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TELEVISION AND EDUCATION:

***CHANNEL ONE* IN CONTEXT**

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Interdisciplinary Studies

by
Mary B. Nemnich

June 1995

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the use of television in the classroom through analysis of the classroom news program *Channel One*. It uses critical analysis of symbols and contextual mythology as a methodology for uncovering meaning.

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The unsung heroes and inspiration behind this thesis are my husband Lee and my children, Alex and Alissa, who gave unselfishly and without complaint of precious family time so that I could pursue my studies. Their unending patience, understanding and loving support sustained me throughout this journey.

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PREFACE

In modern society, there has emerged a phenomenon that has influenced our culture perhaps more than any other previous phenomenon. Its impact has brought down governments, helped to win wars, made heroes out of villains and changed the hearts and minds of an entire country. Virtually everyone has been exposed to it on some level. It has been hailed by some as the unblinking watchdog of the public good and purveyor of fair and unbiased information. It has been castigated by others as a propaganda puppet, a tool of the left or a greed-driven monster that caters to the most basic common denominator among us. From low brow to high tech, for better or worse, leading us into the information age, it is "The Media."

"The media" refers to any printed or electronic forms of communication that serve to inform or entertain us. Generally, this means television and the press. In recent years, the expression is properly said with disdain and a shake of the head, as we have witnessed events in the media that are more and more bizarre all the time. Sometimes, television "news" reporting takes on decidedly dramatic overtones, the resulting story rivaling any made-for-television movie. Thanks to the media, the line between fiction and real life has become increasingly blurred.

Our fascination with the media has spawned a whole new lexicon of phrases. For instance, a person who appears on

television over and over can become a "media darling." A news story run amok becomes a "media circus." Common occurrences such as press conferences or announcements are orchestrated for the camera and become known as "media events." Through our constant exposure to television and the press, we have all become "media savvy."

The fact is that the media pervades our existence. Although we tend to take it for granted, we experience its effects on many levels. We encounter its abundant and varied forms throughout the day, from the morning newspaper to the car radio to the late show. The media is the locus for much of our culture. From it, we learn about art, lifestyles, trends in fashion and modes of behavior. It brings us "History In The Making" and then "conveniently" furnishes us with interpretation of that history. It shapes political issues and makes or breaks candidates on the turn of a "sound bite." We continually process the information we receive through the media and, consciously or not, we form certain assumptions based on it. Those assumptions inform our understanding of the world.

To some extent, we can control our consumption of certain forms of media. We can change channels on the television, or simply switch it off. We can choose the publications to which we will subscribe, the motions pictures we will see, the music we will listen to. Nonetheless, there are other forms of media that are out of our

control. For example, we are "passive consumers" of such things as billboards, background music and commercials that interrupt radio and television programming and now, even motion pictures.

The "choice" factor in the media we consume is sometimes taken out of the equation entirely in certain arenas. One important place where electronic media, specifically television is being used extensively is in the classroom. Recently, many school districts have begun introducing commercial television into the school day of thousands of American students. Commercial television presented within the context of the classroom, particularly the secondary-level classroom, is implicitly "required," just as certain texts are required. Middle and high school students are natural captive audiences. Bound to their desks for the requisite six hours a day, they are at the mercy of the teacher, be that teacher human or electronic. Thus, there is no choice on the part of the student in receiving the media that is presented in the classroom. That choice has been made by someone other than the student, whether the teacher, the school administration or the television producer.

Additionally, unlike other curriculum materials such as books, commercial television in the schools is unregulated. In fact, in the case of the commercial classroom television news program *Channel One*, control of the programming comes

from outside of the school itself. It snaps on automatically at certain, preset times of the day, presenting content that has usually not been previously seen by school personnel. The presence of this type of media cannot be selected, critiqued or supervised. Hence, without some sort of gate-keeping by the school, even the teacher may not have a choice in what is presented.

Education provides exposure to complex communication systems and, arguably, there are definite effects which result from that exposure. Due to the enormous implications for the impact of these effects on understanding, on perception and on lives, the use of commercial television in education carries with it definite issues of social responsibility that require scrutiny. That is why this study is being undertaken.

There are certain questions that are especially significant to an inquiry into the use of electronic media, specifically commercial television in the classroom, in terms of constitutive knowledge, cultural transmission and intellectual development. Since classroom education provides one of the cognitive lenses through which we filter our perception, how does the media shape our perception? It is also important to examine the use of symbols, as television is symbolic by nature--indeed, it is a symbol system unto itself. How they are created and do they form a mythology of their own? What is the effect of that "symbology" on the

classroom?

Another consequential question is whether exposure to classroom television is intrusive or selective. As part of a curriculum, especially, that issue is an important one; to what extent is curriculum self-regulated and to what extent coercive? Given the symbolic nature of television, there is great potential for unwitting perception. In other words, if education may be perceived as awareness, then, as soon as we are aware of a symbol, we become in effect educated.

One significant outcome of commercial television in the curriculum is its potential impact on our definition of knowledge. In the traditional view of curriculum, knowledge was seen as a commodity to be "poured into" the student. The modern view of knowledge acquisition is built around the concept of questioning. In this view, children are seen more as engaged, active partners in their learning. Given the passive nature of the television viewing experience, will this theory of learning change from the concept of inquiry to one of acceptance? Furthermore, if, for example, advertisements are part of an "educational" television program, then are these commercials to be considered as a valid part of the knowledge base? Clearly, an examination of the emerging definition of knowledge as it relates to electronic media in the classroom is called for.

This analysis will examine the above questions and issues through an exploration of the use of commercial

television in the classroom. *Channel One*, a television news program for high school and middle school students, will provide the focus of this analysis. An attempt will be made to discover whether there are patterns of meaning being expressed through broadcast media and what they are.

Responsibility for media effects is an issue that must be dealt with, especially as it concerns education. Media presented within the context of education has an implicit stamp of legitimacy on it. It is therefore vitally important that what is presented be examined critically. Our very futures depend on it.

INTRODUCTION

My interest in pursuing an inquiry into the use of commercial television in the schools was motivated by personal as well as academic objectives. As the mother of two school-aged children, I have an acute interest in the process of education. Like many parents, I have witnessed the impact of television in my children's lives and wondered about its impact on the changing character of the classroom.

When my son Alex was small, he used to end each cartoon viewing session by going into his room to play with his "action figures." Soon, we would hear the unmistakable sounds of seven-year-old combat--the mouth sounds of gunfire and explosions and punching. He would play like this for some time, barking impromptu dialogue and making bloodcurdling death rattles as foe after foe was vanquished. My daughter Alissa, upon having watched the ballet "The Nutcracker" on television, danced in front of her mirror for hours--in her slip, making up romantic songs to accompany the dance. In their childlike way, they were seeking meaning in what they had witnessed on television. Through various modes of expression, they used alternative meaning systems to bring life to their experience. They instinctively tried to mediate the messages they had seen.

Television furnishes children with information about the world. For good or ill, intentionally or unintentionally, it educates. Through the messages it transmits, the

images it portrays, the symbolism it uses, the colors, the setting, the sounds that it conveys--it educates. It is how those messages are interpreted and assimilated by the audience that is important.

The process of education, like so many other life experiences, can be looked at as a communication process. The educator, or source, communicates a symbol or symbols to the students who receive and decode those messages, making sense of them. Their receiver response is returned to the teacher in the form of questions and comments. Then, that data is re-encoded and returned to the pupil as feedback. This is a standard model of communication (Samovar & Porter 17-18). In this process of give and take, the apprentice creates meaning from the symbols, ultimately becoming educated.

Symbols being communicated to the students can take varied forms. Words are primary symbols, easily apprehended in most cases, as a basic human communication tool. Pictures, books, charts, signs, music, even the teacher's mode of dress and patterns of speech all convey meaning. However, there is one teaching tool, used with increasing frequency in the classroom, that in and of itself is a meaning system--the television.

Long maligned in studies attesting to its negative effects on kids and education (Williams, Huesmann, Liebert, Winn), television is nevertheless becoming a staple of

education. What is communicated there and how meaning is derived from it thus demands scrutiny. But to understand television as a meaning system requires knowledge of what it is and is not.

To begin with, the nature of the medium is different in significant ways from other meaning systems expressed in the classroom. For one thing, television content is presented as a complete package. It not only communicates its message, but also provides context and interpretation for what is presented. Furthermore, television differs from other symbol systems in that the feedback portion of the communication model is missing. There is no give-and-take with the screen. What you are given is all there is. Additionally, the messages from television are immediate. There is no mediation through time or reflection. And finally, television is primarily a visual medium. These factors all influence the way in which meaning is conveyed through this medium.

When I watch television with my children, there is a continuous sub-dialogue going on simultaneously with the program. As we watch, the kids ask questions intermittently about what they are seeing. "Why did he do that?" "What did you and Dad think of Nixon?" "Mom, is that real?" I provide interpretation, explanations and commentary to help mediate what they see. The average child spends 30 hours per week watching television (Moody 3), often alone. With-

out some interpretation of what's going on on the little screen, children are left to draw whatever conclusions the television and limited experience will permit. A 1990 study found that young children take what they see on TV as "trustworthy information about the world" (Flavell et al 417). Mediation of what is presented on television, then, is of primary concern in the classroom.

The visual dimension of the medium is especially troubling to educators, who see this aspect as antithetical to reading. Children today are "visual learners," incapable of translating words into images because they have spent hours learning to do the opposite. They are a post-literate generation who comprehend things differently than previous generations and therefore need different strategies to derive meaning from text (Iyer 98). Consider that movie scripts of the 1940s contained 25% more dialogue than those of today, for movies of the same length (Iyer 98). Films today rely more on the visual images than the dialogue to move the story. "News" comes in sound bites. MTV has mastered the three-minute video--a vignette that summarizes the song being played on the air. Television is the medium where kids are comfortable. It moves at their pace. It is planned that way.

This is not a good thing, educators tell us. Writing in *Education Week*, Jane Healy takes on the venerable "**Sesame Street**" as being detrimental to reading. She says that the

dancing numbers and bright colors give kids false impressions of what reading is. When a kid finds out that numbers don't animate and dance off the page, they "find reading boring and can't understand why meaning doesn't magically appear--like a special effect..." (Healy 63). Another problem Healy finds with "Sesame Street" is one that is destructive to the learning process as a whole. In order to keep children's attention from wandering while they are watching, "Sesame Street" utilizes a common television ploy. They throw in bright color and fast action with sudden loud noises to yank the kid back when their concentration strays (Healy 65). Exposed to so much artificial stimulation, the brain soon becomes dulled by them, changing its natural attention mechanisms. Add to this the fact that television does all the work and all the thinking in the name of entertainment, and teachers are faced with students who want to be entertained in the classroom. When the lesson gets boring and students can't "change channels," they simply tune out.

Perhaps most disturbing to educators is the effect that television has on imagination. Children, who spend approximately 18,000 hours from the age of 5 to 18 with television, compared to 12,000 in the classroom, (Moody 5) have difficulty calling up pictures in their minds to accompany the words they are reading (Healy). An English teacher in South Carolina found that her students were more creative in their

writing when they had a pictorial referent, than when they only had a written or verbal assignment. These kids said they needed pictures to stimulate their writing--that they couldn't conjure up "mind pictures" on their own (Thompson 48)!

The role of imagination, or imagery, is crucial to successful reading. Consider the dismal prospect of trying to read a book without mental images to accompany the words. We "picture" the way characters look, the rooms they inhabit, the things they do. Indeed, the joy of reading is to be derived from the rich imagery the author has labored to inspire in the reader. Thousands of people "saw" the fateful battle between Captain Ahab and Moby Dick long before Gregory Peck came along in the film version.

Yet, despite all the hand-wringing by educators and social scientists, television has "followed the children to school" and more educators are beginning to view it as a valuable adjunct to curriculum (Leslie et. al. 46). One innovative use of television to enhance reading skills is the captioned video. Captioning has long been used in commercial television for hearing-impaired viewers. Schools may purchase the caption decoders and use them in the classroom (Koskinen et al 37). Students then can view videos related to current lessons that are captioned right on the screen, just like the subtitles on foreign films. Television then becomes a sort of "moving story book" and reading

benefits from its placement within the "highly motivating and reinforcing context of television viewing (Koskinen et al 37-8)."

Television may also be used to enhance readings. For example, students in a Connecticut high school English class were shown a dramatization of Athol Fugard's play "Master Harold and the Boys" which the teacher had taped from a presentation on A&E, the cable arts and entertainment channel. This was part of a whole unit she was doing on South Africa. To end the lesson, students then read "Kaffir Boy," about life for Blacks in South Africa. Said the teacher, "I really believe that if you come at one topic from a lot of points of views, it starts to register." She added, "I don't like competing with television, but I like using it as a tool (Leslie et al 46)."

In the foregoing examples, television was used proactively. The students in the two cases were interacting with the television. However, for the most part, the television experience is passive. Viewers are not actively involved with information processing. In fact, research studies on brain function have shown that viewers are in the "alpha wave" state of reduced brain activity while watching television (Moody 14). They are not engaged in what is being presented. There is thus great potential for unwitting comprehension, that is, lessons being learned on a subconscious level. Schools must take this factor into account

when introducing television into the curriculum. Indeed, some districts formalized critical television viewing skills curricula as an attempt to demystify the whole phenomenon of television (Neuman 114-115). Their theory was that television was another form of literacy and must be taught. Their mission was to encourage kids to watch purposefully as well as critically. But, these projects failed to effect any permanent results and were abandoned sometime in the mid-eighties (Neuman 116).

To be most useful in a school, then, television is *interacted with*, rather than merely *experienced*. Experiments with alternative meaning systems help students to "unpack" meanings from text of various other kinds, and provide them with a richer context in which to experience literature. In reading, for example, when children are unable to access a concept due to lower reading achievement, sometimes they can comprehend the same piece by experiencing it through other forms of art, such as dance or music. Similarly, television content can be mediated through other contexts in order to uncover meaning. One obvious form of mediation of television content is through guided discussion of the material viewed. Other, more creative means might also be employed. For example, some children might be encouraged to draw pictures of their feelings about a particular program. Kids who do better with music could write and perform a piece that summarized the content of the show.

Still others might find meaning through poetry, rhymes, chanting or even rap. The idea is to deconstruct the messages that are normally just beamed at them with no mediation or reflection whatsoever.

A new use of commercial television in schools makes the need for examination more critical than ever. In 1990, Whittle Communications Corp. began broadcasting special programs into certain public schools via satellite. The program is called *Channel One*. The schools signed three-year contracts, agreeing that 90% of students would see the program every day. In exchange, Whittle provides the school with free televisions for every class, free VCRs and a satellite dish. Two minutes of each of these 12-minute "news" programs are commercials (Greenburg & Brand 143).

An analysis of *Channel One* will provide the focus for an examination of the commercialization of the classroom. In order to get a comprehensive picture of the philosophy behind this commercial news venture, and to gain a perspective on their development, the next chapter will trace the history of *Channel One*.

CHAPTER ONE

CHANNEL ONE: A HISTORY

Channel One is the brainchild of Christopher Whittle, a publisher from Knoxville, Tennessee. Whittle began his publishing career early, while still a student at the University of Tennessee. In 1969, with his classmate and partner Philip Miffed, he created a magazine for freshmen called "Knoxville in a Nutshell" (Hammer 52). In 1970, they published condensed versions of textbooks for fellow students (Brodinsky 540). Out of these dorm room ventures grew their company, 13-30 named for the age of Whittle and Miffed's target audience (Hammer 52). The educational materials they published, including wall charts, magazines and books can be found in hundreds of college campuses and thousands of elementary and secondary schools throughout the country (Brodinsky 540).

In 1979, Whittle and Miffed bought the ailing Esquire magazine and turned it around by targeting it to baby boomers at the beginning of the boomer eighties (Elson 31). Whittle and Miffed parted company in 1986. Miffed took Esquire (later sold to Hearst Corp.). Whittle kept the specialty magazines and founded Whittle Communications, Inc. (Solomon 62).

Whittle's specialty is targeted advertising. His company, Whittle Communications, Inc. invented "wall media," large ads that are displayed in laundromats and hospital

waiting rooms (Pomice 54). Behind wall media ads was the notion that people doing their laundry had nothing else to occupy their time. They were essentially captive audiences until the timer went off on the dryer.

His company also published "Special Reports," a magazine and series of videos aimed at a discrete and captive group: patients in the endless process of waiting their turn at the doctor's office, the average wait being 27 minutes. "Special Reports," closed in February 1994 (Landler 66), devoted all ad space in each publication to just one sponsor. This venture generated 80 million dollars in two-year ad contracts for the company (Pomice 52).

Channel One was a natural choice for Whittle. As a rule, his audiences usually shared certain general characteristics: 1. They were in a place where they had to be 2. They had to remain in that place for a specific period of time 3. Their attention was not otherwise occupied. Casting about for another group possessing similar traits, Whittle hit on the classroom.

The youth market is a lucrative one for advertisers. Teenagers represent a powerful purchasing force, generating an impressive \$57 billion in sales every year (Advertising Age 1). James U. McNeal writing in *American Demographics* in 1992, estimated that children between the ages of 4 and 12 influence \$132 billion in purchases every year (Wartella 451). Middle school-aged children, targeted along with high

school students for *Channel One* programming, are between the ages of 11-14.

Whittle's philosophy of single sponsor advertising, such as he had utilized in "Special Reports", appealed to major companies considering sponsoring *Channel One*. In light of the fact that approximately 750 ads a day appear on individual television stations (Pomice 52), the idea of a 12-minute program carrying just one or two was attractive indeed.

Sponsors smelled a profit in *Channel One*. They paid an impressive \$314,000 a minute to jump on the gravy train (Toch 88). In 1994, *Channel One* signed more than \$200 million in long-term contracts (3 1/2 years on average) with Pepsico, Mars, Proctor and Gamble and others (Landler, Greising 68).

However, Whittle professed high-minded motives when he first proposed the project of commercializing educational television. He decried the woeful ignorance of current events by today's youth. He was quoted as saying that they thought, "Chernobyl was Cher's full name (Toch 86)" and that "the Ayatollah Khomeini is a Russian gymnast (Hammer 52)." Quips aside, though, Whittle promised his sponsors they'd have an audience of 6.5 million captive viewers of *Channel One*.

Whittle's offer to educators was simple. If a school signed a three year contract with *Channel One*, it got a

satellite dish, two VCRs, a 19-inch television set for every classroom and all the cable and wiring and maintenance needed for the run of the contract. As part of the "deal," the school districts agreed that 90% of the students would watch daily (Greenberg and Brand 143).

Channel One was first introduced into U.S. schools in March 1990. It was billed as a television news program for middle and high school students. According to Whittle, his company single-handedly built an entire electronic infrastructure to help remedy the "shockingly" archaic conditions of America's public schools. They "...laid 6,000 miles of cable...installed 10,000 satellite dishes...bought and installed over 300,000 television sets" in just 24 months at a cost of over \$200 million (Brodinsky 541).

Because of the commercial content, the introduction of *Channel One* initially generated a controversy. There were protests from every educational organization from the National Educational Association to the PTA. Action for Children's Television led a move to have "Whittle-free Zones Across America" (Pomice 54). Several states attempted to ban *Channel One*; California was one of them. Bill Honig, California's Superintendent of Schools at the time, said, "If you mandate that kids watch it, you really have a problem with who controls the curriculum (Zoglin 59)." In the end, California's endeavor was denied by the state supreme court in 1992 (Brodinsky 541-2). The only state with a

prohibition still remaining is New York (Solomon et al 65).

The 12 minute program contains ten minutes of news and two minutes of commercial advertising. It is beamed via satellite into the classroom. According to Jerome Johnston, a *Channel One* researcher from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, *Channel One* is delivered to schools in the following way:

The program is produced every day in Los Angeles. Each night it is uplinked to a satellite and transmitted to every subscribing school. The broadcast is preceded by a signal that turns on the recorder in each school. By 6 a.m. the news show is available for preview and retransmission throughout the school building at a time selected by the school (Johnston 438).

Some 350,000 television sets now carry *Channel One* in schools (Landler 68). More than 8 million kids in over 12,000 middle and high schools all over the country--about 40% of American teenagers--now receive *Channel One* (Wartella 450). (65% of all US Catholic schools are also online (Brodinsky 541).)

Whittle had surpassed his initial projections, but in the midst of building *Channel One*, other Whittle Communications ventures began to unravel. "Special Reports" magazine, established in 1988 closed in 1994 at a cost of \$25 million. Whittle had also developed Medical News Network (MNN) an online service directed at doctors to keep them informed of breaking developments in the medical industry (Landler 69). Advertising was, of course, part of the service. With the health reform effort of the Clinton

administration, attention was shifted away from private doctor's offices to large HMOs. MNN was abandoned when Whittle was unsuccessful in selling it. It was closed in August of 1994 at a loss of \$35 million (Landler 68). By late 1994, 30 of Whittle Communications titles had folded (Elson 31). From 1992 to 1994, Whittle's staff had dwindled from 1,100 to 700. The company's financial health was in jeopardy.

Whittle's most profitable project was still *Channel One*. He began to look for a buyer for part of the program. He entered into negotiations with Wall Street's Goldman, Sachs & Co. to buy half of *Channel One*. When he received an offer to buy the service outright from K-III Communications Corp., (the publisher of *Seventeen* and *New York* magazines,) Whittle sold *Channel One* in August 1994 for \$300 million (Landler 69).

CHAPTER TWO

TELEVISION AND CONTROL

If a person were to have a party and invite all the media controllers in the country, it could be held in a very modest home. The fact is that only a small handful of individuals controls all the media produced in this country. In Manufacturing Consent, Herman and Chomsky identify just 24 "media giants that make up the top tier of media companies in the United States (Herman, Chomsky 5)." The majority of these are owned by families, members of which still sit on the board. Thus, it is not merely fancy to imagine that this assembly could gather in the same room. Indeed, Chomsky and Herman assert that they are a sufficiently small group to act in concert when the need arises (Herman xii). The authors are not advancing a conspiracy theory by such an assertion. Rather, they point out that these media producers are like-minded, seeing things in much the same way.

They:

"do similar things because they see the world through the same lenses, are subject to similar constraints and incentives, and thus feature stories or maintain silence together in tacit collective action and leader-follower behavior (Herman, Chomsky)."

The issue of media control is an important one when applied to educational television programming. For example, whose "lenses" are being used to view the world? Perhaps the lenses of a majority, wealthy, male media producer are inadequate or irrelevant for useful viewing by a minority,

economically disadvantaged female student. If, as Chomsky and Herman maintain, the media serve a societal purpose in that they "inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society (Chomsky 1)," it is important to know whose values, beliefs and codes of behavior are being inculcated. Perhaps more importantly, we need to know exactly how media exercises control. There are several ways in which this happens.

One significant way the media exercises control is in how it helps to shape our perception of certain events. Some incidents receive wide coverage in the media, while others may rate only a passing treatment. We automatically assign import to these issues based on how much or how little coverage they receive. For instance, live television coverage of the O.J. Simpson murder trial was emphasized to the extent that all the networks gave over prime daytime programming hours to it at the expense of all other programming. Meanwhile, the murder rate of over 1,000 homicides a year in Los Angeles (U.S. Dept. of Justice 112) continues unabated and largely unreported on television.

A prime example of how media shapes our perception of events is found in an examination of the television news coverage of the Persian Gulf War (Nemnich). To begin with, we were exhorted by the media through fervently patriotic television images to "support our troops," and, by exten-

sion, the war. We were bombarded daily with pictures of fresh-faced kids in the gulf, poised for war, intercut with images of support rallies and whole neighborhoods festooned with yellow ribbons back home. We were shown only those images that depicted an America unified behind a *successful* war, so that to have opinions not solidly in support of the Gulf conflict was discouraged. The television coverage of anti-war protest rallies and public debate about the war, so prevalent before the conflict, gradually disappeared as the conflict intensified. The voice of dissent was marginalized, effectively bringing the country into unilateral alignment with the Bush Administration's stand on the war.

The war was "sanitized" in the media to make it easier for the American public to accept it and back the Administration's policies in the Gulf. We were kept in complete ignorance of the cost in human life and the ramifications to the area of our presence there. Early on, General Norman Schwarzkopf announced that there would be no "body counts." He pointed out that this practice had had disastrous results in Viet Nam and such mistakes would not be made again. The lessons of Viet Nam, where media coverage of the war led to disillusionment with the war (Chomsky 169), were not lost on Washington.

The attempt to downplay the carnage in the media led to an interesting array of buzz words, words like "collateral damage," a phrase used to refer to human lives lost. We

were distanced from the destruction of war as surely as were the pilots who flew the "sorties" into "target-rich environments" and observed their impact from thirty-five thousand feet up through a camera lens mounted on a "smart bomb." Pentagon press briefings made much of the wonder of the splendid technology of our weaponry, showing endless videotapes of smart bombs and their accurate effect on buildings, but saying little about their toll of human lives. If estimates of more than 100,000 Iraqi deaths had reached us during the crisis, as they have since, the Administration would have been hard pressed to hold onto their command of public sentiment.

In the foregoing example, the television news media acted essentially as controller of information for the government. Writing in the Media Monopoly, Ben Bagdikian observes,

"Authorities have always recognized that to control the public, they must control information. The initial possessor of news and ideas has political power--the power to disclose or conceal, to announce some parts and not others...to predetermine the interpretation of what is revealed (Bagdikian xviii)."

Identifying several media control mechanisms, Chomsky and Herman enumerate five "news filters" that they maintain serve to marginalize dissent and control discourse in order to further the aims of government and powerful private interests. Known as the "propaganda model," these filters are:

1. Size, ownership and profit orientation of mass media
2. Advertising as primary income source of mass media
3. "Sourcing" mass media by government and business "experts"
4. "Flak" as a means of control and discipline
5. Anti-communism as a control mechanism

Examination of the news coverage of the Gulf conflict disclosed a close fit within the patterns of the propaganda model (Nemnich), especially the third, fourth and fifth filters.

However, the perceptual filter most relevant to the examination of commercial classroom television, and thus to this essay, is the second of Chomsky's filters; "advertising as primary income source of mass media." A major reason that advertisers exert control over media is simply that they pay for their programming. Television is a place for advertisers to shop their wares; the programs are often an afterthought to the main event--the product of the sponsor. "The programs are in a deeper sense really ads for the commercials, depicting lifestyles for which the commercial has a product or service to plug in," writes Hal Himmelstein in TV Myth and the American Mind. "They are prefatory statements that herald the ads; they become the everyday activities that surround but cannot intrude on the sacred time of the commercial break (Himmelstein 56)."

George Lipsitz echoes this assertion in the book Pri-

vate Screenings:

"Advertisers incorporated their messages into urban ethnic working-class comedies through indirect and direct means. Tensions developed in the programs often found indirect resolution in commercials. Thus Jeannie MacClennans' search for an American sweetheart in one episode of "Hey Jeanie" (a 1950's sitcom) set up commercials proclaiming the abilities of Drene shampoo to keep one prepared to accept last-minute dates and of Crest toothpaste to produce an attractive smile (Spigel and Mann, 78)."

Yet a third way in which advertisers control television is by withholding sponsorship from "unfriendly" media producers. For example, Gulf + Western withdrew its support of public television station WNET after it aired the documentary "Hungry for Profit," which Gulf + Western viewed as "virulently anti-business, if not anti-American (Herman, Chomsky 17)." Neither is controversial or thought-provoking programming regarded favorably by advertisers, since these do not usually put viewers in consumer mode. "Advertisers will want, more generally, to avoid programs with serious complexities and disturbing controversies that interfere with the "buying mood." They seek programs that will lightly entertain and thus fit in with the primary purpose of program purchases--the dissemination of a selling message (Herman and Chomsky 17)."

With revenues from television and radio advertising at a staggering 37 billion dollars a year (Troy 189), it benefits media producers to cooperate with sponsors. Not to do so is to commit economic suicide.

One goal of media producers, then is to deliver the largest and most affluent audience to the advertisers. Advertisers become, in effect "patrons of the arts" and media producers compete for their patronage. Thus, "the choices of these patrons greatly affect the welfare of the media, and the patrons become what William Evan calls "normative reference organization," whose requirements and demands the media must accommodate if they are to succeed (Chomsky 16)."

The affluence of the high school and middle school audience of *Channel One* is indisputable. Adolescents control \$57 billion in sales every year (Advertising Age 1). Additionally, *Channel One* reaches over 8 million kids every day (Wartella 450), guaranteed by contractual agreement with the schools. So, the two most important audience factors for sponsor appeal--size and affluence--are present in *Channel One* audiences.

The unspoken intent of advertisers is to foster consumerism in general among television viewers. Referring to this cultural predilection to consumerism, Himmelstein says,

"The moral imperative of acquisitiveness in contemporary advanced capitalist societies is manifested in such strongly held values as private property, security, competition, and achievement...This imperative is evident not only in adult life, but also in children's preparations for that adult life. Advertising provides children with pecuniary enculturation--teaching them how to grow up to be good consumers (Himmelstein 40)."

For children, that "teaching" process begins at a very

early age. With increasing frequency, it takes place at the institution where other forms of learning are occurring: the school.

CHAPTER THREE

ADVERTISING IN THE SCHOOLS

Channel One is not the only, nor even the first, purveyor of commercials to the classroom. Children have long been the sought-after prize of marketers. For some time, though, the youth market was sacrosanct, cut off from advertisers as a protected group. But as their economic influence grew, so did the interest of advertisers. As they have grown as a consumer force, influencing billions of dollars in spending every year, children of increasingly younger age have become targets of advertising (Wartella 451). Marketers have developed several strategies for targeting this lucrative group, among these being direct marketing to the schools themselves.

Ellen Wartella traces the evolution of youth marketing in an article titled, "The Commercialization of Youth." Citing a history by Paula Fass called "The Beautiful and the Damned," Wartella points to the "flapper" of the 1920's as the first discernible youth group with a common, distinct set of values, traits and social behaviors. Popular media followed and chronicled their exploits in music, movies and print. Then, she says, this group was pitched everything from cigarettes to raccoon coats, the well-publicized trappings of their generation (Wartella 448).

"Seventeen" magazine premiered in 1944, a response to the emergence of a clearly defined demographic group called

"teenagers." This group took on more definition through the 1950's, where they were portrayed as a discrete set of young people with their own musical tastes and hangouts, e.g., drive-ins. Movies and music, Wartella states, played even more narrowly to this generation and the marketing niche became more clearly defined. It was during this period, for example that fast food restaurants made their first appearance (Wartella 448).

Then, in the 1960's and 1970's, television took over as the main agent of children's marketing, elevating the Saturday morning cartoon marathons to new heights of commercialism, offering a dazzling array of sweet snacks, cereals and toys along with the cartoons (Wartella 449).

Since then, Wartella continues, there has been an explosion of youth marketing. The last twenty years have seen a dramatic increase in direct mail marketing to children. There are special pre-teen magazines and even specialty departments for children within retail stores, like the McKids section in Sears stores that uses McDonald's characters to attract kids (Wartella 450). Everything from "infotoons--" really just program-length commercials for toys, like the "He-Man" and "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" cartoon programs--to special products aimed just at kids now assails children at every turn, in every venue, including schools.

In some form or another, advertising has existed in

schools for quite awhile. Ads appear in school yearbooks and newspapers. Troll Magazine markets books and posters directly to school children and offers incentives to schools who have children participate. Some restaurants sponsor reading activities. Pizza Hut, for example, offers pizzas to students as incentives for reading (Wagner 63). Recently, Minute Maid, maker of orange juice, co-sponsored a literacy program with Scholastic, Inc., a company that publishes a variety of school titles. Minute Maid enclosed coupons for their products along with the educational materials. Scholastic, Inc. also got involved with AT&T and Armour (maker of hot dogs, a children's staple) in educational programs that included a marketing component for their products (Wartella 450).

As part of this study, the researcher paid a random visit to a 5th grade classroom that yielded an abundance of commercially sponsored "educational" materials. There were posters on the walls of the Disney movies *Aladdin* and *Angels in the Outfield*, both movies targeted to a youth audience. There were also posters from Troll Magazines, Trumpet Club and Discover Books, all companies that sell books to children through the schools. One pamphlet advertised a children's summer camp and another one was a solicitation of money to support a "save the manatee" group.

The Disney posters were the clearest example of targeted advertising. At the bottom of the *Angels in the Outfield*

poster, there was a large ad for Hi-C fruit drinks. The copy said, "Name the can contest! Find out how you could win a free trip to Walt Disney World, plus \$5,000 for your school, or win one of 500 Hi-C watches!" Right next to the movie title were the words, "Now On Video!" On the back of the poster, the copy purported to be a writing exercise for the children. It gave tips on how to write a news story, i.e., using the who, what, where, when, how formula. It also explained the importance of writing and rewriting. One suggested activity for trying out these "skills" was to write a commercial for Hi-C. A case of Hi-C samples actually accompanied this "activity." The following is an excerpt from the activity instructions for writing the commercial:

"write and perform a commercial for the sponsor of your Sports Report Show: Hi-C Fruit Drinks.

1. Look at the new Hi-C 7.7 ounce can. Hold it; how does it feel in your hand? Do you think this can should have its own name?
2. Notice the flavor. What does the name suggest to you? Now taste the sample. How do you feel about the taste? How would you describe it?
3. Write down words that help you tell how you feel about Hi-C Fruit Drinks. Do you like Hi-C more now that you've seen this new can? What would convince you and your friends to buy it and try it?"

Under "Topics to Talk about," the questions were:

"Why do companies advertise their products? What does advertising do in our economy? What does it do for you and your family? How many places other than TV can you find advertising? How has writing the Hi-C Fruit Drink commercial helped you understand more about advertising and products you and your family shop for?"

The *Aladdin* poster carried the same type of advertising information, but with a different sponsor: Dannon's Sprinklins, a yogurt for kids. The copy on this poster advises children how to do animation, write movie scripts and make movies. It also has a storytelling contest that children can enter.

"Sue" is a middle school teacher in southern California. She displayed a copy of "Science World" magazine that is widely distributed to middle schools. It is published by Scholastic, Inc., also the publisher of the respected "Scholastic News" and other school periodicals. This magazine focuses on scientific news reports and developments. The May 5, 1995, issue contained no less than seven advertisements in a twenty-six page magazine, selling everything from personal products, like hair mousse, suntan lotion and deodorant to a career in the United States Navy.

"Sue" also indicated that she keeps copies of magazines such as National Geographic in her classroom for reference purposes. She stated that she has used both Newsweek and Time magazines for current events and as a research source for her eighth grade classes. She says they are excellent for helping her students learn the value of reference material outside of encyclopedias and dictionaries. "The type of ads these magazines have, for things like cigarettes, are not always good. But you weigh things for the greater good," she said. "Kids see more than that on the way home

from school or at the 7-11. And they get value out of the magazines that outweighs the negative effects of the ads."

Recently, the incursion of advertising into the schools has become even more pronounced. A school district in Colorado Springs has taken to overt solicitation of advertising dollars to help their schools get the materials and equipment that conventional funding can't provide. Their school buses carry signs, movable billboards, really, that advertise 7-Up and Burger King (Wagner 63). Other schools accept materials carrying prominent company logos and advertising messages. Evans Jr. High School in Washington, D.C., for example, displays art posters bearing the Miller High Life (beer) logo (Wagner 63).

So-called educational materials such as posters and informational pamphlets sometimes provide inaccurate information to children in the interest of selling their products. A nutrition pamphlet put out by Kellogg's (cereal maker) and directed to school children states, "Breads (like toast and bagels) and cereals (even the sweet ones!) are low in fat. Go ahead and enjoy them! (Wagner 63)." The dangers of too much sugar in the diet are downplayed in the indictment of fat content in foods. The self-serving nature of this information from a company that manufactures cereal products that are often sugar-laden and targeted toward children is obvious. Hershey Co. (maker of chocolate), published a similar "nutrition" brochure telling the kids

that they could "easily eat a chocolate bar or piece of cake" and still maintain a balanced daily diet, if they included such things as fruit and cereal for breakfast and a tuna fish sandwich for lunch. This is followed by a recipe for a sweet snack that calls for Hershey products (Wagner 63).

While critics censure the questionable practice of making consumers out of school children, school officials all over the country point to diminishing coffers as justification for it. They are faced, they say, with coming up with ever more creative ideas for raising scarce funds.

Channel One argues that children are exposed to far more ads at home than they ever would be at school. They hold that exposure to a mere two more minutes of commercials in school is a fair bargain in exchange for the knowledge they gain in current events. "I don't see why we can't bring [commercials] into the service of education. It's a reasonable trade-off," Whittle said in 1990 (Zoglin 59).

They further maintain that their commercials are more appropriate in terms of content than the grab bag that kids experience in regular commercial television viewing at home. *Channel One* student news reporter says,

"As a student before, I had no problems with the commercials on *Channel One*. They were the same I see on regular television. I mean, Pepsi, Nintendo--they're innocent commercials. Some commercials you see [on regular television] are "iffy," like underwear or something. They don't show that stuff on *Channel One* (Student reporter Brandon was interviewed by telephone on May 17, 1995. Herein-

after referred to as BI. See appendix for full text of interview.)."

David A. Neuman, executive producer of *Channel One* echoes the sentiments of "Sue" and other teachers when he asserts that use of a national magazine, such as Time or Newsweek as part of a lesson on current events, exposes children to far more ads than ever they would see on *Channel One*. Further, he says, those publications would include ads for such things as cigarettes and alcohol, decidedly more menacing things than athletic shoes (David A. Neuman, Executive Producer of *Channel One*. Interviewed on Tuesday, May 30, 1995, by telephone. Hereinafter referred to as DNI. See appendix for full text of interview.)

A typical child sees over 350 commercials a week (Troubling 65) and not all of them are "innocent." U.S. News and World Report, assisted by researchers who specialize in violence on television studied fifty hours of programming to discover the incidence of inappropriate commercials on family or children shows. They found that kids who watch 25 hours of television per week (the national average, approximately) would be likely to see some inappropriate commercials. They cited some examples:

- During a show called "Pinocchio's Storybook Adventure," aired at 4:00 p.m., a promotional spot for the adult drama "In The Heat of The Night" was shown, detailing the plot of the upcoming show: "a troubled girl gives birth to a dead baby," and "having sex with a retarded person is sexual

battery."

- A commercial for "The Untouchables" ran during an afternoon showing of "Full House," a family show featuring school-aged children. Its visual content: two shootings.
- Just before "The Simpsons," a promo for the horror film "Leprechaun" shows a hand reaching up through the floor to grab a victim (Troubling 66).

Peggy Charren, founder of action for Children's Television (ACT), argues that it is incumbent on the parents and other consumers to become activists in order to prevent such inappropriate commercials from occurring during children's programming. She recommends writing letters and making phone calls, especially at the local level. Local television stations don't want to look bad in their home towns, she says. She recommends calling the General Manager directly. "Pick the most violent ad and say, "What is your excuse for this? (Troubling 66)"

The problem with this approach to advertising in the schools is that the commercials there are not as readily accessible to others as they are to the school children and teachers. They are intended for student audiences only. Parents are not likely to ever view the contents of a *Channel One* broadcast including commercials, nor is a member of the general public, unless they specifically ask permission of the school to enter a classroom and view it. The distribution of the program is carefully controlled. It was, in

fact problematic to acquire artifacts of *Channel One* newscasts for study. (See Chapter 5)

The fact is that, to advertisers, educational institutions represent just one more niche in a business that seeks increasingly new and profitable venues for product placement. Children are the market and school is where you find them.

Besides targeted advertisements, there are certain cultural myths and symbols that are employed in newscasts, including *Channel One*. These symbols convey meaning and communicate to the audience in specific ways. The next chapter details how myth and symbol operate in the news and sets up a methodology for study of *Channel One* programming.

CHAPTER FOUR

SYMBOL AND MYTH: A METHODOLOGY

Semiology, the science of signs, revolves around the notion that signs and symbols have meaning. Several theorists are known for their work in semiology. Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure, often called the "father of semiology," first used the term semiology and is generally credited with founding the science. C.S. Pierce, an early Twentieth Century American communication theorist, called his study of signs "semiotics (Solomon 14)." For the purpose of this essay, however, the work of French structuralist Roland Barthes will provide the basis for a methodology of study.

Barthes has postulated a meaning system wherein meaning is imbedded within certain symbols. In his most famous example of this paradigm, Barthes describes a photo on the cover of *Paris-Match* magazine. It depicts a Black soldier in a French military uniform, saluting a French flag. Barthes uses this example to illustrate the way in which symbols work to convey meaning on different levels. He uses the terms sign, signifier and signified to describe the interplay between what is seen and what is discerned in meaning.

The photo itself is the "sign." It is the frank and obvious artifact that conveys an event: a soldier saluting a flag. The subject of the photo, the Black soldier, is the "signifier." He is the vehicle through which the meaning is

conducted. The meaning conveyed by the photo--proud nationalism, allegiance to France by citizens of all races and the virtues of French colonialism--is what is signified. The cultural understanding of the nation is brought to bear upon interpretation of the symbolism in the photograph. It is myth that makes this understanding possible.

Barthes uses the term "myth" to refer to the contexts within which we construct meaning. By this interpretation, a myth is a code that informs and defines our whole belief system. It is itself a system for assigning cultural meaning to the events of our lives. Meaning comes, not from the object itself, as with the photo example, but from a culturally constructed reading, or concept of the object. Hereafter, use of the term "myth" will refer to that contextual reading, rather than to the traditional conception of myth as a cultural story.

Myth furnishes a frame of reference for perceiving our world. It provides the lenses through which we filter our view of everything--history, social interactions, relationships with other cultures and within our own. It helps us to order everyday experiences. In short, myth shapes our world view.

For example, we use the myth of the American Dream--the "bootstraps" story that says "with hard work and persistence, anyone can become a success in America"--to explain our attitude toward welfare recipients. The "Domino Theory"

myth justified several wars. The myth of the American West influences us to see the world in terms of "an opposition between the natural world and the human world and to judge all things by virtue of their relation to human needs (Solomon 17)."

Television news is not exempt from this contextual mythic framework. The application of mythic filters is unconscious, automatic. Therefore, news is not the objective set of facts it holds itself out to be. It can't be. Rather, it is a collection of culturally defined events. It can thus never be completely value free because it is automatically framed by our mythology.

In "The News as Myth," Tom Koch asserts:

"To say that news reports present a mythic, narrative system is to say that it describes signs (actions or events) that are presented through a series of cultural filters which include values of the reporting and reading culture. News reportage thus takes the raw events of our world and places them in a unifying context, a translation that renders them comprehensible and safe to readers or viewers... (Koch 23)."

As Barthes himself put it, "Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts: myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflection (Koch 25)."

There are some dominant cultural myths utilized in giving that "inflection" to the news. The myth of the individual, that is, one who goes up against the institution in a sort of heroic quest for the truth, is amply represented in the television news anchor. This courageous hero does

battle with those who would deny us our sacred right to know.

"The individual hero-correspondent, who has used his craftiness and wit to outsmart the institution and to penetrate the institutional barriers that hide the conspiracy or deception, now reveals his efficiency by trapping the reluctant interviewee into ostensible admissions of guilt or into internal contradictions in his answers... (Himmelstein 203)."

The networks play to this mythic quality of the anchor in shopping their news program to the public. Consider the ABC description of its one-time anchor Frank Reynolds: "Uniquely qualified to bring you the world (Himmelstein 204)." This description is almost godlike in its tone. Only a god, after all, could hand over the world. The anchor assumes an omnipotent and comforting quality as the person who can bring order to the chaos of daily events. Walter Cronkite's calm "...and that's the way it is" signature reassured millions of Americans through assassinations, the Viet Nam War and constant social turmoil on campuses all over the country. Like the Greek gods who indulgently watched their creations muddle through their tragi-comic lives, the news anchor "stand(s) above the fray, guiding our view of the world and teaching us how to react... (Himmelstein 210)."

The cultural myth of eternal progress, that is of a society forever moving forward, is also evident in television news. Technology is part of this. Americans get a particular thrill out of seeing how-did-they-do-that scien-

tific wizardry on television. Impressive computer-generated graphics, high-tech news gathering devices such as satellites and slick, state-of-the-art production values dazzle the viewer and encourage them that America's progress and position as a technological power is assured.

Perhaps the most powerful myth working to guide the entire television news process is one of its own creation, that of its objectivity. This is a dearly held and staunchly defended myth. It allows the culture to accept what it sees on the news as trustworthy information about the world. It allows the news producers to essentially buy their own press. It reinforces itself with every "investigative report" and point/counterpoint editorial. The imperative to be objective is a sacred trust that journalists take very seriously.

The myth of objectivity so effectively frames the television news that journalists may sometimes be blind to their own bias. Television critic William Henry put it this way: "American TV news, like the rest of American journalism, is scrupulously "objective"--which means it does not challenge the prevailing biases of a predominantly white, Judeo-Christian, imperial, internationalist, capitalist society (Himmelstein 215)." The "objective" viewpoint of news reportage, in other words, in reality favors the dominant cultural position on the issue at hand.

These mythic frames are difficult to discern because a

culture is steeped in them from the beginning. It's a "can't see the forest for the trees" kind of problem. What is more easily discerned in a television newscast are the symbols that are used, consciously or unconsciously, to reinforce the message being communicated at any given time. Symbols speak eloquently; a gold band on the third finger of the left hand tells a story in this culture, as does a certain kind of automobile, a neighborhood, a school.

On mainstream network newscasts, there are certain symbols that inform us that we are witnessing a "serious" news program. News sets, once no more than a desk against a static backdrop now are set in the foreground of the actual newsroom itself. The viewer sees the news gathering staff busily hurrying about in the background, no doubt in the process of obtaining the latest, fast-breaking story. Some sets exhibit monitors displaying the coming or continuing story, plus live-action pictures of the newscast in progress. Many have clocks, some set to international time zones. Telephones are often visible on the anchor's desk as though to suggest that they must be in constant touch with breaking news events. Most anchors also hold a pen, presumably used to write the stories in an instant, as they break.

Music is an essential symbol in television news. Most newscasts favor classical sounding pieces, with authoritative drums, soaring brass and sweeping strings. The theme for the ABC news program World News Tonight with Peter

Jennings begins with a masterful tympany drum solo, leading to a brass fanfare. NBC's Nightly News with Tom Brokaw, in a piece composed by John Williams especially for the program, uses a musical device common to news music; busy strings in the introduction recall teletypes and bustling newsrooms, leading to the traditional horns and strings in a serious, yet hopeful fanfare. The ponderous, mellifluous voice of James Earl Jones intones, "This is CNN" underscoring a composition of brass and sweeping harp strings. The original news theme for CBS Evening News is performed by no less than the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

The news anchors themselves provide the most instantly recognizable symbol. These are the icons of television news. Without exception, all three national network anchors are white males with dark hair. They effect a sober, yet warm and approachable demeanor. They are always seated, never standing or moving about the set. They are usually attired in suit and tie, although Dan Rather was known for a time for wearing homey sweaters, an attempt to overcome his aggressive, "cool" reputation, earned as a tough correspondent for the White House beat and *60 Minutes* (Himmelstein 210-11).

Network news anchors appear to be prosperous, successful and unquestionably a part of "the establishment." They are the principal of the school, the CEO of the corporation, the charter member of the country club. At the same time,

they are our likeable neighbor down the block. We know these people. We trust them.

Cultural symbols are inbred. Certain of them have universal application. However, it goes without saying that within each culture there are many different cultures, each with its individual set of important emblems and tokens and frame of reference for understanding of them. The youth culture has its own collection of recognizable symbols. This kind of symbolic communication has sparked the recent debate over what constitutes "gang" attire in the schools. For example, certain athletic team sportswear is associated with certain gangs, as are even particular colors. These emblems are almost universally understood by young people. Styles of hair and clothing dictate who is a "geek" and who is "cool" to teenagers. They use certain symbols to determine who is an appropriate person to date, to eat lunch with, to be seen with.

The style in which *Channel One* is presented illustrates the importance of the translation that makes events "comprehensible and safe" for adolescents. Symbols from the youth culture are used deliberately and consciously by the producers, who use young reporters, dressed in the style of the day, speaking in a manner that is familiar and trustworthy to their youthful audience to convey the news.

The symbols evident in a *Channel One* newscast, moreover, differ from those of traditional newscasts. Gone is

the pen and the telephone. Gone is the bustling ersatz "newsroom" behind the anchor. Gone, even, is that sacred bulwark of all network television newscasts: the anchor desk. The symbols in a program geared to a youthful audience are bound to be different from those of the conventional news. They speak a whole different cultural language. They support completely different ideologies. They point to the differently ordered priorities of a totally discreet audience subset: adolescents.

The following critical analysis will uncover and examine those symbols.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TALE OF THE TAPE

Stalking the Elusive Artifact

In order to get a comprehensive look at *Channel One* content, it was necessary to have a copy of the broadcasts that could be reviewed over and over. The first and most logical place to find a copy of a tape is the school itself. Several attempts were made to get copies, all with no success. I was told that it was just not possible to record a broadcast because *Channel One* controlled the transmission, recording and release of all programs. There were, in fact, no taped copies of the program available because of the way in which the show was captured and recorded for broadcast at the school. I interviewed a librarian to find out how that worked.

"C" is a librarian at a California middle school. She is responsible for the taping of the daily *Channel One* transmission. Here is how she describes the process:

"The people at *Channel One* installed a huge recording unit in the library. It has two tape recorders, one internal and one external. Every morning at 2:30 a.m., a signal is sent to the satellite on our roof. This triggers the recording device in the library. The *Channel One* show is recorded on an internal recorder. It is not visible on the outside and it can't be gotten to. Then, when I want to broadcast it to the classrooms, I push a "play" button that feeds it to every room.

"Then, it (the program) stays in there until the next morning. It rewinds and when the satellite turns it on again, it records the new program right over the old one. We never see the tapes

themselves, except when the representative from *Channel One* comes out to change the tapes. This happens about two or three times a year. He'd just come out and clean it out and put in a new tape or whatever it was and then close it up again and that would be it."

Besides *Channel One* newscasts, *Channel One* Communications also makes other educational programming available to the schools. These programs are commercial-free. A series of instructional videos is carried over "The Classroom Channel." These shows focus on one subject area or another, varying with each week. Also available are programs for teachers that are broadcast over "The Educators' Channel." These may be taped on an external VCR.

"*Channel One* makes a calendar of all upcoming programs for the month. There are enough of these that every teacher can have one," says "C." "If a teacher sees one that they want taped, they notify me. I then put a tape in the external slot and it gets taped automatically on the day it airs." Asked if a *Channel One* broadcast could be similarly taped, she responded no.

One teacher at the same school had managed to secure a single copy of a broadcast through direct recording to a VCR in the classroom. That teacher made the tape available to the researcher. However, it was an anomaly in that it was from "Student-Produced Week," a period in which students from *Channel One* schools did their own productions, rather than the usual production crew at the LA studio. Nonetheless, the benefit of this tape was that it showed the two

minutes of actual commercials.

So, the local *Channel One* schools were unable to provide any tapes of broadcasts, although they did say that non-students could view the program, as long as the presence of the visitor to the campus was cleared through the office. It was explained by the researcher, however, that a single program would have to be viewed over and over in order to perform a proper analysis. The schools responded that such an accommodation would not be possible, as a new program was taped every day over the old one.

Next, a student reporter from *Channel One* was contacted for an interview. He agreed in the course of the conversation to also provide a week's worth of programs, which he promptly sent. However, this "compilation reel," as it is called, contained no commercials. Instead, there were sixty-second commercial "blacks," spaces of dead air with a black screen. Thus, program content could be reviewed, but no commercials could be seen. Nonetheless, in the end, the tapes provided by the *Channel One* reporter were usable for critical analysis.

CHAPTER SIX

SYMBOLS IN CHANNEL ONE

The tapes used for analysis were *Channel One* broadcasts from the week of May 8-12, 1995, five shows total. The first program, however, was atypical of *Channel One* programming. It was a special broadcast in honor of V.E. (Victory in Europe) Day. The entire piece was done as it would have looked in World War II. It was shot in black and white, with the actors in period costumes of the day. Even the sound had a grainy quality as old radio shows often do. The set decoration was '40s, with maps and telephones and a teletype machine in the background. As an anomaly, it was not suitable for analysis. In the end, four shows were used for analysis. The number of shows was limited by difficulty in obtaining tapes, as detailed in Chapter Five.

In each of the remaining four programs, the following symbols were tracked and noted: Music, Art, Blocking, Language, Clothing and Hairstyles (of anchors and correspondents) and Camera Angles. Additionally, the quotation opening each *Channel One* program was recorded and the lighting of the show was also noted. Lastly, the overall content of each broadcast was reviewed. Each of these factors will be examined individually.

Music

Music is used to open every segment of *Channel One* News. It is also used in the "bump," that is the transition

between the end of one segment and the beginning of the other, and it is used to close the show. A different piece of music is used for each part. The music is all contemporary and varied from "alternative" rock to R and B (rhythm and blues) and rap, to "straight edge" and "metal." There is no theme music for *Channel One*, that is, there is no recognizable composition that is played to open and close every show. Rather, a different contemporary piece is used every time. Music was also used to underscore several of the news reports.

Art

Channel One uses student-created art works. These are used to open the show and usually for one transition--the lead-in back from the first commercial, although this was not the case on every show. "Pop Quiz," a segment where students can test their knowledge of math, science, history and other subject areas, opens with a standard collage of photographs, such as a butterfly, a horn-player, an elephant's eye and a field of flowers. The artworks noted were as follows:

Show 1

Opening: A painting of a crystal-like object, almost similar to a brain. It throbs and pulses with the music. A child is seen observing the object with an awestruck expression. An opening widens in the object and the child is drawn inside, where there is a space alien-type creature

with its hands wrapped about a pulsating inner part of the "brain." The child smiles, as the *Channel One* logo flies toward him. Dissolve to opening.

Transition: A painting of an outstretched hand with a globe of the earth growing from a twig out of the palm.

Show 2

Opening: The camera moves through a painting of a series of empty rooms, up a stairway, through a succession of doors. It shows a young woman with her hands over her face. She pulls them away, the camera moves in close on her eye, in the center of which is the *Channel One* logo.

Transition: This featured a photo of a landscape with a silhouette of a wolf superimposed over it. This was not student artwork but a graphic used to introduce a special "Return of the Wolves" segment. It was used on subsequent shows.

Show 3

Opening: A young Woman jumping in and out of picture frames. She picks up a guitar and plays it. She ends up in a framed picture of the *Channel One* logo.

Transition: A computer animation of a sky full of clouds. *Channel One* logo flies out of the sky toward the viewer.

Show 4

Opening: A featureless head on a pedestal wearing sunglasses spins around, surrounded by a beach ball, a model

of an atom and the *Channel One* logo all moving around it.

Transition: The *Channel One* logo with a watercolor painting superimposed over it of a smiling, bearded young artist holding his paintbrush with his hand formed in the "heavy metal" sign--index and baby finger extended, all other fingers bunched together--popularized by the "Beavis and Butthead" cartoon characters.

Blocking

Blocking refers to the physical movement of the news reporters. The set of *Channel One* does not contain a standard "anchor's desk." Rather, there is a table that seats three in a triangle, and a couch and love seat grouping. The anchors utilize all of these settings. The anchors frequently are shown standing. This is typically done in the open, though not always. The other preferred blocking shows all of the anchors sitting in comfortable chairs and couches, in casual positions, i.e., sitting on one leg or sitting with leg resting upon the opposite knee.

In Show #1, the co-anchors sat in comfy chairs, cross legged. Show #2 had the anchor standing at the open, sitting in front of a screen in a close-up shot, and sitting around the table with co-anchors at the close. Show #3 featured punk duo "The Ramones" as guest anchors. This show opened with the anchor standing by a spiral staircase with her guests. They later moved onto the couch grouping. On Show #4, the two female anchors were perched on top of the

table, facing each other.

Clothing/Hairstyle

Channel One anchors wear contemporary, casual clothes. In Show #1, the anchor wore a bright yellow polo shirt, open at the collar with a white undershirt visible at the neck. The co-anchor wore an oxford cloth button-down with a white undershirt visible at the open collar. On location at the remote, he wore a sweatshirt over a T-shirt, jeans and a flannel jacket tied around his waist. The female correspondent wore a jacket over a T-shirt. Her hair was done in many small, long braids, known as "extensions" and popular with African-American young women.

Show #2 featured the male student reporter in a T-shirt and jeans, with his hair slicked back in the "wet look" with the sides shaved. The female anchors both wore their long hair loose and casual. One wore a ribbed "poor boy" sweater and the other wore a pink short-sleeved shirt with black leggings.

On Show #3, rock duo "The Ramones" appeared as guest anchors. They both wore dark sunglasses throughout the newscast. Both wore dark T-shirts (one with unreadable writing on it) and jeans. The female anchor wore a black T-shirt with a high-school name on it and black jeans.

The first female anchor on Show #4 wore a long jumper with a T-shirt under it. The other wore a T-shirt and jeans. The African-American anchor wore extensions in her

hair, gathered at the top in a tall cone-shaped barrette.

Language

The use of language was examined to determine the degree of informality and use of slang in the *Channel One* newscasts. The overall tone was intimate, as though the newscasters were speaking directly to a group of other young people. There were several incidences where slang was utilized. In Show #1, the anchor said, "Hold on, y'all" to his co-anchors. In Show #4, in asking the student audience for their opinion on an environmental issue, the anchor said, "So, where do you come down on it?"

The introduction sentence in the show's open was always announced in a casual tone. "OK, you got *Channel One* News" was used twice. On another occasion, the anchor said, "OK, you guys ready to start? What do you say?" The close was usually linked to running out of time for the segment. "Alright, we got no more time, so that's it. Bye" was used on Show #1. "Alright, we're outta time. We'll see ya later." was used on Show #2. The cast usually told the audience good-bye.

News reports were typically straightforward and traditional, in terms of language. In one report on President Clinton's visit to Russia, however, the anchor said, "Mr. Clinton decided not to show up" for a parade of Russian military hardware. "It was his way of protesting" Russia's war with Chechnya, he commented.

Camera Angles

In-studio camera shots of the anchors were typically medium shots, that is, head and shoulders. There were several long shots, showing the full body of the anchors. However, there were no close-ups, showing just the head of the anchor. The correspondents were commonly shown in medium shots. The featured guests in the remotes were typically shown in either a long shot or a medium shot and often with a slanted camera angle.

There was a special feature on the return of the gray wolf to Yellowstone National Park that ran for three of the programs. During these segments, many different camera angles and special effects were employed. "Strobing," a technique wherein the picture moves jerkily, rather than smoothly, was employed while showing black and white stills of wolves in the wild. Most of the experts interviewed--representatives from the Sierra Club, the National Parks Service, the Wyoming Farm Bureau and an organization called Defenders of Wildlife--were shown in close-up profile. Hand-held shots--a cinema verite maneuver in which the camera moves continually as though it is spontaneously following the action--was employed in certain of the interviews, especially with a hunter and also while showing black and white stills of the wolves. During a few interviews with certain of the authorities, the camera tilted up at the subject, rather than shooting the subject straight on.

During an interview with the head of the Wyoming Farm Bureau, a person opposed to releasing the wolves into the park, several camera techniques were utilized. A rotating dolly shot, in which the camera went around and around the subject in a dizzying manner was employed in one instance. A "carnival mirror" effect, in which the image appeared to be rippled and distorted the subject was used in another. The carnival effect was also used in photographing a farmer opposed to the release of the wolves.

Lighting

The lighting on *Channel One* is typically warm, meaning that it is diffused and bright, not harsh. The entire set is lit, so that areas other than the anchor's area are visible. There is even an area upstage, (at the back of the set) that appears to be a production area where other people are gathering news, that can be seen behind the anchors. It is not emphasized, however, and does not distract the viewer.

Quotes

Every *Channel One* segment opens with a quote. They were as follows:

Show 1

"In war: resolution.
In defeat: defiance.
In Victory: magnanimity
In peace: goodwill"

- Winston Churchill

Show 2

"God made the country and man made the town."

- William Cowper

Show 3

"In nature there are neither rewards nor punishments--there are consequences."

- R.G. Ingersoll

Show 4

"The aim of argument, or discussion, should not be victory, but progress."

- Joseph Joubert

Story Content

During the week studied, *Channel One News* reported on both national and international events, or "hard news" stories. Each program contained a "special report"--a piece of a series on the return of the gray wolf to Yellowstone National Park. Additionally, all but one show contained a "pop quiz," a feature during which viewers are quizzed on general knowledge questions derived from featured news stories. There were also a couple stories that focused on students from "*Channel One Schools*," as they refer to schools that are hooked up to the program.

Show 1

News story: VE Day celebrations In U.S. and Europe

Student Interest: Steel drum band from Washington, PA in France to perform at VE Day celebration.

News story: Storms in Texas.

Student Interest: A student from a *Channel One* school

helps clean up after storm.

Science lesson: How hail is formed

Pop Quiz: When did Soviet, British and American forces leave Berlin?

Show 2

News story: Moscow summit. VE Day remembrance with President Clinton in Moscow. War in Chechnya. Endangered Species Act.

Special report: Return of Gray Wolf to Yellowstone National Park.

Pop Quiz: What is the primary cause of a species becoming endangered?

Show 3

News story: Oklahoma City bombing. Arraignment of Terry Nichols.

Special report: Gray wolf, part 2.

Pop Quiz: No pop quiz this show.

Show 4

News story: Pending Supreme Court decision on spotted owl habitat.

Special report: Gray wolf, part 3.

Pop Quiz: What once endangered species was recently removed from the list?

The next chapter will explore the meaning of these various elements.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FINDINGS

Music

The symbols uncovered in a critical analysis of *Channel One* tell a great deal about its mission and its relation to its audience. Beginning with the music, *Channel One* makes every effort to be relevant to its youthful audience. They use a broad cross section of popular music, including within one week, no less than eight different varieties within the genre. These were rap, r&b, rock, alternative, straight edge, punk, new age, and metal. *Channel One* attempts to include several different types of music within each broadcast. They do not credit the artists, a nod to the high context of understanding of their audience.

It is notable that *Channel One* does not have a specific theme for its program as network news programs do. Musical tastes are a capricious thing among teenagers. They change idols and favorites frequently and the continually changing music on *Channel One* is an acknowledgement of that aspect of their culture. There is also strong evidence to be derived from the ultra-modern nature of the music choices on *Channel One* of the prominence of the myth of eternal progress. A cutting edge orientation is important to young people. Music trends change rapidly. A show that keeps pace with current musical developments is more relevant to a youthful audience with a penchant for the avant garde and an eye on

the future than one that stays with predictable choices.

Music sometimes underscores news stories on *Channel One*, a technique never used in network newscasts. This program is targeted toward a generation who grew up on MTV. They are accustomed to musical interpretation of events and of interpretive visual imagery accompanying musical pieces. Music videos on MTV have been indicted by some critics for "forcing" interpretation of a song through a certain artist's video reading of it (Goodwin 11). Background music puts a certain spin on video clips. For example, musical choices for the special reports on the gray wolf's reintroduction into Yellowstone Park included "Ramble On," and "I'll Be There" plus lyrical pieces of songs that went, "I am a hungry wolf" and "now baby just spit me out." These were just musical fragments, but recognizable instantly by a youthful audience.

The guided imagery of song underscoring a video image is discussed by Andrew Goodwin in his book Dancing in the Distraction Factory. He refers to it as the "inner speech of music-visual associations that is triggered in the moment of consumption (Goodwin 58)." This process of association is instantaneous. News events lose their neutrality when accompanied by musical "sound bites." The natural process of meaning construction is arrested in favor of the canned interpretation provided by the pre-existing associations within the musical piece. In other words, musical cues

furnish meaning rather than allowing the viewer to create meaning.

Art

The artwork that appears on *Channel One* is, for the most part, created by students. Some of the images on the sample week were disturbing while others were simply entertaining or amusing and still others were quite brilliant. In short, the student artwork paralleled the gamut of artwork found anywhere.

Questioned about the choices of artworks shown, executive producer Neuman asserted that no grand design dictated the choices. "We advertise the fact that we want to feature student artwork and then we get it in and basically the various people who are involved in the production design aspect of the program--the art directors and the set decorating people sort through the material and the stuff that looks interesting we put on the set," he said. "There isn't a whole lot of science to it. We try to get on as much of it as possible. We try to make sure that there's a balance of input from schools all over the country (DNI)."

The inclusion of student artwork is, more than anything, an attempt at inclusion of the viewers in the process. Neuman calls it "reinforcing the sense of connectedness." He had this to say about this notion of inclusion:

"We try to facilitate interactivity even on a primitive level at *Channel One* through producing a television program by making sure that teachers and students have ample opportunity to input into

the show whatever might be appropriate--story ideas, questions, letters to the editor, artwork, T-shirts, etceteras. There is artwork on any news program, even ones you see at home. Why not have that artwork done by students? We hope that by reinforcing the sense of connectedness we actually enhance the interest level that might be paid to the show."

"The artwork is just one aspect of this entire concept that the audience actively participates in making our program. So, we basically said, why don't we just ask them to participate, help decorate our set, help do the bumpers [transitions] that separate the commercial content of the program from the editorial content...and sort of facilitate and reinforce and glorify the artistic capabilities of our audience..."

Every program begins with an acknowledgement of the student artist of the segment and the anchors frequently mention and thank them during the broadcast as each work is shown. So, *Channel One* makes good its promise of "inclusion" and "glorification" of its student audience.

Blocking

A look at any network news program will show the striking difference in the blocking on *Channel One*. Network anchors sit rigidly still, literally sitting on their coat-tails so that their shoulders don't bunch, moving only their eyes as they read the TelePrompter. *Channel One* eschews the "talking head" blocking of traditional news. In contrast, the youthful anchors of *Channel One* move all about the studio. They are shown standing, sitting and sprawling, even perching.

The anchors mimic the posture of their youthful audience. Teenagers don't so much sit on a chair as they "sit

about" it. Accordingly, the anchors sit on their feet, cross their legs, rest chin in hand, lean on the desk--all rule-breakers in the "grown-up" world of network news. The casual blocking conveys a sense of intimacy, of sitting "with" the audience, rather than sitting "in front" of it.

Standing while delivering the newscast gives a feeling of involvement to the audience. It's as though someone just stopped to chat, planning to be on their way shortly. Standing also plays to the kinetic nature of young people. They've just got to move. Additionally, it gives the impression that the "visit" won't be for long.

The blocking of *Channel One News* is in keeping with the company philosophy of "connectedness." It is important to them that the audience feel a part of what they see on the screen. As David Neuman put it, "We've got a generation that really likes to be interactive with their media. We like to...give the audience the very correct perception that they are actively participating in the progress that we're making (DNI)." The sitting-around-talking-with-friends blocking conveys that interactive participation facet of the program.

Language

The critical analysis uncovered an array of casual and slang language that was built almost structurally into the program. There was no formal, "And now, from Washington..." or "This is CNN," as usually opens traditional newscasts.

Rather, the program usually opened with a lively, "All right, you've got *Channel One News!*" However, even this opening was not standard. The close was also casual, compared with traditional newscasts. There was no "That's our news. I'm Peter Jennings. Good evening." here. The *Channel One* newscast was usually closed with "See ya!" or "Gotta go. Bye!"

The language of *Channel One* mimics that of its audience. Young people don't typically say, "Good evening." They're more likely to say, "Gotta go. See ya!" An adult might say that President Clinton "did not attend" ceremonies in Moscow, whereas an adolescent might say he "decided not to show up," as the reporter actually said on *Channel One*.

Student reporter Brandon said that decisions to make language pertinent to young people are made consciously by the producers. He indicated that the opinions of the young reporters and anchors are respected. They are sometimes consulted for readings on whether or not wording is appropriate for the audience. "If I think something should be said a different way or I think I could communicate with the kids better if I put it this way, I talk to them about it," he said. "And usually, David Neuman really stresses that if the anchors or reporters want to change something, go with it. He's all for the reporters' input (BI)." So, with the words themselves, *Channel One* is again attempting to make their program relevant to young people by, in effect, speak-

ing the same language that they do.

Clothing and Hairstyles

From the minute that *Channel One* opens to reveal its anchors, one is aware of being in a different environment for the news. The anchors wear very casual clothing. Brandon, student reporter for *Channel One* said that he wears his own wardrobe that he'd wear to "hang out." He indicated that the producers encourage him to utilize his own style of dress and hairstyle (BI). They want the audience to see a mirror image of itself.

It is doubtful that Peter Jennings would ever wear an open-collared shirt while anchoring, even more doubtful that he would allow his undershirt to show. But, it is very likely that much of his audience would not wear suits as a matter of daily course. Therein lies a fundamental difference in the way that *Channel One* and traditional newscasts operate. *Channel One* approaches its audience as equals. The producers take pains to ensure that their anchors are recognizable as peers to their young audience. Network anchors, on the other hand, are cast as dispensers of information, "above the fray," oracles on the mount. Grooming and attire are one part of this. Diversity is another main component.

Consider that, of the eight reporters on *Channel One*, four are female and four are male. Two anchors are African-American, one is Asian, three are Caucasian and two are

Hispanic. Student reporter Brandon asserts that this is intentionally done by producers to bring relevance to the audience (BI). They want the audience to see themselves represented on the screen. In this, they succeed.

A significant outcome of the cultural diversity on *Channel One* is the way in which power is defined. On *Channel One*, power is shared among all the anchors and with the audience itself. All the anchors share reporting responsibility. There is an equivalent give-and-take among all of them. Power is dispersed in favor of balanced reportage. Even the audience is cast as a partner in the *Channel One* newscast. They are periodically polled on certain topical questions and their responses are reported to them.

The network anchors, on the other hand, are all white males in suits. Power is controlled exclusively by them. They "assume a central role in all stories, usurping authority from the correspondent in the field (Himmelstein 205)." The audience doesn't see itself fairly represented in the network anchors, neither in grooming nor in diversity. Further, they are never seen as a partner in the enterprise.

Camera Angles

In an essay entitled "Semiotics and TV," Arthur Asa Berger assigns meaning to camera angles, referring to them as "signifiers." The following chart, excerpted from the essay will be helpful in getting at the significance of the camera angles used in *Channel One*:

SEMIOTICS OF THE TELEVISION MEDIUM		
<u>SIGNIFIER</u>	<u>DEFINITION</u>	<u>SIGNIFIED (MEANING)</u>
CLOSE-UP	FACE ONLY	INTIMACY
MEDIUM SHOT	MOST OF BODY	PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP
FULL SHOT	FULL BODY OF PERSON	SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP
LONG SHOT	SETTING AND CHARACTERS	CONTEXT, SCOPE, PUBLIC DISTANCE
PAN DOWN	CAMERA LOOKS DOWN	POWER, AUTHORITY
PAN UP	CAMERA LOOKS UP	SMALLNESS, WEAKNESS
ZOOM IN	CAMERA MOVES IN	OBSERVATION, FOCUS
FADE	BLANK SCREEN GETS IMAGE	BEGINNING
DISSOLVE	SCREEN GOES BLANK	ENDING
CUT	SWITCH FROM ONE IMAGE TO ANOTHER	SIMULTANEITY, EXCITEMENT
WIPE	IMAGE WIPED OFF SCREEN	IMPOSED CONCLUSION

(Adler 91-114)

Most of *Channel One* anchor shots are medium shots. The director is aiming for a personal relationship feeling with the audience. Again, the notion of inclusion is very strong here. There are never any pan down shots of anchors or subjects. The notion of shared power is reinforced by the absence of these shots. The message conveyed is that there is no "authority figure" on the newscasts. During the gray wolf segment, though, the pan up shot was used with several

of the authorities who were interviewed. However, this technique was employed to point up the "expert" standing of the guest, rather than as evidence of relinquishing of power by the reporter. The gray wolf segment also contained many close-ups of the subjects being interviewed. The "intimacy" traditionally associated with such a shot according to Berger, might better be interpreted in this instance as degree of expertise or level of authority. It was utilized in order to get the audience to pay attention to the substance of what the subject was saying.

The use of full and long shots in remote interviews with guests is consistent with traditional news reports. *Channel One* compensates for this standard angle by employing other devices, such as strobing and tilting the image. Special effects abound in *Channel One* images. This is rather more an MTV technique than a conscious editorial manipulation of image.

One obvious area, though (and there were few) where a special effect was utilized in order to make a point, was during the segment on the gray wolf. The chief of the Wyoming Farm Bureau was subjected to a series of distorting special effects, including half-lighting, carnival mirror effects, and rotating dolly shots. The net effect of these visual techniques was a sense of distortion of the image, and by extension, the text. From these directorial choices, the audience is led to deduce that the featured subject is

not to be trusted or is giving confusing information, since these techniques were not used on other subjects. It is puzzling as to why this individual was singled out for this treatment, however, since other subjects holding the same position on the gray wolf controversy were given more favorable treatment in terms of camera angles. One striking difference in this subject was his appearance. He had white hair and appeared to be older than the other interviewees. In a youth-oriented program, this may account for his "special" treatment.

In order to "get the heads off the desks," the director must employ devices more suited to entertainment than news reportage (Toch 86). *Channel One* uses many fast cuts. The purpose of the cut is to stimulate excitement and focus the viewer's attention. This editing technique is typically used in television and movie dramas to suggest fast action. It is not often used in television news production, however. Rapid fire cuts are a narrative device and news reporting is traditionally regarded as recitative rather than anecdotal. More often than not, the camera angles utilized in *Channel One* productions bespeak the company's commitment to high production values, rather than editorial commentary.

Lighting

The warm lighting on *Channel One* suggests intimacy. The fact that the viewer can see the entire set creates a sense of being present in the room with the anchors. Addi-

tionally, the anchor is not seen as distinct from the operation, as key lighting of the anchor on network news conveys. Rather, they are a part of the entire production, viewed in context with the rest of the set. This lighting effect takes away from the "godlike" quality of the anchor.

Quotations

The four *Channel One* programs in the sample opened with quotations from Winston Churchill, R.G. Ingersoll, William Cowper and Joseph Joubert. The quotations reflected the theme of each newscast. The Churchill quote was the beginning of a newscast on VE celebrations in the U.S. and Europe. It also came the day after a special broadcast on the actual VE Day. "God made the country and man made the town" was the featured Cowper quote on day 2 of the broadcast. This segment spotlighted a special report on the environment. The third quote, by R.G. Ingersoll--"In nature there are neither reward nor punishments--there are consequences--also featured an environmental theme, in keeping with the special report on the gray wolf and the destruction of the habitat of the spotted owl.

Day four contained a quote by the famed essayist and moralist Joseph Joubert that said, "The aim of argument, or discussion, should not be victory, but progress." On this particular broadcast, all sides were given of the controversial issue of the reintroduction of the gray wolf back into Yellowstone National Park. The quote was in perfect keeping

with the pains the producers had taken to give a balanced look at the issue.

The sources of these quotations--two statesmen, a poet and essayist--are not exactly pop culture icons. It is not very likely that the average high school or middle school student would even know who they were. Nonetheless, there was no attempt to talk down to the audience by using lighter references. Furthermore, the parties quoted represented a cross section of philosophical positions. Joubert was a moralist. Ingersoll was an agnostic. Cowper was a poet who went mad. Churchill was a pragmatic statesman who rescued his country from madness. This is evidence of a program that strives for balance. Additionally, use of these thought-provoking passages reflects respect for the audience of the highest order.

Content

When asked how the news stories that appear on *Channel One* are selected, David Neuman replied:

"Typically, we are looking for the most salient news stories, the biggest and most important ones in the world. Basically, it's like a painting where, if you look at it very close up, you're going to see something different than when you look from very far away. If you take the macro view, we're on 190 days a year and we hope to cover basically the top 100 stories in the world during that period of time."

"Our agenda is basically determined by news events. We are not on any sort of personal campaign to have our particular take on what the biggest stories are. We follow according to what are generally the most important things going on in the world as defined by traditional journalism

standards."

"There are a couple secondary mandates that we have, besides the biggest news stories. The teachers feel it is very important for us to provide some good news as well as the news of the day. We actually believe that that should also be a part of our mix as well and so we provide a number of stories that are about positive role modeling, stories that show how teachers and students are doing good things (DNI)."

Newman also says he includes stories that are relevant to education and educational issues (DNI). These are stories that are not typically focused on in traditional newscasts (Kaplan K2).

In the sample week, *Channel One* reported on the VE commemorations, the violent storms in Texas and the Oklahoma City bombing suspects. These stories were also covered in national network news that week. However, *Channel One* personalized several of their stories by focusing on how they would affect students, particularly students of *Channel One* schools. For instance, the VE Day story included a story about a high school band that traveled to France to be part of the festivities. In the story about the storms, a student of a *Channel One* school was interviewed about the storm damage and footage of kids cleaning up a damaged *Channel One* school was also shown. This personalization of the news stories is another endeavor to bring relevance of the newscast to its young audience.

Each newscast also contained a segment called "Pop Quiz," an attempt at capitalizing on a so-called "teachable

moment," that period when all the elements conspire to drive a lesson home. The science lesson on how hail is formed was further evidence of the intent of *Channel One* news to be educational, not just merely informative or entertaining. David Neuman says that is the primary aim of *Channel One*.

"It's not hard to get people's heads off the desk. It's hard to get people's heads off desks for quality educational programming of a substantive nature about topics that are not necessarily of intrinsic interest to the audience, that you want to achieve a measurable learning result from. That is a challenge (DNI)."

Channel One invests a great deal of time, talent and money to create its program. The program is broadcast to an audience of eight million kids every day. The next chapter recounts some studies on the effect of the program on that audience.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CHANNEL ONE EFFECTS: SURVEY SAID...

The effects on students of *Channel One* programming have been documented by several studies. The findings of two are noted here. Michigan State university's Bradley Greenberg and Jeffrey Brand attempted to assess the effects of *Channel One* advertising and news stories on the student audience. The authors chose four high schools in Michigan, as Michigan was one of four major states who initially subscribed to *Channel One*. Two of the schools had been receiving *Channel One* for six months prior to the study and the remaining two schools had not. The tenth grade history students were surveyed in March and again in May.

The authors found, not surprisingly, that student viewers of *Channel One* knew more about the news items featured on the program than non-viewers of the program. However, they found no difference in general news knowledge between the two groups. Their hypothesis that adolescent viewers of *Channel One* would express stronger interest in news and current events than non-viewers also did not prove out. And, finally, students who received *Channel One* did not report greater use of other forms of news media.

Next, Greenberg and Brand studied advertising effects from *Channel One* exposure. Researchers found that students asked to evaluate commercial products--namely candy, snack foods, a beverage and sneaker--evaluated those seen on

Channel One higher than those not advertised there. Students surveyed also expressed "intent to purchase" items advertised on *Channel One*. Perhaps most telling was that students exposed to *Channel One* reported more materialistic attitudes than the control groups (Greenberg & Brand 143-150).

In 1990, Whittle Communications hired Jerome Johnston of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, to conduct a study on the impact of *Channel One* on the classroom. Johnston's team of researchers studied broadcasts from the fall of 1990 to the spring of 1993. They surveyed students, teachers and principals at 156 schools around the country about their attitudes. Overall, all three groups reported positive impressions of the program. Teachers graded the show between an A- and a B+. Two thirds of the teachers surveyed said they would "strongly" or "very strongly" recommend the program to other schools. The teachers widely reported satisfaction with *Channel One* as a source of current events. Johnston reported that three out of four teachers found commercials to be an "acceptable trade-off" for the value of the program and the equipment that the schools received. The majority of principals also reported favorable attitudes toward the *Channel One* program. They also said that the "free" equipment was the reason they had decided to subscribe.

Three quarters of students surveyed by Johnston report-

ed that the information they received from watching *Channel One* was perceived as being as valuable or more valuable than other things they learned in school. Johnston found that most of the students were "generally quite positive in their ratings of *Channel One*."

The researchers tested students' knowledge of current events by administering a true/false test based on stories covered both by *Channel One* and the traditional news media. Half of the 3,000 students sampled were *Channel One* viewers, and the other half were not. *Channel One* viewers scored only 5-8% higher than non-viewers on the current events test. On the "special report" topics that were explored in more depth over several days, *Channel One* viewers scored 5-15% higher than their non-viewing counterparts. Long term studies conducted on 23 schools, testing retention rates several months after viewing, found that viewers scored only about 3% higher. However, Johnston held that, in schools where the teacher interacted with the programs in a strong current events environment, the scores were 5-8% higher (Johnston 437-442).

Johnston concluded that, overall, the *Channel One* program should be viewed positively for the current events information it provided. Yet it must be interacted with in order to be most effective, he said. "Just as no one would advocate teaching science by having students passively watch "Nova," schools should not expect to teach current events by

having students passively watch *Channel One* (Johnston 441)." In classes where extended discussion followed a segment called "You Decide," in which experts presented all sides of an issue, Johnston found that viewer scores improved.

These studies would indicate that exposure to *Channel One* has a negligible effect on student knowledge of current events. But the two studies differ on whether the inclusion of commercials in the program is acceptable. By Johnston's estimation, the assessment by the adults in his study that commercials are a fair trade-off is "a reasonable stance to take." If commercials are the problem, he says, then so should be all other forms of commercial endorsement in the schools, such as soft drink ads on the sports scoreboards and ads in classroom magazines (Johnston 441). On the other hand, Greenberg and Brand's finding of increased materialistic attitudes and "greater desire" to buy the products advertised on *Channel One* led them to conclude:

The advertised products were well known to this youth market and no new products were introduced. Given a bombardment of media advertising throughout students' daily experiences, why should a few more ads on *Channel One* make a difference...? One possibility, the implicit endorsement of these products by the school, that is, by permitting them to be advertised in school (Greenberg 150).

In other words, given its placement within the classroom, cloaked in the "validity" and authority of classroom text, the commercial messages in *Channel One*, may be seen as more legitimate than those offerings on MTV and daily cartoons.

In 1994, when their contract with *Channel One* was due for renewal, the Colton Joint Unified School District surveyed its students and staff to determine attitudes toward *Channel One*. The district used a closed-ended, agree/disagree survey instrument. Their findings indicated 73% of middle and high school students found the program to be interesting and useful. Sixty-five percent of students reported that *Channel One* news provided their main source for news and current events. Two-thirds of the students said that they "enjoyed" watching the program.

The staff reported generally positive responses to *Channel One*. They found the programs to be useful (65%) in supplementing current events and said that it provided interesting and worthwhile information (85%). While 74% of teachers surveyed said they would recommend that the program be continued, 44% said they never incorporated it into their daily lesson plans. The commercial content of *Channel One* was not investigated. (Note: See appendix for full survey results.)

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In all three surveys cited in the previous section, *Channel One* scored high marks among the majority of students for enjoyment of the program and its handling of current events. In general, neither students nor teachers found anything particularly troubling about the content of the program. The problem, it would seem, is what Jerome Johnston calls "the lightning rod for criticism of *Channel One* (Johnston 442)." Or, to bend a phrase from the Clinton campaign, "It's the commercials, stupid." Leaving those aside for the moment, though, how does *Channel One* come out on balance?

Application of Barthe's semiologic method for disclosing meaning through symbols revealed that *Channel One* is a symbol system that reinforces certain cultural myths of adolescence. Yet, the meaning of the signs and symbols on *Channel One* become clearer when placed within the larger symbol system of television in general. For television symbols to communicate their meaning effectively, there must be some clear concept of "audience."

Communication theorist Chaim Perelman's concept of "universal audience" demonstrates the way that *Channel One* conceives of its audience. Perelman contends that an effective communicator envisions an audience made up of "reasonable and competent people (Foss 108)." This audience is neither elite nor made up of experts. It "serves as a norm

for differentiating 'good arguments' from 'bad arguments' (Foss 109)." More than anything, the Perelman concept implies respect for the audience and this is something *Channel One* demonstrates effectively. There is not condescension, elitism or insult in the content of its text. Rather, the stories are presented in a balanced and intelligent manner.

The audience's role as a partner in the process is a certain indication that *Channel One* respects its youthful audience. Their opinions are sought, as adolescents' rarely are in the "real world." Decision-making capability, denied to them as minors in general society, is permitted them by *Channel One*. In the interactive mode of the program, the anchors appear to talk *with* them, rather than *at* them.

The music, clothing and art symbols on *Channel One* provide further evidence of Perelman's principles. He says that a meeting of the minds is necessary in order for communication to take place. Such a "meeting" allows the audience and the communicator to share the same frame of reference (Foss 107). *Channel One* becomes the contextual frame which brings together all the meaningful symbols that tell adolescents they are entering a familiar milieu. Attempts to "get on the same level" with young people can have disastrous results when undertaken by adults trying self-consciously to "relate" to youth. However, the youthful anchors are able to communicate these symbols effectively, by

virtue of being peers not far removed from the audience; they "wear it well," so to speak.

The balanced nature of the reportage on the sample *Channel One* programs is the final manifestation of the Perelman universal audience concept. He asserts that effective argument seeks a variety of positions on the interpretation of reality (Foss 109). The program not only attempts to present all sides of controversial issues, the producers have even gone so far as to develop a segment called "You Decide" that allows students to hear all sides of an issue presented by experts and then to make rational decisions based on the input. Issues on *Channel One* do not come pre-packaged with opinions. That is the height of audience respect.

Introduction of television into the classroom elevated this symbol system from mere entertainment vehicle to pedagogical tool. However, that transition raised some problems. In Amusing Ourselves to Death Neil Postman argues that television in the classroom reinforces the notion that education and entertainment are linked; that, in order for teaching to be effective, it must be entertaining (Postman 146). Postman offers the "Voyage of the Mimi" as an example of the convergence of entertainment and education. There is evidence, he argues, of an entire "reorientation" toward classroom learning.

The "Voyage of the Mimi" is a math and science lesson

that combines television programs with books and computer programs to teach students about the environment and ecology, map and navigation skills and computer literacy. The program is successful, supporters say, because information is presented in a "dramatic setting (Postman 150)." They maintain that that setting enhances learning. Postman argues that research studies on television's influence on cognitive processing demonstrate the opposite to be true (Postman 152-3). He cites a study, for example, that found that 51% of viewers were unable to recall any news item from a television program they had just seen only a few minutes before. However, Postman's main problem with the "Voyage of the Mimi" is that it was conceived not because it was educational, it was developed because it was "televisable (Postman 152)." So the first concern becomes "entertainment," thus relegating "education" to secondary status and books to even lower status.

This weakening of the classroom tie to the printed word, Postman says, is evidence for a third great crisis in education--the first being the development of written language and the second being the invention of the printing press. Arguing that the appearance of television in the classroom has changed the whole face of education, Postman writes:

"We face the rapid dissolution of the assumptions of an education organized around the slow-moving printed word, and the equally rapid emergence of a new education based on speed-of-light electronic

image... One is completely justified in saying that the major educational enterprise now being undertaken in the United States is not happening in its classrooms but in the home, in front of the television set, and under the jurisdiction not of school administrators and teachers but of network executives and entertainers (Postman 145)."

The changing definition of "teacher" is another outcome of television in the schools. Even in the post-modern classroom, where the teacher is seen as less an authority than a learning partner, the teacher is still the guide, the expert whose voice is the final arbiter. When the teacher's voice is stilled by the television set, the role of authority is invisibly transferred to the "substitute teacher"--the television itself. Whereas a wonderful teacher can influence a child on a lifelong love of learning, an electronic teacher is capable only of inspiring devotion to itself, and in the process, to the idea of being entertained rather than educated. As Postman says, "television does not encourage children to love school or anything about school. It encourages them to love television (Postman 144)."

Yet, despite all the sturm und drang, television is in the classroom to stay. Technology only promises to continue its exponential growth and will no doubt proceed to make inroads in every venue in society, including the schools. Such educational concepts as distance learning--the ability of students to telecommute to class via computer--and widespread use of the Internet even in elementary school classrooms were unimaginable only a short time ago. Children

today are steeped in electronic technology almost from birth. They take each new innovation in stride with a blasé ho-hum. Television in the classroom will no doubt soon be an outmoded tool as advances in communication science continue.

The advertising that critics find so troubling in *Channel One* will also continue to proliferate in various forms throughout the schools as the student population grows and the funding shrinks. Indeed, advertising already exists in more places than it did just a few years ago. Schools have had to devise ever more creative ways of financing their programs.

In a perfect world, quality educational programs would be provided by a benign government which values education more than the special interests of the wealthy and the powerful. Instead of turning to commercial sponsors for needed services and state-of-the-art special programs like *Channel One*, school districts could rely on adequate funding from the government, instead of lip service about the right of quality education for all. Government-supported programs could then be free of advertising and children would have access to high caliber extras, like commercial-free, educational television.

But, this is not a perfect world. The reality is that not all schools can afford special "luxuries" like permanent classrooms, let alone something like *Channel One*, without

outside assistance. Indeed, the numbers bear this out. Six out of ten schools spending less than \$2,600 per student per year contract with *Channel One*, compared with one in ten schools spending more than \$6,000 per student in a year (Celano, Neuman 444). Without supplemental help such as they receive from commercial sponsorship, the shiny new technology of their future is denied to kids from the poorer districts, and their handicap continues into life after school.

Fostering consumerism among young people is a job not properly within the purview of education. By allowing the commercialization of classroom media, school districts are inviting the invasion and plunder of our young people. However, it is the way in which the media is used that makes the difference between negative and positive effects. If the bargain is made to commercialize the classroom in exchange for a few VCRs and some cable, then it is the responsibility of educators to take a proactive role in dealing with the commercial aspect of programs such as *Channel One*. School districts signing contracts with *Channel One* should provide training for teachers that enables them to teach critical viewing to students. Thus, if commercials are part of what is seen, they can be scrutinized along with the text. Also, instead of whining about the loss of twelve minutes of instructional time given over to *Channel One* viewing, and then going ahead and giving up that time with-

out a fight, the schools should give over even more time to it to be used in discussion and analysis. Finally, rather than waiting for *Channel One* to take the initiative in surveying schools about their program, school districts should take it upon themselves to do periodic reviews of *Channel One*. Content could then be scrutinized and critiqued with an eye to how it serves educational goals and standards. A report of findings could then be made available to the parents, the school board and the community at large.

Instead of washing our hands of the dilemma of advertising and education, we need to plunge elbow-deep into the debate. Commercial privatization of the schools is a clear and present reality. Burger King now runs "Burger King Academies," quasi-public schools, in fourteen cities. *Educational Alternatives* operates public schools for profit in Florida, Maryland and Minnesota (Kozol 272). McDonald's runs the school lunch program in Boulder, CO and Taco Bell, Pizza Hut and Dairy Queen are making inroads in the 4.8 billion dollar school lunch market (Rodd 276).

The time has come to weigh the negatives against the positives concerning commercial ventures such as *Channel One* in the schools. The schools are fast becoming a niche market for generating profit rather than a place of inquiry and mastery of skills. When business enters schools, there exists the potential for control of a generation's world

view. "It sells a way of looking at the world and at oneself. It sells predictability instead of critical capacities. It sells a circumscribed, job-specific utility (Kozol 277)." Further, if television is teaching children to be entertained rather than educated, an entire new way of dealing with the medium as curriculum is necessary, instead of dropping it intact into school with no comment.

The time has come to take responsibility for the media that pervades our existence; if not by the producers, then at least by the consumers. We cannot passively allow the selling of our children's education without assertively seeking and accepting accountability. So far, the ball has been dropped where accountability is concerned. If we stand around waiting for advertisers and media producers to pick it up, we will watch it roll ever away and away while our children stand motionless on the sidelines. We need to allay the myth of eternal progress in favor of the myth of successively stronger and better generations. We owe it to our future. We owe it to them.

APPENDIX A:

"Brandon" is the youngest reporter on the *Channel One*. In fact, he is the youngest reporter *Channel One* has ever hired. He is a seventeen year old junior in high school. I interviewed Brandon on May 17, 1995. We spoke on the telephone in order to accommodate Brandon's busy schedule. Permission to interview Brandon was secured through both of his parents. Our conversation was taped, with full understanding and agreement by all parties.

MN: Why do you think you were selected as a reporter? How did that come about?

Brandon: Every year, from October to January, *Channel One* looks for student reporters. Student Participation Workers go nationwide and do auditions. Some students send in tapes. Executive Producer is David A. Neuman.

I went for a field trip to tour the *Channel One* studio with MEChA club at my school. [MEChA stands for Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlan, which means Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan--the name of the ancient territory that occupied the southwestern United States before it became U.S. territory.] The studio people asked me to audition. I'm very shy--at least I was before I went to work for *Channel One*--so I was kind of hesitant.

Then, at a general meeting later, the Executive Producer asked me to try out again. So, we went down to a stage

and they gave me a script. This other girl was with me. She went first. She read off the teleprompter with the director giving tips. Then I did it. They asked me what kind of grades I got.

MN: Does *Channel One* view grades as important? Is that a condition of working there?

Brandon: *Channel One* views it as important in being a student reporter. You know, college-bound, getting good grades.

MN: Does *Channel One* try to be representative of all ethnicity and genders?

Brandon: Yes, I think they do.

MN: Can you tell me about the other reporters?

Brandon: Sure. "Crystal" is an African-American high school senior. "Craig" is a college student who is also African-American. "Rawley" is out of college. He is Latino. Lisa, a college student, is Chinese. Tracy, [female] Kris [male] and Serena are all Caucasian. They are in college, too.

MN: So, were you hired then?

Brandon: I thought I was being hired for student producers week. [During this period, all *Channel One* programming is produced and reported by actual high school students all over the country. One such show is covered in the content analysis section of thesis.] Then I found out I was hired

to anchor.

MN: When did that happen?

Brandon: Well, I got hired in December, but I didn't actually start working until January.

MN: Did you sign a contract with *Channel One*? If so, for how long?

Brandon: I first signed until June 1995. Then [when they started talking about the next year] I wanted to run for office at school next year. I didn't know if I should run for a smaller or bigger office. It would depend on whether or not I was working at *Channel One*. So, I scheduled lunch with the Executive Producer. He asked me then if I wanted to renew and I said yes.

MN: Will you be going on hiatus over the summer or will you be working?

Brandon: Yes. I went to Japan to cover the KOBE quake. I learned a lot about reporting there because of the producer and cameraman who went with me. It was a new culture. I was there for a whole week and I learned a lot about their country, too.

MN: What were the chaperone arrangements?

Brandon: The producer is our chaperone. It was weird because I had auditioned in December, I was hired January 7, 1995, and went to Kobe in February. I had only anchored the show one day, and the next day, they offered Japan to me. I

anchored just one more time and then I went to Japan!

MN: How are the stories selected that appear on *Channel One*?

Brandon: The managing editor chooses the story. They have a story meeting every day from Sunday to Thursday with the senior editorial staff. They talk about stories they think should come on. Some breaking news stories. [They were doing the breaking news story about the US/Japanese trade problems on the day of this interview--the same story that was being featured prominently on network news.]

MN: What, if any, is your input in that process?

Brandon: I'm a bad example because I'm new and inexperienced. Others are in college studying journalism so they have more input. But, if I think something should be said better and communicated better to kids, I make suggestions. The executive producer is all for that. Some producers are more agreeable to that, more free than others. But they feel, especially the executive producer, that being a part of the audience before I became an anchor, my opinion is very valuable, because I'm a student and a former watcher--audience member.

Rawley really gets into the job. He's a former actor and he's really good at what he does. Some of the anchors write a lot of their own stuff.

MN: How often do you anchor?

Brandon: Two times a week, usually. Although that can vary.. It's always different. I could anchor zero times in a week. I'm there three times a week, but I average two times a week anchoring.

MN: What do you do when not anchoring?

Brandon: I do interviews with other schools, do talk shows with other programs. I lead tour groups. Last week, I did a teenage talk show out of Houston to guest on it. I also did a show in Iowa. These were all remotes.

MN: How many anchors are there on each show?

Brandon: There are always two anchoring. But there could be three when someone comes on to do the story. You know, they'll come on to introduce the story they did.

MN: How do you feel about the products that appear? Tell me your feelings about their appropriateness for a teenage audience.

Brandon: I don't oppose commercials whatsoever. As a student before, I had no problems with commercials on *Channel One*. They are the same I see on regular television. I mean, Pepsi, Nintendo--they're innocent commercials. Some commercials you see [on regular television] are "iffy," like underwear or something. They don't show that stuff on *Channel One*. The company at *Channel One*--someone at *Channel One*--chooses the people that we'll air.

Sometimes I see commercials on *Channel One* that they

don't air on regular TV. Like Pepsi commercials. A week later, I'll see them on TV. Every commercial I've seen except one, I've seen on TV.

MN: Again, how do you feel about the appropriateness of those commercials for teenage audiences?

Brandon: I feel that they appeal to some extent. I saw a Nintendo game on one program in school and actually went out and bought it. Actually, it [the same commercial] was airing everywhere. I can't honestly say I drink Pepsi, because I see it on television anyway. But I do drink Pepsi.

MN: Do you personally use the products? Is that expected of you?

Brandon: Many, but not all. Before *Channel One*, I ate Skittles, I drank Pepsi, I played Nintendos and I wore Nike and I still do now. They don't expect me to, though.

MN: Have you ever been asked if you use the products?

Brandon: No.

MN: Do you have any contact with the sponsors?

Brandon: No. None whatsoever.

MN: Do they ever come to the set?

Brandon: No, not that I know of.

MN: Have you been asked to make personal endorsements of the products?

Brandon: No. None of the other reporters have either, that

I know of.

MN: You said you were a *Channel One* viewer before your appointment as a reporter. Tell me about that experience.

Brandon: Honestly? Yes. I would be sitting in class and it comes on every day. It has its educational value.

Basically, it was my only source of world-wide news. I had always had *Channel One* to inform me.

Some of it is not interesting to students, like President Clinton's balanced budget amendment, or something like that. I still feel the same way. I'm still working on a way to make it interesting to all students. I know if we were to quiz the students, 90% probably wouldn't remember some of those stories. But when we do stories on AIDS or sports, or the Oklahoma City bombing, ratings (go) way up. Never can you have 100% of the audience agreeing with you.

When I was in junior high, (I didn't get much out of it (sic.) I don't think junior high students should be watching it. I don't think they pay attention to it as well as high school students do. It's a maturity thing. You become more aware of the importance of certain things. News is important. I think it's very important to know what's going on in the world.

MN: So you watched *Channel One* in what junior high grades?

Brandon: Both 7th and 8th grade. But I didn't get as much out of it then. I don't think junior high kids are ready to

see it yet.

MN: How did you feel about the commercials then, as a viewer?

Brandon: They were regular commercials--the same I saw as at home. I didn't even know the commercials were an issue until I started working there and I thought that was really dumb that people would be opposed to it.

When I started working there, I noted there were very few schools west of the Rockies or in New York. We have a big map with markers on it showing *Channel One* schools all over the country. I asked why and I was told California and New York had tried to keep it out and I thought that was ridiculous.

MN: How did you feel about the program when you were in junior high?

Brandon: Well, like I said, junior high kids don't pay as much attention to it. I didn't get much out of it in seventh or eighth grade. When I got to ninth, I paid more attention. By tenth, I watched it day in and out found it very interesting.

MN: Can you summarize the vision of *Channel One*? What is their philosophy?

Brandon: I think *Channel One* is a really good idea. I can't even imagine thinking this up. I mean, it seems so farfetched. Television in the classroom. Who would have

thought to use that? I think it is the main source of news for the majority of students. *Channel One* tries its best to appeal to the majority of students and to be factual. We have researchers checking every little fact, to make sure it is fact, not opinion. It's very important to the producer. Their philosophy is to keep the students informed of what's going on in the world.

MN: Do you think they do a good job of that?

Brandon: I see it as individuality. I know people who don't try hard in school. Others want to excel. Those kinds of students can take in and absorb. And *Channel One* does it for them.

MN: How has the *Channel One* vision been articulated to you and/or any other staff members?

Brandon: They said, "you know what it is. You've been exposed to it since junior high. They told me things like, "the Wall Street Journal doesn't like us. They say we're more like MTV than real news." Stuff like that.

MN: Is that something that gets discussed regularly?

Brandon: Yes, we are all aware of the stories. (People say,) "Oh, oh, Wall Street Journal doesn't like us again," or something and we all laugh. We appreciate it a little more when a story in Newsweek or something says, "*Channel One*: Good or Bad?" and then gives both sides.

MN: How do you feel about the negative press that you get?

Brandon: I'm still a kid. I get mad at things like that. I think we could be really valuable to schools. I wish we were in every school. I don't think it's going to happen, though.

MN: Why is that?

Brandon: Funding. We have lots of companies. But we can only do so many per show. Also, there are lots of schools who want it and others that don't. Nevada is the only state in the country with none whatsoever. In California, there are only 150 of them, and most of those are private with the exception of mine and just a couple of others. The, there's New York. Those three states--I don't think that's going to change. It's funny. To make such a big deal over the commercials.

MN: Have any students told you that they don't like the commercials?

Brandon: Yes, they come to me. Usually it's only that we're overplaying it too much.

MN: Do you pass this information on?

Brandon: They (producers of *Channel One*) just tell me that we have to show them. No one (student) has ever said, "This is wrong." No, I've heard "That was corny." I've never even thought (something).

MN: When you were in school, how did your teachers interact with *Channel One*?

Brandon: The only thing about *Channel One*, after the show, the teachers would ask what we thought. Some teachers did. I remember some days in my science class, we spent the whole period arguing and discussing and what we had seen on *Channel One*. I've been in some where the teacher says nothing.

MN: Did you ever have a teacher just bag on it? (Criticize it)

Brandon: No, I don't remember that. No one has ever really bashed *Channel One*.

MN: Did any teacher ever just turn it off?

Brandon: Yes, it's happened several times, but very rarely. In case of a test or something, some teachers might turn it off if it interfered with a test.

MN: Is journalism a career you plan to pursue?

Brandon: It used to be. I started writing for my newspaper in ninth grade. I knew I wanted to go to college, but I wasn't a top student. I wasn't super-outstanding, but this experience has made me super-outstanding. I have private tutors now and I learn more that way.

MN: Where do you want to go to school?

Brandon: UCLA. My major is yet to be decided. I know I want to work in television. I don't know about news. I've never been a news guy. You know, sit there in a suit. At *Channel One*, we dress casual; shorts, I wear my flannel shirt, jeans. They want us to.

APPENDIX B

COLTON JOINT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
STUDENT SURVEY *CHANNEL ONE*
May 1994

Junior and Senior High Results

1. The *Channel One* new program is easy to see and hear.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	1,194 (79%)	1,742 (83%)
Disagree	308 (21%)	346 (17%)
Total	1,502	2,088

2. The *Channel One* daily news program provides interesting and useful information.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	978 (65%)	1,621 (78%)
Disagree	517 (35%)	456 (22%)
Total	1,495	2,077

3. The commercials on *Channel One* are not offensive to me.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	1,206 (80%)	1,837 (89%)
Disagree	294 (20%)	237 (11%)
Total	1,500	2,074

4. *Channel One* news is my main source of national and worldwide events.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	489 (33%)	748 (36%)
Disagree	1,011 (67%)	1,326 (64%)
Total	1,500	2,074

5. Teachers show other programs on the *Channel One* monitor.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	761 (51%)	1,016 (49%)
Disagree	738 (49%)	1,054 (51%)
Total	1,499	2,070

6. I enjoy watching *Channel One*.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	799 (54%)	1,557 (77%)
Disagree	676 (46%)	478 (23%)
Total	1,475	2,035

COLTON JOINT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
STUDENT SURVEY CHANNEL ONE
May 1994

Combined Results - Junior and Senior High School Students

1. The *Channel One* news program is easy to see and hear.

Agree	2,936	(82%)
Disagree	654	(18%)
Total	3,590	

2. The *Channel One* daily news program provides interesting and useful information.

Agree	2,599	(73%)
Disagree	973	(27%)
Total	3,572	

3. The commercials on *Channel One* are not offensive to me.

Agree	3,043	(85%)
Disagree	531	(15%)
Total	3,574	

4. *Channel One* news is my main source of national and worldwide events.

Agree	1,237	(35%)
Disagree	2,337	(65%)
Total	3,574	

5. Teachers show other programs on the *Channel One* monitor.

Agree	1,777	(50%)
Disagree	1,792	(50%)
Total	3,569	

6. I enjoy watching *Channel One*.

Agree	2,356	(67%)
Disagree	1,154	(33%)
Total	3,510	

COLTON JOINT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
STAFF SURVEY CHANNEL ONE
May 1994

Combined Results - Junior and Senior High Results

1. The TV installation works well, and the equipment is satisfactory.

Agree	193	(94%)
Disagree	12	(6%)
Total	205	

2. The *Channel One* daily (news) programming provides interesting and worthwhile information.

Agree	173	(85%)
Disagree	31	(15%)
Total	204	

3. The commercials on *Channel One* are not offensive to the classroom environment.

Agree	132	(65%)
Disagree	72	(35%)
Total	204	

4. The teacher's guide is useful.

Agree	116	(63%)
Disagree	69	(37%)
Total	185	

5. The *Classroom Channel* programs are useful supplemental programs.

Agree	115	(65%)
Disagree	62	(35%)
Total	177	

6. The *Educator's Channel* programs provide helpful professional development programs.

Agree	78	(52%)
Disagree	72	(48%)
Total	150	

7. Overall the Whittle Educational Network is worthwhile.

Agree	148	(77%)
Disagree	44	(23%)
Total	192	

8. In my classroom, students enjoy watching *Channel One*.

Agree	121	(63%)
Disagree	70	(37%)
Total	191	

COLTON JOINT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
STAFF SURVEY CHANNEL ONE
May 1994

Combined Results - Junior and Senior High Results

9. I recommend that the *Channel One* program be continued.

Agree	146	(74%)
Disagree	50	(26%)
Total	196	

10. How often do you incorporate *Channel One* programs into your daily lesson plans?

Daily	24	(12%)
Weekly	35	(18%)
Once a Month	50	(26%)
Never	85	(44%)
Total	194	

COLTON JOINT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
STAFF SURVEY CHANNEL ONE
May 1994

Junior and Senior High Staff Results

1. The TV installation works well, and the equipment is satisfactory.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	89 (98%)	104 (91%)
Disagree	2 (2%)	10 (9%)
Total	91	114

2. The *Channel One* daily (news) programming provides interesting and worthwhile information.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	78 (85%)	95 (85%)
Disagree	14 (15%)	17 (15%)
Total	92	112

3. The commercials on *Channel One* are not offensive to the classroom environment.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	55 (60%)	77 (68%)
Disagree	36 (40%)	36 (32%)
Total	91	113

4. The teacher's guide is useful.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	48 (56%)	68 (68%)
Disagree	37 (44%)	32 (32%)
Total	85	100

5. The *Classroom Channel* programs are useful supplemental programs.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	55 (68%)	60 (63%)
Disagree	26 (32%)	36 (38%)
Total	81	96

COLTON JOINT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
STAFF SURVEY CHANNEL ONE
May 1994

Junior and Senior High Staff Results

6. The *Educator's Channel* programs provide helpful professional development programs.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	32 (46%)	46 (58%)
Disagree	38 (54%)	34 (43%)
Total	70	80

7. Overall the Whittle Educational Network is worthwhile.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	62 (76%)	86 (78%)
Disagree	20 (24%)	24 (22%)
Total	82	110

8. In my classroom, students enjoy watching *Channel One*.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	48 (57%)	73 (68%)
Disagree	36 (43%)	34 (32%)
Total	84	107

9. I recommend that the *Channel One* program be continued.

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Agree	62 (73%)	84 (76%)
Disagree	23 (27%)	27 (24%)
Total	85	111

10. How often do you incorporate *Channel One* programs into your daily lesson plans?

	<u>Junior High</u>	<u>Senior High</u>
Daily	14 (16%)	10 (9%)
Weekly	11 (13%)	24 (22%)
Once a Month	24 (28%)	26 (24%)
Never	36 (42%)	49 (45%)
Total	85	109

APPENDIX C

MARY NEMNICH TELEPHONE INTERVIEW WITH DAVID NEUMAN

MARY I don't know if Daneen briefed you on my background. I'm doing my master's thesis on *Channel One*. My master's program is called Education and the Media. I want to understand the impact of the introduction of technology into the teaching process. All right, first, some of your background, if I could. You came from Fox (television network), is that right? ...

D.N. Well, I was working at Fox and I was working at NBC and before that I was working at the White House.

MARY Okay. You were working at the White House?

D.N. Yes.

MARY And what did you do there?

D.N. White House Fellow, which is a non-partisan program where I worked as an assistant to a man named Craig Fuller who was the Assistant to the President for Cabinet Affairs in 1983-84.

MARY So that was under Reagan?

D.N. Yes.

MARY Right, and so then, how did it come to be that you are at *Channel One*?

D.N. Well, actually, I was a producer at Fox and I got a call from an executive recruiter who had been given my name by Grant Tinker (then president of NBC). And Tinker had been consulted by this recruiter to try to fill this posi-

tion for people to be in charge of programming.

MARY Okay, did you have any contact with Lamar Alexander who was later Bush's Secretary of Education?

D.N. Yeah, he was not Secretary of Education when I was there.

Mary I wondered if that's how you came to the attention of Christopher Whittle in the first place?

D.N. Absolutely not. But who I came to the attention as I mentioned I, actually, there was an executive recruiter who, who met with Grant Tinker who asked Grant who could you recommend to us from the television industry that we should ask, and Grant recommended me. And that's because I used to work at NBC when Grant Tinker was the chairman and, and that's how he knew me, from that.

MARY At that time were you tapped as a producer because, as I read in an article, they hired you to "get the heads off the desks" basically, is that what it was?

D.N. Well I'm sure that that's one reason that they were hiring me, but I'm sure that there was (another.) I gave them a rather comprehensive set of suggestions that I felt that the program needed and, I think it needed on a whole variety of fronts in order to improve its quality and improve its appeal and effectiveness with the audience. And I would certainly say that getting their heads off the desks wasn't really...it's not that I don't think that that's an important part of the task, but I think that it's much more

than that. It's not hard to get people's heads off desks, it's hard to get people's heads off desks for quality educational programming of a substantive nature about topics that are not necessarily of intrinsic interest to the audience and that you want to achieve a learnable, a measurable learning result. That is a challenge.

It's not a challenge to get heads off of a desk; I could do that very easily every day and I certainly think that in its earliest incarnations, *Channel One* didn't do an adequate job of capturing the attention and interest of the audience, but it's certainly a problem early on.

MARY Okay, so could you tell me what presence or voice Christopher Whittle still has in *Channel One*, if any?

D.N. There isn't any, for all intents and purposes.

MARY There isn't any, okay. ...

D.N. Since K-III bought the company.

MARY Right, I wanted to ask you about anything significant that happened at the time of the transfer of ownership from Whittle to K-III. Could tell me how *Channel One* has changed since being acquired by K-III, if it did.

D.N. Well, I will tell you this. I will tell you that number one, Whittle Communications was a company that was involved in many different kinds of businesses and they were having a lot of business problems in those businesses and so the attention of the management of Whittle Communications was somewhat distracted dealing with business situations,

business crises.

MARY Okay.

D.N. You know K-III is a very stable, extremely well-run company. I think education is the single largest area that they do business in. I loved K-III from the minute they came in because the first thing they wanted to talk about was product quality. The focus of their businesses is making sure that the product is of highest quality. They were very impressed by what they saw in terms of the programming itself, they watched a lot of videotapes, they really sampled what we were putting on the air quite extensively and from Bill Riley, who's the chairman of K-III, on down, the first point that they would make to me is how important it was for the company's focus to be on the quality of the product. To that extent, our budget for our programming, which was always something that was getting squeezed and sort of shaken during the Whittle Communications' ownership period, was immediately enhanced and stabilized. They looked at the teacher's guide that we were producing when they bought the company and they said this isn't nearly good enough; we have to invest more money and upgrade the quality. I would say they were willing to, you know, they, they were definitely looking at this long-term. They wanted to invest long-term, they wanted to emphasize product quality, and they wanted to know what they could do with management to reinforce my own efforts to make sure

that we were producing the highest quality programming possible. To that extent they have always been very, very supportive. They've prioritized the programming from a budgetary standpoint and feel that the quality of the product is paramount, insulated from any other vicissitudes in the business world.

MARY If I could just get clarification. You're referring to the product as the content of the news program?

D.N. Yes. I mean they were considered like the core property, you know the 12-minute daily newscast.

MARY Right okay, ...

D.N. And the other thing that's kind of interesting is, is that we also have aspired to improve the quality of redistributing the *Classroom Channel* and obviously we're always looking to improve the quality of the teacher's guide, the other sort of support material they provide to schools. K-III is very interested in those things and also have allocated additional resources to make that happen.

MARY Okay...

D.N. So K-III was just more knowledgeable of the world of schools and education, I think, than Whittle Communications. There was more focus on those worlds that have a long history of interaction with those words in terms of providing publishing properties.

MARY Okay, do you have any educators on your staff?

D.N. Well, we have many people who are from the world of

education and we have many people who advise us from the world of education, so it tends to structure itself according to a project-by-project basis. But most of our people who are on the newscast are from the news, but many of them have sort of, you know, backgrounds where they have something to do or another with education, that they have been teachers once upon a time, and they have been working closely with education; and when we research individual stories and when we sort of make changes in the newscast, typically those come about because of input from educators that we call upon, on either a formal or informal basis, to advise us and work with us on any given task.

MARY Okay, how many schools are you currently in? My last ...

D.N. It's approximately 12,000, but it's slightly under or slightly over but it's, it's just about for all intents and purposes, it's 12,000.

MARY Are there projections for adding more?

D.N. I think that eventually we probably will, it's not going to happen probably for the next 18 months, but there is demand for more. I think that I've heard it said informally to this company that they believe very confidently that 1,000 or 2,000 more schools would be relatively easy to add from the standpoint of demand. In other words that it would be easy to find another 1,000 or 2,000 schools that want to have the service but it requires a very large capi-

tal investment and, in order to do that, as our, as our company continues to grow, probably it will be inevitable that we want to make that larger investment.

MARY All right, there's not a time line even informally that you know of for that?

D.N. No... If you're talking about adding a 100 or 200 more schools, it could well be that that would happen within the next year or two.

MARY Okay, just moving to the content of the show for, program for a moment, how are the stories that appear on *Channel One* selected, and what is your role in that process, if any?

D.N. Well I'm executive producer of the newscast so ultimately I'm deciding on what's going to go in the program and what isn't. We have a relatively straightforward mandate, which is to provide news to schools. So typically we are looking for the most salient news stories, the biggest and most important news stories in the world and we're attempting to do those. The problem is, it's like a painting where, if you look at it very up close you're going to see something very different than what you see when you look from very far away. If you take the macro view, we're on a 190 days a year, and during that 190 days we hope to cover basically the top 100 stories in the world during that period of time. Many of them of course we're going to cover repeatedly. We may spend four minutes, you know, on 17 dif-

ferent occasions or we might take five minutes on three different occasions. But we are looking for the largest news stories. We feel that most of our agenda is basically determined by news events, in other words, we're covering generally the largest news stories, the biggest stories, the front page stories, the stories that dominate the national current events agenda. And we aren't on any sort of personal campaign to have our particular take on what the biggest news stories are. We follow what are the most important things going on in the world as defined by traditional journalism standards. Now, there are a couple of secondary mandates that we have, the primary mandate being the biggest news stories, you know, the world of current events. And the secondary mandates would be that teacher's feel it is very important for us to provide some good news as well as the sort of, news of the day. In other words, teachers, many teachers believe that it is a mistake, and we concur, to just focus exclusively on negative things. If a kid murders his mother and father that, in a traditional world of journalism, that's news. But if a girl who is blind for her whole life graduates from high school with highest honors and overcomes her disability, somehow that's not considered news. So, we actually believe that that should be a part of our mix as well, and so we provide a significant number of stories that are about positive role modeling; stories that show students and teachers doing good

things, and important things, overcoming obstacles and providing a role model for others. And another aspect, well I'm not sure whether I'd call it tertiary, a part of that secondary sort of category in stories, would also be stories about the world of education. In other words, education news has a higher agenda at *Channel One* than it does at other news organizations. So anything having to do with education, federal education budget, state education activities, you know, innovations in the world of education, political issues that pertain to education, prayer in schools, funding of scholarships, affirmative action--the things that have to do directly with education--have a significant place in our program because of our sort of uniqueness in the world of education.

MARY How is the art work that appears on the program chosen?

D.N. Well I think that one of the things that I really emphasized on the program is that we've got a generation that really likes to be interactive with their media, computers or E-Mail or anything having to do with sort of the emerging world of interactive media. Our audience is into that and, I think of course, in a very positive way and for the education. We try to facilitate interactivity even on a primitive level at *Channel One* through producing a television program by making sure that teachers and students have ample opportunity to input into the show whatever might be

appropriate, story ideas, questions, letters to the editor, artwork, T-shirts, etceteras. In other words, we sort of view that the aesthetics of the program as being an opportunity for the students and world of education to sort of play a part. So there is artwork on any news program, even ones you see at home on CBS and NBC. Why not have that artwork done by students? Why not have the wardrobe that our anchors wear once again reinforce that sense of connectedness? We hope that by reinforcing the sense of connectedness we actually enhance the interest level that might be paid to the show and give the audience the very correct perception that they are actively participating in the programs that we're making. That's why when we get back to your educator's question, you know the truth of the matter is, this program, the specs of this program have basically been designed by teachers. We believe that teachers control the content of *Channel One*. Teacher's overwhelmingly say to us do more of this, or do less of that. Ultimately, unless we have some technical problem with it, that's what we view as our obligation to do and in fact we, we follow that. The agenda that I described to you really was one that teachers told us. Teachers told us the reason you're in the schools is because we want the news. They don't get the news at home, they don't read newspapers, they don't watch television news at home. They need the news, it's an important part of their education, that's why we have you, so that's

what we prioritize. They also say, but you know we've got a problem with theirs at home, because news at home only emphasizes the negative and it shorthands everything rather than giving you one fair substantive explanation of things, so we want you to do it differently on *Channel One*. We want you to be less biased, we want you to be more substantive, we want you to provide more context for the audience and we want you to provide some good news too, because we think the media is screwed up in that regard, they emphasize the negative. So the artwork is just one minor aspect of this entire concept that the audience actively participates in making our program. So we basically said why don't we just ask them to participate, help decorate our set, help do the bumpers that separate the commercial content of the program from editorial content of the program and of course facilitate and reinforce and sort of glorify the artistic capabilities of our audience, which of course we're all about. That's what education is all about.

We advertise the fact that we want to feature student artwork and then we get it in and basically the various people who are involved, there isn't any scientific system of selection, but the people who are involved in the production design aspect of the program, the art directors and the directors and the set decorating people sort through the material and the stuff that looks interesting, we put on the set.

MARY Okay...

D.N. There isn't a whole lot of science to it except for the fact that we try to get on as much of it as possible. We try to, you know, ensure that there's (representation), make sure that every single thing that we put on the air isn't from Texas or from North Carolina, but there's a sort of, you know, balance of input from schools all over the country. But again, even that's not scientific.

MARY Okay, just for a moment if you could, what is the review process by the schools, if you can tell me about that. How often does that happen, what does it consist of? Is it ongoing? Do the schools review *Channel One* periodically?

D.N. Oh well, they review it. I have eight million bosses, 350,000 supervisors; and I would say that, yes, they do in a variety of ways, some structured and some unstructured. On a daily basis we survey a cross-section of our audience, somewhat scientifically selected to sort of represent the cross-section of demographic characteristics of our audience, urban, rural, wealthy, poor...

MARY Is this done by phone?

D.N. Yeah, there's a daily telephone survey so that after, about 60 students and 30 teachers a day are queried over the phone, by surveyors who basically ask them to grade and evaluate each and every element of the program, to each individual story, the show overall, the artwork, the graph-

ics, the music, the story selections, of the sense of fairness and balance, etceteras. All of those things are tabulated and a report is immediately compiled so that when we screen the day's program in our offices, in front of our staff, we also have a viewer feedback report that reports on what those 100 people who were surveyed in the daily survey have to say about the program, and the sample is constantly changing.

MARY Does this ever go before the school board specifically or is it done through telephone survey only? Does this ever go before the district for review, because I know you had a pretty stringent process when you first came in back in 1990.

D.N. Well, you're talking about, I think, two entirely different things. In other words, basically any school board, anywhere, is entitled to evaluate *Channel One* and to decide on whether or not to renew *Channel One* on the basis of any program we broadcast at any time. So in other words, the truth of the matter is, we're graded every day by every user, every teacher and every school board and every principal, effectively have the last word. They have the last word about whether or not *Channel One* will be renewed, about whether or not *Channel One* will be shown in the classroom and in their school that day. So when you're saying does our feedback go before the board, well we've never had a board say, "*Channel One*, we want to look at your feedback."

Usually the boards are looking at the feedback of their own teachers and their own students. I think that's entirely logical. We don't have anything to hide in that regard, in fact, remarkably I think it's extremely positive, generally speaking and it's extremely positive on most days. However, we look very carefully at what criticisms are put forth about the program from either teachers or students and even one comment from one student or one teacher can precipitate a huge change in our program, if we feel merit in that conflict in that comment. You know it could be that somebody'll say you know, that report you did on the peso devaluation, was really unclear. ,My students are completely confused. We read that and we look at the piece and we say, you know they're absolutely right, we, we didn't do this as well as we should have and we left something very unclear. We could go on the air the next day with more information and elaborate on that very subject so as to clarify that problem and that's how we use feedback, generally and specifically, to affect the content of the program., Now, in addition to this daily survey, we also publish a report card, what we call a report card, which is basically a survey form in every teacher's guide. The teacher's guide is distributed to every teacher in our system, every month. So every month, any teacher in our system, can pull out that report card, fill it out, pop it in the mail, send it to us, we get it here, and we Xerox it for every member of the

editorial staff and distribute it., So again, the input of that one teacher, taking five minutes to fill out that one survey, is, is felt by everybody who has anything to do with writing or producing a news story at *Channel One*. So if that teacher says we did a good job or we did a terrible job; if that teacher says we're biased against Republicans or Democrats, we literally, everybody who is involved in writing that story, shooting that story, producing that story, directing that story, making graphics for that story, gets to look at that feedback and absorb that and of course, presumably affect or in some positive way, the way they go about it on the next occasion. Now, in addition to that mechanism we have an E-Mail address and we get a very substantial number of comments on a daily basis about our programming, and then in addition to all that, we do focus groups very frequently and members of our editorial staff, on an on-going basis, make visits to schools, where we sit down with students and teachers in their classrooms. I've, I've seen our program now in 30 states, in different schools, we all sat in the back of a class, watched it just like everybody else watches it, and observed and asked questions, and it has really been extremely valuable. Probably the focus groups, when it all boils down to it, are the most valuable things that we do, because when you get that direct communication, you know, it really happens. Now those are sort of the standard institutional structures that

we have for feedback. In addition to that, I had a story one time on "Abusive Relationships," and we were feeling a little bit uncertain about how graphic the story could be or should be. We had a rough cut of the story and we said there were some shots we weren't quite sure about. So we called up 12 middle school teachers and high school teachers at random, and said we're from *Channel One*, you're in our system, we're trying to do this series on this subject, would you please look at a tape for us and give us your input. We sent it to them; they gave us feedback; the producers and we all sat down together, reviewed what the teachers had to say and only made editing choices accordingly, factoring in that input. Similarly, recently, we had a situation where we did a, a recreation of a 1970's newscast in order to talk about the fall of Saigon. And, we had a character in it, we had a multi-ethnic cast in it and our African-American character set off some alarm bells with one of our producers, who said, "You know, I'm just not sure about the image (of) this character. I think it may reflect adversely on African-Americans, and I'm just uncomfortable with the imagery and it feels a little "Sitcommie," this character." We said, okay, why don't we send it out to a dozen African-American educators and see what they think. So we got a hold of a dozen African-American educators, (from) various parts around the country, they gave us their feedback and the feedback of, I think, two of the 12 educa-

tors was, you know, we really have a problem with this. This is not a positive image for our students, it's the kind of a stereotype in some ways, it's a problem. So, we reshot the piece, recast the character, re-edited and put it out, and it changed ultimately. So we actually, probably use viewer feedback to a greater degree than any television program, and certainly any television news program that I've ever known or ever heard of.

MARY So, you have both formalized and, and informal sort of ad hoc means of doing that.

D.N. Yeah. When *Channel One* was originally established, we actually had a board of educators, educational advisors for like, the first two years. After the original period, it kind of disbanded, and we sort of went to more ad hoc kinds of advisory groups. But we are actually going to, for the classroom channel, re-establishing a board, and we probably intend to use them a little bit for the *Channel One* uses as well, but I think that will just be in addition to all the stuff that we, we already use. The problem with any board of ten teachers, or 20 teachers or 30 teachers, is eventually it becomes as low as opinions, and we're actually more aggressive than that. That's why we want thousands of opinions, and that's one of the reasons that we've gone to more ad hoc uses of advisory.

MARY What I understand, both from research and from you, is that the philosophies of *Channel One* during Whittle and

since K-III were entirely different.

D.N. Well you know, the truth of the matter is that my philosophy has been consistent throughout my tenure at *Channel One*, and I was here during Whittle. But you know, what you probably would need to understand to have an accurate understanding of Whittle and *Channel One* was that the parent company just wasn't that involved...

MARY Because of the other projects...

D.N. Whittle was kind of demonized within the educational community both personally and as a company, but *Channel One* was really kind of a separate entity, kind of churning along. The reason that you perhaps feel this more acutely in terms of your own media research, is that because Whittle is associated with the Edison Project (Whittle's plan to build for-profit public schools.) All that other baggage of that gets lumped in with *Channel One*, but *Channel One* never had anything to do with the Edison Project. It wasn't like *Channel One* news was out rah-rahing the idea of privatizing... of the voucher system or, or for profit schools, you know what I mean. *Channel One* was a newscast. The media controversy can have a life of its own and Whittle Communications and its corporate soap opera, had a life of its own. But frankly, sitting from where I sit, they didn't really have all that much to do with our service. You know, it wasn't like we were sitting here in the newsroom saying "Oh my goodness," you know the NEA had this to say about *Channel*

One; or Bill Honig had this to say about *Channel One*, what are we going to do about it in the show today? We're just sort of quietly chugging along, trying to make a quality educational news program for teenagers at school. It didn't have much to do with us, it's just with K-III, we had a parent company with a blue-chip history in the world of education, and, and a great deal of creditability and sort of long-term security in terms of how they approach doing business in the educational community and serving the educational community, and so it was just a plus. But it's not like K-III came in and said, "We want to do things differently now, than Whittle." You know what I'm saying? What they said to me was keep doing what you were doing before, because we actually think that was very good and unlike the rest of Whittle Communications, which had its problems, we look at *Channel One* and say this is a good program. See, if you were to say to me, "David, what has empirically changed?" You know, the truth is, well our budget is bigger than it's ever been, and it's more secure because we're in a corporate parent that's very secure, and very dedicated to product quality. Certainly K-III is more ambitious as to the future of working in the world of education, and you know, empirically there just aren't huge differences.

MARY Because the product of the news program itself has continued unchanged; and that was what your focus was, and has been, and that has not changed, you're saying.

D.N. Yeah, you know it's, you know and again, there was never any interference in our editorial content under Whittle Communications; and there isn't any interference in our editorial content now. I think what's been probably problematic for us is that there have been so many distortions perpetuated in the media about *Channel One*, but most of those were completely garbage, I mean, they were just completely untrue.

MARY While we're going down this road, I would like you to tell me more about that, about your reaction to the criticisms that *Channel One's* received.

D.N. Well I think you know I mean it, it depends on what the criticism is. In other words, if people say that they object to commercials in the classroom, I understand that and I respect that. There's some people who philosophically are going to be opposed to the idea of commercials in classrooms for any reason. I respect that. I don't think anybody in my company takes issue with that. If your priority is keeping kids away from commercials, then you know what to do. If your priority is getting your kids a great education, well then it becomes a little trickier. Then you've got to say, well what are the costs of this and what are the benefits, and what makes sense and what doesn't make sense for our students. We feel very confident that the service that we're providing is, obviously, providing value to our 12,000 schools because they keep renewing us at very alarm-

ingly, high rates.

MARY Well you know I have research that says 99 percent of the schools renewed after the end of their contract in the summer of 93. Could you tell me if that's close to the renewal rate today?

D.N. That's the statistic that was reported to me and I have no doubt that it in fact was true.

MARY And is that for that today as well?

D.N. I don't know about today because I'm not the guy who's in charge of that, but I know it's up there, if it's not 99 it's 97. It's a very high renewal rate and I know, and I, I know because I've talked to so many educators and so many students. I know that we're making a positive difference in people's education; but I totally understand it if somebody says I hate commercials so much, or keeping television commercials out is my priority, well then absolutely, you shouldn't have *Channel One* in your service. It takes on a life of its own in the media.

MARY So, you're saying that if people had problems with commercials, then that's something that you weigh with the quality of the education?

D.N. Well yeah, but I find it fascinating that for instance, let's just say *Channel One* is probably in 70 percent of the Catholic middle schools and high schools in the United States and interestingly enough *Channel One*, by the way, with its editorial agenda is not influenced to any

degree other than its influence by all educators. I mean, in other words we don't tailor our show for Catholic schools or public schools or private schools or what have you. And in spite of the fact that Catholic schools are located, in many cases, in inter-city areas, and have very low budgets, and are working under challenging conditions in terms of the school environment, isn't it fascinating that their reputation is, that if you go to a Catholic school, you get a good education, that they're the biggest users of *Channel One*? In other words, isn't it fascinating that in the LA (Los Angeles) school district, LA Unified doesn't have *Channel One*, but the Catholic Archdiocese in California with all those wonderful students, many of whom have very challenged backgrounds in terms of socio-economic categories and at-risk categories, and so forth, isn't it fascinating that they snap up *Channel One*? And, and I think it's fascinating to ask, ask those people who think it's immoral or unethical to adopt *Channel One*, "You think the Catholic educators don't have a sense of morality or ethics? You think what they believe is selling their students down the river for commercial purposes? You think that's it? Or do you think what their real concern is getting their students a great education. Which do you think it is?"

I like to ask my friends that who are on a soap box as far as commercials go. The truth of the matter is the commercials are the commercials, and if I was a teacher and

I passed out Newsweek Magazine to my students to teach current events, would anybody think that I was a rotten teacher or that there was anything inappropriate about it? Even though Newsweek Magazine has ads in it, by the way ads for alcohol, hard liquor, cigarettes, beer, you know things that *Channel One* would never advertise, yet are advertised in Newsweek and the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times and Time and US News and other very credible, very valuable magazines that can be a positive part of someone's education. Do you really think that someone, as an educator would have something to apologize for, for utilizing those materials in order to help teach students? And yet, I find it somewhat ironic that we can create such a brouhaha out of the commercials on *Channel One*. Because, in my view, from my viewpoint, I actually believe that it's just an overblown controversy that exists only in the media. How can you read about controversy everywhere, especially in California where you're doing your research, and at the same time read about 99 percent renewal rates? That's an anomaly. Where's the disconnect there? What, what's going on? Well what's going on in my opinion is, it's advantageous for certain people to, to sustain a quote, "controversy," unquote, in the media that doesn't really exist because in the world of education they understand that Newsweek Magazine is a perfectly valid and useful tool to teach, and unlike Newsweek, they don't even have to buy this. We don't require them to give us any

money, you know. Now the other thing that I would mention on that subject of controversy is that one very easy way to avoid any controversy at all, is, we could just charge. We can charge a very reasonable amount of money, like a dollar a month or something like that, to students, and provide it without any commercial at all, and make more money than we make now as a business, as a profit-making venture...Isn't that interesting? And then we'd be heroes, you know we would just go and take bows at major award ceremonies, and we could trip and hug with every organization of any kind in the country and beat our chests with pride. But there's only one catch--the schools, our customers don't want it that way. They want it free, with the commercials in it, paying for it. That's the way they want it. So in other words, I'm sitting here selfishly wishing that I could just have this thing as a paid service, because then you and I could just focus on what really is an issue, which is what is the content of our newscast; and, how can we succeed at educating young people rather than focus on this kind of pseudo-issue. These commercials are such minutia because, frankly, for our 12,000 schools, they're not an issue. Principals roll their eyes when the subject of commercials comes up because they, of course, know that there're ads in the school's newspaper and ads in the school yearbook and ads in Time and Newsweek and it's on people's sweatshirts, and that commercial activity of various kinds has always,

within certain sensible limits, it's been a part of education.

MARY Okay, can we just take a minute here. I want to ask you a few questions, specifically now, about the sponsors and about the commercials and whatever you can...

D.N. That you'll have to talk to somebody else about, because I don't have anything to do with the commercials or the sponsors. I will get you the name of somebody that you can talk with about that.

MARY That'll be fine. Can you tell me this, if the sponsors have any word in the selection of the news items that are featured?

D.N. None whatsoever.

MARY None whatsoever.

D.N. Of course this is one of those great lies that are sometimes perpetuated about *Channel One*. It is an outrageous lie, anybody who tells you that for five seconds an advertiser has had any control or input whatsoever, in what we cover or don't cover is stating a categorical falsehood. But of course it doesn't stop them from suggesting and insinuating. You know, we have a complete church-state relationship between our editorial and our advertising and that's, like again, about your questions on advertising, it's like, I don't have anything to do with the advertising.

MARY Yes, Okay. Could you please comment on why it was so difficult to see *Channel One* programs? When I asked at the

school, they told me that the way in which it's captured (recorded) makes that impossible, because it's taped internally and it's erased by the...

D.N. We can get you samples and you can take a look at em.

MARY Is there any reason for that, that there is difficulty in getting them? Are they subject to review by a parent for example? Could a parent look at this as...

D.N. It's the same review that any educational material is, Mary.

MARY But they'd have to go through you?

D.N. Well no, it's like typically I went to a principal who said, every once in a while we have a parent who asks, you know, what is it about this *Channel One*, I've heard these things; I've read these negative things; and he said so we always say, come on in and watch it. They bring them into the school and in front of a TV set that shows *Channel One*, they push the play button, they watch the show that was in the school that day; and he said that's always the last we ever hear from that parent. And they always say, the parent says, well this is good. It's like yeah, that's why we have it! And, and you know there isn't any conspiracy here or anything. There's a system that is self-contained for simplicity for the schools. In other words, the thing is in a special machine that's just designed so that all the school has to do is hit one button.

MARY Okay, are the broadcasts archived anywhere for review,

that the general public could look at some archives maybe? Or would they go through you or through *Channel One* studios...

D.N. I would put you in touch with our public relations...

MARY All right, now you've really spoken at length about your basic philosophy as you see it. Is this an articulated philosophy by K-III? And actually, David, you could also help me with clarification here, I keep referring to it as K-III, but it is still--your corporation is still called *Channel One Communications*.

D.N. Well *Channel One Communications* is a wholly owned subsidiary of K-III...

MARY So, back to my question. If there is an articulated philosophy, what is the philosophy?

D.N. I'll put you, I'll put you in touch with our PR people.

MARY Okay, is there a process where, whereby *Channel One* looks after the school's compliance with the terms of their contract?

D.N. PR Department can tell you about that.

MARY Okay, one more thing. Do you know about a school that has opened up in "Mall of America?"

D.N. Yes.

MARY You do? Is that a *Channel One* school?

D.N. We did a very short story on it, because it's a *Channel One* school.

MARY Okay.

(Interview closed with assurances that the other contacts within *Channel One* would get in touch with the researcher, which they never did.)

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