste and cultural distinction:

Often underpinning expressions of the appeal of 'the real', the use of a discourse of authenticity frequently revealed taste markers and a set of cultural distinctions deployed by these cinemagoers, notably between the veracity and 'honesty' of

*Etre et Avoir* and the contrasting ‘fakery’ and ‘inauthenticity’ of reality television. (p. 11)<sup>15</sup>

In other words, describing documentaries as good, authentic, genuine, informative and educational, and reality television as bad, fake, fabricated, cheap sensationalism and entertainment - as Wolfgang does - can be a way for (middle-class) viewers to assert and display their socio-cultural status. Similarly, in a study with young viewers in the United Kingdom, Buckingham (1993) shows that critical discourse about televisual entertainment can be a way for focus group participants to assert their social position by presenting themselves as sophisticated viewers. By performing as critical viewers, that is, by showing their intellectual distance, scepticism or cynicism towards lower cultural forms, participants distinguish themselves from an imagined mass audience made of common, unsophisticated, uneducated (working class?) viewers. As Buckingham writes, “being critical is a social, discursive practice” (p. 294). This type of discursive practice is also illustrated by a conversation between Ms Goldblum, Krista and Lec about what viewers may learn from the reality programme *Keeping up With the Kardashians*:

Krista: I love the show *Keeping up With the Kardashians*.

Ms Goldblum: Yeah, I watch that [...]

Krista: At the same time, I watch it and I’m just like, it’s so bad that it’s good because this show is teaching young women to aspire to having a shit ton of money for not really doing anything. What do they actually do? They don’t do anything.

Ms Goldblum: You don’t need to work hard, you don’t need to be talented. I think it influences people, yeah.

Lec: It’s overwhelmingly popular. And I think it’s because people who don’t have that kind of money don’t hate to fantasise and see what it’s like to live like that.

Krista: But it’s also what people want and aspire to.

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<sup>15</sup> *Etre et Avoir* (Philibert [Director], 2002) is a French documentary about a small rural school.



Ms Goldblum: You watch it and you can, I think, you, from your point of view, you see it for what it is, and you move away from it. You're not watching it going 'That's me. I'm going to do this. That's going to be me'.

Krista: I don't become obsessed and go 'I need that, I want that'.

Ms Goldblum: And it's not your logic or your reality, actually. Whereas people watch and like, I think it's quite delusional, right? Because I watch it, it's entertaining...

Lec: They're funny!

Ms Goldblum: ...but to me it's not reality.

Krista: It is a delusion of society.

Ms Goldblum: It is so scripted. Everything about that is so scripted. They got writers and that show is so choreographed and planned. But people who aren't aware of that, they think that it's actually, genuinely achievable and it's genuinely, you know, that it is like, a feasible future for them. That's like, that is creepy.

Krista: So you think it's bad?

Ms Goldblum: But I'm not the...I've got, I know the lesson. It doesn't matter because I'm in no trouble of falling into it. It's the people who should learn the lesson who are the ones who are not learning. They're the ones who can't dissociate themselves from it. They can't see it.

Krista: So you think that it's bad. That people could potentially take it seriously and learn the wrong things?

Ms Goldblum: But I say shame on those people, you should be smarter, you should know better.

These responses illustrate what communication scholars call the "third-person effect" (Davison, 1983): the participants expect unrealistic reality programmes like *Keeping up With the Kardashians* to have a greater and more harmful effect on other viewers than on themselves. As W. Phillips Davison (1983) writes, "in the view of those trying to evaluate the effects of a communication, its greatest impact will not be on 'me' or 'you'

but on ‘them’ – the third persons” (p. 3). By positioning herself as a critical viewer of *Keeping up With the Kardashians*, and by showing that she does not learn the wrong lessons from it, Ms Goldblum distinguishes herself from “them”, the imagined mass of media-illiterate, unsophisticated, uncritical viewers “who are not learning” and “who can’t dissociate themselves from it”, thus establishing her own socio-cultural status of media-literate, sophisticated, educated viewer.

As Ang (1985) and Corner (2002) note, critical viewing is not incompatible with entertainment. Although critical viewers usually experience less enjoyment, being critical can contribute to a different kind of pleasure, which involves mockery, irony or subversion. For example, Ms Goldblum is entertained by *Keeping up With the Kardashians* even though she views it with critical and intellectual distance. Referential viewing, that is, belief in a programme’s authenticity and “willing abandonment” (Austin, 2005), is not a prerequisite for entertainment; but my analysis shows that it is a prerequisite for learning from - and *with* - a programme.

## Conclusion

As noted earlier, televisual education and televisual entertainment are sometimes perceived as distinct and separate rather than blended, and entertainment is often associated with hedonistic escapism. Neil Postman (1985), for example, argued in the 1980s that the growing importance of entertainment media and its merging with news would lead to the weakening of serious information. My case study of *Who Do You Think You Are?* challenges this view by demonstrating that entertainment can be part of televisual pedagogy. My interviews reveal that the producers use entertainment techniques as pedagogical tools to teach history and ethics. For them, teaching means engaging the audience by telling stories and by encouraging empathy and emotional involvement. This is supported by my textual analysis and my study of the programme’s reception. The discussion groups and online comments confirm that viewers believe that they learn if and when they enjoy watching the programme and through entertainment responses such as emotional involvement, empathy, identification, parasocial interactions with the celebrities and feelings of curiosity, excitement and thrill. These findings are in alignment with recent research conducted by communication scholars

who distinguish hedonistic and eudaimonic entertainment (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Oliver & Raney, 2014). Hedonistic entertainment centres on pleasure, fun and escapism and does not lead to deep learning. Eudaimonic entertainment, however, is a higher form of intellectual delight, which is linked to enlightenment, insight and reflection. My study of the pedagogy of *Who Do You Think You Are?* shows that televisual entertainment can be a form of eudaimonic entertainment and that it can result in deep learning.

My case study also highlights the importance of authenticity and trust for televisual learning, although this aspect was not mentioned by the professionals I interviewed. My textual analysis reveals that *Who Do You Think You Are?* invites learning by using some of the conventions of the documentary to persuade viewers that what they see and hear is authentic and that it is a reliable source of knowledge. The discussion groups confirm that viewers must trust the programme in order to learn from it. Those who view the text referentially and accept it as truthful also say that they learn from it; however, those who position themselves as critical viewers and question its authenticity do not trust it nor do they learn from it.

Finally, my case study highlights audiences' activity and agency by showing the different ways in which viewers interpret and use the same televisual text. The programme fails to teach the viewers whose readings are not in alignment with the producers' pedagogical intentions and with the educational messages encoded in the text. Those viewers are neither entertained nor convinced that the text is authentic, and as a consequence, do not perceive it as educational. Furthermore, my study reveals that among those who do learn, some gain forms of knowledge that were not predicted by the interviews or the textual analysis, which indicates that viewers' learning cannot be determined by the programme makers nor by the text.

Television does not only teach through individual programmes but through the confrontation of different genres and pedagogies (Ellis, 2000). Previous studies show that both educational and entertainment programmes have the potential to educate viewers; but are there any differences between the pedagogy of educational programmes and the pedagogy of entertainment programmes? If so, what are they? To answer this question, I apply the same research strategy to the soap opera *Home and Away*.

## Chapter 4: The Pedagogy of *Home and Away*

### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from my case study of *Home and Away*, a long-running Australian soap opera that follows the lives of the residents of the fictional coastal town Summer Bay. Although they are often associated with escapism in common-sense discourse, several studies show that soap operas can teach by promoting awareness about social issues (Baym, 2000; Bowles, 2000; Buckingham, 1993; Hobson, 2003; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Livingstone, 1998; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986; van Vuuren et al., 2013). However, with the exception of Tulloch's research on *A Country Practice*, previous studies do not explain *how* soap operas teach. As explained in chapter one, Tulloch's work is useful for my research because it reveals that soap writers teach by encouraging emotions and by "showing rather than telling" (1986, p. 181). My case study extends his findings by identifying specific pedagogical models in *Home and Away*.

In particular, I demonstrate that the programme relies on two contradictory models: although it uses a constructivist approach to raise awareness about issues and to prompt reflection and discussion, it also applies transmissive techniques to teach morality. As explained in the Introduction, these pedagogical models offer conflicting views of the teaching-learning moment. In this chapter, I examine a form of informal teaching that transcends the boundaries of schooling and educational media: I show how the transmissive and constructivist pedagogical models, which are usually considered in the context of formal educational settings, apply in the context of informal teaching through entertainment television.

The first section focuses on the production perspective. I examine the discourse of three professionals involved in the writing and distribution of *Home and Away*: how they perceive their role in terms of education and entertainment, whether they aim to educate and if so, what pedagogical models, techniques and tools they use.

In the second section, I present the findings from my textual analysis to explain how the programme's generic and textual features invite learning.

The third section focuses on the reception of *Home and Away* by a small sample of viewers. I analyse some responses to the programme and whether these responses are in alignment with the writers' intentions and the textual features.

## **Production**

To investigate the production perspective, I conducted semi-structured interviews with two writers who worked as writer, story producer and script producer on *Home and Away* between 2007 and 2012. To ensure consistency with my previous case study, I also conducted a semi-structured interview with a Seven programmer. My interviews reveal differences between the writers and the programmer and ambiguities within the discourse of the writers. Although they clearly privilege entertainment over education, both writers acknowledge that the programme has an educational dimension. Unlike the programmer, they consider themselves as responsible entertainers, and this sense of responsibility influences their pedagogy. My interviews also reveal that the writers adopt two contradictory pedagogical stances: one constructivist and one transmissive.

## **To entertain**

According to the programmer, Seven does not aim to educate its audience: "education isn't the final objective. The decisions are made on ratings, which in itself affects it being educational, because education isn't the main goal" (Seven Programmer, Interview, 8 February 2014). For the programmer, the "main goal" of commercial programmes is to generate revenue for the network: "I think, ultimately, television is a business that is selling advertising. And I think that advertising is the key product [...] I don't think that education is a concern, particularly to the business". Business imperatives are linked to entertainment: in this view, the mission of commercial television is to attract viewers by providing pleasure and escapism. This contrasts with the Reithian definition of public broadcasters as responsible intellectuals and with the idea that television can inform, educate and entertain simultaneously. Indeed, the programmer sees education as potentially detrimental to entertainment and therefore to business:

I don't think that television should be responsible. I think that television needs to be free to be about anything, and just the pure entertainment factor. Escapism [...] I think that's the core of TV, ultimately [...] If you get away from that, and you try to make it educational, is that not going to affect the plot? And is that going to make it less satisfying?

Unlike the programmer, the writers believe that commercial programmes like *Home and Away* can teach. When asked if the programme has an educational dimension, Writer 2's answer is "absolutely. And in some cases deliberately, with the storylines" (Writer 2, Interview, 5 February 2014). Nevertheless, they are aware that *Seven* does not aim to educate: "I have to say that the educational side of it or the message side of it is not always overt. I would not think that the network is setting out to say that or do that". Although they recognise that the programme can teach, both writers reject the label of "educators" and consider themselves primarily as entertainers:

I think [*Home and Away*] is escapist in that respect. They can watch stories set at the beach, or in a town where...one of the things that we have to keep in mind is that Summer Bay is a place that everybody wants to come to [...] which links it to escapism. It's about small communities and communities that reflect our own communities and our own families. I think that's something people crave. It's a feeling of, I don't know, safety and pleasure, I guess [...] Also, we have stories that obviously hook them in. They want to see people getting romantic or there is a mystery that is unresolved that draws them back. (Writer 2)

By providing escapism, the writers aim to attract a large and diverse audience: ideally, "everybody wants to come to" Summer Bay - and watch *Home and Away* - and all viewers identify with the characters and their community. This assumption is questionable since the programme has been accused of failing to represent Australia as a multicultural society (Wilkins, 2012). Although the large ensemble of characters is diverse in terms of age and socio-economic backgrounds, there is little to no ethnic diversity. In the November 2011 episodes, for example, all the actors are of Anglo-Celtic descent, except Ada Nicodemou, who is Greek Cypriot, and Jay Laga'aia, who is Samoan. As Laga'aia remarked in 2012 after his character was written out, the programme's predominantly Caucasian cast does not reflect Australian society

(Wilkins, 2012). The writers' conception of "our" community and of "everybody" is not culturally or ethnically inclusive, which may reduce the appeal of the programme and the pleasures it offers to viewers who do not identify with Caucasian or Anglo-Celtic actors and characters.

According to the writers, however, the main appeal of the programme is its storylines, which they refer to as "drama". The term "drama" sometimes refers to a genre distinct from soap operas, but in the context of my interviews it was used in reference to narrative conflicts and tensions. The notion of creating entertaining stories "that hook viewers in" (Writer 2) was a recurring theme. Although they acknowledge that some storylines can educate, both writers insist that "drama always has to come first" (Writer 1, Interview, 1 February 2014). Creating entertaining stories is their primary objective and it is always given precedence over teaching:

As long as it's entertaining and dramatic, you can explore stuff [...] I think you can [educate] as long as entertainment comes first and as long as drama comes first [...] You can educate, but it always, always has to be dramatic. (Writer 1)

The writers and producers of *A Country Practice* in Tulloch and Moran's (1986) study have a similar discourse. Using phrases that are strikingly similar to those of the *Home and Away* writers, they explain that even though they aim to educate viewers about social and health issues, they always prioritise drama over education. For example, script producer Hugh Stuckey, who worked on *A Country Practice* between 1981 and 1988, is quoted as saying that "the drama really comes first. If that doesn't entertain, there's no point putting any messages in" (Cited in Tulloch & Moran, 1986, p. 66). Similarly, the writers of *Home and Away* explain that although they explore issues in a way that has the potential to educate, these are addressed mainly for their dramatic and entertainment value: "when there is a social issue to be mined, we're looking primarily at the drama of it, what drama are we going to get out of it? What are the stories?" (Writer 2). This is explained further by Writer 1:

On a serial, you can actually tackle social issues quite a lot. Well, you kind of have to because you gotta make so much story. Pregnancy is always a good soap storyline, because you can drag it out over nine months [...] Cancer is good. Like, it sounds weird, but diseases like cancer is a good story because it's so

mysterious. It can start and stop and it can be cured or kill people. So dramatically it makes good stories.

Soap operas often address themes like pregnancy and illness, which can raise awareness or prompt reflection and discussion about social or personal problems (Baym, 2000; Bowles, 2000; Buckingham, 1993; Hobson, 2003; Livingstone, 1998; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986; van Vuuren et al., 2013). However, from the writers' perspective, the value of a storyline is primarily linked to its entertaining dimension rather than its educational potential.

The writers of *Home and Away* (and *A Country Practice*) use the word "drama" as a synonym for entertainment and as opposed to education. They imply that stories are inherently associated with pleasure, which they believe to be at odds with teaching and learning. Like the programmer, they implicitly separate what educates and what entertains. As noted earlier, this binary view - drama versus teaching, pleasure versus learning - although contested by many media scholars and by television professionals who see themselves as edutainers<sup>16</sup> - pervades mainstream, academic, institutional and professional discourses (Hinds, 1991; Klein, 2011, 2013).

### **To not miseducate: television professionals as responsible entertainers**

The writers believe that entertainment can be incompatible with education because their need to prioritise drama may lead to misinformation and miseducation:

Clearly I can't stand here and tell you with a clean conscience that I have been awfully accurate to all types of issues, or characters, or people in the community. I haven't. Because we're also searching for drama. And we're searching for conflicts and we're searching for interesting stories. (Writer 2)

One thing soaps don't do well sometimes is medical accuracy. You have to push it a bit. Or accuracy about legal issues, you know? Say you're trialled for something, in real life that can often take five years, but in a soap it happens

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<sup>16</sup> My previous case study, for example, shows that the professionals working for the public broadcaster SBS see themselves as edutainers and aim to simultaneously inform, educate and entertain.



really quickly [laughs]. Because otherwise, often if we did things the way they are done in real life no one would watch. So you sometimes have to put that aside, with legal things and also medical things. People get wrong ideas sometimes about how things are done. (Writer 1)

Nonetheless, the writers claim that they try to not misinform or miseducate. They say that they feel responsible to be as accurate and as moral as possible, within the confines of dramatic entertainment:

It's all about drama, it's all about finding the stories, that's the primary and single focus. But in finding those stories, decisions have to be made about the message we are conveying. Because you can't just make up a story and then tell it in a way that is irresponsible [...] So there is definitely a sense of responsibility towards what we put on television from my perspective [...] I feel that in my capacity as an entertainer if you like, I have a responsibility to make sure that what I'm saying is morally correct and as truthful as possible. (Writer 2)

The writers do not identify as edutainers but see themselves as responsible entertainers. This conflicts with the programmer's conception of commercial television. As in Tulloch and Moran's (1986) study of *A Country Practice*, the programmer discards the notion of responsibility, focusing exclusively on entertainment and commercial success whereas the writers feel a sense of responsibility. This confirms that there can be divergences between professionals involved in the production of a programme and network executives involved in its distribution (Tulloch, 2000; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). Perceptions about entertainment television's mission, its responsibility and educational dimension are not homogenous within the industry. Television professionals, like viewers, are active audiences who interpret televisual texts in different ways (Tulloch, 2000). Different professional communities (of writers, producers, broadcasters) - which can be defined as different interpretive communities - may have different readings of the same text and different understandings of their role in society. In the case of *Home and Away*, the programmer interprets the programme as pure entertainment and does not believe that commercial entertainment television should have any responsibility. The writers, on the other hand, interpret *Home and Away* as potentially educational and believe that commercial entertainment has a

responsibility towards the audience.

Although they sometimes privilege drama and entertainment over accuracy, the *Home and Away* writing team often consults advisors and experts to ensure some degree of accuracy in their stories:

It's always hard to make something realistic on TV, but we do try. There is a medical advisor on the show, and we do try [...] Also, you can call up and do your own research, which can be good. Sometimes that research has to be shaped a bit to fit the drama. But you try. Within the dramatic confines, you try to make it as realistic as possible. (Writer 1)

The main thing is that you don't want to misinform the public. Misinformation is actually dangerous, right? [...] I do think you gotta be careful about how you portray things, especially the health issues. You know, you're not saying that this particular pill cures you or this one kills you. You have to be faithful to reality. (Writer 2)

The producers of *Who Do You Think You Are?* talk about their responsibility in a similar way:

My personal feeling about responsibility is...accuracy [...] Accuracy is so, so important because people are taking information from television as, you know, gospel. So we always talk about accuracy as a duty not a virtue. So it's not something we think of last. We think of it first. You have to be absolutely accurate, honest and transparent. (Producer 2)

These shared concerns about accuracy are noteworthy because they reveal underlying assumptions about the power of television and audiences' interpretive abilities and inabilities. These statements show that the writers of *Home and Away* and the producer of *Who Do You Think You Are* imagine the audience as vulnerable to media power and unable to interpret, analyse and contextualise televisual content. This discourse is grounded in the media effects theoretical model, which assumes that television has the power to directly influence viewers' cognition and behaviour and that audiences are passive, uncritical and vulnerable to the effects of television:

How do we show suicide or somebody suicidal without causing people who are

watching the show to then go and commit suicide? You know, we've been told that the figures say that if somebody mentions or portrays suicide on a television show, the suicide numbers spike. (Writer 2)

As Hartley (1999) points out, media professionals often perceive audiences as vulnerable and media messages as powerful, and therefore, potentially harmful: "TV executives and programme makers are among the first people to worry (parentally) about the 'effect' of TV violence, for instance, or (liberally) the representation of minority groups on screen or (conservatively) the need to protect family values" (p. 19). Indeed, these assumptions about audiences' vulnerability to televisual power are also perceptible when the writers discuss their responsibility in terms of morality. Because they assume that television has the power to directly influence beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, they feel the responsibility not only to be accurate but also to be "morally correct" (Writer 2): "our number one job is to be entertaining [...] But you also don't want to give really bad, put bad messages out there" (Writer 1). Both interviewees refer to this sense of responsibility as their "moral code":

My responsibility lies in my moral code. I wouldn't want to condone reprehensible actions or activities [...] You have to make the decision about what you're going to say about that issue. And in that decision-making process on how to tell that story comes the message or the moral code. (Writer 2)

This moral code is not motivated purely by a sense of personal responsibility or a desire to be educational; it is also influenced by broadcasting regulations and commercial motivations. The writers have to follow the Australian Communications and Media Authority's (ACMA) Code of Practice, which aims to "regulate the content of commercial television in accordance with current community standards" (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2010, p. 1) and contains rules regarding language and the depiction of violence, nudity, sex, drugs and suicide (p. 13). Moreover, the writers try not to "put bad messages out there" to avoid alienating some viewers and advertisers.

Although their motivations are not purely educational, it can be argued that this commitment to a moral code is a form of teaching. As I demonstrate below, the writers aim to teach moral values and to encourage moral behaviours through transmissive

techniques - which conflicts with the constructivist, open-ended techniques they use to educate viewers about social and personal issues.

### **Teaching without moralising: constructivist discourse**

The educational dimension of soap operas is often linked to their propensity to explore topical subjects and work through public debates. Because they address a wide range of topics within their storylines, they can raise awareness about issues, prompt reflection and provoke discussions amongst viewers (Bowles, 2000; Briggs, 2010; Ellis, 2000; Klein, 2013; Liebes & Katz, 1990). In their reception study of *Dallas*, for example, Liebes and Katz (1990) show that “viewers typically use television fiction as a forum for discussing their own lives” (p. 154). According to Kate Bowles (2000), however, this educational dimension is more pronounced in British soap operas, which address topical and social issues in a realistic way, than in American soap operas, which emphasise escapism and glamour. Australian soap operas like *A Country Practice* and *Home and Away* fall within the British tradition since they consciously explore social and topical issues to educate (Bowles, 2000; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). This is explained by the SBS programmer I interviewed as part of my case study of *Who Do You Think You Are*:

When you look at soaps and things like that, you look at those and you think ‘Oh, they’re just terrible’ but they educate people. I can remember working at Seven and with *Home and Away*, some of the topics about rape, and suicide and stuff, they help contextualising [issues] in a really nice way [...] A lot of people would go ‘That’s not educational at all!’ and often they sensationalise those topics. But even so, it’s still pushing those topics to the forefront. (SBS Programmer)

This is confirmed by the writers, who explain that they consciously address social and health issues in their storylines:

Recently on *Home and Away*, there was a story about a character who had melanoma, who got cancer, and eventually died. So there was an educational component in trying to make it as realistic as possible. There was also a young

female character, Ruby, who got diabetes [...] *Home and Away* has tackled an amazing amount of topics over the years. Which you can do on a serial, you can actually tackle social issues quite a lot. You often use it to explore issues in Australian society. I remember during the first season, a character, Carly, was raped by a hitchhiker. It was pretty confronting [...] We also did an Australia Day riots story, which was inspired by the Cronulla riots,<sup>17</sup> which was used to explore racism. (Writer 1)

This comment draws attention to the link between accuracy and pedagogy. The writers feel a responsibility to be accurate not only to avoid misinforming but also when consciously trying to inform and educate. For instance, educating the audience about skin cancer requires making the storyline as accurate as possible by doing preliminary research and consulting medical advisors. Writer 2 also mentions the Australia Day riots story and explains how they used it to address racism in a series of episodes broadcast in late January and early February 2010:

A few years ago we did [a story] on Australia Day [...] We'd found that on Australia Day long weekend, there are people sporting Australian flags, wearing them down to the beach, drinking, and being aggressively Australian. And a discussion came up about what is Australia Day about? And is it about racism? Is it about us trying to be, you know, 'We're Australian and we're better than other people, but they're coming into our country'? And so we did an Australia Day episode, in which there was a racial issue against a Muslim guy and Ada's character. So, yes, there are issues.

Although the writers address social problems like racism, nationalism, unemployment, crime, violence, drugs or alcoholism, most issues concern emotions, personal relationships or sexuality because the programme focuses on "emotional drama and conflict" (Writer 2):

[*Home and Away* is] educational in the fact that people who maybe don't have time after work, you know, a lot of our viewers now, both parents, both adults in the house work, and their children go to school and then there's not a lot of time

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<sup>17</sup> The Cronulla riots were a series of violent racial confrontations that took place in 2005 in Cronulla, a southern suburb of Sydney.

at the end of the day to be having discussions about life, or whatever is going on. And I think one of the key things about a show like *Home and Away* being on every afternoon is that people learn how to behave and how to solve problems and how to react to people who are going through any sort of crisis, who have even minor issues. They are learning about sex, you know, having sexual experiences or going through love or going through grief. And they watch these shows and they learn how to deal with life issues. (Writer 2)

The Seven programmer, who, paradoxically, claims that the network has no educational intention, acknowledges that programmes like *Home and Away* have the potential to teach “about relationships and interactions”:

Watching relationships and how they develop and how certain actions play out. And in drama, you can watch that happen and that, in a way, it’s learning about relationships [...] And I think that’s something. I think it’s important, to be able to watch relationships develop [...] In our educational system, I think there’s a gap for teaching that sort of stuff [...] We don’t get taught about relationships really in school. Like, in PDHPD [Personal Development, Health and Physical Education] you learn about the mechanics of safe sex, and how to avoid taking drugs and alcohol, and you learn about the scientific things, but you don’t learn so much about how to protect yourself in a relationship or how to drop someone nicely.

As noted in chapter one, the idea that media entertainment fills in gap in formal education, particularly for questions regarding relationships, sexuality and sexual health is supported by several reception studies conducted with children and young people (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Lumby & Albury, 2008; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014; McKee, 2012; Noble & Freiberg, 1985; Noble & Noble, 1979; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997).

The producers and writers see the programme as a platform to explore such issues without moralising. In an interview published in November 2011, the producer Cameron Welsh explains how the writers address social issues:

What we have tried to do with stories of this kind is not make judgments. It is really a case of presenting it and leaving it open for discussion. Our research

tells us *Home and Away* is watched a lot by mums and teenagers. [That means] we can present an issue like this [domestic violence] at seven o'clock at night. Families can watch it and then discuss it. (Cited in news.com.au, 2011)

The terms “making judgments”, “moralising”, “preaching” and “lecturing” are often used pejoratively by the writers, who insist that they do not write from a moral standpoint or with moral authority nor do they use storylines to tell viewers what is right and what is wrong or how they should behave: “You’re not actually writing the story to tell people how to be” (Writer 2).

You never lecture on a show, but you can use stuff to illustrate something in a dramatic way [...] Very rarely on a serial have I seen people want to do stuff that has a specific message [...] But, you often use it to explore issues in Australian society. (Writer 1)

Here, Writer 1 contrasts the constructivist pedagogy of *Home and Away* with a more transmissive pedagogical approach, which is to teach morality in an authoritative way. Conveying an overt educational or moral message is perceived as “lecturing” and as speaking with moral authority, which, according to the interviewees, would be inappropriate for television writers. Similarly, the programmer claims that television should not have a moral agenda:

It’s not done from a moral standpoint, I don’t think. And I don’t know if it should be either. TV, if its starts getting moralistic and ethical, then it’s got an agenda [...] And what is right and wrong anyway? It’s tricky.

According to Klein (2011), most entertainment producers reject the label of “educator” because they associate education with lecturing and because they do not want to be perceived as elite intellectuals telling people what to think or how to behave. She quotes the British documentary producer Nick Mirsky as saying:

I don’t feel my job is to preach at people and tell them what to think, but it is our job I suppose to get people to look at the world around them and think about it, and engage with it, but not tell them what they have to think. (Cited in Klein, 2011 p. 917)

Like Writer 1, Mirsky discards the transmissive pedagogical model, which

conceptualises viewers as passive recipients, adopting instead a constructivist discourse which conceptualises viewers as active: “looking”, “thinking” and “engaging”. The writers of *Home and Away* also explain that their pedagogical intention is to make people think about issues: “we’re also looking at how we present this issue in a way that is fair and interesting and opens people’s minds.” (Writer 2).

One of the pedagogical techniques the writers use to explore issues in a constructivist way is to represent several perspectives on a single issue:

You don’t want everyone agreeing on something, it’s good to have different points of view [...] It could be, say, if a character has cancer and they don’t want to do any more treatment. You know, they say ‘I just want to have a good quality of life’ and others characters go ‘No, you should do treatment, you should fight this thing, you should fight this as much as you can’, and the person who has cancer goes ‘No, I would rather not do it’. That’s a really interesting dilemma [...] Often drama is better when it’s like: ‘This is one point of view, this is another point of view’. If you shove your opinions down people’s throats, people might go, they don’t want to watch. (Writer 1)

Representing different viewpoints is a dramatic technique that the writers use to entertain (through narrative conflicts) and to avoid alienating some viewers; but it is also a constructivist pedagogical technique that aims to prompt reflection, discussion or debate instead of transmitting a single message in an authoritative way. In this model, viewers are conceptualised as active learners. In my textual analysis, I further examine these constructivist techniques.

### **Teaching morality: transmissive discourse**

Although the writers claim that they present different perspectives on a single issue in a way that is “fair” (Writer 2) and balanced, they acknowledge that they privilege some perspectives by representing them positively and undermine what they consider conservative views by representing them negatively:

Colleen was a character that we could use. One of her really useful purposes was that she had an old fashioned, non-liberal, more judgemental view on the world.



And nobody took her very seriously. So, you know, as a character she was a bit silly and people thought she was silly and ignorant, and ill-informed. And so this character became a representation of what we would as storytellers consider to be an ill-informed, bigoted view. And she allowed us, as a character, to present the other person's argument. So if, for instance, we had an issue, I'm gonna say gay, I don't remember what Colleen's attitude was towards gayness, let's say it was a gay issue. We would be able to say most of our characters would be open to this. And for the people, for the viewers who were not open to it, Colleen was the voice of them. So we could have her say 'Oh, I don't think it's right! I don't understand how two women can be together and I don't think it's good for the children!' Colleen could speak in those ways, allowing that voice of Australia, that perspective through. But it was encased in a character that nobody had a lot of respect for. Or her views nobody had a lot of respect for, because we knew that her views were old-fashioned and closed. And therefore, by allowing her to speak, we were undermining those views. Nobody is going to take her seriously. And yet the people that feel that way feel that their voice is being heard as well. (Writer 2)

Moreover, the writers say that they promote moral values they consider universal - or at least, those commonly accepted in the Australian society: "It wouldn't be deliberately anti-anything except for what we would morally all agree with, like anti-murder, anti-drugs." (Writer 2). For example, Writer 1 explains that they indirectly promote tolerance by making the main characters tolerant:

The show does have a moral code [...] There are some lines, some positions the show does take. You never find an Australian show where a main character is really racist, you know, who would say 'I don't like non-Anglos'. Normally that role is given to a guest star or a big player. So, I guess in a sense that's educational [...] But you wouldn't, I can't think of any Australian show where the lead characters would say something racist or homophobic. So, that's an example of education, in terms of pushing a certain agenda.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The SBS documentary series *Go Back to Where You Came From* (Cordell, 2011-2015) contradicts this as most of its main participants have racist attitudes.

This discourse of tolerance and multiculturalism is contradicted by the recent accusations of racism made against the programme and by the lack of ethnic diversity within the cast, which I mentioned earlier (Wilkins, 2012). But it is significant because it reveals one of the educational goals of the programme, which is to promote certain values and to teach viewers what is right and wrong. This is also mentioned by Writer 2:

One of the key things about a show like *Home and Away* being on every afternoon is that people learn how to behave and how to solve problems and how to react [...] And so the real moral core of the show, which is a deliberate moral core, is to say this is how people should behave, this is the right way.

The phrase “deliberate moral core” is important as it confirms that *Home and Away* has a moral agenda. More importantly, this shows that the writers aim to establish the superiority of certain moral values, rather than engaging with difference. In this respect, *Home and Away* differs from *Who Do You Think You Are?*: the former aims to teach moralizing normativity whereas the latter aims to teach ethics as engagement with difference (Hawkins, 2001).

To teach viewers how to behave, the writers illustrate moral lessons through storylines:

There was a young female character, Ruby, who got diabetes and that was to show: this is the right thing to do. When Ruby got diabetes, she was told ‘This is what you gotta do, you gotta take your medication’. But then we did a storyline where she was really upset and didn’t take her medication, and as a result wound up in hospital. You know, that’s educational in a way which means you got diabetes, take your medication. (Writer 1)

According to the programme’s moral code, characters who do the right thing are rewarded and those who do the wrong thing are punished. In the example above, Ruby’s bad decision to not take her medication was punished since she had to be hospitalised. As I explain in my textual analysis below, the text uses parables as transmissive pedagogical tool. Another rule of *Home and Away*’s moral code is that characters who behave immorally must either be punished or redeem themselves. The religiously-connoted concept of redemption is another evidence of the programme’s moral agenda:

There is an absolute, a deliberate decision to always make their decision, our core characters' decisions, redeemable. We call it, you know, how do we redeem this person? If they've done the wrong thing they have to do then the right thing to make up for it. And if they don't do that then the character is irredeemable and therefore, is usually quite soon after lost to the show. (Writer 2)

Rewarding characters' good actions and punishing their bad actions is a pedagogical technique that assumes that viewers learn morality and good behaviours directly through modelling (Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993; Williams, 1981). It is based on Bandura's (1963) social learning theory, which states that people learn behaviours through the observation of rewards and punishments and through imitation. This transmissive technique is also used by producers of entertainment-education:

The melodrama in a telenovela represent[s] a natural confrontation of 'good' role models against 'bad' ones, providing a unique opportunity to promote 'socially desirable' behaviors and dissuade 'socially undesirable' behaviors [...] Each time a positive role model performs a socially desirable behaviour, they are rewarded immediately. Each time a negative role model performs a socially undesirable behaviour [...] he/se is immediately punished. (Singhal et al., 1993, pp. 3-5)

This transmissive approach is grounded in the media effects model which assumes that the media directly influence users' cognition and behaviours. It assumes that learners uncritically absorb knowledge and moral lessons. This assumption is challenged by active audience researchers who have shown that responses to and interactions with media content are complex and diverse, and are influenced by various social, cultural and individual circumstances (Hall, 1973, 1980; Harindranath, 2009; Hodge & Tripp, 1986; Jensen & Rosengren, 1990; Lewis, 1992; Liebes & Katz, 1986, 1990; Livingstone, 1998). Similarly, the transmissive model has been criticised by education scholars who argue that learners are not passive and uncritical recipients of knowledge but active participants in the learning process (Ramsden, 2003). Pedagogical techniques based on the social learning theory, like all transmissive techniques, are problematic because they disregard viewers' interpretive agency. Singhal, Rogers and Brown (1993) acknowledge that these techniques fail when viewers identify with the "wrong"

characters. Their study of the Indian entertainment-education soap opera *Hum Log* (Joshi, 1984-1985), for example, reveals that many older women identified with “a negative role model for female equality, who portrayed the role of a stereotypical Indian wife-mother” (p. 7).

*Home and Away*’s moral agenda is partially hidden because, like most television professionals, the writers do not want to appear as elite intellectuals telling the audience what to think or how to behave and because they assume that viewers do not want to be taught morality (Klein, 2011):

You never lecture on a show [...] Otherwise people will turn off. They will go ‘I don’t wanna watch this, I don’t wanna be lectured to’. Which has happened. Sometimes, TV shows and films can get preachy. We’ve all watched films where it gets preachy. (Writer 1)

This assumption about what viewers want (and do not want) is supported by some reception studies. According to Buckingham and Bragg (2003):

In general the teaching offered by soap operas is more effective where it is less overt – where it encourages viewers to make their own judgments, rather than simply commanding their assent. Viewers may be happy to learn from such programmes, but they do not wish to feel that they are being taught. (p. 55)

In my analysis of the discussion groups, I explore the idea that viewers do not want to be lectured by television and that consequently, constructivist pedagogy is more efficient than transmissive pedagogy. In my textual analysis below, I show how the writers’ pedagogical discourses and intentions translate into textual features and how generic conventions function as pedagogical tools.

## **Text**

In this section, I analyse eighteen episodes of *Home and Away* that were broadcast on Seven between 1 November 2011 and 25 November 2011 and were written or produced by the writers I interviewed. Using the works of other textual and visual analysts and previous studies of soap operas to guide my analysis, I show how the programme’s textual and generic features invite viewers to learn. My textual analysis is twofold. I

first demonstrate that one of the pedagogical techniques of *Home and Away* is to encourage referential involvement by using some of the conventions of the soap opera genre. In particular, I show how it uses soap realism, melodrama and romance as pedagogical tools. I next investigate two conflicting pedagogical models in the text: on one hand, *Home and Away* addresses social and personal issues in an open-ended way and without taking positions, which is in alignment with the writers' constructivist discourse. On the other hand, the text also teaches morality through transmissive techniques. My textual analysis thus supports my interview findings.

### **Soap realism as a pedagogical tool**

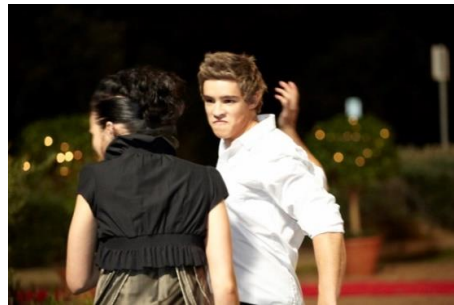
As several reception studies show, many soap viewers seek to virtually escape daily realities to enjoy an illusory world of glamour (Brunsdon, 1997; Livingstone, 1998). This escapist dimension, however, is less pronounced in British soap operas, which are usually more realistic and less glamorous than their American counterparts (Bowles, 2000; Hobson, 2003). British soap operas often follow the realist tradition and adopt some of the conventions of social realism in their depiction of the everyday life of ordinary working-class and middle-class people (Hobson, 2003; Jordan, 1981; Longhurst, 1987). For Bowles (2000), Australian soap operas strike a middle ground between American escapism and British gritty realism. While American soap escapism is linked to the glamour of the cast and the wealth of the characters, in Australia this escapist dimension is associated with rural or small town settings (Tulloch & Moran, 1986).

Keeping to the Australian tradition, *Home and Away* blends small town escapism with a realistic representation of everyday life and social issues (Bowles, 2000). Although presented as a safe haven where viewers can escape the worrisome realities of daily life, Summer Bay is plagued with delinquency and a wide range of social problems. When Alan Bateman initially created the programme in 1988, its focus was on foster children arriving in the small community; as Andrew Mercado (2004) observes, this "revolving door of young delinquents" (p. 252) and their troubled families have provided many of the programme's storylines:

Alan Bateman had always wanted the show to tackle serious social issues such

as drugs, alcoholism and domestic violence. Wanting a harder edge than (what was then) the much softer *Neighbours* meant that *Home and Away* would tackle teenage pregnancy and rape within the first couple of months. (p. 254)

In the November 2011 episodes, the teenage delinquent character is Stu Henderson (Brenton Thwaites), a tattooed member of the River Boys, Summer Bay's surfer gang. Stu fights rival gangs, steals cars, and spikes the punch at his school formal.<sup>19</sup> In these episodes, he also stalks and abuses his girlfriend, Sasha Bezmel (Demi Harman).



**Addressing domestic violence: Sasha (Demi Harman) and Stu (Brenton Thwaites)**

In addition, these episodes explore political corruption, road safety, social precarity and teenage pregnancy, as well as more personal “life issues” (Writer 2) such as fidelity, commitment, first sexual experiences, having children, planning for the future, grieving the death of a child, cancer and safe sex. As the SBS Programmer points out, by tackling these issues, the programme can potentially inform, raise awareness and provoke discussions. Not every storyline, however, has an educational dimension. My analysis focuses on those that can be interpreted as educational because they address social, personal or health issues.

Soap operas are realistic not only because they address topical issues and personal problems, but because they do so in a way that is relatable (Baym, 2000; De Kosnik, 2013; Ellis, 2000; Hobson, 2003; Jordan, 1981; Livingstone, 1998; Longhurst, 1987). According to Livingstone (1998), soap realism allows “viewers to recognise events, situations and problems of their own lives” (p. 56). One of the main conventions of the genre is that the lives of the characters must resonate with the viewers’. As Ellis (2000) writes, “the soap opera works through news issues [...] by providing narratives with resonance to the everyday experiences of the prevalent thinking of their viewing

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<sup>19</sup> A school formal is a ball held for students during the school year.

publics” (p. 110). According to Baym (2000), this dedication to resonance has always been one of the central aspects of the genre. I argue that realism and resonance are part of soap pedagogy because they invite referential involvement, which facilitates learning (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Hinds, 1991; Jenkins, 1992; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014; Noble & Freiberg, 1985; Noble & Noble, 1979; Tulloch, 2000; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986; Turner, 2010).

One of the reasons why the storylines may resonate with the viewers’ lives is because the characters appear to live in the same present time as the audience (Baym, 2000; De Kosnik, 2013; Ellis, 2000; Hobson, 2003; Jordan, 1981; Longhurst, 1987). Soap operas often respond to real life events and integrate topical issues in their stories: “‘pretending’ that the fictional stories are part of the ‘real’ world is made extremely convincing by relating the characters, stories and emotions to what is currently relevant in the world as it is represented” (Hobson, 2003, p. 74). This realist technique is exemplified by the Australia Day storyline about nationalism and racism, which was part of an episode broadcast on Monday 1 February 2010, that is, less than a week after the real Australia Day.<sup>20</sup> To raise awareness and prompt reflection and discussion about racism, the writers encourage viewers to relate to the story by situating the events in a context that resembles their real lives. For long-term viewers, this effect of resonance is enhanced by the fact that soap time mimics real time (De Kosnik, 2013; Hobson, 2003):

Unlike the compressed temporalities of a two-hour film or a one-hour weekly series that runs for only a few years, soap opera events unfold in a timeline that mirrors viewers’ lived time quite closely. A soap opera airs five days per week for fifty weeks of each year, usually for many decades, and so viewers have the sense that they live their lives alongside, or in tandem with, soap characters. Even though the events in soap characters’ lives are usually far more dramatic than those taking place in viewers’ lives, the parallel between soap time and real time gives soap operas a certain ongoing realism that other forms of drama rarely match. (De Kosnik, 2013, p. 361)

Moreover, the programme depicts everyday life in a realistic way (Hobson, 2003; Jordan, 1981; Livingstone, 1998; Longhurst, 1987). Because its narrative development

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<sup>20</sup> Australia Day is celebrated on 26 January.

mainly occurs through dialogue (rather than actions), the characters are frequently shown doing mundane activities like working, drinking coffee, cooking dinner, going to the gym, or doing their homework, while having conversations: these do not provide narrative information but connote everyday life. Ordinarity and everyday life are also signified by some of the settings, costumes and props (Hallam & Marshment, 2000). Although some scenes are exteriors filmed on location in Palm Beach (a beachside suburb of Sydney), the majority of sets are domestic interiors or workplace settings. Similarly, the characters' plain outfits and make-up suggest ordinariness: "certain elements of the 'ordinary' are shown through the unobtrusive nature of the costume; anonymous and indistinctive signify the ordinary" (Hobson, 2003, p. 69).



**Signifying ordinariness through costumes: Dex (Charles Cottier) and Xavier (David Jones-Robert)**

Furthermore, *Home and Away* invites referential involvement through emotional and psychological realism. Like most soap operas, it focuses on the joys and sufferings of everyday life, so the characters' inner lives and emotions resonate with the viewers' (Ang, 1985; Briggs, 2010). Borrowing Williams' phrase, Ang (1985) argues that soap operas reproduce "structures of feeling" (p. 45), thus inviting empathy and identification:

Viewers will recognize themselves in the characters, not only in what they do, the lives that they live out and the dilemmas that they face, but also in how they feel. Its realisms in this are as much 'emotional' as they are 'empirical'. (p. 71)

Therefore, the implied soap audience is expected to empathise and/or to identify with the characters. I extend this idea: the implied audience must empathise and/or identify with the characters in order to learn. In other words, the text must resonate empirically and emotionally with the viewers' personal lives for the text to have an educational impact.



To ensure emotional realism and invite empathy and identification, the writers must maintain what Livingstone (1998) calls “character naturalism”, which refers to their psychological coherence across episodes and seasons. As Writer 1 explains: “when you create a character to start off with, you want to make sure it’s identifiable and likeable. And when you’re writing it, the main question is: is it truthful to that character? That’s probably the bigger issue”.

In addition, to be considered realistic, the characters must display psychological complexity and nuance. As Hobson (2003) points out, soap characters are not one-dimensional. As the series unfolds, different aspects of their personality are revealed and viewers discover their intricacies: “while the initial representation may be an indication, it is in the unfolding and never-ending stories that the characterization is developed. Because of the ongoing nature of soap operas, characterization can never remain at the level of the stereotype” (p. 84). In *Home and Away*, all characters evolve and transcend the hero/villain dichotomy. Minor character Dallas Phillips (Emma Griffin), for example, is initially introduced as a stereotype: nicknamed “the virgin slayer” by other characters, she is presented as a femme fatale and home-wrecker. In one episode, she seduces main character Dex Walker (Charles Cottier), thus breaking up his relationship with April Scott (Rihannon Fish) (episode 5419). The following week, however, Dallas is presented as homeless single mother caring for her hospitalised three-year old son (episode 5430). Thus, between these episodes, she evolves from villain to devoted mother. For Hobson, such evolution is crucial for viewers’ referential engagement because audiences cannot relate to stereotypes. Because her characterisation eventually transcends the stereotype of the evil temptress, Dallas is supposed to become more relatable; viewers are expected to empathise, to sympathise and to feel concerned with her social situation. Conversely, it can be argued that this type of radical character transformation offsets the text’s internal consistency and “narrative or *soap world* realism whereby action and causation are plausible within the bounds of the soap narrative and characterisation” (Barker, 1998, p. 74). In any case, the implied audience must perceive the characters as psychologically realistic and complex in order to view the text referentially and to learn from it. My discussion groups support this argument: despite the textual features, some viewers consider the characters unrealistic and this perceived lack of psychological realism hinders their learning.

Finally, soap realism can be linked to audiovisual conventions that aim to maintain an illusion of reality (Jordan, 1981; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). According to Jordan (1981), soap operas' naturalistic style is used to "suggest an unmediated, unprejudiced and complete view of reality" (p. 28). This form of naturalism, which aims to make the production process invisible by hiding the fact that the camera is actively constructing reality, is inherited from Hollywood classicism. Programmes like *Home and Away* and *A Country Practice* use some of the stylistic conventions of Hollywood classicism, including continuity editing, to create a "smoothly flowing narrative" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p. 195) by using matches on action, eyeline matches, shot/reverse shot patterns, and by following the 180 degree rule.<sup>21</sup> This use of Hollywood classical conventions may be linked to the producers' efforts to make soap operas "comfortable" and easy to watch (Tulloch & Moran, 1986). Bevan Lee, who wrote the first episode of *Home and Away* and worked on the programme as a script producer for over twenty-two years, has been quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* saying that Australian audiences prefer drama to be "comfortable, cosy, fairly realistic, and not challenging" (Cited in Austin, 1999). But these classical audiovisual conventions are also part of soap pedagogy because they are used to convey a sense of everyday life naturalism, thus inviting referential involvement (or as Austin (2005) puts it, "willing abandonment") rather than intellectual distance or critical analysis.

To summarise, soap operas are considered realistic because they address social issues (social realism); they paint everyday life in a relatable way (everyday life realism); they portray emotions that viewers may experience (emotional realism); they maintain characters' psychological coherence and complexity (psychological realism); and they use some audiovisual conventions inherited from Hollywood classicism (classical Hollywood realism). This multifaceted resonance is pedagogical because it invites learning through relatability and referential involvement. I argue that in order to learn from the educational content encoded in *Home and Away*, its implied audience must view it referentially, that is, they must relate to the situations and the characters, empathise with them and/or identify with them. Conducting discussion groups with viewers allows me to test and validate this argument.

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<sup>21</sup> The 180 degree rule means that the camera never crosses the imaginary line to view the scene from the opposite side of the action.

### **Melodrama and romance as pedagogical tools**

Claiming that soap operas teach through realism and melodrama seems paradoxical since melodrama is by definition unrealistic: “realism and melodrama are often posed as antithetical aesthetic terms, with realism connoting authenticity and truth and melodrama exaggeration, sensationalism and sentimentality” (Hallam & Marshment, 2000, p. 19). In the nineteenth century, realist art was assumed to be masculine and educational whereas melodrama was perceived as a more feminine form of entertainment (Hallam & Marshment, 2000). Soap operas, however, blend realism and melodrama (Baym, 2000; Livingstone, 1998; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). In this part of my textual analysis, I show that *Home and Away* teaches through two generic features that are traditionally considered as the more feminine and melodramatic aspects of soap operas: emotion and romance.

In soap operas, issues “take on meaning from the standpoint of personal life” (Tulloch, 2000, p. 66), which means that they are explored through family or romantic relationships and through emotional conflicts or dilemmas (Jordan, 1981; Longhurst, 1987; Tulloch, 2000; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). This is part of their pedagogy: to invite learning through referential and emotional involvement, they explore issues not through rational analysis but through the prism of the characters’ personal and emotional lives. As Hobson (2003) explains, soap operas make the unfamiliar and the unknown understandable by encouraging viewers to empathise with characters who deal with certain problems. Expanding on this idea, I argue that to inform and educate, soap operas show what certain social and personal problems *feel like*.

This is illustrated by the storyline about domestic violence. The story begins with Stu showing signs of jealousy when Sasha receives a text message from another boy. In a fit of rage, he takes her phone and hits her (episode 5418). She decides to end the relationship, but he emotionally blackmails her, threatening “to do something extreme” if she leaves him (episode 5419). She later forgives him, but he continues to abuse her both emotionally and physically. In the extract below from episode 5429, she refuses to get in his car, telling him that she does not want to be with him anymore before running away.



**Shot 1 (image)**

CU of Sasha, standing at the bus stop, looking at Stu who is sitting in his car.

**Shot 1 (sound)**

[Sasha] *No, I don't want to be with you.*

Sound of birds and car engine.



**Shot 2 (image)**

Straight cut to reverse shot of Stu, in CU, sitting in his car, talking to Sasha through the window.

**Shot 2 (sound)**

[Stu] *Get in the car, now.*

Sound of car engine.

Suspenseful low, long ascending notes played on strings.



**Shot 3 (image)**

Straight cut to reverse shot of Sasha in CU. Slow zoom-in on her face. She breathes heavily and runs away.

**Shot 3 (sound)**

Sound of birds, car engine, Sasha breathing.

Suspenseful, low, long ascending notes played on strings slowly getting louder.



**Shot 4 (image)**

Straight cut to medium shot of Stu, hastily getting out his car.

**Shot 4 (sound)**

Sound of car door opening.

Suspenseful low, long ascending notes played on strings getting louder.



**Shot 5 (image)**

Straight cut to medium shot of Stu, hastily getting out his car. Similar to shot 4, but slightly further.

**Shot 5 (sound)**

Suspenseful, low, long ascending notes played on strings getting louder.



**Shot 6 (image)**

Straight cut to frontal medium long-shot of Sasha running away. Stu runs after her. Shaky hand held camera. Fade-out.

**Shot 6 (sound)**

Sound of footsteps running. Suspenseful low long ascending notes still playing.

In the final scene of the episode, Sasha comes home and lies to her sister Indi (Samara Weaving) about what happened. She then goes to her bedroom, sits on her bed, and lifts her shirt to reveal bruises on her abdomen. The episode ends with a close up on her face revealing her tears and smudged makeup.



**Shot 7a (image)**

Medium long-shot of Sasha in her bedroom, closing the door and slowly taking off her bag.

**Shot 7a (sound)**

Sound of the door closing and of Sasha taking her bag off. Mark Seymour's soft rock ballad *Sometimes I Wonder If I Know You Too Much* is playing.



**Shot 7b (image)**

The camera pans to follow Sasha, sitting down on her bed, in a medium long-shot.

**Shot 7b (sound)**

Sound of Sasha sniffing. *Sometimes I Wonder If I Know You Too Much* still playing.




**Shot 8a (image)**

Straight cut to CU of Sasha's abdomen. She slowly lifts her shirt to reveal bruises on her abdomen.

**Shot 8a (sound)**

*Sometimes I Wonder If I Know You Too Much* still playing.

	<b>Shot 8b (image)</b> The camera slowly tilts up to show Sasha's face, in CU. Her face is flushed and her makeup is smudged.	<b>Shot 8b (sound)</b> Sound of Sasha, breathing/crying. <i>Sometimes I Wonder If I Know You Too Much</i> is still playing. The music ends before the credits start.
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(Stark [Writer] & Nottage [Director], 2011)

Here, the concepts of viewer position and implied audience are useful to understand how the textual features address the viewer and encourage certain responses to invite learning. In these two scenes, “empathy replaces speculative understanding” (Ellis, 2000, p. 122). The text works through the issue of domestic violence, not through information, rational explanation or debate but by encouraging empathy with a fictional victim: in other words, it invites viewers to feel with and feel for victims of domestic violence and to experience the situation “from the inside” (Ellis, 2000, p. 122). The viewer position created by the text and embedded in the text is a position of empathy and the implied audience is expected to understand Sasha’s situation by emotionally relating to her.

To explore the issue through Sasha’s perspective, the textual features stress her emotions of fear, distress and pain as well as her inability to speak up. In the first scene, fear is denoted by the actress’ slightly exaggerated performance, heavy breathing and facial expressions (which are highlighted by the use of close ups in shots 1 and 3 and by the zoom-in on her face in shot 3). Although the assault is not shown (in compliance with the ACMA Code of Practice), several textual features are used to present Stu as a threat. The colour of his car, green, is usually considered as a dichotomous and ambivalent colour, connoting nature, health and vitality as well as danger, poison, decay, illness, corruption and evil (Bellantoni, 2012). Fear and danger are also signified by the ominous and suspenseful low, long ascending notes played on strings, which are progressively getting louder, thus reinforcing the dramatic tension. Shot 6 invites fear by signifying violence, not only through Stu’s actions and facial expression, but also through depth of field, framing and camera movement: filming Sasha in the foreground and Stu in the background and showing them running closer towards the camera creates

a sense of threatening, abrupt violence, which is enhanced by the shaky hand-held camera (Monaco, 2000).

Unlike the first scene, which is tense and fast-paced to signify fear and violence, the second is slow and intimate to emphasise pain, sadness and distress. Mark Seymour's slow, soft rock ballad *Sometimes I Wonder If I Know You Too Much* connotes nostalgia and sadness. The character's emotions are underlined by the impression of intimacy created by the private setting, the warm tonalities and low-key lighting, which also denotes darkness and connotes secrecy. The absence of spoken words in this scene is significant: Sasha's silence, like the lie she tells her sister in the preceding scene, symbolises her inability to speak up.

These textual features also encourage empathy and emotional responses in the audience. The use of close ups, for example, emphasise drama over setting and invite intimate understanding of the character (Hansen et al., 1998; Lury, 2005; Monaco, 2000; Scollon & Scollon, 2003). The music in both scenes is used not only to signify emotions but to provoke feelings of dread and anxiety (in the first scene) and melancholy and sympathy (in the second scene). Here, the text puts the viewer in a position of intimate understanding of the character, thus inviting learning not through "speculative understanding" (Ellis, 2000, p. 122) or cognitive comprehension but through empathy and emotion. It does not only teach by "showing rather than telling" (Tulloch & Moran, 1986, p. 181), but also by showing what this situation (domestic abuse) feels like.

As the storyline about domestic violence illustrates, issues are explored through romantic or interpersonal conflicts. Because soap operas focus on personal relationships, social and personal problems usually involve a narrative pair. As noted above, issues are used by the writers to create what they call "drama", that is, narrative tension and conflict between characters. This applies to domestic life and relationship topics such as loyalty, commitment, parenting, or planning for the future, but also to broader social problems like racism, unemployment, crime, violence, corruption, road safety, social precarity, drugs, or alcoholism. As Longhurst (1987) observes: "soap operas block collective solutions to social issues and raised problems by 'resolving' these within the confines of the home and the tight-knight community and hence in



personal terms” (p. 634). Social problems are dealt with on a micro-level - often through the prism of romance - rather than on a macro-level, and never involve broader political or social structures.

To educate, the series often ties serious issues to romance. For example, in the November 2011 episodes, the theme of social precarity is explored through the romantic relationship between Dex and Dallas. Similarly, road safety is addressed through the romantic relationship between Bianca Scott (Lisa Gormley) and Liam Murphy (Axle Whitehead), and political corruption through the romantic relationship between John Palmer (Shane Withington) and his wife, Gina Austin (Sonia Todd). When John, one of Summer Bay’s councillors, starts accepting gifts from the developer Dennis Harling (Daniel Roberts) Gina tells him that these could be mistaken for bribes, but he refuses to acknowledge it (episode 5420). Eventually, John is accused of being corrupt and is asked to resign from the council (episode 5423). What is significant in terms of pedagogy is that although the theme of corruption concerns Summer Bay’s political life, its main impact is on John and Gina’s marriage. The other councillors or their meetings are never shown. Instead, the story concentrates exclusively on the romantic conflict between the characters and the impact that this has on their marriage: “political and work institutions are either absent or not central” (Longhurst, 1987, p. 638).



**Exploring corruption through romantic conflict: John (Shane Withington) and Gina (Sonia Todd)**

Conflict within romantic pairs has dramatic and entertainment value (as the writers explain), but it is also a pedagogical tool through which the text explores personal and social issues. This supports the idea that soap operas do not teach through rational information, explanation or analysis but through the prism of personal and emotional lives in order to invite viewers’ referential and emotional involvement.



### **Constructivist techniques**

From the writers' perspective, conflict between the characters is primarily an entertainment technique used to create dramatic tension. As Tulloch (2000) observes, soap operas "always try to present [issues] as entertaining 'dramatic conflict' rather than moralising about 'issues'" (p. 60). It also allows writers to juxtapose different perspectives on a single issue, which is another characteristic of the genre (Baym, 2000; Geraghty, 1991; Hobson, 2003; Modleski, 1982). Presenting several opinions on a particular issue is a technique used by soap writers to avoid alienating some viewers, since it creates "space for viewers with different experiences to relate to different perspectives within a programme" (Livingstone, 1998, p. 60):

There is no single hero figure, no single perspective expressed [...] In soap opera, the variety of perspectives expressed are individually personified in the various characters. Each issue (abortion, marriage, loyalty etc.) is given an open treatment because different characters each express a different perspective on the issue. The viewer is presented with a range of often conflicting viewpoints, and the interest lies in their juxtaposition, in the fact that often there is no simple answer, and in the space for the viewer to interpose his or her own views on the issue. (pp. 63-64)

As Writer 2 explains, this is one of the functions of the gossip Colleen Smart (Lyn Collingwood) who often embodies conservative opinions to allow "that voice of Australia, that perspective through".

But the presentation of multiple viewpoints is not a mere entertainment technique: it is also a fundamental aspect of the programme's constructivist pedagogy. As Roberta Pearson (2013) writes about the science fiction franchise *Star Trek* (Roddenberry, 1966-2005):

When an episode tackles a controversial social issue, the diverse range of characters [...] can voice a diverse range of views rather than simply reflecting the society's dominant assumptions. And since these diverse and sometimes controversial opinions are voiced by familiar and even beloved characters, viewers may be more inclined to consider positions differing from their own. (p. 214)

Similarly, by confronting different points of view on a single issue, *Home and Away* invites viewers to learn about different outlooks and to think about the issue from a range of perspectives. Viewers are not expected (by the writers and the text) to passively absorb a fixed educational message, but rather, to actively engage in the learning process through reflection and possibly through discussion and debate.

This constructivist technique is illustrated by the November 2011 episodes, in which political corruption is explored through the conflict between John and Gina. Similarly, the issue of planning for the future is explored through the conflict between Indi and her husband Romeo (Luke Mitchell): Indi wants Romeo to get a stable job and to start saving for their future whereas he prefers to live simply and to keep working as a surfing instructor. The theme of first sexual experiences is explored through a clash of opinions between two friends, April and Ruby. After breaking up with Dex, April decides to lose her virginity to someone she does not love (her friend Xavier Austin (David Jones-Roberts)] “to get it over with” (episode 5425). Ruby disagrees, advising April to wait until she finds someone she loves. Their debate is illustrated by a conversation in episode 5427:



**Confronting perspectives: Ruby (Rebecca Breeds) and April (Rihannon Fish)**

Ruby: So...What about being desperately in love? I mean in your big long list of things that makes a guy perfect to share your first time with, shouldn't it be like, right up there? You can't tell me you feel that way about Xavier.

April: No.

Ruby: April, I was happy to go along with this when it was all just talk and when we were playing with possibilities, but this is getting serious.

April: I know that.

Ruby: What if you and Dex get back together? You're gonna wish that your first time was with him.

April: No, I won't! Because it's over and I'm moving on with Xavier at the formal. Please don't tell anyone about this. It's my life. I have to make my own decisions.

(Wilson [Writer] & Raco [Director], 2011)

In these examples, the programme encourages viewers to think about the issues from different perspectives. Unlike entertainment-education soap operas, which use transmissive techniques to deliver a single, unequivocal educational message and to teach how to behave (Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993) *Home and Away* contrasts different perspectives, thus inviting reflection and possibly discussion:

Soap opera thus cannot offer clear and singular solutions to the personal and moral problems portrayed [...] Rather they explore a multiplicity of relevant perspectives on the issues [...] There are no objective truths, no answers, no permanent securities, no uncompromised actions, no absolutes. (Livingstone, 1998, p. 52)

This textual openness is enhanced by the narrative structure. One of the defining features of the soap opera genre is that most resolutions are temporary (Baym, 2000; De Kosnik, 2013; Hobson, 2003; Jordan, 1981; Longhurst, 1987): "the story never can end. There never is even a sense that resolution is possible or imminent. Soaps have an 'absolute resistance' to the final resolutions that often are taken to be a defining characteristics of narratives" (Baym, 2000, p. 61).<sup>22</sup> This open-ended narrative structure allows viewers to actively engage with the content (Barker, 1998; de Bruin, 2008; Livingstone, 1998). As Chris Barker (1998) explains:

The narrative themes of soap opera and its 'open' textual structure make soap opera a potent resource for talk about the morality of personal relationships [...] While soap opera raises numerous issues of personal and sexual morality they are rarely 'moralist' in the sense of positioning viewers in one moral discourse

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<sup>22</sup> This is another aspect of soap realism (De Kosnik, 2013; Jordan, 1981; Longhurst, 1987).

which is regarded as the only possible ‘right’ course action. Both theoretical understandings and empirical evidence about the way people ‘read’ television soap opera suggest that the text does not ‘impose’ a moral regime on viewers but provides a resource for people to talk about in an ‘active’ and creative way (p. 65)

Similarly, Milly Williamson (2005) argues that their lack of permanent solutions contributes to serials’ moral ambiguity:

Serialisation as a narrative form is unable to sustain the clear categorisation of the moral universe through the unambiguous description of good and evil. Serialised narrative produces shifting perspectives and extended middles that, as many feminist have noted in relation to soap opera, contribute to the moral complications that surround characters. (p. 48)

As mentioned above, the characters of *Home and Away* transform as the series unfolds, and usually transcend the good/evil dichotomy. Furthermore, because of these narrative shifts, soap operas “encourage multiple interpretations” (Baym, 2000, p. 63). The storyline about April’s first sexual experience illustrates this idea. After having several arguments with Ruby and her sister Bianca, she changes her mind and decides to not sleep with Xavier (episode 5434). At this point in the story, the text seems to privilege one viewpoint (Ruby’s and Bianca’s) and to have one distinct educational message: it is important to be in love with one’s first sexual partner. However, in the following episode (episode 5435) April sleeps with Heath Braxton (Dan Ewing), Summer Bay’s local drug dealer who was previously romantically involved with Bianca. April’s decision to lose her virginity to Heath (whom she does not love) contradicts the moral message contained in the previous episode. Watched in isolation, episode 5434 has the potential to teach viewers that it is important to be in love with one’s first sexual partner; but because of the serialised structure and narrative openness, the lesson remains ambiguous. According to Longhurst (1987), even when storylines have conclusions “the final recuperation is not as important as the initial raising of the issue and resolution is always temporary anyway” (p. 646). Instead of transmitting unequivocal messages in an authoritative way, the text teaches by stating problems without taking positions, raising awareness and offering different solutions.

### **Transmissive techniques**

The paradox of *Home and Away*'s pedagogy is that it uses a constructivist approach to invite reflection and discussion without moralising while directly teaching moral values in an authoritative manner. As Livingstone (1998) observes, soap operas are both open and closed texts: although they seem open to interpretation, they are also "closed in that conclusions may be reached about the moral superiority of one of the expressed views" (p. 64). In the last part of my textual analysis, I examine *Home and Away* as a "closed" text that makes statements and takes moral positions. Challenging Barker (1998) and de Bruin's (2008) argument that soap operas avoid moralising, I demonstrate that *Home and Away* is "'moralist' in the sense of positioning viewers in one moral discourse which is regarded as the only possible 'right' course action" (Barker, 1998, p. 65). *Home and Away* uses three transmissive techniques to teach morality. First, the moral lesson can be told, that is, explicitly formulated in the dialogue. Second, moral behaviour can be shown through the characters' actions. Third, the moral message can be illustrated by the stories' conclusions (even though resolutions are often temporary).

The technique of teaching by telling is transmissive and based on media effects theories, since it aims to teach values and behaviours directly and authoritatively. Although it is rarely used in *Home and Away*, some examples can be found in the November 2011 episodes, particularly in storylines about road safety. For example, in episode 5421, Sid Walker (Robert Mammone), Sasha's father, scolds her for getting in a car with Stu who was driving dangerously, telling her that "it is a very dangerous thing to be doing":

Sid: Sash', what's this I hear about you hitting around town with Stu?

Sasha: Let me guess...Xavier told you.

Sid: Look, it's irrelevant who told me. Would you care to explain?

Sasha: Well, I wasn't the one driving.

Sid: Well, I sure hope not. It's still a very dangerous thing to be doing. And if you don't believe me, maybe you can spend twenty-four hours with me in the emergency department.

Sasha: Okay. I made a mistake. You can ground me.

(Wilson [Writer] & Nottage [Director], 2011)

In another episode, Sasha delivers the moral lesson to Xavier, who is furious after Stu stole his car:

Sasha: He'll bring it back, okay!

Xavier: Yeah? In what state? [He grabs Sasha's mobile] Give me your phone!

Sasha: What are you doing?

Xavier: Calling Stu before he wrecks it.

Sasha: Oh, good idea, because it's not dangerous at all for him to answer his phone while driving! [She takes her mobile back] What if he gets in an accident?

(Stark [Writer] & Nottage [Director], 2011)

Sasha's tone is sarcastic but the moral message is articulated in the dialogue. In the previous example, the moral message is formulated even more overtly by Sid. In these examples, the text aims to teach viewers how to behave directly through the dialogue by stating what is right and what is wrong and how they should behave. However, this technique is seldom employed because explicitly stating what is right and what is wrong or telling viewers how to behave is seen by the writers as "preaching" and "lecturing".

Because they do not want to appear to be lecturing or preaching, the writers prefer to show or illustrate moral lessons instead of articulating them in the dialogue. The storyline about Irene's cancer, for example, teaches morality by showing moral behaviour. After Irene undergoes a mastectomy and chemotherapy, the Summer Bay community shows their support by visiting her, helping her, and by organising a fundraiser (episode 5415).



**Showing good behaviour: the Summer Bay community organises a fundraiser for Irene**

In the following episodes, several characters are shown looking after her, keeping her company, and cheering her up. In this example, the moral message, which is that communities and individuals should take care of sick people, is directly shown through the characters' actions. Underpinning this pedagogical technique is the assumption that viewers learn by modelling, that is, by imitating the characters. As explained above, this technique based on the social learning theory aims to transmit moral values and behaviours authoritatively and assumes that television has the power to shape, or at least influence, behaviours (Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993; Williams, 1981).

The main pedagogical technique of *Home and Away* is to illustrate moral lessons through narrative resolutions. Despite the text's openness, its storylines do have conclusions: issues get resolved and certain perspectives triumph over others. Thus, it can be argued that *Home and Away* teaches through parables. Parables are short didactic stories that illustrate moral or religious lessons. Their narrative structure is simple: a character faces a moral dilemma, makes a bad decision and suffers the consequences. The moral lesson is intended to be obvious, although it is not explicitly formulated. Parables use narratives and characters as pedagogical tools to make abstract moral lessons entertaining, engaging and easy to understand. Like teaching by telling and teaching by showing, it is a transmissive technique.

In the storyline about political corruption, for example, the character, John, faces a moral dilemma (should he acknowledge the possibility that Dennis' gifts were bribes and discuss the issue with the council?), makes a bad decision (he refuses to explain himself) and suffers the consequences (the council asks for his resignation). The moral lesson is not explicitly formulated but it is clear: accepting gifts from a developer is not appropriate for a politician; politicians should not be corrupt. Similarly, in the storyline about first sexual experiences, April faces a moral dilemma (should she sleep with

someone she does not love to “get it over with” or wait for someone she truly loves?), makes a bad decision (she loses her virginity to Heath, a drug dealer and her sister’s ex-boyfriend, whom she does not love) and suffers the consequences (Heath ignores her after they have sex). Although not explicitly formulated, the moral lesson is that it is better to love and trust one’s first sexual partner. As in all parables, immoral decisions are punished (Livingstone, 1998). Characters who behave immorally must either redeem themselves through good behaviour, or be punished, sometimes by being killed off by the writers. For instance, Stu, the abusive delinquent, violates many moral standards but does not redeem himself; as a consequence and as a punishment, he later gets killed off (episode 5451). As mentioned earlier, this transmissive technique is also based on the social learning theory.

My textual analysis supports my interview findings by confirming that the programme uses two conflicting pedagogical models. It highlights the link between educational goals and pedagogy by showing that the text uses constructivist techniques to raise awareness and to make viewers think about issues, while applying transmissive techniques to teach morality. This pedagogical ambivalence is also linked to assumptions about the audience. Although *Home and Away* aims to teach morality in an authoritative way, the writers are uncomfortable with this aspect of their pedagogy and adopt a constructivist stance because they assume that viewers do not want to be lectured. My discussion groups allow me to investigate this idea further.

## **Reception**

To analyse the reception of *Home and Away* and test the validity of my interviews and textual analysis findings, I conducted two discussion groups with four viewers each. Because one of the aims of my thesis is to compare the pedagogy of *Who Do You Think You Are?* with the pedagogy of *Home and Away*, I selected the same participants for both case studies. This was beneficial because some made explicit comparisons between the programmes. Although *Home and Away* aims to educate viewers about issues and to teach morality, my participants say that they do not learn anything from it. This lack of learning can be linked to their lack of pleasure: indeed, my participants say that they were not entertained, even though they define *Home and Away* as “entertainment”. I



also show that despite the textual features which invite learning through resonance, relatability and emotional involvement, these viewers view the programme critically instead of engaging with it referentially and emotionally. Despite their negative assessments of the programme and their claims that it does not teach them anything, it is possible that these viewers did learn from it: as I explain further below, because genres like soap opera and reality television are usually stigmatised as “bad” television, viewers are sometimes reluctant to admit that they enjoy them or learn from them (Baym, 2000; Buckingham, 1993; Hill, 2005). But my analysis focuses primarily on what these viewers say about their learning (or lack thereof) and how they perceive it, rather than actual, assessable learning. As noted in chapter two, my aim is not to uncover the objective truth about televisual teaching and learning but to examine some of the meaning-making processes and discourses that circulate across the different sites of the circuit of communication.

### **The pedagogical role of entertainment**

Despite the writers’ intentions and the programme’s textual features, my participants all agree that *Home and Away* fails to teach them anything:

Lec:                They teach you nothing [...]

Marnie:           I don’t know if there is anything to learn, really [laughs]. I can see what they’re trying to make people learn from it but I don’t think people would actually learn anything from it [...]

Ms Goldblum: I guess it’s easy, it’s mind-numbing, right?

Lec:                Oh, totally!

Junior:            Yeah.

Ms Goldblum: It’s not difficult, it doesn’t ask anything of you, you don’t have to...

Lec:                It’s white noise.

Ms Goldblum: ...yeah, you don’t have to make any contribution [...] Now I have to say ‘insulting’, I think it’s the wrong word that I used. But, it’s more feeding...

Lec: Un-intelligence?

All: [laugh]

Lec: It's to have it on when you're doing like other stuff.

Ms Goldblum: It's background noise, yeah.

Lec: And you do get fed a lot!

These viewers interpret the programme as non-educational entertainment. As Hill (2005) explains in relation to audiences' discussions of reality television, this type of negative responses reflect a broader stigmatisation of lowbrow entertainment, which is generally deemed idiotic and harmful and labelled "trash" (p. 4) by social commentators and in popular press. Because of this stigmatisation, the idea of learning from these lower cultural forms is often mocked by viewers:

The stigma associated with watching reality TV is so great that the first response viewers commonly make when asked about informative elements in reality programming is to make a joke [...] This type of instant response to questions regarding learning in reality programming is typical of all the discussions. As viewers reject the idea of learning outright, they belittle reality programmes ('twaddle'), and in turn belittle their own viewing practices ('mindless'). (p. 85)

Unlike Marnie, who believes that the programme tries to teach but fails, Ms Goldblum and Lec consider that *Home and Away* does not aim to teach anything. They acknowledge that it addresses issues but believe that the writers integrate those only to entertain:

Ms Goldblum: My impression is that they try to come across as dealing with an issue, but it's just fluff. It's not. They're just here to make an entertaining thing and it helps if it looks like they're trying to educate at some point [...]

Lec: I don't think the themes are there to teach anything. I think they're there to keep the people in that age bracket involved in the show. And so, I think they pick things that relate to that age group and then play off that.

Interestingly, Lec uses the word "themes", which does not have the same educational connotation as the word "issues". For her, the topics of road safety, cancer,

commitment, and first sexual experiences are only the subject matter of the episode, not its educational content. The participants also believe that *Home and Away*'s regular viewers and fans only seek out entertainment and escapism:

Krista: One of my friends, she watches this show religiously [...] She actually watches it, it's like her favourite thing in the world. She is a social worker and she works at Kings Cross, and every day she's dealing with homeless people, sex workers, and drug addicts and really full on stuff like, heavy stuff. And I think maybe she enjoys that show because it's so ridiculous. And the people, the issues they're dealing with, apart from obviously the cancer issue, the issues they're dealing with are really trivial, compared to the kind of stuff she sees every day. So, I think for her it is a form of escapism [...]

Ms Goldblum: It's like the perfect mind-numbing thing.

Lec: Totally!

Ms Goldblum: You don't have to think.

Junior: Yeah, and I can understand that. In the sense that if you deal with a lot of personal, emotional stuff at work, you come home and totally zone out and it's better than watching something like *The Wire* or something like that, which is much more gritty [...]

Lec: [Soap operas] teach you nothing. But it's definitely a buffer [laughs]!

This contradicts my interview and textual analysis findings: the interpretation of *Home and Away* as pure escapism undermines the programme makers' intention to educate by tackling serious issues and encouraging moral behaviour.

Although my participants describe the programme as escapism, they were not entertained by it. When asked about their first impression after the screening, all express dislike. The first and most dominant impression of *Home and Away* is that it is not enjoyable:

Interviewer: What would be the one thing that you would take away from watching this episode? The most memorable moment or most memorable element?

Arya: It was really, really shit! [laughs]

All: [laugh]

Wolfgang: Yeah, that was my first thing to say. Sitting through it was a challenge.

All: [laugh] [...]

Arya: But it's not bad enough to get to that point where it's entertaining, it's just bad, it's not *The Bold and the Beautiful*.<sup>23</sup>

Naomi: It's just bad.

Wolfgang: Yeah, overall I found it really painful to watch.

Naomi: [laughs]

Wolfgang: I can't stand it, I couldn't stand it.

Marnie: I was waiting for the ad break.

Arya: It never came! [laughs]

Many reception studies of soap operas focus on fans or regular viewers (Ang, 1985; Baym, 2000; Geraghty, 1991; Hobson, 2003; Modleski, 1982; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). The advantage of examining regular viewers' responses to soap operas is that they have extensive knowledge of the programmes and can discuss their characters and storylines in depth. But my study shows why it can be useful to speak to other viewers: selecting non-fans and viewers who had never seen the programme allowed oppositional readings to emerge, thus highlighting viewers' interpretive agency along with their tastes and preferences. Despite the writers' and programmer's main intention, which is to provide pleasure, my participants stress their displeasure through hyperboles like "sitting through it was a challenge" or "I found it really painful to watch". This conversation, which took place at the beginning of the first discussion, is echoed by another conversation at the beginning of the second session, in which the participants express their displeasure through mockery and irritation:

Interviewer: What was your overall experience of that specific episode?

Ms Goldblum: [sarc.] Jam-packed! Drama! [laughs]

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<sup>23</sup> *The Bold and the Beautiful* (Bell & Bell, 1987-) is an American soap opera.

Junior: It was hilarious.

Krista: That's so...I can't...I find it, like, I can't believe I used to watch it. I find it so annoying to watch! Because you want to yell at the characters. It really annoys me a lot. Because it's so stupid! [...] That was just annoying! [...]

Junior: It's infuriating. Yeah, yeah, yeah! Oh, yeah it is. I find it insulting, yeah. I hate it. I can't stand it [...]

Krista: It's taking the monotony of everyday life and putting it on TV! And they try to make it interesting and exciting, and it's not. Ah! It's so annoying!

In my textual analysis, I show that signifying ordinariness is one of the fundamental aspects of soap realism, and that it is a technique used to invite relatability and referential involvement. Settings, costumes, make-up and props often connote domesticity and everyday life and characters are frequently engaging in mundane activities while having conversations. According to Hobson (2003), "soap opera makes the ordinary fascinating and elevates the minutiae of everyday life to popular art" (p.110) and their success "lies in their ability to make the familiar interesting and the mundane exciting" (p.141). As argued above, this is also an essential aspect of soap pedagogy since it invites learning through resonance. For viewers like Krista, however, the "minutiae of everyday life" in *Home and Away* is not perceived as "fascinating" or "interesting" but as "annoying"; it is not defined as "popular art" but as bad television. Instead of inviting pleasure and referential involvement, the text and its focus on ordinariness creates annoyance, mockery and critical distance. This is echoed by another conversation in the other group:

Marnie: I suppose that a daily episode show like *Home and Away*, like *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *Neighbours* all of those rely on just representing...

Arya: Really mundane catastrophes.

Marnie: ...yeah! Everyday life and the drama that can be found in everyday life.

Arya: 'I missed my bus!' [laughs]

All: [laugh]

Taking further Hobson's claim, it can be argued that for some viewers, the failure of soap operas (to invite referential involvement) is due to their inability "to make the familiar interesting and the mundane exciting" (p.141).

My textual analysis also reveals that the programme invites learning by encouraging emotional and empathic engagement. One of the reasons why my focus group participants claim that they did not learn is because they did not feel emotionally engaged nor did they empathise with the characters:

Marnie: I wasn't actually concerned about will they resolve this? Or, you know, how long will this argument be going on for? It's just, I don't care!

Naomi: Yeah. [sarc.] How can she be so inconsiderate that she doesn't see he has needs? I don't care! [...] I guess, my engagement or my emotional connection is about the characters, and that is what will get me into a show, it's when I actually end up caring about the characters. *Home and Away*, I don't care, they could all die tomorrow and I'll be fine.

All: [laugh]

Krista, who feels that she has learnt from *Who Do You Think You Are?* but not from *Home and Away*, compares the two programmes:

Krista: I feel like when I was watching [*Who Do You Think You Are?*] I was more captivated and I felt like the room was a lot more quiet and we were intrigued, and it was a different sort of drama, it was more like, the anticipation that you were going to find something out. And that was real people, and a real emotion. Whereas [*Home and Away*] that was just annoying! Their characters were annoying, what they were doing what just so fake! And I felt like my mind wandered a lot more, watching that.

Krista contrasts the two programmes in terms of quality, but also in terms of their relatability, resonance, suspense and excitement. She describes the programme that she learns from as better, more realistic and relatable and overall more entertaining than *Home and Away*. Some participants explicitly link their lack of learning to their lack of entertainment and engagement:

Arya: I find it hard to see how anyone would find any of those messages

compelling because I just can't relate to any of the characters at all and I don't give a shit what happens to them.

Wolfgang: Yeah.

Arya: So they could all die in the next scene...

Marnie: [laughs]

Arya: ...and, I wouldn't care.

Marnie: Probably enjoy it a bit more [laughs]

Arya: I would learn nothing.

What is significant here is that Arya emphasises the link between learning and "caring", which refers to empathy, emotional engagement and parasocial interactions with the characters. As her comment suggests, such entertainment responses (or lack thereof) affect televisual learning.

Although the writers claim that their target demographic ranges from sixteen year-olds to thirty-nine year olds and that the programme appeals to parents as well as adolescents, its stories are largely "teenage-focused" (Writer 1). Because it may be more appealing to younger viewers, I questioned Naomi, Lec and Krista about their prior experience of watching the programme as teenagers, and I asked the participants if they thought other viewers could learn from it:

Lec: It could be teaching younger people who grow up [...] what your responses to certain things should be, possibly? [...]

Krista: This show is designed for young people who are having those thought processes.

Lec: Those issues.

Krista: It's replicating things that people in that age group are thinking themselves [...]

Ms Goldblum: Someone would have learnt from that.

Lec: Yeah, growing up. I'm wondering how much I would have taken on from them. Not Colleen!

Ms Goldblum: Someone would have learnt from that. Someone would have, it would have helped them [...]

Junior: A fourteen year-old kid would be able to, yeah.

Lec: To identify.

Junior: Like, my own sex is important when I have it. And bikes are bad.

Although my participants define the programme as non-educational entertainment, their responses are more complex. As the discussion above shows, some of them consider that *Home and Away* can be educational and that young people can learn morality and moral behaviours from it. They believe that young people could learn from the programme because they assume that younger viewers could be entertained and engage with the programme. Krista explicitly formulates this correlation between entertainment and learning:

Krista: Often *Home and Away*, I remember when I used to watch it, it was so stupid but they would deal with themes like, you know, someone might have got raped in the show, or date rape, or someone might have got anorexia and stuff. So I could see in a way they're trying to teach young people about morals and self-respect [...] I think that if you know the characters and you know their storyline and you feel invested in them and you feel emotionally connected to them. And we don't. We watch that, we don't care about those characters. But if you watch that show and you like it and you watch it all the time, I mean, you care about those characters, so therefore, I think, it would have more an impact about what they go through and what you learn from it. Yeah, I would totally agree with that. Because you'd be like 'Oh you're such a good girl, why are you getting into that car with that guy? No!' Yeah, you know their story and where they're coming from and it makes it more real.

In this comment, Krista highlights different aspects of the entertainment experience: enjoyment (which is the main feature of entertainment), emotions, empathy, parasocial relationships ("you feel invested in them and you feel emotionally connected to them") and interactions with the characters ("you'd be like 'Oh you're such a good girl'"). She



unequivocally articulates the link between those entertainment responses and learning. In her view, entertainment directly contributes to learning: the educational impact of the programme is explicitly linked to enjoyment (how much the viewer likes it) and emotional involvement (how much they care). Indeed, it is possible, based on my findings, to hypothesise that regular viewers and fans learn from the educational messages encoded in *Home and Away* because they are entertained and because they emotionally engage with the text. Their responses are likely to be aligned with the writers' intentions and the textual features.

Another crucial difference is that my participants view the text with critical distance whereas fans usually engage with soaps referentially (Ang, 1985; Baym, 2000; Hobson, 2003). As Krista points out, fans are likely to learn because the characters and storylines seem *real* to them. Some comments made by Lec suggest that referential viewing (perceiving the text as real and relatable) is more important for televisual learning than entertainment. Lec, who says that soap operas like *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* "teach you nothing", does not view them referentially; however, she admits that they are "not un-entertaining". Her responses therefore indicate that entertainment does not necessarily result in learning:

Lec: It was a trip down memory lane seeing them all. Alf Stewart, Colleen, Irene, Georgie Parks...Marilyn! [...] I felt pretty excited to see characters that I grew up with. I thought that was really cool. And some of the themes, you can tell that there are themes they try to hit on every now and again, like drugs or cancer or bullying or whatever. There's always a few different storylines, and they've got a few things they always tie in. And I was thinking how funny it is that they have to write every day these shows to try to keep the teenagers entertained. And all the walking around [laughs] and how they're just sipping a milkshake and [laughs] I don't know, it's just bizarre. But, you know, not un-entertaining.

Because of the parasocial relationships she developed with the characters as a child and as a teenager, Lec experiences a sense of nostalgic pleasure. However, she underplays her enjoyment by using the phrase "not un-entertaining". This could mean that her

enjoyment was indeed limited; but this softening may also be caused by feelings of embarrassment. Indeed, for some viewers liking soap operas can be a source of shame (Baym, 2000; Buckingham, 1993). By understating her enjoyment, she may be conforming to the “group consensus” (Daymon & Holloway, 2002), which is that *Home and Away* is bad and unentertaining. What is crucial here is that her (limited) enjoyment does not contribute to her learning. Although she perceives the programme as “not un-entertaining”, she explicitly says that she does not learn anything from it - which confirms that entertainment is not a sufficient condition for learning from television.

Lec does not learn because she views the text critically instead of viewing it referentially. In the comment above, she discusses the content (including the social and personal issues it addresses) from a position of intellectual and critical distance; she does not engage with the characters and storylines as if they were real or realistic. In Cohen’s (2006) words, she is not “engrossed in the world the text creates” (p.191). Instead, she criticises and mocks the programme and displays her knowledge of the production process and of the writers’ intentions and constraints (Buckingham, 1993). I next explore in more depth the role that referential viewing – in particular, perceived realism and relatability – plays in televisual learning.

### **The pedagogical role of referential viewing**

As Cohen (2006) points out, referential viewing involves emotional proximity with the text whereas critical viewing is a form of intellectual distance. My participants distance themselves from *Home and Away* in several ways: by displaying their knowledge of its production processes; by providing subversive readings of the text; by criticising it; and by mocking it.

First, my participants position themselves as intellectually distant and critical by displaying their awareness of the programme’s constructed nature and their knowledge of its production processes (Buckingham, 1993; Cohen, 2006):

Arya:            You see the constraints of producing a show every day, like how there’s no wide shots because they can’t show that there’s actually nothing around what they’re shooting [laughs]. They’ve only got ten extras [...]

Lec: I can't imagine how they keep these things going, like having to churn out the episodes. It's such a small world, and these things create conflict. That's what's driving the story forward by, oh someone's gonna have a bad sexual experience at the formal, or someone's gonna have another car accident.

Here, Arya and Lec focus on production processes: how the programme was written, filmed, acted. Arya's comment is an implicit critique of *Home and Away*'s low budget and production value. Lec also positions herself as a critical viewer by displaying her knowledge of the writers' intentions and constraints.

Others present themselves as critical by providing oppositional or subversive readings of the text (Tulloch & Moran, 1986). Naomi and Wolfgang, for instance, resist soap operas' dominant meanings by distorting their educational messages:

Naomi: I remember watching *Neighbours* as a kid and still having those moments when being like 'Oh alright, just sleep with him at the formal, I don't care!' Like, it's lame [...]

Wolfgang: I hope he dies in a car accident. That would be sick. Best thing that happens! [...] I hope she just goes and shags him or something. You want that. You want these things to happen.

Naomi: Yeah, I'm bored!

"These things" (the character dying in a car accident or losing her virginity at the high school formal) are imaginary story developments that aggressively challenge and disfigure the educational messages encoded in soap operas.

Critical viewers also distance themselves from soap operas by distancing themselves from their fans, who are often devalued, ridiculed, alienated and associated with the mass of ordinary viewers (Baym, 2000; Buckingham, 1993; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). Soap viewers are also usually feminised and associated with the stereotype of the gossip-loving housewife (Baym, 2000; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). In the discussion below, Ms Goldblum distances herself both from *Home and Away* and from its imagined audience:

Ms Goldblum: Because now I'm playing into the stereotype I think, but I picture like, a

really sad, old, adult woman. If I imagine who's watching this.

Lec: Depressed?

Ms Goldblum: She's alone, she's like the typical housewife, doesn't work, stay-at-home mum, just completely, like, from another era. She's not a modern woman!

All: [laugh]

Ms Goldblum: If someone could learn something from it, that's the stereotype I imagine.

As these discussions suggest, my participants also dissociate themselves from the programme through criticism, mockery and laughter. Most of their criticisms concern the programme's overall quality and are expressed through characterisations such as "bad" (Arya, Naomi, Marnie, Wolfgang); "not good" (Ms Goldblum); "horrible" (Wolfgang); "insulting" (Junior, Ms Goldblum); "trash" (Junior); "shit" (Arya); "bullshit" (Ms Goldblum); "like junk food" (Marnie); "cringe worthy" (Wolfgang); "lame" (Naomi, Wolfgang, Junior) and "corny" (Wolfgang). When asked why they laughed during the screening, Marnie, Naomi, Wolfgang, Ms Goldblum and Junior all agree that they laughed at the programme, not with it. The participants' laughter during the screening was not due to enjoyable feelings of exhilaration but signalled sarcasm and mockery:

Marnie: For me it was funny because it was bad [...] And Alf is just funny, he's such a bogan!<sup>24</sup> But I don't think it was, you know, great comic humour, it was more like, 'Oh, no' kind of funny [...]

Wolfgang: In regards to laughing at it, I think it was because it was either so bad, or it was really, really corny [...]

Naomi: Yeah, I was kind of laughing because it was bad, just a bit lame [...]

Junior: I find it also hilarious at times, because you can make some jokes out of it.

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<sup>24</sup> "Bogan" is an Australian pejorative slang word used to describe a person from a lower, working class background.

Their negative assessments of the narratives and characterisations conflict with the writers' intentions, which is to make the characters "likeable and identifiable" (Writer 1) and the storylines exciting and relatable. There is a divergence between the programme's generic and textual features, which aim to convey a sense of realism and resonance, and these viewers' interpretations of the programme as "corny" and "lame" and the characters as stereotypes.

Indeed, the main reason why my participants view the text with critical distance is because they do not perceive it as realistic or relatable. Perceived realism and relatability are fundamental aspects of referential viewing. Perceived lack of realism or relatability, on the other hand, is usually associated with critical viewing (Ang, 1985; Briggs, 2010; Buckingham, 1993; Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Cohen, 2006; Jenkins, 1992; Liebes & Katz, 1986, 1990). As the following conversation illustrates, one of the main criticisms against *Home and Away* concern its lack of realism:

Naomi: They're not particularly complex characters; they are quite two-dimensional [...]

Ms Goldblum: It's somehow linked to reality but I just think the way they portray it is such bullshit.

Junior: Yeah, it's pretty simple, they map out the issues in a very simple way. They set up good characters and bad characters.

Lec: Well, because it is light and you know, just on the surface and 2-D and fluffy [...] Characters are huge!

Junior: They're so ridiculous.

Lec: They're not your regular characters.

Krista: They're a really....thin...

Lec: Two-dimensional.

Krista: ...two-dimensional, thin version of what a person is [...] The things they do, I find them, they're really unrealistic. I don't feel like people act like that. And then it's like, why are they doing stupid things? I felt kind of agitated [...]

In this context, the adjectives “huge” and “thin” are both used to emphasise the characters’ lack of realism: Lec describes them as “huge” because she perceives their personality traits as exaggerated and caricatural and Krista describes them as “thin” because she considers that they lack psychological depth and complexity, an opinion which is also conveyed by the adjective “two-dimensional”. Similarly, Junior describes the characters as stereotypical heroes and villains. These responses conflict with the programme’s textual features, which aim to convey a sense of psychological realism. As explained in my textual analysis, the characters are intended to be complex and nuanced (Hobson, 2003). However, even the long term characters that my participants have known for decades fail to transcend stereotypes: Alf Stewart (Ray Meagher), for example, is perceived as eternal, typical “bogan” and Colleen is seen as the stereotypical gossip.

According to my participants, this lack of realism also applies to the characters’ language, behaviour and relationships:

Arya: This is a show that you’re laughing at all the points where it just does not ring true. Because none of it does. All the conversations, even the words that they use, the phrasing, like when she’s talking about losing her virginity, ‘Your special list’ and just everything!

Marnie: [laughs]

Arya: Everything falls like a lead balloon and you laugh at it [...] Like those women, I don’t think women have existed like that in Australia for thirty years.

Marnie: What?!

Arya: I have not heard anyone talk like that since the very early days of my life.

Marnie: What? ‘I can make the Shirley Temples or lemon lime bitters?’ I reckon there’s a few of them still out there! [laughs]

Arya: No, no, no just that say ‘Daaarl’, like, you don’t hear that anymore! [...]

Wolfgang: And the ‘concrete block’ call. He’s like: ‘Oh not that concrete block!’

All: [laugh]

Arya: Yeah, 'That concrete block'!

Wolfgang: 'Not that fucking idiot!' that's what you're supposed to say! 'Concrete block', I've never heard that before!

Marnie: It's not an expression! [laughs]

Arya: I've never heard anyone say that! I don't even know what it's supposed to mean!

All: [laugh]

My participants also contrast the portrayals of relationships and family dynamics in *Home and Away* to their depiction in *Who Do You Think You Are?*:

Krista: Going back to your question about the theme of relationships and how people relate to each other and family dynamics and stuff. Even though there was a ton of it in *Home and Away*, it was all about family dynamics and how people relate to each other and their relationships. Yeah, but it didn't occur to me to talk about that because I found it really un-relatable. I found it really unrealistic and it didn't mirror [...] Their response to it, and the way they handled that situation was so far removed from reality. [*Who Do You Think You Are?*] was real people and a real emotion. Whereas that was just...annoying! And like, the characters were annoying, what they were doing what just so fake!

Ms Goldblum: [*Who Do You Think You Are?*] I mean, even though I don't think it's that genuine, but it's still genuine human emotions whereas this [*Home and Away*] is synthesized human emotions.

Lec: It's plastic.

The distinction made by the participants between *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Home and Away* may be linked to generic features, since the former is a factual programme whereas the latter is scripted. However, soap operas can be considered realistic by viewers despite their fictional nature (Ang, 1985; Hall, 2003). The fact that my participants do not view *Home and Away* referentially is not due to its fictional

nature but to its perceived lack of plausibility, typicality and emotional realism:

Naomi: I guess I could put myself in that couple's age bracket [Liam and Bianca]. But I was kind of like, oh okay, so it's the late twenties to early thirties age bracket. So here's another conversation with the woman who's trying to hint that she wants kids, or wants something more from a male partner who is freaked out by the conversation. I've just seen that so many times!

Marnie: It was very cliché.

Naomi: Yeah, and it was just, okay, we're doing this again, alright [...]

Krista: The scene where the girl is like...

Lec: 'Have sex on my formal'.

Krista: ...yeah, 'Give it up on my formal night', that's such a stereotype...

Lec: It's a cliché.

Krista: ...cliché thing, that you see all the time in movies and in shows. That's like, the formal night and there's a girl and she's freaked out about sex so she thinks 'I'm just going to give it up! I just want to get it over and done with and it's going to be my formal night' you know? That's what I was thinking when I saw that. I was like 'Oh my God, I hate that, I hate that as a storyline!' [...] This is a stereotype.

Here, the participants relate the characters and situations in *Home and Away* to other texts ("in movies and in shows") rather than real life or their own personal experiences. Some viewers in the other group drew similar parallels between the programme and other media texts to express mockery and critical distance:

Arya: It's like an American teen movie.

Marnie: From the nineties! It's *American Pie*, from the nineties!<sup>25</sup>

Because they perceive *Home and Away* as unrealistic, these viewers are unable to make a connection between the programme and their own lives:

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<sup>25</sup> *American Pie* (Weitz & Weitz [Director], 1999) is an American comedy film about four high school students who enter a pact to lose their virginity.



Arya: I think it's a version of Australianness that not a lot of Australian people, certainly not a lot of Australian people who live in Sydney can relate to. Like, the way that they talk and everything about it.

Some participants emphasise this by contrasting *Home and Away* to *Who Do You Think You Are*, which they consider more authentic and therefore more relatable:

Ms Goldblum: [*Home and Away*] is less genuine, I think.

Junior: Yes! Totally.

Ms Goldblum: But that show [*Who Do You Think You Are?*] is targeted as being a genuine, human, emotional experience. You get to peek into this man's very special moment of self-discovery. That's why I think you relate to it. It's more genuine. Whereas [*Home and Away*], I think you're more removed because it's more staged [...]

Krista: I found [*Home and Away*] really un-relatable. I found it really unrealistic and it didn't mirror anything. Even though, the only thing that it mirrored for me was the discussion I've had with Jono, my fiancé, about the motorbike. But their response to it and the way they handled that situation was so far removed from my discussion with him that for me it didn't trigger anything about relationships that made me think about him and our interaction. The other programme [*Who Do You Think You Are?*] it just seemed more authentic and therefore more relatable. [In *Home and Away*] I just couldn't relate to the way people dealt, interacted in their relationships.

Similarly, Marnie compares *Home and Away* to the American drama *Girls* (Dunham, 2012-), which she considers more relatable and therefore, more educational, even though its story is set in New York:

Marnie: As we all said, none of us really felt that we related to any of the characters in *Home and Away* but a show like *Girls* perhaps, when I watched it, clicked a bit more as they fit more with my context, my age bracket, my living circumstances or economic circumstances. It is in the city, it isn't up the coast like *Home and Away* is [...] I suppose that show

[*Girls*] because you relate to it a bit more, promotes a bit more inward perspective, it encourages you to think about your own experiences and learn about your own experiences, in a way, be a bit more introspective.

Marnie believes that she learns from *Girls* because she makes a direct connection between its characters and storylines and her own circumstances and real life experiences; the un-relatability of *Home and Away*, on the other hand, makes learning impossible. Wolfgang explicitly formulates this link between this perceived lack of relatability and the programme's failure to teach:

Wolfgang: Even though they're in our age bracket, they're so unrealistic those characters. They're so...

Naomi: Two-dimensional.

Wolfgang: I can't see how you could, like, how that show could give anyone anything, as far as education.

When asked whether other viewers could possibly relate to the programme and learn from it, they express reservations. Although some consider that teenagers could be entertained by the programme and possibly learn from it, Arya, Wolfgang and Ms Goldblum believe that most teenagers would find the programme's characters and storylines unrelatable:

Arya: I'd be interested to know how popular it really is with teenagers. Because I remember when I was a teenager, I was very sensitive to representations of teenagers that weren't authentic. And I feel that this is really inauthentic. And if I was a teenager, I'd think it was really naff.

Wolfgang: Yeah I agree. I think teenagers could watch it, but they would say that it's lame, that 'That's not cool, that's not how we are'. Because it's not how teenagers are [...]

Ms Goldblum: If you're talking about kids nowadays, kids aren't having sex when they're eighteen. They're having sex when they're twelve! So actually in *Home and Away* they're behind. That's not the reality anymore. Kids now, I don't think this targets them at all. I think it misses the boat with them.

This is supported by a reception study that Hobson (2003) conducted with young offenders in the United Kingdom in 1996. Although the young viewers whom she interviewed enjoy watching *Home and Away*, they do not perceive the programme's characters and storylines as realistic or relatable:

For these young men, the life in the series is 'cushy'; no one has to sign on and they all get jobs. This is paradise and in unspoken contrast to their own lives on the estates, of which they have previously spoken, where crime and drug dealing was everyday life [...] The simple thesis of the programme is that if you were young and in trouble and your own family had difficulty or were not willing to look after you, you could be taken into foster care and all your problems would be dealt with – and not only that, but you would live in an idyllic community, next to a beach. Not like their lives. (pp. 192-193)

Like my participants, the teenagers interviewed by Hobson view *Home and Away* with critical distance:

Steve: Yes, but they are all like, it's all like these pretty people, like with the mothers, they try to make out they are like us [...]

All: Yes, stereotyping!

Rudy: Everything's all cushy, like there's no one there to sign on the dole. [Laughs] They all get jobs like, and everybody's like willing to help everybody else, you know what I mean [Laughter from all the boys]

DH: So do you think that it's nothing like what life is like here?

Rudy: No. It's a paradise there, imagination – what, living there, next to the beach, living next to a beach, mm, paradise, paradise. (Hobson, 2003, p. 192)

Although its central focus is on teenage delinquents, the programme fails to resonate with the actual experiences of those real teenage delinquents. They consider the programme unrelatable because the characters are stereotypical, and more importantly, because the situations depicted do not reflect their own lives and personal circumstances (which may be linked to their geographical and socio-cultural viewing contexts, that is, to the fact that they live in the United Kingdom and not in Australia).

Finally, the programme's mode of address, that is, the way it conceives, addresses and teaches its audience, is also criticised by some viewers. One of the criticisms made by Junior, for example, is that "it's so simple and it's assuming zero of the audience". Based on his reading of the programme, he concludes that its implied audience is unintelligent and uneducated. According to him, the writers create a programme that lacks realism and depth because they do not conceptualise their viewers as intellectually sophisticated and demanding.

Similarly, others criticise the programme for addressing viewers with a moralising and patronising tone. Indeed, another reason why my participants feel that they do not learn is because they are aware - and critical - of the transmissive techniques that the programme adopts to teach morality. This is important because it confirms the writers' fears about moralising and lecturing the audience: viewers who are aware of the programme's educational and moral agenda and its transmissive pedagogy disengage with the content and resist its educational messages. This is illustrated by a conversation between Marnie and Wolfgang, who accuse *Home and Away* of patronising and "talking down" (Wolfgang) to the audience:

Marnie:       The whole first ten minutes or so felt like a really bad road safety advertisement about 'Oh no! You shouldn't be in the car!' or 'They don't find that cool and you won't get the hot chicks if you buy a motorbike'. I just couldn't shake that.

Wolfgang:    And 'I can't drive a V8 [engine] because I'm on my Ps [Provisional Driver Licence]'.

Marnie:       They try to push a teen 'You should really choose your first time' kind of message.

Arya:         [laughs]

Marnie:       'You can't go over sixty!' and all these kind of cliché...teen...education things. I felt like, I don't know, maybe it's because I'm a teacher, there was messages there about budgeting, 'You can afford this car, you can't afford that' or 'I can afford this ride to the formal'. And then there were messages about, I couldn't stop noticing all of the 'You can't speed',

‘You’re gonna have an accident if you ride that car’. So, there was road safety, there was budgeting, there was the sex-ed kind of video, you know, the cringe worthy ‘Save yourself, don’t lose it at the formal’ and just cliché things that we would have studied in PE [Physical Education] Health at high school [...] But also the message about, you know, ‘Your kid should be driving a safe car’ felt like a parent message.

Arya: Yeah.

Marnie: Like a message that mothers at home would be like ‘Yeah! You go girl! Yes! That’s what I’m trying to teach my child!’ Not necessarily something that would work for the kids but maybe that the mothers would be all justified by seeing that on a ‘teen’ show, even though it’s not actually a teen show [...] They’re trying to target it towards young people, but in reality, I think it would appeal more to older people.

Marnie and Wolfgang criticise the programme for explicitly stating what is right and what is wrong and for telling people how to behave. In other words, they distance themselves not only from the text, but from its transmissive pedagogy. According to Marnie and Naomi, it is also likely to fail to teach young people because it addresses them in a tone that is authoritative:

Naomi: It’s all the lessons that a parent would want their child to learn. But it’s done by a parent. So it’s lame [...] It’s like your parent is trying to teach you something, but you can tell because it’s your parent trying to teach you, it’s not someone from your age group that will make you probably relate to it [...] It’s an adult’s construction of what they think a teenager is like. And it doesn’t particularly ring true, I suppose.

Marnie: Yeah, I can’t picture teenagers saying ‘concrete block’. But I can see an adult thinking that a teenager would say ‘concrete block’.

Naomi: Because they don’t want them cursing.

Marnie: Yes! [laughs]

According to my participants, because of the programme’s moralising tone, young people are likely to view it critically and to distance themselves from it. However, these

viewers' interpretation of the programme as a closed pedagogical text (transmitting moral messages in an authoritative way) may not be shared by others. As previous research shows, the same televisual text can be read as pedagogically closed, or transmissive, by some audiences and as pedagogically open, or constructivist, by others (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004).

## Conclusion

The findings of this case study are in alignment with the findings of my case study of *Who Do You Think You Are?* since both challenge the assumption that there are two distinct types of television programmes: “those that entertain and those that teach” (Hinds, 1991, p. 118). Although the writers see themselves as entertainers first and foremost and privilege drama over education, they also acknowledge the educational potential of *Home and Away*. From their perspective, the programme is not pure escapism but can be used as a platform to explore social and personal issues and teach morality. However, the interviewees reject the label “education”, which they associate with the negatively connoted terms “lecturing”, “preaching” and “moralising”. The writers’ fear of appearing educational, which, as Klein (2011) shows, is typical of television professionals, influences their pedagogy. To avoid moralising and to enable viewers to make up their own mind, they adopt a constructivist approach by exploring issues in an open-ended way and by confronting different perspectives. Paradoxically, my interviews and textual analysis indicate that the writers use transmissive and authoritative techniques to teach how to behave - even though they are uncomfortable with this aspect of their pedagogy. My discussion groups confirm that a lack of entertainment impedes perceived learning. Despite the writers’ stated intention to educate about issues and despite their (less explicit) moral agenda, the programme fails to teach my discussion group participants because it fails to entertain them. This supports the findings of my case study of *Who Do You Think You Are?*

Furthermore, my case study confirms that referential viewing is crucial for televisual learning. In my textual analysis, I demonstrate that the text invites learning through referential involvement. I show that it uses some of the codes and conventions of soap realism as pedagogical tools to create an effect of resonance and that it invites

learning “from the inside” (Ellis, 2000, p. 122) by encouraging viewers to empathise with the characters. This is verified by my discussion group participants’ oppositional readings. Despite the textual features, these viewers do not learn because they perceive the programme as unrealistic, un-relatable and patronising. Their critical responses also suggest that they reject its transmissive pedagogical techniques, thus underlining the theoretical flaws of the transmissive model.

As mentioned in chapter one, some scholars argue that both referential and critical viewing result in learning (Buckingham, 1993; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014). Liebes and Katz (1990), for example, claim that viewers learn by combining critical distance and emotional engagement. For Buckingham (1993), soap operas are educational because they enable viewers to shift between these modalities of response. My two case studies challenge this argument by showing that critical viewing and intellectual distance hinder learning. Viewers who adopt a critical and distanced position may learn about the programme (Brabazon, 2006; Eco, 1979; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014). But my analysis suggests that they are less likely to learn *from* it and *with* it. I further explore the pedagogical role of critical responses in my discussion chapter below.

### **PART THREE**

#### **Discussion and Conclusion**



## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

In this chapter, I critically discuss my research process and findings in relation to the literature and in the context of ongoing debates. My aims are to explain how my findings support and challenge certain arguments; to highlight the significance of my study by showing how it creates new knowledge; and to discuss some of its limitations.

In the first two sections, I use my findings on televisual pedagogy, the “how” questions, to address issues of educational content, or the “what” questions. Considering what television can teach allows me to reflect on the pedagogical role it plays in society, thus contributing to the “fear vs desire” debate I explored in chapter one (Hartley, 1999). I first address the notion of television as a teacher of ethics and morality. I show how my study supports Hawkins’ (2001) argument that television has the potential to teach both morality and ethics. This discussion about ethics and morality also gives me an opportunity to compare public service television and commercial entertainment.

In the second section, I reflect on television as a teacher of cultural citizenship, particularly in relation to entertainment programming and what is often considered “trash TV” (Hill, 2005, p. 4). Challenging the fear school, I argue that entertainment television - including what is commonly seen as lower cultural forms like reality programmes and soap operas - can foster cultural citizenship. To support my argument and widen the scope of my study, I show how my case study findings apply to another programme, the American soap opera, *Empire* (Daniels, 2015-).

These discussions about what television teaches then lead me to reflect on what televisual teaching is, what it means, and on the interpretive processes involved in defining what constitutes teaching and education on television. Because mainstream media are an informal site of teaching and learning with no overt curriculum, it is crucial to reflect on the theoretical and methodological processes through which researchers can identify their lessons. I address this question in the third section. One of the main ideas that emerge from this discussion is that televisual education is not synonymous with televisual teaching.

The fourth and final point of discussion concerns televisual learning and how my thesis contributes to audience research. In particular, I reflect on what it means to be critical as a television viewer and how it influences learning. Entering debates with television scholars and media literacy scholars, I resolve the contradiction I have drawn attention to earlier, which is that being critical both facilitates and hinders learning. The conclusion summarises my contributions to knowledge as well as the study's main limitations.

### **Television as a teacher of ethics and morality**

As previously noted, ethics (the knowledge of right and wrong) is linked to difference. It concerns how human beings engage with and treat "the other person" (Silverstone, 2007, p. 6). According to Hartley (1999) and Hawkins (2001), television has the ability to teach ethics as engagement with otherness. By representing a diverse range of identities, practices and positions, it promotes cultural "neighbourliness" and "fellow-feeling" (Hartley, 1999, p. 186) among different communities and citizens. From this perspective, television has the potential to gather populations, to connect people from various backgrounds and to promote multicultural understanding, respect and tolerance. It can be an agent of cosmopolitan curiosity, in which individuals and communities can learn from one another or "simply be intrigued by alternative ways of thinking, feeling and acting" (Appiah, 2006, p. 97). Silverstone (2007), on the other hand, claims that while the media should foster ethics through "mediated appearance, the visibility of the other, of the stranger as well as the neighbour, the capacity for dialogue and the manifestation of discord, the presence of alternative views" (p. 32), they fail to do so. He concedes that the media represent difference but deplores the lack of authentic dialogue and productive engagement with otherness, which hinders the possibility of real connection and identification between strangers. For him, representations of otherness in the media either deny difference, which leads to indifference, or exaggerate and demonise it, leading to hostility. From his perspective, the media are characterised by sameness, assimilation, incorporation and a general denial of otherness. One of the goals of my thesis was to enter this debate by asking whether television can teach ethics as engagement with difference.

### **Documentary and ethics**

My case study of *Who Do You Think You Are?* supports Hartley (1999) and Hawkins' (2001) view and challenge Silverstone's (2007) argument by showing how the programme promotes respect and tolerance and educates viewers about cultural diversity. The producers explicitly say that they want to inform and educate their audience about different national heritages and histories and to teach them that diversity is part of the Australian society and identity. SBS' main educational goal is to promote tolerance and multicultural understanding. To do so, it engages with otherness both outside Australia (by focusing on the foreign) and inside Australia (by focusing on the multicultural aspects of the Australian society). In *Who Do You Think You Are?* this engagement with otherness, both inside and outside Australia, is manifest in the celebrities' multicultural identity or migrant background and in the programme's focus on migrant and international history. From the audience's perspective, one of the strongest educational messages of the programme is that ethnic and cultural diversity is a fundamental component of the Australian identity. By establishing a connection and creating identification between different communities and identities within the Australian society, the programme shows how television can educate about difference by giving visibility to "the other [...] the stranger as well as the neighbour" (Silverstone, 2007, p. 32). This case study also underlines the pedagogical role that a public broadcaster like SBS can play in society, especially in terms of public education, ethics and cultural citizenship (Hawkins & Ang, 2007).

Moreover, my thesis extends Hartley (1999) and Hawkins' (2001) argument by showing *how* television teaches ethics: in particular, it highlights the pedagogical role of emotions, empathy and narrative imagination in relation to televisual ethics. Based on my study of *Who Do You Think You Are?* it is possible to argue that television can successfully promote multicultural understanding, tolerance, respect and compassion by inviting emotions and by encouraging viewers to empathise with others.

### **Soap opera, ethics and morality**

In regards to ethics and morality, the case of *Home and Away* is more complex. The writers claim that they promote tolerance by making their main characters tolerant and open-minded. Moreover, the programme engages with difference by showing what certain problems (such as domestic violence, cancer, social precarity, teenage pregnancy or child mortality) feel like and by encouraging viewers to empathise with characters who are in those situations. As Ellis (2000) and Hobson (2003) explain, this is characteristic of soap operas:

It is in the presentation and exploration of the unknown that soap operas reach their highest audience appeal, and the storylines based on issues which are, for the most part, unfamiliar to the audience are those which become the most talked about, and often the most influential [...] For the majority of the audience, these same stories are never going to be part of their direct life experience; but they are part of the life about which they read and see reports on television. It is part of contemporary life and they can share in understanding it in greater depth by experiencing the representation in televisual form [...] The soap operas educated and informed us about important parts of other people's lives and helped us understand. (Hobson, 2003, pp. 142-143)

To support her argument, Hobson lists several examples of what she calls “unfamiliar” situations that have been represented in British soap operas, such as homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality, domestic violence, child abuse, AIDS or murder. Similarly, a wide range of social and personal issues have been addressed in *Home and Away* since the first episode was broadcast in 1988. By tackling those issues, soap operas have the potential to inform and to educate about others through empathy and narrative imagination. Because they address a wide range of social and personal issues, these programmes can people more aware, more understanding (and perhaps more respectful) of differences by making them “think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself” (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 391). As I demonstrate in my case study chapter, soap operas do so through realism, resonance and parasocial relationships: thus, it is by combining the familiar and the unfamiliar that they can teach ethics.

Further, *Home and Away* aims to educate about otherness by confronting different perspectives on an issue instead of transmitting a single message in an authoritative way. The storylines that address social or personal problems usually involve a conflict of opinions between characters, which allows the writers to present different viewpoints on a particular issue. Therefore, the text engages with difference not only by representing situations and issues that may be “unfamiliar” to the audience, as Hobson (2003) argues, but also by recreating (and possibly inviting) debates about those issues. By doing so, soap operas open up “the capacity for dialogue and the manifestation of discord, the presence of alternative views” (Silverstone, 2007, p. 32).

However, the argument that soap operas can teach ethics as engagement with difference is not supported by empirical audience research. The viewers in my discussion groups claim that they do not learn from *Home and Away* nor do they believe that it can educate by promoting ethics, respect or tolerance. Although previous reception studies show that soap operas can teach by promoting knowledge, reflection and discussion about issues, these studies do not indicate that viewers become more open-minded, more respectful or more tolerant as a result of watching soap operas (Baym, 2000; Buckingham, 1993; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Livingstone, 1998; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986).

Furthermore, although *Home and Away* has the potential to make “the ‘unknown understandable” (Hobson, 2003, p. 154) by representing unfamiliar situations, it also teaches moralising normativity. Despite their constructivist discourse, by “saying this is how people should behave, this is the right way” (Writer 2), the writers and the text work to establish the superiority of certain moral values and positions. This is noticed by my discussion group participants, who criticise the programme’s moralising and lecturing tone and its transmissive pedagogy: “the whole first ten minutes or so felt like a really bad road safety advertisement [...] they try to push a teen ‘you should really choose your first time’ kind of message” (Marnie); “it’s like your parent is trying to teach you something” (Naomi). Such audience responses are important for two reasons: first, they confirm that viewers tend to reject transmissive and authoritative pedagogical techniques (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014; Singhal et al., 1993). Second, they suggest that from the viewers’ perspective, the programme aims to teach morality rather than ethics: according to my participants, *Home and Away*

does not engage with difference but authoritatively “pushes” certain rules and moral values.

Unlike ethics, which, by definition, connects people across cultures and societies (Appiah, 2006; Hawkins, 2001; Nussbaum, 2006), morality is situated in a specific socio-cultural context (Harindranath, 2012; Hawkins, 2001; Lewis et al., 2012). By promoting the values of a specific community, televisual morality “works to promote particular lifestyle choices” (Lewis et al., 2012, p. 541). As Hawkins (2001) writes, this form of televisual teaching “is about the production of a particular habitus: an arrangement of personal habits, attitudes and rituals that are informed by ethical values and principles” (pp. 417-418). Indeed, some of the moral values promoted in *Home and Away*, such as the importance of social networks, mateship, neighbourliness and family bonds (as illustrated by the storyline about Irene’s cancer) as well as the importance of health and well-being, or education, work, financial success and occupational mobility (as illustrated by the storyline involving Indi, who wants her husband Romeo to find a better job than surfing instructor), can be linked to the promotion of a lifestyle tied to a particular community: Anglo-Celtic, middle class Australia (Doyle & Tranter, 2014; Parsler, 1971).

To summarise, the literature, the writers of *Home and Away* and my own textual analysis indicate that soap operas have the potential to teach ethics as engagement with difference. However, my interviews and textual analysis also reveal that *Home and Away* teaches morality by asserting the superiority of certain moral standards attached to a particular habitus. When promoting these moral values in a transmissive way, it fails to establish an ethical dialogue between different communities and identities, which substantiates Silverstone’s (2007) criticism. The normalisation of these Anglo-Celtic, middle class moral values and positions as authentically Australian undermines the potential of the programme to promote diversity. This argument is strengthened by the accusations of racism made against *Home and Away* (including by its actors) and by the criticisms regarding its failure to represent Australia as a multicultural society (Wilkins, 2012).

## **Entertainment, trash and cultural citizenship**

As explained in chapter one, television's engagement with otherness is not only about ethics: it also concerns its ability to foster cultural citizenship. Media representations of difference are a both an ethical and a political issue because they concern pluralism, which is a vital aspect of democracy (Silverstone, 2007). According to Hartley (1999), television participates in the development of cultural citizenship by promoting respect for difference and cultural neighbourliness. From the fear school's perspective, however, television fails to teach cultural citizenship because it does not productively engage with otherness and because it does not inform and educate citizens about important social and political issues (Miller, 2007; Silverstone, 2007). Disputing Hartley's optimistic view, Miller (2007) claims that contemporary television is unable to promote cultural citizenship, not only because it denies otherness, but because it merely promotes consumerism through entertainment instead of informing and educating viewers about social issues and politics. Focusing on the American context, Miller argues that television addresses its audience as consumers instead of addressing them as citizens, and that it should take a more responsible approach in order to fulfil its educational potential as informal teacher of cultural citizenship. Underlying this argument is the assumption that entertainment programming provides hedonistic, mind-numbing pleasure and escapism and that it is unable or unwilling to tackle serious issues – or, at least, that it is less able to do so than serious, educational programming.

## **Entertainment and cultural citizenship**

My study supports Hartley's (1999) view and challenges Miller's (2007) argument by showing that entertainment television (in Australia) tackles serious issues. Some of the producers and writers of *Home and Away* consciously aim to educate their audience about a wide range of problems including racism, crime, violence, domestic abuse, corruption, unemployment, precarity, drugs, alcoholism, rape, teenage pregnancy, bullying, eating disorders, environmental issues, road safety and so on (Hobson, 2003; Mercado, 2004; van Vuuren et al., 2013).<sup>26</sup> *Home and Away* does not only seek to

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<sup>26</sup> Some of the issues addressed in *Home and Away* (for example, eating disorders and environmental issues) are mentioned by Miller in his description of what television should focus on.

entertain its audience nor does it simply promote the consumerist lifestyle and values of middle class, Anglo-Celtic Australia: like *A Country Practice*, it is designed by its producers and writers both as a “quality soap” that educates and as commodity that entertains (Tulloch & Moran, 1986). From the writers’ perspective, entertaining and educating are not incompatible goals and it is possible to address viewers both as consumers and as citizens.

Miller (2007), who implicitly associates entertainment with consumerism, implies that only programmes that tackle political issues in a serious manner have the ability to foster cultural citizenship. However, my research shows that televisual entertainment can educate into ethical citizenship. Television does not have to appear to be serious nor does it have to be explicitly and primarily educational to foster ethics, cosmopolitan curiosity and cultural citizenship; it can do so through pleasure and entertainment. This idea is formulated by Hartley in *Uses of Television* (1999), where he claims that television teaches cultural citizenship through entertainment, “visual culture, talk and narrative” (p. 46). But his work does not delve into these “how” questions. My thesis reinforces and extends Hartley’s argument by explaining how and why media entertainment can serve education and cultural citizenship. One of the original contributions to knowledge that my study makes is to demonstrate why entertainment contributes to televisual learning.

The use of entertainment as pedagogical tool is made apparent by my analysis of *Who Do You Think You Are?* which adopts an edutainment approach and successfully uses techniques such as storytelling, emotions and celebrities to educate about history, multiculturalism and tolerance. My discussion group participants also mention entertainment programmes that have the potential to educate the public about social and political issues and to enhance cosmopolitan curiosity. *The Wire*, for example, is described as a programme that entertains while also informing about inner city life in the United States, the drug trade, working class culture, city politics and public education. As Krista points out, its depiction of the urban working class in the United States educates viewers about social and political issues and, more importantly, gives visibility to a culture, a lifestyle and identities that many audience members (especially in other countries like Australia) may not be familiar with, thus fostering cosmopolitan curiosity and multicultural understanding:



Krista: In *The Wire* I learnt about blocks of people, and that a whole block becomes a community and that community gets really addicted to the drug system, and it starts as a young kid and it's a spiral. And you learn about the cities, and it's fed from the top, from politics. So, even though it is total escapism for me because it's so far removed and I find it quite entertaining, I learn a lot about human nature and parts of the world where that is a reality, where drug culture is a reality, day in and day out. And so I feel like I know a lot more about what society is like [...] Yeah you learn heaps. And because it's entertaining.

Krista's final comment illustrates a crucial idea, which I demonstrate in my two case studies: televisual entertainment is not only compatible with education, it facilitates learning.

Previous reception studies show that viewers learn through referential responses such as emotional engagement, identification, empathy or parasocial interactions with characters or media personae (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014; Noble & Freiberg, 1985; Noble & Noble, 1979; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986). My thesis contributes to this field of inquiry by showing that viewers learn not only through referential involvement, as other media scholars have shown, but also through enjoyment, which is the core feature of entertainment (Vorderer et al., 2004). The strong connection between televisual learning and enjoyment, which I highlight in my analysis of the reception of *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Home and Away*, is also apparent in discussions about other programmes, such as the wildlife documentary *River Monsters* and the dramas *The Wire* and *Breaking Bad*. Although being entertained does not always lead to learning (as shown by Lec's responses to *Home and Away*), enjoyment and engagement are necessary in order to learn from television. Televisual education does not need to differentiate itself from entertainment; on the contrary, it must use entertainment to advance public knowledge, ethics and cultural citizenship.

### Trash and cultural citizenship

This thesis belongs to the desire school of thought and aligns with Hartley's (1999) claim that "if critical, educational and governmental rhetorics were more 'loving' [...], if more ambition for popular media were inspired among both producers and audiences, then television, popular media, entertainment and even Rupert Murdoch would no longer be 'dirty words'" (p. 33).

Although lowbrow entertainment is frequently disdained in popular discourses and academia, some scholars draw attention to the aesthetics and the social relevance of popular culture and "trash" (Hill, 2005; Hunter & Kaye, 1997; Sconce, 1995, 2004; Turnbull, 2004). This is not to deny the difference between low and high culture, nor to claim that all popular media texts have great artistic and aesthetic merit (Gripsrud, 1989). Rather, my argument is that what is sometimes considered low, bad or trash (in common discourses or by informed critics) is worth investigating because it can educate.

It is possible to find more contemporary and global examples that support this view. The American soap opera *Empire*, for instance, illustrates how entertainment genres commonly perceived as trash (such as soap opera or reality television) can participate in the formation of cultural citizenship. Broadcast in prime time on FOX and currently broadcast on channel Eleven in Australia, *Empire* follows the lives of the fictional Lyon family as they fight and create alliances to take control of Empire Entertainment, a hip-hop music company. At first glance, *Empire* (which is an immense success both domestically and internationally<sup>27</sup>) appears to be popular culture trash, or at least escapism with no artistic or educational value. As critics have noted, its acting is often unconvincing and its writing is unoriginal and filled with soapy clichés (Wiegand, 2015).

But it is possible to argue that *Empire* has a pedagogical role and that it contributes to the formation of cultural citizenship, not despite its soapy dimension, but

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<sup>27</sup> *Empire*'s premiere ranked as FOX' highest rated debut in three years and its viewership has since increased continuously. It is the first American prime time programme in twenty-three years to have its viewership increase week by week over its first five episodes (Bibel, 2015). It has been sold worldwide and is now broadcast in Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Poland, the Netherlands, Australia, South Africa, China, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong.

because of it. The series has indeed been praised for giving visibility to the African American identity in the United States and internationally (Saunders, 2015). Moreover, like British and Australian soap operas, *Empire* tackles social issues in a way that invites learning through empathic understanding, narrative imagination, reflection and discussion. For example, it addresses the issue of homosexuality and homophobia in the African American hip-hop culture, including in a storyline involving the homophobic protagonist Lucious Lyon (Terrence Howard) and his gay son, Jamal (Jussie Smollett):

LGBT story lines and characters on network prime time aren't new, but for a show steeped in a genre that has a history of homophobia, 'Empire' feels groundbreaking [...] In black culture, masculinity often begins and ends with heterosexuality, and homosexuality is often seen as a sinful aberration. For a show like 'Empire' — whose cast is black and will likely attract a predominantly black audience — to feature a gay man who isn't a stereotype or comic relief is bold enough in its own right. But seeing it on a hip-hop show makes the show feel like a game changer. It's unlikely that there's a single black gay man who won't be able to identify with Jamal, who's portrayed by Jussie Smollett [...] Lucious may be an extreme caricature, but his views are still troublingly common in hip-hop [...] A young black man powered by R&B and hip-hop who is unashamed of who he is and in a loving, same-sex relationship isn't a revolutionary idea in the real world. But in the realm of television and radio, it could be. (Kennedy, 2015)

The series' engagement with gay issues may be due to the influence of its co-creator and executive producer Ilene Chaiken, who also created *The L Word* (Chaiken, 2004-2009), a drama that uses entertainment to educate mainstream audiences by giving visibility to the lesbian identity (Akass & McCabe, 2006). As Hartley (1999) explains, it is by representing those community-based identities (African-American, hip-hop, gay, lesbian etc.) that television fosters cosmopolitan curiosity, neighbourliness and tolerance among citizens and communities.

*Empire's* treatment of homosexuality has the potential to educate for several reasons. First, it raises the issue of homophobia within the African American community and the hip-hop community, thus giving visibility to this problem, or

pushing it “to the forefront” (SBS Programmer). By doing so, it can increase awareness and prompt reflection and discussions about this social issue, as explained in my study of *Home and Away*. Secondly, by representing and confronting different perspectives (Lucious’ homophobia, Jamal’s homosexuality and his mother Cookie’s [Taraji P. Henson] acceptance), *Empire* deals with this issue in an open-ended, constructivist way instead of promoting a single, unequivocal moral message. As argued earlier based on my interviews and textual analysis of *Home and Away*, this allows different viewers who may have different viewpoints to engage with the storyline through identification (Livingstone, 1998). This is important in the case of *Empire* because Lucious’ homophobic views may be shared by a large part of the audience, as Gerrick D. Kennedy (2015) points out. Moreover, this constructivist technique is a form of engagement with difference since it opens up a dialogue and a debate between conflicting points of view. Thirdly, the series educates by inviting empathy, if not identification, with the character of Jamal. As Hobson (2003) argues, this is one of soap operas’ generic features; and as I demonstrate in my analysis of *Home and Away*, it is also a fundamental aspect of soap pedagogy. The text educates by encouraging narrative imagination and empathy with Jamal - who is written as a likeable and identifiable character - thus showing what homophobia feels like. The pedagogy of *Empire* lies not only in the narrative and emotional tension between the homophobic father Lucious and his gay son Jamal but in the tension between viewers’ possible identification with Lucious and their empathy with Jamal.<sup>28</sup>

Soap operas like *Home and Away* and *Empire* inform and educate neither by using formal pedagogical techniques traditionally used in classrooms or textbooks nor by adopting a serious educational or political approach. On the contrary, they teach ethics (as engagement with otherness, respect and tolerance) and cultural citizenship (as awareness about social issues, cosmopolitan curiosity and neighbourliness) through entertainment techniques like storytelling, emotions, empathy, identification and

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<sup>28</sup> It is significant that Lucious overcomes his homophobia and accepts his son as a homosexual Black man and legitimate hip-hop artist at the end of the first series. Through this character evolution, the programme teaches a moral value (tolerance; acceptance of homosexuality) by showing viewers what is right and how to behave. By the end of the series, the viewers who identified with Lucious’ homophobic views are invited to change those views through modelling (imitation). Like most soap operas, *Empire* moralises. It uses both a constructivist, open-ended approach to explore issues and transmissive and authoritative techniques to teach morality.

parasocial relationships with characters. When used as pedagogical tools, these may be more successful (at least with some audience members) than programmes that are explicitly and overtly informative or educational because they are more likely to engage some viewers, as demonstrated in my case studies.

Finally, it is possible to argue that entertainment contributes to cultural citizenship because it functions as a platform for discussion (Klein, 2013; Liebes & Katz, 1990). Indeed, cultural citizenship is also linked to citizens' ability to participate in democratic debates and discussions (Livingstone, 2011). Televisual entertainment can serve as a forum through which viewers discuss their interpretations of television and viewing experiences, as well as media representations or social and political issues. For instance, in their discussion of *Keeping up With the Kardashians*, Krista, Lec and Ms Goldblum consider different aspects of the programme, including: the reasons for its success; the messages it conveys; its representations of gender; its influence on young women; its factuality and authenticity (or lack thereof); its polysemy and possible interpretations by different viewers; and issues of critical media literacy. Their conversation shows how programmes that are seen as "pure escapism and indulgence and entertainment" (Krista) can function as a platform for serious dialogue. Similarly, my focus groups showed that *Who Do You Think You Are?* prompts discussions between viewers about history, multiculturalism, social issues like domestic abuse, human nature and other topics.

Television fosters cultural citizenship not only by representing different community-based identities and by engaging with otherness, but also by inviting viewers to think, talk and participate in debates. From a constructivist perspective, thinking and talking about issues are not mere pedagogical processes through which viewers gain knowledge, but can be seen as an educational end, that is, a learning outcome in itself. If teaching means facilitating learning rather than delivering facts or instructions and if learning is conceived as active rather than passive, the educational outcomes of television are not only what viewers learn from it (facts, skills, ethics) but also what they do with it: thinking, talking, debating.

## **What is (televisual) teaching?**

In this chapter, I have argued that televisual entertainment, including genres and texts that are commonly perceived as lower cultural forms, has the potential to inform, to teach ethics and to foster cultural citizenship. This leads me to explore the question: is everything and anything on television teaching? Because mainstream media are an informal site of learning with no explicit curriculum, identifying the educational content of television programmes is an interpretive process for producers, audiences and researchers. Investigating television as a teacher raises questions about what constitutes teaching and education on television, and who decides what is educational and what is not. Who defines television's educational goals? Who determines what it can, should and does teach? And how can researchers establish what televisual content is teaching?

## **Informal teaching and bad teaching**

Entertainment-education and educational programmes are developed based on curricula that are explicitly formulated before and during the production process (Klein, 2013; Lesser, 1975; Morrow, 2006; Singhal et al., 1993). Singhal, Rogers and Brown (1993) explain that entertainment-education programmes revolve around "a central educational value which all involved parties could agree on" (p. 3) and that these values are "agreed to in writing by mass media officials, public health officials, policy makers, religious leaders, commercial sponsors and others" (p. 4). In this case, the professionals involved in the production process decide upon the educational goals, or "values", of the programmes. This is also the case for educational children's programmes, whose educational goals and content are pre-determined by teams of producers, researchers, educators and educational advisors (Lesser, 1975; Morrow, 2006).

Identifying the educational content of programmes that are designed primarily to entertain is a much hazier process. Because of their lack of explicit curriculum, establishing what constitutes teaching in entertainment programmes can be a matter of interpretation for television professionals, audiences and researchers. Such ambiguity is apparent in my interviews with the *Home and Away* writers, who frequently contradict themselves when talking about their educational objectives: they claim that their main

educational goal is to “explore [issues] in Australian society” (Writer 1) without moralising, while also explaining that their intention was to show people “the right way” and “how to behave” (Writer 2). This ambiguity about *Home and Away*’s educational content also affected my textual analysis. Identifying educational storylines was, to an extent, a matter of subjective interpretation.

This issue is further complicated by audiences’ interpretive agency. From an active audience theoretical perspective, neither the programme makers nor the texts (nor the researcher) can pre-determine if viewers will learn and if they will interpret a programme or a storyline as educational. For instance, it is significant that the social and personal issues that I identify as educational content based on my interviews with the writers and on my reading of the text (road safety, cancer, commitment, first sexual experiences) are not considered as such by viewers like Ms Goldblum or Lec, who describe them as “themes” instead of issues.

Furthermore, viewers define what they learn from a programme. They interpretatively identify the lessons of a programme and what constitutes televisual teaching:

Interviewer: Do you think that there are any shows that are entertainment but from which you can also learn things?

Ms Goldblum: *Dexter*.<sup>29</sup> I am very confident that, if I had to murder someone, I could probably do it.

All: [laugh]

Ms Goldblum: And if I had to watch *Top Gun* enough,<sup>30</sup> I think, you know what? If this was a fucking emergency and I had to land a plane, maybe I could!

Like Krista’s perception of what she learns from *Keeping up With the Kardashians* (“I’ve learnt about fashion because they’re so into fashion [...] I’ve learnt about rap, because of Kanye West”) or Lec and Junior’s statement that “anything on HBO is

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<sup>29</sup> *Dexter* (Manos, 2006-2013) is an American crime drama that centres on Dexter Morgan, a serial killer working for the Miami Metro police department.

<sup>30</sup> *Top Gun* (Scott [Director], 1986) is an American action film about Naval aviators.

educational”, Ms Goldblum’s understanding of what constitutes learning is problematic from an educational perspective. Not only the idea that the American action film *Top Gun* teaches aviation skills seems arguable, but “learning” how to commit murder is not educational because it negates ethics, one of the main outcomes of education. This raises the questions: can promoting unethical lessons be considered teaching? If the delimitation of teaching and learning is a matter of subjective interpretation, can *anything* be considered teaching?

A related problem emerged from my textual analysis of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, which shows that the programme teaches that personality is hereditary. Although this is never explicitly formulated in the programme, most episodes imply that personality traits are transmitted from generation to generation, a debatable concept that is not supported by scientific evidence in the text. This suggests that *Who Do You Think You Are?* may teach incorrect lessons.

Defining and delimiting what constitutes televisual teaching is not only an interpretive process, it can be problematic because television can convey unethical or incorrect lessons. If the aim of education is to further knowledge, skills and ethics, are television’s bad lessons - that is, its incorrect or unethical messages - part of televisual teaching? Is bad teaching part of televisual pedagogy? To address these questions, it is necessary to distinguish the concept of teaching from education, as I explain below.

### **How to identify televisual education and televisual teaching**

Televisual education is not synonymous with televisual teaching, although they often overlap. Televisual education refers to content that explicitly or implicitly, directly or indirectly advances knowledge, skills or ethics, or aims to do so (Appiah, 2006; Bloom, 1956; Nussbaum, 2006). Researchers can identify televisual education by using the literature. To identify the educational content of *Home and Away*, I referred to previous studies that reveal that the educational content of soap operas is linked to their coverage of topical issues (Bowles, 2000; Buckingham, 1993; Livingstone, 1998; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal et al., 1993; Tulloch & Lupton, 1997; Tulloch & Moran, 1986; van Vuuren et al., 2013). Other studies show that television can educate by fostering ethics (Harindranath, 2012; Hawkins, 2001; Lewis, 2008; Lewis et al., 2012). This is



confirmed by the *Home and Away* writers, who explain that they consciously address social, personal and health issues and that they aim to teach moral behaviours. Thus, the literature, along with my interviews, helped me delineate *Home and Away*'s educational content: the storylines selected to be part of my textual analysis are those that noticeably address social, health or personal issues or contain a manifest moral message. Although identifying issues and moral lessons is a somewhat interpretive task, which I carried out intuitively, it was also informed by the literature as well as my interview findings.

Televisual teaching, on the other hand, does not necessarily advance knowledge, skills or ethics and can include incorrect or unethical lessons, as illustrated by *Who Do You Think You Are?*, *Dexter* or *Keeping up With the Kardashians*. In other words, not all televisual teaching is educational. It is also important to acknowledge that not everything on television is teaching. Televisual teaching is the communicative moment that occurs at the intersection(s) between senders and receivers. It lies in the overlaps between the lessons that the programme makers aim to teach, or those encoded in the text, and the lessons perceived or learnt by the viewers. The idea that personality is genetically inherited is mentioned neither by the producers of *Who Do You Think You Are?* nor by my discussion group participants, but it is apparent both in my textual analysis and in online comments posted on the SBS website. In other words, this lesson is taught and learnt. The fact that it is learnt (or at least, perceived) by some viewers supports my interpretation: this lesson may be inaccurate, but it is what the programme teaches. It can therefore be considered televisual teaching, although it is not education. "Bad" televisual teaching is not education since it does not foster knowledge, skills or ethics (indeed, it can hamper education), but it is nonetheless a form of teaching and needs to be examined as part of televisual pedagogy.

This example shows how methodological triangulation can help determine what constitutes televisual teaching. Comparing different sets of data allowed me to investigate the intersection between the lessons taught (the meanings encoded in the texts) and the lessons learnt. By investigating media communication as a conjunctural process that connects senders, texts and receivers, researchers can identify overlaps between teaching and learning. This can be done by adopting a conceptual and methodological framework that links production and/or text, and reception.

## Being critical

The problem of bad televisual teaching leads me to discuss the importance of critical skills and media literacy. Some scholars claim that for television to be used as an informal site of teaching and learning, viewers need to possess critical media literacy skills (Brabazon, 2006; Eco, 1979; Hartley, 1999; Hobbs, 1998). For them, learning from television does not mean trusting that it accurately represents reality, but being able to critically understand and analyse it to gain knowledge, skills or ethics. As illustrated by the lesson about heredity in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, most media texts offer no guarantee of expertise. Therefore, critical media literacy is necessary in order to contextualise and interpret media messages, evaluate their accuracy or relevance, and more generally, to efficiently use television as a source of learning. However, this argument contradicts audience research, including my case studies, which indicates that being critical hinders learning because, in practice, critical viewers distrust programmes and do not accept them as realistic, authentic and reliable sources of knowledge (Buckingham & Bragg, 2003, 2004; Noble & Freiberg, 1985). In the next section, I enter this debate to explore and resolve this contradiction.

## Critical media literacy

My discussion groups confirm that critical media literacy is a necessary prerequisite in order to learn from television. Viewers need to know about television and to understand and analyse its forms, its genres and its messages in order to learn from it. This idea is summarised by Marnie, who explains how her knowledge and understanding of television genres influences her learning:

Marnie:        If it's something that is either a pure documentary or wrapped up as fact [...] I have to feel like they've done a decent enough job of portraying the history in a factual way for me to think that I have learnt something rather than just thinking that it was a really good story. Because I know if it's presented not as a documentary, if it's presented as a story and a narrative therefore I can't rely on that as my historical knowledge. I have

to question that. [In *Who Do You Think You Are?*] I'm conscious of whether they're constructing a story only because this show is presented as non-fiction, it's presented as factual, it's not presented as a drama series. You know, Don Hany is in *Offspring* and when he's in *Offspring* you go 'Okay well,<sup>31</sup> this is fiction and I know I have to suspend disbelief' and you go into that mode of thinking and you just relax and just accept things that happen, even if they're completely off the wall insane. But a show like this, where it's factual, I guess you look at it a bit more in a way that you would a newspaper article and deconstructing, 'Well is this the truth?' They're presenting it as the truth, so I feel like I automatically have to question whether it is truthful and if you're in that frame of mind then you start being a bit more aware of awkward moments or contrived moments.

Marnie's critical media literacy skills allow her to identify televisual forms and genres and to distinguish fictional entertainment (which she describes as "narratives" or "stories") from factual programmes. This distinction is crucial for her learning because it allows her to contextualise and assess their content and to determine how she can use it as a source of learning. In other words, critical media literacy allows her to analyse and evaluate what she sees on television and the knowledge she gains from it. This is not to say that Marnie does not learn from fictional entertainment; rather, it suggests that learning from factual programmes involves different generic expectations and modalities of responses. Her media literacy also allows her to evaluate the accuracy and reliability of factual programmes. As Hill (2002, 2005) shows, audiences' knowledge and understanding of generic conventions influence their readings of factual television and their perceptions of authenticity. Moreover, Marnie's comment highlights the link between critical media literacy and critical viewing: it is because of and through her knowledge and understanding of television forms and genres (that is, her critical media literacy skills) that she is able to intellectually "deconstruct" televisual texts and to "question" their authenticity and reliability (that is, to view them critically).

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<sup>31</sup> *Offspring* (Oswald, 2010-) is an Australian comedy-drama series broadcast on Network Ten featuring Don Hany.

My discussion groups provide other examples that support the argument that critical media literacy is a necessary prerequisite for learning. For instance, Marnie jokingly says that she “learns heaps” about the FBI and the CIA by watching the American crime drama *The Blacklist* (Bokenkamp, 2013-) but she explicitly contextualises and critically evaluates the knowledge that she gains from it:

Marnie:        *The Blacklist*. I learn heaps about the FBI and CIA watching those shows [laughs]. It’s not factual, I know it’s not factual though! [laughs] It’s artificial learning.

By pretending to believe that the fictional representations of the FBI and the CIA in crime dramas are accurate (or to take television “as gospel” as one of the *Who Do You Think You Are?* producers puts it) Marnie implicitly pokes fun at the (imagined) uneducated and media-illiterate viewers who are misinformed by television. Her critical media literacy skills, however, allow her to analyse these representations, which she interprets as superficially and loosely related to reality. Similarly, Krista, who says that she learns about social issues and human nature from *The Wire*, concedes that this programme is only one subjective interpretation of American inner-city criminality and drug culture:

Krista:        I feel like I know a lot more about what society is like. Even though it’s only one interpretation seen through the lens of directors, but I feel like I know a lot more about what life would be like on the street. You know? But I know it’s not necessarily always an accurate interpretation.

Moreover, some of my participants believe that viewers who are not media literate can be miseducated by what they consider bad teaching. For example, Krista and Ms Goldblum worry that viewers who do not possess the necessary critical media literacy skills could be misinformed and miseducated by the incorrect and unethical lessons taught by reality programmes like *Keeping up With the Kardashians* (“It’s so bad that it’s good because this show is teaching young women to aspire to having a shit ton of money” [Krista]). Krista and Ms Goldblum assume that they have the necessary media literacy skills to critically analyse and assess television’s bad lessons, but that others “who aren’t aware” (Ms Goldblum) can be misinformed and miseducated by such programmes.

### **Critical viewing and critical involvement**

Arguing that being critical is necessary for televisual learning heightens the contradiction that I outlined above: indeed, my study also shows that critical viewing, which is a form of intellectual distance, hinders learning. Critical viewers can be entertained but they are unlikely to learn *from* the programme, particularly when they interpret it as inauthentic, unrealistic or as an unreliable source of knowledge. To resolve this paradox, I propose to distinguish two modalities of response: critical viewing and what I call critical involvement. The former is a form of intellectual distance that involves distrust and often mockery of the programme, and in the context of televisual teaching, distrust and mockery of the teacher. Critical viewers may learn *about* the programme by analysing its production processes (how it was produced, filmed, directed, edited etc.) or its messages and agenda (what it tries to teach for instance), but my findings show that because they distrust the text/teacher, they are unlikely to learn *from* it and *with* it.

Critical involvement, on the other hand, is a form of intellectual proximity or connection, which combines literate, critical analysis and trust. When critically involved, viewers exercise their analytical abilities but still trust the text/teacher and accept it as authentic or realistic and as a reliable source of knowledge. The main difference is that critical involvement is a form of referential viewing whereas critical viewing is the opposite. Critical involvement is a referential response because viewers still “accept the basic assumptions of the producers and imagine the events described in the text as if they were real” (Cohen, 2006, p. 191). This is illustrated by Marnie’s statement: “I have to feel like they’ve done a decent enough job of portraying the history in a factual way for me to think that I have learnt something”. Here, she refers to a response that involves both analysis *and* referential viewing. She can trust factual programmes and therefore learn from them if and when she evaluates them as accurate, reliable sources of knowledge. Indeed, it is through and because of her critical media literacy skills that she is able to view these programmes referentially, to trust them and to learn from them. As this example shows, viewers learn by being critically involved and trusting rather than intellectually distant and sceptical. Krista’s comments about

*Keeping up With the Kardashians* suggest that she is critically involved since she is able to analyse the programme and to contextualise its content and the knowledge she gains from it, while also trusting that it faithfully depicts certain subcultures (fashion and rap music). Viewers may combine, or shift between critical viewing and critical involvement, in the same way that they may shift between critical and referential viewing (Ang, 1985; Buckingham, 1993; Hill, 2005; Liebes & Katz, 1986, 1990; Masanet & Buckingham, 2014). Marnie's responses to *Who Do You Think You Are?* for example, alternate between trust based on her literate reading and intellectual distance, or scepticism.

The distinction between critical viewing and critical involvement is best illustrated by my participants' discussion about *The Gruen Transfer* (Denton & Casimir, 2008-),<sup>32</sup> an Australian panel programme about advertising:

Marnie: Speaking of ads, I just thought of something about learning from TV. Shows like *The Gruen Transfer*, I find I really enjoy that show and I really enjoy the way that they break down the ads. And I mean, all of us, I think we're the kind of people that watch things with one eye absorbing it, and one eye in that critical mode, and shows like that appeals to me because it teaches you how to break down the ads, how to read between the lines and figure out how it's constructed, how it's contrived.

Interviewer: So it addresses you as critical? It's not just trying to teach you something by manipulating you but they know you're critical and so they're going to teach you how to be more critical?

Marnie: Yes.

Naomi: And they're open about what they're doing, I suppose. You don't feel like you have to have that critical part of your mind on, because you feel like they are showing you everything that's there.

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<sup>32</sup> The Gruen transfer, named after the Austrian architect Victor Gruen, refers to the moment when consumers entering a shopping mall are disoriented by an intentionally confusing layout, slow down and lose track of their initial intention.

Wolfgang:                You're on the same team.

Marnie:                 Yeah, so I think that in a way it teaches, for people who are naturally critical of what they watch, it teaches you even more things that you can look for to be critical.

For these three participants, watching *The Gruen Transfer* is a learning experience because it is enjoyable and entertaining and because they view it referentially rather than critically. They trust the text (which does not patronise but addresses them as intellectual peers) and they accept it as authentic and as a reliable source of knowledge. More importantly, this discussion indicates that they are not critically distant but critically involved. Through referential viewing, trust and critical involvement, they learn from and with the programme, which increases their knowledge, critical thinking and media literacy. Critical viewing - being critical *of* the programme - creates intellectual distance, which hinders learning (from the programme), whereas referential viewing and critical involvement - being critical *with* the programme - create intellectual proximity and exchange, which facilitates learning.

## **Conclusion**

My thesis supports the desire school's argument about television's educational potential. It aligns with Hartley (1999) and Hawkins' (2001) views and challenges Silverstone (2007) and Miller's (2007) claims by demonstrating that both educational and entertainment programmes have the potential to advance knowledge, to foster ethics as engagement with difference, and to enhance cultural citizenship. Based on my case studies, I have argued that television, including texts and genres that are commonly perceived as low culture or escapism, can participate in the formation of cultural citizenship by representing diverse identities and communities, informing and educating citizens about important issues and prompting discussions about those issues.

Furthermore, my study contributes to this field of inquiry by explaining how television educates. In particular, it highlights the crucial role that entertainment techniques play in televisual teaching and the role that entertainment responses play in televisual learning. One of my original contributions to knowledge is to demonstrate

that televisual education and televisual entertainment are not only compatible but that televisual entertainment is a fundamental component of televisual pedagogy. By doing so, my thesis challenges widespread perceptions about the binarism between education and entertainment and the notion that popular entertainment is a mere form of populism promoting consumerism or reinforcing dominant ideologies (Giroux, 1983, 1994; Miller, 2007).

In addition, my thesis makes an original contribution to audience research by differentiating critical viewing, a form of intellectual distance that hinders learning from and with television, and critical involvement, which facilitates learning because it involves trust, referential viewing, “proximity” (Cohen, 2006) and intellectual exchange. Distinguishing these two modalities of response resolves the contradiction I outlined in my literature review.

It could be argued that the use of discussion groups (or focus groups) as a method to analyse media reception fails to reproduce everyday conversation and natural viewing contexts (Barbour & Schostak, 2011; Weerakkody, 2008). Where the image is and how it is encountered always influence the viewing experience (Lister & Wells, 2001; Morley & Silverstone, 1991; Rose, 2001). Although I considered the impact of the discussion group setting on my participants’ responses and explicitly asked them about their natural viewing habits and media ensemble, my data was not sufficient to determine if and how their usual viewing contexts influence their learning. However, my intention was not to uncover the truth about my participants’ real or usual media experiences but to observe how interpretations circulate through social interactions, debate and negotiation. As explained earlier, my discussion groups did not aim to reflect real-world groups and real-world viewing experiences but *were* in themselves real-world groups and viewing experiences (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996).

Having limited time, resources and access to media professionals, it was difficult to recruit a larger number of participants for my interviews and discussion groups. This raises the issue of my study’s generalisability, that is, the degree to which my findings can be applied from my sample to a broader population. However, representativeness and generalisability, which can be achieved through quantitative and statistical methods,



are not appropriate criteria to evaluate qualitative research (Small, 2009). The purpose of qualitative research is not quantify or measure a phenomenon or to apply findings from a sample to an entire population. Rather, it aims to explain the specifics and the mechanisms of a particular process: “various forms of qualitative analysis acquire general explanatory value, despite their ‘non-representative’ empirical sample” (Jensen, 1991b, p. 7). The “explanatory value” of such qualitative studies is linked to their ability to explore meaning-making processes, language, discourses and experiences in depth (Jensen, 1991a). My interviews and discussion groups should not be understood as small sample studies but as multiple case studies: each individual who participated in my interviews and discussion groups can be considered as a single case that provides insight about televisual pedagogy (Small, 2009). These individuals (like the two programmes that I selected as case studies) are not meant to be representative or to reflect a population because the objective of my research was not statistical representativeness. But their individual perspectives have explanatory value since they allow me to reveal significant aspects of televisual pedagogy. As I argue in chapter two, representativeness and generalisability are not always valid criteria to assess research because it is possible to learn from the particular (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Stake, 2000).

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This thesis has investigated television as an informal site of teaching and learning, that is, as an educational platform that exists outside and beyond traditional classroom environments. Because informal sites of teaching and learning play a significant role in the education of children and young people, as well as in the “lifelong”, or continuing, education of adults, it is important to understand their educational content and pedagogies (Buckingham, 2003; Collins & Halverson, 2009; Gee, 2004; Gottschall, 2011; Hartley, 1999). Recent studies in the field of media education have investigated the pedagogy of interactive digital media technologies, but most of the research currently conducted in this field tends to neglect traditional, non-interactive media platforms like television, film, newspapers and magazines (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Gee, 2004; Jenkins et al., 2006; Livingstone, 2002, 2004, 2011). Although some media scholars have demonstrated that television, including entertainment genres like sitcoms, dramas or soap operas, can educate by increasing knowledge, teaching skills or providing guidance in terms of ethics and morality, most studies have passed over the notion of televisual pedagogy. My thesis has addressed this gap by explicitly asking: how does television teach?

Putting the emphasis on the concept of pedagogy has allowed me to analyse teaching as a method and as a dynamic process, while also addressing questions of educational content, goals or outcomes (what television teaches). Although it answered the “what” questions raised in the literature, my study was primarily concerned with the “how”. Its aim was to understand in what way (through which pedagogical models) and by what means (through which techniques and tools) television, as an informal teacher, educates audiences. In this context, television was not defined as an object (a television set) but encompassed both the practitioners who produce and distribute programmes, and the programmes themselves (which I also label “televisual texts”). Thus, my investigation focused on two types of teachers: television professionals and television programmes. Both were assumed to have interpretive power and to circulate meanings. Based on this assumption, I set out to identify the pedagogical techniques and tools that

some television professionals use to educate and the pedagogical techniques and tools that can be found in some televisual texts. My main research questions were: in what way and by what means do television professionals educate audiences? And in what way and by what means do television programmes educate audiences? Furthermore, the notion of pedagogy allowed me to define teaching as a communicative moment that connects teachers and learners. This study has sought not only to understand how television teaches but also to explain what happens in the teaching-learning moment when television is the teacher and viewers are learners. Because pedagogy is a communicative moment that fundamentally involves learning and learners, I proposed to identify some of the reception processes and responses through which viewers learn by exploring the question: how do viewers learn from television?

Drawing on the research strategy that Tulloch and Lupton (1997) use to understand how different televisual genres raise awareness about health issues, I chose to compare the pedagogy of an educational programme, the Australian version of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, a documentary series about genealogy, and the pedagogy of an entertainment programme, the Australian soap opera *Home and Away*. Previous studies show that entertainment television can teach but my aim was to go beyond this notion to reveal whether the pedagogy of entertainment television differs from the pedagogy of educational television.

In this final chapter, I show that the purposes of my thesis have been achieved. In the first two sections, I synthesise my empirical findings and explain how they answer my research questions. I then highlight the value of my conceptual framework by explaining why it was beneficial to trace the circuit of communication, that is, to link production, texts and reception. In the third section, I discuss the possible implications of my findings for media researchers, media professionals and educators. Finally, I point toward possible directions for future research.

## **Pedagogy and pleasure**

I selected *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Home and Away* as my case studies because I expected to find significant divergences between the pedagogy of a

documentary series and the pedagogy of a soap opera. In this regard, my case selection reflects deep-rooted assumptions about the binarism between education and entertainment (Hinds, 1991; Klein, 2011, 2013). My investigation revealed some differences between educational and entertainment television: for example, as I initially anticipated from the literature, the producers and programmer of *Who Do You Think You Are?* embrace the educational dimension of their work more willingly and more openly than the professionals involved in the production and broadcasting of *Home and Away*, who distinctly privilege entertainment over education.

However, one of the key ideas that emerged from my study is that regardless of a programme's industrial label and conventional categorisation, entertainment plays a crucial role in televisual education. Previous research indicates that entertainment programmes can teach. My study went beyond this idea by showing that some programmes, including those labelled "educational", use entertainment techniques to teach. In other words, one of the main conclusions of my study is that entertainment can be a pedagogical tool through which both public service, educational television and commercial entertainment television teach, and a response through which viewers learn. My interviews with the producers of *Who Do You Think You Are?* and my textual analysis showed that providing enjoyment and encouraging viewers' engagement through entertainment techniques is a fundamental aspect of its pedagogy. They revealed how and why the producers and the text rely on entertainment techniques to teach history, to educate viewers about multiculturalism and to promote ethical values like tolerance and sympathy. In addition, my discussion groups highlighted the role that enjoyment plays in televisual learning. Although being entertained does not always lead to learning, my participants' responses to both programmes showed that televisual learning requires enjoyment and engagement and that, conversely, a lack of pleasure hinders learning. This was also supported by discussions about other programmes such as the documentary series *River Monsters*, the media analysis programme *Media Watch*, the dramas *The Wire* and *Breaking Bad* and the reality programme *Keeping up With the Kardashians*.

Therefore, my study challenges the education versus entertainment binarism, not only by confirming that educational programmes can entertain and that entertainment programmes can educate, but also by highlighting the role that entertainment and

pleasure play in televisual teaching and learning. Moreover, my study shows that this applies to television programmes that do not fit into the category of entertainment-education (which intentionally uses entertainment as a pedagogical tool but adopts a transmissive pedagogical approach). Entertainment techniques also function as pedagogical tools in mainstream programmes that aim to educate in an indirect and constructivist way.

### **Pedagogy and authenticity**

Another crucial idea that arose from my study is that authenticity and trust are fundamental features of televisual teaching and learning. Although this aspect was not mentioned by the professionals I interviewed, my textual analyses revealed the different ways in which both programmes signify the real to invite learning. *Who Do You Think You Are?* signifies actuality and authenticity by using some of the conventions of the expository and observational documentary and by offering glimpses into celebrities' "real" lives and authentic selves, thus inviting viewers' trust and referential engagement. Similarly, *Home and Away* uses some of the conventions of soap realism to create an effect of resonance, that is, to encourage viewers to relate to the characters and to the storylines. Although it is different from the documentary's rhetoric of authenticity, the concept of resonance, which is at the core of *Home and Away*'s pedagogy, is linked to the real since it implies that the text reflects or resembles viewers' real life experiences. Thus, both *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Home and Away* invite learning through referential viewing. Although they use different techniques and generic conventions to achieve this goal, both work to signify the authentic and the real and to encourage viewers to believe that they accurately represent reality.

Conducting these two case studies has allowed me to show that this applies to factual programmes (which, by definition, are based on actuality) as well as scripted, fictional programmes that are not as directly and as obviously linked to actuality. One of the key findings of my study is that in order to educate viewers, fictional programmes must be realistic and invite referential involvement. Although it may seem disconnected from everyday life reality, a science-fiction programme, for example, may be

educational if it is emotionally or psychologically realistic and resonates with viewers' real-life emotions, experiences or situations.

Viewers must trust that the programme is an authentic representation of the world and an accurate source of knowledge in order to learn from it. Those who distrust a programme and do not perceive it as authentic or realistic (whom I called "critical viewers") may learn about the programme but they are unlikely to learn from it. One of the original arguments that I have made based on my empirical findings is that there are two different ways to be critical as a television viewer: viewers can be critical of a programme by intellectually distancing themselves from it, criticising it and mocking it. This modality of response - which, based on the literature, I labelled "critical viewing" (Buckingham, 1993; Cohen, 2006; Liebes & Katz, 1986, 1990) - hinders learning. However, viewers can also be critical *with* a programme, particularly if it encourages them to use their analytical skills. This modality of response, which I labelled "critical involvement", is a form of referential viewing that facilitates learning through critical thinking. Critically involved viewers use their intellectual and analytical skills but still accept the programme as an authentic and reliable source of knowledge about the world. This distinction between critical viewing and critical involvement is significant as it impacts televisual learning.

### **The teaching-learning moment**

The pedagogy of television involves a number of combinations, intersections and interactions. Pedagogy is a contact point between teaching and learning, between the mind and the heart, between thinking, feeling and experiencing, and as I have demonstrated, between information, education and entertainment. Furthermore, *televisual* pedagogy is as a contact point between media professionals' intentions, televisual texts and viewers' responses. To conduct this study I traced the circuit of communication: I analysed how meanings circulate from one interpretive site to another and how they are created, negotiated, challenged and reappropriated by several social audiences (producers, writers, programmers, viewers, and researcher) across those interpretive sites.

This conceptual framework, which draws on visual cultural studies, is based on assumptions about television, teaching and learning. Defining television professionals as teachers implies pedagogic intent and authority (Gottschall, 2011). But rather than presuming that all television producers, writers or programmers identify as teachers and aim to educate their audiences, I sought to determine whether the professionals involved in the production and the broadcasting of *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Home and Away* have educational intentions. The interviews revealed that all of them, except the *Seven* programmer, consciously aim to educate viewers, although some privilege entertainment over education.

As Gottschall (2011) points out, media professionals' pedagogic intentions do not determine nor do they entirely delimit pedagogic meanings. In order to understand the pedagogy of a media text it is therefore necessary to study its textual features independently of professionals' discourses and perceptions:

A well-executed textual interpretation [...] is not an account of how closely the text represents the producers' intentions, nor how accurately it records the audience interpretation of the text [...] Beyond the mediated role of the producers' and the audiences' intentions, the textual analysis can 'take a life of its own' (often in ambiguities, unresolved dichotomies or contradictions) where the textual critic 'finds crucial insights'. (p. 302)

Indeed, analysing the programmes' textual features revealed lessons and aspects of their pedagogies unnoticed by the professionals whom I interviewed (such as the role of authenticity and realism or the idea that *Who Do You Think You Are?* teaches that personality is hereditary). It is therefore beneficial to consider the texts as independent pedagogical agents, indeed as teachers, which invite learning in their own way, and whose pedagogy may diverge from that of the programme makers.

Gottschall (2011) argues that the method of textual analysis alone allows researchers to "keep the film's complexity, multiple meanings and multiple 'lessons' in play" and that audience research runs the risk of pinning "the film down to a single meaning or effect" (p. 299). My study challenges her argument by showing that investigating viewers' interpretations can highlight textual complexity by revealing the multiple, divergent and sometimes contradictory meanings contained in a single

programme or episode. Examining viewers' readings does not reduce the text to a single meaning: on the contrary, it underlines media texts' polysemy and allows researchers to delve into their complexity. My participants' readings of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, for example, were varied: some interpreted the programme as an educational documentary series whereas others perceived it as pure entertainment and as reality television. Amongst those who claimed that they have learnt from it, some said that they have gained historical knowledge; some believed that they have learnt about their own family history; while others explained that they have gained a better understanding of human nature and interpersonal relationships. Investigating televisual learning through audience research does not restrain textual complexity: it reveals the multiplicity of meanings that circulate in and around the text.

Tracing the circuit of communication can highlight divergences between production, text, and reception, but it also allows researchers to identify overlaps between those interpretive sites. As I explain in chapter five, identifying these overlaps through methodological triangulation is crucial to determine what constitutes teaching on television. Furthermore, using this conceptual framework and methodological design (that is, linking production processes, textual features and reception processes) strengthened my arguments by showing that some of my findings apply not only across both case studies but also across the different sets of data. This conceptual framework fortifies the arguments I make in relation to pleasure, authenticity and referential viewing. The idea that entertainment and pleasure are crucial aspects of televisual pedagogy, for example, surfaced not only in both case studies, but across the different sets of data. Similarly, the significance of authenticity, realism, trust and referential viewing, initially revealed in my textual analyses, was confirmed by the discussion groups.

Investigating the different sites, or moments, of the circuit of communication has made this thesis stronger in two ways: by highlighting the complexity and versatility of televisual meanings, and by revealing overlaps and intersections between production, text and reception, thus reinforcing some of my arguments.



## **Implications**

As explained in my Introduction, cultural studies research tends to follow one of two distinct paths: some culturalists focus on issues of public knowledge, public sphere, information, power and hegemony while others prefer to explore popular culture, taste, entertainment, pleasure and agency (Hartley, 1999; Livingstone, 1998). As Livingstone (1998) points out, public knowledge culturalists usually investigate news and current affairs programmes whereas popular culture culturalists generally examine entertainment formats, like romance novels or soap operas. This division within the field of cultural studies is comparable to the education/entertainment binarism that pervades the media industry, media institutions, and popular discourses (Hinds, 1991; Klein, 2011, 2013). Based on my thesis findings, I would argue with Hartley (1999) and Maton and Wright (2002), that cultural studies can reconcile what Livingstone sees as two separate paths (knowledge and pleasure) by following the footsteps of cultural studies pioneers Hoggart (1957), Hall and Whannel (1964) and focusing on issues of informal education and pedagogy. By “re-turn[ing] the focus of cultural studies to its own educational formations and contexts” (Maton & Wright, 2002, p. 379) and exploring “pedagogic questions of what and how” instead of focusing on questions of hegemony and power, culturalists can explore knowledge and pleasure as two intertwined and interdependent facets of the media experience.

This thesis has also revealed modalities of response that play a significant role in audiences’ viewing experiences, which could influence the way in which media researchers analyse reception processes, including but not limited to televisual learning. The theoretical distinction I have made between critical involvement and critical viewing, for instance, can impact the way television researchers understand what it means to be critical or to view a programme referentially, and how these modalities affect reception processes. By highlighting these modalities of responses and clarifying the differences between critical viewing and critical involvement, my study has made an original contribution to the field of media studies and cultural studies.

The initial purpose of my project was to use educational concepts and theories in order to further theoretical understandings of television and its pedagogy. But this thesis also has practical implications, which could be useful for educators and media

practitioners who wish to educate their audience. My findings suggest that media professionals who want to educate need to provide pleasure and enjoyment by using entertainment techniques. These entertainment techniques include: telling stories and using narrative devices in order to create suspense, arouse curiosity, excitement and thrill; inviting viewers' emotional engagement, empathy and narrative imagination; and developing or exploiting their parasocial relationships with celebrities or characters. Although not mentioned in my case studies, humour is another entertainment technique that media professionals can use to educate (Vorderer et al., 2004).<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, television producers need to convey a sense of authenticity or realism (depending on generic formats), which is crucial to viewers' referential involvement and to their learning. These techniques can be used as pedagogical tools because entertainment and referential viewing facilitate learning; however, it is important to note that these pedagogical techniques do not systematically guarantee learning since viewers are active interpreters of televisual content whose responses cannot be predicted or predetermined by textual features nor by the programme makers' pedagogical intentions.

From an educator's perspective, it is significant that televisual edutainment can lead to deep learning, as demonstrated in my study of *Who Do You Think You Are?* The viewers in my discussion groups related the knowledge they gained from the series to their existing knowledge and they applied what they learnt from it to their own lives and experiences outside the viewing session. This is noteworthy because, as education scholars show, traditional schooling sometimes leads to surface learning, particularly when students focus on external demands like academic assessments (Gee, 2004; Kohn, 2000; Marton & Säljö, 1976; Ramsden, 2003). Informal learning through televisual entertainment, on the other hand, is not motivated by those external demands and it can result in a better and deeper understanding of the world. This may encourage educators to slightly shift their focus away from standardised testing, examinations and assessments, which often lead to surface learning, and to put more emphasis on edutainment platforms or techniques that are more likely to increase student engagement and to result in deep learning.

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<sup>33</sup> The SBS programmer described humour and comedy as pedagogical tools that allow television "to push through boundaries and makes people think about issues".

## Directions for future research

As Tulloch and Moran (1986) show in their study of *A Country Practice*, television directors, editors, set designers and actors can be considered as teachers since they too play a role in televisual education. Furthermore, these professionals may adopt different discursive positions about televisual teaching and education (Tulloch, 2000). Therefore, it could be fruitful to interview a wider range of professionals to further understand how they perceive their educational role, to analyse their pedagogical techniques and tools and to highlight more similarities and differences between professional communities and individuals. This may support some of my arguments and highlight more nuances.

Another avenue for further research would be to conduct a reception study with fans. The lack of fan perspective was not an issue in the case of *Who Do You Think You Are?* because some of my participants were regular viewers who enjoy the programme (although they did not identify as fans) and because I was able to access online comments posted by viewers who are familiar with the series and actively engage with its paratext, which provided a perspective that approximates that of fans (Baym, 2000; Scott, 2013). However, my participants, who were aged between twenty-five and thirty-five and uniformly disliked *Home and Away*, were not representative of its fandom. According to its producers and writers, *Home and Away* targets sixteen-year-olds to thirty-nine-year-olds but is largely “teenage-focused” (Writer 1) and is more appealing to young viewers (news.com.au, 2011). Accessing relevant online data about fans proved difficult. Although fans of *Home and Away* are active on the Internet, it was challenging to find online sources that contain useful data about their learning. In my case study chapter, I formulate the following hypothesis: regular viewers and fans who enjoy soap operas like *Home and Away* are likely to learn from those programmes because they are entertained, because they cognitively and emotionally engage with the content and because they view it referentially. Their responses are likely to be more aligned with the writers’ intentions and the textual features. Investigating how soap fans learn would be fruitful to test this hypothesis and verify that they indeed learn through enjoyment and referential involvement. Consolidating my research could also shed more light on the ethical and moral knowledges viewers gain from soap operas.

To determine how natural viewing contexts, social interactions and other media platforms (including digital technologies and social media) influence televisual learning it would be beneficial to combine focus groups or semi-structured interviews with viewers with participant observation. Based on the literature and my discussion groups, I have argued that viewers learn from television through social interactions and that, from a constructivist perspective, these social practices can be considered both as a learning process and as an educational outcome. This argument could be expanded through further empirical research. Observing viewers in their natural viewing contexts would also be useful to determine what viewers do while watching television or how they engage with a programme's paratext, and how these para-televisual activities affect their learning. To what extent does media convergence contribute to televisual learning? For example, does technological multitasking facilitate learning from television or does it impede it? Do surrounding media technologies distract viewers or can they increase their engagement with the content? Some researchers have started to tackle these questions, which are worth exploring further (Masanet & Buckingham, 2014).

### **Concluding remarks**

This thesis has opened up avenues for reflection about television's potential to educate the public and provided an opportunity to rethink what it means to inform, to educate and to entertain viewers and how these goals can work jointly. The assumption that information/education and entertainment are divergent and operate independently in the media is still pervasive. This preconception initially influenced my own methodological choices. However, current research conducted in the fields of media studies and communication studies, including this thesis, suggests that these two aspects of media production and reception are not divergent, and more importantly, that they can and should work together to educate children, young people and adults. Providing pleasure and enlightenment is possible and desirable, both in the media and in educational settings. Eudaimonic entertainment is an objective worth pursuing in informal and formal sites of teaching and learning and it is a concept that is worth exploring and researching further.

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