

Kids' Take on Media:

First-ever national survey of Canadian children and adolescents on their media habits

TORONTO – Canadian children's and adolescents' attitudes and behavior regarding media is wide-ranging, and this is why they need teachers and parents to play a greater role in developing their critical thinking skills.

On the eve of National Child Day (Nov. 20) and World Television Day (Nov. 21), the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) has released the results of *Kids' Take on Media*, a landmark national survey of 5,756 students in Grades 3 to 10.

“We chose the timing to highlight the significant influence that media has in the lives of children and adolescents, and to highlight our role as parents and educators in making the most of that connection,” says Terry Price, CTF President.

The ground-breaking research in *Kids' Take on Media* found that approximately 75 per cent of children and adolescents chose their favorite television programs because of two attributes: “exciting” and “funny” while the “violent” component was the least favored of all, ranking at the bottom of the list of 10 possible attributes presented to children in the survey.

“This sends a clear message to the industry that violence does not increase the popularity of a program but excitement and humour does,” explains Price.

In addition, the research found that frequent news watchers feel more worried about the world but also more motivated to do something about it. Younger children are the ones most frightened by the news, feeling their personal safety is at risk. Girls are more likely to be sensitive to the harmful effects of media violence; 60% of younger boys play video and computer games daily; and 75% of kids in Grades 7-10 watch restricted movies at home.

The *Kids' Take on Media* study shows that children and adolescents whose parents supervise their TV viewing and who discuss violence, racism and sexism in the media, are more likely to be aware of the negative impact of media violence. Many children, however, are on their own. Nearly half the students surveyed say they receive no parental guidance on which TV programs they can watch, and two-thirds report that no-one says which video or computer games they can play, or for how long. These children are more likely to regard media violence as benign.

“Clearly parents and teachers have a crucial role to play in helping young people sort through the wealth of media in our society,” adds Price, noting that an astounding 48% of Canadian kids, aged 8-15 have their own TV and 35% have their own VCR. “We need to teach young people to think critically about what they are watching or interacting with on TV and computer screens,” explains Price.

More than half the students surveyed in Grades 7 to 10 said they had witnessed real acts of violence that mimicked computer games, videos or television shows. And the young people themselves recognize the need for supervision. Their top-rated TV show -- *The Simpsons* -- is one they believe younger children should not be watching. They also recognize the power of interactivity in video games, saying there should be tighter age restrictions on mature-rated video

and computer games than on R-rated films. When asked why they disliked certain video games, “too boring” and “not enough action” were cited as the top two reasons.

“Although media education is mandated in all provinces and territories, there is little professional development for teachers or resources attached to this new discipline,” says Price. “Furthermore, as children get older, they increasingly see the value of studying media in school.”

She also notes that “there are many excellent resources currently available to parents and teachers to help give young Canadians the best that the world of media can offer”.

Based on the *Kids' Take on Media* survey results, CTF has produced a resource list and a special *Bulletin for Parents* with tips and information to nurture media literacy at home. The *Parents' Bulletin* is being distributed to parent and teacher networks such as: the Canadian Home and School Federation (CHSF); Family Service Canada (FSC) and the Canadian Association of Media Education Organizations (CAMEO). It is also being sent to parents whose children participated in the national survey last spring. The information can be readily applied by others involved with nurturing children such as counsellors, after-school caregivers, coaches and leaders, etc.. In addition, CTF is currently preparing a teacher/student activity guide based on the *Kids' Take on Media* survey. This guide will also be available on the CTF web site early in 2004.

The survey was designed and conducted by Erin Research, in collaboration with CTF and the Media Awareness Network (MNet). It was made possible by a Government of Canada grant through the Department of Justice's National Crime Prevention Centre.

More than 120 schools took part, representing rural and urban communities, Francophones inside and outside Quebec, and Anglophones in every province and territory in Canada. The response rate was an exceptional 93%. The margin of error for a survey of this size is plus or minus 1.3% 19 times out of 20.

A special CTF Advisory Committee involving some of CTF's national education partners included MNet; CAMEO; Concerned Children's Advertisers; Canadian School Boards Association; CHSF; Centrale des syndicats du Québec, FSC and Positive Entertainment Alternatives for Children Everywhere (PEACE).

The Canadian Teachers' Federation is the national voice of 240,000 teachers across Canada whose mandate is to promote public education, the teaching profession and the well-being of children and youth.

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A summary of the findings of *Kids' Take on Media*, is available at www.ctf-fce.ca and www.erinresearch.com

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