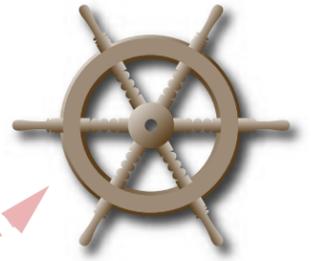




Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Teaching to the Curriculum: Bringing Media Literacy Outcomes and Expectations into the Classroom

by Jane Tallim, Co-Executive Director, Media Awareness Network

Television, movies, the Internet, video games, and music are popular forms of media that occupy much time in our daily routines. This is especially true of children and youth. In a time when young people are growing up in front of computers and televisions—and often know more about technology than most adults do—it is more important than ever to ensure that they understand and think critically about the media that form such an important and enjoyable part of their daily lives.

Media literacy is the ability to bring critical thinking skills to bear on all media. It is the ability to interpret and value media content and to understand media's cultural, political, commercial and social implications.

Media education is the process through which we become media literate, a process that is grounded in the sound pedagogical approach of starting learning where kids are and acknowledging and building on the positive, creative and pleasurable dimensions of our popular culture.

Gone are the days when teachers would integrate media activities into their classes as fun fillers. Canada is now a world leader in recognizing the importance of fostering literacy throughout a wide range of language systems that include mass media and multimedia.

According to the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts curriculum, media literacy deals with the culture and lifestyle of students. They enjoy thinking and talking about what is going on in the media. For teachers, it is an opportunity to have students examine how they are influencing and being influenced by popular culture.

The recognition and endorsement by all Canadian provinces and territories

of media literacy across the curriculum provides an immediate “green light” to teachers who are interested in teaching media studies. No longer consigned to language arts, outcomes and expectations for media literacy can be found in such diverse subject areas as health, consumer education, personal development, global studies, civics, multi-cultural/anti-racism programs, information technology, music, and visual arts.

Media education encourages young people to probe media artefacts, prompting them to pose questions such as: Who is this message intended for? Who wants to reach this audience, and why? From whose perspective is this story told? Whose voices are heard, and whose are absent? What strategies does this message use to get my attention and make me feel included? How do the unique elements and codes of a specific genre affect what we see, hear or read? How might different audiences interpret the same media production?

To be media literate in this new environment young people need to develop values and a range of critical thinking, communication and information management skills. Teachers want to help (85 per cent believe helping young people to think critically about Internet content is an important part of their job¹) but cannot without the proper tools and resources.

Working with curricular outcomes

For teachers who are interested in integrating media education into their classrooms, Media Awareness Network (MNet) offers a number of free, bilingual, media education resources—lessons, activities, games and interactive learning modules—which are linked



to media literacy curriculum outcomes and expectations for every province and territory in Canada. Housed in the “For Teachers” section of MNet’s extensive website (www.media-awareness.ca) is a handy lesson library search tool that permits teachers to access any one of hundreds of free lessons for Grades P-12, according to grade level and topic.

Teachers can also find lessons through MNet’s Media Education in Canada section, where media-related outcomes and expectations extracted from provincial and territorial curricula are linked directly to supporting lessons and resources.

Getting Involved

To mark the importance of media education, from **November 3 to 7, 2008** MNet and the Canadian Teachers’ Federation are co-leading Canada’s third annual **National Media Education Week**. This week shines a spotlight on the innovative ways that Canadian

educators and students are promoting media literacy in their classrooms.

¹Media Awareness Network, 2005.

During the week, teachers and students are encouraged to celebrate, discuss and think critically about media. Why not take this opportunity to join colleagues across the country in making media education happen at your school? The supporting website for the week (www.mediaeducationweek.ca) has many ideas, resources and activities to get teachers started. Media create a shared environment and are, therefore, great catalysts for learning. No matter what the grade level or discipline, there are countless opportunities to stimulate and engage students through media education.

© 2008 Media Awareness Network

[From *The Teacher*, October 2008, Volume 47 Number 2, page 6 © NSTU 2008]