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Education aims to nurture a thinking world

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Education aims to nurture a thinking world

ONE of the main tasks of education is to nurture inquiring minds. Equipping students with a capacity to think about the world is as important as gaining a formal qualification.

Indeed, the two should not be separated - what use is a qualification which has not also enabled you to be a thoughtful citizen? A

democratic system is dependant upon an educated and informed public. When both education and information are restricted, democracy suffers accordingly.

The channels of information in our society are, outside the Internet, tightly managed. Rupert Murdoch, for instance, controls 70 per cent of the

For argument's sake

Blind obedience has no place in education, says **Anthony Ashbolt**, and democracy needs questions as much as answers.

newspaper market in Australia. Today, the Murdoch press is beating the war drum loudly. With notable exceptions (including the *Illawarra*

Mercury), much of the media are following and forgetting to ask the right questions. Government propaganda masquerades as media commentary.

The "war on terrorism" is accepted terminology when, in reality, it is a useful sound bite for governments that require an unthinking population. "Weapons of mass destruction" is a phrase thrown about with gay abandon by those in authority who have used them (both the phrase and the weapons) so frequently they are blind to history.

Too many journalists, however, parrot these sorts of phrases, just as our Prime Minister, in such an embarrassing fashion, insists upon parroting the playground language of (US President) George W Bush and (US Defence Secretary) Donald

Rumsfeld ("the game is up", as if international diplomacy can ever be reduced to a game).

In the relative absence of critical analysis and keen questioning from media proprietors and their agents, education becomes even more significant. That role is not to provide a correct line but rather to encourage alternative views. To the trained eye, government propaganda is clearly characterised by serious gaps. It is harder to pick through the skein of half truths parading under the language of humanitarian compassion. Is the "liberation" of the Iraqi people a genuine goal of the US, or does

something more chilling lurk behind that word?

Too often, news derives from official sources. Alternative sources, within the education system itself, are frequently ignored. There, are, of course, exceptions. Educators face the vital task of challenging students to question the news, particularly when that "news" might be little more than propaganda.

- *Dr Anthony Ashbolt is a lecturer in Media Politics and American Politics at the University of Wollongong.*

■ Got something to say about education? Send thoughts to argument@illawarramercury.com.au