

From the Media Awareness Network



Barry's Bulletin

a popular culture digest for media educators

By Barry Duncan

Summer 2006

It has been a year of modest but important success stories in media education.

For me the highlights in the last year include:

- Serving as a visiting scholar in Queensland Australia.
- Expanding the Additional Qualifications (AQ) Media Studies courses at York and University of Toronto (OISE UT). We are creating leaders for the future.
- Working with AML president Carolyn Wilson to develop a new Web site for AML.
- Participating in the Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA) Conference in San Francisco.
- Organizing two well attended forums held in Toronto at the National Film Board: i.) Marketing to Kids, and ii.) Media and Global Studies.
- Publishing a comprehensive media literacy issue of "Orbit", an educational periodical from the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education.

Canadian Teen Magazines FUEL and VERVEGIRL: an Exercise in Representation



Most high schools in Canada receive free copies of the teen magazines FUEL (for boys) and VERVEGIRL (for girls). As long as someone on staff signs for the big bundle, these publications can enter your high school. What they offer is a great opportunity for media students to deconstruct material which is pitched to them. Thanks to Youth Culture Group, the Toronto based publisher, you get some ideal exercises in deconstructing teen representation. My media education colleague, Ian Esquivel, had the teachers in our Media AQ class spend a profitable hour perusing both magazines.



For Discussion

Here are some suggestions for using this text with your students. These suggestions are based on FUEL.

- Since the publisher, Youth Culture Group, offers us a magazine for boys and one for girls, what are the obvious differences and similarities between FUEL and VERVEGIRL? How is 'coolness' defined in each magazine?
- What is the ratio of space taken for articles versus that for advertising? We noticed that many of the products being promoted were sold at Wal-Mart. Discuss the importance Wal-Mart plays in defining teen culture.
- What do the magazines tell us about activities for boys compared to those for girls? For example, boys seem to have much more fun—they are playing in bands, playing video games and driving racing cars. Girls seem very passive and are always posing for the camera. In VERVEGIRL you are invited to "help a sister out! Do you know a girl who is ready to be the next VERVEGIRL ON THE VERGE?"
- The ads in FUEL were predictably about music, bicycles, clothes, and video games. Students can analyse these ads for representations of youth, for the design and layout used, and the messages and values being conveyed through the ad's construction.
- What about significant content? In FUEL there was a science fiction story described as an "Allegorical Tale of Adventure and the Post-Modern Age". We agreed that this dense, worthwhile and challenging story was much beyond the average high school grade 11 student. This raises the question about who is vetting this publication.
- The token social conscience article involved child soldiers in Sierra Leone—a frightening account of a nine-year-old boy drugged with cocaine leading a troop on a killing mission. This is an article that would certainly provoke discussion.
- A final exercise would be to go to the Web site www.fuelpowered.com to view previous issues and discuss the themes described in the last year by the magazine.

Fuel for the Wi-Fi-er: Toronto Media Teacher Sheridan Hay takes aim at Starbucks

What a brilliant ad! Loading the coffee into the CD-ROM drive is having lots of fun with the notion of people needing to be loaded up with coffee in the morning (or "powered" as suggested by the ad). The fact that anyone who spent good money on a laptop computer would place a heavy drink (a) on such a sensitive and delicate mechanism a CD-ROM drive, or (b) put a drink so close to the computer it demands that the audience suspend disbelief and just enjoy the image (those with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder should turn the page as quickly as possible). Interestingly enough, the intended audience would likely know how unrealistic the image is because the ad offers information in a coded form. One has to know what Wi-Fi is (wireless fidelity), what a Hotspot and most importantly for the companies involved in the promotion, what the roles of Bell and Starbucks are in the venture and why we should care.

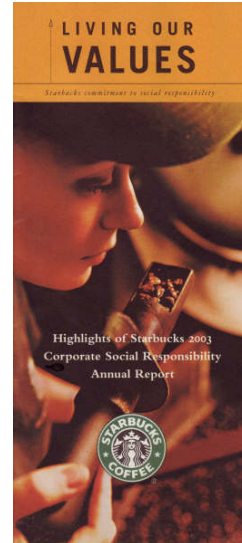
The more significant feature of this ad is that it further demonstrates how technology has managed to squeeze a place for itself in that coolest of society's public spaces: the café: a place where revolutions



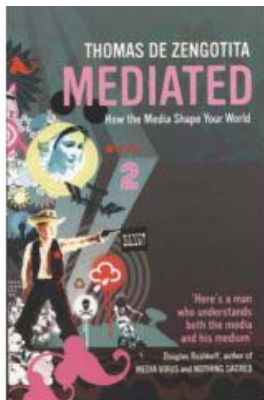
were planned and dreamed of, where relationships were kindled, discussed, and ended, where books and magazines were both devoured and written has now become the place for technology and business. More amazing than forcing a coffee cup into the inside of a computer, we are replacing conversation with cell phones, live music with iPods, and newspapers with laptops. So long berets and cigarettes, hello neckties and PDAs: the former "hotspot" for Marxism is now the Hotspot for Microsoft.

For Discussion

- Go to your nearest Starbucks and pick up a copy of its brochure "Commitment to Origins" and learn about Starbucks role in the global coffee community and its dedication to organic coffee and fair trade. Most interesting is their "Purchasing Guidelines" which makes the case for the company's pro-active, favourable environmental, social and economic policies. For example, "Workers' wages and benefits should meet or exceed the minimum required under local and national laws."
- However, students should look at the Starbucks Web site and determine how persuasive the critics who dispute its reputation (e.g. using genetically modified coffee beans and horror of horrors, printing messages on their cups which "destroy family values and virtues"). Putting these debatable aspects aside, Starbucks seems to be a corporate good citizen. Or, are there tales to the contrary which need to be told?



Book Review



Mediated: How the Media Shape Your World

Author: Thomas Zengotita

Published by Bloomsbury Publishing, London and New York, 2005

A Review by William Wallace

We lead mediated lives, says writer Thomas Zengotita in his new book, and it is mostly a good thing. Zengotita is a seductive writer who knows, that you know, you are being seduced. We laugh with him as he admits his fallen state, and encourages us to admit our own. We do and it feels good: "Que sera sera".

What does it mean to lead a mediated life? It is to admit, as The Barenaked Ladies sing, "It's all been done before." Nothing we do is original. In fact, we are immersed in images, real and fictive, to the extent that even when we are feeling most real about our lives, even in moments of pure elation or grief, we can nearly always recall how it was just like that time on that episode on TV.

How depressing can that be? Not at all, says Zengotita. The richness is in "getting it". Getting the references, being in the know. And whether we know it or not, the cultural ether – the Blob, Zengotita calls it (get it?) - mingles in our minds to the degree that we know that our lives are at once real and performative.



But Zengotita is no relativist charlatan. He is in many ways a moralist; he reveals this side of himself most in his least successful chapter - the last, where he attempts to struggle with the concept of the original through Nietzsche. He ceases to play and becomes earnest in his attempt to save the authentic. But perhaps he is just being ironic.

But ironic distance, even if it is the *modus operandi* of modern life, is not what Zengotita is about. Whether he is considering childhood and parenting, or adolescence, or the fate of nature, his playful approach discards irony. Even as his beautiful sentences set us up for his next zinger—playing us, as it were—he is able to capture truths about modern life that are invigorating.

An example: in chapter five, *Busy, Busy*, he is able to explain clearly why, in the face of the human suffering we see daily in the media, we don't act. The promise of information to allow us to act in order to make the world a better place is overtaken by paralysis. We are numbed by the degree of human suffering such that we are unable to act. Some might suggest that he is simply letting us all off the hook, but his clarity points us to a solution for our guilt-burdened hearts.

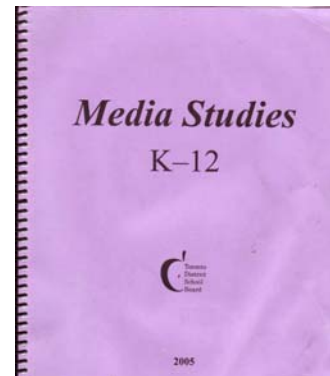
Zengotita engages in a dangerous dance with his audience. He could easily become too chummy with the "me"-ness in all of us, but that seems part of his strategy. Even as he emboldens us by the countless options to embrace the word 'whatever' and all it stands for, Zengotita engages that part of ourselves that still cares.

William Wallace
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Toronto District School Board
Toronto, Canada

Recommended Resources

***Media Studies K-12*, a Special Publication from the Toronto District School Board**

We know that most media teachers have had little or no formal training in media literacy. How can I best organize that class on Monday morning is perceived as a vital question not easily answered. Fortunately, there are resources to the rescue ranging from text books to practical teaching guides. And for the lucky teachers in the Toronto District School board there is another resource: *Media Studies K-12*, a 133 page document written by media/language arts consultants Neil Andersen and Sylvie Webb whose reputations have traveled well beyond Toronto.



Media Studies K-12 is a real gift to teachers, both novice and experienced. From learning how to embed media studies in coherent theory and assessment rubrics, to using the teachable moments inherent in global conflicts to providing a meaningful media template for exploring Halloween as a pop culture text, there are valuable insights throughout and appropriate models to give substance to media lessons.

Some of the items that I especially liked include: a brilliant analysis of Harry Potter; how to read a textbook (a truly neglected task for most teachers); and how to read a magazine, newspaper and a Web site. "The Cool for School" for grades 5-8 unit has stimulating media activities for back-to-school. What a terrific way to launch the school year.



There were a few mistakes and oversights which only seasoned media teachers might notice. I trust they could be corrected in a new printing. First off, I think a good media bibliography is necessary and one that does not list out-of-print books. The media triangle, whose source is not identified here, was conceived by Eddie Dick for the Scottish Film Council. "The Teaching and Learning Process" (pg. 7) was not credited. It was formulated as a basic literacy strategy by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.

"Reading Media Works" (pg. 20) points out that "Each medium is unique and communicated with its own language..." This and a few other statements in this section about "bias" are pure Marshall McLuhan who characterized the special properties of different forms of media but not acknowledged here. To make matters confusing, the glossary, gives an entirely different emphasis in its definition of bias as: "A preference toward or against a person, group or thing."

These are but small glitches and Neil Andersen and Sylvia Webb deserve congratulations in compiling these useful, creative resources. They will provide teachers with the structures and the intellectual rigor which are too often missing in our work.

Tel 416-397-2595 E-mail curriculumdocs@tdsb.on.ca

Flow

Flow is a critical forum on television and media culture published biweekly by the department of Radio, Television, and Film at the University of Texas at Austin. Here is an opportunity to see how media scholars frame their arguments. What I like is that all items are brief, forcing writers to come to the point rapidly. And the debates and responses from participants are really informative.



<http://jot.communication.utexas.edu/flow/>

Playing with iPods



I played a little hoax on some media education colleagues who got taken in by what I wrote to accompany these iPod commercials; most just laughed. Here was my script.

"I auditioned to do some iPod commercials to help Apple in their quest to broaden their market beyond the usual youthful customers. Apple sees nimble, old guys like me as their future. Watch for my image in Maclean's and Time magazine as they kick off their new campaign."

O.K, I promise never to cross over to the dark side, to be colonized, militarized and corporatized. I promise.



Media Education Events

National Media Education Week

The Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) and Media Awareness Network (MNet) in conjunction with organizations such as AML are launching a National Media Education Week, November 19-24, 2006.

The primary goal of National Media Education Week is to highlight the importance of media and Web literacy as key learning areas in the information age.

To that end, AML, CTF and MNet are currently working with provincial and territorial teacher organizations and several education and community groups to develop a wide range of media education programs and professional development opportunities. There are many potential initiatives to make this a week of accomplishments such as holding public forums and special workshops, distributing press releases and staging a teleconference with three or more sites across Canada.

Register Now for ACME'S 3rd Continental Media Education Summit

Facing the Media Crisis: Media Education for Reform, Justice, and Democracy

October 6-8, in Burlington, Vermont

Calling all media educators! Registration is now open for ACME 3rd Continental Media Education Summit: Free multimedia education resources packages to the first 300 registrants.

Eighteen plenary and keynote speakers including: Diane Wilson, Amy Goodman, Bill McKibben, U.S. Senate candidate Bernie Sanders, Jean Kilbourne, Robert Jensen, Jerome Armstrong, Carrie McLaren, Jeff Chester, Sut Jhally, John Stauber, Bob McCannon, Josh Silver, Peter Phillips, Anthony Riddle, Lauren-Glenn Davitian, Hannah Sassaman, Pete Tridesh, and Sara Voorhees.

Visit the ACME news list: <http://www.acmecoalition.org/subscribe.cfm>

Project Look Sharp's Media Literacy Summer Institute

July 10-14, in Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York

This four-and-a-half-day immersion course in integrating media analysis and production into any curriculum for K-12 teachers, technology/media specialists, librarians, community educators, and others interested in the field of media literacy includes Mac-based hands-on training. Inexpensive on-campus housing will be available. Registration fee is \$572, and cross-contract through BOCES is available. For more information, visit <http://www.ithaca.edu/looksharp>, call 607-274-3471, or email looksharp@ithaca.edu.

Australia - National Media Education Conference 2006

e-Merging Realities: youth / media / education

6 - 8 October in Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Brisbane, Queensland

In 2006, ATOM Qld Inc will host the National media education conference.



We are pleased to announce that the conference will be held in Beautiful Brisbane on October 6-8, 2006 at the Gardens Point campus of QUT. This is the last weekend of the Queensland school holidays.

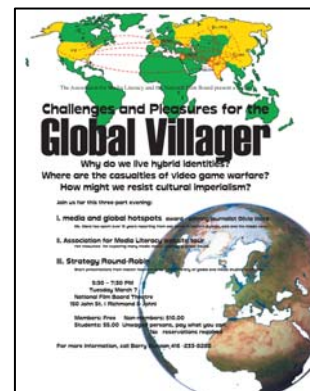
The conference theme will be: "e-Merging Realities: youth / media / education". Keynote presentations, seminars and workshops will focus on how media education at Primary, Middle Years, Senior and Tertiary levels can address:

- * Youth media production and the promises of digital media.
- * Young people and new media in local and global communities.
- * Media and corporate control - the realities for access and participation.
- * Emerging "realities" for changing youth identities.
- * Multiliteracies for Media Education

Media and Global Issues: Getting Connected with the World

On March 7th, the Association for Media Literacy and the National Film Board presented a forum on "Media and Global Issues: Getting Connected with the World."

After award winning journalist **Olivia Ward's** keynote address, on media and global hotspots, there were several short presentations on our global theme. These include students' immersion experiences in living with a family in the Dominican Republic, using the resources of the National Film Board, and teaching about the media implications of September 11 and the Asian Tsunami.



The AML Web site (www.aml.ca) - A Dynamic New Resource for Media Educators in 2006

During the last three years, the Association for Media Literacy (AML) has had some major difficulties in developing and maintaining its Web site. The site was often down or members were unable to log onto the site. Fortunately, those days are over! In March 2006 a new site at www.aml.ca was launched. The site is a tribute to AML President Carolyn Wilson who worked with a new developer to create a terrific new web site. Congratulations Carolyn.

Besides containing excellent lesson plans and media resources, it is expected that members will be able to submit items of interest, share concerns and ideas and above all, offer lesson plans which can be posted on the site.

Media teachers will know of media literacy material at other Web sites, especially the outstanding resources of the Media Awareness Network in Ottawa. However, the AML site will offer materials tailored to the specific needs of its members, including: reports on national and international media literacy news and developments; resources developed by teachers for teachers; and news on events and courses for teachers in Ontario and across Canada. We believe that the AML and MNet sites will complement each other.



Here is a sample of some of the resources you can look forward to perusing:

- President's message - an overview of AML's goals and what's happening in media education in Ontario and in other parts of the country
- Biographies of AML speakers
- AML's political history and a history of media education in Canada
- AML executive Carol Arcus makes the important case for media teachers to work with the concept of audience-both theoretical and practical. As an exemplar, she deconstructs a loaded photograph of CNN reporter Anderson Cooper in a Third World setting.
- Conference reports including a media education conference held in Beijing- China's first!
- Reports on events for members e.g. the dynamic and controversial forum held in Toronto on "Marketing to Teens and Tweens."
- A review of an important new book "Mediated" by Tom Zengotita which takes a fresh look at our current media landscape, from hip hop to the meaning of blogging.

and much more...

Be sure to visit the site at www.aml.ca. Sign up for the AML Newsletter and gain access to classroom resources. Fill in all the information required on the "Membership" registration page and you will have full access to the site for 30 days.

After that time, should you wish to continue your access, you will have to pay a membership fee of \$30.00. Payment can be made by cheque to The Association for Media Literacy, and can be mailed to:

The Association for Media Literacy Membership
c/o Lisa Laviolette
2-100 Elgin Mills Rd. W.
Richmond Hill, Ontario
Canada L4C 0R6

It will be \$30.00 well spent!

Australia Revisited: Media Education that really Surfs

For two weeks in May 2005, I was privileged to serve as a visiting scholar in media education at the University of Technology Queensland, Australia. I was well looked after, this was my second trip to Australia and I can't recommend a visitation highly enough. What you have heard about warm Aussie hospitality is all true.

My key contact was Michael Dezuanni who teaches at the university. He looked after me every step of the way. That Michael is chairing the big Australian media education conference in Queensland next October is almost a guarantee of its success.



I sat in on several classes of media studies at the university. These courses were aimed at preparing pre-service teachers to qualify for jobs as media teachers. Because there is strong demand, many will find jobs. The classes were delightfully informal and the students were enthusiastic. One class had divided into groups to work on an original video which would demonstrate some practical examples of media literacy. Unfortunately, the final product was poorly presented. The students should have prepared better scripts and allowed time to do proper edits. Nothing unique here; It looked like some classes which I encountered in my career!

I presented at two mini conferences and had an opportunity to be in the audience for some engaging seminars. It seems that media educators, even in Australia, (we are accustomed to saying they are world leaders) have to fight to maintain their courses and to be taken seriously by their colleagues. Michael Dezuanni in the conclusion of a conference report on the state of the art in four states in Australia - Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, concludes: "It was clear from the range of stimulating and exciting presentations at the conference that there are some amazing things happening across the country. However, the battle to legitimize the teaching of Media has to be continually won and re-won for us to see its full potential."

A Taste of Sight Seeing



The Gold Coast is Australia's version of Miami: beautiful beaches set against dozens of tall impersonal condos. There was a surfing class we observed in which the instruction didn't seem to help these earnest guys mount their board and ride with the waves. To extend the surfing experience you need to walk through a typical surfing store: a great exercise for fulfilling your surf fantasies. Do you have the right look, the fanciful t-shirts? Or cool goggles? If not, you won't be able to cut it on the beach. In spite of the tourist look and the garishness in the Gold Coast, many educational conferences

take place here. I hope to recommend that my colleagues make an early booking. I want to enrol in that surfing class.

A trip to the rainforest was fascinating and rewarding. Driving through it while going up a mountain made me dizzy, but in a seductively hallucinatory kind of way, it was so dark and dense. (If you are lucky you could see wallabies - cute critters.) Wherever a sunbeam penetrated the dense growth it created a beautiful, shimmering effect.

On the second day of our travels in the rain forest, it was raining. As you walked a well-worn path and negotiated your balance you treaded precariously a narrow, swaying rope bridge on top of the forest. As we emerged, we were confronted by several buses of wildly chattering Japanese tourists covered in swaths of plastic sheeting. I am now convinced that if I served as an eco-tourist guide that I would be dead at the end of the day.



The International Association of Business Communication (IABC Canada) Conference held in Halifax, Oct 16-18, 2005

This was my first conference presentation in which the primary audience was made up of media professionals, not educators. It was a revealing, refreshing experience. These business communicators and public relations people depend on a diversity of skills - social, political and commercial to do their work effectively. There were many lessons here for educators.



I was on a panel entitled "Communications or Propaganda?: the State of 'Truth' in Communications Today." The panellists were Bruce Wark, a journalism professor at the University of King's College, Scott Reid, deputy chief of staff for Paul Martin and me. As a Paul Martin spin doctor, Scott Reid was skilful in putting on a happy face to the Liberal party gaffes. (At the beginning I suggested to him that "he was already tap dancing.") He shared his spin doctoring philosophy extremely well which is inherent in this high flying job. I made the case for nourishing a media literate public and Bruce Wark urged us to learn how to understand the constraints on reporting the news and doing in-depth stories. The audience was lively and brought to the discussion their own definitions and examples of propaganda.

The workshop sessions I attended were excellent. Author Shel Holtz, an author and prominent speaker showed how business communicators can use blogs, podcasts and social networking to enhance their reputation and their brand.

The highlight was Ed Power from Edelman Canada who presented a session on "Brand Care", a PR-centric approach to branding. He explained why McDonalds and Coke have been in trouble and suggested some ways they could pull out of their slump. His detailed example was the Uniroyal Tires account and how Edelman Canada gained a successful brand personality through careful massaging and manipulation by their PR/advertising people.

The participants were eager to learn new strategies. (I didn't hear about the dark side of public relations: such as propping up dictatorial governments, rationalizing the war in Iraq and minimizing the impact of the Exxon Valdez oil spill.) In this regard, the luncheon speaker, Christopher Bennett, a dynamic thirty-ish looking man was an ideal spokesperson. He asserted that his colleagues were losing sight of what's relevant and becoming too reactive to the news cycle and not pro-active enough in leading it. Furthermore—hold your breath—he recommended staying in touch with people out there in the malls and streets. And everybody should be exposed to pop culture happenings for 30 minutes a day and—no surprise—advocated acquiring in-depth media literacy skills. That, I must say took my breath away.

Media Education and Youth Media in the West Bank

By Lee Rother

After thirty years of teaching media education to at-risk high school students in an alternative program for a school board north of Montreal, I wanted the experience of working with youth who are at risk primarily because they happen to live in a region of the world that has or is experiencing conflict. Obviously disruption to a 'normal' education also means that opportunities for Media Education in formal education settings are impossible. However, community youth media organizations in many such settings do provide youth with an opportunity to voice the realities of their lives. *The Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation (PYALARA)*, located in Ar-Ram, a small town in the West Bank, is one of the few such organizations.

For a week and a half in July 2005 I volunteered at PYALARA with twelve teens and young adults who came from several areas in the West Bank including Ar-Ram, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Hebron and Nablus. Some were enrolled in media studies/journalism and communications at universities in the region. Others were in studies such as sociology, economics and business. One or two were unemployed.



In our first session I asked the youth their ideas of the image of Arabs in Western news media. We segued into a discussion of Arabs in mainstream Hollywood movies. Some considered that Hollywood reinforced the image of Arabs as terrorists, especially since 9/11. "So what's the image of Westerners you have from the media?" I asked. Their answer, 'Westerners are self-centered. They are dominated by media'. Two questions occurred to me as a result of the youths' comments:

- What kinds of culture and intercultural understandings do youth in developing and post conflict countries get from local and international media?
- What is the role for youth media in helping youth in these regions to construct their own understandings of these issues?

During my time at PYALARA each of the three teams produced a mini-documentary. The productions, *Living for the moment*, *I am a Palestinian* and *Dreams are born*, reflect the reality of, but rather their productions took on a more inspiring tone. That is, the themes leaned toward a time when peace will be realized rather than about the current conflicts.

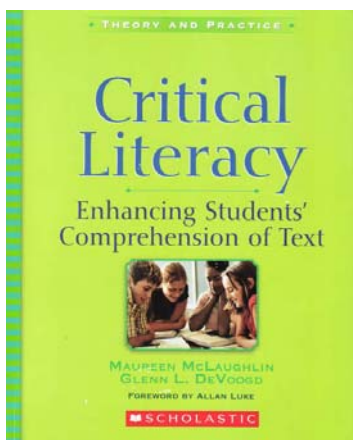
I am pleased to say that the success of the project with PYALARA has prompted the organization to consider developing a mentoring, training program sometime in the New Year. Youth trained in this project will work with Palestinian children in towns and villages in the West Bank. If the funds can be found, I hope to return to PYALARA and work on this mentoring project.

Conclusion

My work with the young people at PYALARA reinforced for me the importance of Media Education as a tool for local and individual transformation in regions of post-conflict, and that has the potential to enable youth to make a positive and constructive impact on their communities and their families. As well, my experience in Ar-Ram bolstered for me the idea that Media Education has a good deal to offer young people in our own school systems here in the West by providing opportunities to explore the world beyond local borders and to question and/or understand the impact national actions have on the international levels.

Thank you.

Critical Literacy: Can media educators benefit from its insights?



While in Australia last May I encountered teachers implementing critical literacy which I had only heard about before. I soon realized that many of the elements of media literacy overlap with critical literacy (CL). Nonetheless, it has much to offer us. Furthermore, it is much more than a fad cashing in on those two overworked words 'critical' and 'literacy'

Rationale: We no longer consider texts to be timeless, universal or unbiased. Texts are social constructs that reflect some of the ideas and beliefs held by some groups of people at the time of their creation. As we examine the underlying values and consider the ways in which we, as readers and viewers, are positioned to view the world, we are



able to develop opposing interpretations. (Critical Literacy document, Tasmania Department of Education, 2003)

"Critical literacy is the analysis and critique of the relationships among language, power, social groups and social practices". (*Critical Literacy in the Primary Classroom*, Knobel and Healy)

I don't want to be superficial in my understandings of CL. In my next bulletin I will address CL in-depth. Here are a few starters to pique your interest

If you Google the term "critical literacy", the first article is from Tasmania and provides an excellent overview. Scroll down to links and look for the article by Allan Luke "Critical Literacy in Australia." This article provides some important first hand background on the contexts of CL.

The one American book on the topic is "Critical Literacy: Enhancing Students' Comprehension of Text," Scholastic Books, 2004. This book is a lucid overview containing both theory and practice. It does, however, water down some of the social-cultural dimensions of CL.

Finally, Wendy Morgan at the University of Technology, Queensland is publishing a book entitled "Critical Literacy and the Aesthetic: Transforming the English Classroom" available in May from the National Council of Teachers of English. I interviewed her at the university and was impressed with her grasp of the topic as well as her knowledge of media education. Her new book would appear to be an outstanding contribution.

If anyone is interested in reading the draft of the first chapter of her new book, and/or would like to be part of a Critical Literacy chat group, let me know. Send me an e-mail (baduncan@interlog.com)

Chris Worsnop Interview



Chris Worsnop is a mischievous character and at a dinner party is known to stage quite a performance. I am a witness. There is no stopping him once he gets going. From dunderhead superintendents to the crew that proposed the ill conceived Youth News Network, its all fodder for his goon show – Monty-Python-style-grinder and ultimately, part of his amazing intellectual and pedagogical talent.

His role as a teacher and a coordinator of English, especially in the area of assessment, would be sufficient to earn him kudos. But his career since officially retiring in 1995 is impressive. Largely dedicated to media education, his work would include innumerable presentations at conferences around the world, the publication of several books including Screening Images and Assessing Media Work and his role on the committee for the prestigious film studies IB International Baccalaureate.

Chris is a strong team player. (Having been on several committees with him, I know.) While on the AML executive, he took on the Youth News Network (YNN), eloquently refuting the questionable rationale of this daily 12 minute telecast for schools that included two minutes of commercials.

While he is super media literate—and especially a connoisseur of good films—he is equally in love with the theatre, performing or taking care of the sound board. I trust he never gets his signals crossed.



B.D. What have you enjoyed in our media menu lately (film, TV, music etc.)

C.W. The best films I have seen recently are *Crash* and *History of Violence*. The best one I have seen again is *Vera Drake*. The last film I saw in a theatre was *King Kong* - and I wish I hadn't. I couldn't begin to list all the video and DVD films I've seen lately. I borrow a lot of titles from my municipal library - international films and classics, and I see them as they arrive - sometimes five or six at a time.

I don't watch a lot of television at all. There are very few shows that I follow. I am a sucker for science fiction. I don't mind watching *Six Feet Under*, *Daily Planet* and some of the British mysteries, but I never routinely watch sitcoms or cop shows, and I absolutely avoid reality television and anything with angels in the title. I should put in the disclaimer that I often look at one episode of any show, just to say I have seen it.

My musical tastes run to Jazz, Baroque and musical theatre (but not Lloyd Weber). There is some popular music that I enjoy. I love the Beatles and Queen for instance, but even when I was a teenager I was never a fan of rock-and-roll, belonging to that group who favoured traditional jazz by Humphrey Littleton, Chris Barber and such. If I had been a gang-joiner, I would have been a Mod, not a Rocker. (See: *Quadrophenia*)

Many of my media education colleagues wonder how I can claim to be a media educator when I seem to avoid so much of modern popular culture. My answer is that I don't feel I need to pretend to be a teenager in my cultural tastes in order to be informed or useful as a teacher. I always try never to put anybody else's taste down even though I can be forceful in justifying my own tastes. I always found it quite useful to be able to say: "Please explain to me about that program (or that music) it's not something I'm familiar with."

B.D. As a retiree, you have many initiatives, media and non-media. Give your many fans an update

C.W. Since the age of 15 I've been very involved in community theatre. Mostly as an actor. Two years ago I directed a play for the first time in almost 30 years, and was delighted to find I still know how to do it. I do a fair amount of sound design for community theatre, too. I also do adjudicating for student and community theatre. I guess adjudicating ties in with my assessment interest. Next season (2006-2007) I will be adjudicating the Association of Community Theatres (Central Ontario) "drama" category.

I love writing and do it a lot: mostly related to media or to assessment in one way or another, but I also do some creative writing which I keep hidden in a shoe box in the back of a closet.

For the last few years most of my media work has been related to the new film course that's being piloted by the International Baccalaureate Organization. Since 1999 I've been involved in the development and implementation of this course and I have just completed my term as the Pilot Examiner. This year is the fourth year of examinations. There are about 40 schools worldwide piloting the course, which we hope will go mainstream in another two years.

B.D. I seem to recall that in England, your home country, your father was in the motion picture business. Can you elaborate and explain its significance for you?

C.W. My dad worked as a projectionist on and off both in England and in Canada. When I was a kid, he used to bring a 16 mm projector home from the cinema and give us a film show as a birthday treat. I cut my teeth on Chaplin and Silly Symphonies. He taught my older brothers how to make stink bombs out of the nitrate clips he brought home. When I was in high school, I used to go help him in the projection booth on nights when he was alone, and during school holidays. This was in the days when it took at least two operators to run the show, because there was a changeover every 10 or 20



minutes, there were carbon arcs to be kept aligned, and there was all the rewind work and film repair that had to be done as the show went on. *Cinema Paradiso* is obviously one of my favourite films.

When you work night after night showing the same film, you either get very bored, or you learn how to see something different each time you see those bits in the middle of each reel, or at the change-over. If you were doing rewinds - and I was always doing rewinds - you missed the same parts of each reel. Over time, you'd get to piece the film together, but you had to build it from pieces you saw separately, or heard at the rewind bench - often not in sequence. Not a bad skill to have for media literacy. When my dad had a day off from projectionist work, as often as not he would take me to the movies for a busman's holiday. He took me to see my first Kurosawa, Ingmar Bergman, Jacques Tati and Fernandel films.

B.D. What are some other seminal influences in making you a media literate educator, first from England and then from Canada?

C.W. There was a cinema in my university town that showed mostly foreign films. I lapped them up. When I started to teach English in Ontario high schools, I thought it was unfair that geography teachers should monopolize the 16mm projectors, so I started using NFB films in my English classes. Later, I set up a school film society. Before long, it had as many parent members as students, and the films we showed became the content of one of the first film units in a grade 13 English course in Ontario. We did a study of Arthur Penn the first year.

I was a member of BFI and SEFT (the Society for Education in Film and Television). In 1968 I spent a summer at the NFB at one of their Summer Institutes. I was teaching in Ottawa then, and got connected to the Canadian Film Institute as well as to the local NFB office, and had a perpetual supply of free films for my classroom. A couple of years later I enrolled at Universite de St Paul (Ottawa University) and did a diploma course in Social Communications. That was Vatican II talk for media studies.

B.D. Can you describe a rewarding media lesson when you were classroom teacher in Ottawa?

C.W. Going back to that first grade 13 film course; there was a student who came up to me before he enrolled and asked me: "You're not going to do to films the same things you did to books, are you?" That was one of the most important lessons I have ever learned - period.

B.D. What were the strengths and the weaknesses of the early days (1960s) in which both of us were participants in what we then called screen education?

C.W. It was bright and new. It was filled with enthusiasm. It coincided with Hall-Dennis, Marshall McLuhan, Trudeaumania, Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, Carnaby Street, the Pill, the Vietnam War, The Rolling Stone, and all the optimism of the era of Confederation, the Montreal Olympics, Man and His World and all that. All of this made it tremendously exciting, and also tended to make it shallow and superficial.

It often didn't really have any foundation other than the enthusiasm of its practitioners. It had long hair and it wasn't seen as being respectable. Some people found that to be its attraction - others the opposite. Even the Ontario Ministry of Education *Screen Education in Ontario*, published in 1970, was accused of having Timothy Leary as a co-writer. BFI and SEFT were trying to establish a background for screen education, through semiotic theories, but that was tough stuff to read in those days. So was McLuhan - difficult - and not enough people put the effort into exploring the theory and bringing it on board with their teaching.



B.D. When you became co-ordinator of English for the Peel Board of education, what were some media education initiatives you implemented?

C.W. I pushed pretty hard to get a group of media teachers organized, but it was a task for Sisyphus. We did workshops, mostly in film/video utilization, and we sneaked some media studies into the workshops. Our media library staff were great, and they helped a lot in selecting titles for our media library that were well made as well as suitable for curriculum content. We managed to get a lot of good media ed. titles into the collection that way. They would be listed as Geography titles, perhaps, but I would put out a list of "titles of interest to media teachers" separately.

More than once we established writing teams to write local curriculum guides for media education, but the furthest we ever got was to include some units in the English curriculum. Eventually, we adopted the AML *Media Literacy Anthology* document and distributed it to all schools as a resource. The chief problems were that media courses were few and far between in the board; media teachers the same. Each course tended to be more a reflection of its own teacher than of a common program. It was hard to devote resources to so small a group when the politicians were shouting about bad spelling and other forms of indecency.

B.D. How would you assess some of the current initiatives in media education content? (e.g. digital literacy, expanded definitions of our work - pop culture artefacts, public vs private space, etc)

C.W. I think the only way to keep track of all the new technology and the social questions people raise around culture is to cling to the key concepts of media education - whichever version of them you contribute to. I'm tired of predictions that the new technologies are going to revolutionize my life and my society. They rarely do. Things change, but I don't see it as a revolution. Remember when the *Greening of America* offered us a whole chapter on the revolutionary effect of bell-bottomed jeans? Remember when "Horror Comics" were going to rot the very core out of (what was then) modern youth? Well, today it's all about how on-line purchasing will revolutionize the way we go shopping, and how cell phones, blogs, and optical cabling will kill print. Perhaps I exaggerate - a little. Thomas Hardy wrote about how the railway had displaced and destroyed a society that could not withstand the new speed of communication, granted, but that society was hundreds of years old, and had hardly adapted since the Norman invasion. Our present society is in a condition of constant adaptation - that is the norm. We are used to it. It is not a revolution.

So these points you raise are examples to me that illustrate the importance of understanding the political and social implications of all communication: the theory of media education, if you like. They need to be understood in terms of their conventions, and how they construct versions of reality that might be different from those of other "media". But to me the lesson remains the understanding of the underlying key concepts rather than the ability to rabbit on, for instance, about Blackberry technology.

B.D. How feasible is it to give media education the credibility it needs to leave the margins and head for the curriculum centre of education?

C.W. Well, Barry, we've been trying for 40 years. But let's be honest about this. Everyone thinks they know what belongs at the centre of the curriculum. And they all have well-meaning arguments to support their daily dose of Phys Ed, Music, Library, Esperanto etc. The centre of the curriculum is a very crowded place, and the people who crowd into it are often more ambitious for their own careers than they are for the good of the curriculum. They can have sharp elbows. Beware.

On the other hand, I often argue that culture is the centre piece of any country's education, and that modern culture is now more - or a least as much - dependent on mediated images and sounds as on mediated words. The pictures and sounds have not so much displaced print in our culture, as they



have expanded the space to make room for more at the centre. To ignore the new media is to neglect the study of our culture. We can no longer claim that literature study is serving the needs of acculturating our students as it was claimed when Dr. Arnold used the great English authors to displace the ancient Greeks and Romans at the centre of the Rugby School curriculum. I'll paraphrase David Daiches who said something like: "We must most certainly become masters of language, or we are in danger of becoming its slaves." But note, he puts the emphasis on understanding - he does not criticize language itself as a culprit. To my mind, there is too much in modern media education that decries the media as a major culprit, and wants to turn media education into an attack engine to protect us all from its evil effects. This is an excuse for avoiding understanding. It substitutes prohibition and puritanism for intelligent analysis. It is not education at all, but civil defence.

B.D. One of your major contributions to media education is in the area of assessment. Why is this so important?

C.W. I'm sure you don't want another textbook on assessment. So very briefly: Even if we were successful in getting Media Education to occupy the centre of the curriculum, there would always be new subjects beating on the door asking for their turn. The only countries where there has been a successful and seemingly permanent implementation of Media Education in the curriculum are those countries where it has been formally established and examined as a graduating credential. In those same countries the credential is bestowed from outside the school through external examination systems. Those countries are: the United Kingdom, Scotland, New Zealand, Australia, France, Denmark, and other European countries. (Soon the IBO Film course will join these as a world wide credit, acknowledged by universities all over the world.) Parents and politicians pay attention to examination results, so one way of making media education important to them is to make sure that it is an examined subject. Now, I'm not talking about the kind of large-scale testing that presently is taking place in Ontario and all over North America. The kind of assessment I'm talking about here is quite congruent with the kind of teaching that's seen as best in the media education courses.

And that brings me to the next point: authentic assessment. I really don't see much point in assessing if the only purpose is to generate numbers and rank-order tables. That leads us to go for the cheapest and quickest test. In North America we know exactly what those look like. Authentic assessment engages students in the real-world tasks and has them submit that performance on these tasks as evidence of their capability within the course. Authentic assessment also respects the teacher's own professionalism as an assessor, and uses the teacher's marks after subjecting them to processes of moderation. Moderation is good for the reliability factor in the marks themselves; it can be helpful and instructive to the teachers; and above all it sends a message that the assessment system respects teachers' judgment. The real life tasks help the student by anchoring assessment in reality.

B.D. You have had two editions of *Screening Images*. Was this little book pitched to a niche audience? Provide some anecdotes.

C.W. *Screening Images* was originally a column I wrote for the Ontario Film Association (OFA) newsletter, *A Newsletter Called Fred*. [Don't ask] OFA gave me a grant to collect the columns into a book in 1993. I wrote a lot of extra materials and connected up the rest and published in 1994. The intended audience was neophyte media teaches who I assumed would be mostly coming from teaching English. It was bought by lots of public and high school libraries as well as individual teachers. It was sold first in Canada, then in the USA, after the Center for Media Literacy started distributing it. Individual copies have been sold into many other countries as well. In 1999, when the first edition was getting a bit out of date, and supplies were running out, I did an extensive rewrite and put out a second edition. My basement hides the 50 remaining copies of the second edition – then it's out of print.



B.D. When Youth News Network (modelled on Channel One) started to promote its services in Canada you became a leading warrior in opposing it. Why did you become so active? Give us one or two highlights of the campaign. What are the lessons of this battle? How would you assess the dangers today of the private sector invading schools with media goodies?



C.W. Briefly, YNN was a bad Canadian clone of Channel One. I'll just talk of two things about it that made me angry.

The first is that it was using my own school board (after I had retired) as a guinea pig for the pilot program. I had been able earlier to scotch a previous attempt to get YNN established there. As soon as I heard about the new iteration, I blew the whistle and got the ball rolling to stop it again. John Pungente was wonderful in rallying the troops from across the country, and AML took it on as a sacred trust. We attended meetings at the school, went to school board meetings, picketed YNN presentations, and wrote screeds of articles debunking every claim YNN made. These were generously spread all over the Internet, and many of them are still there.

The second is that the YNN program was to be offered in class time as an obligatory part of every student's experience. I did some elementary arithmetic and calculated that the Ontario taxpayer subsidizes every minute of class time by more than 4 cents per student. In a 1500 pupil school, operating 185 days a year, the cost of YNN to the taxpayer (YNN insisted its program was "free") would be almost exactly \$130,000.00. One sixth of that subsidy would have gone to pay for time when commercials were being played to the students. The Peel Board at that time had about 30 high schools, so the cost for one board could have been as high as \$3.9 million per year just to accept a no-good "free" program. The right thing to do was to kill it.

Enough said.

B.D. You have for several years been a member of film committee of the UK based International Baccalaureate. What is your role? How important is this group in modelling the teaching of film?

C.W. I've already said something about this. I'll just add that the IB Film course is located in the IB curriculum as an Arts option, alongside Music, Dance, Theatre, and Visual Arts. It is a 2 year course leading to high school graduation. My involvement in it has been a wonderful experience in creating and implementing a course that is authentic in its teaching and in its assessment. I very much like the international focus of the IB curriculum that requires students to study aspects of culture beyond their own country. And I like the no-nonsense assessment that clearly sets out the criteria for success, and then applies them rigorously, not flinching from giving a mark of 1 or 0 if it is warranted, while not demanding absolute perfection in order to award the highest mark. There are no formal examinations in our Film course. Of the three final examined components, two - each worth 25% of the final mark - are projects completed at school and then sent on to examiners around the world for marking. One of these is a documentary film script exploring an issue of film history or film theory. The other is an audio taped critical commentary of a short segment of a feature film. The third, worth 50% of the final mark, is a portfolio of film production work and accompanying documentation that is first marked at the school and then sent to examiners for moderation. My connection with this course comes to an end in September this year (2006) I started working on it in 1999.

B.D. There are many versions of media education beyond North America. You have attended conferences in Brazil and New Zealand. What did you learn that was important for our work here?



C.W. I will leave the IB course as said for this question. In Europe, I have found that the study of media is more focused on academic and critical models than our own "media literacy" approach. Media studies is a more common title for the courses in UK, NZ and Australia, and although they cover much of the same ground as our own courses, they seem not to set as much emphasis on activism as a desired outcome. They tend to be more interested in how individuals use media than in how individuals are victims of the media. Dare I say that they are more intellectual and less emotional in their approach? Or will that get me shot?

B.D. The protectionist position in teaching media is one you have strongly opposed. Why does this matter so much to you? Give some anecdotes

C.W. We don't ask if the math curriculum is working by looking at whether or not kids are getting taller. We don't expect the writing curriculum to produce kids who avoid fatty foods. We don't measure the geography curriculum in terms of how few of its students end up in jail. These expectations would be rightly identified as being desirable, but not reasonable to expect from the curriculum. There is, though, an ominous set of social engineering expectations that are frequently loaded onto the back of media education, as corollaries to the claim that the media are guilty of "causing" all kinds of undesirable behaviours. Media education is touted as an instrument to:

- stop kids from smoking
- steer kids away from alcohol
- prevent pregnancy and STDs among teens
- stop kids from becoming violent
- keep kids away from junk food and obesity
- keep kids off drugs
- stop kids from becoming compulsive consumers
- stop kids' minds from rotting
- provide an antidote to (insert your favourite bugaboo here)

Expecting media education to deliver these outcomes is folly on two counts:

- it assumes that students are mere receptacles for "accepted" norms and have no right to make up their own minds about social issues (I.e. it teaches convergent thinking, when one of the most important things students can learn in schools is divergent thinking)
- it sets up media education to fail if those unattainable major measures are the focus. If media education does not deliver the social engineering outcomes that some people claim to be within its capability, should we then cancel media education courses?

The reasons for studying media in schools are related to the fact that our culture and society are no longer exclusively print-based. It is dishonest to pretend that we are doing a good job of preparing students to live in a modern culture without teaching them to understand and operate within the media of our own time. This must include helping them to understand, articulate and justify their pleasures related to media as a vital part of their overall critical understanding.



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 textbook, *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.

