

MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

Critical Media Literacy in Canadian Classrooms: The Re-education of Media Savvy Children

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1. Introduction

Over the latter half of the 20th century, a number of technological innovations brought about a major shift in the Canadian media environment whereby we have seen traditional media, such as newspapers and radio, eclipsed by ubiquitous, state-of-the-art technologies that are incredibly vivid and burgeoning with interactive potential. New media have appeared while older media have evolved to offer us hundreds of channels and virtually unlimited access to information and entertainment. Along with these developments, our acceptance and appetite for media and technology has also shifted. In 1990 for example, only 10.4% of Canadian households owned a computer and 12.6% had VCRs (Manna, 2002, p. 18). A little over a decade later, in 2001 more than 70% of Canadian homes had computers and VCR penetration reached 93%, according to a report from the Bureau of Broadcast Measurement (*ibid.*). Cable and satellite subscriptions, Internet access, and mobile telephone use have also increased substantially in the last decade. Given what appears to be a vigorous proliferation of media technology, it is hardly surprising that children are becoming remarkably ‘media savvy’. Many children today can program a VCR or a mobile phone; they can navigate the Web while “chatting” on-line with friends across the globe; and they can manipulate the most advanced video and computer games, which can be an awkward task for most adults. But trying to keep pace with technology can be a difficult and expensive challenge, particularly as the competitive market for technological goods renders equipment obsolete ever-more rapidly, year by year. Nevertheless, Canadian educators and the provincial departments that manage them, recognize that it is increasingly important to help children acquire the skills they need to become active and contributing members of this media saturated society. Nearly all Canadian primary and secondary schools now have computers with Internet access in every classroom and many are

installing Cable in the Classroom, a closed-circuit cable television system, to complement teachers' lesson plans for oral and visual communication. In fact, since the early 1980's computers and computer literacy have been recognized as an important part of the education of Canadian children. And while it may be difficult to measure how the pervasiveness of media today impacts student's overall learning, as Rick Shepherd of The Association for Media Literacy (AML) points out, "for better or worse, media culture is our culture and we cannot hope to own it without understanding it" (Shepherd, 1993, p. 1).

Although we have come to recognize the value in keeping pace with technology through education, there appears to be a constant tension among parents and educators vis-à-vis the appropriate extent of children's media use and exposure. Thus in response to growing public concern, there has been a revival in the promotion of media literacy education. For a number of years media literacy has appeared sporadically in lesson plans throughout the country, but its popularity has grown considerably since it became mandated as part of Canadian provincial K-12 Language curricula in 1999. Indeed media literacy education is gaining momentum in many parts of the world, including the United States, Britain, Australia, Japan, Europe and Latin America, with Canada being a notable leader. To understand the scope and significance of media literacy today, it is helpful to begin by exploring the relationship between children and media. In the following sections I describe some of the characteristics of children's exposure to media, in addition to how they make use of media technology in their daily routines. I also consider some of the common concerns regarding children's media consumption. Through a brief overview of the media literacy movement in Canada, I will describe how the concept of media literacy has shifted from its original meaning and clarify what the term implies today. The first sections of this paper set the stage to explore why many researchers and educators now

consider media literacy to be a fundamental part of children's education. From there, I explore various factors that I believe have influenced the diffusion of media literacy programs in Canada, paying particular attention to the Ontario system, which was the first province to mandate media literacy as part of the K-8 Language curriculum. Subsequently, I also offer a short description of some popular media literacy resources, which a number of Canadian educators are currently using to create their lesson plans.

Based on my research of what leading media literacy scholars describe as the necessary components of a comprehensive media literacy program, the final sections of the paper draw attention to what I believe is missing from current media literacy classes and how they might be improved. How the subject of media literacy features in a teacher's lesson plan depends on a number of variables including the availability of quality resources, the educator's own experience with and attitude toward media, their level of technological skill, and the varying levels of technological proficiency among their students. And with on-going debate among scholars vis-à-vis the learning expectations of a media literacy education, it becomes clear that divergent opinions can be connected to competing theories of communications and cultural studies. Certain issues arise from this tension, and as the authors of "Media literacy, media education and the academy" explain, "conceptual problems are fundamental because debates at this level translate into very different kinds of education" (Christ & Potter, p.7). By relating concepts of media literacy to fundamental theories of media studies, I layout the argument that media literacy programs should aim to do more than help children acquire various technological skills. Rather, by integrating concepts of political economy and cultural studies, media literacy education should assist young people to become critical citizens rather than mere savvy media consumers. I thus propose that educators should advance a 'critical media literacy' approach that

encourages students not only to question media texts and stereotypical media representations but also that challenges the systemic principles of commercialization which drive the North American media industry.

2. Children and the Media:

Before we can consider some of the possible benefits of media literacy, we must first develop a clear picture of children's relationship with media and technology. For decades, there has been substantial research into so-called media effects but few studies have aimed to measure children's actual media use. Occasionally Statistics Canada conducts surveys to explore household media consumption. Private broadcasters, advertising agencies, and research consultants might review a particular demographic group in terms of their exposure to media messages. But to date, neither public nor private organizations have sought to measure children's overall interaction with media in Canada. The United States has also neglected to study children's media habits, despite intensified government regulation of children's television programming and complicated ratings systems for media products such as films and video games. Recently however, the Kaiser Family Foundation decided to close the information gap in the U.S. by conducting a comprehensive study that used both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess children's media exposure and use.¹ Their findings were presented in a report titled "Kids & Media @ the New Millennium". Issued in 1999, this report investigated how children's media 'use' and 'exposure' can be related to such factors as age and grade levels, race and gender, types of media in the home and in their bedrooms, parent's education and income levels, and how children rate their personal 'contentedness'. The results of the Kaiser study generated some interesting and even alarming statistics. To get a better understanding of

how Canadian children relate to media, I draw upon information from Statistics Canada, The Bureau of Broadcast Measurement, YTV's "Tween Report" and Concerned Children's Advertisers (CCA) 2001 review of the "Children's Television Landscape."² The Kaiser Family Foundation report, as well as a 2001 study on "Media in the Home" from the Annenberg School of Public Policy, provides additional information to understand how media literacy education might have significant merit in our media saturated society.³

Is Television Good For Kids?

The headline of a November 2002 issue of Newsweek magazine reads "TV is Good for Kids." Smaller type, in the bottom right corner states "No, it's not." The TV debate still grabs our attention and triggers anxiety, as the pros and cons of television are argued as vigorously today as they were in TV's earliest days. However, now that broadcasters such as Nickelodeon and Disney are following in the esteemed footsteps of PBS and offering more 'good-for-kids' programming, the pros of television viewing seem to be gaining ground in the debate.

Nickelodeon now airs 4.5 hours of quality preschool shows daily... Shows like "Dora" and "Blue's Clues" goad kids into interacting with the television set; studies show this improves problem-solving skills. Even the granddaddy of this genre, "Sesame Street," has undergone a makeover to better serve today's precocious viewers.

Daniel McGinn, Newsweek, 2002

In the United States, some television networks are turning to child-development experts to help fine tune their programming through a research-driven process that involves testing and observing how children interact with an episode, minute by minute. In order to meet certain 'educational' requirements set by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), broadcasters themselves are learning - how to balance government restrictions while maintaining the

entertainment value of a show in order to capture a growing child audience that is tuning in at an earlier age. “Sesame Street” for example, was originally geared toward children 5 to 11 years old. However, the Children’s TV Workshop, producers of the program, claim that their audience is now as young as 2 years of age. As a result the producers changed the format of “Sesame Street” to connect with this infant audience. In 1990, the FCC mandated the Children’s Television Act, which requires networks to offer a minimum of 3.5 hours of educational programming per week. Although no such regulation exists in Canada, some television networks have implemented more ‘educational’ programming such as “Arthur”, “The Magic School Bus” and “Caillou”. But as altruistic as these endeavors may seem, most providers of children’s television only became involved with educational-programming after the astounding success of PBS’s “Barney and Friends,” a live-action program aimed at preschool children.

Kids went wild, and merchandise flew off shelves. Until then Nickelodeon and Disney had been content to leave preschool shows to the do-gooders of PBS. Now they saw Gold... It was a profitable move. By 2001 Nick and Disney’s TV businesses had generated a combined U.S. \$1.68 billion in revenue, according to Paul Kagan Associates.

Daniel McGinn, Newsweek, 2002, p. 56.

In Canada, “approximately 56% of the educational programming broadcasting today has been produced within the last three years (Manna, 2001, p. 45). Although there seems to be more quality children’s programming available today, it is also interesting to note that the most popular television shows among Canadian children do not even come close to the category of educational-programming. In 1995, the top programs across all the major Canadian markets were, “Bugs Bunny”, “Home Improvement”, “Friends”, “Funniest Videos”, and “The Simpsons”. By 1997 adult oriented programming, such as “Home Improvement” and “The Simpsons” continued to be present in the top ten and by 2001, “Survivor” had become the

number one watched show for children aged 2-11 (ibid., p. 47). Nevertheless “study after study shows “Sesame” viewers are better prepared for school” (McGinn, 2002, p. 58). And of course parents are happy to see their children watching programs that incorporate vocabulary and basic arithmetic along with ‘sharing’ and positive social interaction, which these programs generally depict. But of the children who purportedly learn from television, unless we ask questions about ‘what other programs they watch’ or, ‘how often they engage in actual learning activities’ or ‘whether they have older siblings whom they learn from’, etc., the question “is TV good for kids?” will remain open-ended.

Debbie Gordon, a former Toronto advertising executive who now teaches children “how to be media smart,” claims that educating children about marketing and advertising is perhaps more important than evaluating program content, because when it comes to kids she says, “advertising is a very big business”.

Every year, Canadian children aged six to eight spend about \$100 million of their own money, while nine to 14-year-olds spend \$1.7 billion, according to YTV’s Kid and Tween Report, an annual national survey that tracks the attitudes and opinions of children. On top of that, those age groups influence a total of about \$15 billion in family purchases each year, from snacks and toothpaste to cars and cell phones.

Dahlia Reich, Today’s Parent, 2003

Gordon estimates that Canadian children view about 504 commercials per week on TV, which amounts to 26,208 exposures each year, or the equivalent of watching nine full days of television. Of course, there is also billboard advertising, radio and Internet ads, product packaging and event endorsements, in addition to new methods of text advertising on wireless communication devices. Put very simply, marketing products and services to children is a lucrative business – perhaps reason enough to advocate media education for kids.

How do Children Access Media?

According to statistics in the “Children’s Television Landscape” report, commissioned by Concerned Children’s Advertisers (CCA), by 2001 children (0 to 14 years) accounted for 18.8% of the total Canadian population, or 5,819,100. Most of these children would apparently rank television as the medium they use most often. In fact, with 99% of Canadian households owning both a radio and television, only 2% of Canadian children watch no TV, while only 6% watch less than 30 minutes per day. The majority of children (41%) watch between two and three hours of television programming daily and approximately 12% watch four or more hours (Manna, 2001, p. 11). The CCA report also indicates that 60% of Canadian households have at least two TVs and over 30% have more than three. Nearly 70% of Canadian homes now have a personal computer and expectations are that use of high-speed Internet, digital cable, and personal video recorders (PVRs) will increase considerably by 2010 (ibid.).

Canadian Ownership of Communication/Media Equipment, 1990 to 2001

| Percentage of Canadians Homes with | 2001** | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 | 1996 | 1995 | 1990 |
|------------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Telephone | 97.8% | 97.8% | 92.0% | 98.1% | 98.6% | 98.7% | 98.7% | 98.6% |
| Television | 98.9% | 98.9% | 98.9% | 98.7% | 98.7% | 98.5% | 96.1% | 88.5% |
| Households with one ^ | | 42% | | | | | 47% | 52% |
| Households with two or more^ | | 57% | | | | | 49% | 36% |
| VCR (with one or more) | 93.1% | 90% | 88.6% | 87.8% | 84.7% | 83.5% | 82% | 12.6% |
| Households with one VCR^ | | 61% | | | | | 66% | 60% |
| Households with two or more^ | | 29% | | | | | 16% | 6% |
| CD Player | | 74.1% | 70.1% | 65.7% | 58.1% | 53.4% | 47% | 15% |
| Computer | 70.0% | 65.0% | 59.8% | 45.1% | 36.0% | 31.6% | 12.6% | 10.4% |
| Modem | | | 38.5% | 32.0% | 21.5% | 15.5% | - | - |
| Internet Access | 59.3% | 51.9% | 33.1% | 24.8% | 13.0% | 7.4% | - | - |
| Cellular Phone | 58.2% | 41.8% | 32.0% | 26.1% | 18.6% | 14.1% | - | - |
| Satellite Dishes | 15.3% | 10.5% | 5.7% | 2.7% | - | - | - | - |
| DVD Player | 11.0% | | | | | | | |
| Cable | 72% | 73% | 75% | 77% | 77% | 76% | 76% | |
| Digital Cable | 7.5% | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

*Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Cable Television Association, **BBM Fall 2001, CAB⁴

While children clearly spend substantial time each day with television, they also use video games, computers, CDs, and other media. Canada's Media Awareness Network (M-Net) claims that Internet surfing has now surpassed television as the main choice of technology used by children in their free time.⁵ "Not only do today's children live in media saturated households, but there is also a significant amount of privatization of media in the sense that many youngsters report having one or more media in their own bedrooms – media that they control and can use in private" (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, Brodie p. 12). In the United States more than 50% of children have bedrooms that contain a TV, radio (70%), cassette player (65%), and a CD player (51%). At least 33% have video games in their bedrooms, 29% have VCRs, and 16% have their own computers (ibid.). This trend toward "privatization" of media is fueling concern that children are primarily exposed to media messages without adult supervision. Although the Kaiser report found that video and movie viewing is a social activity, playing video games and computer use is mainly a solitary activity. 55–65% of children surveyed play interactive video and computer games alone, and over 60% visit chat rooms and web sites alone. Merely 13% reportedly play computer games with others present. The authors claim that in fact none of the media activity children engage in is shared much with parents.

What are the implications of Media use and exposure?

Social conditions that take parents away from the home, in combination with a proliferation of media within the household, have created conditions conducive to, if not solitary viewing, certainly viewing absent of much of an adult presence.

Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodi, 1999

As children more regularly engage with media in the privacy of their bedrooms, or simply without much adult supervision, researchers, parents, teachers and even law enforcement

officials are perhaps more concerned than ever about the negative aspects associated with media. From longstanding apprehension over violent media material to grave concern about the potential for sexual solicitation over the Internet, there are indeed a number of negative implications of children's media use and exposure. The Media Awareness Network, which aims to increase public knowledge about how children interact with media, recently circulated an article via their Website that draws attention to a relatively new media-related problem. According to the author, in the United States "to see an R-rated movie at the theater, the law requires children younger than seventeen be admitted only if accompanied by a parent or guardian. Not so with videos" (Mahoney, 2003, p.1). And while American teens can rent restricted movies on video or DVD that they are prohibited from seeing in theatres, a Federal Trade Commission study also found that eighty percent of R-rated movies are in fact aimed at children under 17 years of age (ibid.). In other words, a majority of filmmakers directly target children with explicitly restricted content. Shielding children from X-rated content has long been regarded as a societal moral obligation. However, protecting children from sexual predators in virtual reality is a new phenomenon, one that has come about as a direct result of technological innovation. In a national U.S. survey of children aged 10 to 17, "one of every five said they had received a sexual solicitation over the Internet" (Hsu, 2003, p. 1). But this frightening statistic merely scratches the surface of the potential harm that can ensue if a child unwittingly interacts with a pedophile online. "Right now there's over 630 million people online. If there were only one percent of that were predator(s) that's over 6 million predators on line" (ibid.). It practically goes without saying, that in today's globally connected environment children must be made aware of the problems associated with Internet use, and the potential for individuals to use personally identifiable information for negative, and even harmful activity.

The sexual predators that preyed on our children in the physical parks and playgrounds have found the virtual parks and playgrounds... what they'll do is sign in, enter chat room, look to see who's in the chat room, they basically do what we call lurking. They watch to see what children are saying, see if there's an opening presented to them.

Detective Mike Sullivan, 2003

Meg Hogarth of Child & Family Canada claims that there is also a major need to challenge the stereotypes that permeate children's television programming. Alarmed by what she describes as overt sexism and violence in media overall, Hogarth alleges that "seen from an early age, these stereotypical images teach boys that to be caring is unmasculine while girls learn that to be female means it is best to be thin, white and very beautiful" (Hogarth, 1995, p.1). If we also consider that the most popular video games, including "Mortal Kombat", "Street Fighter", and "Grand Theft Auto", typically portray extremely violent behavior, it is hard not to be concerned about how they might impact a child's concept of reality or behavior. For example, in the game "Grand Theft Auto," players gain points for stealing cars, picking-up prostitutes and killing them, and shooting police officers. As Hogarth explains, "video games more than any other medium promote male dominator, racist behavior as glamorous and erotic, the only possible response and the essential requirement for winning" (ibid., p.4).

There has certainly been extensive research into the emotional and psychological impact of media violence on children. Even neurological testing has been used to measure how media stimuli affect a child's brain chemistry and many researchers would argue that behavior can be negatively affected by violence in the media. But aside from behavioral issues, how else can media technologies affect children's lives? According to position statements issued by the Psychosocial Pediatrics Committee of the Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS) "the influence of the media on the psychosocial development of children is profound, with both beneficial and

harmful effects on children's mental and physical health (CPS, 1999, p. 1). Therefore, in a series of recommendations concerning media in the home, the CPS suggests that parents should set time limits of less than one to two hours of screen time per day.

Martin Lindstrom, a prominent author of advertising and 'branding' texts who has just published *BRANDchild*, which is based on the world's largest study of "tweens" (children 9 to 14 years) and their relationships with brands.⁶ Lindstrom's analysis provides some remarkable information about how media technology is actually changing the way children communicate. After surveying almost two thousand 9 to 14 year-olds from the United States, Brazil, Germany, Spain, India, China, and Japan, the *BRANDchild* study revealed that 24% of tweens use the Internet as their primary tool to communicate with friends. What is most shocking about this number is that it is ahead of face-to-face communication and the telephone! Thus, according to Lindstrom, the proliferation of interactive communication media such as the mobile phone, computer games, and the Internet is changing language forever. Grammar, he declares, is on its way out. "Close to 50% of tweens in the United States find it outdated to use grammatically correct language and prefer instead to use catch phrases and iconic language"(Lindstrom, 2003, p. 37). Lindstrom argues that a new global language, which he calls "Tweenspeak", will be read and understood by a majority of future generations. Combining icons, illustrations, and phrases "Tweenspeak" is a totally new global way to communicate. Typically words and phrases are abbreviated (ATB – 'all the best'), colloquial pronunciations are written as they sound (BCNU – 'be seeing you'), and numerals are used to replace actual words such as '2' for 'to', and 'too'. Numbers are also used to make new combinations and phrases (2GFU – 'too good for you'). Although parents and teachers might view this so-called language as merely an annoying habit, marketers see it as a golden global opportunity to reach children with their advertising

campaigns. Always looking for new methods to communicate with the youth audience, if marketers can learn to adopt the language of “tweenspeak” and incorporate interactive technologies in their campaigns, Lindstrom suggests that “branding towards teens will more than ever take place in their minds – almost entirely removing any physical product presence”. (ibid., p. 42). One example of the marketing potential of interactive media is a campaign for the energy beverage Red Bull, which uses product placement techniques in Sony Playstation video games. “When a player reaches a particular level a message appears promoting the Red Bull energy drink as a way to break through to the next level” (ibid., p. 41). With estimates that revenues from computer and video games are more than double that of Hollywood movies, media planners are already including gaming as an important element in their efforts to reach future generations. Online gaming alone is expected to grow to over U.S. \$1.5 billion in 2004, according to Professor E. Castravoca of the University of California, Fullerton. Still, the Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) does not yet seem concerned about the potentiality of advertisers of co-opting children’s video games for marketing plans. The CRTC recently approved requests for cable video game channels that would allow players to download games through their TV screens. As long as the channels meet existing broadcasting codes, they will not require any additional licensing.

3. What is Media Literacy Education?

Despite the potential problems that are regularly associated with children’s exposure to media, the fact remains that the Internet, television, newspapers, radio, film, etc., are the means through which we express ourselves and communicate our ideas with others. Today it is nearly impossible to have an informed life without reliance on some form of modern media technology

and as we have seen, communication technologies eventually transform human interaction. The invention of the printing press is perhaps the best example of how technology has altered society but the changes are ongoing. In *Teaching the Media*, Len Masterman illustrates how the visual mode has become the most widely used form of communication in our culture. Even print he explains is more regarded as a visual medium today with a heightened concern for design, layout, and typography. As mentioned earlier, the new language of “tweenspeak” is another example of how technology is changing how we communicate with others. Thus, while groups such as the Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS) recommend limiting media consumption, they also recognize both the value and the importance of keeping pace with media technology. Among recommendations that encourage parents to watch TV with their children and to set time limits of daily screen exposure, the CPS also insists that physicians should become familiar with the objectives of media literacy and provide parents with resources to access information about media awareness programs. Physicians should also actively promote the implementation of media literacy programs in their communities. Media literacy education, according to the CPS, has proven beneficial for giving students a better understanding of how media can affect them both socially and physically. Still the term media literacy means many things to many people. Most educators would probably describe it as a process through which students examine media texts and learn to create messages with media technology, such as print or video, yet there are many differing opinions about what a media literacy class should entail. How exactly does one examine a media text? Should teachers emphasize content analysis, production techniques, and/or audience reception? Is it appropriate to study all types of media? Are television sitcoms and Hollywood movies appropriate learning materials for a Grade 8 class? More to the point,

should media literacy strive to shield children from negative media messages, or should it aim to empower students to challenge the media?

In 1993 at the *National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy* a panel of media education scholars defined media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms” (Hobbs, 1998, p. 16). Furthermore according to most advocates, media literacy requires not only developing the skills to use media technologies but also:

It involves an examination of the techniques, technologies and institutions that are involved in media production, the ability to critically analyze media messages, and a recognition of the roles that audiences play in making meaning from those messages.

Rick Shepherd, 1993.

By applying literacy skills to media and technology, media literacy education can empower individuals to become both critical thinkers and creative producers of a wide range of messages using image, language, and sound. With a formal definition in place, it is important to note that media literacy follows from certain conceptualizations, which include: Media are constructed and construct reality; media have commercial, ideological and political implications; form and content are related in each medium – each has unique aesthetic codes and conventions; and receivers negotiate meaning in media (Christ, 1998, p. 322). Moreover, just as all media is constructed, so too is knowledge, therefore educators should utilize multiple knowledge structures and not only try to affect the cognitive development of students but also their emotional and moral development as well (ibid.). The National Communication Association in the United States asserts that a media literate student must:⁷

1. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the ways people use media in their public and private lives.
2. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of complex relationships among audiences and media content;
3. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding that media content is produced within social and cultural contexts
4. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the commercial nature of media;
5. Demonstrate ability to use media to communicate to specific audiences.

The Ontario Curriculum: Language, Grades 1-8 (1997) indicates that due to the pervasive influence of the media, students should acquire the “ability to understand and interpret messages they receive through the various media and the ability to use these media to communicate their own ideas” (Ontario Curriculum.htm, p. 32). This means for example that by the end of grade 8, Ontario students are expected to:

- Identify and analyze the formulas used in different categories of media works (e.g. talk show – opening monologue, hurried discussion between host and “sidekick”, the guest interview, interaction with the audience, special performance);
- Describe a media work, outlining its different parts and the steps involved in planning and producing it;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of various informational media works (e.g. a Website on the Internet, a documentary film, television or radio programs, newspapers or magazines);
- Create media works of some technical complexity (e.g., a two-minute mystery story on videotape or audiotape).

As communication technologies transform society and influence our understanding of ourselves and our communities, media literacy is expected to help students develop skills that will help them to interpret the barrage of messages they receive each day. However, I maintain that media literacy education could be even more beneficial as a way to help young people become interested and engaged citizens.

4. Why is Media Literacy Important today?

Receiving and interpreting hundreds of messages from the media each day, is a natural part of how we negotiate our lives in most developed societies. For all its advantages and/or disadvantages, the capitalist model of society provides us with endless information about products and services, news and entertainment, political affairs and opinions. And as we become more inter-connected through global communication strategies, how we represent and interpret such information becomes all the more complicated. Aside from obvious language issues, the demands for equity in media's representation of gender and sex-roles, religious or societal values, portrayals of 'the family' and interpersonal relationships are both complex and difficult to balance in a transnational-commercial media environment. For children, interpreting these messages also becomes more complicated when images or ideas conflict with their personal experiences and attitudes.

Educators and parents have begun to recognize that a "counter influence" is essential and that children today need to develop more advanced skills to adequately evaluate and interpret the media. "Young people need to learn a certain attitude of mind towards the media – a kind of healthy skepticism that will allow them to stand back from its influence and think independently" (Labatt, 2001, p. 11). Through media literacy classes, students learn to recognize the power of the media and how it can influence their choices and opinions. At the core of media literacy education is autonomous, critical thinking about issues of representation and ideology. By looking at the media critically, students can become empowered to question and reject messages that discriminate against others. They can begin to understand how their use of media and technology can impact their physical and mental health. Most advocates of media literacy also see it as a necessary tool in the struggle over media violence. According to Elizabeth Thoman,

media literacy is not only an alternative to censoring, boycotting, or blaming the media, “it must be a component of any effective effort at violence prevention, for both individuals and society as a whole” (Thoman, 1993, p.2). Violence, she argues, is ever-present in life and in the media – “it cannot be sanitized out of our culture either through public policy or self-censoring by the media – it will find its way into the news and into the story-lines of both high art and popular culture” (ibid.). However Thoman suggests that media literacy can change the impact of violent images seen by children. Through deconstructing the process involved in staging violent scenes and by decoding depictions of violence in various genres such as news, sports, cartoons and music videos, a media literate individual can uncover and challenge the cultural issues that lead to violence in real life. (ibid.).

While there are a number of opinions about the advantages of becoming media literate, clearly it is not just about violence prevention and the perils of TV viewing. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of media literacy education is to teach students to decipher the intent behind the messages they receive from the media, which are typically sublime and ideological. Indeed as organizations such as Microsoft-NBC, AOL-Time Warner and Westinghouse-CBS extend their hegemony over the domain of communication media our cultural texts become infused with capitalist ideology. This is certainly evident in Canada where only a few corporations dominate a media sphere that is already fragmented by “spill” from American networks. Hence a number of political economists warn that when smaller media companies are taken over by a few mega-corporations, public discourse and opinion is stymied. Increased centralization of media ownership they argue, effectively restricts coverage and interpretations all the while creating an ‘illusion of diversity’. In a multicultural society it is essential that citizens have access to diverse opinions but convergence can be a roadblock to advancing a

tolerant and informed public. Media literacy on the other hand, can foster an appreciation for diverse ideas by encouraging students to seek out information about different ways of life. (Hobbs, 1998, p. 4). After a brief look at how the concept of media literacy has evolved and how it has been implemented in Canadian classrooms, I will return to some of these issues to underscore why I believe media literacy is fundamental to modern citizenship.

5. A Brief History of Media Literacy in Canada:

Information on media literacy education in Canada prior to the 1950s is sparse, however we can trace it back to that decade when various moralistic attempts to promote certain public interest agendas involved censoring media products:

Groups of concerned citizens, sometimes entire memberships of churches, sought to remove allegedly objectionable media content from libraries and newsstands, then motion picture theaters, and later, radio and television programs and record stores.

James A. Brown, 1998.

Brown explains that it was not until educators and researchers began to deal with media content and criticism, that media literacy became pluralistic and less value laden. In the late 1960's Canadian students were introduced to the 'first wave' of media literacy, which emphasized "screen education" and consisted primarily of studying works from the National Film Board, current events and popular television programs. In 1966 the Canadian Association for Screen Education (CASE) was formed in Toronto and in 1969 it sponsored Canada's first media literacy conference for educators at York University. A number of seminars followed the CASE conference to offer training for teachers interested in implementing media lessons, but most educators maintained a text-centered approach to media literacy. As a result students of the first

wave of media literacy learned little about the techniques or institutions involved in media production. Speaking as an educator in the early days of media literacy, Barry Duncan recalls:

Our endeavor was to wean students away from their shallow popular culture fascinations so that they would come to love Masterpiece Theatre, the CBC, the films of Ingmar Bergman and maybe even us.

Barry Duncan, 1994.

By 1971 CASE dissolved and along with it the first wave died out. Thereafter, media literacy received little attention until 1978 when Ryerson University, then the Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, held a conference for 75 educators to determine if there was sufficient interest to rekindle the movement. The Association for Media Literacy (AML) was created shortly after. In the 1980's and 90's the 'second wave' of media literacy developed and was introduced to primary school students. Ontario was the first province to mandate media literacy as part of the curriculum for intermediate and secondary school students in 1987. In 1995, it was introduced into primary schools as part of the common curricula. And in 1998, media literacy was mandated as part of the Language curriculum for student in grades 1-8 and included learning expectations for writing, Reading and Oral and Visual Communication. In September 1999, media literacy was mandated as part of English Language Arts curricula in all the provinces.

6. Factors in the Diffusion of Media Literacy in Canadian Classrooms:

Media literacy has received significant attention lately and it is beginning to appear in many classrooms. However there are still a number of challenges that need to be overcome in order to integrate a meaningful media literacy education. Issues such as an apparent lack of funding for training and resources, costs of media equipment and perhaps even a general apathy among already stressed and overworked educators, have likely affected the diffusion of media

literacy in Canada. Media literacy education is also seen by some people as taking up curriculum time that should be devoted to other subjects.

According to Everett Rogers, there is a particular phase through which an individual passes from initial knowledge of a particular innovation to a decision to implement the new idea, what he calls the ‘innovation-decision process’ (Rogers, 1995, p. 201). Rogers identifies five stages in this process: 1) Knowledge; 2) Persuasion; 3) Decision; 4) Implementation; and 5) Confirmation. In the case of media literacy, as an innovation in the education system a number of factors have had a bearing on each of these stages. In fact, it is not clear that one can trace a precise line in the diffusion of media literacy as outlined by Rogers. In fact many consider media literacy to be a ‘grassroots movement’ which is still a ‘work-in-progress. In the following section I provide a closer look at the factors in the diffusion process, highlighting particular issues that I believe have had the most impact on how Canadian educators come to teach media literacy in their classes. I have categorized these factors as ‘Theoretical Shifts’, ‘Pedagogical Issues’ and ‘Agents of Change’.

6.1) Theoretical Shifts

Although patterns have overlapped through the decades, it is evident that the media literacy movement has responded to varying theories set forth in the fields of communications and cultural studies at given historical moments.

Educators and scholars with disciplinary backgrounds in media studies, the fine and performing arts, history, psychology and sociology, education and literary analysis each may vigorously defend one’s own understanding of what it means to access, analyze, evaluate, or create media texts without a full awareness of the extent of the complexity, depth, or integrity of various other approaches.

Renee Hobbs, 1998

Media literacy, to reiterate, began with an emphasis on religious ideals and morals to counter the negative effects of mass media. Valued as an inoculation against the problems of mass media, this approach can be associated with the communications theory of ‘one-way flow’ or, what is better known as the “hypodermic needle effect”. Later, research trends in critical media studies started to reflect increasing consideration for the media audience itself. For example, Uses & Gratifications research along with Reception Analysis measure how individuals use and interpret the media. With the understanding that the viewers have a particular role in the decoding of media messages, the objectives of media literacy also began to change.

Theoretical grounding for evolving approaches to media, of course, is reflected in successive communication models: direct stimulus-response (hypodermic needle effect); uses and gratifications (what people do with media); cultivation theory, cultural studies, and semiotics (symbols, images, myths); and Marxist theory (hegemony and ideology as driving forces in media).

James A. Brown, 1998

A 1984 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) review supported the shift to viewer agency and notions of ideology in the media. “Media Education” criticized the inoculation model and promoted a more critical approach to media literacy. British media education scholar David Buckingham also explores the impact of communications studies on approaches to media literacy and reveals three main perspectives. First, Buckingham refers to the notion of ‘moral panic’ which associates violence in television programs with children’s behavior and ultimately with the social unrest in present-day society. Although researchers have yet to demonstrate a precise causal relationship between television violence and violent behavior, it is still widely believed that the two are indeed related. The second perspective Buckingham outlines problematizes media and television as a disturbing force that essentially numbs the viewer into a passive receptive state. Marie Winn discusses this view in

The Plug-in-drug (1985) and Neil Postman presents a similar outlook in *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982). Both perspectives recall the ‘hypodermic needle theory’ and reiterate the belief that children must be protected from the potentially harmful effects of the media. Thirdly, Buckingham describes the notion of the ‘consciousness industry’. The main problem with the media according to this position is the way in which they impose biased attitudes on their audiences. This outlook has begun to stimulate current media literacy projects to shift away from the content analysis approach of George Gerbner and “media violence”. Media literacy paradigms are now more in line with contemporary cultural studies and particularly with the Gramscian and Marxist theories of hegemony and ideology as the motivating force behind the production of cultural products and texts. And as Jim Wehmeyer suggests, media literacy “must root itself in a generalized liberal humanism marked by libertarian ideals and a sense of social responsibility related to that of consumer protection and advocacy” (Wehmeyer, 2000, p. 97). Learning to critique the media is only one side of media literacy. Should it not also aim to change the media as well? Arguably, a range of viewpoints has enabled the development of a multifaceted notion of media literacy yet it is apparent that such diverse approaches have also created obstacles for the implementation process. Consequently, the diffusion of media literacy has been slow-moving in part due to the fact that scholars have periodically re-invented the framework of media literacy.

6.2) Pedagogical Issues

i) The Organization of Power:

Another factor that has had a noticeable effect on the diffusion of media literacy becomes apparent when we compare the American and Canadian contexts. As Robert Kubey explains,

“the United States finds itself in the ironic position of being the world’s leading exporter of media products while lagging behind every other major English-speaking country in the world in the formal delivery of media education in its schools” (Kubey, 1998, p. 58). Pointing out that there are various political, economic, historic and cultural explanations for why media literacy in the U.S. resides in the margins of education, Kubey does show that the implementation process has been delayed by a fragmented education system characterized by regional and district divisions. “The fifty states in the United States include over 15,000 school districts with separate administrations” (Brown, 1998, p. 7). Efforts to organize media literacy curricula must overcome potentially hundreds of administrative obstacles.

Having 50 states spread across 3.6 million square miles, all with different educational authorities, and each with scores of local school boards, has led to greater isolation of media educators in the U.S. than has been the case in smaller countries or in those with fewer provinces or states.

Robert Kubey, 1998

In contrast, the Canadian education system is managed by a more centralized structure, which is expressed in the offices of the Provincial Ministries of Education. With fewer divisions of power, curricula programs can be mandated with greater ease and their progress monitored. Nevertheless, the implementation of media education skills has been uneven from school to school and across districts. While some school boards see media literacy as a priority, others have left implementation to the individual teacher. Media literacy classes sometimes also involve the use of equipment that is expensive to buy and maintain. For administrators, these costs are often difficult to justify.

ii) “Back-to-the-basics”

During the 1970’s a central aspect of the collapse of the first wave of media literacy was the ‘back-to-basics’ trend in education and curricula planning, which had both theoretical and economic implications. To begin with, teachers were expected to use classroom time to concentrate on the traditional subjects, such as Mathematics, English and Science. They were quite simply not encouraged to teach subjects other than ‘the basics’. Media literacy was consequently forced into the background. As Barry Duncan explains “from 1972 to 1977 there was inevitably some retrenchment in media studies and teachers had to work largely and somewhat apologetically on their own” (Duncan, 1995, p. 14). Media literacy examines popular culture, and some people believe that popular culture is not worthy of study.

Media literacy also tends to focus on subject material that students often know more about than their teachers. This fact, in conjunction with teacher apathy makes diffusion more subdued.

iii) Part of the Curriculum:

Government action to mandate media literacy in the education curriculum is a fundamental step in the diffusion of media literacy. Although certain bureaucratic procedures must be followed when a subject is mandated, standards for teaching are suddenly put into place and the government itself takes on a certain responsibility for ensuring that children acquire the skills set out in the curriculum. “Once a state mandates something educationally, subsequent hurdles become easier to surmount (Kubey, 1997, p. 60).

iv) Integrated or Independent?

When assessing the value of mandating media literacy the next point to consider is *how* it actually features in the education curriculum. Currently in Ontario media literacy objectives are integrated within the 'Overall Expectations' for Language curricula. But there is debate over the effectiveness of this methodology. Integrating media literacy across the curriculum as another kind of text may result in the enhancement of learning overall, or it may result in an incoherent presentation of the key concepts since it might make certain that teachers will not receive adequate training in media literacy, if it is simply tacked onto various other subjects. And the capacity of educators to teach media literacy would of course have an impact on the diffusion process as well. We can imagine for instance that if teachers were unqualified to teach mathematics or biology, the diffusion of those subjects would certainly be slow-moving and complicated. An alternative possibility is to mandate media literacy as a distinct subject which would help to ensure that teachers are properly trained and given adequate resources for presenting the subject to their students.

6.3) Agents of Change:

Media literacy in Canada is often described as a grassroots movement since its main supporters have typically been community groups, parent and teacher associations, and non-profit organizations, with a handful of prominent individuals. John Pungente and The Jesuit Communication Project (Toronto), Rick Sheppard and Barry Duncan of The Association for Media Literacy (Ontario), and Ottawa's Media Awareness Network have consistently worked toward raising public awareness about media literacy in Canada, with most national and provincial education associations supporting their efforts. Other key figures in the diffusion of

media literacy in Canada include industry organizations and a number of government agencies. Health Canada, the Canadian Department of Heritage and the Department of Justice regularly endorse and financially support various efforts to promote media literacy. However, such assistance warrants a critical glance at least since many of the organizations that receive government assistance for media literacy projects are often intimately connected with commercial media corporations. Concerned Children's Advertisers, the Canadian Cable Television Association and Cable in the Classroom (CITC) are leading advocates of media literacy, but they also work as lobbyists for corporate media agendas. These organizations provide Canadian educators with media literacy resources yet a 'critical media literacy' approach is likely not consistent with their underlying mandates and goals.

7. Media Literacy Resources:

If one were to perform even a quick search of the Internet for media literacy resources, instantly hundreds of links to articles, books and company web sites would pop-up. For educators however there are a number of considerations to make regarding which resources to use in the classroom. Age appropriateness of the lesson material, technology requirements and cost, are primary concerns for individual teachers and administrators seeking credible media literacy resources that align with learning expectations for their provincial curriculums.

One popular "free" resource for teaching media literacy draws from a somewhat controversial past. In 1995, 32 cable television companies and 29 cable programming service organizations pooled resources to develop Cable in the Classroom (CITC), which provides copyright-cleared, educational television programming to public schools across Canada at no charge. CITC corporate members invest over \$5 million to fund the non-profit organization,

which also provides free monthly cable service to public schools that adopt the program. Essentially, CITC provides teachers with access to Television programs that are available during normal broadcast hours, but takes out the commercials and allows teachers to tape shows in advance that they then use in the classroom. Interestingly, Cable in the Classroom has been hailed by Canadian educators as a strongly preferred alternative to the Youth News Network (YNN), which was an affiliate of the U.S. company Channel One. Although Channel One continues to have great success in the United States, The Youth News Network experienced serious opposition from Canadian teachers, parents and school officials that rejected the mandatory advertising rights associated with the program. YNN required compulsory viewing of 2 minutes of commercials per day as well as a single-bias news broadcast that was produced by undisclosed sources. Practically disbanded, YNN has been replaced by Cable in the Classroom, which has earned the support from numerous Canadian educators, teachers' organizations and media education experts. In fact, Prime Minister Jean Chretien launched CITC in 1995 and to date over 8,600 schools across Canada are connected to its service.

Concerned Children's Advertisers (CCA) also provides a free resource for Canadian educators and parents called *TV&ME*, which addresses various issues that affect children including anger management, problem solving, self-esteem, bullying and substance abuse prevention, in addition to media literacy. The learning guide is based on a series of Public Service Announcements (PSAs) produced by CCA and is comprised of examples for lesson plans for students in Grades K-8 that are aligned with Provincial Language curriculums. The *TV&ME* kit comes with a VHS video that introduces the program and the PSAs in addition to a CDROM of the lesson plans. Each lesson includes a section "A Step Further," which gives ideas for how students can augment their learning at home and in their communities. Although the

TV&ME guide is easy to use and provides some interesting ideas for classroom activities, it clearly lacks a critical perspective on media literacy.

The Ontario Elementary Teachers Association (OETA) offers a number of different classroom resources for teachers. One of their guides, *Take a Closer Look* is a practical guide to media literacy for Intermediate grades (7 and 8). The OETA resource is recommended as a tool for teaching students to become “critical and informed consumers of mass media” and addresses expectations in reading, media communications, writing, drama, oral/visual, the arts, science and technology, and health and physical education. However, the obvious focus of this resource is media violence. Although it offers some discussion of discrimination in media texts and other aspects of media literacy, there is little discussion of media ownership and other political economy concerns.

8. A Framework for Critical Media Literacy:

Bearing in mind the ways that media literacy has adapted to, or at least been influenced by theories of critical media studies, I now want to explore how media literacy might improve democracy. Recently there have been a number of debates over the alleged disparity between the tactics for understanding culture offered by communications and cultural studies. While each discipline recommends explicit theoretical frameworks, it is arguable that they are not as divergent as generally assumed. In *“Political Economy and Cultural Studies”* Nicholas Garnham petitions cultural studies to “return” to a political economy perspective because, he suggests, the radical mind-set of cultural studies is unyielding unless it integrates certain qualities of political economy. Garnham claims that cultural studies should focus on cultural production and the hierarchies of capitalism in order to unveil the “false consciousness” that sustains the

negative conditions of capitalism and class domination. However, Garnham's assertion provokes dispute from Lawrence Grossberg for one, who claims that while it has become too celebratory of populism, cultural studies does grapple with issues of power, such as those invoked by notions of gender or race. Nonetheless, most cultural theorists still concentrate on either the production or the consumption side of 'media meanings'. However, Peter Golding and Graham Murdock offer a way out of this chasm. In "*Culture, Communications, and Political Economy*" Golding and Murdock expound a 'critical political economy' approach to investigating the relationship between public communications systems and the culture industries.

It sets out to show how different ways of financing and organizing cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and representations in the public domain and for audiences' access to them.

Golding & Murdock, 1996.

Golding and Murdock argue that "although some studies confine themselves to the structural level of analysis, it is only part of the story we need to tell" (ibid. p. 15). Accordingly, they delineate four essential processes for a critical political economic examination of culture: "the growth of the media; the extension of corporate reach; commodification; and the changing role of state and government intervention" (ibid. p. 16). The authors show that maintaining a division between political economy and cultural studies is perhaps both impractical and unconstructive. Instead, they suggest that critical political economy is a comprehensive methodology for discerning how and why the culture industries produce symbols for us to interpret the world. In a similar way, Justin Lewis and Sut Jhally argue that media literacy should integrate questions of production and reception with the more traditional objectives of textual analysis. In "The struggle over media literacy" they announce that media literacy is "a way of extending democracy to the place where democracy is increasingly scripted and defined". Although they

see textual analysis as an integral part of media education, they also suggest that how we interpret messages in the media invariably trigger questions about power and social construction. Provoked by many scholars who maintain that media literacy is about educating students to become informed consumers, Lewis and Jhally argue that the notion of democracy itself is dependent upon educating citizens to become effective change agents. Surely, there is room to debate whether media literacy can actually achieve such venerated goals, after all, media literacy does reach out to young minds through the most sublime ideological state apparatus – the school. “The institution of public schooling works in powerful ways to reproduce existing power relations in society, and as a result, schools can be among the most repressive, and anti-democratic social institutions” (Hobbs, 1998, p. 6). Nonetheless, I agree with Lewis and Jhally who in fact take their lead from Len Masterman whose book *Teaching the Media* (1985) has had widespread influence on media literacy education in Great Britain, Europe, Australia and North America. Perhaps Masterman’s most significant contribution has been the development of a conceptual framework for teaching media literacy. “The 18 Principles of Media Education” in many ways have brought a sense of coherence to the media literacy movement by outlining its underlying principles (Please see Appendix). Elihu Katz also reminds us of the organic connection between communication, education and democracy: “Democracy is meaningless without multiple voices... it is simply impossible to talk about citizenship training in modern society without reference to mass communication” (ibid). “If one of the fundamental purposes of schools is to teach students the responsibility of living in a democracy, then building students tolerance for diverse opinions and the ability to critically analyze information is essential” (ibid., p. 6). However as previously mentioned a major challenge to citizens and their access to diverse sources of information is the inherent structure of commercial mass media. The most powerful

limit to the quality of information we receive from news and entertainment media is its reliance on advertising revenue. The incentive of advertising encourages media organizations to tailor their messages and content in order to increase the size of their audience. Large media companies are truly in the business of selling audiences to advertisers. “As much of the literature on the political economy of the media suggests, they are there to maximize profits and to serve a set of corporate interests – commercial media have no educational, cultural or informational imperatives...” (Lewis & Jhally, 1998, p. 2). Students must come to understand that media messages are not simply true or false but that they serve particular interests and are derived from particular assumptions. “When automobile ads invariably show cars we might ask not what is being left out of these images (smog, traffic congestion, pollution) but why? In whose interest is it to see the automobile as a symbol of freedom...What are the consequences?” (ibid.). According to Renee Hobbs, there are three major ways that media literacy education can contribute to strengthening the future of a democracy by reaching students in the classroom:

1. Media literacy practices help strengthen students’ information access, analysis, and communication skills and build an appreciation for why monitoring the world is important.
2. Media literacy can support and foster educational environments in which students can practice the skills of leadership, free and responsible self-expression, conflict resolution and consensus-building...to effectively engage with others in the challenges of cooperative problem-solving that participation in a democratic society demands;
3. Media literacy skills can inspire young people to become more interested in increasing their access to diverse sources of information.

Critical media literacy should therefore not only encourage students to ask questions about what they see and read, but also it should challenge the power structures and media institutions that influence what information we receive. Media texts should be measured within the context of their production and reception. A critical contextual approach to media literacy should also offer

students the opportunity to imagine ways of changing media systems to create a more democratic media. “We need to develop a citizenry that appreciated the politics of regulation and funding – to imagine how the system might be changed to offer greater diversity of images, less commercial interruption, more educational children’s program” (Lewis & Jhally, 1998, p. 2). A curriculum that explores questions of the political economy of media can help to increase public awareness about how broadcasting systems are subsidized and regulated.

Another important dimension of why media literacy is essential for developing a critical citizenship is that it helps students to understand the value of the press in a democracy. Citizens need to understand how political media campaigns work. “Today’s conflict oriented coverage of politics makes it possible to tune into the fireworks and miss the substance and the media circus around political campaigns is especially distractive to less educated citizens (Hobbs,1998, p. 1). Media literacy can include analysis of the functions of journalism; it can encourage students to be critical of political issues and how events are depicted in the media. Students can explore the different ways media shapes news stories. A media literacy class can explore how political advertising affects the campaign process. Students can identify the techniques the media uses to attract audiences and manipulate their emotions. It can look at how media shape public opinion about politicians through televised political debates. As Len Masterman argues:

The democratization of institutions and the long march toward truly participatory democracy will be highly dependent upon the ability of majorities of citizens to take control, become effective change agents, make rational decisions (often on the basis of media evidence) and to communicate effectively perhaps through active involvement with the media.

Len Masterman, in Lewis and Jhally, 1998

Media literacy should assist students to become sophisticated citizens by providing them with opportunities to understand that the social and economic structures of media institutions are neither inevitable nor irreversible.

9. Conclusion (Media literacy in the future):

Media literacy, in short, is about more than the analysis of messages, it is about an awareness of why those messages are there. It is not enough to know that they are produced, or even how, in a technical sense, they are produced. To appreciate the significance of contemporary media, we need to know why they are produced, under what constraints and conditions, and by whom.

Lewis and Jhally, 1998.

In "Elementary Media Education: The Perfect Curriculum" Rick Shepherd of the Association for Media Literacy (AML) describes a pilot project that took place in Ontario to promote and support media literacy in elementary schools in the early 1990's. The North York Elementary Media Literacy Pilot Project took place over two years and involved approximately 25 teachers of grades 4, 5, and 6 from ten Ontario schools, the objectives of which were to develop strategies and lesson plans while producing a group of media-literate teachers. The training included three days of in-service, spread over the first half of the school year and although one of the main objectives was to produce elementary media literacy curriculum materials, the organizers of the Project realized that there was still major work to be done before they could build a comprehensive lesson guide.

Our general feeling was that we simply needed more time to explore what has been, until now, unexplored territory in North American education. Although we had a lot of ideas and

many useful strategies, we still had questions about sequencing, dealing with various genres, and developing concepts

Rick Sheppard, 1999

It is evident that media literacy is still a work-in-progress and the diverse approaches to teaching it have created intriguing conflicts and tensions, not unlike those produced by the split between cultural studies and political economy. My experience in the field of media literacy brings to light a further issue - the role of media institutions themselves in the media literacy movement. Oftentimes the media are just one step ahead of efforts to reconstruct them. For example, in the last year I held a field placement with Concerned Children's Advertisers (CCA), which is a non-profit organization funded by 26 Canadian companies who produce and market products for children. CCA's mandate is to use the resources of its members, which includes toy manufacturers, candy-makers, children's television producers, and fast-food companies, to develop Public Service Announcements (PSAs) for television that broach issues relevant to today's kids. Over the past twelve years, CCA has produced more than 35 PSAs that deal with such issues as substance abuse prevention, child abuse prevention, self-esteem, bullying and media literacy. In fact, due to the overwhelming popularity of these commercial messages, Corus Entertainment Inc. dedicated \$1 million to produce *TV&ME*, CCA's media literacy program. It is quite likely that *TV&ME* will become the main media literacy tool used in Canadian classrooms since, as already mentioned, it is available to teachers at no charge and prominent Canadian companies that have enormous financial resources and promotional expertise ensure that the program reaches its audience. Perhaps Kalle Lasn, the editor-in-chief of *Adbusters Magazine*, says it best: "I don't think they are out to do some dirty deed, but it is a conflict of interest, " noting that CCA is funded by marketers and mass media outlets. The point

Lasn makes is, it is doubtful that Concerned Children's Advertisers would truly criticize their main source of revenue. Indeed, there has not yet been a component developed for the *TV&ME* media literacy program that deals specifically with deconstructing advertising. And if it were created, we can rest assured that it would not discuss how advertising and television reaffirms a capitalist ideology.

APPENDIX

18 Principles of Media Education

By Len Masterman

1. Media Education is a serious and significant endeavor. At stake in it is the empowerment of majorities and the strengthening of society's democratic structures.
2. The central unifying concept of Media Education is that of representation. The media mediate. They do not reflect reality but re-present it. The media, that is, are symbolic or sign systems. Without this principle no media education is possible. From it, all else flows.
3. Media Education is a lifelong process. High student motivation, therefore, must become a primary objective.
4. Media Education aims to foster not simply critical intelligence, but critical autonomy.
5. Media Education is investigative. It does not seek to impose specific cultural values.
6. Media Education is topical and opportunistic. It seeks to illuminate the life-situations of the learners. In doing so it may place the "here-and-now" in the context of wider historic and ideological issues.
7. Media Education's key concepts are analytical tools rather than an alternative content.
8. Content, in Media Education, is a means to an end. That end is the development of transferable analytical tools rather than an alternative content.
9. The effectiveness of Media Education can be evaluated by just two criteria:
 1. the ability of students to apply their critical thinking to new situations;
 2. the amount of commitment and motivation displayed by students.
10. Ideally, evaluation in Media Education means student self-evaluation, both formative and summative.
11. Media Education attempts to change the relationship between teacher and taught by offering both objects for reflection and dialogue.
12. Media Education carries out its investigations via dialogue rather than discussion.

13. Media Education is essentially active and participatory, fostering the development of more open and democratic pedagogies. It encourages students to take more responsibility for and control over their own learning, to engage in joint planning of the syllabus, and to take longer- term perspectives on their own learning. In short, Media Education is as much about new ways of working as it is about the introduction of a new subject area.
14. Media Education involves collaborative learning. It is group focused. It assumes that individual learning is enhanced not through competition but through access to the insights and resources of the whole group.
15. Media Education consists of both practical criticism and critical practice. It affirms the primacy of cultural criticism over cultural reproduction.
16. Media Education is a holistic process. Ideally it means forging relationships with parents, media professionals and teacher-colleagues.
17. Media Education is committed to the principle of continuous change. It must develop in tandem with a continuously changing reality.
18. Underpinning Media Education is a distinctive epistemology. Existing knowledge is not simply transmitted by teachers or 'discovered" by students. It is not an end but a beginning. It is the subject of critical investigation and dialogue out of which new knowledge is actively created by students and teachers.

*Downloaded from Media Awareness Network: www.media-awareness.ca/eng/med/bigpict/htm
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Volume 17, Number 3, Summer 1995.*

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NOTES

¹ The Kaiser Family Foundation is a nonprofit independent health care charity in the United States, which focuses on such issues as Health Policy, Media and Public Education, and Health and Development in South Africa. The Kaiser Family Foundation is based in Menlo Park, California and operates a major office in Washington, DC.

² YTV is a Canadian television station, owned and operated by Corus Entertainment Inc., which produces children's programming. YTV conducts an annual national survey known as the "Kid and Tween Report" that tracks attitudes and opinions of Canadian children. Concerned Children's Advertisers is a non-profit, industry and government funded Canadian advocacy group that promotes responsible advertising of commercial products to children. Established in 1990, CCA is best known for their public service announcements that address such issues as bullying, positive self-esteem, substance abuse and media literacy. CCA also produces and distributes a media literacy program titled "TV&ME" which is provided free of charge to parents and educators across Canada. CCA estimates that the "TV&ME" program has reached nearly 1 million Canadian children to date.

³ The Annenberg Public Policy Center was established in 1994 at the University of Pennsylvania to address public policy issues in that United States at the local, state and federal levels. The Center closely linked to the Annenberg School for Communication and supports research on the areas of *Information and Society*, *Media and the Developing Mind*, *Media and the Dialogue of Democracy* and *Health Communication*.

⁴ Reprinted with permission. *The Children's Television Landscape*; Figure 1.5, p. 5.

⁵ Media Awareness Network is Canada's leading voice on media literacy.

The non-profit organization was founded in 1996 to promote media and Internet education across Canada and internationally by producing online programs and resources.

⁶ The survey was conducted by Millward Brown of children in the USA, Brazil, Germany, Spain, India, China and Japan.

⁷ William G. Christ, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 46(2), 2002, pp. 321-327.