media education
MAKE IT HAPPEN!
The purpose of this booklet is to inspire a leap in Canadians’ thinking—and action—on the need to establish the practice of media literacy as a key component in the education of children and young people.

Media are powerful forces in the lives of youth. In this era, unlike in any other, media dominate public and private spaces. The digital information age is now an integral part of our lives and it has changed—quite abruptly—the way we communicate, work and learn.

Young people are immersed in media, moving beyond geographical and regulatory boundaries as they access, absorb, communicate, create and repurpose media content. And they’re doing this largely without guidance and often without reflection.

To be media literate in this new environment, young people need to develop knowledge, values and a range of critical thinking, communication and information management skills. Media education is an essential tool in helping them acquire these skills.

It’s time to recognize media education as an important and forward-thinking strategy for creating thoughtful, engaged and informed citizens. We invite the education sector, public libraries, parent and community groups, government and media industries to work together in supporting and encouraging media education and its widest possible integration into Canadian schools, homes and communities.
Media education is the process through which individuals become media literate—able to critically understand the nature, techniques and impact of media messages and productions.

In Canadian schools, there is a growing awareness of the need to connect classroom learning to the real world and to bring media content into the classroom for analysis, evaluation and discovery.

Media education acknowledges and builds on the positive, creative and pleasurable dimensions of popular culture. It incorporates production of media texts and critical thinking—decoding, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating media—to help us navigate through an increasingly complex media landscape. That landscape includes not only traditional and digital media, but also popular culture texts such as toys, fads, fashion, shopping malls and theme parks.

Media education encourages an approach that is always probing, posing questions such as: Who is the audience of a media production and why? From whose perspective is a story being told? How do the unique elements and codes of a specific genre affect what we see, hear or read? How might different audiences interpret the same media production?

Key Concepts for Media Literacy

Media educators base their teaching on key concepts of media literacy, which provide an effective foundation for examining mass media and popular culture. These key concepts act as filters that any media text has to go through in order for us to respond.

There are a number of key concepts to choose from. Some of the current ones used by media educators are as follows:

1. Media are constructions
   Media products are carefully constructed. They are created with a purpose and from a particular perspective, using specific forms and techniques. Media literacy works towards deconstructing these products, taking them apart to show how they are made and exploring the decisions and factors behind them.

2. Audiences negotiate meaning
   We all bring our own life experience, knowledge and attitudes to media we encounter. Each person makes sense of what he or she sees and hears in different ways. Media literacy encourages us to understand how individual factors, such as age, gender, race and social status affect our interpretations of media.

3. Media have commercial implications
   Most media production is a business and must, therefore, make a profit. In addition, media industries belong to a powerful network of corporations that exert influence on content and distribution. Questions of ownership and control are central because a relatively small number of individuals control what we watch, read and hear in media.

4. Ideological messages underpin all media
   Explicitly or implicitly, the mainstream media convey ideological messages and notions of values, power and authority. In media literacy, what or who is absent may be more important than what or who is included.

In the digital age, the principles of media education are the same as they’ve always been, but the existence of cyberspace is adding new and challenging questions. How, for instance, does technology affect how we relate to others? Is new technology enriching or undermining culture, learning and a sense of community? What roles do ownership, control and access play? What are the challenges in regulating a global, borderless medium like the Internet?

Media education isn’t about having the right answers; rather, it’s about asking the right questions. Because media issues are complex and often contradictory and controversial, the educator’s role isn’t to impart knowledge, but to facilitate the process of inquiry and dialogue.

This role of the teacher as a facilitator and co-learner in a student-centred learning process is not only the model for media education, it has also become an accepted new critical pedagogy. Today, the chief challenges are to locate and evaluate the right information for one’s needs and to synthesize what one finds into useful knowledge or communication. Media education—with techniques of critical thinking, creative communication and computer, visual and aural literacy skills at its core—is a key part of a 21st century approach to learning.
Media education encourages children and young people to question, evaluate, understand and appreciate their multimedia culture. It teaches them to become active and discriminating media consumers and users.

Media education brings the world into the classroom, giving immediacy and relevance to traditional subjects such as History, English, Health, Civics and the Creative Arts. It serves as a perfect bridge for subject integration and interdisciplinary studies.

Media education embodies and furthers current pedagogy, which emphasizes student-centred learning, the recognition of multiple intelligences, and the analysis and management—rather than just the simple storing—of information.

Media education is grounded in the sound pedagogical approach of starting learning where kids are at. Media—music, comics, television, video games, the Internet and even ads—are a part of life that all kids enjoy. Media create a shared environment and are, therefore, catalysts for learning.

** TEN GOOD REASONS FOR TEACHING MEDIA EDUCATION  **

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5. Media education encourages young people to use multimedia tools creatively, a strategy that contributes to “understanding by doing” and prepares them for a workforce that increasingly demands the use of sophisticated forms of communication.

6. In a society concerned about growing youth apathy to the political process, media education engages young people in “real-world” issues. It helps young people to see themselves as active citizens and potential contributors to public debate.

7. In a diverse and pluralistic society, the study of media helps youth understand how media portrayals can influence how we view different groups in society; it deepens young people’s understanding of diversity, identity and difference.

8. Media education helps young people’s personal growth and social development by exploring the connections between popular culture—music, fashion, television programming, movies and advertising—and their attitudes, lifestyle choices and self-image.

9. Media education helps children critique media representation, teaching them to distinguish between reality and fantasy as they compare media violence and real-life violence, media heroes and real-life heroes, and media role models and real-life roles and expectations.

10. With the majority of Canadian students turning first to the Internet for research, media education is an essential component of Information and Communications Technology education, assisting young people in: developing critical thinking skills and strategies for optimizing searches; evaluating and authenticating information; and examining issues of plagiarism and copyright.
**A Snapshot of Media Education in Action**

**Language Arts**
Language Arts provides countless opportunities for media education. Some examples include deconstructing film and television “texts”; adapting a short story or novel into a film; scriptwriting; storytelling across media; examining bias in print, television or online news; analyzing representation in media texts; and assessing the accuracy and influence of these representations.

Media education is embedded in reading, writing, listening and oral communication outcomes. It lends itself perfectly to thematically organized education in the elementary and secondary grades. A unit on television might involve classroom surveys and interviews on habits and preferences, an examination of the dynamics of family life through sitcoms, the production of a school newscast and an analysis of toy ads in the context of marketing to youth.

**Health/Consumer Education**
Healthy living and lifestyle choices are at the heart of Health curricula. What health-related messages are promoted in mainstream media? What roles do advertising and entertainment play in affecting consumer and lifestyle choices? Where do media fit in our lives compared with other information sources such as parents, friends, schools and health practitioners? This is especially relevant with issues around sexuality, substance abuse and obesity.

**Personal Development**
Whether the topic is the family, self-image or conflict resolution, media and popular culture provide a common framework for discussion. How do marketers’ definitions of “cool” compare with what we value in friends? What real-life consequences might result from the acts of aggression that we see onscreen? Do film, television and fashion content promote male-female power imbalances and reinforce unattainable standards of attractiveness?

**Global Studies**
Although we live in a “global village”, information about our interdependent and interconnected world comes mostly from mainstream Western sources. How do sensational news stories and images relating to natural disasters, crises and war fuel misconceptions in the West that people in developing nations are helpless victims? How does mainstream news differ from alternative sources of news, and what impact might alternative perspectives—for example, those available on the Internet—eventually have on the mainstream Canadian press? As globalization of media increases, what impressions are non-Western people gleaning about Western society?

**Civics**
In the Civics classroom, an examination of media and politics can contribute to students’ awareness and engagement as citizens. This might include discussions about “spin,” sound bites, media styles of politicians, the influence of media ownership on political reporting, and the orchestration of public opinion through public relations campaigns. Civics students might also examine social justice, activism and human rights issues through discussions on democratic access to media technologies.

**Multicultural/Anti-racism Programs**
Stereotypes are prevalent in media communications. An analysis of the way various media portray Aboriginal peoples and visible minorities can help students understand how stereotypes function in popular culture, the conditions that give rise to them, and how these stereotypes can influence our perceptions of entire groups of people.

**Technology**
Students tell us that finding and authenticating information on the Internet and protecting online privacy are the topics they most want to learn about. But many Information and Communications Technology programs focus more on technological training than developing search, citing and assessment skills, and the ability to think critically about broader issues. These issues include detecting bias, avoiding plagiarism, and considering the cultural, economic, and personal implications of technology.

**Music**
Popular music is a good jumping off point for examining the influence of media on content, comparing the delivery of similar messages through different music genres, and assessing the influence of the audience (the listener) in constructing meaning and recognizing pleasure.

**Visual Arts**
Today’s Visual Arts students need to access a variety of specific skills drawn from media analysis and production. Digital manipulation and special effects, for example, offer a new realm of creative potential. As they add these skills to their repertoire, students can be encouraged to discuss the intellectual property rights and social issues involved in this new field of creativity. When, for instance, and by what criteria, is digital manipulation ethical?
MEDIA EDUCATION IN CANADA

Canada is considered a world leader in the field of media education. But there’s still a long way to go before the subject is integrated fully into Canadian classrooms.

Media education is a mandatory stream in English Language Arts, and outcomes for media education are included in other subject areas such as Health and Social Studies. While media education programs are implemented in pockets throughout the country, the quality and practice are uneven and media education is not yet widely taught in all provinces and territories or at all levels.

Research findings support the notion that media literacy needs to begin at the very early stages of learning. It may be referred to as “viewing and representing” or “oral and visual communication”. Although it is a mandated curriculum area, teachers at the elementary level have very few resources available to them and very little in the way of professional development to support them. With the disappearance of the school librarian and other specialists in many elementary schools, classroom teachers have become “generalized specialists” in many areas, one of which is media education. Teachers and parents are eager to help their children become media wise, and they are open to new ideas, skills and strategies that will help them in this regard.

With the exception of Ontario’s Additional Qualification Courses in Media Studies, there’s no media education certification program for teachers who wish to upgrade their knowledge and skills in this area. Pre-service teacher training—even in Ontario—is also erratic in this area, with most faculties of education giving only token coverage to media literacy.

Media educators have identified an urgent need to increase professional development opportunities, to update the approach to reflect the digital wireless landscape, and to integrate the disciplines of media analysis and media production across the curriculum in Canada’s education system.

More about the status of media education in Canada can be found at www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/media_education/index.cfm and www.aml.ca/articles/.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED AND LEARN MORE

Teachers
Join your provincial media education association.

- British Columbia Association for Media Education (BCAME)
- Alberta Association for Media Awareness (AAMA)
- Association for Saskatchewan Teachers of English and Language Arts (STELA)
- Manitoba Association for Media Literacy (MAML)
- Association for Media Literacy (AML – Ontario)
- Association for Media Education in Quebec (AMEQ)
- Media Literacy Nova Scotia (MLNS)
- Association for a Media Literate New Brunswick (A-4-ML-NB)
- Association for Media Literacy for Newfoundland and Labrador (AMLNL)

To get more information, including up-to-date contact information, visit the Media Awareness Network’s Web site and access the Media Education in Canada section: www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/media_education/index.cfm.

To learn more about media education, visit the following Web sites:

- Media Awareness Network, www.media-awareness.ca
- Association for Media Literacy, www.aml.ca
- Concerned Children’s Advertisers, www.cca-kids.ca
Parents
You are essential in helping kids better understand media, gaining control of the home entertainment playground, and encouraging media education in schools and communities.

- Learn more about media influences on children and teens by visiting the For Parents section of the Media Awareness Network’s Web site.
- Familiarize yourself with media your children favour.
- Talk to your kids about what they’re seeing, hearing and playing. Discover what they enjoy and why.
- Talk to teachers and parent councils about the advantages of integrating media education into classes.
- Identify media professionals in your local community and invite them to visit schools and parent meetings.

Librarians
As specialists in information literacy, you have an important role to play in providing access to quality media education resources and promoting Internet literacy.

- Provide your staff with professional development training programs that build expertise on Internet and media education issues.
- Share this expertise with the public through media awareness programs. Address topics such as safe and responsible Internet use, marketing and privacy concerns and authentication of online information.
- Work with media educators to create comprehensive collections of media literacy resources for parents, teachers and youth.

This booklet was made possible through the collaboration of the following organizations:

Media Awareness Network
Media Awareness Network (MNet) is a non-profit Canadian organization whose mission is to support and encourage media and Internet education, and its widest possible integration into Canadian schools, homes and communities. Its aim is to help children and youth learn to critically understand and actively engage with all forms of media.

MNet hosts a Web site with one of the world’s largest repositories of English and French resources for media education and Web literacy. MNet’s programs include online classroom and community resources, licensed professional development workshops, cross country speaking tours and community partnerships and initiatives.

Canadian Teachers’ Federation
The Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF) is the national bilingual umbrella organization for Canadian teachers. It comprises 14 provincial and territorial member organizations, which represent 213,000 teachers nationally.

In 2003, CTF conducted a Canada-wide survey of 6,000 young people, ages 9 to 16. The survey, which received funding from the Government of Canada, focused on what this age group had to say about media in their lives. Kids’ Take on Media provided a rich snapshot of Canadian students’ media-related habits, preferences and opinions, and prompted the CTF to create and distribute a media management guide for parents and a media literacy guide for teachers. Furthermore, they recommended that Canadian teachers increase and strengthen the practice of media education in the classroom.
Association for Media Literacy

The Association for Media Literacy (AML) is an Ontario-based, non-profit, internationally acclaimed organization made up of teachers, parents and media professionals.

Founded in 1978, the AML promotes media education as a means of understanding the influence that media and the related rapidly evolving technology have on our culture. AML seeks to achieve this through educating students, teachers and the public as well as networking with education, business, government, media and community organizations that share these concerns. To date, AML conferences, workshops and publications have reached over 10,000 educators in Canada and around the world.

Canadian Association of Media Education Organizations

Founded in 1992, the Canadian Association of Media Education Organizations (CAMEO) is composed of Canadian media literacy organizations Canada-wide. These organizations include media education associations from nine provinces, as well as the Jesuit Communication Project, Media Awareness Network and Concerned Children’sAdvertisers.

The goal of CAMEO is to advocate, promote and develop media literacy in Canada, through its member organizations.