



May 2003

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Lecturer Discovers Formula For Making Hit Films



Arts Canada LONDON - A British university lecturer who claims she has discovered the winning formula to making successful movies says *Toy Story 2* is the closest match to a perfect film. Sue Clayton, a director and screenwriting lecturer for the University of London and the British Film Council, says that a movie must have the right mix of seven essential elements to become a big hit.

She said the film must be made up of:

- action – 30 per cent,
- comedy – 17 per cent,
- good versus evil – 13 per cent,
- love/sex/romance – 12 per cent,
- special effects – 10 per cent,
- plot – 10 per cent, and
- music – 8 per cent.

She said Disney's animated adventure film *Toy Story 2* was the film that matched closest to the recipe. The film grossed more than \$485 million US worldwide. Clayton said she conducted a detailed examination on the top grossing films in the UK over the past 10 years. Movies ranged from *Titanic*, *Die Another Day*, *Notting Hill* and *The Full Monty*. She said the Oscar-winning *Shakespeare in Love* came very close to matching the blueprint, but should have used more special effects.

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Application in the Classroom

- 1) Check out several blockbuster/hit films and see if you can verify the successful film formula. One way to do this is to play several movie cassettes and record the amount of time consumed for each of the various categories.
- 2) For class discussion, select a well known film such as *Titanic* or *Star Wars* and annotate the plot summary with the various elements of the formula. To determine why the successful film formula works, brainstorm why these elements seem to be so universal and so engaging when they are all brought together.
- 3) Can you find examples where most elements of success were in a film which was not a hit? (Or, for that matter, examples of films that *didn't* follow this formula, but were still box office hits.) Account for the reasons.
- 4) Write an outline for a film script in which you deliberately incorporate the ingredients for the successful film formula. Be sure to include not only each element – e.g. action – but also the approximate amount of time.

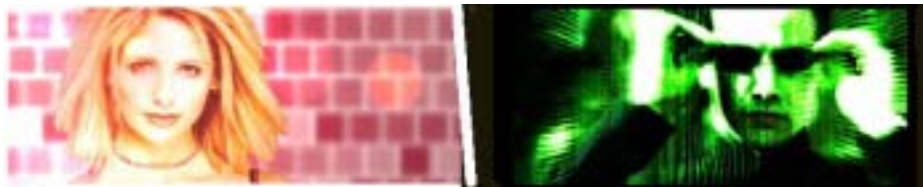
Post War Iraq and Media Studies

"While dialogue isn't the Bush Administration's preferred mode of communication, sometimes war demands sacrifice. And, ultimately, democracy can't be built on Tom Brokaw lip-synching Arabic or even on genuine Iraqis reading from U.S.-approved scripts. Instead, it will only flourish if we help the Iraqis create media outlets that truly give them their own voice."

Alternet, May 13, 2003

Question: What are some suggestions to achieve this important goal of truly giving Iraqis their own voice?

Buffy the Vampire Slayer and The Matrix Reloaded



Opinions and debates, literary, religious and philosophic references, a terrific *mélange* of popular culture intertextuality – welcome to the final episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and part two of the Matrix saga, *Matrix Reloaded*.

Much has been written about these two media texts and more is on the way because they both raise so many ethical and philosophic issues. Academics and some mainstream journalists are knocking the ball out of the park as they offer new interpretations.



Final Takes on Buffy

"Toronto Jesuit priest and media educator John Pungente, who hosts the Bravo program *Scanning the Movies* and runs a media literacy program called the Jesuit Communication Project, has hailed *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a seminal pop-cultural achievement that has more to say about personal growth, spirituality and doing the right thing than a dozen *Shields* put together. (That Pungente hasn't been excommunicated for his troubles drives a figurative stake through claims made by some of the more obsessive religious fringe groups that *Buffy* glamorizes witchcraft, the way, say, Harry Potter encourages bespectacled lads to dabble in the dark arts.)"

Alex Strachan, *Vancouver Sun*, April 2003

"Future generations will need to understand North America's millennial culture through the lens of *Buffy* and *The Simpsons*. *Buffy* is the most compelling female character on television, maybe the most compelling character period...

Like *The Simpsons*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has managed to exist on several levels. It has a rare sense of humour about itself – an attribute that appeals to entertainment writers who like to think that they can be knowing and ironic about popular culture. It has been a heterosexual love story, a lesbian love story, a mother/daughter drama and a saga about high-school geeks. However, what has really made *Buffy* important and unusual on television has been its concentration on right and wrong. It has always been about moral issues, situational ethics and the burden of being compelled to do the right thing."

Mark Kingwell, *National Post* May 16, 2003

"There are many TV shows that purport to take life seriously, but few actually have a moral intelligence. They are simple-minded, innocuous and insipid. *Buffy* has been about the delicately intricate problem of morality. It has always suggested that what's right is a constantly shifting thing. And that's the human experience."

John Doyle, *Globe and Mail*, May 14, 2003



The last word goes to media educator and avid fan John Pungente, who wrote the following:

"The rolling of the closing credits, Tuesday, May 20, 2003, on the last episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* will mark the end of a television series that – when it was good (and that was almost always) – will remain (along with *Northern Exposure*) – one of the best North American television series ever. *Buffy* had something for everyone – of every age. High drama co-existed easily with a touch of soap, a healthy dash of humour, more than a soupçon of romance, and seasoning it all were themes of redemption and morality, of right and wrong, of love and death, of growing and being allowed to grow. Our world will be a poorer place without – to paraphrase Shakespeare – a little touch of *Buffy* every Tuesday night."

For the die-hard Buffy fans among you:

The Web has a variety of *Buffy* sites with diverse interpretations.

www.slayage.tv – the online international Journal of Buffy Studies

www.slayage.com – for just about anything you ever wanted to know about Buffy and Angel

N.B. John Pungente recently received an honorary doctorate from St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Congratulations John!



Summer Reading: An Essential List of Media-related Books and Articles

Want to be up to date in media? Want to share insights with your savvy colleagues? Here is a selected list for summer reading and beyond. It is personal and subjective. Some of the books are recent and others are a few years old but still very relevant. Some are intellectually dense but rewarding. (Be well rested before attempting to read.)

These resources will introduce you to new media paradigms, critical pedagogies, ways of thinking about media and popular culture. In light of 9/11 and the War in Iraq, I have included several recent books which explore globalization and global studies. Without seeing our work in these larger contexts, we cannot engage in truly relevant media education.

Books

Summer release:

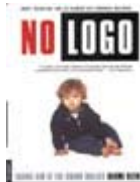
Media Education: Learning, Literacy and Contemporary Society

David Buckingham, Polity Press, to be published in Summer 2003

Prolific UK media educator David Buckingham distills his vast experience in media education and provides innumerable insights into the current debates. He addresses pedagogical models, media analysis as well as production with digital media. Arguably the best and most comprehensive overview of the field to emerge in the last ten years, this lucid account should serve to catalyze media education think tanks around the world.



N.B. The book will be reviewed in the September Bulletin.



No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies Naomi Klein (Alfred Knopf Canada, 2000).

Arguably the most influential and widely read book about new paradigms in marketing, branding and the subsequent backlash through cultural resistance. Here are the trends which are impacting profoundly on our understanding of free trade, evolving media use and other corporative, market-driven phenomena.



Open World: The Truth about Globalization Philippe Legrain (Abacus, 2002)

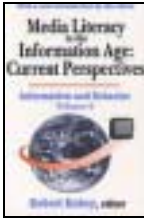
A readable overview of the forces creating globalization. It dares to quarrel with Naomi Klein's thesis, considering it to be scaremongering. Gives a balanced view of the pros and cons.



Implicating Empire: Globalization & Resistance in the 21st Century World Order eds. Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney (Basic Books, 2003)

Our best radical thinkers expose the war on terrorism to reveal its true agenda. The voices of dissent include leading activists such as Stanley Aronowitz and Ellen Willis.





Media Literacy in the Information Age: Current Perspectives

ed. Robert Kubey (Transaction Publishers, 1997)

The nineteen contributors to this collection include some of the best media education writing in the world. Of particular importance is the 53 pages from UK educator Len Masterman whose groundbreaking book *Teaching the Media* (1985) is no longer in print.



Digital Diversions: Youth Culture in the Age of Multimedia

ed. Julian Sefton-Green (Routledge, 1998)

This anthology was written by teachers and academics who have conducted empirical research. Here are the ideas that don't get talked about in those uncritical, utilitarian workshops on computer literacy. One of the few books which brings media literacy and cultural studies concepts to bear on digital media.



Teaching Youth Media: A Critical Guide to Literacy, Video Production, and Social Change

Steve Goodman (Teachers College Press, 2003)

There are plenty of production books in circulation but none that caters to the needs of media educators. Based on his vast experience in media production with youth – primarily inner city kids from New York – Steve Goodman offers us a critical pedagogy for doing media production. In this endeavour, he connected with both the social and the literacy needs of students.



Visual Messages: Integrating Imagery into Instruction 2nd edition

eds. David Considine and Gail E. Haley (Teacher Ideas Press, 1999)

The book covers all the important media literacy issues and provides excellent resources to address them. A terrific compendium of essential information.



Literacy in a Digital World: Teaching and Learning in the Age of Information

Kathleen Tyner (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998)

Here is a thoughtful and ultimately visionary analysis of both American and international achievements concerning multi-literacies: computer, critical, information and media literacy. A revised version of this outstanding study is forthcoming.



Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel

Jean Kilbourne (Touchstone Press, 2000)

North America's best known gender critic takes aim at the gender representation in today's advertising. A very readable account.



Honey, We Lost the Kids: Re-thinking Childhood in the Multimedia Age

Kathleen McDonnell (Second Story, 2001)

From Pokemon to Harry Potter, the Toronto author takes the pop culture pulse of kids. She finds more positive than negative dimensions, demonstrating that many of these pop texts are read in empowering ways.



Other Reading:

Cable in the Classroom Media Literacy Resources

<http://www.ciconline.com/Enrichment/MediaLiteracy/ThinkingCritically/default.htm>

This collection includes several outstanding articles, specifically, David Considine's "Media Literacy Across the Curriculum" and Neil Andersen's "New Media and New Media Literacy." (Neil Andersen's article is especially topical, providing a solid, credible, media literacy critique of digital media.)

Telemedium: the periodical from National Telemedium Council

<http://danenet.danenet.org/ntc/>

The recent big issues of the periodical *Telemedium* offer short, readable articles (for those who are reluctant to read long books) on such important topics as "Media Literacy and the Arts" and "Media and Youth". While *Telemedium* is sometimes uneven in quality, on balance, it offers us many great ideas from leading media educators, for which we should be grateful.

Recommended Resource

Scanning Television, Second Edition (2003)

Teachers who used the first edition of *Scanning Television* were delighted with its contents. There are plenty of lively video clips for discussion and plenty of useful background information. The second edition is even better and should be regarded as simply the best current classroom resource for media teachers.



The package consists of:

- Four videos or two DVDs
- Four Teacher's Guides

How can you lose when you have 51 video clips encompassing a range from the famous, wildly funny "Spaghetti Story" to the problematic Alcatel commercial which uses, (or, as some would say, trivializes) Martin Luther King's famous "I have a Dream" speech. Knowing the key players and the educator advisors involved in this outstanding audio-visual package, I would have to admit it is no surprise that there is such outstanding quality.

Written by Neil Andersen, Kathleen Tyner and John Pungente, and produced by documentary film maker Gary Marcuse, the material is organized along the five themes developed in the textbook *Mass Media and Popular Culture*: "Media and Representation," "Selling Images and Values," "Media Environments," "The Global Citizen," and "New and Converging Technologies."

The 96-page teaching guide provides a useful overview and then addresses each of the 51 examples with "Before Viewing," "Foci for Viewing," and "After Viewing." Primarily in the form of questions, there are also some suggested research topics. The compelling questions will encourage divergent thinking and will certainly access higher order thinking skills. (Occasionally, they are too abstruse, with a "guess what I am thinking" tone which a sharp editor might have addressed.) There are also sheets containing useful organizers such as "Writing" and "Critical Thinking."

Of the excerpts, everyone will have their own favourites. Here are a few of mine:

- The material on "Branding" (#37), "POP Goes the Product" (#29), and "Culture Jamming" (#20 and #21) superbly addresses the huge trend in marketing to teens and



- provides examples of organized resistance and playful 'subvertising'.
- The socially important material found in "PSAs Aimed at Children" (#26 and #27) and "PSAs Aimed at Racism" (#12).
 - In light of the War in Iraq, the timely interview with AL-Jazeera Television (#43) will be useful.
 - With the release of the new *Matrix Reloaded*, students will be intrigued with the behind-the-scenes making of its predecessor, *The Matrix* (#32 and #33).
 - Finally, everyone will be amused and slightly horrified with "Are you Popular?" and "Dating Do's and Don'ts." These are excerpts of educational films from the late 1940's that provide an amusing and revealing textbook study of North American cultural mores.

Cost: \$299.95 plus shipping and handling
Harcourt Canada, 55 Horner Avenue, Toronto, ON MZ 4X6.
(416)-255-4491 cs_canada@harcourt.com

Alternative Perspectives



***The Nation* - An Important Alternative Periodical**

The Nation is a valuable alternative to the typical mainstream journalism of *Time*, *Newsweek* and *Macleans*. With the neo conservative views prevailing in the media, it is reassuring that left leaning writers such as Naomi Klein and Mark Crispin Miller will be published. Now the magazine wants to make a deal with teachers. For the media teacher, *The Nation* has much to offer.

The Nation Classroom

The Nation Classroom, developed with the help of a National Teacher Advisory Board, is a new program that features discounted bulk subscription rates to *The Nation* magazine for high school and college instruction and includes a free desk copy for educators. Most importantly, It also features a new weekly Internet-based resource guide designed to bring diversity, democracy and dialogue back to the classroom.

The guide includes:

- Student Pages with reading, vocabulary, research and writing lessons.
- Teacher Pages with answers, suggestions and additional activities.
- Archive Sections featuring articles comparing events past and present.
- Themed Archive Packs, primary source material going back to 1865.

The Nation Classroom was created to provide balance to the other sources of news and social comment widely available to students, such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News & World Report* and the *New York Times*.

For more info on The Nation Classroom:

<http://www.thenationclassroom.com>



Media Literacy – Call for Essays



Special Section: Media Literacy
Spring 2004, Volume 8, Issue 1
www.rapidintellect.com/AEQweb/index.htm

The British online academic journal, Academic Exchange Quarterly, is looking for submissions for a special section on media literacy in their Spring 2004 edition.

Submissions are encouraged from teacher-scholars at all levels and across disciplines who have incorporated media study or the teaching of media literacy into their classrooms. The deadline is any time until the end of November 2003.

To find out more about this upcoming edition and how to submit essays, visit the AEQ Web site at: <http://www.rapidintellect.com/AEQweb/spri044.htm>

On the Road for Media Education

Spring was a busy time for promoting media education. In addition to speaking with educators, it was heartening to meet people who are not necessarily in school settings, but have much to contribute to the media literacy movement.

- February 7, I was impressed by the unbridled enthusiasm of the budding, young teachers I met during my address to several classes at a conference for social science teachers in Toronto. Many of them vowed to implement media literacy in their future classrooms.
- On February 13-14, I addressed keen English and media teachers in both Calgary and Edmonton who are part of the Alberta Association of Media Awareness (AAMA).
- March 6-8, at the "Understanding Today's Media Saturated World" conference in Connecticut, I presented workshops and participated in panel discussions. (See my review in the April Bulletin.) It was reassuring to see the birthing of a new regional media literacy organization. Successful media education has always emerged from grassroots organizations.
- May 2, in Ottawa, I addressed the provincial film and video review boards across Canada who had organized a film classification conference. Their goal was to harmonize their film/video classification policies as much as possible. My media literacy presentation stressed that media literacy was an alternative to censorship and that there are many positive trends today which make the case for stressing film appreciation. This group was in agreement and now see a commitment to media literacy as a viable new role for their organization.



International Perspectives

Local Japanese Broadcasters Support Community-Based Media Production for Schools

Yoshimi Uesugi, Graduate Student, Nagoya University, Japan

An increasing number of educators have been promoting media literacy at schools and community centres in Japan for the past decade. Several organizations such as teachers' groups, non-profit organizations, and scholars have facilitated this movement at schools and community centres.

The MELL Project (Media Expression, Learning and Literacy) at the University of Tokyo, which consists of scholars, university students, school teachers, media producers, and journalists, has played a role as a mediator between classrooms and broadcasters. One initiative that MELL has been following is the NAB Project (National Association of Commercial Broadcasters). I am a member of the MELL Project and am also involved with the NAB Project as an observer.



The NAB Project allows opportunities for journalists and producers of local broadcasting companies to visit schools and community centres to teach children how to make short news items on video. The video productions they create are broadcast locally. The aim of this project is to provide a place in the community where people and broadcasting stations learn about media through production. This arrangement provides an opportunity to improve broadcasting content dealing with social problems such as violence and stereotypes through dialogue between public and broadcasters, who often have opposing viewpoints.

MELL regards the following two aspects as being unique to the NAB Project. One is the emphasis on media production rather than on analysis. The other is the opportunity to learn the effects and influences of television.

Two local Japanese broadcasting companies participated in this project during 2001-2002, and four participated during 2002-2003. Children created storylines promoting their schools or addressing a locally relevant topic, shot, and edited video with help of specialists in broadcasting. It was sometimes observed that children could not understand journalists' explanations. This allowed journalists the opportunity to reflect more critically upon what they consider routine work.

After finishing production activities, children discussed the distinction between reasonable and overly controlled direction, and began to recognize while watching television, the intentions of producers. Broadcasters were satisfied that children as an audience learned the process of production through hands-on activities. They were also pleased to discover the audiences' view of broadcasters, and intrigued by the possibility that productions created by the audience could eventually become new media content.

The majority of broadcasters do not necessarily agree on promoting media literacy projects because the broadcasters are not yet convinced that media literacy is beneficial. Regrettably, many broadcasters still consider media literacy to be a threat.

Further practice and research will be increasingly necessary to prove that learning media with audience participation produces both financial and ethical benefits for broadcasters.



Media Events Highlights, Spring 2003

Two notable events took place in Toronto this past spring.

Sharefest: What's Happening in the Media Classroom

Held in Toronto, May 8, 2003

Professionally speaking, spring is a good time to get teachers together, to get them inspired with new ideas for next year. To this end, the Association for Media Literacy has, for several years, staged an annual Spring "Sharefest." Our goal has been to review new resources and hear presentations on new curriculum units that work well in the classroom. Informal and lively, Sharefest is pitched primarily to teachers in the Toronto area.

Naturally we are really impressed by *Scanning Television Part 2*, which has been in circulation since February and several NFB videos such as *McLuhan's Wake*.

At this year's Sharefest, there were three presenters: Henry Gomez, Craig Haid and Karla Mancini. Henry began his session by making an excellent case for the value of community/alternative radio and reported on how his students have become involved in co-operative work credit arrangements with several radio stations.

Craig and Karla presented their action research projects for this year's Additional Qualification course in Media Studies at York University. Action research is driven primarily by developing a key question to be explored in the classroom – in this case based on suitable media topics. What Craig and Karla presented was their final research and investigations.

Karla's project involved her Grade 10 students becoming 'cultural tourists' through documenting different Toronto neighbourhoods (in practice, these were usually ethnically defined). The documentation included the use of media in their selected neighbourhood (e.g. posters, pop culture paraphernalia). The students took photographs that would typify the area and conducted interviews with local people. To clarify their final take on the selected neighbourhood, each student did a 'subvertising' – the Adbusters-inspired construction of something satirical. In doing this, they had to capture the essence of this neighbourhood.

There were several overarching ideas in the project, such as "what does it mean to be a Canadian?" and "what are the meanings behind pop culture icons?" (like the ones inspired by Douglas Copeland's new book *Souvenir of Canada*).

Craig Haid's project used the concept of cool, in which each student was asked to define for themselves what or who is 'cool'. Students were then asked to respond and rate a variety of celebrities, from Rue Paul to Christina Aguilera, in each case explaining their coolness or lack thereof. In the process, the notion of gender representation emerged, in particular gay representation. This exercise provided an authentic response which allowed the teachers to add additional layers of complexity to the theme of representation. (There were many threads of media and creative responses which came out of this project and my bare bones description does not do it justice.)

This project went beyond typical media projects. It used media codes and conventions. It built on reception theory and subjectivities. It forced students to explore a community which was unfamiliar to them. Finally, it exploited their enthusiasm for employing the techniques of satire.



Corporate Media: Vital Issues of Ownership, Control and Cultural Sovereignty

Panel Discussion held April 9th, 2003

National Film Board, Toronto

Co-sponsored by The Association for Media Literacy and the National Film Board

While debating the values of corporate media might seem to be a dry topic, the ideas and long range implications are of paramount importance to anyone working in or writing about the mass media. The kind of news we see, as well as the kind of entertainment programs we consume, are all profoundly affected. Will merger mania stop? Are fewer media conglomerates the road we should take in order to have viable and strong media players?

Compared to the United States, Canadians believe that our situation is not too bad, that our big media corporations are benign. Our real situation yields a mixed report card. Unfortunately, the evidence does not support our typical lukewarm response. Here are the panellists who participated in this special event:

- Trina Mc Queen was, until recently, President of CTV and prior to that President of the Discovery Network and Vice-President of programming for the CBC. Trina brought her formidable work experience to the issues. She seemed unflappable whenever there was a disagreement
- Gordon Pitts is a *Globe & Mail* business reporter and author of the critically acclaimed book *Kings of Convergence: The Fight for Control of Canada's Media*. The book examines the ownership of the big Canadian media corporations such as CanWest, Global, Rogers and Shaw. Gordon brought tons of important data to the topic.
- Barrie Zwicker is a media critic at Vision TV and an experienced journalist. He has always been the tenacious bulldog, ready to go into action in an instant whenever there are contradictions and evidence of creeping neo-conservatism. Currently, Barrie is promoting his video on the tardy response of the US military to the planes crashing into the World Trade Towers on September 11.

It turned out to be an ideal panel. No one dominated the proceedings and the panelists interacted nicely with each other. There was lively debate and sufficient time for audience response. Topics covered included: defining the key issues of corporate control; comparisons with the United States in terms of the impact of ownership and control; and finally, the implications for Canadian media content.

Upcoming Media Events



Literacy and Liberty

Rights, Roles & Responsibilities in a Media Age

National Media Education Conference 2003

June 28 - July 1

Baltimore, Maryland

<http://www.amlainfo.org/>

Folks! This is the big North American bi-annual media conference and deserves your full attention. The conference has attracted presenters from around the world and several of the keynote speakers – especially Australian media educator Barrie McMahon – are outstanding. The conference is also a chance to meet the UK's charismatic Len Masterman, a media education guru if there ever was one.



Media Literacy Summer Institutes 2003 Vancouver, BC

Part One: An Introduction to Media Literacy

June 24-27

This practical four-day course will give teachers and teacher-librarians of Grades 7 to 12 the basics they need to become media literate, strategies to support teaching media literacy, and help with finding suitable resources.

Topics will include: The Key Concepts of Media Literacy, Prime Time Television, Reality TV, Media Violence, The News, Values, Cultural Diversity, Social Justice, Global Issues and Advertising - Selling to Teens

Part Two: And Now for Something Completely Different

July 2-7

You're a media literacy teacher or teacher librarian who's either taught about the media for a while and/or taken a course/summer institute/night class to the extent that you've mastered the key concepts and got the meaning of *The Simpson's* down pat. Now you want to move on – to learn about the ideological constructs of the media's reporting on 9-11, or to explore Mark Crispin Miller's theories on media ownership, or to find the implications of globalization and cultural diversity for the media or branding and new marketing techniques by the *Merchants of Cool*, or to find how to take your class to the Mall and introduce them to "The Temples of Mammon" or to dare to watch an entire episode of Buffy and use it in class – then this four day course is just for you.

Contact: Dan Blake - dblake@bctf.bc.ca

Presenters

John J. Pungente, SJ, has given over 300 presentations, workshops and lectures on Media Literacy. He is president of the Canadian Association of Media Education Organizations (CAMEO).

Dan Blake, President of the British Columbia media literacy association (CAME) and media literacy teacher.

Carolyn Wilson, a teacher, author, consultant and President of the Association for Media Literacy (AML) in Ontario, Canada.

Concluding Thoughts

Many of the items from *Barry's Bulletin* have been reprinted in periodicals including *Telemidium*, *Our Schools*, *Ourselves* and *Australian Screen Education*.

To everyone in cyberland, thanks for your support and feedback. I would like to thank the Media Awareness Network in Ottawa for their nourishing of the Bulletin, going into its fourth year next January. Above all, kudos to Jane Tallim who has shown her amazing skills in capturing the right design, finding the right illustrations for the Bulletin and keeping me on track.

Have a media literate summer. See you in September



Barry Duncan is an award-winning teacher, author, consultant and founder and past president of the Ontario-based Association for Media Literacy. Co-author of the best selling text book, *Mass Media and Popular Culture*, he has presented workshops and keynote addresses to thousands of teachers in Canada and around the world. You can contact Barry at baduncan@interlog.com.

