



March 2003

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Top sci-fi characters of all time



A poll conducted by SFX, a science fiction magazine, determined the top 20 sci-fi characters of all time.

The top ten were:

- 1.) Doctor Who
- 2.) Spike from "Buffy The Vampire Slayer"
- 3.) Buffy Summers from "Buffy The Vampire Slayer"
- 4.) John Crichton from "Farscape"
- 5.) Aeryn Sun from "Farscape"
- 6.) Han Solo from "Star Wars"
- 7.) Willy Rosenberg from "Buffy The Vampire Slayer"
- 8.) Darth Vader from "Star Wars"
- 9.) Angel from "Buffy The Vampire Slayer"
- 10.) Gandalf from "Lord of the Rings"

Explorations

The cult favourite "Buffy The Vampire Slayer" places four of its characters, and the eccentric Brit Doctor Who is placed as number one in the poll.

- How will Buffy fans convince other people that the series deserves this recognition? (Doctor Who fans must do the same thing.)
- Assuming that this poll is reliable, what generalizations can you make about the characteristics of popular sci-fi type characters? (You may even want to debate the label of sci-fi as it is applied here.)



Are you tired of product placements?

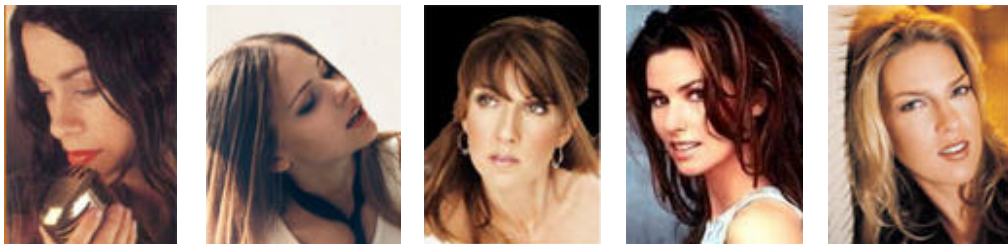
With more and more people zapping commercials or doing other things, it is understandable that product placement is becoming the best survival strategy for nervous advertisers. Usually associated with feature films, product placement is now ratcheting up big deals with producers of television drama. A good example is cosmetics giant Revlon which paid \$7 million to be featured as a regular story element in the ABC day time drama "All My Children." Said one producer: "You can't fast forward through plot lines."



Critical Questions

- Watch a variety of TV dramas and list the product placement you've identified. In each case, discuss how skillfully they were executed. To what extent was it distracting from the story (e.g. holding a can of coke so that it seems pushed into your face)? How might you direct it differently?
- Draw up a list of possibilities for future product placement indicating how you would place them in dramatic scripts. In order to not alienate your viewers, strive for subtlety.

Canadian pop divas: do they rule the world?



Celine Dion, Shania Twain – both of them on centre stage at his year's Superbowl are part of a powerful group of Canadian pop divas who include Avril Lavigne (highlighted in last months' Bulletin), Diana Krall and Alanis Morissette. How does a small country like Canada (33 million) fare so well? Aaron Wherry of *The National Post* (January 16, 2003) suggested the following answers. Canada is small and strategically placed close to the U.S., giving them a running start to international fame; Americans can get more easily lost or sucked into the corporate machine and finally, the minimum Canadian content rules on radio have provided generous exposure to young artists.

Critical Questions

- Do you agree with the writer's explanations? What else would you include or disagree with about Canadian success?
- While the Canadian music industry may seem healthy, it can be very fickle. Discuss how long this trend can sustain itself.
- At age 18, the current sensation Avril Lavigne has the heavy weight of the Canadian music industry on her shoulders. Is she up to the challenge?



Family films: will we be drowning in them?



After the success of the Harry Potter films, Hollywood is doing what it has always done: give them more of the same. The Los Angeles Times noted: "Often criticized in conservative political and cultural quarters for ignoring family values, studios are now vying for hard-to-find quality material with gentle themes and universal appeal."

Noting that Hollywood could have increased its profits by producing more G-rated movies, Miramax's co-president of production said: "We will be bringing the Miramax sensibility to some family films." It should also be pointed out that when family oriented films are re-released as videos and DVDs, they rent five times as many as R-rated films.

Critical Questions

- Over the years, family-oriented films have gone in cycles. What circumstances might change their current market-success story?
- Selecting several, currently successful family oriented films, what factors account for their success?
- Write a film proposal for a family-oriented movie. Defend your plot and the choice of actors and director. Outline your marketing campaign, indicating how you would effectively use television, newspapers and movie posters to promote your product.

Media clips

Telemedium, the Journal of Media Education: a vital part of the Media Literacy Movement in North America

When AML – the Association for Media literacy – held its first big media education conference in 1990 in Guelph, Ontario, we met Marieli Rowe, the executive director of the National Telemedia Council (NTC) and several other members of her advisory board. NTC and AML were thrilled to discover each other. (Our much sought after Ministry Resource Guide was excellent bait.) Ever since that time, AML and NTC have been very compatible philosophically and several of my Canadian colleagues regularly have their articles published in *Telemedium*.



As a member of the editorial team for *Telemedium*, I have come to know Marieli's virtues including her generosity, compassion, tenacity and genuine optimism. Her only significant liability is her insistence on having 90-minute teleconferences in which the editorial advisers plan the next issue, often beginning with little or nothing in our hands.

The recent and future issues of *Telemedium* – most of them thematically based – are filling an important gap in North American media education resources. Currently, there is no publication like it, (I would point out, however, that the AML newsletter has had its share of lively and relevant editions.) Historically, *Telemedium* will be seen as providing an invaluable outlet for media educators who are breaking new ground and keeping a fragile movement alive.



BD What is National Telemedia Council's role in 2003?

MR To begin, this is our fiftieth anniversary. We have been planning for the past two years, when we began to realize that this was actually likely to become a reality. For this fiftieth anniversary year, we have planned an ambitious program envisioned not only to celebrate the past, but more importantly, to look to the future: to find a way to articulate a vision "Toward a Media Wise Society." Our role, our Board decided, should be as a convener at the pinnacle the visionaries and the practitioners, the researchers and those who have pioneered, together with those who will be the new generation: new emerging scholars, teachers who will be the leaders of tomorrow. We would like to think that in twenty years from now, we can point to the NEW generation of Barry Duncans, John Pungentes, and Kathleen Tyners, Len Mastermans, David Considines, David Buckingham, Mary Moens, Carolyn Wilsons, and Neil Andersens, and say "Oh yes, of course, we knew them way back when, in 2003, and they were first published in *Telemedium*."

Toward this end, we are publishing a special Anniversary issue of *Telemedium* that will be a compendium of **today's** leaders in the field in the broadest sense possible to share their vision of the state of media literacy and its future. Barry Duncan and Kathleen Tyner are the coeditors of this major issue, to be published this summer. Secondly, another issue of *Telemedium* will focus on **new emerging** scholars; researchers and practitioners new to the field of media literacy who will be the leaders tomorrow. Rich Fehlman, Neil Andersen, and David Considine are the guest editors of this issue, planned for Fall 2003. And thirdly, we are convening an international forum to lay the foundation for the future. We hope to do this by identifying key issues to be addressed in order to realize or put some teeth into this vision. We want this event to be a working conference with "legs." The forum will take place on November 7th, but it will be the culmination of a nine-month discussion we have already started. It is our hope that through this thorough examination before the event, we will be able to present a set of specific issues to the participants together with concrete plans to carry out in the next few years.

BD What is the essential background of Marieli Rowe?



MR Funny that you should ask! Maybe it just consists of two words: longevity and experience! The truth is, I really have no business being where I am, or doing what I do. I studied zoology at Swarthmore College, a wonderful small college in Pennsylvania, where thinking, critical evaluation, creating and aspiring to the highest possible standards was just the "norm." In graduate school in Boulder, Colorado, my ambition was to specialize in ecology (a term known only to biologists in those days) way up at timberline in the Rocky Mountains. Instead I got married to a crazy wonderful idealist of like mind, settled for a teaching degree, had three wonderful boys and became passionate about them. I discovered that ecology was still my field the ecology of childhood in a rapidly changing media environment.

As my parenting evolved, so did my passion for media literacy. And I got forever stuck in my love for the young child. Years later, when I went back to school for my Master's degree (finally!), I focused my work on media literacy and the pre-school-aged child. And to this day, when I talk about media and the young child, I think about the **new Ecology of Childhood**, so changed in the rapidly evolving "Media Age."

I became involved with the National Telemedia Council back in the early sixties through personal friends and because they were doing a Children's Film Festival. Later, as a member of the



Governor's Commission to study cable TV for Wisconsin, I discovered (along with the eye-opening experience of political agendas) the exciting potential of cable to serve the unique needs of young audiences. From this, and with other interested Board members, grew the creation in 1978 of a children's Cable Channel (KIDS-4) dedicated to programming by and for children aged 9-13 and actively promoting a media literacy education approach. In 1981, NTC held an international "Kids to Kids" interconnect via satellite between the children of KIDS-4 and children in Brisbane, Australia.

BD Conferences have played a major part in your work. Tell us why they are so important.

MR You asked about conferences in your question about my experience at NTC – well I've lost count. They were an annual event from 1953 through 1995. The last was the Boone Conference, chaired by David Considine, who was at that time a member of the NTC board. In my early recollections of the '60s, our conferences usually were hosted by members and member organizations in other locations, including Minneapolis, Chicago, Los Angeles, Dayton, Baton Rouge, Milwaukee, Washington D.C. and, of course, Madison. Often they were held together with others, such as NCTE, host universities, and the long defunct National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB).

Our Board usually had a budget of about \$2000 for the conference. (We always stayed within our budget. We NEVER came out ahead, nor were we trying to. The big exception was the D.C. conference that featured the "Kids to Kids Across Space" event via satellite. That event cost \$30,000. We managed to raise that money in cash and in kind). I learned how to run a conference from these experiences. What I learned most of all was that it's easy and wonderful to plan the program and invite speakers, but it's hellish to "pull in" the audience/participants, and I always dreamed of the day when we might have to turn away someone because it was too full!

Partnerships, co-partnerships and cooperation have always been the cornerstone of our organization's activities and the key to any successes. Whether a helping hand from a faculty member to facilitate a meeting on our University campus, a joint conference with NCTE, Edgewood College, our Canadian friend the AML, Appalachian State University, or the USC Annenberg campus . . . the list is endless and diverse, and I believe must grow and be strengthened for any future vision to succeed. This summer there will be the AMLA's National Media Education Conference in Baltimore (Alliance for a Media Literate America), and NTC will present the Jessie McCanse Award. Close to home, our new office is within the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, and we are building new dimensions for both. And most important is the *Telemedium* partnership with our Canadian friends, spearheaded by Barry, supported by the AML leadership; the exciting progress of our Journal owes so much to this great bond and partnership.

BD So what makes *Telemedium – the journal of Media Education* so valuable?

MR Partnerships, Collaborations, and Persistence. This remains true for today and for the future of *Telemedium*. When I became executive Director of NTC and the editor of the newsletter in late 1978, I had among my hopes for the future the idea to develop the 4-6 page newsletter into the "media literacy journal of choice" for all interested in the field of media literacy. If that hope is on its way to realization – and I believe it is – this is due to the outstanding, intensely involved people. Among these I single out Marty Rayala, Barry Duncan, David Considine, and Rich Fehlman for their leadership and many hours of total dedication, freely and selflessly volunteered. They are closely followed by the dozens of names you will find in the rosters of authors. I have long been aware and deeply grateful that when it comes to the response of authors asked for their contributions to media education, the "yes's" are simply unanimous. And *that* is what makes *Telemedium* so valuable.

BD What's the typical story behind an issue of *Telemedium*?

MR Behind each issue as it makes its way finally to the post office is a long arduous process a story that we keep trying to streamline, but in the end, re-appears first in the conceptual development and finally in its minutiae and the technical hang-ups along with last minute news,



edits, typos, and visuals that would not come through. (The age of technology may makes more things possible, but by no means easier!)

We begin each issue with a long pre-history of discussing the major focus, concepts, and timing. (Some of our recent issues have been two years in the making). What is exciting about this is the outstanding, dedicated, totally volunteer Editorial Board, which because its members are widely dispersed, meets via teleconference regularly and as needed. After the preliminary plans are made, we research the specific authors to be invited to contribute. We do our best to be broadly inclusive in covering theory and practice. We seek to expand our coverage by asking the advice of colleagues and in recent years, where possible, we have invited an expert in the specific area being covered to be our "Guest Editor" for that issue. As articles come in, every Editorial Board member is asked to review and comment. Throughout, we work closely with the authors to ensure the integrity, include visuals, and check that the design phase improves the intent of the author. In fact, editing and design have become a vitally combined process. It is a mutual collaborative process and it invariably becomes quite intense in the last phases.

Over the past few years as we have made changes, the design phase of *Telemedium* has become a major item. Marty Rayala, Art and Design Educator, has spearheaded this development. You can see his designs on most of the covers of *Telemedium* shown in the montage accompanying this article.

BD What are some of the examples of articles that media educators praised highly?

MR And now, you are asking me to single out some outstanding articles; not fair, Barry! It's like asking a mom to praise one of her children more than the others. In each issue of *Telemedium*, we are hoping that someone will find something of value in every article. Some are packed full of "do-it" ideas; others insightful and powerful. Some teach practical units, others hint at self-discovery. Some, while highly informative, are dense reading. Others are lyrical throughout, an inspiring read.

It is after all one of the goals of our Editorial Board to create a "whole" whose parts are all important. I can point to some of our issues, especially most recent ones, in which I believe we came close to our goal; the issue on "Global Studies and Media Literacy," which came out on the heels of the horrific attack on the World Trade Center, is a very powerful issue, keynoted by two important articles of the same title. The authors were Carolyn Wilson and Barry Duncan, who also added his excellent Study Guide. Complementary to these articles are wonderful comments by Douglas Rushkoff, Carlos Cortes, Joseph Pelton, and ten other major voices from around the globe.

In the recent issue on the Young Teen, "Media and Youth," guest-edited by David Considine, some fourteen outstanding educators and youth specialists, including teens themselves, built a valuable media literacy picture. David's two articles are both outstanding and of lasting value.

Of course, I loved the issue on the young pre-schooler, "Pride and Joy: Media Literacy and the Early Years." It was guest-edited by the outstanding expert, Dr. Faith Rogow. Her insightful lead article, "The ABCs of Media Literacy" is a gem. And there are wonderful articles covering a host of key issues by Idit Harel, Hedda Sherapan (Mister Rogers), Kathleen McDonnell, Joanne Cantor, David Considine to name but a few.

I could go on like this for pages the issue on the Internet; on "Understanding Television;" on "A Healthy Balance"; on "A Hundred Years of Movies." And coming up, almost ready to go to the printers, is the biggest issue of *Telemedium* so far ever published. This issue seeks to make new connections in media literacy in the world of the Arts, a subject not yet embraced seriously in our society, by either the Artist OR the Media Literacy Educator. The field is so vast, that we can only hope that the diverse authors will strike a responsive chord in some of our readers!

BD What do you like best and what might frustrate you in your tasks?



MR I thoroughly enjoy working with the most talented and inspiring visionaries in the field of media literacy. They are willing, eager, and always ready. There is no end to this truly exciting adventure.

The frustrations are in the technicalities of design capabilities due to lack of funds, and the constant pressure of deadlines. And I dearly wish I knew how we might greatly increase our readership.

AMLA (Alliance for a Media Literate America) year in review

AMLA members received a yearly report for 2002 in which many achievements were noted including an organization with 500 members; establishment of nine caucuses on topics such as faith and academic research; first elections and passage of a referendum calling for the FCC regarding rules of ownership. Congratulations for pioneering work.

Adbusters magazine has ambitious plans for 2003

Can you feel it? 2003 has all the makings of a flashpoint in history. For months we've been living in the long shadow of September 11. Now we're seeing that the War on Terror is something else as well: an entrenched defense of an unsustainable culture of fear and self-interest. There's never been a more important time for all-out activism.

In addition to setting up an office in the UK and expanding its subvertising activities, here is the press release from Adbusters. (www.adbusters.org)

"The May/June issue of *Adbusters* will mark a triple milestone. First, it will push our worldwide circulation to well over the crucial 100,000 barrier. Second, we will finally realize the goal of becoming a truly international magazine, with a 10,000-copy boost to our United Kingdom distribution. And third, readers worldwide will tune in to our first-ever CD of music and spoken-word jamming - which we'll include as a free insert. Mixed by master innovator DJ Spooky, the CD brings together some of the most outspoken and accomplished artists of our time. What's the new music of revolution? Try Ani DiFranco, Fugazi, Patti Smith, Coldcut, Allen Ginsberg, Public Enemy, Negativland and more."

Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers

by Alissa Quart, Perseus Publishing, 2003. 239 pages

The important work of Naomi Klein in her ground breaking book *No Logo* is starting to bear fruit. Writers who agree with her thesis are extending her ideas. Those who think she has stacked the cards against the globalization movement are trying to demonstrate that her examples are not typical and that her "brand bully" thesis is too monolithic. Alissa Quart provides us with an excoriating look at the Naomi Klein version of the world of youth marketing, including the most vulnerable target known as 'tweens.' It has already been pointed out (see review in Amazon.com) that Alissa Quart centers largely on middle class white kids and the branding games they play in our suburban shopping malls. There is little here about youth of color or negotiating the meaning of trendy consumer goods. Perhaps that's another book.



The marketing tactics of the cool hunters, trendsetters and 'influencers' are explored superbly



through the anecdotes with teenagers involved in their exchanges. Throughout, Quart makes her condemnatory judgments whereas the marketers are simply pragmatic: if it works it's good. Girls wanting to be popular with their friends and boost their egos may, in complicity with the marketers, set trends. The "peer to peer" marketing tactics are explored in depth. Directed by 30-something marketers who have great communication skills with teens and pick up crucial information, the so called 'cool hunters' seem to be able to probe the fickle desires of their young audience. Plying their goods at parties, exploiting their need to be seen as valuable, the marketers will do anything to seize the most recent trend.

The chapter on self branding, focusing mercilessly on tattoos and boob jobs is fascinating and frightening. The story of a whole family chipping in for breast augmentation of the 16-year-old daughter is a saga of the truly despicable.

Teen films and video games are given separate chapters. In the latter we learn how teen culture can be co-opted. Here is Quart's sardonic conclusion. "Games like so many other products, aim to harness teens' desires for an idea – a "true" world – and give them a branded one instead."

In her concluding chapters she almost loses her thread with her forays into competitive Bar-Mitzvah blow-outs and the preparation by ambitious teens to learn about the tactics to make it into prestigious Ivy League universities. In such areas, the notion of branding as an emotive, carefully crafted construction of personality and image projection becomes debatable.

(In the last bulletin I reviewed the Canadian study *Kidfluence: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*, in which the authors explore the consumer needs of youth, the great opportunities for business and examples of the typical strategies. The author is non-judgmental. I would urge media educators to buy both books. I learned from Toronto marketer Anne Sutherland, co-author of *Kidfluence* that an American version of her book is due in September from McGraw Hill. Using the PBS video *The Merchants of Cool* and the two books *Kidfluence* and *Branded* will provide teachers with outstanding resources. When you delve into this territory, your students may think you are a phony version of a cool hunter but rest assured: knowledge is power.

A few Quotes from *Branded*:

"Top brands are like stars, and working for the brand puts a teenager in proximity to stardom, makes him or her a member of a starlet's entourage" (p. 20)

"Most kids will say they will do anything to be sponsored. Having a tony brand on his clothes or board seals a young skater's coolness and gives him, in the same way as it gives the regular teen trend spotter, a sense of being near both a celebrity skater and a brand that the celebrity skater is identified with." (p.105)

"Teen girls who get the breast enhancements wish to be erotic objects of consumption, following the not-so hidden currents in the culture that both eroticizes teen girls and punishes those who act on their libidinal impulses." (p. 121)

"All the teen writers – published memoirists and fiction writers, web diarists, and Web cam exhibitionists alike – have understood that teen bodies are products. It makes sense to these teens to merchandise their bodies and experiences. Teen authors have become the architects of their own trademarked identities, strong-willed and mercenary in equal measure." (p.177)



Recommended Resources

The feature film *Kandahar* is now on video



Set in Afghanistan, this is the compelling journey of a woman desperate to find her sister before she fulfills a suicide pact. A film that gives context to the harsh landscape and to the Islamic teachings, a country where there was (have we already forgotten?) a short lived war to rout the Taliban. (See my study guide in "Barry's Bulletin" of January 2002.) I know several teachers who took their classes to see the film and had great discussions.

Naomi Klein's new monthly column

Readers of "Barry's Bulletin" will know that I am a devout Naomi Klein fan and that for me *NO LOGO* with its profound media and cultural implications deserves to be in the top five 'must-read' for media teachers. Now *The Nation*, North America's best known leftist periodical, has just announced that Naomi will be writing a monthly column. (Whatever happened to her *Globe & Mail* column where she would continually upset its fanatical, free trade business-oriented readers?) Her first column, dated February 3, was entitled "The Rise of Fortress Continent." She writes: "A fortress continent is a bloc of nations that joins forces to extract favorable trade terms from other countries – while patrolling their shared external border to keep people from those countries out." Her examples include Mexico, Canada and the European Union.

The magic of UNICEF – check out the Web site!

UNICEF has an interesting Web site on media and kids entitled "Magic" www.unicef.org/magic. There is material on video production, animation and on some media literacy practices. In many sections, there is a somewhat imperious tone and much of the information seems rather bland and obviously written by an international committee. (Frankly, UNICEF's track record in the realm of media education has been more rhetoric than reality.)



However, one can glean some useful information from Magic and there are plenty of links to worthwhile sites. Check it out and decide for yourself.

The following is the UNICEF Oslo Challenge.

The Oslo Challenge to media professionals at all levels and in all media is:

- to raise awareness in the media professions about the rights of children and how they can be protected and promoted by good professional practices or harmed through inappropriate policies or actions;
- to work ethically and professionally according to sound media practices and to develop and promote media codes of ethics in order to avoid sensationalism, stereotyping (including by gender) or undervaluing of children and their rights;
- to resist commercial pressures that lead to children's issues and the rights of children to freedom of expression, fair coverage and protection from exploitation, including as consumers, being given low priority;
- to work to enhance the relationship between children and the media so that both grow and improve in understanding of the positive and negative power and potential of the relationship.



On the Magic Web site, UNICEF has published codes and guidelines to provide examples of good practice and advice on working ethically and professionally with children in the media.

The Oslo Challenge to teachers is:

- to acknowledge and support the rights of children to have access to media, participate in it and use it as a tool for their advancement;
- to provide a protective and supportive environment in which children can make choices as media consumers that promote their development to their full potential;
- to be as informed as possible about trends and directions in the media and, where possible, to contribute actively to forming such trends and directions through participation in focus groups, feedback mechanisms and by using procedures laid down for comment and complaints on media content.

Upcoming Events

Attention Classroom Teachers - a plug for the Media & American Democracy Institute, courtesy of Frank Baker

Harvard is again sponsoring a weeklong Media & American Democracy Institute this summer, July 20-26. Tuition is free for qualified teachers. Deadline for applications is May 9.

- I participated last year and I can attest to the quality of the program. Additionally, you will hear from the best and brightest minds in print and broadcast journalism.
- You will also meet with fellow teachers and develop strategies for incorporating the media into your classroom instruction.
- If you can afford to travel there and pay your own accommodations, this is worth checking out.
- Check out the web site for details. www.teachingdemocracy.gse.harvard.edu/

"Literacy & Liberty: Rights, Roles & Responsibilities in a Media Age"

The 4th National Media education Conference sponsored by Alliance for a Media Literate America will be held in Baltimore June 28-July 1, 2003. Keynote speakers include Barrie McMahon, outstanding Australian media educator and Jeffrey Wigand (His life was featured in the film *The Insider*).

Contact www.nmec.org for more information

The Association for Media and Technology in Education in Canada (AMTEC)

The 30th National Conference of the Association for Media and Technology in Education in Canada, will be held in Montreal, Quebec, at Concordia University, May 25-28, 2003.

This 30th national conference is committed to offering outstanding sessions that address a wide range of current media, technology and education issues, education practices, research and diverse points of view.



A key strand, E-convergence: Education, Media and Technology, addresses the convergence of education, media and technology in electronic and mediated environments; implications of this convergence on learning and teaching; and the skills needed to succeed in electronic and mediated environments - Media Literacy, Information Literacy and Technological Literacy.

The AMTEC 2003 Program Committee is putting together the finishing touches to the program. Final presenter confirmations are coming in and the program promises to provide lots of information, provocative ideas, and opportunities to meet and exchange views with people from near and far.

To learn more about the conference, visit <http://doe.concordia.ca:16080/amtec/>

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.

