Media Literacy

▼ An Alternative to Censorship ▲

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Policy Project**

*a think tank on artistic and
intellectual freedom*

FREE EXPRESSION POLICY PROJECT

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Executive Summary

Media literacy education has come a long way since the 1970s, when the first "critical thinking" courses were introduced in a few American schools. Most educators today understand that with the revolutionary changes in communication that have occurred in the last half-century, media literacy has become as essential a skill as the ability to read the printed word. Equally important, media literacy education can relieve the pressures for censorship that have, over the last decade, distorted the political process, threatened First Amendment values, and distracted policymakers from truly effective approaches to widely shared concerns about the mass media's influence on youth.

The purpose of this report is to inform the public and policymakers about media literacy education and its superiority to TV ratings, Internet filters, "indecency" laws, and other efforts to censor the ideas and information available to the young. The report concludes with the following policy recommendations:

⬧ Congress should recognize that although there are many troublesome images and ideas in popular culture, the actual effects of the mass media are complex and difficult to predict. It should therefore make a clear statement of national purpose to promote media literacy as an essential part of basic education that is far preferable to censorship as a means of addressing concerns about popular culture's influence on youth.

⬧ The federal government should create guidelines for media literacy education which recognize that critical thinking is the goal, and that media literacy is more than simply an "inoculation" against violent, sexual, or other controversial content in art and entertainment.

⬧ The national commitment to media literacy education should be backed up with adequate funding through federal and state governments and nonprofit foundations; but funds should not be accepted from profit-making corporations that produce media content.

> ## Media literacy has become as essential a skill as the ability to read the printed word.

⬧ Media literacy concepts should be integrated into language arts, social studies, visual art, health, and information technology curricula.

⬧ Teacher training is essential to effective media literacy education and should be supported through seminars and workshops, and incorporated in undergraduate and graduate school programs.

Introduction:
Why Media Literacy Education Is Preferable to Censorship

From the early days of radio and movies to the vast resources of today's World Wide Web, the mass media have been an object of fascination for youth. Yet parents, educators, and youth advocates have long been uneasy about many of the media messages that children and teenagers encounter. Popular culture can glamorize violence, irresponsible sex, junk food, drugs, and alcohol; it can reinforce stereotypes about race, gender, sexual orientation, and class; it can prescribe the lifestyle to which one should aspire, and the products one must buy to attain it.

Thus, it isn't surprising that calls to censor the mass media in the interest of protecting youth have been a mainstay of American politics for many years. Attempts to censor gangster movies in the 1930s, crime comics in the 1950s, and TV violence today have produced an almost unending series of laws, regulations, and proposals for restricting the art, information, and entertainment available to youth. The advent of the Internet – a medium in which young people are often better versed than their elders – has only intensified these concerns.

There are many reasons why censorship is an unsatisfactory response to concerns about the mass media and its effects on youth. Foremost is the First Amendment, which protects the ability of youngsters as well as adults to read, watch, listen, access ideas, and think about them. This First Amendment protection is not simply a legal technicality to be overcome if possible by laws or policies cleverly crafted to avoid constitutional pitfalls. The right to explore art and ideas is basic to a free society. Without it, children and adolescents cannot grow into the thoughtful, educated citizens who are essential to a functioning democracy.

There are also practical reasons why censorship to "protect" youth is a bad idea. First, it is difficult for people to agree on what should be censored, and to define it in terms that are clear enough to put publishers and distributors on notice of what is banned. Many people point to "violence in the media," "extreme violence," or "gratuitous violence" as inappropriate and harmful to children. But these are elastic and subjective concepts. And most of those who think that "media violence" is bad for kids acknowledge that they don't mean to include televised versions of Shakespeare, Sophocles, or *Saving Private Ryan.*

Context counts for everything in art and entertainment: how is the violence presented; what are the consequences; what are the ambiguities in the story? There is no way that a censorship law or a simplistic letter-or-number rating system can make these judgments. As media scholar Henry Jenkins has observed, because different youngsters react very differently to the mythology, symbols, and stories in popular entertainment, "universalizing claims are fundamentally inadequate in accounting for media's social and cultural impact." [1]

Censorship also creates taboos that make the forbidden material more attractive. Curious youngsters will defy the bans – making their way into R-rated movies, de-programming v-chips and Internet filters, sneaking looks at dad's *Hustler* or mom's *Playgirl.* Indeed, it sometimes seems that censoring youth is more about sending them a *message* of social disapproval than about actually preventing them from reading or viewing everything that might be thought age-inappropriate or psychologically damaging. But if the idea is to disapprove bad values and inculcate good ones, and more importantly, to teach youngsters how to make these judgments for themselves, then there are more effective ways than censorship to go about it.

Here is where media literacy education comes in. It not only teaches students how media messages are made and how they differ from reality, but it shows them how to analyze those messages, whether they involve commercial advertising, ethnic and gender stereotypes, violence, sexual decision-making, or other complex issues. As a White House report recently noted, media literacy empowers young people, not only to understand and evaluate the ideas found in popular culture, but "to be positive contributors to society, to challenge cynicism and apathy and to serve as agents of social change." [2] Whatever the effectiveness of censorship, it can't accomplish this. Education in media literacy is thus not simply an alternative to censorship; it is far preferable to censorship, for it enhances rather than curtails young people's intellectual growth and their development into critically thinking adults.

This report presents a summary of media literacy education – its history; its different educational currents; and its implementation in the United States and abroad. It begins with an introduction to the different strands and philosophies in the media literacy movement; then gives a brief history of the movement, from early concerns over commercial advertising and media violence to sophisticated programs that provide youngsters not only with critical insights but with opportunities to learn and problem-solve through creating their own media. The report then describes some of the major groups involved in media literacy today, as well as developments in a number of states and in Canada, Great Britain, and Australia, which are far ahead of the U.S. in incorporating media literacy into basic education. The report concludes with public-policy recommendations for broad, coordinated media literacy education, free of corporate influence or control, and fashioned with an understanding of the complex role that popular culture plays in the lives of youth.

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Chapter 1:
What Is Media Literacy Education?

To be media literate is, simply put, to possess the critical thinking skills needed to "read" mass media communications, be they advertisements featuring sophisticated-looking women smoking cigarettes, quick-cut shootout scenes in action films, or coverage of far-off wars on the evening news. Rather than being passive consumers of movies, TV shows, and video games, or looking at them as neutral vehicles for information possessing some valid claim to authority or truth, students learn that media "realities" are "constructed" – whether to produce an adrenalin rush, sell a product, or reflect a social or cultural idea. They may also learn about the economic concentration of today's mass media, and the ways that large media corporations censor and control information.

In the U.S., media literacy education has been incorporated into English language arts, social studies, and health education courses; it is also sometimes a discrete course of study. Most programs include class discussions on media production techniques, narrative elements such as characterization and symbolism, and structure of the media industry. Many supplement classroom lessons with hands-on projects, calling on students to create their own advertisements, public service spots, or video games. After-school programs, youth arts or journalism projects, and church groups also provide media literacy education.

Efforts to introduce media literacy education have been frustrated at times by the notion that popular culture is funda-mentally less enriching or edifying than traditional curriculum subjects. At different points in the 1980s and '90s, "back to basics" attitudes took hold in the U.S., Canada, and England – favoring traditional, conservative pedagogy and the avoidance of educational "frills." In these climates, media literacy tends to be one of the first subjects dropped.

But as media literacy leader David Considine writes, the role of mass media "in shaping public perception and public policy" cannot be ignored. He quotes the educator Ernest Boyer: "'It is no longer enough to simply read and write. Students must also become literate in the understanding of visual messages.'" They must learn "'how to spot a stereotype, isolate a social cliche and distinguish facts from propaganda.'"[3]

After decades of relative neglect or sporadic support, the U.S. government today recognizes the importance of media literacy. State education departments have incorporated media literacy and critical thinking in their curricular stan-dards. But the comprehensiveness and sophistication of the different programs around the country vary enormously, and the federal financial commitment is still quite small.

In the continuing absence of a strong national mandate, various private groups have stepped in to supply information and resources, most often by publishing curricula, conducting training workshops, and organizing conferences. The diversity of these media literacy organizations

reflects the multi-faceted concerns of the movement. University-based and scholar-led groups such as the Center for Media Studies at Rutgers University and the Graduate Program in Media Literacy at Appalachian State University are the source of much of the theoretical discourse on media literacy, and also provide information, training, and resources. Citizens for Media Literacy in North Carolina concentrates on the potential for media literacy to foster more active citizenship. The New Mexico Media Literacy Project teaches kids to recognize and resist the consumerism and often addictive behavior promoted by TV advertising. San Francisco's Just Think Foundation targets lower-income youngsters who are deemed "at risk" for crime, violence, or drug use. In 2001, the Alliance for a Media Literate America formed to unite many of these groups, with the goal of "bringing media literacy education to all 60 million students in the United States, their parents, their teachers, and others who care about youth."[4]

The communications industry has not been oblivious to these developments, and some companies have initiated media literacy programs of their own, or have offered funding to media educators. This issue of corporate funding has set off one of the major debates in the media literacy field. TV networks including ABC, CBS, NBC, the Discovery Channel, and, in a highly controversial instance, the commercial provider of classroom news and advertisements, Channel One, have sponsored media literacy projects. The situation is rife with conflict of interest, as corporate-sponsored programs will inevitably steer clear of too-stringent a critique of their benefactors. As Professors Justin Lewis and Sut Jhally say

(describing a media literacy program sponsored by Continental Cablevision), the company's notion of "informed citizenship means little more than a weekly perusal of *TV Guide*."[5]

The conflict over corporate sponsorship also highlights a philosophical rift between those who focus on analysis of media content and those who view the structure of the media industry as an equally important concern. Wally Bowen of Citizens for Media Literacy observes that the "structural issue of media ownership" is one of the major challenges for media literacy educators, especially given the increasing consolidation of the communications industry, which is leaving less and less room for grassroots or dissenting voices.[6]

Media literacy leaders also disagree over fundamental objectives. Many oppose the "protectionist" or "inoculationist" philosophy, which sees media education primarily as a way to protect children from bad messages – and

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> - Renee Hobbs

in the process, denigrate their favorite TV programs, music videos, and video games. The result, they fear, is decreased student interest and ineffective education. "Many teachers at both the K-12 and university levels have found that students are unresponsive to the idea that they are helpless victims of media influence who need to be rescued from the excesses

and evils of their interest in popular culture," reports media literacy pioneer and Temple University professor Renee Hobbs. [7] Others point out that the protectionist approach "privileges" certain texts over others, and substitutes value judgments for truly critical analyses. [8]

Yet Bob McCannon, head of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project, asserts that it is "a myth that 'protectionist' media literacy does not work. On the contrary, when people are inspired to analyze their hypermediated culture and live a life for themselves and not Coke, Mastercharge, Budweiser, consumerism, fashion ads, Big Media, Big Tobacco and the corporate hegemony, it is the most powerful motivator for kids and citizens."[9]

Media literacy is admittedly "more than a vaccine," McCannon says; very few successful programs "are just bashing and protecting." On the contrary, they "respect kids' views, encourage questioning, and value popular media." But they also criticize mass media producers when they deserve it. Marieli Rowe of the National Telemedia Council replies that McCannon's approach "has powerful popular appeal but it does not educate young people to acquire the ability for autonomous critical thinking. Instead, it successfully indoctrinates them

to accept preconceived value judgments."[10]

The tension between simple protectionism and more nuanced understanding of media's influence will continue, if only because the protectionist approach is directly responsive to concerns about media violence, drugs, and other subjects, and thus more likely to receive government funding and popular support. One of the challenges for media literacy education, then, is to build public support for approaches that go beyond simple protectionism and teach youngsters to adopt an overall more critical stance toward the dizzying variety of popular culture available to them.

In this scenario, media literacy is an important response to a media-saturated society but is more than simply a vaccine against sexual risk-taking, gender stereotypes, or violence on TV. In much the same way that analyzing *The Canterbury Tales* might lead students to discover how Chaucer used poetry to make a statement about medieval ideas of morality or class, media literacy education can teach students about the subtle ways their own world is presented to them. In the process, it can not only relieve pressures for government censorship, but empower youth to defend their own free expression rights.

Chapter 2:
Media Literacy In The U.S.: A Brief History

Until the 1970s, the U.S. media literacy movement consisted primarily of scattered, small-scale efforts. In the 1930s, for example, a group of English teachers, working in cooperation with the pioneers of public radio, founded the Wisconsin Association for Better Broadcasting. They circulated a list of "good" radio programs, along with "helps" to increase listeners' "awareness, critical evaluation, and appreciation." In 1953, this group became the American Council for Better Broadcasts. In the early 1960s, it drafted a basic syllabus for analyzing TV shows and conducted summer workshops in curricular development.[11]

Meanwhile, media literacy pioneers such as Father John Culkin at Fordham and Tony Hodgkinson at Boston University wrote articles and conducted summer institutes that inspired the first generation of media scholars. Educator Barry Duncan writes: "It was John Culkin who was responsible for bringing Marshall McLuhan to Fordham for a year, providing him with the audience and publicity that his revolutionary ideas on communication deserved."[12]

In 1969, the National Education Association passed a resolution recommending critical viewing curricula to counteract the presumed ill effects of media violence.[13] The same year, scholars James Anderson and Milton Ploghoft devised one of the first comprehensive curricula for a consortium of Ohio school systems. Called the Critical Receivership Skills Project, Anderson and Ploghoft's model incorporated media literacy objectives into social studies and language arts classes.[14]

In 1970, New York City's public television station, WNET, began holding workshops in local schools to help educators incorporate television in the classroom. The station would later augment its program with assistance from the U.S. Office of Education. Also in 1970, another Anderson and Ploghoft venture, the Television Viewer Skills Project, began in Eugene, Oregon. The students particularly enjoyed being able to observe the mass media's "persuasion techniques."[15] Finally, in 1970 the National Council of Teachers of English passed a resolution encouraging teachers to include "non-print texts" (i.e., film and television) in their classrooms.[16]

In 1974, two significant media literacy projects were launched outside public schools. First, the Media Action Research Center (MARC), supported by government and nonprofit groups, was established in New York City. Religious in orientation and thus favoring, according to media education scholar James A. Brown, "a 'values approach' rather than a neutral one," MARC undertook extensive curricular projects, beginning with "Television Awareness Training" in 1977. This program examined how TV portrayed ethnic minorities and presented issues like premarital sex and homosexuality, and highlighted the disparity between

Christian values and prevalent media messages.[17]

Second, three researchers began a two-year project at Harvard University to study the efficacy of media literacy education. Funded by the U.S. Office of Child Development, Aimee Dorr and her associates tested three curricula on elementary-age children in six hour-long sessions largely featuring game- and role-playing. As a "control," they used an established "social reasoning" curriculum that aimed to teach the basics of social interaction, and tested it against two media literacy programs: an "industry curriculum" which highlighted the artificiality and economic motivation of entertainment programs (teaching, for instance, that "plots are made up" and "money for programs comes from advertisers"); and a "process curriculum," designed to show students how to distinguish between truth and the fantasy or skewed reality on television. One focus of the study was whether media literacy could decrease children's susceptibility to skewed portrayals of race.

The researchers first evaluated the children's racial attitudes through a test that asked them to match different descriptive terms, half positive and half negative, with photographs of people of different races, sexes, and ages. After completing their six-hour courses, all children watched an episode of the sitcom *The Jeffersons* that the researchers had decided set forth "mildly uncomplimentary views of blacks." After the program, the students were given a variety of tests to measure media literacy skills, including an interview and a modified version of the attitude exam to gauge how much *The Jeffersons* had influenced their views.

The researchers found that the children who had received one of the media literacy curricula were better able to analyze the program's content – to distinguish, for example, between its real and fictional aspects. They concluded that even the brief, six-hour exposure to media literacy education was effective in teaching the students to "understand and evaluate television content."[18] The children's real-world notions of race did not change markedly after the six sessions, though. Racial attitudes are bred over time as a result of many factors, and it may be too much to expect a brief media literacy course to change them.

In 1976, New York's East Syracuse-Minoa school system, in consultation with Milton Ploghoft, initiated a series of voluntary summer workshops for teachers. Each summer from then until 1979, the teachers met for five half-days to collaborate on curriculum design and basic television education. These efforts allowed educators to form clear objectives, but they relied, in James Brown's words, solely "on the initiative and commitment of self-selected teachers," with little "systematic integration."[19]

By the time of the last East Syracuse workshop, school district 91 in Idaho

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Falls, Idaho, had decided to integrate media literacy into its social studies and language arts courses. The curriculum was developed under Anderson and Ploghoft's direction and financed by the Idaho Falls Department of Education through a federal curriculum innovation program. The new critical-viewing course spanned grades 3-6 and was to be taught in two 1½-hour sessions per week. Three of Idaho Falls's six elementary schools adopted it.

Teachers in the Idaho program used a standardized set of audiovisual materials and a manual, which was published in 1981 as *The Way We See It: A Project to Develop Analytical Televiewing Skills*. In grade 3, students learned to analyze commercials; in grades 4 and 5, they assessed entertainment programs (learning, for instance, to spot stereotypes); and in grade 6, they studied TV news. In every grade, students kept journals of their television viewing and thus reflected on their media consumption, and at the end of each year, they produced their own commercial, entertainment, or news spots. A final portion of the program consisted of "home components," which encouraged critical discussion among students and their parents. ("... Tonight invite your parents to sit and watch a television program with you. After the program tell your parents your views on the program. What was the theme or value of the story? ... Were the conflicts realistic?" and so on).

Anderson and Ploghoft later evaluated the Idaho program's effectiveness using a "Television Information Game," which required students at each grade level to watch and analyze brief televised segments. They found the third grade

students demonstrated dramatic improvement in television-related cognitive skills; the older students made noticeable but less marked progress. Among Anderson's conclusions – with which Brown agrees – is that media literacy should be introduced early.[20]

Another study began around this time in Connecticut. Yale professors Dorothy and Jerome Singer introduced critical viewing into grade 3-5 language arts classrooms in order (among other goals) to help children "understand how television influences feelings, ideas, self-concept, and identification," "learn about the purpose and types of commercials, including public service or political announcements," "learn what aspects of a program are real, and how fantasy or pretend elements are created," and "become aware that TV rarely shows someone recovering from an act of violence or the aggressor being punished."

The Singers gave 134 children an eight-session course: an introduction to television, "Reality and Fantasy on Television," "Camera Effects and Special Effects," "Commercials and the Television Business," "Identification with Television Characters," "Stereotypes on Television," "Violence and Aggression," and "How Viewers Can Influence Television." Homework required the students to rewrite commercials and come up with alternate ways to resolve conflicts that ended in violence on TV shows. At the end of four weeks, the children who received media literacy instruction scored significantly higher than children in a control group on tests that included questions such as "How does television make characters disappear?" and "Who pays for television programs?"[21]

In 1980, the Singers conducted a similar study among younger students, using more games and child-oriented activities (a puppet show, for example). Before and after completing the course, students took a test to measure their familiarity with camera and editing techniques, their awareness of props, and their ability to distinguish between "real," "cartoon," "realistic," and "impossible" television figures. Questions included: "Are commercials part of the TV story?" and "If a famous person advertises a toy on TV, does it mean the toy will never break?" The researchers found that "on almost all measures, children's understanding of TV was significantly enhanced by the curriculum."[22]

THE GOVERNMENT GETS INVOLVED

The first major federal initiative in media literacy began during the presidency of Jimmy Carter, in 1978, when the Office of Education and the Library of Congress held a conference on "Television, the Book and the Classroom," then called for funding proposals for curricular projects to equip students with critical viewing skills. The following year, four programs were selected for funding:

❚ WNET-TV in New York City developed classroom materials for grades 5-9, held nationwide training sessions for educators, community leaders, and librarians, and created a workbook, or "Criti-Kit," which was published in 1980 as *Critical Television Viewing: A Language Skills Work-A-Text*.

❚ The Austin, Texas-based Southwest Educational Development Laboratory produced a "Training Manual for

Teaching Critical Viewing Skills," a set of "Teacher Cue Cards" that outlined activities for integrating critical viewing into K-5 curricula, a series of pamphlets titled "Television: A Family Focus," which contained instructions for critical viewing activities as well as information on the structure and effects of television, a booklet series for children that taught about the technical aspects of TV production by following two characters through a television station, and a "TV Discovery" board game to play while watching television.

❚ The San Francisco-based Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development organized workshops for parents, educators, and others to teach critical viewing skills, and published a high school textbook, teachers' guide, and handbook designed to help families assess the role of TV in the household. The text had seven chapters, covering the structure of the TV industry, production techniques (which showed students "that all TV programs are deliberately 'staged'"), advertising, news programming, and media messages (that is, how presentation of stereotypes, ideals of beauty, violence, and so forth influence viewers' values and perceptions).

❚ The Boston University School of Public Communication produced workbooks, teachers' manuals, and four short textbooks that were eventually joined in a single volume, *Television Literacy*. In 1980, the project began conducting single-day workshops to train educators and parents to implement the curriculum.[23]

By then, however, the program had become the object of considerable criticism, having received a Golden

Fleece in 1978 – the "award" established by Senator William Proxmire to call attention to misused tax dollars – "for spending $219,592 to develop a 'curriculum package' to teach college students how to watch television."[24] Amid the flurry of negative press, the government eventually canceled its contract with Boston University and the project officially ended in mid-1981 – not long, as Rutgers University professor Robert Kubey has noted, after Ronald Reagan, whose campaign proposals had included the dissolution of the barely two-year-old Department of Education, assumed the Presidency.[25]

Indeed, government funding for all four federally supported media literacy programs ceased by 1982. The recession of the mid-1980s led, as media literacy consultant Kathleen Tyner put it, to "a widespread belief that students should be trained to compete in the global marketplace. Because media education was linked in the public's mind with the recreational technology of television, the critical viewing curriculum was seen as an unnecessary frill."[26] "Back-to-basics" became the dominant theme in U.S. education policy. What Brown has called the "watershed years" for media literacy programs were drawing to a close, as curricula faded from use and published materials fell out of print.[27]

THE 1980s

Despite the retrenchment, a few new projects emerged in the early 1980s, including the U.S. Catholic Conference's 1982 curriculum, *The Media Mirror: A Study Guide on Christian Values on Television*, and the National Telemedia Council's "Kids-4," a TV channel created for and by 9-13 year-olds. (NTC was the successor organization to the American Council for Better Broadcasts.) The National PTA also announced in 1982 that it would publish four curricula for critical television viewing, aimed at different grade levels. These had been in the works since 1979, when the PTA's then-two-year-old TV Action Center (which had previously concentrated on evaluating various programs' appropriateness for children) began developing a curriculum and accompanying workbook.[28]

The first two PTA curricula, for grades K-2 and 3-5, appeared in 1982. Each included a teachers' manual and student activity book focusing on TV's portrayal of the family and prodding students to compare their own home life with media depictions. The purpose, as Brown has written, was "to wean students from TV depictions as the ideal or normative or even as representing real life." Sporadically placed amid these lessons were segments relating to broadcast techniques, scheduling, ratings, and the roles of TV's executive, creative, and technical staffs. Brown comments that the program focused too much on the issue of families; teaching about "how television operates and affects program content as well as viewers' perceptions of the real world was done indirectly, at best."[29]

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The PTA did not complete the two upper-level curricula.

1982 also witnessed a major global development: UNESCO held an International Symposium on Media Education in Grünwald, Germany, which drew delegates from 19 countries and ended with a "Declaration on Media Education." The document called on "the competent authorities" to "initiate and support comprehensive media education programs – from pre-school to university level, and in adult education," to develop training courses, stimulate research and development, and "strengthen the actions undertaken or envisaged by UNESCO and which aim at encouraging international cooperation in media education."[30] UNESCO later published a book on media literacy and organized an international colloquium in Vienna. Its Declaration is often cited in support of broader media education.[31]

> The mass media formats of film, TV, and video were now the sites of significant artistic achievement.

In 1985, Canadian media literacy expert John Pungente of the Jesuit Communication Project issued his own set of global recommendations. Pungente observed media literacy programs in 23 nations and collected questionnaires from 363 Jesuit-run secondary schools. He concluded that "authorities must give clear support to such programs by mandating the teaching of Media Studies," and making sure that curricula are developed, materials are available, and in-service training is provided.[32]

By the late 1980s, media literacy in the U.S. was regaining momentum. In 1987, Kathleen Tyner established the San Francisco-based Strategies for Media Literacy, which developed media education resources, organized teacher training workshops, and published a quarterly journal, *Strategies*. Two years later, the Catholic sister and activist Elizabeth Thoman founded the Center for Media and Values (since 1994, the Center for Media Literacy) in Los Angeles. This organization grew out of the 12-year-old quarterly magazine *Media & Values*, which Thoman started as a graduate school project in the mid-'70s at the University of Southern California. *Media & Values* became one of the leading journals in the field, promoting a "social analysis" approach to media issues adapted from the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator.

Thoman originally designed the publication for youth leaders and adult educators in the liberal religious community – Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. Funding came from a patchwork of subscription income, foundation grants, and donations from social justice initiatives of Catholic religious orders and Protestant denominations. From 1983-1989, *Media & Values* was owned by the Protestant-led Media Action Research Center – but as the world of public education warmed to the idea of media literacy in the late '80s, the magazine was reincorporated in 1989 and evolved into a non-sectarian non-profit educational enterprise, publishing the first generation of media literacy curricula in the United States. The magazine published 63 issues and nine "Media Literacy Workshop Kits" on topics such as sexism in the media and "Parenting in a TV Age" before its demise in 1993.[33]

Whether because of increased concern with mass media content, a changed political situation, or other factors, media literacy took off again in the early 1990s. A new curriculum appeared in 1991: Kathleen Tyner and Donna Lloyd-Kolkin's *Media and You: An Elementary Media Literacy Curriculum.* (Lloyd-Kolkin was director of the government-funded Critical Television Viewing Skills Project at the Far West Laboratory in San Francisco.) *Media and You* consisted of lesson plans and activities in English and Spanish for grades K-5. The course had five units: the definition of mass media, production techniques, entertainment, advertising, and information.[34] The following year, David Considine and Gail Haley published a comprehensive text, *Visual Messages: Integrating Imagery Into Instruction*, which advocated an interdisciplinary approach of integrating media literacy concepts into existing curriculum, and linking them with broad goals like responsible citizenship, and with cooperative learning, multicultural education, and critical thinking skills.[35]

Also in 1992, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) generated ten recommendations for effective media education – focusing, understandably, on the needs of teachers. The Council called for accreditation standards in critical analysis of media, "treated seriously through teacher workshops, training, materials and guidelines" and "the empowerment of teachers through networking."[36]

National media literacy conferences were also coming into vogue. The Southwest Alternate Media Project, with

Tyner's Strategies for Media Literacy and the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC), a coalition of nonprofit media arts groups, organized a 1992 conference in Austin which resulted in a new National Alliance for Media Education (NAME).[37] Although this group is now dormant, it helped raise awareness of media literacy and strengthen ties between media artists and educators. One of its projects was to create a media arts directory, with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).[38] This NEA participation was important because it signaled a recognition not only that film, TV, and video were now the sites of significant artistic achievement, but that media literacy and media arts skills go hand in hand.

A second conference, in December 1992, was sponsored by the Aspen Institute and brought together 25 leaders in the field. The participants in this seminal event established a definition of media literacy and a framework for future programs. As communications professor Patricia Aufderheide noted in the conference report, the landscape of media literacy in the U.S. had until then been characterized by "a blizzard of idiosyncratic projects, typically driven by the passion of individual teachers and organizers." What it lacked were "a central mission or mandate," infrastructure (that is, "an operating foundation, a professional association, a central database and network"), "legitimacy," "basic information" on the state of media literacy education, and evaluation of results.

The Aspen conference accordingly identified four immediate needs: data, publicity, infrastructure, and a collaborative network that would link people from

the worlds of public policy, educational reform, arts, and public television. To meet these needs, the participants established task forces and resolved to set up a test site for media education, selecting New Mexico because its official state standards already featured a media literacy requirement.[39]

The Aspen conference reflected the movement's new emphasis on staff development. It seemed clear that without teacher training, simply inserting a media literacy segment into a language arts program and using "off the shelf" curricular materials would not be effective. The conference report noted that Appalachian State University in North Carolina had taken the lead by requiring all teachers in training to take media literacy courses.[40] Now, a year after the Aspen conference, Renee Hobbs organized a week-long staff development program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. This was the first of many such programs; others were held at Columbia University, New York University, and Minneapolis's Walker Art Center.[41]

Hobbs by this time was also involved in a controversial media literacy initiative in Billerica, Massachusetts. In 1992, the Billerica school district agreed to broadcast to its students Channel One's 12 minutes of daily current events, along with two minutes of teen-oriented advertising. In exchange, the company provided schools with free TVs, VCRs, and satellite equipment. Channel One had been widely criticized as a cynical and educationally dubious marketing scheme that sold a captive audience of schoolchildren to advertisers. As the company itself boasted in a press release, its programming "is a marketer's secret weapon ... an unparalleled way to reach a massive teen audience in a highly relevant, important and uncluttered environment."[42]

In response to criticism from the national PTA, National Education Association, and National School Board Association, Billerica commissioned Hobbs to develop a staff training program that would use Channel One as the basis of media literacy instruction. This "Billerica Initiative" called upon participating teachers to enroll in a 2½-year master's program in media literacy that Hobbs developed in association with Fitchburg State College and a regional professional development center.[43] Hobbs eventually became a paid consultant to Channel One and created *Media Matters*, a series of lessons for Channel One viewers. The text taught basic techniques such as translating the messages behind advertising and assessing the credibility of "soft" versus "hard" news.

Channel One was not alone among TV entrepreneurs in sponsoring media literacy programs. In 1992, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (NATAS) commissioned Dorothy and Jerome Singer to design a media literacy curriculum as a basis for "collaborative partnerships between broadcasters and educators nationwide." This "Creating Critical Viewers Program" can be downloaded for free from the NATAS Web site.[44]

The mid-1990s also saw renewed interest from the federal government. Part of the impetus was the continuing political heat focused on media violence. During the summer of 1993, the U.S. Departments of Justice, Education, and Health and Human Services (HHS) co-hosted a two-day forum, "Safeguarding

Our Youth: Violence Prevention for Our Nation's Children," which drew a small group of media professionals, educators, community leaders, and students to address "our growing culture of violence." Among the directives in the resulting report was that "[b]road-based media literacy education needs to become a priority in the U.S. and implemented in an inter-agency, interdisciplinary approach" that should involve not only the Departments of Education and HHS, but the Federal Communications Commission and Federal Trade Commission.[45] It was unclear how these last two agencies were to participate in developing media literacy programs, given that both are primarily regulatory, but one clue could be found in the report's suggestion that students be encouraged to send postcards complaining about offensive programming to the FCC, which has the power to grant or deny broadcast licenses.

In 1994, President Clinton signed the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act," which established a National Education Standards and Improvement Council to review and certify state standards for educational content and student performance. The Department of Education provided more than $400 million to states and local school districts to develop performance and content standards in nine core subjects: English, math, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, history, geography, and the arts. The arts standards included media literacy concepts at all primary and secondary levels.[46] But since the standards were voluntary (albeit with the incentive of federal funding), media literacy education continued to vary enormously from one school system to the next.

The federal government's interest was essentially protectionist; it wanted to "inoculate" adolescents against unhealthy media messages about sexuality, violence, nutrition, body image, and alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. In 1995, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) issued grants to promote media literacy in these areas, and the White House convened a meeting of media literacy and substance abuse prevention groups. Two years later, CSAP was one of several federal agencies to incorporate media literacy in their drug-prevention programs. (Others included the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Office of Justice Programs at the Department of Justice.) CSAP balanced its protectionist approach with "lofty goals about community involvement and citizen participation."[47]

In 1995, more than 300 scholars and activists converged on Appalachian State University for the most expansive media

Without teacher training, simply inserting a media literacy segment into a language arts program and using "off the shelf" curricular materials would not be effective.

literacy conference to date, organized by the National Telemedia Council and ASU. The White House sent representatives, and according to conference chair David Considine, a post-conference meeting on campus fostered cooperation between government drug-prevention officials and the media literacy community. The event was repeated the next year and eventu-

ally grew into the National Media Education Conference, sponsored by a new organization, the Partnership for Media Education (PME). Founded by Renee Hobbs, Elizabeth Thoman, Nancy Chase Garcia of the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, and Lisa Reisberg of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the PME hosted the National Media Education Conference annually and also sponsored events for U.S. attendees of the International Media Literacy Summit 2000 in Ontario, Canada. Soon after, PME evolved into the Alliance for a Media Literate America.[48]

> "Media literacy is being hijacked by corporate interests who are using the movement to buy legitimacy and deflect citicism of their products."
> - Bob McCannon

Educators were meanwhile continuing to assess media literacy programs. A major study was undertaken in 1995-96 when Renee Hobbs and her colleague Richard Frost gave separate "teams" of 9th graders in a Massachusetts school district four different curricula:

⌐ The "Chameleon Team" received media literacy education integrated across language arts, history, science, and math. In science class, for instance, students compared two documentary films about the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill, one produced by *National Geographic*, the other by Exxon.

⌐ The "Plaid Team" was exposed to mass media only in history and English classes, without instruction about media production or technique. The teacher showed clips from *Ben Hur*, for instance, during the unit on Roman history.

⌐ The "Red Team" used primarily off-the-shelf media literacy materials.

⌐ The "Gold Team" served as a control, with no modification of the curriculum.

At the end of 12 weeks, the school district tested the four groups, using a 1992 Channel One news segment on Hurricane Andrew. The test asked the students to identify, among other things, the news item's target audience, the strategies it employed to grab the audience's attention, and what information had been omitted.

The Chameleon team, which had received the most comprehensive and coordinated curriculum, "significantly outperformed" the other groups in media analysis skills. For example, just a third of the Red team students correctly identified the "author" of the news segment as Channel One, compared to 72% of the Chameleon team. Hobbs and Frost concluded that the most effective media literacy program integrates skills across all subject areas, and includes both analysis and production activities. Simply exploring media violence or substance abuse "in a short set of lesson plans using off-the-shelf curricula," they said, "did not appear to develop effective analysis skills."[49]

MEDIA LITERACY COMES OF AGE

By the late '90s, both academic institutions and state and federal agencies had begun to recognize the importance of

media literacy. Rutgers University established the Center for Media Studies in 1996 with Robert Kubey at the helm. Among the center's objectives is to produce "new collaborative research and scholarship, teaching, and outreach efforts."[50] A master's program was instituted in 1999 at Appalachian State under the direction of David Considine, who had worked with the media literacy movement in Australia before moving to the U.S. and who pioneered an interdisciplinary approach that infused media competencies into different degrees and departments.[51]

Also in 1999, Robert Kubey and Frank Baker of the Media Literacy Clearinghouse in South Carolina published a survey of the extent to which state education standards incorporated media literacy concepts. Up to that point, says Baker, "no one had conducted such a study, so no one really knew how widespread state standards for media literacy were."[52] Kubey and Baker built on earlier work by Considine, who had initiated the idea of looking for media literacy concepts in existing state curriculum standards around the time of the 1995 conference at Appalachian State.[53]

By the late '90s, influential journals were devoting whole issues to media literacy. Both the International Communication Association's *Journal of Communication* and NCTE's *English Journal* published symposia on pedagogy, political progress, and philosophical differences in the media literacy world. The *Journal of Adolescent Health* published a special supplement on "youth and media," with articles that were largely protectionist in orientation. The National Telemedia Council began to place its major focus on

publishing *Telemedium: The Journal of Media Literacy* three times a year.[54]

In 1999, the Channel One controversy and the question of corporate cooptation of media literacy erupted again. Channel One was a major sponsor of the National Media Education Conference that year in St. Paul, Minnesota, to the dismay of several prominent media educators, who refused to attend. Journalist Steven Manning reported that "angry conference attendees ... forced the meeting's organizers to hold a special session to defend and debate Channel One's presence. And the controversy has hardly ended there, spilling over into local media literacy meetings and discussion groups."[55]

In one post-conference note to a media literacy listserv, Renee Hobbs recounted how she had been "deeply troubled" by Channel One's presence in classrooms when first approached by the Billerica School District, but eventually found that it provided "regular daily opportunity for a media literacy lesson." In particular, she said, Channel One's teen-directed advertising made teachers acutely aware of the need to teach media literacy skills. Hobbs accused "ivory tower" colleagues of demonizing Channel One, which, she pointed out, was now received by 40% of U.S. secondary schools.[56]

Bob McCannon of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project responded to Hobbs: "You, for better or worse and, undoubtedly, with the sincerest motives, are now a paid part of the PR process."[57] McCannon told journalist Manning that "media literacy is being hijacked by corporate interests who are using the movement to buy legitimacy and deflect

criticism of their products." Hobbs responded: "If I gave workshops every day for the rest of my life, I could never reach the eight million children Channel One reaches every day."[58]

While media literacy leaders argued over corporate sponsorship, the U.S. government was renewing its interest, to the tune of nearly $1 million in grants in 2000 from the Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts. Media literacy, according to the DOE announcement, "refers to the ability to understand and interpret the artistic content of images, including violent messages, transmitted through the electronic media." Priority was given to schools where at least ¾ of students came from low-income families.[59] The purpose of the NEA's involvement was to bring community arts resources into the educational process in order to help youngsters deconstruct messages and develop their own voices through media arts.[60]

Ten programs in eight states received this federal funding during the 2000 fiscal year. Five of them – offered by schools in Los Angeles, Tampa, Florida, Minneapolis, Española, New Mexico, and Providence, Rhode Island – focused on counteracting the presumed effects of media violence. The other five projects had a broader approach, seeking to address a range of risks and issues that young people face. All the grants, according to David Considine, represented "the protectionist paradigm and [did] little to see ML as a player in citizenship."[61]

⎮ The Darlington County, South Carolina, school district's "Children as Critical Consumers and Creators of Media Project" proposed not only to tackle violence, but to tie in to schools' existing character education, sexuality education, and drug awareness programs.

⎮ The West Contra Costa County School District, California, initiated "Work of the Mind: Media Literacy for Kids and Teens," which targeted "at-risk, predominantly minority students whom conventional academic approaches often fail to reach."

⎮ The "Making Connections Project," instituted in an alternative 7-12 school on the Flathead Reservation in Pablo, Montana, intended to use media literacy to encourage students' engagement with the arts and culture of their community rather than blindly adopting "the values promoted in the mass media."

⎮ "Points of View: Building Empathy through Media Literacy," a project in the public school district of Marlboro County, South Carolina, focused on teaching production techniques and allowing students to use media projects to interact with their community.

⎮ West Philadelphia High School planned to use its federal funding to develop after-school and summer media-arts and technology programs, enhance its media-arts facilities, and train staff to begin developing a curriculum.[62]

The following year, the NEA and DOE again collaborated, this time spending $2 million on 17 grants, ten of them for continuing work by year 2000 grantees; the other seven to new programs. Among the new grantees was the Center for Media Literacy (formerly the Center for Media and Values), which joined with a Los Angeles elementary school, the Music Center of Los Angeles County, and

a local animation company to train students and teachers in critical thinking, the arts, and media production.[63] Although this funding of a group with strong Catholic and Protestant participation raised concerns about government entanglement with religion, CML's founder Elizabeth Thoman says that except for curricula specifically intended for religious education, the Center's materials have never had a sectarian slant, and that by 1993, its funding base had shifted to predominantly nonreligious foundations.[64]

For the 2002 fiscal year, the federal government allocated an additional $2 million to the 17 existing grantees but failed to fund any new projects. Shelton Allen of the Department of Education has suggested that this failure reflected the difference between the George W. Bush Administration's educational philosophy and that of its predecessor.[65]

Nevertheless, media literacy had come of age. A few months before the fiscal year 2001 grants, Senator Thad Cochran introduced a resolution designating March 2001 and 2002 as "Arts Education Month" and explicitly linking art with media literacy by noting that arts education stimulates many cognitive skills, including "critical thinking" and "nimbleness in judgment."[66] Although the resolution probably reflected too utilitarian a view of the value of creative arts to please all culture-lovers, it marked a significant advance from the back-to-basics philosophy.

Congress reaffirmed its commitment to arts education in early 2002 when it passed President Bush's big education initiative, the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2002." This massive addition to the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which broke new ground in terms of federal involvement in state and local education policy, specifically allocated funds for arts education and recognized the importance of integrating it into the regular curriculum at both elementary and high school levels.[67]

Also in early 2002, the White House released a policy statement supporting media literacy education – at least for purposes of teaching youngsters about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Summarizing a "Media Literacy Summit" held the year before, the report acknowledged "the power and influence of the media on America's youth" and argued for expanded media literacy education to help them "gain skills to intelligently navigate the media and filter the hundreds of messages they receive every day." The report suggested three approaches: "parent-focused," Internet-focused, and "faith-based," but skirted the politically charged question of whether government funding can be used for the third approach, which involves the teaching of religious messages.

The White House report recognized critical thinking and "healthy self-esteem" as key components of media literacy education, and emphasized the importance of respecting youngsters' intelligence and accepting their "pleasure in media use." "Don't 'bash' the media," it warned; instead, "acknowledge that the media are a powerful and amazing influence that can be used for positive and healthy ends. Media literate people more fully appreciate media's complexity, creativity and potential. They do not blame the media for society's problems."[68]

Chapter 3:
Media Literacy Today

Media literacy in the U.S. today is a patchwork quilt of nonprofit advocacy groups, for-profit providers of curricular materials, and assorted state and local initiatives, a handful of which receive federal funding. Yet the movement is growing; new ideas and energy abound; and along with a multitude of youth arts and journalism projects, media literacy is increasingly understood to be a vital part of educating youth. Below are descriptions of the major media literacy organizations (we don't attempt to identify every organization concerned with the issue), of developments in four states, and of the international scene.

ADVOCACY AND INFORMATION GROUPS

⌃ **National Telemedia Council** ⌄ (www.nationaltelemediacouncil.org). The oldest national media literacy organization, the National Telemedia Council (NTC) traces its origins to the 1930s, with the founding of the Wisconsin Association for Better Broadcasting, which evolved into the American Council for Better Broadcasts (ACBB) in the 1950s. The ACBB became the National Telemedia Council in 1983 and began working with teachers to introduce media literacy into classrooms.

Avoiding simplistic judgments on what programs are "good" or "bad," the NTC promotes "a philosophy that values reflective education and cooperation rather than confrontation with the media industry." Still based in Madison, Wisconsin, the NTC publishes *Telemedium: The*

Journal of Media Literacy and coordinates workshops for educators and parents. In November 2003, it sponsored a five-city interactive teleconference on new directions in media literacy, with topics such as "New Media and Digital Culture" and "Testing the Limits of Democracy." [69]

⌃ **Center For Media Literacy** ⌄ *formerly Center for Media and Values* (www.medialit.org). In 1989, Elizabeth Thoman's magazine *Media & Values* evolved into the Center for Media and Values with the primary purpose of generating and distributing media literacy curricula. Each of the Center's "Media Literacy Workshop Kits" for teachers, community leaders, parenting groups, and church or synagogue instructors corresponded to an issue of *Media & Values*, ranging from the general ("How to Analyze the News Media") to the more pointed ("Selling Addiction: A Workshop Kit on Tobacco and Alcohol Advertising," "Images of Conflict: Learning from Coverage of the Gulf War"). The kits included lesson and activity plans, manuals and background material for teachers, handouts, and videos.

A 1992 collaboration with the National Catholic Educational Association resulted in an ambitious curriculum kit, entitled "Catholic Connections to Media Literacy." The next year, with assistance from the philanthropic Carnegie Corporation and other foundations, the Center published *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media*, a comprehensive curriculum, heavily based on a standardized set of video

segments, for grades 4 through teen/adult. Aiming to move audiences "from awareness to action, from passivity to engagement, from denial to accepting responsibility for what each of us can do as individuals, as parents, as citizens, as participants of our media-dominated society," *Beyond Blame* calls on students to examine violence in films, cartoons, music videos, news broadcasts, and dramatic programs. Specific topics include the movies' representation of heroism, images of violence against women, the effects of various editing techniques, and students' own viewing habits.[70]

The year *Beyond Blame* was published, three Kansas City, Kansas, after-school programs – held, respectively, at a Boys and Girls Club, a Catholic parish, and a youth center for high-risk adolescents – piloted the middle-school portion of the curriculum. According to a survey taken at the beginning of the course, 17% of the 75 students had maintained that violence was a "good way" to resolve conflicts; at the end of eight weeks, this figure had fallen to 6.9%.[71]

In 1994, the Center renamed itself the Center for Media Literacy (CML), reflecting the shift in its focus from publishing *Media & Values* to developing curriculum. As books and video-based curricula began to be published, the Center recognized the need for an efficient distribution system to publicize and disseminate materials to schools and teachers. From the first eight-page catalog featuring its own collection of Media Literacy Workshop Kits, the Center's annual Resource Catalog has grown to 40 pages and is now a definitive "illustrated bibliography" of the field. The Center's president, Tessa Jolls, formed alliances with two educational resource

distributors, enlarging the Center's outreach to more than a million teachers a year.[72]

The Center does not take a simplistically protectionist approach. One of its case studies, "Establishing Media Literacy in a Catholic School Setting," notes that "the heart of media literacy is informed inquiry" and "media literacy is an alternative to censoring, boycotting, or 'blaming the media.'" Thoman writes in another CML article: "Because of each individual's age, upbringing and education, no two people see the same movie or hear the same song on the radio. ... This concept turns the tables on the idea of TV viewers as just passive 'couch potatoes.'"[73]

⚠ Media Education Foundation ⚠

(www.mediaed.org/index_html). Founded in 1991 by Sut Jhally, professor of communications at the University of Massachusetts, the Media Education Foundation (MEF) aims to bolster media literacy in the face of a communications landscape increasingly dominated by corporate media giants and multinational mergers. The year before, Jhally had created a 55-minute videotape culled from segments of music videos and with his own narration, for use in his courses examining popular culture images of sexism and violence. Titled *Dreamworlds: Desire/Sex/Power in Rock Video*, the video was at first circulated among Jhally's UMass colleagues, but he eventually sold copies to communications and women's studies departments at universities nationwide. MTV demanded that he stop distributing the tapes and recall the already distributed ones, on the ground that he was violating its copyrights. Jhally refused,

arguing that his copying of the video segments for the purpose of academic critique was legal under the "fair use" provision in copyright law. MTV did not, in the end, pursue legal action (in part, perhaps – as the MEF Web site suggested – because the channel was in the midst of its own anti-censorship campaign at the time).

By 2002, MEF was producing and distributing more than 40 educational videos, many with accompanying study guides. These included critiques of media messages such as *Pack of Lies: The Advertising of Tobacco*, *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* (which explores the ways race, gender, and class are portrayed in Disney films), and *Off the Straight and Narrow* (which looks at images of homosexuality in contemporary TV programs). Other resources for media literacy educators included *Getting the Message Across*, a guide to video production. Originally funded primarily through loans, the MEF today is supported by its video sales as well as private donations and grants from the Ms. Foundation and the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, among others.[74]

⚠ Center for Media Education ⚠

(www.cme.org). The Center for Media Education (CME) was founded in 1991 by Kathryn Montgomery. Its main activity is generating research and informational materials on "the potential – and the peril – for children and youth of the rapidly evolving digital media age." For example, in a 1997 study called "Alcohol and Tobacco on the Web: New Threats to Youth," CME researchers looked at the strategies that alcohol and tobacco-promoting Web sites use to appeal to youth. It reported that one site featured

"an off-the-road wild ride with a red 'cyber-rodent' who zooms through a desert littered with tequila bottles and other Cuervo merchandising icons"; another site presented interviews with rock stars alongside "a steady stream of promotions" for beer.

CME propounds a reductive view of violent media content as having uniformly adverse effects, and it is not an integral part of the media literacy movement. Its recommendations center more on regulation than on analyzing media critically. Although the alcohol and tobacco report does advise that "parents and educators... help educate our nation's youth about these new dangers," it also suggests that the Federal Trade Commission investigate "unfair and deceptive advertising"; that the Food and Drug Administration "carefully monitor online tobacco promotion ... and develop any additional safeguards needed to protect youth"; and that cigarette companies "refrain from moving onto the Internet to market and promote their products."[75]

⚠ Citizens for Media Literacy ⚠

(www.main.nc.us/cml). Founded in 1991 by former University of North Carolina-Asheville journalist and now-executive director Wally Bowen, Citizens for Media Literacy (CML) advocates media literacy as a tool to produce engaged citizens who will actively question corporate power and consumer culture. One of its early projects was the irreverent *Get a Life!* comic book, which followed a teenager through a behind-the-scenes television tour. The comic is available on CML's Web site and in 2002 satirized Channel One along with other commercial media products aimed at youth.

In addition to conducting local workshops for media literacy teachers, CML promotes free expression and access to information, advising journalists and activists, for instance, on freedom of information and open records laws and presenting lectures on such topics as "Distortion, Distraction, and Democracy" and "What Citizens Need to Know About the First Amendment." CML also maintains the Mountain Area Information Network, which provides free Internet access to the mountain communities of Western North Carolina. It has received funding from (among others) the nonprofit corporation Public Interest North Carolina, the private Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, and the North Carolina Humanities Council.

Bowen has criticized the media literacy movement for being a "rather insular and self-referential coterie of media educators" that excludes a broader range of scholars, teachers, public health advocates, librarians, journalists, parents, and other citizens who are interested in challenging the mass media system. He calls most U.S. media literacy initiatives too "scaled-down" and "politically palatable," which he attributes to reluctance to critique the media industry too sharply. "We are not immune," he wrote in CML's former newsletter, *The New Citizen*, "to the peer pressure of our well-heeled colleagues in the media industry. Indeed, some U.S. media educators see the media industry as a primary source of funding."[76]

⚊ Project Look Sharp ⚊

(www.ithaca.edu/looksharp). Project Look Sharp, based at Ithaca College's Center for Research on the Effects of Television, focuses on providing staff development resources – workshops, for example, on specific issues like body image and the credibility of information on the Web. Look Sharp also organizes intensive summer courses and mini-courses, in which participating educators draft their own lessons incorporating media literacy instruction.

The organization has published a pamphlet outlining "12 Principles" for integrating media education in existing curricula. It explains Look Sharp's philosophy of "weaving media literacy into the curriculum whenever and wherever possible throughout the school year," in all grade levels, instead of introducing it as a discrete subject. The goal is both to render it more effective and to ease the burden on educators, "who are already overwhelmed with the demands of a full curriculum."[77]

⚊ Media Literacy Review ⚊

formerly the Media Literacy Online Project (interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/mlr/home). Based at the Center for Advanced Technology in Education at the University of Oregon, Eugene, and directed by Gary Ferrington, the Media Literacy Review aims "to make available to educators, producers, students, and parents information and resources related to the influence of media in the lives of children, youth, and adults." The *Review* operates a Web site that is the key source of online resources on media literacy. The site has links to media literacy organizations, lesson plans, training programs, and events worldwide. It houses an extensive archive of articles from other Web sites, ranging from "An Introduction to Media Literacy" by David Considine to "How *Seventeen* Undermines Young Women" from Fairness and

Accuracy in Reporting. Twice a year, the *Review* compiles a collection of online articles devoted to a different theme: the fall/winter 2001 issue, for example, focused on non-fiction film, and the site linked to historical overviews of documentary film, teaching resources, and sample syllabi, as well as online guides to filmmaking and Web sites for film institutes and festivals.[78]

❗ New Mexico Media Literacy Project ❗ (www.nmmlp. org). The New Mexico Media Literacy Project (NMMLP) was established in the early 1990s by the Downs Media Education Corporation and was soon taken over by the Albuquerque Academy, a private school, with funding from the McCune Foundation, state agencies, and other public and private sources.[79] In contrast to Renee Hobbs's Media Literacy Project and other groups, the NMMLP says it "believes that media literacy requires *independence* from media corporations, so we do not take money from the global media giants who are restricting information, redefining freedom, limiting our democracy and presenting so many negative educational choices to our children and citizens." Indeed, the Project believes that the major global media corporations "have become the world's biggest censors, controlling the content of information that reaches the average person."[80] It relies on support from public and nonprofit entities, supplemented by director Bob McCannon's honoraria from speaking engagements and the like, which he donates to the organization.[81]

Since 1993, the Project has generated curricula, held hundreds of workshops, training sessions, and presentations for public schools, parents, and community organizations, and conducted extensive research into the efficacy of its various efforts. It focuses largely on the pernicious effects of advertising in seducing young viewers to consume junk food, alcohol, tobacco, and other unhealthy products.[82]

Consistent with its grassroots philosophy, the NMMLP traveled to 70 schools statewide in the 1998-99 and 1999-2000 school years as part of its Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Program (TUPAC), at each school delivering a 90-minute presentation on the techniques tobacco advertisers use to attract young customers. A survey conducted at 14 of the schools afterward found that 73% of nonsmokers were less likely to start smoking, and over half of the smokers tried to quit.[83] In 2002, McCannon wrote: "we are in the 6th TUPAC grant, and every year the numbers get better as we get better at doing ML/ME for prevention."[84]

In 1999-2000, NMMLP also gave presentations on media promotion of alcohol; as part of the project, students produced counter-advertisements that eventually aired on cable channels that appeal to youth (MTV, TNT, USA, Nickelodeon, and the Discovery Channel). Also in 1999-2000, the Project initiated "Media 2000" at six New Mexico public schools; it combined age-specific lesson plans with a CD-ROM, *Media Literacy: Reversing Addiction in Our Compulsive Culture,* and covered five areas: violence, nutrition, relationships, body image, and alcohol, tobacco, and drug use.

Beginning in 1999, NMMLP also implemented a media literacy-based substance abuse prevention curriculum at

six middle schools, reaching more than 1,300 students. The program included a six-day unit designed to fulfill the State of New Mexico's media literacy standards. In addition to *Reversing Addiction*, schools received *Understanding Media*, a CD-ROM with 400 pages of text, visual resources and sample questions such as "Does smoking help you lose weight?" or (in response to ads in which slim, attractive women smoke cigarettes), "Are these ads telling the truth about smoking to women?" Two sample covers of *Teen* magazine featuring loud, splashy text and fresh-faced models are accompanied by the questions, "What's the 'formula' behind the production of these covers?" and "Is it a coincidence both these covers are so similar?" The program also involved training sessions for teachers and parents. Follow-up evaluation indicated a decrease in positive attitudes toward alcohol and tobacco as compared to pretest figures.[85]

In fiscal year 2001, NMMLP gave hundreds of presentations or workshops to more than 51,000 people; 77 of the events were outside New Mexico. "We are producing a revolution in media awareness," the Project's Web site said. "Our goal is to make New Mexico the most media literate state in the U.S."[86]

⚑ Just Think Foundation ⚑

(www.justthink.org). The San Francisco-based Just Think Foundation was founded in 1995 by education activist Elana Yonah Rosen and interactive designer Aaron Singer as a response to media violence and, in particular, the growing tendency of child advocacy groups to promote censorship rather than education to combat it. Just Think combines grassroots outreach, especially to teenag-

ers, with curricular and staff development.

In 1998, the foundation published *Changing the World Through Media Education: A New Media Education Curriculum*, targeted to teachers of grades 4-8 and containing lesson plans, guidelines for activities, classroom materials, and ideas for hands-on media projects. The book has eight units, beginning with general overviews ("What Is This Thing Called Media?"), and progressing to thematically organized chapters on "community, society, and democracy"; "the power of images" (covering such topics as ideals of beauty); "behavior and consequences" (addressing media violence as well as "inappropriate language"); "health issues" (examining drug, alcohol, and tobacco messages); and "real people" (examining attitudes toward celebrity, heroism, and leadership).

Another of the foundation's curricular projects concentrates on media

> Major global media corporations "have become the world's biggest censors, controlling the content of information that reaches the average person."
> - NMMLP

stereotypes and role models. Titled *Developing Minds*, the 10-week curriculum is aimed at 4th-12th graders and includes a comic-style book for students, supplementary class materials on CD-ROM, and manuals for educators and parents. Projects like this are directed in large part toward minority and lower-

income youth who, the organization believes, are most susceptible to the influence of undesirable media role models. Accordingly, Just Think has refurbished a retired school bus and outfitted it with high-tech electronic equipment (including a video production facility and computers with Internet connections). Staff members travel in this "Just Think Mobile" to schools and after-school sites in lower-income communities and conduct *Developing Minds* sessions as well as lessons from Just Think's "Body Image Project."

Though the Foundation's trained instructors often deliver the program themselves, its Professional Development Program also trains teachers to incorporate media literacy into a variety of class subjects and familiarizes them with the *Developing Minds* course. Funders include United Way of the Bay Area, the Sundance Institute, and a long list of other backers, many of them corporate. Apple, Microsoft, and Adobe provide funds and products (the Just Think Mobile's iMacs feature Microsoft and Adobe software), while companies ranging from Air France to Disney and Skyy Vodka have provided donations in-kind.[87]

⁐ **Media Education Lab at Temple University** ⁐ (www.renee hobbs.org). In 1996, Renee Hobbs founded the Media Literacy Project, which published curricular materials and research studies, organized teacher training programs, and provided consultancy services. During the previous four years, Hobbs had been a consultant to the Billerica, Massachusetts, school district, developing media literacy programs in part to defuse criticisms of the district's use of Channel One.

In 2003, Hobbs moved from Babson College in Wellesley, Massachusetts to Temple University in Philadelphia, where she now heads up Temple's Media Education Lab. The Lab's Web site features Hobbs's basic curriculum, *Media Literacy,* as well as current research projects on adolescent girls and body image, critical thinking skills about advertising, and the rise of media education in Italy.[88]

⁐ **Center for Media Studies** ⁐ (www.mediastudies.rutgers.edu). The Center for Media Studies at Rutgers University, directed by Robert Kubey, is mainly designed to foster dialogue among researchers, scholars, media professionals, educators, parents and others with a stake in media education, and to establish a network that allows them to build effective media literacy programs. It seeks to "initiate and support intellectual partnerships across departments and academic units" and "address issues of public concern regarding media performance" (for example, the relationship between media and cultural diversity, or between media and health).

The center organizes training sessions, conferences, workshops, and seminars; through the Office of University Relations, it also conducts press conferences and TV and radio broadcasts. Its New Jersey Media Literacy Project is designed to implement the state's "Core Curricular Content Standards" by helping students "access, evaluate, analyze, and produce both electronic and print media." In 2000, a bill introduced in the New Jersey legislature proposed to allocate $1,040,000 for the Center and the New Jersey Department of Education to develop teacher training programs; it was

amended, however, to allocate only $530,000 and add provisions concerning local school districts' own efforts to find funding for media literacy. A $1.5 billion budget shortfall in 2001-02 sank hopes for the bill's passage.[89]

❚ Media Literacy Clearinghouse ❚
(http://www.med.sc.edu:1081). The Media Literacy Clearinghouse in South Carolina is maintained by Frank Baker, coordinator of distance education and K-12 school services for the South Carolina Educational Television Commission, chair of the 1999 National Media Education Conference, and co-author, with Robert Kubey, of the comprehensive 1999 survey of state media literacy standards. Launched in 1998 with funding from the state legislature, the Clearinghouse is a program of the Office of Alcohol and Drug Studies at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine. Its explicit purpose is to use media literacy to reduce adolescents' health risks. The Web site contains articles and lesson plans.[90]

❚ Media Channel ❚
(www.mediachannel.org). Media Channel, a division of the alternative news service Globalvision, is a nonprofit public interest "supersite" dedicated to a range of media issues, including the suppression of information by media conglomerates. Its Web pages on media literacy focus on corporate ownership and monopolization, development of alternative sources of information, and the importance of media literacy in a world increasingly dominated by global technology.

❚ Alliance for a Media Literate America ❚
(www.amlainfo.org). The Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA) was created

at the 2001 National Media Education Conference to enhance nationwide collaboration and "advocate for media literacy in ways that are more powerful and influential than any individual, project, or institution can achieve alone." The founding declaration added: "Medical, social service, and justice system professionals have identified media literacy as a vital tool in the promotion of public health, prevention, and wellness." AMLA's Web site emphasizes the importance of "critical inquiry" and "skill-building" rather than "media-bashing and blame," and states its desire to be "a key force" in bringing media literacy education to all American youth.

AMLA's belief that effective media education requires broad support is reflected in its funding sources. Its founding sponsors included both the nonprofit educational television company Sesame Workshop and the corporate media entities AOL Time Warner and Discovery Channel. The backers of its founding conference included the New York Times Foundation, the educational publishing house Holt, Rinehart and Winston, the Fox Family Channel, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Media Education Foundation, and the College of Communication at the University of Texas. As AMLA notes on its Web site: "We believe that corporations, especially media corporations, have a social responsibility to support media literacy. If we deny them the opportunity to do so and then criticize them for not doing so, we create a no win situation, both for them and for the potential beneficiaries of their efforts."[91]

At its founding conference, AMLA decided to organize biannual national conferences, institute a referral service to

connect media literacy specialists with schools and communities that want media education training for their teachers, begin publication of a national journal, and award an annual prize to recognize achievement in the implementation of media literacy programs. It has since formed various subcommittees, chaired by prominent media literacy advocates such as Frank Baker, David Considine, Elana Yonah Rosen, and Cyndy Scheibe. AMLA members have also formed caucuses around the country, some based on geographical regions; others to discuss specific subjects like "Commercialism in Schools" and "Media, Sexuality, and Gender Relations."[92]

⚑ Action Coalition for Media Education ⚑ (www.acmecoalition.org) The Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME) is, as of 2003, the newest media literacy organization. In part a reaction to the AMLA founding conference in 2001 (the fifth national meeting organized by essentially the same group of media literacy leaders), ACME's explicit purpose is to use media education to "deal with corporate censorship, racism, commercialism in the schools, news monopolies and the misrepresentation of women and minorities." As *The Nation* magazine wrote of

> "As media saturate our lives, it is vital that children learn to decode messages and images, to ask critical questions about who is creating them and for what purpose."
> - Media Channel

ACME in January 2002, "leading media scholars and educators are forming a new progressive media literacy organization, one that will remain independent of media conglomerates that bankroll existing groups."[93]

Since its founding conference in October 2002, ACME has participated in a number of grassroots campaigns, including the massive national effort to urge the Federal Communications Commission not to eliminate its limitations on media ownership. It has also established an evaluation system for media literacy curricula and resources (books, films, multimedia tools, Web sites) and plans to endorse those that meet its standards on its Web site. Its monthly e-bulletin, BACME, features articles, links, and information about media literacy projects and political reform efforts. Its three-prong mission statement includes: "teaching media literacy skills to children and adults so they can become more critical media consumers and active citizens; championing a wide array of independent media voices; and democratizing our media system through political reform efforts."

ACME's sponsors range from the American Academy of Pediatrics to Project Censored and the New Mexico Media Literacy Project.

STATE INITIATIVES

In 1999, Frank Baker and Robert Kubey's survey of state curriculum frameworks reported that at least some media literacy concepts were included in the standards of 48 states; by 2002, they had increased the count to all 50 states. The breadth and content of these stan-

dards vary enormously, from California and North Carolina's extensive and detailed media literacy requirements to Kansas' single reference, in its social studies standard, to "explaining the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War from a variety of perspectives," including "media subculture." [94] In New Mexico, Bob McCannon's New Mexico Media Literacy Project has collaborated with the state on a comprehensive K-12 media literacy curriculum. Similarly, Wisconsin's comprehensive curriculum was influenced by David Considine's interdisciplinary approach and his philosophy of engaging students in "constructing meaning rather than passively accepting it."[95] Following are descriptions of four quite different state media literacy initiatives.

❗ **Massachusetts.** Massachusetts' experiments in media literacy began with the Billerica/ Channel One controversy of 1992, and conflicts continued to beset media literacy education in the state. Renee Hobbs reports that when in 1995 a group of educators, scholars, artists and activists calling themselves the Massachusetts Coalition for Media Literacy convened for a series of meetings at public television station WGBH, "the conflicts generated by diverse goals, motives and instructional practices became apparent."

> Some people were offended by the anti-media ("kill your television") tone reflected in the comments of some participants. Some academics felt that the remarks of teachers and representatives of nonprofit groups were superficial and not sufficiently informed by theory. Some participants believed the critical

educational objective should be to reverse young people's unhealthy dependence on media messages and persuade them to shift their interest toward the alternative media arts, while others understood mass media consumption to be a natural, developmentally normal part of childhood and adolescence.[96]

Despite the conflicts, the Massachusetts Department of Education incorporated media literacy into its language arts, social studies, and health curricula. A "media strand" has been part of the English language arts framework since its introduction in 1994. Early versions of the standard, which is divided into "media analysis" and "media production" segments, "had almost a kind of suspicion of the media, and we've worked very hard to get rid of that," according to Susan Wheltle, who coordinates the state's English, arts, foreign language, and history and social science frameworks.[97]

Massachusetts' 2001 media literacy standards aim to highlight the difference between mass media and more traditional objects of study rather than demonizing one in favor of the other; they begin with an acknowledgment that "while the written text rightly remains the central focus of the English language arts classroom, the study of works in other media affords teachers opportunities to teach about the distinctive characteristics of each medium and the dynamics of adaptation from one medium to another."[98] Thus, "learning Strand 26" in language arts requires students to "identify, analyze, and supply knowledge of the conventions, elements, and techniques of film, radio, video, television, multimedia

productions, the Internet, and emerging technologies." The "Health/Prevention" curriculum requires evaluation of commercials, including, for example, the credibility of ads for quick weight loss programs and low-fat foods.[99]

While media literacy is thus an integral part of the state's curriculum standards, local school boards are largely responsible for figuring out how to incorporate it. The school district of Burlington, for example, has drafted its own "K-12 Media Literacy Expectations for Student Learning," designed to comply with the state standards.[100] One district attorney, Kevin Burke of Essex County, has also adopted a media literacy program, aimed at juvenile offenders and designed to help them "deconstruct harmful media messages" and "make healthier decisions in their own lives, particularly in the areas of violence, drug use and prejudice." The program, called *Flash Point: Life Skills through the Lens of Media Literacy,* was pilot-tested among youth on probation, in juvenile diversion programs, and in custody. More than 200 juvenile justice and prevention coordinators across the state have been trained to teach the curriculum.[101]

❧ **Hawaii.** Hawaii represents an early attempt to mandate media literacy at the legislative level. As Kathleen Tyner has pointed out, media literacy is an issue of some urgency in Hawaii, given its potential to combat ethnic stereotypes prevalent in the mass media and, in turn, to teach students to create their own media products that convey more balanced portrayals of the state.[102] Media literacy, with its goal of creating a more empowered citizenry, strikes a particularly resonant chord in a state that has

grappled with issues of its own sovereignty.

In 1994, Hawaii state legislator Jackie Young introduced a bill calling for the Legislative Reference Bureau to conduct "a study on an appropriate media literacy education program in the State of Hawaii." Citing "organizations such as the National Telemedia Council, Strategies for Media Literacy and the Center for Media and Values [that] have strived to work together to inform the public of the importance of media literacy" and the example of Ontario, Canada's state-mandated program, the bill could have been a first step toward a comprehensive media literacy initiative for the youth and eventually the adult population of Hawaii. The bill did not pass, however.[103]

Since then, the state has sponsored smaller-scale media literacy programs such as the Cultural and Visual Literacy Project, a collaboration between the Hawaii International Film Festival and the State Department of Education. The project conducts workshops for teachers and provides them with lesson plans and, in some cases, classroom materials that help them frame discussions about films that the students have viewed at festival screenings.[104] Meanwhile, the state's language arts, social studies, health, and educational technology curriculum strands all incorporate media literacy concepts. In its standard for teaching "Technology as A Tool For Research Grades 4-5," for example, Hawaii requires students to identify "the source of information and the point of view presented for analysis of any bias," including "whether material retrieved over the Internet is fact or opinion."[105]

❧ **California.** According to Kubey and Baker's 1999 study, California possesses one of the nation's most comprehensive set of requirements. In grade 4 language arts, students learn to "evaluate the role of media in focusing attention on events and in forming opinions on issues." By grades 11-12, the curriculum must cover the "strategies used by media to inform, persuade, entertain, and transmit culture," including "perpetuation of stereotypes." Secondary school social studies curricula must address inaccuracies and biases in political advertising, radio, and film. Health courses require student essays evaluating family dynamics in a selected TV program, collages showing how advertisements convey messages about body image, and classroom discussions on "influences and pressures to become sexually active."[106]

In addition to California's curriculum requirements, two programs funded by the U.S. Department of Education's 2000 Media Literacy Initiative operated outside public school classrooms. In 2001, "Work of the Mind: Media Literacy for Kids and Teens" in the West Contra Costa County School District targeted "at-risk" elementary-school students, many of them expelled from mainstream schools for bad behavior, while "Inter: Re-Active: Youth, Gaming and the American Social Imaginary" at Belmont Senior High School in Los Angeles collaborated with a local nonprofit and a digital-arts studio to bring youth and artists together on creative projects to combat violence in urban, low-income, primarily immigrant neighborhoods. Participating youngsters in this "Inter: Re-Active" program discuss media violence and design alternative fantasy games which, with support from two private foundations and a venture capital

consultant, will be commercially marketed, thus providing the students with "a financial reward for their creative product and public recognition of their investment in an important contemporary social issue." The work, in turn, will become part of the students' portfolios and increase their chances of college admission and scholarships. [107]

❧ **Maryland.** Maryland was the first state to create a comprehensive media literacy curriculum to be incorporated in a variety of classroom subjects (language arts, social studies, math, and health) in public schools throughout the state, although it has not been officially mandated. In the wake of the 1999 shooting at Colorado's Columbine High School, the state embarked on a public-private partnership with the Discovery Channel and commissioned Renee Hobbs to draw up separate curricula, keyed into Maryland's state content standards, for elementary, middle, and high school students. The result, collectively titled *Assignment: Media Literacy,* was published in 2000 and comprised 18 instructional units, each accompanied by video clips.

In addition to covering the basics of critical media viewing, the elementary school course considers such subjects as "heroes and villains" and, like the other two curricula, contains production assignments such as making videos and public service announcements. One activity in middle school calls on students to "invent a non-violent game or sport for the 21st century" to go along with a unit on violence in entertainment. The high school curriculum builds more explicitly on students' familiarity with sophisticated social studies and language arts concepts,

with units devoted to "crime reporting," "the culture of celebrity," and one – covering "history, literature, and the mass media" – that requires students to "reflect on the connections between journalism, history, and literature by exploring colonialism in Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries."[108]

Maryland has directed much of its effort to teacher training. Once the curriculum was prepared, the department contacted all school superintendents in the state and began holding regional training sessions for teachers. By 2002, more than 2,700 Maryland teachers had completed training through *Assignment: Media Literacy*, and received a free copy of the curricular packet. Project director Lynn Widdowson notes that the Maryland program has been successful because the curriculum can be integrated seamlessly into existing lesson plans, so that teachers do not have to figure out where to fit media education into their class time, or to sacrifice other coursework to make way for media literacy units. Widdowson says, however, that the curriculum has been less successful in schools where only media specialists received training rather than classroom teachers. A study of the program's impact, conducted by Robert Kubey of Rutgers along with the New Jersey Media Literacy Project, concluded that *Assignment: Media Literacy* "was very well received and effective in both changing attitudes and increasing media knowledge."[109]

THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

While media literacy continues to develop by fits and starts in the U.S., in many other countries it is accepted as an essential part of basic education. It is incorporated in K-12 curricula in the majority of industrialized nations. As Baker and Kubey found, "when it comes to the *delivery* of media education, the United States lags behind every major English-speaking country in the world."[110]

A movement for media literacy developed in South Africa in the late 1970s and 1980s through grassroots organizations like Women's Media Watch, a community-based education and production project, and the Media Resource Center, which promoted media education among teachers and journalists opposed to apartheid. The movement was essentially part of the resistance to the propaganda- and censorship-driven ruling party. Since 1995, the South African National Curriculum's language and arts standards have called for media literacy education. In 2003, the government's Film and Publication Board began a National Media Education Initiative with the goals of empowering youth to be "discerning consumers" as well as "creative and proficient users of the media to produce our own 'stories' to tell each other and the rest of the world." [111]

In France, the Ministries of Communication, Education, Sports, and Agriculture joined forces in 1979 for a two-year experiment in TV education. Though no formal curriculum was developed, the program, called Young Active Television Viewers, initiated teacher training, introduced critical viewing courses into 11 school districts, and conducted interviews with more than 100 students to evaluate its effectiveness. Today, media education in France is directed primarily through the Center for Liaison Between Teaching and Information Media, an agency of the Ministry of Education.[112]

In Israel, concern about gender issues, child welfare, commercialism, and the fate of Jewish tradition in a world dominated by American pop culture led the Ministry of Education in 1990 to appoint two committees to formulate a national media education program. Curricula for all levels of elementary and secondary education as well as teacher training programs resulted. The Israeli model emphasizes media literacy as a tool for achieving social goals, and despite the initial top-down nature of the initiative, the educational system has become less centralized and some teachers and schools have created their own programs rather than using the nationally created curricula.[113]

These countries all enjoy more centralized educational systems than the United States and thus have had an easier time implementing media literacy programs on a national or regional level. Their examples are worth considering, however, as the U.S. moves toward adopting media literacy both as a necessary component of contemporary education and as a preferable alternative to censorship. Following are more detailed descriptions of media literacy education in Canada, England, and Australia.

⌡ **Canada**. The first wave of Canadian media literacy activity began in the 1960s, with the rise of film education efforts, including the founding of the Canadian Association of Screen Education. Teachers responded to an increasingly media-saturated climate – including a growing youth-oriented popular culture – by using film as a springboard for teaching more traditional language arts and social studies. But by the mid-1970s, the country had adopted to a back-to-basics philosophy, and media education advo-

cates were left, as Canadian expert Barry Duncan has noted, to "work largely and somewhat apologetically on their own."[114]

The media literacy resurgence began in 1978, when 70 educators convened in Toronto; by the end of the conference, Duncan had formed the Association for Media Literacy (www.aml.ca), which has since held conferences and workshops and published curricular materials, most notably the 1989 *Media Literacy Resource Guide.* The *Guide* contains background on media concepts, extensive sample activities, and ideas for integrating media study into the high-school curriculum. As part of a geography lesson, for instance, the *Guide* suggests that students compare media images of major cities like Dallas, New York, or Los Angeles with the socioeconomic realities of those cities. A chapter on popular music suggests that teachers discuss music videos with their students, asking such questions as "What characters are consistently mocked, criticized, or presented as unattractive?" and having them think about how their clothing styles are influenced by pop stars. Other lessons require students to identify the "hooks" in popular songs or compare the music of their parents' generation with their own.

The *Guide* also provides a clear articulation, frequently cited since, of what the authors considered the eight basic concepts of media literacy:

⌡ All media are constructions.

⌡ The media construct reality.

⌡ Audiences negotiate meaning in media.

⌡ Media have commercial implications.

⇂ Media contain ideological and value messages.

⇂ Media have social and political implications.

⇂ Form and content are closely related in the media.

⇂ Each medium has a unique aesthetic form.[115]

Just before the *Guide* appeared, the Ontario Ministry of Education commissioned the AML to hold in-service training sessions for educators throughout the province. Upon its publication, the Ministry sent copies to the province's educators, administrators, and educational consultants. Available in French, Italian, Spanish, and Japanese, the *Guide* has been used as a model for programs not only across Canada but worldwide. AML members continue to host workshops around the world for teachers wishing to introduce media literacy into their classrooms.[116]

In 1987, two years before the *Guide* was published, Ontario became the first Canadian jurisdiction to make media literacy a mandatory part of its curriculum. "Because of the pervasive influence in our lives of print and electronic media," the province's curricular guidelines maintain, "it is important for students to learn how to understand and interpret media works," not only through analysis and knowledge of industry codes and practices, but through "designing or creating their own media works, using a range of technologies to do so. By working in the various media to communicate their own ideas, students will develop critical thinking skills and understand at first hand how media works are designed

to influence audiences and reflect the perspectives of their creators."[117]

Media studies is one of four compulsory strands of Ontario's English curriculum for grades 9-12, alongside reading, writing, and language. Similarly, "media communication skills" are a part of the requisite English program at every grade level from 1-8. The province's curricular guidelines contain detailed requirements in both media analysis and production-oriented projects. Today, Ontario has one of the most developed and concrete mandatory media literacy programs anywhere.

While generally lauded for its achievements, Ontario's program has not escaped criticism. Media scholar Robert Morgan, for example, has called its large-scale curricular undertakings too "decontextualized" and has argued that media literacy education needs to be addressed more specifically to the real-world experience of its audiences, including in particular the students' socioeconomic conditions.[118]

Following Ontario's example, every other Canadian province has mandated media literacy as part of its English curriculum. To avoid reinventing the wheel, provinces have joined together in hopes of building common curricula for grades K-12. Two regional organizations have resulted: the first, formed in 1993, is the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education, with education ministers from Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, and the Yukon Territory. The second, the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, was formed in 1995 by ministers of New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador,

Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Both groups have protocols that directly refer to media education, though each province is left to create its own standards.[119]

▌ **England and Wales.** England is in many ways the birthplace of media literacy education. As early as 1929, the London Board of Education's *Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers* urged teachers to give children specific training in evaluating (and resisting) what it considered the low standards of early movies.[120] In 1933, the literary critic F.R. Leavis published what media literacy leader David Buckingham calls "the first systematic set of proposals for teaching about the mass media in schools," though its "central mission ... was nothing less than the salvation of the culture" – teaching students to "arm themselves against the false and corrupting influence of the mass media and to move on to the self-evidently good and true values of the literary heritage."[121]

But Leavis's approach was to be overshadowed by the cultural studies movement in academia, which recognized that revolutionary changes in communications had occurred during the 20th century, and that non-print media now wielded vast influence over art, politics, and virtually all aspects of social life. Scholars developed an "anthropological notion of culture," according to Buckingham, that "challenged the distinctions between high culture and popular culture, and between art and lived experience."[122]

At the same time, many teachers of English saw themselves as protectors of children from the "false consciousness" that mass media were thought to promote. This tension between protectionism and

the more analytical style of cultural studies continued, but as media scholar Andrew Hart reports, teachers increasingly "recognized the hypocrisy in routine condemnation of what were major sources of information and pleasure for themselves as much as for their students."[123]

In 1988, a mandated National Curriculum for England and Wales was proposed, and the government's Department for Education and Skills appointed a committee, led by Manchester University English professor Brian Cox, to come up with recommendations. The resulting Cox Report urged that media education be integrated into the English curriculum and offered suggestions for systematic inclusion. The following year, the government's National Curriculum represented the first official recognition of media studies, although the actual teaching requirements remain minimal, according to media educator Cary Bazalgette: "The National Curriculum is a book two centimeters thick, and the media education requirements take up only about ten lines. There is a little bit for 11-16 year-olds as part of English, and an even smaller bit for the same age group as part of Citizenship." But there are also optional courses in Media Studies and Film Studies for older students, she says, and "many teachers would be keen to do

> "When it comes to the delivery of media education, the United States lags behind every major English-speaking country in the world."
> - Robert Kubey & Frank Baker

more than the minimum," if they were given resources and training.[124]

Thus, despite the National Curriculum requirements, teachers have been largely left to figure out for themselves how to fulfill them. Hart notes that teacher training in media literacy has always been insufficient in England; funds for professional development have decreased amid renewed back-to-basics focus on core curriculum. Since most teachers have received little academic training in media studies or media education, their understanding of the subject's theoretical foundations can be uneven. Even with an understanding of these theoretical or ideological issues, many teachers have found it difficult to translate them into the classroom.[125]

Remedying this, in part, have been the efforts of the British Film Institute and the Film Council Education Fund. In the late 1980s and early '90s, the BFI published two books that summed up media literacy's definition, rationale, and theoretical background: *Primary Media Education: A Curriculum Statement*, edited by Cary Bazalgette, and *Secondary Media Education: A Curriculum Statement*, edited by Julian Bowker. Other BFI publications include teacher-support materials such as *Moving Images in the Classroom: A Secondary Teachers' Guide to Using Film & Television*, a detailed manual for media analysis classes, and *Film as Product in Contemporary Hollywood*, a packet of lesson plans and class materials. The BFI also offers teacher training and recently worked with the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport to develop a policy statement defining and encouraging an analytical, critical-thinking approach to media literacy.[126]

❚ **Australia.** While England's implementation of media literacy was top-down but left teachers to find their way in uncharted waters, in Australia teachers often found themselves stifled by inaction at the upper levels. Through the 1960s, the Board of Secondary Education's compulsory curricula, according to media educator Robyn Quin, were "rigidly controlled, unabashedly traditional, externally examined, and marked by a strict hierarchy of disciplines,"[127] making educational innovation difficult. At the time, Australian educators, influenced by the cultural studies movement, were beginning to understand the importance of mass media critique and were eager for change.

This analytical focus is characteristic of Australian media education. The teachers' union ATOM (Australian Teachers of Media) was a critical voice in introducing media literacy education and providing it with a politically conscious, bottom-up rather than top-down character. ATOM's publication *Metro Education* has featured articles by "the international who's who of media literacy," says David Considine.[128] The union developed curriculum materials, including a much-admired series of motion picture study guides that are now used in the U.S. as well. (Films covered range from *Little Women* and *Huckleberry Finn* to *Bambi* and the Mel Gibson/Franco Zeffirelli *Hamlet*.[129]) ATOM's work gave the media literacy movement particular prominence in urban centers like Melbourne and Sydney. As Considine notes, teachers unions in Australia "are well aware of class issues" and thus bring a critical perspective to bear on the political ideology reflected in mass media.[130]

Educational restructuring in the 1970s was key in encouraging the rise of media education. In 1971, standardized examinations for high school students were brought to an end, leaving individual school systems to conduct their own assessments, while lower secondary curricula were placed in the hands of school systems rather than the university-dominated Public Examinations Board. The opportunities for educational reform that these changes opened up coincided with a new abundance of financial backing: Prime Minister Edward Gough Whitlam's Labor party, elected in 1972, resolved to increase money for education and established a heavily endowed Schools Commission that was directed to give funding precedence to projects originating at the local level.[131]

Among such projects were professional development workshops for media educators in the state of Western Australia, which has boasted one of the most active media literacy movements in the country. For over a decade, Western Australia's standards have required that a quarter of English curricula for grades 1-12 be devoted to media education.[132] The "Viewing strand" of the statewide English standard "focuses on students' viewing a wide range of visual texts with purpose, understanding and critical awareness," and requires them to "progress towards becoming analytical and critical viewers of an extensive range of visual texts." Students must identify "the codes and conventions characteristic of a range of text types to construct meaning" – for example, "tension is heightened in films by dramatic music or sound effects such as a heartbeat or a squeaky chair."[133] There are also active media literacy programs in the language arts, arts, and technology curricula of each of Australia's five other states.

In 1991, the Western Australian Ministry of Education attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of media literacy instruction in lower secondary schools by administering a test to 10th graders, asking them to analyze a portion of a television sitcom and various newspaper advertisements. In examining the results, Robyn Quin and Education Ministry manager Barrie McMahon discovered that while the vast majority of students had acquired basic media literacy skills – for example, identifying media stereotypes – very few were able to identify the real-world effects of those stereotypes. They suggest that perhaps teenagers do not yet have the life experience needed to make the conceptual leap, or that "current teaching methods do not equip students adequately to make the necessary connections."[134]

Another possible explanation is that they are expecting too much of media literacy. It cannot singlehandedly heal all of the world's ills, but it can teach creativity, competence, and critical thinking, which in the long run will enable young people to view media more intelligently and make healthier decisions about their lives.

Conclusion

Continuing concerns about sexual messages, stereotypes, and fantasy violence in the mass media have made the need for media literacy education all the more evident in recent years. Critical thinking is an essential skill for all citizens in a democracy, whether they are evaluating a TV ad, an action movie, or a news report of a politician's speech. Rather than resorting to censorship or ratings schemes in response to the presumed influence of violent or otherwise troublesome messages in popular culture, policymakers should commit to making media literacy an essential part of every young person's education.

As this report indicates, though, the concept of media literacy is neither simple nor monolithic. Avatars of an overly reductive and purely protectionist approach to media violence or other broad categories of art and entertainment fail to take account of style, context, parody, ambiguity, and other factors that affect how teenagers and children experience popular culture. Major differences exist over whether funding or other participation from corporations that produce media content inevitably corrupts the educational process. Media literacy educators also disagree over the extent to which issues

of corporate consolidation and control should be part of the curriculum. As the momentum for media literacy education grows, these conflicts need to be addressed head-on – and resolved in favor of pedagogies that emphasize critical analysis without simplistic media-bashing, that recognize media's "creative and democratic potential,"[135] and that are free of compromising corporate influence.

In the past few years, the federal government and education departments in many states have come to recognize the importance of media literacy and have supplied some financial and institutional support. Yet the U.S. still falls short of much of the world in embracing media literacy education. American politics often seems stuck in a rhetorical blind alley where, instead of focusing on forward-looking educational policies, advocates and politicians expend their energies on headline-grabbing but ineffective – and constitutionally dubious – calls for more ratings, filters, and other forms of censoring the young. Media literacy is far better than censorship, not only for those concerned about troublesome media messages but for everyone committed to modern education, intellectual freedom, or the healthy development of youth.

Policy Recommendations

❚ Congress should recognize that although there are many troublesome images and ideas in popular culture, the actual effects of the mass media are complex and difficult to predict. It should therefore make a clear statement of national purpose to promote media literacy as an essential part of basic education that is far preferable to censorship as a means of addressing society's concerns about popular culture's influence on youth.

❚ The federal government should create guidelines for media literacy education which recognize that critical thinking is the goal, and that media literacy is more than simply an "inoculation" against violent, sexual, or other controversial content in art and entertainment.

❚ The national commitment to media literacy education should be backed up with adequate funding through federal and state governments and nonprofit foundations; but funds should not be accepted from profit-making corporations that produce media content.

❚ Media literacy education should be integrated into language arts, social studies, visual art, health, and information technology curricula.

❚ Teacher training is essential to effective media literacy education and should be supported through seminars and workshops, and incorporated in undergraduate and graduate school programs.

Endnotes

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