

**MEDIA EDUCATION PROJECT**  
research-based monograph series



**MEDIA EDUCATION:**  
**INTEGRATION**

[mediaeducationproject.ca](http://mediaeducationproject.ca)

## TALKING ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING

**M**edia Education Project is a collaborative effort of Canadian educators. This monograph series is a collectively authored document that incorporates the ideas and activities of a varied and diverse group. By talking with many stakeholders, one of our goals is to exchange and mobilize knowledge about research, curriculum, and pedagogical approaches for insertion into teacher education, professional support, and professional development programs.

Through the constant back and forth among the vast number of teachers, researchers, and other educators, we have developed this series of monographs to address critical issues in media education. By building on the experiences and practices of teachers these monographs provide a clear and conceptual framework of issues that emerge from both everyday teaching practices and current media education research.

*Our intention is to encourage further discussion—to get more people to talk about teaching and learning.* Many of the ideas presented here will not be new for experienced teachers. In fact, many teachers are already doing media education on a regular basis. These monographs make explicit that media education approaches emerge from research-based practices, from programs that work, and from everyday classroom experiences. Please share these monographs to instigate further discussion about curriculum and pedagogy, teaching and learning.

While there are several excellent, free resources available for any teacher, the goals in this monograph series are to frame some of the larger conceptual and theoretical issues in the practice of teaching media. We highlight the importance of (1) integration, (2) metacognition, (3) creativity, and (4) assessment.



## CONTEXT: MEDIA EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

**I**n 1986, the province of Ontario became the first educational jurisdiction in North America to include media as a compulsory part of all students' education from Grades 7 to Grade 12. In 2006, Ontario mandated media in elementary education as well. The widely acclaimed Ontario Ministry of Education *Media Literacy Resource Guide* (1989), celebrated as a teacher-friendly curriculum, integrates information about media and cultural theory with

practical classroom activities. While Ontario's *Guide* remains an important resource, many acknowledge that radical changes in the media landscape since the 1980s warrant a reconsideration of curriculum and pedagogy in media. Furthermore, a growing body of Canadian and international research suggests that now is the time for media education to assess and revise its core assumptions, goals, and practices.

## MEDIA IN THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM?!

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What is uniquely important about the Ontario Ministry's understanding of literacy education is the role of media as an area that must be integrated with conventional approaches to the study of English. The Ministry documents identify the expectations of the English curriculum as organized in four broad areas of learning:

*Oral Communication, Reading and Literature Studies, Writing, and Media Studies.* What is often distressing for many teachers is the idea of having to add *media* to their already crammed day. *Integration* enables teachers to open their current Language Arts and English education practices to media without leaving behind their current knowledge and practice.

By incorporating the use of creative, critical, and metacognitive thinking skills, the curriculum identifies a range of media education practices. Important activities such as deconstructing an advertisement or

playing with a storyboard can be useful tools for developing knowledge of the conventions of Standard English. Indeed, it is especially important to recognize that media doesn't have to be something that is just added on, but is an area of learning closely interrelated to the more traditional practices of literacy education.

The outcomes of media education are consistent with the outcomes of literacy in general. In other words, the knowledge and skills described in the four strands are both interdependent and complementary. Teachers plan activities that blend media with elements from other strands of the Language curriculum in order to provide students with experiences that promote meaningful learning.

## TEACHING AS AN INVESTIGATIVE PRACTICE

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Our approach to media education is informed by a rich history. The oldest approach to media education focuses on protecting young people from what are believed to be the very harmful and powerful influences of media. A second approach to media education utilizes standards and criteria to distinguish good from bad, helping students discriminate among the wide range of media artifacts. These first two approaches emphasize teaching *about* media texts, its forms, conventions and techniques.

Another approach to media education attempts to justify teaching *through* media, where media are viewed strictly as instructional tools. There was a time when teachers used media as a reward for working hard or as a lure for the unmotivated. Certainly, many educators understand approaches that use media as a means to visualize certain literary pieces, by supplementing the learning of narrative devices and literary techniques.

Of course, these approaches are not mutually exclusive. What we call for is some combination of these three approaches within a coherent framework that considers learning as an *investigative* practice. Following the model of experiential learning, investigative practices help students develop critical awareness, agency, and empowerment.

An investigative approach to media education has three significant elements: (1) Teaching and learning are emphatically student centred and inquiry-oriented, pedagogical practices stress investigative strategies; (2) The process of making meaning through critical investigation is emphasized through strategies of observation and creative production; and (3) Multiple literacies, modalities, and learning styles function as the criteria for assessment and evaluation of student work and performance.

## MEDIA EDUCATION & TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

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Media Studies was added to the curriculum because technology is responsible for radically changing our physical and symbolic environments. A metaphor to explain technological change will make the case more explicit: Imagine a clock face with 60 minutes on it representing the 5000 years that people have had access to writing systems. On this scale, there were few significant media changes until about seven-and-a-half minutes ago when the printing press came into use in Western culture. Two minutes ago, the telegraph, photograph, and locomotive arrived. One-and-a-half minutes ago, the telephone, phonograph, rotary press, motion pictures, automobile, airplane, and radio. One minute ago, the talking picture. Television has appeared in the last 40 seconds, the computer in the last six, satellites in the last few seconds, along with laser beams, translation machines, interactive telecommunications, the Internet, video games, and dozens of other far-reaching media changes. Such radical changes are unprecedented. Public education is responding because for many young people, experiences with media function as informal learning.

Our mediated environments are saturated with communication experiences best described as popular culture. The concept of popular culture

triggers different thoughts for different people. For some, the term represents a criticism of cultural experiences (particularly mass communication experiences) that are in some way mediated, characterizing them as destructive, common, and vulgar. For others, the concept of popular culture represents the best way to understand contemporary political, social, and cultural experiences. The meanings of these experiences produce a social identity for the people involved.

Students of popular culture find their starting point in a wide variety of places, from virtually anywhere within their daily habits and practices. To study media is to become conversant with the structure of our society's communication systems, including the economic, technological, and institutional dimensions. There are always multiple explanations for every phenomena. The point is not to isolate a single explanation or discover a final answer but to learn about the world from multiple points of view. This understanding gives more control over experience. It provides a more confident place from which to speak about all forms of culture and communication.

## WHAT IS A TEXT?

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The dominant trend in English education in the mid-20th century, from the 1920s to the early 1960s, called for close readings of texts as the primary method of interpretation. Adherents to this school of thought are ardent in their advocacy of attention to texts themselves, and in their rejection of any interpretation based on ideas not contained within the text. A second school of thought called for a theory of reading that was more investigative. This theory implies that each text invites a diversity of reading methods and interpretations rather than a singular method of reading and interpretation. This investigative theory of reading acknowledges both what texts do to readers and what readers do with texts.

This second approach greatly broadens the realm of what counts as an interpretation but still identifies errors in readers' interpretations of texts. Typically, analyses of texts should involve a progression from the intuitive to the intellectual; from poetic knowledge, in which the reader is in momentary appreciation of the literary text, to prosaic knowledge, in which the reader puts this literary work into a field of similar works forming a coherent structure.

Given the unprecedented changes in the media landscape, literary texts can also consider the

context of reading consumer culture. We live in an era in which elite, high, or official culture has lost its dominance. The older traditions of official culture, which define text as literary, cannot hope to colonize, dominate, or contain everyday and mundane cultural practices. More formal approaches to aesthetics have been replaced by a grounded, everyday aesthetics. Media educators consider the ways their students make meaning of commercial, cultural commodities alongside more traditional texts found in art and literature.

A broadened understanding of text includes everyday objects of perception (in informal culture, for example, a face, a city, an advertisement). A distinctive feature of this new use of text is that it is informed by the Latin word *texere* (to weave) and *textum* (a web; texture). Texts are recognized as woven, and readers join authors as the weavers. That is, the emphasis is on the text as an open and perhaps even unfinished process in which the reader has some specific and symbolic work to do.

If the curriculum includes novels, poetry, and plays as literary texts for analysis, construction, and critique, then an integrated curriculum includes texts such as film, television ads, video, websites, and blogs. Each of these texts

## WHAT IS A TEXT?

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is material for analysis enabling creative and constructive activities. There is a clear relationship between young people's symbolic abilities to express themselves in speech and writing and their abilities to view, represent, and create. Students can read media just as they can read a novel. Many of the existing curriculum expectations for reading remain applicable.

Any form of communication that carries and conveys meaning can be considered a medium of communication. Media, the plural form of the word medium, makes explicit that more than one form or mode of communication is necessary to convey a message. The notion of multimodalities helps define the way that media works within communication systems. A website is multimodal because it uses words, images, and sounds to transmit meaning, which simultaneously stimulates our senses in a number of different ways. Similarly, a book is multimodal because it relies on several media of communication: the medium of words, the medium of paper, and so on. The knowledge and skill required in media study is an extension of existing literacy practices which emphasize the need for reading and writing skills. Literacy comes before media literacy, and media literacy draws on existing literacy skills.

Just as we are able to analyze how a print-based text such as a novel was written at a specific period of time for a certain audience, so too can we analyze how a film was produced in a certain way for an intended audience. All media construct and carry meaning, so all media can be analyzed. There are some significant ideological shifts from reading and writing to viewing and representing, but many of the ways of thinking about reading and writing remain applicable to viewing and representing.

Media analysis can include a vast range of approaches, from the study of phenomena in general, to the study of particular texts (things, works, objects, artifacts, etc.): Disney, Britney Spears' hairstyle, serial novels, Harry Potter, Nancy Drew, comic books, Batman's costume, a video game, mall design, a pair of jeans, Hollywood, lipstick, radio, the latest hip hop hit, corporate Internet sites, a school's webpage, this monograph you are reading right now—these are all examples of media that are open to investigation, ready to be integrated into the curriculum.

## MEDIA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

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### WHO IS COMMUNICATING AND WHY?

Every media message is communicated for a reason: to entertain, to inform, and usually to persuade. A basic motive behind most media programs is profit through the sale of advertising space and sponsorships.

### WHO OWNS, PROFITS, AND PAYS FOR MEDIA MESSAGES?

Media messages can be measured in terms of economic value. Most media messages are owned, designed to yield results, provide profits, and pay for themselves. For example, news and entertainment programming, including film and television, try to increase their audiences to attract advertising dollars. Understanding economic factors is key to analyzing media messages.

### HOW ARE MEDIA MESSAGES COMMUNICATED?

Messages are communicated through the use of forms, conventions, and techniques such as sound, text, and image. Most messages are enhanced by the use of visual and technical elements, like camera angles, special effects, editing, or music. Analyzing how these features are used in any given message is critical to understanding how that message attempts to persuade, entertain, or inform.

### WHO ARE THE TARGET AUDIENCES FOR MEDIA MESSAGES?

All messages are made for some group of people or audience. People filter these messages based on their beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviours, and past experiences. Identify the target audience for any given message to predict how its audience may engage in a range of interpretations.

## QUESTIONS YOU CAN APPLY TO ANY TEXT

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### WHAT ARE THE INTENDED OR UNDERLYING PURPOSES BEHIND THE MEDIA MESSAGE?

Behind every message is a purpose and point of view. The advertiser's purpose is more direct than a producer's program, though both may seek to entertain. Understanding their purposes and knowing whose point of view is being expressed is crucial to understanding the motivation behind any media message.

### IS THERE A CONSISTENCY BOTH WITHIN AND ACROSS MEDIA?

A media message's social and political slant, tone, local/national/international perspective, and depth of coverage changes across media. Because media messages tell only a part of the story and different media have unique production features, it helps to evaluate multiple media outlets and channels that cover the same issue. This allows for multiple points of view, some of which may be missing in any single message or medium.

### WHAT IS **NOT** BEING SAID AND WHY?

All messages are limited in both time and purpose, and rarely are all the details provided. Identifying the issues, topics, and perspectives that are NOT included can often reveal a great deal about the purposes of media messages. In fact, this may be the most significant question that can uncover answers to other questions.

## A CRITICAL CURRICULUM

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Criticism can roughly be defined as the organized use of literary and non-literary techniques and bodies of knowledge to obtain insights into literature. Non-literary techniques refer to such analytic approaches as the application of psychoanalytic or semantic principles to literary works. Non-literary bodies of knowledge range from such things as anthropology (e.g., ritual patterns of savages) to sociology and political science (e.g., the nature of capitalism). These techniques and bodies of knowledge move from the concrete to the abstract and are the tools employed in constructing and evaluating the meaning of all texts and media.

Symbolic responses and critical statements are the result of several analytic strategies: elucidation, explication, and evaluation. To elucidate is to make some aspect of the text more clear; to explicate is to elaborate on some notion suggested in the text; and to evaluate is to judge the text against some standard or principle. To these might be added the strategy of description, for in describing a text we do not merely mirror or repeat it, but re-order and re-live it, thereby giving it our own meaning.

Critical strategies require the reader to take a critical stance towards the multiple codes embedded in the text. Taking a critical stance

requires the reader to include the language of criticism in a response and to sift through the multiple layers of texts. Critical strategies enable students to apply critical judgements.

What we are calling for is a critical curriculum that puts its emphasis on inquiry-oriented pedagogical practices. Inquiry-oriented curricula tend to offer activities which stress critical thinking. This means that the teacher's pedagogy centres on the creation of a dialogue—i.e., not just discussion, but the kind of talk that leads to symbolic and metacognitive thinking. In this context, strategies of decoding and creative production are stressed and divergent readings of texts are positively valued for their potential to stimulate further analysis and thus growth in understanding.

To elucidate, consider the range of possible interpretations students might put to the word *crow*. Some will imagine actual birds, small black crows, large passerine ravens, or birds reported in the news as very susceptible to the West Nile virus. Others may rely on literature and popular culture genres to negotiate meaning. Edgar Allen Poe's gothic poem *The Raven* and Alfred Hitchcock's horror film *The Birds* recognize crows as harbingers of doom and death. Students might also consider mythology and folklore to make meaning.

According to Greek mythology, when the crows gave bad news to the goddess Athena, she flew into a rage, and cursed their feathers to be black. An additional interpretation might refer to Old Crow, Canada's most remote Aboriginal community. No literary context has been provided in this example so as to allow for multiple and divergent readings. Within particular learning contexts, give students freedom to investigate their interpretations before a final or correct answer is provided. Support divergent readings by posing questions that lead students toward the work.

This emphasis on investigation encourages a heightened self-consciousness about the processes of interpretation. In this way, students will recognize that everyone uses a selective and interpretive process to examine media texts. This process and the meanings obtained depend on psychological, social, cultural, and environmental factors. Given this view, teachers strive to enable students to

understand how media texts come to have a range of meanings and to develop richer, more symbolic readings.

A critical curriculum will stress the development of three particular kinds of critical strategies: (1) Textual strategies that emphasize activities like dissecting, decoding, and deconstruction help students unpack and understand media texts, forms, conventions, and techniques; (2) Strategies that encourage creative production give students an opportunity to see how media texts work from the inside out; and (3) Metacognitive strategies that allow students to reflect on their experiences, skills, and their own symbolic thinking. The inquiry-oriented classroom is about investigation. Investigation is critical when it helps learners to understand, analyze, pose questions about, and affect the sociohistorical, cultural, economic, and political realities that shape their lives.

## SIX STEPS TOWARD A CRITICAL STRATEGY

As a possible creative media or writing assignment, consider these six steps as distinctly separate when asking students to make meaning of any text. Media texts often appeal to our sense of emotions, so media education must work to distance students from what they feel about a particular text to a point where feelings are tools to help discover and investigate meanings.

### 1. SELECT

There are literally millions of media examples that we live with in our everyday lives. One of the most difficult parts of integrating media into a curriculum is the selection of which media to use. How do you know where to begin? Though there might be particular texts that interest you, ask your students to bring in their own examples, and to provide a rationale for their selection. In this way, the assignment begins with the student *owning* the work.

### 2. DESCRIBE

Often students will form an opinion about a text without really paying close attention to all the textual details. Help focus their attention by asking them to spend more time with their selected text. Have students carefully observe the text in question and describe what they see. Encourage them to withhold their judgement and simply describe what they see, read, and/or hear. This serves to enhance their perception and observation skills and to strengthen their ability to articulate their observations.

### 3. ANALYZE

Analysis requires students to build a conceptual map showing the matrix or web of ideas, topics, and associated sub-topics. Students analyze media texts by asking and answering questions related to the lesson at hand: How does the text relate to the assigned reading? Who owns this message? What are the channels of communication? Who are the intended audiences? Ask students to identify questions they think represent the important issues.

## SIX STEPS TOWARD A CRITICAL STRATEGY

### 4. INTERPRET

After careful description and analysis of a media text, encourage students to construct their own interpretation of the text. This interpretation makes interconnections among textual elements. These should take the form of an argument and should include a thesis statement and evidence from the text. At this stage, students are beginning a first draft of a media or writing assignment.

### 5. EVALUATE

After students have carefully crafted an argument, encourage them to make a final judgement about the text. Students learn that their evaluations and feelings are informed by description, analysis, and interpretation. These, in turn, help young people see the world from multiple points of view and from a variety of perspectives.

### 6. REFLECT

Finally, just when students think they've seen the last of this assignment, ask them to reflect on the processes of description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Did these steps help inform their ideas? Ask them to spend a moment writing a personal reflection to summarize what they have learned, measure themselves against their own goals, and set future goals. Students might write a letter to the creator of the text they selected or imagine how they would produce this text differently if given the chance. Also, ask them to comment on their work as a whole, and on their own assessment of their learning outcomes. Let metacognitive activities give students a real investment in their own learning.

## NEGOTIATING PEDAGOGY

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Following the school reform movement of the past few decades, media education assumes a student centred pedagogical practice in which the student is viewed as an active, aware participant in lifelong learning. This image of the learner is an essential consideration not only in the design of media education, but also within the larger pedagogical frame in which the curriculum is negotiated. Negotiating the curriculum means deliberately planning to invite students to contribute to, and to modify the educational program, so that they will have a real investment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes. Negotiation also means making explicit, and then confronting, the constraints of the learning context and the non-negotiable requirements that apply.

There is no such thing as educational media *per se*. Media education calls for dynamic processes of discourse that emerge when media are integrated into the curriculum. Media education is at its best when teachers invite students to participate in classroom discussion about media, and extend the discourse to community and society. *Simply put, discourse makes media educational.* Media education begins with the language of criticism, and this is the same language of criticism required for the analysis of traditional texts.

Media education should begin with students' current media habits, thereby bridging the gap between what students do outside of the classroom with classroom activity. Young people have a broad range of media experiences and it is important to recognize that media are important to all students for communication and expression. Media education is a means of giving young people high expectations of all media, and ultimately, of themselves.

Media can be integrated into existing educational practices by creating a question-centred classroom where curriculum is negotiated. Classroom environments are open to information and communication exchanges when teachers maintain a dialogue with students about their media practices. By encouraging students to speak openly about their media use, teachers can begin to construct a media discourse that can be used in a variety of educational ways. When students recognize their role as active agents in the classroom and in their informal uses of media, the empowerment they feel can lead them to participate in community transformation.

## MEDIA EDUCATION: OUR MISSION

Media Education Project is a collective and collaborative effort of Canadian teachers and researchers. In addition to this monograph series, we have developed a digital learning commons for media educators. This is an online portal that welcomes user-generated content and seeks to support the needs of media educators by providing resources and forums that promote interaction. We launched our site in November 2007 and have been overwhelmed with the response from teachers across Canada. Monographs are available in French and English at [mediaeducationproject.ca](http://mediaeducationproject.ca). A limited number of print copies are available for free to schools in Ontario. Just ask!

A member of our team can be available to visit your school (in Ontario) to meet with groups of teachers to talk about media education or other issues discussed in this monograph series, in the learning portal, or about the project in general. Don't hesitate to contact us, and visit our site to see the latest developments!

Looking for a curricular starting place for media education? We highly recommend Media Awareness Network's *Media Education: Make It Happen!* available on their website [www.mediaawarenessnetwork.ca](http://www.mediaawarenessnetwork.ca)



We hope you will visit our learning community so you can participate in the discussion. Join the crowd! Add your voice! [mediaeducationproject.ca](http://mediaeducationproject.ca)

**The project thanks the hundreds of teachers who shared their best practices and classroom experiences.**



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MEDIA LITERACY

The mandate of Media Education Project is to support Ontario teachers while collecting information about best practices and teacher experiences. This is a research-based study housed at the University of Guelph. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact the Faculty Investigator Dr. Mark Lipton by email ([liptonm@uoguelph.ca](mailto:liptonm@uoguelph.ca)) or by phone at 519-824-4120, extension 56049.

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