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— 3 —

Television and the Shaping of Cognitive Skills

Renee Hobbs

Everyone knows that television has tremendous influence even though the word "influence" has been bandied about so much that it almost seems trivial. Nevertheless, for 30 or 40 years we've been hard-pressed to describe the nature of that influence. What is well documented is the way that people's behavior and attitudes are affected by the content of what they see on television. We have documentation on violence on television and its influence on behavior; on television's portrayal of sexuality; on consumer socialization; and how the content of advertising messages has influence.[1] However, if we think that only the content of television programming influences our society, we greatly underestimate the potency of the medium.

What I want to discuss are some of the social consequences resulting from the very form and structure of the medium; more specifically, I want to address the impact of format and editing conventions of television. My hypothesis is that two aspects of the structure of the medium, television format and television editing conventions, are both extremely powerful vehicles that reflect and shape the cognitive processes of attention, organization, interpretation, and prediction. Thus, in effect, I am proposing a mechanism for understanding *how* television influences culture and values, because although the content of television influences culture and values, so does its form, in highly specific and predictable ways.

We know that communication media, like language and television, are not simply vehicles for transmitting messages, not simply pipes through which we send messages. If they were, they wouldn't be so powerful. Communication media serve not only as vehicles for transmitting messages; they are used in creating and developing messages—that is, they are used in thought. We have internalized communications media, just as we have internalized language, so that these media can be used not only to transmit messages but as tools to think with.[2]

Early filmmakers surely exploited the new medium in ways that illustrate the relationship between media and mental processes. Consider the creative power of early filmmakers as they used celluloid to construct messages. Techniques like the close-up and the zoom are symbolic codes that are analogues of everyday patterns of visual attention. In some sense the zoom represents the actions we engage in when we pay attention, because when we pay attention, we move to focus on a single small part of the scene, and everything else blurs and disappears in the background. Filmmakers, either consciously or unconsciously, invented techniques of manipulating the distance between the camera and the subject which externalize this process of perception. Close-ups, long shots, and zooms are representations of a very complex mental skill—paying attention. A number of the editing conventions of television may be perceptual analogues of mental processes, which may explain why it is so easy to watch television. In fact, my colleagues and I developed the following experiment to get at this very issue.

The experiment was designed to test some assumptions regarding media literacy. For about 15 years now, we have been bombarded with the concept of media literacy. This concept is informed by the notion that the symbol systems of television, the editing conventions, are similar to print, in that viewers must learn how to decode them.[3] But do viewers need practice and experience with the medium to be able to decode editing conventions? Scholars have considerable evidence on how children understand television and know that some combination of age and experience is necessary to process television images accurately.[4] And of course, very young children don't decode television so well as adults.[5] With all the research evidence, however, it is unclear whether developmental factors regarding age or experience with the medium are essential prerequisites for understanding the editing conventions.

The question is, how do you find a population that has had no experience with television? Certainly none exists in this country! But in some remote areas of the world, there are some groups of people who have never seen films or television, although each year this population diminishes. Such a population could be used to help investigate whether editing conventions are comprehensible to adult viewers with no familiarity with film or television. The Pokot people of western Kenya are such a people. They have never seen television, never seen film, never seen two-dimensional representations like photographs or maps. They live in an environment virtually as close to a tribal culture as exists in the twentieth century, the perfect group for a naturalistic experiment. We showed them two versions of a television program that we made using plausible occurrence in the village.[6] In one version, we turned the camera on, let the narrative event proceed in front of the camera as if it were a proscenium stage. When the narrative event was over, we turned the camera off.

In the second version, we used only one editing convention: manipulated point-of-view. In other words, we changed the relationship between the camera and the subject using close-ups, medium shots, and long shots. In a three-minute narrative event, we used 13 edit points or "cuts." The content of both versions was otherwise identical. The length of the broadcast was identical. The only difference between these two broadcasts was that one had no editing at all, and the other had 13 edit points manipulating point-of-view, the distance between the camera and the subject.

What we found was rather surprising. We found that there were no differences in the ability of the tribal villagers to comprehend the message. The villagers who saw the edited version were just as competent at decoding as were the villagers who saw the unedited version. With no experience with the medium, these villagers were perfectly adept at decoding this mediaspecific symbol system, namely, point-of-view narration. Based on our research, we believe that some editing conventions are perceptual isomorphs of experience: You don't need experience with the medium to learn to decode them. This explains why television is so easy to watch, why it takes so little effort for us to decode, why it takes no mental effort to watch television. From this it follows that the representational codes of film and television can also help to develop or degenerate the cognitive skills of attention, comprehension, interpretation, and prediction.

Television and Attention

The relationship between television and attention is the area in which we have the best evidence for understanding television's influence. Writing in the early years of the twentieth century, Hugo Munsterberg was the first experimental psychologist recruited by William James at Harvard to begin the experimental laboratory. He was also an aficionado of film, which in the beginning of the twentieth century was exploding with creative new techniques and devices for manipulating the expressive potential of the medium. Munsterberg made some remarkable observations about the similarities he saw between editing conventions and attention. He viewed the close-up as an externalization of the process of paying attention, and in the same way, viewed the flashback as a technique for representing memory just as the flash-forward externalized the mental skills of imagining.[7]

It is absolutely remarkable to read a psychologist more than 70 years ago making these observations and, although the argument seems somewhat simplified in retrospect, it represents the first time psychologists looked at the relationship between the products that we use in creating film and video and the processes that we use inside our head.

We have more empirical evidence on the relationship between children's attention and editing conventions than about most other topics in the field of media studies. Researchers know that young children between the ages of two and five seem compelled to attend to editing conventions, and certain editing conventions draw the attention of children more than others.[8] Those editing conventions are ones that include high movement, rapid pacing, lots of edit points, and loud music. These editing conventions are intense in the use of movement that is perceptually salient, which compels attention. Researchers have discovered that young children are compelled to watch the screen when those editing conventions are used, but that over time, children are able to control their attentional behavior; that is, older children are not so compelled to watch the screen when those editing conventions are used. This bears a close relationship to what we know about the human perceptual system. Our eyes are designed to actively monitor change. It is built-in, hard-wired, as it were, into the perceptual system.[9] Younger children don't have very much control over using that perceptual system, and so they are compelled to watch the intense movement on the screen. And those of us who have seen children that age watching television can see the intensity with which their attention is drawn to the screen. Older children are better able to mediate their attentional skills and control that behavior.

Although over time we gain control, even adults find this array of movement and visual changes on the TV screen compelling. Think of the time when you were in a conversation and the television was on in the room. Sometimes, no matter how interesting the conversation might happen to be, no matter how much you wanted to participate in the conversation, you found your eyes being drawn inexplicably to the screen. It is an attentional behavior that even adults find difficult to control. In this way, then, editing conventions shape attention patterns by capitalizing on our natural instinct to monitor changes in the visual display.

Television formats also interact with our attentional skills in a way that serves a useful function. After all, we watch television at home, in an environment with multiple distractions and multiple possible activities. Thus the predictability of certain kinds of formats, like the sitcom, the game show, the drama, even the commercial, permit us to allocate our attention very selectively. For example, young people will often walk out of the room when a program is on that they are supposed to be watching. If you ask them about it, they are very candid: "I don't have to watch now; I don't have to watch until after the commercial." Viewers engage in multiple activities while watching television because we have learned how to allocate our attention by our familiarity with program formats. The format of the medium simplifies the processes of paying attention, making it possible to watch television in conjunction with other activities of daily life.

Although generations of teachers and parents and physicians and psychologists have talked about the degeneration of our attention span owing to the influence of television, we have very little empirical evidence to support that belief. When you talk to teachers, especially older elementary school teachers who have been teaching in the schools for years, and who can compare the children of the 1950s and 1960s with the children of the 1970s and the 1980s, they will frequently comment on the decreased attention span of children and attribute these differences to the influence of television.

According to many media scholars, television presents a fragmented set of images and sounds, and that fragmentation becomes paralleled in our own attentional skills.[10] Because we are used to receiving

fragmented information and information in discontinuous form, we come to p[illegible] that form; and information, such as a formal lecture, that requires sustained attention over a long period of time, becomes more difficult because it is not habitually required in our culture. Consequently, it takes a great deal of effort and discipline to make the attentional adjustment to a formal lecture of 60 minutes or more, for it is an adjustment that runs against the grain of discontinuity.

Television and the Skills of Organization and Interpretation

Researchers can easily tell whether someone is paying attention or not. However, it is not so easy to examine the "black box" of the rest of the cognitive process. How are you encoding this information in memory? What meaning are you making of it? We have relatively little understanding of the way in which television affects the skills of organization and interpretation, primarily because those skills must be inferred. They are invisible to us except through indirect examination.

Nevertheless, I want to say more about how television affects how we store, organize, and interpret information by discussing television news. Researchers who examine viewers' ability to comprehend television almost always use television news programming because, given the manner in which the news is presented, it is easier to measure this mode of learning directly. The broadcast news on the major networks present us with isolated snippets of information: 45 seconds on upcoming elections, 100 seconds on business and economics, 35 seconds on health and science. Those snippets make it easy for viewers by permitting us to decide whether or not to encode that information. Clearly, the conventions and formats of television help us encode information from a television program in ways which are most profitable to the commercial medium.

For example, my understanding of economics is at such a rudimentary level that I don't bother to encode televised economic news in my memory, even though I may pay attention to it. Because my understanding of economics is not well developed enough for me to encode the information into my existing set of knowledge and beliefs, it simply slips by; and because this information is only on for a few seconds, it slips by easily. On the other hand, for science and health stories, politics or sports, I have a well-developed array of information. Thus, when I hear the cue for science and health or sports, I pay more at[illegible]n and I actively encode this information into my existing knowledge.

In a sense then, isolated snippets are valuable: they help viewers retrieve information about which they already have well-developed schemas for understanding. On the other hand, television's isolated snippets do not help viewers encode information in memory if they don't have sufficient prior knowledge. The 45 seconds on economics or the 35 seconds on elections make it impossible to encode that information if viewers don't have an understanding of that topic to begin with.[11] In other words, a few seconds of information is not going to help develop the schemata viewers need to encode this information. Therefore, television's isolated news snippets do help to acquire information rapidly about topics already known. But conversely, the isolated snippets inhibit the ability to encode information on topics that viewers don't know very much about. Watching television news, then, really only helps viewers to reinforce what they already know; it does very little to make them more sophisticated in these topics other than to provide a few new bits of data.

Doris Graber comments on the obvious value implication of such behavior:

> When people fail to learn or create appropriate schemas for certain types of news, that news cannot be absorbed. The socialization of average Americans apparently leaves a number of gaps in schema structure. These gaps then make it difficult to focus public attention on some important problems. News about most foreign countries or news about science are examples. Even when such news is presented in simple ways, most of the audience fails to make the effort to absorb it because appropriate schemas did not form part of past socialization.[12]

Thus the simplicity of television news makes it possible for only a few viewers to extract meaningful information and excludes others who simply don't have a well-developed understanding of those current events. "What will happen," Graber asks, "to the quality of learning about public affairs if newspaper use continues to decline and electronic media capture an increasing share of the audience's attention?"

The answer seems obvious enough. Owing to the limitations imposed by the commercial format, television network news is unable to

provide us with sufficient background and information to help us develop schemas for understanding complex events in places like the Middle East and Central America. Therefore, unless you already know something about these topics, unless you know, at the very least, where the Middle East and Central America are (and we've recently discovered that upwards of 50% of Americans do not know such elementary geographic facts) television news will be of no assistance in helping you develop your understanding in these areas.

The economic and commercial constraints on television as a medium of information are critical here, for television's failure to inform and to edify is not due to a limitation inherent in the medium itself. It is not inherent in the medium of television that a "cut" has to be made every three seconds, that the pacing and rhythm have to be what it presently is, causing viewers to change channels every 3.7 minutes.[13] In fact, the present shape, look, and feel of television are not due to the inherent capabilities of the medium, but are a result of the economic environment in which the medium was initially created and in which it, for the most part, continues. In other words, when we look at the format of television and when we think of the interpretive framework that television provides, we cannot overlook the economic forces that created these formats.

In the 1950s during the so-called "Golden Age of Television," there was a lot of experimentation and a diversity of social views were presented. "CBS Playhouse 90," Paddy Chayefsky's "Marty," and many other programs presented complex views of American social life. But such ambitious, socially relevant, and intellectually challenging programming has become obsolete, because of the influence of advertisers who looked for programs that provided a pleasant atmosphere in which to portray their product.[14] Do you want your soap advertisement shown next to a difficult and complex portrayal of social crises in America, or programming that generates ambiguity regarding the relationship between power and the disenfranchised? Or do you want your product put in an environment that shows American middle-class people at their best, with healthy, white, smiling faces and beautiful teeth?

Decisions to minimize this kind of ambiguity were systematically made in the fifties and they have persisted to this day. In the 1980s programs emphasize affluence. Of course, "Dallas" and "Dynasty" are the first examples that come to mind. But think of programs that appear to us rather innocuous, like "The Cosby Show." The affluence which

underlies this program is almost invisible. We don't even pay attention to it, yet it is part of the very fabric of the messages, the messages that represent the format, that represent the way advertisers and broadcasters want us to see ourselves and our society. In this sense, consider the broadcasting strategy called LOP ("least objectionable programming"), developed in the early 1960s. By the very economic nature of television, which has to appeal to the most number of viewers to be successful, the least objectionable programming strategy appeals to the largest number of viewers. Such a strategy has a very definite influence on the format of television, which in turn has a direct influence on messages communicated through television. By permitting this medium to evolve as it has, we have as a consequence reduced the diversity of media formats and messages, so that television formats reinforce mainstream social views.

Even with the increasing number of channels available with cable television, there is little diversity because it is still restricted by the prevailing formats. Michael Schudson comments: "These conventions help make culturally consonant messages readable and culturally dissonant messages unsayable. Their function is less to increase or decrease the truth value of the messages they convey than to shape or narrow the range of what kind of truths can be told."[15] Television formats reinforce certain assumptions about the political world, the social world, and the world of values as well.

Television and the Skills of Prediction and Expectation

When we pay attention, organize, encode, and interpret information, we are led to pay attention again and to make new choices. That is the cognitive skill of prediction and expectation, and in many ways it is television that has shaped our expectations about all elements of our culture, from politics to religion. And here I argue that repeated exposure to television format and editing conventions sets viewer expectations, directly shaping cultural and social values.

For example, I have found, over the years of teaching, that I have a difficult time trying to introduce video art to college students. My students sit patiently through video art pieces and after it is all over, say, "Huh? What is it? It's not a sitcom, it's not a game show, it's not a news program, it's not a documentary. What is it?" It's not good, because it doesn't fit their expectations about what television is. Now this is a very

difficult objection to counteract, because they are telling me very explicitly that the conventions that exist on broadcast television are identical with television itself. Such conventions are good because students and the rest of us have been exposed to them over and over again. Many video artists combat this strategy by satirically playing on these conventions, manipulating and altering them. But that is still playing within the realm of our existing expectations.

Let us reflect on programs that do not use the editing conventions of network television with its rapid pacing, slickness, and visual intensity. Is it inherent in the medium that to be successful you have to use those conventions? Is it inherently bad television to portray, for example, a talking head? Is there something, as Murray-Brown (Chapter 2, this book) and Postman suggest, basically boring about that? I don't think so. I think it has rather to do with our expectations, which develop over time. I do not think it is inherent to the medium that we have to prefer rapid pacing and ten-second sound bites to longer shots of people speaking in full sentences and paragraphs.

Viewers, however, through their repeated exposure to television, demand those conventions. Thus, for example, PBS, in order to be successful and to compete for viewers, has been forced to present educational and instructional programming with those techniques intact, using the conventions of commercial television to teach about culture, values, science, and all the rest.[16] And consider the multiple reasons why local access cable television programming failed to attract viewers, leading to its virtual demise. One reason is that people didn't watch it. Why didn't people watch it? It didn't look like "good" television. Viewers comment: "They only had two cameras; it was unprofessional; it didn't look good." Note here that reference to content is irrelevant; reference is rather to form and appearance. It didn't look like commercial television, and so it didn't attract viewers. Why fund such an endeavor? Through repeated exposure to a limited number of formats and a uniform pattern of editing conventions, our expectations have already been set as to what is good and what is bad on television. These expectations are not inherent to the medium, but are the result of repeated exposure to the conventions already familiar to us.

Obviously, the hegemony of commercial broadcasting formats has an influence on viewers' ability to accept new formats. In this regard, we have had an interesting naturalistic experiment in American television during the 1980s: the advent of music television, the first example of a

dramatically new format in television in a long time. Music television, when it started in 1981, originally used a variety of formats, which are, however, hard to describe in words. Forget for a moment the arguments regarding the content of music television, the sexual and violent images and messages. The structure and the form of music television in 1981 was considerably more diverse then than it is now at the end of the decade. Only three or perhaps only two formats are commonly used on music television today: the narrative format, where a story is portrayed (like a little sitcom or soap compressed into three minutes), and the performance video (which has the musician displayed in all his or her splendor). Some would argue that the restriction of format in music television is probably a result of economic issues, so that record companies who are spending a lot of money don't take risks, and go with what's safe. While this argument has conventional feasibility, I would argue that the reduction in format is due rather to a sensitivity to what viewers like: a conventional format in music videos just as in everything else on television. Viewers like familiar formats. This is an empirical fact. They like narrative and performance videos, since narrative videos are easy to understand, are comfortable, and performance videos don't require much mental effort at all. Producers are responding to the interests of their audience; thus they deliberately reduce the diversity of formats.

Finally, it is clear that formats also influence our understanding and expectations regarding message content. As television becomes the dominant medium in our society, in our culture, we sense that it has influence far beyond itself and that it has a tremendous influence upon other media, especially print media. For example, the newspaper *USA TODAY* explicitly models its form on television; indeed, it is television-inspired. It is highly graphic, pictorial in nature, and brief and fragmented; one rarely has to jump to an inside page to finish reading anything in *USA TODAY*. Its fragmentation is its value because it doesn't take very long to read. You can't spend more than twenty minutes on *USA TODAY* even if you are among the slowest readers.

In other words, television format has determined public expectations regarding all formats, at least for the mass public, which itself influences the elite public more than we would like to admit. Television formats not only influence television but all other aspects of culture. It is precisely in this sense that formats and editing conventions have their greatest power.

Television's prominence in our society is neither good nor bad in

terms of inherent value. But television's restrictions of formats and editing conventions can shape our expectations so that we are not exposed to a full range of information and ideas. Here is where the medium is potentially dangerous. It is here that specific value judgments intrude. By its ability to shape our interest in information, television editing conventions and formats encourage a value system that emphasizes fragmentation over continuity, repetition over diversity, and familiar messages over unfamiliar ones, all of it in 30-second bits instead of more sustained attentional patterns. It is this video legacy that has shaped modern American politics and business and religion and culture, not through the messages presented on television, but through specific utilizations of the form and structure of the medium itself.

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The Emperor Has Only Clothes: Toward a Hermeneutic of the Video Text

Lenore Langsdorf

Paul Goldberger, in the *New York Times*, distinguishes "those arts that are by nature visual, like architecture, from those that are not primarily visual, like music." He goes on to observe:

> But what is happening in both fields is not so dissimilar. In architecture, we see visual complexity put aside in favor of intense, easy visual impact. In music and theater, we see musical or verbal ideas nearly overwhelmed by a mode of expression that is supposed to serve them, not dominate them.
>
> Sometimes this happens . . . where there is so little inherent substance behind all the visual excess that we might easily say the emperor has no clothes—or more properly, that the emperor has only clothes. . . . [This] does little to expand the bounds of traditional theater, for it is not, in the end, of the theater. . . . Its ancestor, really, is television.[1]

The frequent absence of that "inherent substance" of ideas in contemporary cultural production is the topic of this chapter. On the basis of a consideration of the formal features of lived experience, verbal text, and video text, I propose that certain ideas, which are foundational for

Chapter 2. Video Ergo Sum.

1. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press As An Agent of Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 44.

2. *Interfaces of the Word* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 316.

3. Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p. 18.

4. HMSO, Cmnd 9824.

5. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Television and Behavior*, Vol. 1, (1982), p. 73.

6. Ong, *Interfaces*, p. 322.

7. Nielsen Survey of 1980, quoted by Henry Scott Stokes in the *New York Times*, 22 July 1982, III, 15:1.

8. *Television and Behavior*, Vol. 2, p. 339.

9. See, inter alia, Op-Ed. article entitled "Illiterasee att Wurk" by William McGowan in the *New York Times*, 19 August 1982, page no. 19, 27:1 and Op-Ed. article by Jonathan Kozol in the *New York Times*, 30 October 1986.

10. *Books in Our Future* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), p. 12.

11. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Dell, 1982).

12. Kozol, *New York Times*, 30 October 1986.

13. Cmnd 9824, p. 78.

14. *In Search of History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 517.

15. *Television and Behavior*, Vol. 2, p. 344.

16. Ibid., p. 342.

17. Ibid., p. 57.

18. Edward Jay Epstein, *News From Nowhere* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 242.

19. See my study of the eight KGB tapes on Andrei Sakharov and Elena Bonner, "Sakharov, The KGB and the Mass Media," undertaken for Boston University's Program for the Study of Disinformation, and published in *The New Image Makers: Soviet Propaganda and Disinformation Today*, Ladislav Bittman, ed. (McLean, Va.: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988), 159-200.

20. E.H. Gombrich, *The Image And The Eye* (New York: Phaidon, 1982), p. 138.

21. Epstein, p. 4.

22. Alan M. Dershowitz, *Reversal of Fortune* (New York: Random House, 1986), p. 235.

23. Epstein, p. 39.

24. "Television and Police: Attitudes and Perceptions of the Police and the Public" (New York City Police Foundation, 1987).

25. See, for example, *Crooks, Conmen and Clowns* (1981) and *Prime Time Crime* (Media Institute, 1983). See also *Television and Behavior*, passim.

26. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), p. 59.

27. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Viking, Penguin Books, 1986), p. 77.

Chapter 3. Television and the Shaping of Cognitive Skills.

1. David Pearl, Lorraine Bouthilet, and Joyce Lazar, eds., *Television and Behavior*, Vol. 1 (Rockville, Md.: National Institute of Mental Health, 1982).

2. David R. Olson, and Jerome Bruner. "Learning Through Experience and Learning Through Media," in *Media and Symbols: The Forms of Expression, Communication and Education*, David R. Olson, ed. (Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, 1974), 125-150.

3. Patricia Marks Greenfield, *Mind and Media*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

4. W. Andrew Collins, "Schemata for Understanding Television," in *Viewing Children Through Television*. Hope Kelly and Howard Gardner, eds. (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1981), 31-46.

5. Gerald S. Lesser, *Children and Television* (New York: Vintage, 1974), and R. Liebert, J.M. Neale, and E.S. Davidson, *The Early Window: Effects of Television on Children and Youth*. (New York: Pergammon Press, 1973).

6. Renee Hobbs, Richard Frost, and John Stauffer, "How First-Time Viewers Comprehend Editing Conventions." *Journal of Communication*,

Autumn (1988): 50-60.

7. *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study.* (New York: Dover, 1970 [1916]).

8. Mabel Rice, Aletha Huston, and John C. Wright, "The Forms of Television: Effects on Children's Attention, Comprehension and Social Behavior," in *Children and the Formal Features of Television*, Manfred Meyer, ed. (New York: K.G. Saur Munchen, 1982).

9. Julian Hochberg, "Motion Pictures and Mental Structures." Paper presented at the Eastern Psychological Association, Washington, D.C. 1978.

10. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Viking, 1985).

11. Renee Hobbs, "Visual Verbal Synchrony and Learning from Television News." Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1985.

12. *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide* (New York: Longman, 1984). This quotation and the one following are both from p. 206.

13. *Harper's*, Index, August 1988.

14. Christopher H. Sterling, and John M. Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting.* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1978).

15. "The politics of Narrative Form: The Emergence of News Conventions in Print and Television," *Daedalus* 3, Fall (1982): 97-112.

16. Gerald Lesser, *Television and Children* (New York: Viking Press, 1974).

Chapter 4. The Emperor Has Only Clothes.

1. "Design: The Risks of Razzle-Dazzle," *New York Times*, 12 April 1987, II: 1, 34.

2. In an important sense that is easily overlooked by some who see the study of the humanities (and philosophy in particular) as destructive of traditional values, this ability to appropriate the meaning of texts is a profoundly conservative force. Demonstrating why that is so would take us away from the present topic, and so I can only suggest the line of argument by pointing out that we are more apt to be impressed by ideas and values proposed in the texts of our cultural tradition if we can entertain them on the basis of our own understanding, rather than as dogma imposed upon us. You may argue that those goals are (at best) quaint holdovers from the Enl. ment; I counter wit defense of them as what could and even should thrive even if philosophy dead. But that is an issue for another day.

3. I say "at most" and "typically" because some students are poor at planatory reasoning also, while others excel in both explanatory reasoning a the sort of noncausal reasoning that I call interpretive reasoning. For a broa discussion of this difference as one of skill in "instrumental reasoning" rat than "judgment," and some causal reasoning of my own as to why students disposed toward the former rather than the latter, see my "Is Critical Think a Technique, or a Means of Enlightenment?" *Informal Logic* 8 (1986): 1-17

The strong difference I see between "explanation" and "understandi reflects a long tradition in the history of hermeneutics. For both my understa ing of that tradition and the general text theory on which I rely, I am indeb to the work of Paul Ricoeur. See, for example, his *Hermeneutics and the Hum Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

It may also be helpful to acknowledge that my references to phenomen ogy refer primarily to the Husserlian tradition, as exemplified in the work Robert Sokolowski and Richard Zaner. See, for example, the former's *Prese and Absence: A Philosophical Investigation of Language and Being* (Bloomingt Indiana University Press, 1978) and *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Pres Things* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974) and the latt *The Context of Self* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981) and *The Wa Phenomenology* (New York: Pegasus, 1970). The hermeneutic phenomenolo analysis I practice here owes much to the work of Don Ihde; see, especi *Experimental Phenomenology* (New York: Putnam's, 1977) and *Hermene Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwes University Press, 1971).

4. Examples of the sort of texts basic to those courses would be *Apology, The Federalist Papers, Hamlet, A Tale of Two Cities, Death of a Sales Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, and *Under Six Flags: A History of Texas.*

5. *Oxford English Dictionary.*

6. Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny here. That observation gives ris speculation that one factor in our tendency to evaluate television as inferi the printed word may be an association of video with nontechnological (nat visual experience. We share that ability with animals and employ it from b without any apparent effort. However, nontechnological verbal experience speaking) develops only with some effort in humans, and is minimally or at all present in other animals. Technologically elaborated verbal experi (i.e., handwriting and printing) share and exaggerate those "advanced," hu specific characteristics of speech. It may be that our literary proclivities en

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LITERACY FOR THE INFORMATION AGE

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For citizens living in the United States at the end of the 20th century, it hardly seems necessary to state the evidence which shows the dominance of film, television, and other mass media products on the lives of Americans (see Alton-Lee, Huthall, & Patrick, 1993; Howe, 1983; Kubey, & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990 for examples of recent evidence). There are few educators still in the practice of teaching who hold the same level of animosity toward television as the generation of teachers in the 1950s and 1960s, many of whom viewed television as their professional nemesis. Many teachers are increasingly using mass media "texts" to enrich their subject areas, comfortably moving between the textbook, the trade book, the newspaper, the film and the videotape in their efforts to bring rich ideas into the classroom.

As for the study of images and mass media in elementary and secondary schools, there has been increasing momentum among language arts and social studies teachers to include media analysis and production activities in the classroom. However, since the word "media" has become entrenched in the educational community as the province of librarians, and media technologies and messages conceived of as merely a delivery system to transfer messages, images have been relegated to the margins, taken for granted to serve as mere decoration. In a society where media use is the central leisure activity for most of its citizens and the dominant source of information about the world, the study of the mass media has been neglected in schools. Students have had little instructional support analyzing and thinking about media messages. Educators often mistakenly believe that they are engaged in expanding the concept of literacy when they use television to teach *with*, and few understand that media literacy consists of teaching *about* media as well.

So the problem is clear: our students are growing up in a world saturated with media messages, messages that fill the bulk of their leisure time and provide them with information about who to vote for and what consumer decisions to make. Yet students receive little to no training in the skills of analyzing or evaluating these messages, many of which make use of language, moving images, music, sound effects, special visual effects and other techniques that powerfully affect our emotional responses.

Educators' exclusive focus on language is a legacy of the historical context of the past, when cultural survival depended upon the mastery of the printed word. While these skills are even more important today, language is only one of a number of symbol systems which humans use to express and share meaning. Changes in communication technologies over the past 100 years have created a cultural environment that has extended and reshaped the role of language and the written word. Language must be appreciated as it exists in relationship to other forms of symbolic expression — including images, sound, music and electronic forms of communication. Scholars and educators are coming to recognize that literacy is not simply a matter of acquiring decontextualized decoding, comprehension and production skills, but that the concept of literacy must be connected with the culture and the contexts in which reading and writing are used (Cook-Gumperz, 1986).

This chapter urges educators to consider this new definition of literacy, a definition adapted by the author based on the work of educators who identify themselves with the "media literacy" movement (Firestone, 1993):

> Literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms.

Embedded in this definition are both a process for learning and an expansion of the concept of "text" to include messages of all sorts. This view of literacy posits the student as being actively engaged in the process of analyzing and creating messages, and as a result this definition reflects some basic principles of school reform, which generally include:

- inquiry based education
- student-centered learning

Hobbs, R.(1997). Literacy for the information age. In J.Flood, S.B.Heath & D.Lapp (Eds.), Handbook of research on teaching literacy through the communicative and visual arts (pp.7-14). New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan.

- problem solving in cooperative teams
- alternatives to standardized testing
- integrated curriculum

BASIC PROCESSES OF LITERACY: ACCESS, ANALYZE, EVALUATE AND COMMUNICATE

The four processes which constitute the new vision of literacy provide a powerful frame in which to consider how people develop skills in using language and other forms of symbolic expression. For example, the ability to *access* messages connects with those enabling skills that include decoding symbols and building broad vocabularies. It also involves those skills related to the locating, organizing and retrieving of information from a variety of sources. Additionally, access requires the ability to use the tools of technology, including video technology, computers and various on-line services. Access skills are often labeled as information literacy, or more recently, "driver training for the information superhighway."

The ability to *analyze* messages connects with those interpretive comprehension skills that include the ability to make use of categories, concepts or ideas; determine the genre of a work; make inferences about cause and effect; consider the specific strategies and techniques which are used to construct the work; and identify the author's purpose and point of view. At the secondary level, the ability to analyze messages may also include a recognition of the historical, political, economic or aesthetic contexts in which messages are created and consumed.

The ability to *evaluate* messages concerns those judgments about the relevance and value of the meaning of messages for the reader, including making use of prior knowledge to interpret a work; predicting a further outcome or a logical conclusion; identifying values in a message; and appreciating the aesthetic quality of a work. Although the skills of analysis and evaluation are frequently conflated by practitioners of media literacy, it is important to recognize that analysis skills depend upon the ability to grasp and make effective use of conceptual knowledge that is outside the student's own perspective, while evaluation skills make use of the student's existing world view, knowledge, attitudes and values.

The ability to *communicate* messages is at the heart of the traditional meaning of literacy, and the skills of writing and speaking have been highly valued by educators. In the last 20 years, writing has come to approach the primacy that reading has held in the language arts hierarchy. Communication skills are diverse and, to some extent, media-specific. General skills include: the ability to understand the audience with whom one is communicating; the effective use of symbols to convey meaning; the ability to organize a sequence of ideas, and the ability to capture and hold the attention and interest of the message receiver. Media-specific production skills for video include: learning to make effective choices in framing and point of view; learning to use visual and auditory symbolism; and learning how to manipulate time and space effectively through editing.

Expanding the Concept of "Text"

While the four concepts provide a new frame for thinking about the processes involved when people create and share messages, what makes the new vision of literacy so powerful is the application of these skills to *messages in a variety of forms.* At present, reading / language arts educators focus on literature as the core of the K–12 curriculum: the short story, poetry, drama and nonfiction are claimed to be ideal because they "motivate learning with appeal to universal feelings and needs ... classic literature speaks most eloquently to readers and writers" (California State Board of Education, 1986, p. 7).

But they also may seem disconnected and remote from the experiences of students, who have been "escorted across the globe even before they have permission to cross the street" (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 238) by the television. Critics have claimed that, too often, a literature-based reading / language arts program "ignores the life experience, the history and the language practice of students" (Freire, & Macedo, 1987, p. 146), and that when literary materials are used primarily as vehicles for exercises in comprehension and vocabulary development, students may become alienated from the processes of reading and writing in a range of contexts.

In the past, educators have been comfortable to disenfranchise and overlook present-day cultural products, especially television, even though many works of literature which are now considered classic or traditional began their life as popular works designed for mass audiences (Beach, 1992). But just as scholars and critics have engaged in heated controversy over what texts are appropriate study objects to be included in the canon of essential literary works (Gless, & Herrnstein Smith, 1992), these debates are filtering into changes in the curriculum.

Many educators have discovered that the analysis of contemporary media can build skills that transfer to students' work with the written word. When educators permit and encourage the study of contemporary media products in classrooms, students develop skills that alter and reshape their relationship to media products. Nehamas (1992) explains that "[s]erious watching ... disarms many of the criticisms commonly raised about television." More important, analysis of media texts helps students gain interest in writing and speaking, and helps nurture students' natural curiosity and motivation. Consider a story presented by Lauren Axelrod (cited in White, 1993a), a high school teacher in Houston, Texas:

> I used media literacy concepts to get my low-achievement students to tackle Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland.* I started with an extensive analysis of the Francis Ford Coppola film, *Apocalypse Now*, and we discussed the film's narrative structure, mood, point of view, rhythm and character development. Then a team of students read Conrad while another team read Eliot. We then applied the same concepts to the short story and poem in group discussion and writing exercises. Finally, students created a videotape which compared and contrasted the three works with each other. I saw students turn on to literature in a way I never saw them engage with anything in the classroom.

Media education exists as an increasingly vital component of elementary education in Great Britain, Canada, Australia,

Spain and other nations. In Great Britain the mandate includes media education as a strand within the National Standards developed in English, which requires students to study the ways in which media products convey meanings in a range of media texts (Alvarado, & Boyd-Barrett, 1992; Bazalgette, 1992; Brown, 1991; Buckingham, 1991; Lusted, 1991; Masterman, 1985). While still controversial among those who favor a more traditional and narrow view of 'culture,' scholarly work in media pedagogy has grown widely, and consensus is growing about the set of concepts, skills and learning environments that best help strengthen students' ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in many forms.

The New Vision: Key Analytic Concepts

Current approaches to reading / language arts often make use of a laundry list of concepts that inform the work of teachers and students in a classroom. Such lists are the result of adding new paradigms for learning upon older models. Layer by layer, the models now used in reading / language arts have become cumbersome and unwieldy (Hawthorne, 1992). Hawthorne writes, "The scope of English heightens the individuality of curricular patterns. ... Teachers are left to weave the various components into a coherent pattern for themselves and their students" (p. 116). But a simple and powerful new definition of literacy, as proposed in this report, makes it possible to identify the most important processes, concepts and skills for K–12 instruction and makes use of these with a wide variety of message forms, from folktales to commercials, from historical fiction to newspaper photography.

Media literacy incorporates the theoretical traditions of semiotics, literary criticism, communication theory, research on arts education and language development. Although the conceptual principles of the new vision of literacy have taken many forms for various curriculum writers in Great Britain, Canada, Australia and the United States, the following ideas are critical components of all programs.

All messages are constructions. Print messages are created by an author who selects the ideas and words to convey meanings. Images are created by a photographer who makes similar selections, and television programs are created by a group of people, led by a producer, who make choices about each image and word used from many possible options. The construction of messages requires careful thinking, creativity and organizational skills. Knowing how messages are constructed helps the reader to appreciate the artistry involved and to better interpret the meaning of a work.

Messages are representations of social reality. Messages have a relationship with the lived experiences of individuals in many cultures. Even when a message is imaginary, hypothetical or fantastic, it represents social reality, which is defined as the perceptions about the contemporary world that are shared among individuals. Messages also represent the social realities of times and places far removed, and help us make sense of the past, present and future. People need the ability to judge the accuracy of particular messages that may or may not reflect social reality.

Individuals negotiate meaning by interacting with messages. The meaning of a message is found in the act of inter-pretation. Each reader or viewer uses prior knowledge and experience in the process of reading or critical viewing. A skill-ful reader or viewer examines many different stylistic features of the text and pays careful attention to the context in which the message occurs in the process of interpretation. Different individuals can find quality and beauty in various texts.

Messages have economic, political, social and aesthetic purposes. People create and share messages for many reasons, but in modern culture making money is one of the most important. Many messages produced in our culture have an economic purpose of some sort. When authors have political purposes, they use a message to gain power or authority over others. When their agenda is social, they use a message to present ideas about how people could or should behave, think or feel. When authors have an aesthetic motive, they use a message to experiment with different kinds of symbolic forms and ideas. Understanding how messages operate in terms of their economic, political, social and aesthetic purposes helps readers better understand the context of a work.

Each form of communication has unique characteristics. An author makes choices about which kinds of media are most appropriate to convey a particular message. Television news has characteristics that favor messages that are immediate and visual, while news photographs have characteristics that favor messages with an emotional component. When writing, an author must carefully choose the most effective genre in which to work, since an essay, a memo, a short story or a poem can all be effective forms, depending on the purpose, audience and content of the message. Being a good communicator means knowing which formats, genres and media to use in a wide variety of situations.

It is clear that the most dynamic concepts of current practice in reading / language arts instruction are wholly consistent with these key concepts. But when educators include the analysis and creation of film, photographs, newspapers, radio and television, new concepts are required to enable students to ask critical questions about these contemporary forms. Some of these concepts may be unfamiliar to reading / language arts teachers, particularly at the elementary level. For example, teachers in some communities have sometimes been reluctant to include the analysis of how messages have political or economic purposes. While it may be argued that analysis of the economics of literature is not of central value for young students, analysis of the economics of media messages is essential to help middle school and high school students understand the nature of communicative messages in contemporary culture. It would be irresponsible to include the study of film, television, newspapers or other mass media without providing students in grades 4 and up with a paradigm to help them understand the ways in which messages have value in the marketplace.

Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills

As glossily packaged and presented film, video and advertiser-supported materials enter the school classroom, teachers often consider video materials valuable because everyone in a classroom is presumed to be able to decode the messages on the screen. But the new vision of literacy presented in this chapter is not just aimed at cultivating the relatively simple process of decoding messages—it is the sophisticated analysis, evaluation and the active creation of messages that are the most significant, complex and vital skills needed for survival in an information age. These take a lifetime to master fully.

Even very young students can engage in conceptual analysis and evaluation of media messages, at a time when they are still beginning to master the decoding and comprehension skills required for print. According to Resnick (1987, p. 31):

> The most important single message of modern research on the nature of thinking is that the kinds of activities traditionally associated with thinking are not limited to advanced levels of development. Instead these activities are an intimate part of even elementary levels of reading ... when learning is proceeding well.

When teachers make use of a full range of messages in developing children's literacy, higher-order cognitive skills can be integrated into the activities of very young children using media messages as study objects. This helps motivate students to master the basic accessing skills to crack the code of the printed word. These analytic concepts, already familiar to students in their work with media artifacts, can then be applied to print forms. Elementary teachers who have used this approach find that "much of the language used to view television critically is transferable to other media—noticing camera angles in photography, understanding differences between reality and fantasy. ... There are also many connections to teaching verbal and written skills" (Lacy, 1993, pp. 11, 12).

What happens, according to British educators, is that when students critically examine a wide range of texts in both print and visual media, they develop more complex expectations about everything they read and see. "Media education is often seen as a way of defending children from television. It ought to be seen as a way of giving them high expectations of television, of all media, and of themselves" (Bazalgette, 1992, p. 45). Such views represent the potential of expanded literacy in reshaping the character of our nation's near limitless appetite for mass media products and in doing so, helping citizens reconnect to the rich storehouse of literary treasures from many cultures, past and present. If media literacy skills help young people develop an appetite for reading, we would judge it a stunning success. If media literacy skills help young people develop an appetite for the stimulating, complex and provocative kinds of television programming increasingly more available as a result of cable television, then in time, we would expect media industries to begin increasing the quality of programming. Such goals have yet to be examined among researchers because, as yet, there are so few community or school-based laboratories where media literacy is being implemented at a system-wide level. (The author is aware of only three districts in the United States which have attempted media literacy initiatives designed to reach all students in the school district: Billerica, Massachusetts; Cold Spring, Minnesota; and Dennis-Yarmouth, Massachusetts.)

THE CONSEQUENCES OF EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF LITERACY

The new vision of literacy has consequences for some of the most important issues which face American educators today. As developed in the following pages, this chapter outlines how the new vision of literacy helps restore the important connection between the school and the culture, making education more relevant to the communities to which students belong. It also outlines how the new vision of literacy reflects the kind of authentic learning which occurs when reading and writing occur in contexts where "process, product and content are all interrelated" (Edelsky, Altwerger, & Flores, 1991, p. 9) and where language skills and language learning are conceived of as being inherently social processes, requiring direct engagement and experience tied to meaningful activity.

Building Relevance Between the Classroom and the Community

The claims by now are depressingly familiar: many students actively resist the process of learning in school, and while they can decode language, they cannot infer meaning; the school curriculum is fragmented and decontextualized, promoting indifference and intellectual dependency (Diaz, 1992; Hirsch, 1989). Fortunately, elementary educators have already begun to respond to these criticisms by making changes in their methods of instruction: moving away from a curriculum which emphasizes facts and isolated skills and toward an emphasis on collaborative, active learning which involves complex thought and interpretation.

Multicultural education is education that values human diversity and acknowledges that "alternative experiences and viewpoints are part of the growing process" (Grant, 1993). The new vision of literacy proposed in this report is fueled by this philosophy. It promotes cultural pluralism and social equality by making changes in the processes and content of school curriculum; in doing so, it is centered on "building meaningful relationships between curriculum and life" (Pang, 1992, p. 67).

Carlos Cortes argues that media literacy is essential to multicultural education, noting that media literacy strengthens students' knowledge about various media forms, helps develop analytic and creative skills in responding to media, and helps students become skilled in using print, images, sounds and other tools to express and share ideas. Cortes (1991, p. 153) writes, "Media can be used to stimulate students to consider multiple perspectives on current and historical multicultural dilemmas." Clearly, both multicultural education and the new vision of literacy proposed here share the goal of opening up the canon to expand the range of works which are studied in the classroom.

Not unexpectedly, much of the criticism that has developed about the inclusion of works by Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, African Americans and others can be directed at the new vision of literacy as well, which would include works from popular culture which some critics have labeled "trash." Educators who believe that "good literature" is a "salve one can apply to children from the wrong side of the tracks to heal them of their background" (Beach, 1992, p. 554) are likely to resist any effort which attempts to make the canon more responsive to the lives of students and their communities. But John Beach recognizes that the time is ripe to examine the variety of definitions of "good literature" and suggests that instead of viewing literature as a pyramid which places classic works at the top and works of popular culture at the bottom, it should be considered "like a tree with many branches; the 'best' can be found at the tip of each branch."

ESL / Bilingual Education. How might the new vision of literacy affect students who come to school speaking other languages besides English? According to bilingual / educators, the instructional methods which are most effective in ESL / bilingual education are identical with the active learner-centered model which the new vision of literacy promotes. Techniques which make use of drama, songs, objects and audiovisual materials to help convey meaning and content are highly effective.

In Portland, Maine, media artist Huey (also known as James Coleman) developed a media education program for ESL students speaking 27 languages, where students make film and video using animation and live-action techniques. Portland elementary teachers "have found that Huey's approach offers their students a creative way to improve their English, their public speaking and their communication skills in general. ... and it breaks down walls between schools and communities through cable TV and closed circuit screenings and student research within the community" (White, 1993b).

Writing for the College Board, Hirsch (1989, p. 60) notes:

> Over and over again, teachers in ESL and bilingual classrooms have realized the power of authentic tasks to motivate communication and language learning. ... In searching for authentic tasks and materials, many ESL and proficiency teachers are looking beyond traditional textbooks to primary sources in the language they are teaching, including newspapers, television commercials, menus, hotel receipts, children's books, and journalism and fiction.

Parent Education. In some communities, parents are active and supportive players in the day-to-day life of the school. In too many communities, however, parents are disenfranchised partners in the educational process. In considering the relationship between the new vision of literacy and the home–school connection, it is necessary to identify the high level of ambivalence and concern that many citizens have with the ways film, television and other mass media have shaped public discourse. Many adults believe that television has damaged the process we use to elect public officials, that mass media organizations disrupt the private lives of individuals unnecessarily; that violence in film and television programming desensitizes people and alters their conceptions of the social world; and that the values of sensationalism have reshaped culture and the arts (Bianculli, 1993).

The new vision of literacy proposed in this chapter is based on a fundamental truism about the purpose of democracy: in order for citizens to be engaged in self-governance, they must critically analyze and evaluate information and resources. This work is essential if citizens are to take meaningful action and make meaningful decisions on issues of concern to the community. But in a culture in which citizens see themselves as spectators and consumers, democracy is threatened. When citizens do not employ their skills of analysis and evaluation to information and entertainment products, apathy and cynicism reign.

The new vision of literacy could help encourage parents to more fully embrace their responsibilities to help their children interpret the meanings of the complex messages which bombard them everyday. Too often, parents feel intimidated by the activity of the classroom, by routines that are established by educators who may unintentionally disempower parents from embracing their own authority as interpreters of textual materials. While some parents may hesitate to voice their interpretations of a literary work, parents often feel quite comfortable discussing their interpretations of a film, a situation comedy, a dramatic series, a documentary or an op-ed article. The new vision of literacy creates opportunities for parents and their children to engage with the complex task of sorting out the meanings of the messages in the environment.

Making Classrooms Centers for Authentic Learning

Educators have been discussing how to make learning more authentic since the 19th century, when John Dewey first began outlining how children's own activity, their work, could be a vehicle for learning. When learning is authentic, the content of classroom discourse is meaningful and relevant to students; language skills are not taught in isolation; connections between subject areas are emphasized. According to Sizer (1984), in authentic learning environments, students learn through direct experience with tasks they themselves value, with intellectual stimulation from teachers who ask thoughtful questions and provide supportive coaching.

The new vision of literacy helps nurture new relationships between teachers and students, helping rebind the current contrast that "exists between *paidia* (play) and *paideia* (education)" (Gallagher, 1992), based on the recognition that the aim of the reading / language arts teacher is to cultivate a learning environment where students bring their own naturally energetic exploration to the study of new ideas. Rather than considering language development as a series of isolated and fragmented skills, the new vision of literacy puts students at the center of the processes of accessing, analyzing, evaluating and communicating messages. Most important, the new vision of literacy is centered around empowerment, defined as the "process through which students learn to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live" McLaren, 1989, p. 186).

Integration with other subject areas. As is clearly evident, the new vision of literacy provides a simple, process-based model that makes connections between reading / language arts, the visual and performing arts, social studies and science. Shepard (1993, p. 35) explains how the new vision of literacy is an ideal tool for subject integration at the elementary level:

> If media literacy is presented to [teachers] as just another add-on, there will be little hope for its adoption. If, however, media literacy is presented not just as something that meets students' needs, but something that will meet the teacher's need to integrate the disparate elements of a broad curriculum, then it stands a good chance of becoming an important part of the curriculum. In fact, media literacy functions so well as an integrator that it would be worth using even if it were not as intrinsically important as it is.

Since mass media artifacts are relevant to science, social studies, the visual and performing arts as well as reading / language arts, teachers can easily make connections that stretch across subject areas by teaching with media and teaching about media.

In some communities teachers across the core subject areas are being trained in how to integrate media literacy concepts into many curriculum areas. In Billerica, Massachusetts, teachers in language arts, social studies, health education, science and the visual and performing arts are discovering the synergy which results from team-developed initiatives. For example, in the spring of 1994, teachers collaborated on a district-wide program to help students critically analyze tobacco advertising as part of the health curriculum. Students examined the historical, political and economic dimensions of tobacco advertising; they reviewed, categorized and analyzed a huge volume of persuasive materials designed to make smoking look attractive; and they made their own public service messages, targeted at their own community, to persuade them against smoking. More than 2,000 students in grades K–12 participated in the project by designing slogans, writing newspaper editorials, designing billboards, bumper stickers, posters, radio ads and videotape public service announcements. Teachers persuaded the local billboard company to put up one student's billboard design on the major highway of the town, giving thousands of citizens the opportunity to read a child's message, and creating a powerful message for students. Such examples emphasize the ways in which media literacy activities bring a renewed sense of relevance between the worlds of the classroom and the world of contemporary culture.

Using new tools of assessment. When assessment is authentic, it has as its central purpose the goal of providing feedback to a child and his or her parents about the quality of the learning experience. When assessment is authentic, it mirrors the ways in which standards of quality are evaluated in the world outside of the classroom: through close examination of products and performances.

For more than a century, assessment in the United States has been shaped by the needs of scholars and academics to standardize and quantify learning experiences (Gould, 1981). This has led to an atomized, fragmented view of the learning process, one conducive to "data reduction." Now, educators are coming to recognize the need to reclaim the assessment process, and as a result, diverse new forms of assessment are being used in schools.

The new vision of literacy provides simple and direct opportunities to observe, monitor and evaluate the processes of accessing, analyzing, evaluating and communicating messages in a range of informal and formal settings. Since the creation of messages is central to the new vision of literacy, portfolio-based models of assessment are consistent with the new vision. Indeed, the premise of the new vision is based on the idea that the processes of accessing, analyzing and evaluating messages all contribute to the creation and communication of messages, so that students can make direct connections between their reading and their writing, their viewing and analysis of images, and the process of creating messages using language, images, sounds, music, graphics and video.

The Toronto Board of Education's Benchmark Program has been using an assessment model designed to demystify educational goals and illuminate the nature of good performance (Larter, & Donnelly, 1993). By combining authentic performance activities with systematic observation and holistic evaluation, teachers can assess student skills in a way which most closely matches the broad general skills that are at the core of reading / language arts instruction. For example, in one benchmark of students' ability to comprehend nonprint information and their oral communication skills, grade 3 students in Toronto are asked to watch a videotape on owls and explain the major ideas in their own words. Students were found to generally lack strong skills in the comprehension of informative video, perhaps because their expectations about television shape their level of motivation and effort in decoding (Salomon, 1979). Such evidence reminds us of the lessons of the reading comprehension scholars—how important it is not to assume that our students understand what they see just because they see it.

The development of standards, tied to authentic performances, that allow educators to assess the quality of students' writing, speaking, listening and thinking skills is consistent with the new vision of literacy. The province of Ontario was the first in Canada to mandate that media literacy instruction be at least 30% of the reading / language arts program in grades 7–12. The performance of younger students from the Toronto Board of Education results suggests that students lack basic comprehension skills of information presented in video formats, pointing clearly to the necessity of direct instruction to help students in grades K–8 learn to comprehend, interpret and analyze a wide range of texts, including messages from television and the mass media.

Staff development issues. Teachers are just as ambivalent about media culture as the rest of the citizenry. As discussed earlier, teachers have a wide range of attitudes about the value and consequences of broadening the concept of literacy to include new materials, especially popular music, film, television and music videos. However, teachers who have attempted to incorporate these materials into their classroom realize that students have a tremendous amount of

knowledge and interest in these messages, and teachers and students can share together in the learning process.

It is not difficult for teachers to move from teaching exclusively with media to addressing media as study objects. Some teachers have described the process as similar to the process of "consciousness raising" about gender and race which many educators experienced in the 1970s. "It's like putting on a new pair of glasses—you see the same things [in media culture], but now I approach these messages differently," wrote one teacher in a program of teacher education at the Harvard Institute on Media Education, a staff development program in media literacy that was conducted by the author in 1993 and 1994 that attracted educators from across the nation.

But German educator Dichanz (1992) writes plainly about what it takes to make the new vision of literacy a reality in schools: "It is the staff that has to translate tasks ... into practical work, and it is that staff that has to be provided with the theoretical background for this new approach..." For U.S. educators, this means that the work of staff development is best accomplished, not by individual teachers acting independently, but through coordinated and sustained efforts, using resources and tools which help them gain access to new ideas and practice new strategies of managing classroom activity. Such work is well underway at the state, district and local levels. For example, the State of New Mexico has mandated that all students complete a media literacy course before high school graduation, and begun a process of teacher training so that media literacy will be integrated into the curriculum at all grade levels. And in the community of Billerica, Massachusetts, after 3 years of study, 26 teachers have completed the first Master's Degree in Media Literacy, supported by Merrimack Education Center and Fitchburg State College, in order to implement a new vision of literacy in grades K–12 integrated within existing subject areas. Teachers graduating from this program are beginning to teach additional teachers in the New England area.

If media literacy is to emerge as a new vision of literacy for the information age, then a high degree of coordination will be required from among a range of shareholders: the scholarly community, educators in K–12 environments, parents, the publishing and media production industries, and the standardized testing industry. Given the decentralized nature of American schools, it is unlikely that such coordination will receive the support it needs, and more likely that media literacy initiatives will develop as a result of innovation and experimentation in the diverse "labs" of individual districts, schools and classrooms. For an institution which has historically clung to the concept of literacy as the central organizing force of education, we must respect the time it will take educators and scholars to promote the type of sustained and meaningful change that is needed for our schools.

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Teaching Media Literacy—Yo! Are You Hip to This?

RENEE HOBBS

WALKING DOWN THE CORRIDORS of a middle school in suburban Massachusetts, the distinctive blare of a television commercial stands out against the more traditional patter of classroom noises:

Yo! Are you hip to these? Are you in the know?
Cause here's where Eggo Minis are made to go—
In Yo' Mouth!
Who needs a plate?
In Yo' Mouth!
Cause they're made to fit your face!
In Yo' Mouth!
They're mega-yum.
In Yo' Mouth!
The taste is pure fun!

Inside the 7th-grade classroom, a teacher is leading a discussion about this particular TV ad; on the blackboard, a list of all the computer graphics and other images in the ad—more than 30 different descrip-

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tions—appears on the blackboard, written in a student's handwriting.

"Who's the target audience?" asks the teacher.

"Boys—our age," responds a student. "They only showed boys in this ad."

"And the music—it was like rap music, sung by boys," chimes in another. "It's sung in a kind of aggressive way, and the words 'In Yo' Mouth'—that reminds me of '*In Yo' Face!*"

"What's a synonym for 'In Yo' Face?'" asks the teacher, feigning ignorance.

The class erupts in laughter, and a chorus of replies follows as children call out their synonyms. The teacher flips open the thesaurus and adds some additional words: defiance, bravado, dare.

The teacher changes the pace. "In your notebooks, everybody take five minutes and write down one or two reasons why the producer chose this phrase for the Eggo Mini Waffles campaign." Notebooks fly open, pens are located and students quickly get down to writing. This is clearly something they have been doing regularly. After five minutes, he asks students to read their ideas aloud. Six hands are in the air.

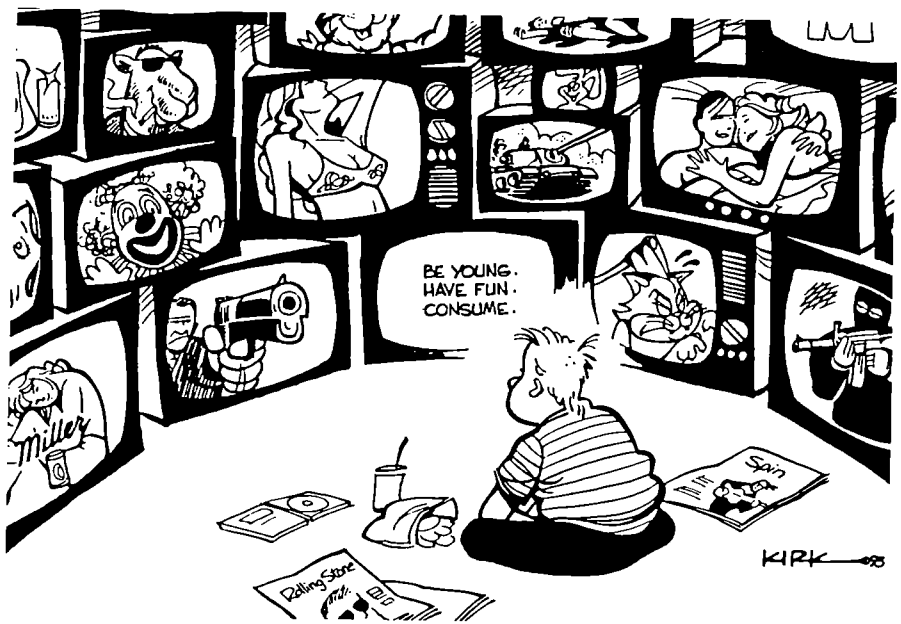
A dark-haired girl begins to read. "The producer wants to show that eating Mini Waffles is a way of showing independence, being defiant."

Says another, "The producer wants kids to think it's cool to eat breakfast on the run, not with a plate, not sitting down."

"The producer might want to link Eggo Mini Waffles with the attitude of 'In Yo' Face!' because that daring attitude is so popular with kids nowadays," says another boy.

After a few more such interpretations, the teacher wraps up the lesson. "So sometimes commercials can use people's feelings—like defiance—to link to their products. For your critical viewing project tonight at home, I'd like you to look for a commercial that uses bravado, especially kids defying adults. If you find one, write down the name of a commercial and be prepared to describe it to us tomorrow."

Then, the teacher switches gears to *Flowers for Algernon*, the short story the class has been reading, and notes Charlie's growing defiance toward his new friends at this point in the story. The whole media literacy enterprise this day, clearly a regular part of this middle-school English classroom routine, has taken up about 10 minutes of the period.



KIRK ANDERSON

IN MORE AND MORE CLASSROOMS in the United States, educators are beginning to help students acquire the skills they need to manage in a media-saturated environment, recognizing that in its broadest sense, "literacy" must include the ability to skillfully "read" and "write" in a wide range of message forms, especially considering the dominance of image-based electronic media. In fact, the powerful concept of literacy was the driving force that led leaders in the media literacy movement to adopt a comprehensive definition of media literacy as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and produce communication in a variety of forms" in a conference sponsored by the Aspen Institute in 1992. Put simply, media literacy includes the skills of literacy extended to all message forms, including those little black squiggles on white paper. Media literacy encompasses reading and writing, speaking and listening, critical viewing and the

ability to make your own messages using a wide range of technologies, including audio technology, billboards, cameras, camcorders, and computers. But media literacy is not a new subject area, and it is not just about television—it is literacy for the information age.

Educators find numerous reasons to introduce media literacy as part of the curriculum. Some see it as a tool to build relevance into contemporary education, building links between the classroom and the culture so that students will see how important themes and issues resonate in popular culture just as they do in the study of literature, history or social studies. Some see it as a citizenship survival skill, essential to be a thoughtful consumer and an effective citizen in a superhighway-driven media age. Some see it as a kind of protection for children against the dangers and evils engendered by the excesses of television, and they also see it as an antidote to manipulation and propaganda.

Others see media literacy as a new kind of English education, learning to appreciate and analyze ads and sitcoms and films with the same tools used to study poetry, the short story and the novel. And then there are those who see it as a way to give children the opportunity to tell their own stories and better understand the power of those who shape the stories of our culture and our times.

But there are other visions of media literacy, more narrow and more problematic. Unfortunately, some see media literacy as an option for low-performing, underachieving students whose interest can be piqued by television and nothing else. Some see it as a kind of vocational education, where kids can learn to make TV and head for careers like the grown-ups they see on the screen. Some see it as a chance to play with sophisticated electronic tools, like character generators, video toasters and wave-form monitors. Still others see media literacy as a way to make children aware of the web of "false consciousness" that capitalism has woven into our psyches. Some think media literacy is just about making "good choices" about what to watch or read. And many simply think the curriculum is already too crowded and teachers already too incompetent, burned out or overburdened to make room for media literacy. It is because American educators have so many diverse perspectives on the benefits and value of media literacy and the best strategies for

implementation within public education that its last 20 years of growth have been so slow.

Outside the United States, by contrast, media literacy has gained some measure of official status; within Great Britain, Canada, Australia, Scotland, Spain and other nations, it is a required part of language arts programs in grades seven through 12. Most of the training U.S. teachers now receive is strongly patterned after models provided by British scholars, including Len Masterman, David Buckingham, David Lusted and Cary Bazalgette, as well as British and Canadian teachers who have written about their experiences teaching media analysis and media production to young people.

With this nation's renewed interest in children and education in the 1990s, there have been significant signs of recent growth in the movement emerging in the United States. In the state of North Carolina, for example, media literacy is included in both the communication skills (English) and information skills curricula. In many communities, educators have begun the process of thinking seriously about expanding the concept of literacy to include media. While there was only one teacher-training program in media literacy in 1993, in 1994 there were 12 different programs held across the United States. In most communities, however, media literacy exists due to the energy and initiative of a single teacher, not because of a coordinated, communitywide programmatic plan of implementation. The community of Billerica, Mass., is developing a comprehensive media literacy program that reaches all students across the curriculum in grades K-12.

AT CIRCLE TIME in a kindergarten class, the teacher shows the children two samples of television programs: an ad and a cartoon. "How are these different?" she asks.

"The first one was shorter," says a little brown-haired girl.

"The first one had real people and real cereal," says a boy.

"The second one was a cartoon," says another.

The teacher notices that her students do not spontaneously use the word "ad," "commercial" or "advertising," so she introduces the words to them: Ads are messages that are trying to sell a product. Over

the next few days, they look at a few ads, and after each one, the teacher asks the children to describe how the ad tried to sell the product.

"By making it look real big," says one girl.

"By using music to make it exciting," says another. "By having a story with cartoon animals and birds."

Then the teacher invites a parent into the kindergarten to make a home video of the kindergarten. The parent tapes about 10 minutes of the morning class. At the end of the day, the children watch the tape and sit, transfixed in rapt attention by the familiar images of themselves and their classmates made novel by the camera's presence.

"Did this tape show everything that happened in our class today?" asks the teacher.

Heads nod in agreement. "Yes," they intone in unison.

"It showed us putting our coats on hooks."

"It showed Tim and Kimitha in the loft."

"Was there anything that happened in our class that was *not* shown?" the teacher asks again.

The children look thoughtful. Arthur raises his hand slowly. "I came in late today," he says. "It didn't show *me* putting my coat on the hook."

Gradually, a flurry of hands go up. All the children can think of things that weren't shown. The teacher carefully listens to all the responses and explains to the children that a camera can never show everything at a scene. She notes, "A camera can only ever show *part* of an event, and it's the person who uses the camera who decides what to show and what to leave out."

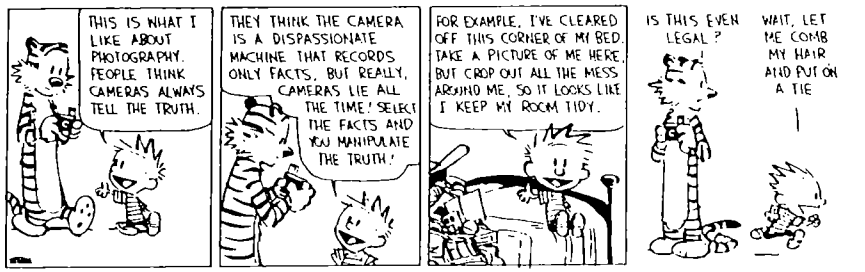
WHILE MEDIA PRODUCTION is not offered in every school, most have production facilities or equipment of some sort. Videotaping student sporting events and dramatic performances has been routine since the 1970s. According to teachers, it's coaches who often have the most modern video production equipment and playback facilities. And, of course, parents are out in force with their video cameras documenting school plays, recitals and all gatherings that highlight their children's genius.

Student-generated production activities are found less frequently in American schools but are more and more evident at the secondary level, where students, instead of reading the ubiquitous morning announcements over the PA system, may create their own morning news program. High school students make their own music videos, tape commercials for their school plays, perform satirical "Saturday Night Live" skits in after-school programs, deliver critiques of the new principal using computer publishing programs, and hand in class assignments (and college entrance essays) on videotape or via modem. Of course, student production in journalism and the performing arts has long been an important part of secondary education.

In a culture that values technology as the mark of progress and the completion of professional quality media programs as a sign of success, "doing stuff" with video (or better yet, with computers and video) is sometimes touted as cutting-edge education. It is for this reason that educators often jump on the media technology bandwagon. But student-based media production activities do not necessarily build media literacy skills. Sometimes, adults' preoccupation with media technology, and their own ego investment in the product, interferes with a child's engagement in the complex process of learning to create meaningful messages.

One young teacher working with 8- to 12-year-olds eagerly showed off the students' final videotape in a public screening at a private school's summer arts program. It was a satiric takeoff of "Planet of the Apes," with students taking the on-camera roles and reading lines obviously scripted by the teacher. The camera work, editing, sound effects and music selection were all clearly the work of the teacher, someone who was undoubtedly headed for graduate school in film production. Conversation with the children participating in the program revealed that they learned quite a bit about taking direction from a filmmaker, but little about the process and skills of filmmaking itself.

It's not surprising that in an educational environment that values product over process, media production classes (in both print and video) can become playgrounds for creative grown-ups who make all the important decisions about the construction of the school newspaper or class video project, then set young people on the task of finish-



ing the scut work. Many young people who are disillusioned or cynical about student journalism programs in high school point to their inability to take real responsibility for the choice of message content in the paper. Similarly, plenty of video magazine programs are produced by students who are coerced into making promotional messages for the sports program, the foreign-language program, or whatever programs the grown-ups approve. Such is more or less standard educational fare in our schools.

Such practices occur because to truly empower children and youth with the ability to design the content and form of their own messages would entail tremendous risk to the current educational system. The issues that concern our teen-agers today—sexuality, classism and racism, drug use, violence, the environment and the nation's future—are topics that most educators are unprepared to bring into the classroom. Teachers and parents in a community often find the voices of young people very uncomfortable to hear and nearly impossible to respond to.

ONE OF THE BIGGEST FAILURES of contemporary journalism education has been in defining its mission as the cultivation of interest in the profession, focusing on developing young people's interests in careers in journalism. This goal is far too narrow, considering the oft-expressed and imminent danger of losing the next generation of news consumers. Journalism educators must begin to carve out a larger and more productive goal, one that reaches all our children: helping young people develop the citizenship skills to be effective, skillful and critical news readers and viewers.

Such skills are essential for full participation in a democratic society, yet they are skills that few young people get the opportunity to develop. When newspapers are used in American classrooms, too often they are used for vocabulary practice and reading comprehension, and not to strengthen students' critical understanding of newsgathering practices, their reasoning or analytic skills.

As an effort to reform current educational practice, media literacy advocates explicitly aim to link the skills of analysis with student production activities, in many of the same ways that language arts educators link reading and writing as interdependent skills. But what exactly are the skills of analysis? And what kinds of media analysis are most appropriate for children of different ages? Most media literacy programs stress the following key concepts, adapted from British and Canadian educators:

• *Messages are constructed.* The construction process is invisible to the readers of newspapers or the viewers of television. Awareness of the choices involved in the making of media messages sensitizes readers and viewers to the subtle shaping forces at work—in the choice of photo or cutline in a newspaper, in the images, pacing and editing of a TV news program. Noticing the construction of a message helps one become a more critical, questioning reader and viewer—but this kind of noticing doesn't come naturally to the process of reading or watching TV. It is a learned behavior.

• *Messages are representations of the world.* The reason why media messages are so powerful is that viewers and readers depend on them for their understanding of the culture. One reason why children are thought to be more vulnerable to media influences is because they have less direct real-world experience to compare with the representations provided by television and mass media. Are police officers really like the guys on "Cops"? Are high school students really as cool as the ones on "Beverly Hills 90210"? Is our community really as dangerous and violent as it appears from reading the newspaper's Metro section? Understanding how media messages shape our visions of the world and our sense of ourselves is a central concept in media literacy.

• *Messages have economic and political purposes and contexts.* Understanding that mass media industries sell audiences to advertisers is a powerful new concept to many American adults, who are barely aware of how a newspaper can be delivered to the doorstep for 35 or 50 cents a day or how television can enter the home at no cost at all. Teaching this concept to young people, of course, can be sticky, for how you teach about it depends on your ideological perspective on advertising, market economics, the industrial revolution and late-20th century capitalism. Individuals employed by giant media companies might not feel comfortable with the idea of high school teachers and students analyzing their ownership patterns and acquisitions, looking critically at their annual reports and reading their trade magazines. But any meaningful critical discourse about media messages must include a careful and systematic examination of the economic and political contexts in which films, TV shows, newspapers and news programs are produced.

• *Individuals create meaning in media messages through interpretation.* While a U.S. family still may occasionally sit down to watch a TV program together, the meanings they derive from the program will differ. Based on contemporary scholarship in literature and the humanities that examines the intersection between the reader and the text as the source of meaning, this perspective focuses on recognizing and critically analyzing the pleasures and satisfactions that readers and viewers get from the experience of media consumption. For example, in one English class, a 10th-grade student submitted an essay on "The World Wrestling Federation," analyzing the powerful symbols of good and evil embedded in the setting, costume and music of the program, interpreting the typical impotence of the referee as a defense of vigilante justice, and describing his own comfort in knowing the good guy will always win. After reading this young viewer's thoughtful, creative work, who can say that WWF is trash television? While not being completely relativistic, media literacy advocates often refuse to line up with those individuals who have a more traditional perspective on children's TV, those who are very comfortable intoning the merits of public broadcasting and the evils

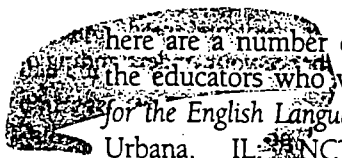
of popular, mass audience fare, championing the "good" shows and decrying the "bad" shows. It may not be so important what you watch, media literacy advocates say, but how you watch it.

FOR YEARS, MANY EDUCATORS (and some parents, too) have stood like ostriches, sticking their necks in the sand and trying very hard to ignore media culture. To many of us, television was the enemy of the fine arts, culture, history and all that is best about civilization. The reasoning went like this: If only we ignore television, our children will ignore it and all will be as it was before television.

Now that the culture is almost totally transformed by the compelling electronic and visual experiences that enter our living rooms (and nearly all other parts of our daily lives), the ostrich stance seems more and more ridiculous. It's time to face up to the media culture we have created and the media culture we have consumed. It's time that parents and teachers begin to help our children to embrace and celebrate the messages worth treasuring, to analyze and understand the economic and political forces that sustain the media culture, and to develop the skills and new habits we all need to think carefully and wisely about the messages we create ourselves and the abundant messages we receive.

The Simpsons Meet Mark Twain: Analyzing Popular Media Texts in the Classroom

Renée Hobbs



There are a number of reasons why the educators who wrote *Standards for the English Language Arts* (1996, Urbana, IL: NCTE/IRA) have adopted the term "nonprint texts" to describe works that are not traditional classroom resources in the K–12 classroom. "Nonprint texts" is an umbrella that includes everything from photographs to web sites, TV shows to popular music, but this term also covers and avoids mention of the point that many of these works are—dare we say it?—popular.

Over the years, *English Journal* pages have included reports from teachers who use popular films, music lyrics, advertising, magazine photographs, tabloid newspapers, cartoons, animation, and more in the process of stimulating students' speaking, writing, viewing, reasoning, and critical thinking skills. When these texts are used to strengthen students' reasoning, critical thinking, or communication skills, then teachers are engaged in the practice of media literacy.

Teachers who have used popular works in the classroom know that such works can generate some remarkable, vigorous, and sophisticated reasoning, rich conversations, and dynamic writing from young people. Many teachers have told me that the writing they assign on media topics is among the best they receive all year. It's a transformative experience for a young person to discover that the same skills used to discuss *The Tempest* can be applied to an episode of "The Wonder Years." Students who discover this in a powerful way chant a mantra that many teachers who employ media literacy have heard frequently: "I'll never watch TV the same way again!"

USING "THE SIMPSONS" IN ENGLISH CLASS

In the classroom I have employed an activity where students compare an episode of "The Simpsons" to some speeches and essays of Mark Twain, including selected passages from *Life as I Find It, Roughing It, The Gilded Age, A Connecticut Yankee,* and *The Prince and the Pauper.* It's an instructional strategy which invites students to consider the categorization of texts into "high" and "low" culture, and helps students build media literacy skills by applying tools of textual analysis to a popular program.

Because students have background knowledge about "The Simpsons," most can vividly describe the characters, the plot lines, and the controversies associated with the program. Some older students may remember the tensions associated with the "Bart as Underachiever" T-shirts which were popular among schoolchildren when the show first premiered in 1989. In the classroom, we create a list of all the contextual information we have about Simpson creator Matt Groening, the Simpson "home," FOX network, and the show's history, including specific information about how frequently old episodes and current ones are aired on local stations.

Discussing "The Simpsons" leads students to a better appreciation of a literary classic.

Since most students categorize "The Simpsons" as a cartoon, we begin by exploring the characteristics of this genre, discovering that the program's success has spawned a host of adult-oriented cartoons. We analyze the elements of the program opening, which show the family members in daily life, with Bart being rambunctious and slightly devious, Lisa being artistic and humane, Homer carelessly dropping nuclear waste throughout the town of Springfield, and Marge doing the grocery shopping. Students may write short paragraphs about the way characters' personalities are suggested by these brief visual fragments which serve as character introductions.

SOCIAL CRITICISM

We then consider elements of social criticism that are an essential component of many episodes of "The Simpsons." Working

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insanity plea; the use of financial credit; and lobbying and bribery in Washington. We discuss the importance of knowing facts about the political and social historical context of nineteenth-century America in order to interpret Twain's social criticism and discuss why the target lists we developed for Twain and Matt Groening share many elements in common.

This simple compare/contrast activity has enormous power when students are encouraged to stretch between the familiar to the unfamiliar, the present to the past, and between the now "high" literary culture to the "low" culture of popular television programming. Students are surprised and delighted to learn that, during his lifetime, Twain's work was not regarded as suitable material for use in schools, just as some educators today might not find "The Simpsons" a suitable classroom text.

While teachers are most comfortable discussing the major Twain literary works as literature, it's a valuable experience to expand the study of this major American writer by examining his life as a public entertainer, because through this process, students can appreciate the economic, political, and social history of nineteenth-century America and Twain's popular public identity, which was essential to his financial condition. An essential component of media literacy skills is the inclusion of the study of the economic issues in the fields of message production, including book publishing, past and present. It also helps students recognize that great works of literature are being created now, but that we might or might not be able to identify which specific television programs, comics, web sites, popular films, contemporary works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and theatre will speak powerfully to future generations about the cultural world of the 1990s.

WEB RESOURCES

Stephen Railton of the University of Virginia has created a web site, *Mark Twain in His Times* (http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/), which contains a collection of resources designed to illustrate how Twain's works were composed, defined, marketed, and reviewed by people during his lifetime. Students can read many literary works on-line, see posters and marketing materials that promoted Twain, read excerpts from the letters Sam Clemens wrote to his wife while on the circuit making humorous speeches, and see the reviews published in newspapers after his performances.

After looking at Twain's newspaper reviews and letters, one student brought in a Simpsons comic book where in a letter to readers, Simpsons' creator Matt Groening humorously comments on his experience appearing as a guest with Jay Leno, David Letterman, and Conan O'Brien on the late night talk show circuit. Another informed me that there is a Simpsons web site where readers can download an extensive bibliography of newspaper and magazine references to the program and an exhaustive collection of every episode, with details including the quotes Bart is made to write on the blackboard in the opening of each episode. Some episodes are documented with complete scripts (http://snpp.com).

CONCLUSION

In an interview on "60 Minutes" regarding media literacy teaching at the college level, media historian and English literary scholar David Marc commented on the value of engaging students in the process of applying their minds to the formal analysis of media texts. He noted that students bring an enormous reservoir of energy and interest in the works of contemporary media culture, and asked, "Should we squander that energy? Ignore it? Or use it towards the goal of building students' skills in analyzing the complex and powerful ways in which people create messages and meanings through communication?" If our goal is to prepare young people for effectively managing their lives in a media-saturated society, equipped with the critical and analytic skills that are essential for evaluating and appreciating information and entertainment, then for many teachers media literacy activities that build connections between popular culture and literature are a part of the answer to that question.

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Renee Hobbs

Teaching the Humanities in a Media Age

An innovative program helps teachers discover how to integrate media literacy concepts into high school humanities instruction.

Educators have a love-hate relationship with mass media and new communications technologies. Although they appreciate the instantaneous access to current events, the diversity of programming choices, and the ability to access information through the Internet, they also have important concerns about television, mass media, new technologies, and the rest of media culture.

Some teachers see how the rise in celebrity culture has changed the role models available for youth. Others are concerned about the emphasis on materialistic self-gratification or about how gender representation in the media affects the attitudes of developing adolescents. Some teachers are troubled by the anonymity fostered in Internet chat rooms or by the sensational and repetitive hype in newspapers, magazines, films, and television programs. Still other teachers are annoyed by the "entertain me" attitude that some students have, hating the idea that teachers compete with TV and other electronic media for their students' attention.

Nearly all agree that media culture has affected the work they do in the classroom. Nearly all agree that media culture is an ingredient in young people's lives that can be mobilized to support classroom learning.

In an essay about some of the "unspoken silences" in public education, Ted Sizer (1995) wrote,

> All of us know that the minds and hearts of our children are influenced in ever increasing ways by the information and attitudes gathered far outside the schoolhouse wall, from an insistent media and commerce that depends on it. . . . How the schools do, do not, or should connect with the newly insistent media world is rarely mentioned. We live in an information rich culture, one controlled by commerce, but we plan the reform of our educational system as though the schoolhouses were still wholly encapsulated units. (P. 83)

Increasingly, educators have begun to integrate media literacy activities into the context of the K–12 language arts, social studies, health, vocational education, or arts curriculum. In Texas, for example, 12th graders are expected to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in many forms, including the ability to compare and contrast among media genres and the ability to produce a short documentary. Many other states are beginning to recognize that the ability to critically analyze and create messages using media and technology are essential skills for life in a media-saturated society (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1996).

To explore how media analysis and production can be integrated into existing secondary curriculums, we developed an ongoing program especially for secondary-level teachers, The Re-Visioning Project. The program began with a week-long institute in August 1998, "Teaching Humanities in a Media Age," held at Clark University and supported by grants from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations and the AT&T Foundation. A diverse group of 50 teachers from school districts including Los Angeles, Atlanta, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and Worcester, Massachusetts, met for the institute and continues to meet in regional teams during this school year. Follow-up activities include regular study groups, opportunities for peer observation, and the sharing of lesson plans and samples of student work on a Web site.

The program was based on the essential features of rich professional development experiences (Darling-Hammond, 1998). First, we emphasized the activities of learning and teaching, including designing and planning lessons, evaluating student work, and developing curriculum. Second, we emphasized the analysis of practice, looking at and demonstrating sample lesson plans, critically reviewing video cases of other teachers' work, and reflecting on participants' own experiences with

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media and technology in the classroom. Third, we emphasized the development of a collaborative sharing of knowledge and experience, encouraging regional and school-based teams to engage in a multiyear program of continual learning.

A Pedagogy of Inquiry

Elizabeth Thoman, a faculty leader for the Re-Visioning Project, emphasized that in the secondary curriculum, media literacy is not so much a process of teaching students about what they don't know about media industries. Instead, media literacy is a pedagogy of inquiry, a process of asking questions about what we watch, see, and read. Often, media literacy in secondary schools is an elective, with units of instruction on newsmaking, advertising, violence, and so on. Notes Thoman,

> It is important to embed the basic ideas of media literacy into all the subject areas—especially in the humanities. By doing this, educators can ensure that all young people gain the skills to understand the media culture around them while simultaneously building skills in writing, reading, reasoning, and world knowledge.

Analyzing Nonfiction

Cheryl Chisholm, another faculty leader for the project, spearheads media literacy initiatives in Atlanta under the auspices of the National Black Programming Consortium. Chisholm emphasizes the importance of helping teachers explore ways of demonstrating how *point of view* shapes the facts we get about news events in contemporary society:

> It's important for high school students to understand how information is presented through lenses which may validate existing power relationships and inequities in the culture.

Such experiences help teachers look at the world from multiple perspectives and gain awareness of their own assumptions and values (Delpit, 1995).

In one sample lesson, teachers viewed three versions of the Philadelphia MOVE bombing story, from the TV newsmagazine *20/20*, a *Frontline* documentary, and the work of an independent filmmaker. After viewing the opening five minutes of each program, participants analyzed how the language, visual images, editing, and composition affect our interpretations of news events. By viewing different versions of the same event, teachers could identify the points of view that were missing from various messages. Media literacy skills can help high school students recognize how the news media may shape representations of "justified violence" in ways that reinforce power imbalances in our society.

To explore the uses of film and video in studying the past, participants viewed and discussed the Oliver Stone film *JFK*. Through an interactive process of asking questions and making inferences from information presented through language and images, teachers analyzed different Web sites about the assassination. They compared and contrasted sites that document the accuracies and inaccuracies in the Oliver Stone film. Teachers identified the different strategies that Web designers use to enhance the authenticity and authority of a message. With the increasing use of the Internet as a research tool by high school students, it is essential to identify a set of critical questions to help students analyze information and build their tolerance for complexity.

Angles of Vision

Catherine Gourley, another faculty leader, described the process of research for nonfiction books, based on her experience as an author of works for young adults. When authors use primary source materials, those primary sources are media messages—and they also need to be critically analyzed. Gourley demonstrated a lesson that compares two primary sources from the 19th century: a printed advertisement inviting men to sign aboard a whaling ship and a letter from a sailor aboard a whaling vessel. Noted Gourley,

> Media literacy is not just about television. Asking questions about print media invites students to get involved not just as decoders, but as critical thinkers—and that is an essential component of teaching reading at the secondary level.

A major topic of the summer institute was the role of the mass media in the development of personal, social, cultural, and ethnic identity. Karon Sherarts, a media education consultant from Minneapolis, led a session to help teachers appreciate the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives. According to Sherarts, including perspectives of individuals from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds can enrich students' understanding of voice and point of view and can help students better understand themselves and the world around them.

Frankenstein Through a Media Literacy Lens

Through a presentation of a model lesson with an analysis of the instructional process, participants explored how media literacy themes connect to the study of English literature. Participants discussed the themes of technology, gender, power, and control as relevant in 19th century Britain and how these issues relate to the role of mass media and technology in our lives today.

Small groups of teachers critically analyzed versions of the Mary Shelley novel *Frankenstein*. Some teams analyzed the novel; others looked at the documentary, a feature film, and Web sites on Frankenstein; still others reviewed comic book adaptations of the novel.

Another activity was designed to help students recognize and use their understanding of visual symbol systems. Teachers viewed projections of the covers of 10 comic books based on *Frankenstein* from the past 50 years. Teams of participants reviewed the covers carefully, looking for visual clues about the time period in which they were created and placing them in chronological order. Teachers discovered that Frankenstein of the 1950s resembles Charles Addams's *New Yorker* cartoons, whereas in the early 1960s, Frankenstein looks distinctly Western in orientation, with chaps and a cowboy hat in a desert landscape. By

the late 1990s, Frankenstein has tattoos and body piercings.

Creating media messages provides opportunities for hands-on problem solving that, in turn, promotes deeper analysis. Teams of teachers designed half-hour animated television programs, using one of the Frankenstein comic book covers as the visual representation of their character. They determined the target audience for the program, created a title, and wrote a one-line "log line" of the episode's plot. Using various dimensions of characterization, they wrote about different components of their Frankenstein character.

After completing their brainstorming, team members presented their ideas as a pitch, a short persuasive presentation used to sell a television program to a network. All these components were subject to rigid time pressures and deadlines, which media industries routinely face. The electricity was palpable as teachers brainstormed, played, laughed, argued, and wrote out their plans for their first episode of a new animated television show featuring Frankenstein. According to Kathleen Tyner (1998),

> The goal of student production is not self-expression, nor vocational job readiness for future jobs in media industries, although these may be important by-products of production in the classroom. . . . The primary emphasis of hands-on production is to inform analysis. (P. 200)

When High Schools Get Media Attention

Many educators have acquired their attitudes about the mass media as a result of receiving media attention, both wanted and unwanted. Re-Visioning faculty leader Frank Dawson, a former media executive and now an English teacher at Crenshaw High School in Los Angeles, shared an experience faced by students and faculty when the media descended on the school. ESPN featured the school when it scheduled its first night football game since a drive-by shooting at a game years before caused the cancellation of the evening schedule. After viewing the ESPN story, teachers shared their perceptions of the reality represented in the media, the information omitted from the story, and the personal experience of being reported on. Considering how the media stereotypes urban high schools in particular, and high schools in general, teachers recognized the ways in which media producers control how we see the world and how parents and community leaders see high schools.

Photo courtesy of Renee Hobbs

Literacy for the Information Age

Many educators are beginning to recognize the powerful connections among literacy theory, critical pedagogy, and principles of constructivist learning. Scholars called the New London Group advocate literacy teaching that encourages students to become social change agents by using various symbol systems of communication. They recognize that the skills of literacy operate within the historical and social contexts in which people send and receive messages in a culture (New London Group, 1996). The Re-Visioning Project is one effort to empower high school teachers with greater understanding of ways to build students' critical, reflective connections between the world of the school and the media culture that they experience in their daily lives.

At the conclusion of the institute, teachers from Concord, New Hampshire, reported on their school district's decision to integrate media literacy into the high school by revising the grade 11 language arts/English curriculum to emphasize communications/media. According to principal Tim Mayes,

> It's vital that the skills of critical analysis, reasoning, and communication be connected to the world in which we all live—and that is now a world where media and technology play a major role.

The rigorous yearlong curriculum for the more than 400 11th graders at Concord High School includes the study of nonfiction and fiction, film, video, advertising, print and television news, as well as persuasive and business communication.

Recognizing the deep and varied connections between students' experience of the mass media and the essential themes of the arts and humanities can be energizing. Said one teacher who participated in the Re-Visioning Project's summer institute,

> I learned that after 28 years of teaching I can become excited about new ideas—it's as if I were just beginning. ■

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What is Media Literacy?

"In more and more classrooms in the United States, educators are beginning to help students acquire the skills they need to manage in a media-saturated environment, recognizing that in its broadest sense, literacy must include the ability to skillfully 'read' and 'write' in a wide range of message forms, especially considering the dominance of image-based electronic media. In fact, the powerful concept of literacy was the driving force that led leaders in the media literacy movement to adopt a comprehensive definition of media literacy as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and produce communication in a variety of forms" in a conference sponsored by the Aspen Institute in 1992.

Put simply, media literacy includes the skills of literacy extended to all message forms, including those little black squiggles on white paper. Media literacy includes reading and writing, speaking and listening, critical viewing, and the ability to make your own messages using a wide range of technologies, including audio technology, billboards, cameras, camcorders, and computers. However, media literacy is not a new subject area and it is not just about television: it is literacy for the information age."

--Renee Hobbs, *Media Studies Journal*,1994

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RENEE HOBBS

Deciding What to Believe in an Age of Information Abundance: Exploring Non-Fiction Television in Education

This paper explores the crucial but largely unconscious decisions that we make each day as we decide which information is believable and truthful. By looking carefully at the ways in which some television messages can be made to seem authentic and credible, teachers can improve students' critical viewing skills through dynamic, interactive learning activities that invite students to ask, "How do I decide what to believe?"

Who hasn't sat in a darkened classroom, listening to the "beep" of the filmstrip or the clacking of the take-up reel, or basking in the blue glow of the television monitor? For nearly 70 years, non-fiction and documentary programs have been used in American public schools. In a recent survey of high school teachers, 22% claimed to use television programs frequently, and teachers also report that more than 50% of the video materials used for instructional purposes were obtained via taping programs at home off the air (Public Broadcasting Service, 1997).

As a result of cable television and the increasing number of choices on television, the elementary school may no longer be the first place where some children encounter television non-fiction. There has been an explosion in the quantity of non-fiction materials available to children in the home, including news programs (*Nick News*), documentaries (*Where in the World?*), and animal programs (*Krafft's Creatures*). However, this increased quantity of educational and informational programming does not ensure that children will be exposed to it. In particular, urban schoolteachers have reported that children have less and less familiarity with

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informational messages of any sort — television news, newspapers, documentaries, animal and nature programming. In an age of information abundance, television can be an escape from reality. In many families, non-fiction programming is not a part of how television is used in the home.

When elementary or secondary teachers use documentaries or other non-fiction materials, they often identify it as "enrichment," resources that enhance their coverage of subject areas, particularly language arts, social studies, history, science, and geography. This often leads to the belief that school-sanctioned media messages are unproblematic — that, like a textbook, the information is just "there." But just as scholars and educators are beginning to identify the biases, myths, and uses of propaganda in textbooks (Loewen), it is critically important that teachers open up a range of questions in the classroom that invite students to become more reflective about the largely unconscious process of deciding what to believe.

Perhaps the fact that non-fiction programs are perceived as believable and trustworthy is the best reason of all to subject them to the process of critical inquiry. Determining the truth value of information has become increasingly difficult in an age of increasing diversity and ease of access to information. While the concept of truth and its uncertain and changing value(s) have been problematized by philosophers, historians, and scholars throughout all of human hisory, this paper presents a more modest and practical approach to the questions about evaluating the truth claims of media messages.

In this paper, we review a number of classroom strategies that teachers have used to examine the construction of authority and authenticity in non-fiction and documentary television programming. Careful analysis of deciding what to believe about non-fiction television can open up opportunities to explore parallel decision-making processes about what we choose to believe when we encounter information in the newspaper, on the radio, in film, from friends and colleagues, and on the Internet. Exploring the domain of non-fiction television can inspire discussion of some of the humanities' important questions about truth, intentionality, meaning, and interpretation in ways that are relevant to young people.

What is Non-Fiction Television?

Many students are familiar with the word "documentary," and teachers are aware of the existing attitudes about beliefs their students have about this genre of film and television programming. By middle school, students can usually identify the specific broadcast and cable channels that feature documentaries, and some will recognize that most documentary programs are not designed for a youth audience. While many students enjoy documentaries, others can have negative attitudes, and label these programs as "boring," "slow," and "tedious." When students are asked, "Who watches documentaries?" they often identify teachers as a target audience. Social class differences are evident in students' background knowledge about documentaries, since students from low-income environments may have less personal home-viewing experience with documentaries than those from middle- and upper-class households.

When Scottish filmmaker John Grierson defined the documentary near the turn of the century as "the creative interpretation of actuality," he recognized that documentaries are creative representations of actual people, groups and events. According to Medhurst, "Grierson established the documentary film as the type dealing with the 'creative treatment of actuality.' For Grierson, both the 'creative' and the 'actuality' dimensions were crucial for a proper understanding of the documentary form" (p. 185).

Under this broad definition, we may also consider reality-based shows like *America's Most Wanted*, *Rescue 911*, and *Cops* to be "creative interpretations of actuality." While many students claim to find "school TV" boring, non-fiction programs are quite popular with young American students in their home viewing environments. Reality-based genre programs have large audiences of pre-adolescent and young teens. These programs are compelling and provocative, purporting to represent the lives of real people in dramatic situations often involving accidents or violence, using a format that often includes recreations, simulations, and manipulation of images and sounds. These programs are reshaping the conventions and routines of both the news and the documentary producer. For young people, these are the present-day, non-school based documentaries, a "creative interpretation of actuality."

Why the national obsession with this sort of voyeuristic entertainment? According to Segal, "The preponderance of these shows is also related to the bottom line: they are extremely inexpensive to produce. Why engage a group of talented writers and producers to make intelligent and exciting TV when it's more profitable to dip into the endless pool of human grief?" (p. 56). Clearly, there are distinct pleasures associated with watching "real" human grief as opposed to fictionalized human grief, as evidenced by the ratings for this disturbing form of entertainment. This phenomenon also explains the recent spate of reality-based programs, including *Most Terrible Car Crashes*, *Wildest Police Videos*, and the like.

Teachers can explore students' understanding of the complex determinations involved in assessing the "realism" of a media message through a classroom activity that explores the boundaries of the genres of non-fiction and fiction television. The activity invites students to place various types of programs on a continuum that ranges from "more real" to "less real." Students quickly discover that, while there is broad consensus about the realism of some programs, others do not fit comfortably on the continuum. Is a televised sports game more real or less real than a game show? Is a newsmagazine program like *20/20* less real than a network sports program? What makes fiction often seem more "real" than non-fiction? By problematizing the concept of realism, this activity invites students to reflect on how much we use genre-based expectations in assessing whether a media message is true or not.

What is the Producer's Purpose?

Because the documentary has a kind of intellectual authority as a "serious" genre in film and television, many viewers assume that the documentary is neutral or objective. But this fallacy is dangerous precisely because it leads away from critically analyzing a message. Since all messages express a point of view, the simplest way to explore the concept of point-of-view is to identify the constellation of motives which drive a producer to create a documentary: to inform, to educate, to entertain, to persuade, for self-expression, for profit.

Identifying the motives of documentary filmmakers has a distinguished intellectual history, as Erik Barnouw first established the enterprise in his landmark history of the genre by identifying each chapter of the book by a label which suggests motive, like "Explorer," "Visionary," and so forth. In his book, *Theorizing Documentary*, Renov identifies similar rhetorical and aesthetic functions of non-fiction arts, but omits the functions of entertainment and profit because he is primarily concerned with independent documentary productions.

Occasionally, teachers make use of the concepts of "bias" and "ideology" to analyze the producer's purpose. Because a producer works in a social, political, and economic context that sets constraints on a program's content, tone, and stylistic elements, there are enormous variations within this genre. Documentaries which are produced in Great Britain through the BBC are usually quite different from those produced by U.S. commercial programming, which differ from independently produced documentaries. In the United States, many people associate the word "documentary" with the particular characteristics which mark the non-fiction programs produced by public television. But in exploring the widest range of documentaries which represent "creative interpretations of actuality," enormous differences are apparent. These differences are more systematic than simply those of stylistic or individual differences between filmmakers. Educators can use the study of the documentary to reveal how technological and economic forces in the broadcasting industry have shaped the representation of historical fact. Rapping notes:

> The contrast between the 1950s documentary approach of *See It Now* and that of contemporary reports is telling. As video technology grew more sophisticated, the triumph of style over content was heightened. This allowed the networks to apply a variety of aesthetically moving and impressive techniques to serious topics. On the other hand, the range of views examined and the depth of the examinations have not changed as much as sometimes seems the case. . . . Documentaries

> now serve the somewhat different purpose of expounding on, and so justifying, policies already in place. They rarely challenge hegemony, they explain it. (p. 117)

How Does the Producer's Purpose Shape the Content?

During the 1950s and 1960s, many documentary producers believed that it was possible for the camera to record "raw" reality, to reduce the intervention of the filmmaker's presence and give viewers "the feeling of being there." Lightweight film equipment and the growing use of the camera as an instrument for scientific observation led to the development of documentary techniques called Direct Cinema, or "cinema verité," films that claimed to objectively capture experience without the use of dramatic structure or narration (Winston; Nichols, 1991). But the goal of capturing "reality" without the intervention of the filmmaker proved to be an illusive and nonsensical goal. The camera must be directed by a human eye and mind, and every choice about where to point the lens is a human decision which shapes the program content (Tobias). Although a documentary can authentically reproduce some aspects of actual experience, a documentary cannot ever be perfectly objective.

Teachers have used student-created media production projects to help students appreciate the creative shaping involved in the construction of a documentary or non-fiction work. In one activity, the teacher breaks the class into six teams, giving each team one of the six motives: to inform, persuade, entertain, expres oneself, teach, or make profit. Using their motives to drive the brain-storming, students identify their target audience, develop a program concept, list the sources who will be featured on their program, and describe some of the important locations and visual images that will be shown.

In one classroom I observed, teams of students were developing six different documentaries about food poisoning. One team developed a documentary about food preparation procedures in the fast food industry, with behind-the-scenes images from MacDonald's and Burger King. Another team, whose purpose was to inform,

used a startling opening featuring stomach-churning shots of midway rides at the state fair to hook viewers into a investigation of salmonella poisoning at the fair. Another team developed a concept that used high-profile celebrities and musicians like Whoopi Goldberg and Seal to tell stories about their food poisoning experiences in order to provide facts and lessons in an entertaining way. By working collaboratively to create a specific message to suit these different motives, students were reflecting on the complex decision-making involved in the choices about what language, sound, or images to use in creating media. It was clear that these students were gaining some insight on how viewers' sensitivity to producer's motivation affects the process of deciding what information is more or less credible.

While it is possible to identify the journalistic "line" or "angle" of a documentary, the structural logic of a work is often created in such a subtle manner that it escapes detection until after the work is completed (Medhurst). Multiple viewings and structural analysis of the choices made by the filmmaker are an important process that teachers can use to help students analyze how the producer's purpose shapes the content.

How are Image, Sound, and Language Used to Manipulate the Message?

As a word, "manipulation" has a bad reputation. But the original meaning of the word manipulation comes from the French word for "handful." When we examine the meanings listed in the dictionary, manipulation means "to operate with the hands in a skillful manner." But it also means to control or play upon "by artful, unfair or insidious means to serve one's own purpose." Manipulation is a necessary part of the creation of film and television. You have to handle images and words — sort them, organize them and put them together — in order to make a message meaningful.

Handling language is a complex affair in the production of the documentary, because the language is largely designed to be heard, not read. A documentary producer has to write a script for the voice over, conduct interviews, and edit them to select only the most relevant and useful soundbites. The most challenging part of

the process consists of organizing the language to present information in a sequence which is compelling.

The producer's ability to control another person's voice — their language, their presentation of self — is an area of documentary production that raises significant ethical issues for consideration by students. For while the subject of the interview controls what he or she chooses to say, the producer can, through editing, reshape the ideas the subject presents. And since the producer controls the choice of language and image, a producer can often make a individual look strong or weak, believable or phony.

Students often first encounter this when they create a video message as part of a school project, and this phenomenon represents an important "teachable moment" when it arises. In one classroom, students conducted an interview with the school principal, and discovered in the editing room that they could make the man look like a fool pretty easily, just by selecting some phrases and ideas and omitting others. The question, "What responsibility does a producer have in representing a source?" acquires depth and meaning when it happens in the context of real-world media production activities.

Language is used to recontextualize the meaning of images used in a documentary, to lead the viewer towards a "correct" or "preferred" interpretation of an image. I saw one simple exercise used by a teacher to illustrate the producers' power and responsibility in shaping a program by the selection of language. The teacher gave students a long (five minute) video interview of an individual, along with a printed transcript of the tape. She asked students to select the one sentence that most closely captured the main thrust of the longer talk. Students made widely different choices, and classroom conversation centered around why students made the choices they did. The teachers then invited students to select a sentence that would make the source look more or less favorable to illustrate the power of the producer in shaping another person's representation.

And of course the camera itself, while it captures some aspects of perception, shapes *images* just by choosing what to focus on, and by the very look of the image itself. Camera techniques like the close up, the pan, the angle shot, the freeze frame, the time lapse, and the aerial view all influence our perceptions of a scene. Lighting, activity within the frame, the pace and rhythm of the

editing all work to influence viewers' emotional responses to the image. A producer and editor can create feelings of excitement, exhaustion or paranoia by using many different images of a single scene to make something look more exciting and interesting. This kind of manipulation is increasingly necessary because contemporary television programming has nurtured a set of expectations in viewers that everything be visually dynamic (Tobias). Perhaps this is a "natural" bias of film and television, or maybe the public has simply been trained to expect that television present a fast-paced and ever-changing visual display.

Often, a producer steps in front of the camera to adjust reality to make it more suitable for the demands of production, to create a more compelling image, to tell a better story. Such practices are common in documentary production. Manipulation of events in front of the camera is still considered inappropriate in the context of television news, as exemplified by the 1993 NBC *Dateline* fake of an explosion in a GM truck to illustrate the design problem in the vehicle (Pavlik). When this story was covered in the news, journalists tended to represent producers' actions in ways that made them appear lazy, sloppy, or unethical.

But re-enactments and the inclusion of fictional elements in documentary have been part of the art form since it was invented. When Robert Flaherty created *Nanook of the North*, he wanted to get a portrait of life inside an igloo. But life inside an igloo is dark, too dark for primitive film cameras. So Flaherty asked the Inuit to build half an igloo and pretend to live in it, so that he could get the shots of sleeping, eating, and getting dressed that he needed (Marshall).

Does it matter whether the producer manipulates events in front of the camera or creates fictional events to represent real events? As more and more complex manipulation of time, space, and reality become commonplace, people need the skills to detect this manipulation and understand why it is used in order to evaluate the messages purporting to represent the world outside our immediate experience. For young people, the best way to understand the ethical issues inherent in the manipulation of image, sound, and language is to experiment with their combination and discover the consequences for themselves (Tyner).

In one school I visited, a teacher told me an interesting story of a team of 9th grade students who were creating a video documentary about the pollution in the pond near their school. On the day of the taping, students arrived at the pond but couldn't find any visible examples of trash. One student rooted around in a nearby trash can and ran up to the teacher. "Could we put this empty Coke can in the shot?" he asked. "I know that this pond usually has a lot of garbage in it, but just not today."

The request generated a major discussion among students in the class, and they asked a number of questions that the teacher didn't know how to answer. "Don't TV journalists change things a little bit to get a more dramatic shot?" asked one. "Would we be lying if we put the can in the pond to illustrate the pollution?" wondered another student. Another inquired, "Would we be lying if we found the garbage at the pond's edge but moved the garbage to show all of it in the same shot?" The teacher recognized the opportunity, and videotaping stopped as they spent the rest of the period exploring whether or not an image has to be literally true in order to tell the truth. This is one of the most difficult and powerful questions in the humanities, and when students can wrestle with the question in terms of their own lives and their own actions, it has far more resonance than when the teacher presents the idea in a lecture.

What Techniques Are Used to Enhance the Authenticity of the Message?

As we have shown already, the word "real" is rather complex when it comes to the study of film and television. Documentary film and television derive their power because the images they provide seem authentic and believable. As Postman notes, "Television is our culture's principal mode of knowing about itself. Therefore — and this is the critical point — how television stages the world becomes the model for how the world is properly to be staged" (p. 104).

But the concept of "authenticity" is itself a construction. As Bill Nichols writes, "Our perception of the real is constructed for us by codes and conventions" (1991, p. 189). The most common visual codes which communicate authenticity include the use of

archival footage, the hand-hand camera, the re-enactment, and the use of time-space conflation. Once recognized by viewers, these techniques are easy to spot. When these are identified, viewers consider a wider range of strategies for evaluating a message's authenticity. For example, viewer may assess the backgrounds and qualifications of the experts, the experience of the producer, the use of research evidence, and the internal consistency of the message to evaluate the believability of a message.

It can be an uncomfortable process for teachers to explore their own assumptions about facts they ordinarily do not question (Tyner). As new approaches to teaching history and social studies emphasize historical fact as a construction, teachers are invited to create learning environments where "history," "data," and "information" are concepts which are continually open to critical inquiry and revision (Davidson and Lytle). What are the codes and conventions that communicate believability? The use of archival film footage is one of the most commonly used techniques to enhance authenticity, because the footage encourages us to assume that, because the images are old, they are true (Nichols, 1993). For example, in *In Search of the Edge*, a marvelous "fake" documentary, the program uses old home movie footage, with the grainy texture of 1930's newsreel film, to introduce a research scientist who purportedly discovered that the Earth was flat. The convention of black-and-white archival footage automatically leads viewers to believe that the character is a real person. Only by asking the iterative question, "How do you know what you know?" can students explore the assumptions about believability that are embedded in the use of this technique.

The public's exposure to amateur video and hidden camera techniques also have altered our expectations of what "real" looks like. People's expectations about what images are authentic are influenced by camera techniques that include the shaky camera, the grainy image, the use of time/date stamp. Now, media professionals have made advertising, documentaries, and even fictional programming using these techniques, imitating the look of authentic style to grab viewers' attention. One teacher I know invited students to collect a range of examples of print, film, and video images that used a "homemade" visual style. Students came in with examples

from commercials for gum, sneakers, film, and they found examples from news, reality TV, entertainment news, situation comedies, and dramas. The iconography of amateur video has transcended genres, according to students in this class, because "the wild movement grabs your attention."

Re-enactments are another visual convention for communicating authenticity, an irony not lost on the high school students who wrestle with the paradox of whether you can "make something *seem* more real by faking it." One art teacher I know builds on the connection between re-enactments and other visual conventions that artificially mimic the perceptual process, like perspective drawing. Inauthentic imagery is widely used in the construction of documentary, and often extends the emotional power of a work. For example, when making a program about the Middle Ages, a producer will have no access to authentic film or video of the time period and may need to develop creative ways to produce compelling visual images that convey the mood of the times. Close examination of documentaries which make use of re-enactments, for example James Burke's series, *The Day the Universe Changed*, is a valuable resource to help students see the creative and complex ways in which authenticity is constructed using a range of techniques.

Documentaries are at their most effective when they appear to be fair, neutral, and unbiased. Medhurst has identified techniques that have been used by producers to claim objectivity:

1) introduce widely shared cultural values as a premise that are shown to be violated by the documentary's antagonist;
2) use the technique of historical recall, where several people conjure up from memory details of the past;
3) call attention to details of place and person, that by their naturalness, bear testimony to the filmmaker's integrity;
4) choose a particular type of on-camera host, that because of past associations, can assure the audience of the normative value of the report. (p. 185)

Students can identify these techniques and closely examine their usage in the context of news, documentary, and other non-fiction forms. This experience changes the nature of the viewing experience in ways that may transfer to the world outside the classroom.

What Techniques Are Used to Enhance the Authority of the Message?

Many documentaries use experts or authorities whose explanations, claims, and presentation of information serve as the substance of the program. "Though striving to appear fair, neutral and objective, the privileged narrator "knows" more than the audience and successfully communicates that superior knowledge through intonation, interpretation, and assertion" (Medhurst, p. 187). However, the documentary also uses a number of techniques to represent the "expert" visually, to communicate to the viewer that we are watching an individual whose ideas have credibility. Producers take advantage of viewers' expectations about how experts should look, how they should sound, in what kinds of locations they should be situated, and even how they should look at the camera. "Our willingness to agree with what is said [by experts or witnesses] relies to a surprisingly large extent on rhetorical suasion and documentary convention. The implicit rule in documentaries is 'Trust those who speak to the camera unless given reason to do otherwise' " (Nichols, 1991, p. 157).

Students can be invited to look at how experts are framed visually in television news and documentary production to determine what the "rules" are for the visual representation of experts. On *60 Minutes*, students can identify several kinds of "head shots" that are used in framing sources, with an extreme close-up commonly used when sources are being critically attacked by the hosts.

In another exercise, students take a non-fiction program and count the demographic characteristics of the experts. Who gets to be an expert? Experts who are middle-aged, white, well-educated men are the mainstays of the television news and documentary programming. When teachers invite students to consider the reasons

why these patterns exist, students respond in various ways. For some subject areas and topics, they could be the only available people who knew about the topic. For some producers, the choice of male experts could be unconscious effort to find "credible types," still associated with white men. Could the dominance of older white males, in subtle ways, shape people's expectations about who is entitled to be an expert? This is an essential question to explore with secondary students.

Exploring the convention of the "voice of God" narrator affords another opportunity for critical analysis. This narrator, always invisible, speaks in a voice that is flat and unemotional, as though the "facts" speak for themselves. "The narrative voices enjoy the privilege that accompanies suspension of disbelief" (Medhurst, p. 62). Often, a teacher can dig up an old documentary film or tape with a "voice of God" narrator, and invite students to listen and to identify the assumptions, values, and interpretive language embedded in the narration.

What Techniques Are Used to Involve or Engage the Viewer in the Message?

One of the most important challenges faced by a producer of a news or documentary program is how to get the viewer involved in the program. Michael Curtin has called this "packaging reality," the process of giving non-fictional messages a dramatic shape (Ohmann). Getting viewers' attention and keeping their attention is one of the classic concerns of all media makers.

The need to monitor our environment to search for visual change, especially changes that relate to sex and aggression, has been essential for our survival. Keeping a keen eye out to monitor sex and aggression is one of those skills that has been biologically useful to the maintenance of humans as social creatures. The driving force behind most commercial programming is ratings, and programs which feature sex, violence, children, animals, and UFOs (the staples of sensationalism) will attract viewers. (For example, the Discovery Channel has found that large animals, especially sharks and others that can eat you, generate the highest ratings.) These five elements embedded in most commercial television programs have been

recognized as highly effective in attracting and maintaining attention when viewers have a lot of programming choices. Students can be invited to look for these elements in top-rated shows, to discover the predictability that is built in to the construction of a hit program.

Another powerful technique to attract audience attention is the use of narrative structure. Stories have long been recognized as the most powerful way to organize ideas. By focusing on heroes, victims, and villains, producers can increase the likelihood that viewers will be engaged with the topic. However, the use of typical story elements in non-fiction can also distort and constrict the complexity of an issue. Nichols notes:

> Most documentary films also adopt many of the strategies and structures of narrative (though not necessarily those of the popular entertainment film). . . . [M]any "social problem" fiction films are made with as civic-minded and socially responsible a purpose as many documentaries. Thus documentary fails to identify any structure or purpose of its own entirely absent from fiction or narrative. The terms become a little like our everyday, but unrigorous, distinction between fruits and vegetables. (1991, p. 36)

When students can appreciate that both fiction and non-fiction genres are in the business of storytelling, they gain insight on the social constructedness of messages in the cultural environment, and appreciate the ways in which people can effectively communicate with each other.

Television has an important influence on our perception of reality and our understanding of the world around us. Because children and young people have so much less experience with the real "real world," it hard for them to make good judgments about whether the life of a police officer is accurately represented by *Cops*. Young people who watch a lot of TV often find that TV's "reality" seems more real that their own day-to-day experience.

Helping young people develop reasoning skills about the constructed nature of TV is the essence of media literacy education. Parents and teachers need to make this an integral part of a child's education, both in school and at home.

Television producers also expect that viewers are media literate. According to TV producer Susan Fales, "The audience has a responsibility to distinguish between history and fiction, truth and fantasy. If someone can't tell the difference between the Civil War and *Glory* then they deserve to be ignorant" (Braxton and Welkos). With attitudes like this well-entrenched among members of the Hollywood community, viewers need to be increasingly vigilant about deciding what to believe among the many choices of programs we see on TV. Most importantly, we need to reshape the way we use media and technology, so that we are actively involved in questioning the messages we receive.

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The Seven Great Debates in the Media literacy Movement

by Renée Hobbs

In recent years, there has been an explosion of educational practices and curriculum resource materials that make use of the broad concept of *media literacy*. Media literacy has been defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms (Aufderheide, 1993). It is a term used by a growing number of scholars and educators to refer to the process of critically analyzing and learning to create one's own messages in print, audio, video, and multimedia. Its emphasis is on the learning and teaching of these skills through using mass media texts in primarily school-based contexts (Alvarado, Gutch, & Wollen, 1987; Brown, 1991; Hobbs, 1994a; Piette, 1997). Media literacy, though, is a concept whose broad definition and range of applications lead to diverse approaches, creating some intriguing conflicts and tensions. Tyner (1992) has drawn parallels between the emerging media literacy movement in the United States and the parable of the blind men and the elephant, each of whom senses a tiny part of the whole. 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. Illustrating the antagonism generated by this diversity, at the founding convention of the Cultural Environment Movement in St. Louis in April 1996, Bob McCannon, a leader of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project, noted that, "Whenever media literacy educators get together, they always circle the wagons—and shoot in!"

Does the wide diversity of perspectives among educators serve as a source of strength for the emerging media literacy movement, or does it suggest the essentially problematic nature of recent attempts to define and implement such an expansive and unstable concept as media literacy?

The tensions that are generated when media educators come together may limit the ability of educators to collaborate on projects of significant national or

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Renée Hobbs (EdD, Harvard University, 1985) is an associate professor of communication at Babson College and is director of the Media Literacy Project at Clark University's Hiatt Center for Urban Education. She teaches courses in media studies and offers teacher education programs in media education. She would like to acknowledge Sarah Michaels and Bob Neill of Clark University for their support of her research during the 1996–97 academic year.

Renee Hobbs
Director, Media Literacy Project

Renee Hobbs is one of the nation's leading authorities in media education. Professor Hobbs developed the Harvard Institute on Media Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1993. She created KNOW TV, a curriculum for secondary level teachers on the critical analysis of documentary television, which won the Golden Cable ACE Award in 1995. Hobbs is a dynamic presenter and is frequently called upon as a speaker for conventions and conferences.

Media Literacy Project Associates

A team of experienced education professionals is available to deliver workshops and offer staff development and education programs. Project associates are graduates of the Felton Media Literacy Scholars Program, the nation's leading leadership development and training program in media education.

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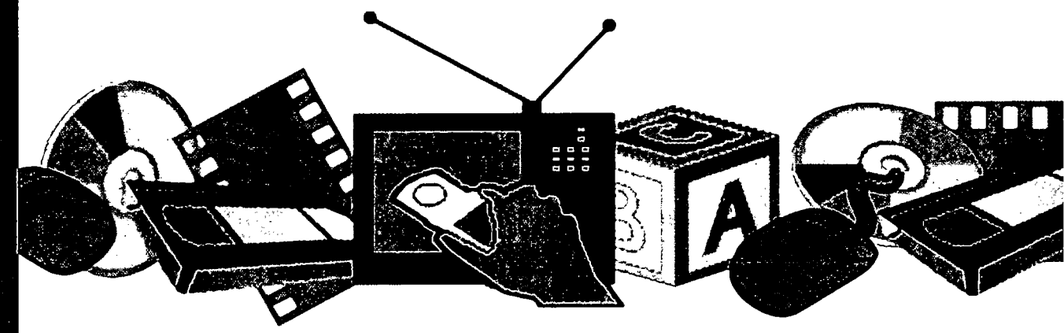


Media Literacy ***(n.)***

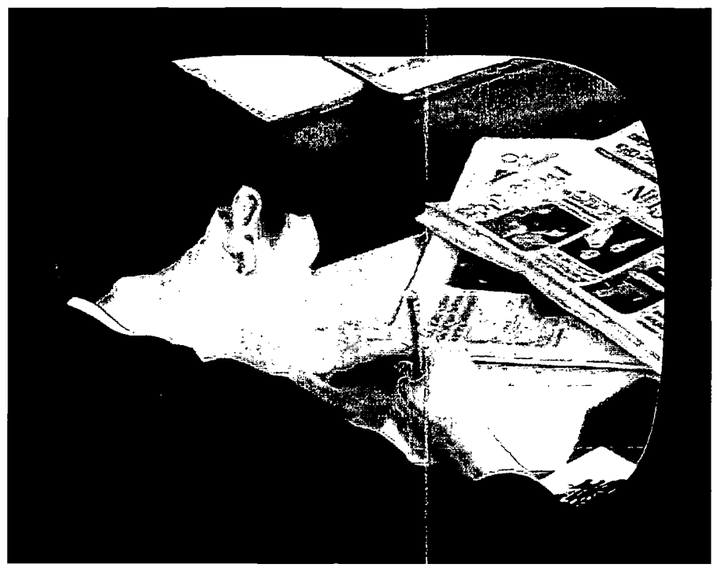
1: the process of asking questions about what you watch, see and read **2:** literacy skills applied to mass media culture and information technology messages **3:** a necessary skill for life in a media saturated society

The Media Literacy Project

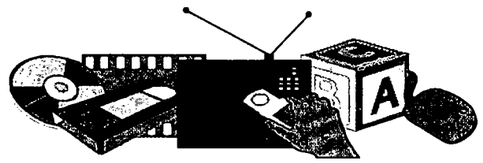
Our Mission

The mission of the Media Literacy Project is to improve the quality of K-12 education by strengthening young people's ability to ask questions about what they watch, see, and read.

The Media Literacy Project develops media education curriculum materials, provides innovative and high quality teacher education programs, develops parent and community outreach programs, and initiates research to help build a systematic understanding of how an expanded conceptualization of literacy can improve education.



Examples of Curriculum Development Projects



- **KNOW TV**, award-winning curriculum materials for teaching the critical analysis of documentary and non-fiction television
- **Tuning in to Media**, a half-hour videotape introduction to media literacy education
- **Messages and Meaning**, curriculum on using the newspaper in the classroom to promote critical thinking skills
- **Deciding What to Believe**, activities for exploring the authority and authenticity of internet web sites
- **STAND** (Students Taking Action, Not Drugs) curriculum activities for helping students to create their own video anti-drug public service announcements
- **TV Smarts**, three short video segments to promote discussion for children and teens

Surviving and Thriving in the Age of Information

There can be no doubt about it: we are in the middle of a revolution which is transforming the nature of knowledge and information.

We live in a world where facts are dynamic, not static and fixed; where there is a vastly expanded set of choices regarding information and entertainment; where immediacy and instantaneousness are changing our expectations about knowledge; and where skillful manipulation of the visual media both enhances our ability to learn and makes us more vulnerable to false knowledge.

The convergence of technologies of communication has created new kinds of expression, information, and entertainment, new processes and forms of scholarly inquiry, and new ways of learning about the world around us.

Media literacy is a new and expanded vision of communication which takes into account the more complex environment in which we now all must manage, a world in which information comes from many sources and in many forms.

The Media Literacy Project Professional Development Programs

The Felton Media Literacy Scholars Program is a competitive program offered annually for a small group of talented educators, media professionals and community leaders. The program features 75 hours of instruction and a rigorous advanced-level curriculum which explores a wide range of theoretical and pragmatic issues in media education. An advanced leadership development program operated in coordination with the Center for Media Literacy in Los Angeles, the Felton Scholars Program is the premier media education program for mid-career professionals in the United States.

Teaching the Humanities in a Media Age, a week-long Summer Institute for high school teachers, focusing on the connections between media literacy and the subject areas of English literature, American history, and the fine and performing arts.

Specially designed workshops, seminars and graduate-level courses for school district personnel are available on a number of different topics. Programs have been designed for teachers in grades K-12, parents and community leaders, leaders in the public health, justice, and medical communities. Staff development programs are available for professional development credits. All staff development programs are crafted with the specific needs of the school district with the close coordination of school leaders.

Recalling Mark Twain

After lunch, students wriggle into Ellen Ackerman's English class to discuss the fact that Mark Twain was a journalist in his time. They talk about point of view and dissect the words "history" and "documentary."

Ms. Ackerman then shows a film, a spoof about the "discovery" that the earth is flat.

"How is expertise constructed?" Ms. Ackerman asks her class.

"Older white male with British accent - makes him seem well-educated and classy," one student calls out.

"Government building in the background," says another.

Students seem to catch on to media literacy very quickly: After all, the media are more of their world than was true of any other generation. Many students say they know that cigarette manufacturers try to make smoking look appealing to young people, but discovering the "how" or the hook makes the lesson non-condescending.

"I like finding out how producers try to play with your mind," says one student who sports a shaved head and baggy clothes.

In media-literacy terms, that's empowerment: being an informed consumer of information.

Some parents are uneasy about their children taking media-literacy classes. Why is my child watching television for homework? is a common question.

Dennis-Yarmouth's MacPherson finds, however, that once parents are informed, they realize media literacy can build relevance between what goes on in the classroom (education) and what goes on at home (television) and in society. On the horizon, he adds: decoding the Internet.

Hobbs agrees with this wholeheartedly: "Too often we uncritically accept information from a computer screen as authoritative. Media literacy concepts provide an effective framework to ask questions about this new growing communication tool. The same questions that we ask about the mass media we need to ask about new on-line information technologies."

Top Ten Viewing Tips For Television

1. Watch TV with your children.
Ask questions about shows; initiate discussion about themes and topics.

2. Let TV expand and enlarge your world.
Find related books and magazines at your public library. Keep an atlas or globe next to the TV set and find places mentioned in the news.

3. Talk back to your television.
Question what you see and hear on TV while watching with your children. Challenge or support the ideas presented.

4. Discuss how conflicts on TV are resolved.
Is there unnecessary violence? Does the violence portrayed include the real-life consequences? Discuss options for solving the conflict without using violence.

5. Introduce your own values.
Use TV as an opportunity to express and explore your own values on topics such as drugs, alcohol, and appropriate sexual conduct.

6. Ask your children who is being stereotypes in a program.
Are people made to act and talk a certain way because of their age, gender, race, religion, or cultural backgrounds? Discuss what messages are being sent by the way people look and act.

7. Relate TV to real-life situations.
Discuss with your child the fact that easy solutions are not often found to complicated problems.

8. Be aware that all TV programs have an underlying economic purpose.
Discuss this with your children using TV commercials and shows as a springboard.

9. Build a home video library.
Make it a practice to tape your child's favorite shows for future viewing. Taping shows to watch later helps children recognize that they can choose to do other activities while their favorite shows are on.

10. Don't be afraid to take charge of your TV set.
Take time each week to review TV program guides for the week ahead and decide what your family will watch. Set limits on how much TV your family watches and what they are watching.

For a free catalog of media literacy resources for parents, teachers, church and community leaders, contact the

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DECODING THE MEDIA

A growing trend teaches children how to analyze and critique today's media messages.

BY KIRSTEN A. CONOVER
Staff writer of the Christian Science Monitor

Educators are finally coming out of denial: Students are more interested in "The Simpsons" than in Socrates. By conservative estimates, students spend 1,500 hours a year in front of the TV and 1,100 hours a year in school.

What has that meant for children and society?

"Historic change" for the past decade, says George Gerbner, dean emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania. "The change in the way our children are socialized is so major, so pervasive, that most of us take it for granted." Dr. Gerbner has been monitoring the media for 30 years.

For years, society has worked to reduce the supply of objectionable media available to children: Parents have set limits; others have crusaded for V-chips and congressional bills. Now educators are increasingly working on the "demand" side of the equation by training students to be "media literate."

Media literacy, or media education, is loosely defined as the ability to access, analyze, and evaluate as well as communicate — messages. It's about asking questions, prompting discussions, and empowering the receivers of media messages, rather than regulating or censoring the message-senders.

"The media-literacy movement is predicated on the notion that for the first time, children are born into a cultural environment that is no longer established by the parent, the church, the teacher," media-literacy guru Gerbner explains. "Television tells them.

"School has, in effect, a new task," Gerbner continues. "No longer the first dispenser of information, school needs to be the organizer, analyzer, and the critic, so children don't keep absorbing images and messages in media assuming 'this is life' ... that 'this is correct and accurate information.'

Media-literacy teachers aim to help students learn to be thoughtful gatekeepers of their own consciousness in this Information Age. The movement is catching on nationwide:

- New Mexico has formalized the concept of media literacy, requiring all students to take a course in it before they graduate from high school.
- North Carolina and Massachusetts have called for media education to be integrated into school curriculums.
- Individual schools and school districts are offering programs and seminars for teachers, parents, and students in media literacy. "Know TV" a project developed by Time-Warner Cable and The Learning Channel, is a well-known example.
- The White House has included media literacy as a strategic initiative in the 1996 National Drug Control Strategy. The aim is to help students examine messages about drug use in film, television, and music.

"Our young people need to be educated to the highest standard in this new Information Age," said US Secretary of Education Richard Riley, during an address at a Rockville, Md. middle school in December, "and surely this includes a clear awareness of how the media influ-

ences, shapes, and defines their lives."

Today, 'Media is Culture'

The movement has been spurred by the media's growing allure and pervasiveness. Jay Dover, program director for the Center for Media Literacy (CML) in Los Angeles, puts it this way: "Media is no longer looked at as *part* of culture, it *is* culture.

"Everyone who is teaching media literacy is doing it in a different ways but most are sticking by certain principles," Mr. Dover says. The CML produces training materials for teachers.

Decoding or deconstructing messages is at the core, Dover explains, offering a metaphor: "In 'The Wizard of Oz' they're in awe of the wizard. When the curtain is drawn back, they see it's just a person manipulating [the image]."

In the late 1980s, only a handful of professors were teaching media literacy.

Today the issue is of much wider concern, Dover says. Ironically, media-literacy movements in other countries were given a boost by the export of Hollywood-produced television shows. In 1987, Ontario, Canada, issued a requirement that 30 percent of its students' language arts coursework include media literacy. Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Germany have also made media education a priority. By comparison, the United States, in the words of Dover, is "woefully behind." That is changing.

A Supermarket Analogy

Many media-literacy advocates in the US are encouraged by recent conferences and other events that have brought together politicians, parents, teachers, programmers, filmmakers, online companies, and others. Rising concerns over content - particularly violence - and what Gerbner calls "a galloping monopolization of media" have also attracted attention.

"This is the discussion that we've not had-that we're finally having," Dover says. "It's going to open the door to broaden the dialogue to an amazingly diverse group all invested in the welfare of our culture."

Cable-TV companies with educational missions are also supporting media literacy, figuring that if people become better-informed viewers they will appreciate - and support - more "nutritional" shows.

"If we can help parents and teachers teach new consumers skills young people need in order to navigate this media saturated environment," says Linda Brown, educational director of Discovery Communications, "we're providing a valuable service to our customers."

"We find that after folks have been through our 'Know TV' workshops, they enjoy watching TV a lot more," Ms. Brown adds. "They know they're good consumers."

Brown draws a supermarket analogy: Thirty to 40 years ago, the relative lack of choice made grocery shopping simpler. As processed foods and choices increased, shoppers had to make informed choices and read labels for nutrition content. "We want our viewers to be label-readers," Brown says. The cable industry has a responsibility to help educate viewers, she adds. "We don't want them to feel like they're victims of our mediums."

THE FIVE CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA LITERACY

The Center for Media Literacy in Los Angeles produces and distributes resource materials for teachers. Here are what they consider the core concepts of media literacy:

ALL MEDIA ARE CONSTRUCTIONS.
Media are carefully manufactured cultural products. They create an emotional experience that looks like reality, but of course is not - because it is all made up by people who select this picture and edit those words or include this scene while another 20 versions land on the cutting-room floor.

MEDIA USE UNIQUE "LANGUAGES."
The language is unique to each medium - whether newspapers, TV game shows, or horror movies. Scary music heightens fear, camera angles convey relationships, headlines signal significance. Understanding these languages heightens our appreciation of media experiences and makes us less susceptible to manipulation. The best way to understand how media are made is to make them: Media production and analysis are two sides of the media-literacy coin.

AUDIENCES "NEGOTIATE MEANING."
No two people see the same movie or hear the same song on the radio. Skillful readers and viewers examine different stylistic features of a media product and pair attention to the context in which the message occurs. Media-literacy skills allow us to be conscious and deliberate about what we experience.

MEDIA HAVE COMMERCIAL INTERESTS.
Media are ad-driven businesses. Newspapers lay out ads on their pages first. The space remaining is devoted to news. Likewise, TV programs don't exist simply to entertain us. They are there to ensure that a certain number of viewers will be watching when a commercial comes on. Most media are provided to us, as media researcher George Gerbner says, by corporations with something to *sell* rather than by the family, church, or school with something *to tell*.

MEDIA HAVE EMBEDDED VALUES AND POINTS OF VIEW.
Media, by their very nature being constructed, carry a subtext of who and what is important - at least to the person or persons doing the constructing. There are no value-free media. The challenge for all of viewers and consumers of media is to learn to "read" the media critically to uncover the embedded value messages.

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Photo by Robert Hamson - CSM Staff

'Attention is the product being sold to advertisers. People's biggest "ah-ha!" is coming to a better understanding of the economics of the media industry.'

— Dr. Renee Hobbs
Babson College

The nitty-gritty of media education, however, happens in the classrooms. Nowhere is the ground more fertile than the schools, where teachers are sowing the seeds of media knowledge in the minds of their students.

One of nation's foremost authorities on media literacy is Renee Hobbs, associate professor of communication at Babson College in Wellesley, Mass. Dr. Hobbs created the media-literacy program *Know TV* and co-authored *TV Eye: A Curriculum for the Media Arts*. She is also the former director of the Institute on Media Education at Harvard University.

"Attention is the product being sold to advertisers," Hobbs says, and her job is to help people see how the media try to attract that attention. "People's biggest 'ah-ha!' is coming to a better understanding of the *economics* of the media industry," she says.

Hobbs recently spent a day at the Dennis-Yarmouth High School on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. Teachers in the schools there, from kindergarten through high school, are integrating media education into the curriculum as one of four demonstration projects funded by a federal grant from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention in Rockville, Md.

"If we think about it, what are the things we are most concerned about in our society?" asks Bruce MacPherson, director of health for the school district. "They are all reinforced in the electronic media. Yet we don't reinforce the few educational skills needed to interpret what we see and hear... This is where media education steps in."

Teachers show interest

Mr. MacPherson, who initiated the pilot program, doesn't require teachers to sign on to the project; he offers training to those who want to try – 85 teachers out of 300 are practicing it. The program began in May. "We expect more as time goes on," he says.

This day, Hobbs is visiting classrooms, and will conduct an evening workshop with teachers on violence in the media.

"Now, unlike three years ago, everybody is familiar with the phrase *media literacy*," says Hobbs, a mother of two school-aged children. She estimates that 6 or 7 percent of all teachers claim to be teaching it.

"Sometimes, when people think of media literacy, they think it's media bashing," Hobbs says. "But media literacy is the practice of asking questions about what you watch, see, hear, and read. Media literacy skills can be applied to all forms of communication."

Teacher Thad Rice has been using media literacy concepts in his classes for two years. His first-period Interpreting Media class agrees to allow a reporter to sit in — as long as she answers their questions about journalism.

Today, they are role playing at an imaginary metro-area newspaper. In one sticky scenario, a reporter eager to uncover corruption and racism wants to persuade his editor to let him write a story about a bank discriminating against Asians in housing loans.

The editor, on the other hand, is worried about readership and also about advertising. He wants the reporter to write about a popular circus that is coming to town. Not only that, the bank in question is a major advertiser and the editor personally knows some of its board members.

Students are timid at first with the role playing, but the scenarios escalate into thoughtful discussion about ethics and point-of-view in newspaper stories.

In another classroom, four team leader teachers discuss their uses of media literacy. *Adsmarts*, a popular program that looks at advertising, was developed by the Center for Media Literacy with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Princeton, N.J.

What techniques are used to make this ad effective? students are asked. Who makes money from this? How do different viewers interpret the ad? What is the authenticity of the message? How do language, sound, images influence? Special attention is given to cigarette ads because smoking rates are rising among young people, especially girls.

Teachers tend to have fun with exercises. One is having his students design an ad campaign for double-salted onion gum. On the documentary front, a specialty of *Know TV*, a science teacher invites students to compare different interpretations of the Exxon Valdez oil spill — one put out by Exxon, the other by environmentalist Jacques Cousteau. Perhaps students' all-time favorite is the BBC's 1957 April Fools' Day "documentary" about the "spaghetti harvest."

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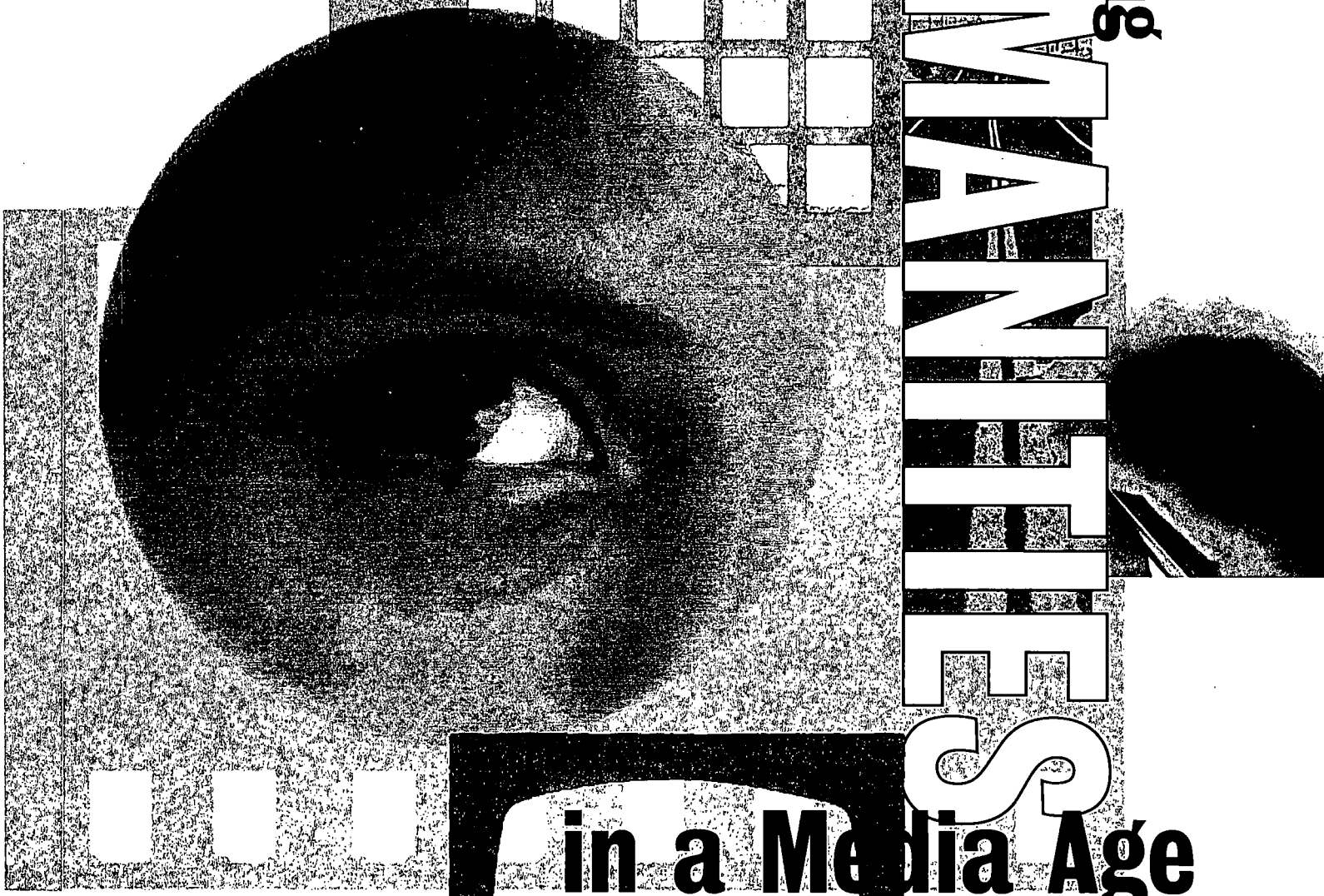
The Re-Visioning Project

Teaching HUMANITIES in a Media Age



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