

Questions and Answers

Nov. 19 Newser on Kids' Take on Media

1- Why is it in the interest of a federation of teacher unions to conduct such a study? It's not related to the teaching profession per se.

(Terry Price/Roger Régimbal)

We believe the media are incredibly influential in the lives of young people and teachers have a central role in helping them to develop literacy skills for using media well. That means first understanding how young use media, what they like and don't like, and the role they see media playing in their lives.

Children and adolescents bring their concerns and issues to the classroom for discussion after watching the previous evening newscast or after an incident that has had an impact worldwide (i.e. Sept. 11). Although kids watch and play at home, they seek out the answers in the classroom which often becomes the forum for discussion.

So doing this research is part of doing our homework. It gives us important insights and will help teachers work with their students on media-related issues.

2- Are you saying that violence in the media has a negative impact on children's behaviours and development?

(Anne/Kasia)

Kids did tell us that they had seen imitations of violence they'd seen in media played out by classmates. But there's a long-standing debate in the research world about whether there is a direct, provable link between violence in media and violence in real life... there is no definitive answer that we know of.

Our concern is the "culture of violence" and the normalization of aggression and lack of empathy in our society – and that's where researchers and all those concerned with the welfare of children are now focusing their attention.

The interesting thing is that kids said clearly that violence was the thing they valued least in media content. That's a powerful message to the media industries as they try to appeal to young people.

3- How many teachers include media literacy in their classes across Canada?

(John Pungente)

Media Literacy is a mandated part of the Language Arts (LA) curriculum for every province and territory and at almost every grade level. For exact details, please visit the Media Awareness Network Web site. About ten years ago the Ontario AML did a survey and found about 58% of LA teachers were teaching media literacy. The numbers have likely dramatically decreased in Ontario. Because so few teachers have any pre-service or in-service training, few feel able to teach media literacy.

It is impossible to know how many have been trained in it since it was made obligatory - even in Ontario (which was 1986). No one has ever done a survey on this issue. Very few Canadian faculties of education offer their English teachers a course in MediaLiteracy - some faculties do offer one class in one semester devoted to media literacy - hardly training.

(Anne Taylor to add)

Teachers are the largest user group for MNet's Web site, indicating a tremendous interest and growing use of media education resources at the grass roots level.

(Linda Millar to add)

Concerned Children's Advertisers has also developed an excellent program called "TV and Me" – a one-of-kind comprehensive program that provides teachers, parents, caregivers and community organizations with tools to help children develop important media and life skills.

4- So your study is just another study on the impact of media on kids. What makes your story in your study so unique?

(Terry Price/George Spears)

This is the first time that we've heard from children themselves in such large numbers about what makes TV programs, video games and movies attractive – or not – to them.

We've heard from academics, journalists and researchers from all points on the spectrum.. But this study -- Kids' Take on Media -- is based entirely on kids' voices.

This is probably the largest survey of its kind – looking at kids' traditional media use – ever to be conducted in Canada, North America and possibly in the World.

5- What would be your bottom-line message to the average Canadian family with respect to their television viewing habits?

(Silvia Dyck/Judi Varga-Toth)

Get involved with your children's media activities – talk about what they watch, the games they play, and the music they listen to. Use their media experiences to talk to your kids about important issues – whether it's violence, racism, bullying or even just what's going on in the news and how they feel about it.

Pay attention to the video and computer games your kids are playing. Check out their graphics and content. The interactivity of video games is very powerful – it fully engages the user in the scenario being played out. You can actually become the perpetrator of crimes, not just a passive observer. So whether the content is positive or negative does matter. Even the kids feel that interactive games should be more closely supervised than films or television programs.

Other tips for parents on getting involved are featured in the CTF's Bulletin to parents which is available on-line at www.ctf-fce.ca.

There are other valuable resources for parents on the web – Concerned Children's Advertisers and MNet offer excellent materials and workshops online.

6- Are there gender differences with respect to media habits?

(George/Kasia)

Gender differences are a prominent feature in the report. Girls basically enjoy the same programs that their parents watch, while boys tend to choose shows of which their parents disapprove.

Girls' favourite games and shows focus on story and social relationships. Boys respond to action, adventure and fantasy figures. For more than 50% of boys in grades 3-6, playing video or computer games is a daily activity. For most girls, it hardly appears on their radar screens.

Boys' frightening memories, triggered by violent or "scary" films or TV programs, last longer than those of girls but they also enjoy violence more in their video games. For most of the girls surveyed, violence in games, films or TV programs is a definite turn-off.

7- Why do you say that educational programming has to compete with the best in order to be successful with children?

(Anne)

The children in the survey made it clear that it's high production values – speed and action and challenging graphics – that turn them on, not violence. Humour and the satisfaction of rising to a challenge are also important. The goal is to create material that engages children – through their emotions, through their minds and even through their bodies.

Once kids' get used to a certain pace in mainstream video games, they're going to be impatient with and less likely to benefit from slow, boring educational programming.

8- In your opinion, what happens in the long run to children who view media violence as benign?

(Linda Millar)

Survey results suggest that children who do not discuss issues like media violence, racism and sexism in school or with their families take it for granted so that small cruelties, meanness or lack of civility become the norm.

We're not talking here simply of outright cut-throat violence with knives and guns, but of a continuum of "culture of violence" or – if you prefer an other metaphor – a kind of psychic pollution that our kids are constantly breathing in.

9--What would you say is the most significant difference in media habits between Francophone children and Anglophone children?

(Roger Regimbal/Alain Pelissier)

The most striking difference between Francophone kids in Quebec and kids in the rest of the country, both Anglophone and Francophone, is that a lot of the TV shows watched by Francophones in Quebec are made in Quebec and reflect their own cultural concerns and values. Kids in the rest of the country are watching mainly U.S. programming.

Francophone kids who live inside and outside of Quebec choose different favourite TV programs. In both the younger and older age groups, those who live in Quebec choose more Quebec-based programs than those who live outside Quebec. For québécois students in Grades 3-6, 30 percent of their top 10 programs are made in Quebec versus 10 percent for Francophones in other parts of the country. For students in Grades 7-10, the differences become even more pronounced. For québécois teens, 60 percent of their top 10 favourite programs originate in Quebec, versus 10 percent for Francophone teens outside Quebec.

The top program for all Anglophones and Francophones:

Les Simpsons – The Simpsons

Grades 3-6 Anglophones

Top program for girls: The Simpsons

Top program for boys: The Simpsons

Grades 3-6 - Francophones

Top program selected by Francophones outside Quebec: *Les Simpson*

Top program selected by Francophones in Quebec: *Radio Enfer*

Grades 7-10 – Anglophones

Top program for girls: *Friends*

Top program for boys: *The Simpsons*

Grades 7-10 - Francophones

Top program selected by Francophones outside Quebec: *The Simpson*

Top program selected by Francophones in Quebec: *Les Simpson*

9- What other resources are available to teachers and parents on media literacy?

(Linda Millar/Anne Taylor/John Pungente)

Media Awareness Network- this award-winning Canadian site is the largest online media education resource for teachers and parents in the world.

<http://www.media-awareness.ca>

*Concerned Children's Advertisers' **TV&ME for Parents** is part of the larger TV&ME program involving children, parents, educators and community, which is designed to support children in developing healthy media habits and life coping skills.*

<http://www.cca-kids.ca>

P.E.A.C.E. Positive Entertainment Alternatives for Children Everywhere

<http://www.trop-peace.com>

Media Watch

<http://www.mediawatch.ca>

11-How much did this survey cost Canadian taxpayers? Why would Justice Canada invest tens of thousands of taxpayers' dollars in this initiative?

(Terry Price/Roger Régimbal)

This research was extremely inexpensive, in large part, because of the voluntary participation of teachers who administered the survey across the country.

The survey cost CTF about \$125,000 – which includes development of questionnaires, focus groups, printing and distribution of surveys, return mail of questionnaires, compilation of the data by the research house, preparation of final report, translation and staff time.

Justice Canada contributed its funding because it wanted to understand better how young people use media, how much violent content they consume and to raise public awareness of the value of education and parental involvement.

12- How are you distributing the Bulletins to parents?

(Terry Price/Roger Régimbal)

CTF is currently printing 25,000 copies of its Bulletin to parents. These will be distributed through various networks including the Canadian Home and School Federation, Family Service Canada, to parents whose children participated in the survey, to teacher organizations across Canada as well as through media literacy teachers represented by the Canadian Association of Media Education Organizations. The Bulletin is also available online at www.ctf-fce.ca

13- Why do you think that parents and teachers should play a critical role in helping young children sort through the wealth of media in our society?

(Silvia Dyck/Judi Varga-Toth)

Kids may be the “experts” when it comes to familiarity with media messages –even 2-year-olds can sing certain catchy ad jingles-- but they need help in developing critical thinking skills so that they can become discerning and educated media consumers. Besides, teaching kids to be media-savvy is part of parenting these days. As one parent said “We don’t keep kids inside just because there are cars on the

road. But we don't let them go play in the traffic either. Instead, we teach them the skills they need to get across the street safely. I think it's the same with media.

14. What role do you think teachers should play?

(Terry Price/Roger Régimbal/John Pungente)

We're encouraging teachers to integrate media education into whatever subjects they are teaching – health, family studies, language arts, social studies, career and personal planning....

Kids love their media, they love to talk about them and figure out how they work...so we suggest teachers build on their enthusiasm. They can help young people to realize that what they see, hear and experience in media content is the result of many decisions made by human beings for a purpose – sometimes to inform, sometimes to sell, sometimes to entertain.

Educators don't have to be the experts, they just have to use their teaching skills in encouraging kids to question and analyze media content. This is an important part of developing life-long literacy skills.

CTF is preparing a teacher/student guide based on the survey that it will post on its Web site early in the New Year. CTF will also post the original questionnaires to allow teachers to download, distribute and invite their students to fill out. From their results, students will be able to compare themselves to the rest of the country outlined in the report.