

MEDIA EDUCATION PROJECT
research-based monograph series

MEDIA EDUCATION:
ASSESSMENT

mediaeducationproject.ca

TALKING ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING

Media 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

In 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.

ASSESSING MEDIA? WHERE DO I BEGIN?

Media education assessment includes authentic strategies that involve activities valued by students. These are tasks worth learning and 'teaching to'. Authentic strategies simulate the challenges facing our students in their education, their civic and personal responsibilities, and their media habits. Not all media education learning contexts can invite the same level of engagement, criticism, creativity, and curiosity. To address discrepancies among classrooms that often parallel inequalities and disparities in school funding, media education assessment strategies can be designed to foster self-confidence, creativity, critical literacy, and analytic maturity. These are the primary objectives of media education.

Media education closes the gap between critical analysis and creative practice. Students participate in their community's discourse about media as active media citizens and by performing meaningful and real world tasks. Teachers build on activities and processes that naturally occur for students both in the classroom and in their everyday lives outside the classroom. Perhaps the greatest challenge for media educators is mapping the relationship between assessment and the changing media environment. When students know more about

technology than teachers, which is often the case, teachers aren't assessing skill, competence, or proficiency with technology but instead critical autonomy and awareness of agency. Herein lies the challenge of building a bridge between life in the classroom and the everyday media uses of students.

Of course, how to assess and evaluate critical autonomy is no easy task. Assessment and evaluation are carefully planned, sensitive, and caring processes that require teachers' expert and professional judgement. These judgements are applied for different purposes at different times. Teachers use a variety of assessment strategies to help students improve their learning. Although rating scales are a necessary part of the evaluative process, media education encourages assessment that speaks to students with words, not just numerical scores. To truly aid student improvement, symbolic forms of communication should tell students where they have done well, where they have done poorly, and what they need to do to improve and grow.

ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION, AND FEEDBACK

Assessment and evaluation signify different processes. Assessment refers to the ongoing gathering of information about student performance, achievements, and behaviours. Assessment also includes teachers' psychic and mindful collections of less tangible student issues, including a range of learning styles and modalities, approaches to creativity and curiosity, and demonstrations of metacognitive strategies and self awareness practices. Assessment isn't just quantifiable where teachers count or score performance indicators, but should be about teachers' perceptions of their students and the larger issues at stake in relation to learning outcomes.

Effective assessment is a continuous process that is integrated into everything teachers do, into all aspects of the curriculum. This provides teachers with relevant and useful information that (1) gauges student progress and performance, (2) identifies tangible learning outcomes, and (3) helps determine the effectiveness of their instructional materials and procedures. Assessment strategies function as feedback mechanisms—of both student performance and instructional materials. Keeping mental notes on student activity helps

teachers monitor how they are doing and what they need to do next. Assessment isn't just about watching over students, it's also about developing and improving classroom practice.

Evaluation, on the other hand, refers to the process of comparing student achievement against a set of standards, or in some circumstances with the achievements of other students. Like assessment, evaluation is a continuous, on-going process—there isn't just one test at the end of the year. Evaluation tools, like tests, are performance indicators. Over time, as scores and other value sets are compared, teachers can gauge how students evolve and determine learning outcomes. The process of evaluation acknowledges that learning is never complete, that students continually develop and evolve. Evaluative measures are also feedback mechanisms that can let the teacher know which lessons may have worked best and why. Evaluation requires a variety of specific tools to provide a static measure of performance, knowledge, and progress. Most evaluative tools are designed to score a student's performance on a given scale at a fixed point in time. Always remember that scores are only small steps in the larger life of

AT A GLANCE

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION TOOLS

the learning cycle. The results of one measure, or a few small measures cannot tell you everything about a student.

The goal of effective evaluation is to design a variety of evaluative tools that speak to the different ways students learn. Using an assortment of tools enables more accurate measurements of student progress, which demonstrate and explain multiple cognitive and symbolic activities. Evaluation tools tend to focus on particular performance indicators which cannot link directly to every element of curricular learning outcomes.

It's important to emphasize that any single evaluation tool does not necessarily say something about the intellectual life of a student.

Evaluation tools are predictors of success. To really assess student thinking, imagine evaluation tools as predictors of future growth, not just as measures of performance.

1. Rating Scale:

Score performance level with a number, figure, fraction, percentage, statistic, or lettergrade.

2. Checklists:

Make expectations clear by cataloguing specific skills or knowledge sets that students must demonstrate during a performance, task, or assignment.

3. Anecdotal Records:

Written observations collected over time keep track of one's teaching practice as well as student progress, growth, and areas of strength and need.

4. Running Record:

Ongoing written records document individual or group learning to identify key aspects of improvement, instructional decisions, and next steps.

5. Frequency Scale:

Chart how often a student demonstrates required behaviours, desired attributes, and learning skills.

6. Developmental Continuum:

Guide students through the levels or phases of learning by identifying stages of skill, knowledge acquisition, attitude, or student goals.

7. Rubrics:

Communicate expectations to students by arranging sets of criteria and performance indicators according to expected levels of performance.

8. Exemplars & Anchors:

Samples of student work are matched with performance levels set out in a rubric, which are then used to create sets of graded anchors.

9. Scoring Guides:

To increase reliability, an instruction booklet provides precise explanations of how marks are awarded for test questions or performance indicators.

10. Teacher Moderation:

Collaborative assessment in professional development settings fosters discussions about expectations and gives participating teachers an opportunity to be both reflective and data-driven.

THE CHALLENGES OF EVALUATING MEDIA

Media education makes explicit that young people bring capacities other than language, numbers, and science to the table. Teaching and learning with media means recognizing how multiple literacies, modalities, and learning styles help to develop critical autonomy, build confidence, encourage self-direction, and inevitably improve basic literacy skills. Acknowledge, appreciate, and activate different learning skills and capacities by building assessment strategies that draw out the very best. Evaluative tools rich in symbolic activities enable educators to gauge multiple skill sets which can help students discover their strengths, learning styles, and symbolic sensibilities. Every student has the potential to develop strength in one or several content areas and effective educators nurture these proclivities.

Of course, this puts insurmountable pressure on teachers, particularly those working with diverse groups of students. Canada's cultural mosaic means we live in a pluralistic society where multiple worldviews represent the multiple explanations for the ways the world works. Our diversity represents an enormous range of (1) knowledge and skill sets, (2) symbolic capacities, literacies, and fluencies, and (3) values, ethics, and worldviews. For these reasons, evaluation indicators that isolate single explanations or identify final answers are insufficient.

What's needed are assessment and evaluation strategies that consider students from multiple points of view. A full range of assessment tools bestow students with greater understanding and control over experience. This learning provides students a more confident place from which to speak about the dynamics of all forms of media and communication.

NEGOTIATE TO ENGAGE AND EMPOWER

Another important way for teachers to mitigate the pressures of assessment and evaluation is to build a negotiated evaluation practice. In media education, assessment should begin as a collaborative practice among teachers and students. No one would disagree that for most of today's youth, media are the first curriculum. Let students drive classroom decisions about media by inviting them to propose projects that meet the criteria. When students are asked to assume an active role in the evaluation of their formal media education, they develop responsibility for their own learning. This is a source of empowerment and agency that can function in two important ways: first, students begin to learn how to self monitor their informal media use outside the classroom; and second, students build metacognitive strategies to assess their own education as a whole, to develop a love of learning.

Before classroom negotiation begins, teachers need to explicitly confront the constraints of the learning environment and the curriculum with

clarity about any non-negotiable requirements. For students to thoroughly participate in any kind of honest negotiation, teachers must demystify and be open about the nature of evaluation, criteria, and standards. Project objectives, performance indicators, and learning outcomes must be clearly communicated throughout the process. The negotiation should begin with firmly and clearly stated objectives. Feedback should be built into the negotiation process so students can constantly engage with instruction and instruction can respond appropriately to feedback.

Often unstructured challenges are necessary so students require clarification of problems. In this way they gain practical experience in the use of knowledge. Sometimes, the assessment strategy is to consider not how well a student does, but how poorly by setting up a student to make mistakes. It is through making mistakes that we learn that we have something to learn and can develop our judgement.

SELF & PEER EVALUATION

Self and peer evaluation are metacognitive strategies that help students connect performance with learning. These assessment strategies are some of the primary means by which collaboration, negotiation, and feedback occur. The ability to evaluate one's own performance is both an essential skill required for lifelong learning, and a metacognitive strategy that empowers a sense of self worth in the individual. Engagement is one of the by-products of self-assessment and peer evaluation precisely because when metacognition and symbolic thought are activated in the classroom as serious activities, students develop a real investment in their own media habits and the teaching/learning cycle.

Using self-assessment does not just mean giving students the numeric grade they assign to themselves. Self-evaluation is a twofold process. On the one hand, students evaluate their own work against an evaluation scale, checklist, rubric, or guide to establish "Where am I now?" On the other hand, students must set themselves goals for future development by asking, "Where do I want to be?" As students take greater responsibility for their own education, their ways of working adapt to their personal learning styles.

Similarly, peer evaluation strategies are essential skills required in the ever-expanding media landscape. Whenever two or more students are working together on a project or problem, each student assesses the contribution of every member of the group. This process provides students with different perspectives on their own work and assists them in working with others. In this sense, self and peer assessment promotes the kinds of critical and creative literacy that stress the development of student autonomy.

Teachers are trained in, or provided with, assessment and evaluation tools that are based on larger trends in educational research and practice. Media education research encourages the use of a variety of tools that can be applied in productive, creative ways to encourage symbolic work. The growing obsession with student grades, standardized test scores, and school rankings puts excessive pressure on teachers to justify and validate the quality of their assessment strategies. Too often teachers aren't given sufficient time or necessary professional development for meaningful assessment of student learning. Teachers must provide a grade and a short comment in a report card a few times each year. As a result, rating scales are some of the most standard tools used in education. Often considered objective assessment tools, rating scales are frequently preferred over any subjective analysis. In fact, all evaluative tools are the result of some kind of subjective, symbolic interconnections made in the minds of their creators. Assigning numeric values efficiently informs students (and parents) the extent to which required criteria have been met, but these tools provide few symbolic forms of communication that inform students how to improve and grow. Consequently, rating scales alone are ineffective in the teaching/learning

cycle and cannot function as the sole method for performance evaluation.

Assuage the pitfalls of rating scales by involving students in metacognitive processes of self-assessment and reflection. Metacognitive analysis can take the form of letters, diary entries, stories, scripts, blogs, or other narrative forms. Media education research encourages metacognitive assessment as a fundamental component at every stage of review. As opposed to numeric values, open-ended writing authorizes students to freely summarize what they have learned, measure themselves against their own goals, and set future goals. Another metacognitive tool is a checklist for cataloguing student skills or knowledge sets. Checklists encourage reflection and can be easily scored. Provide a checklist at the beginning of an assignment to demystify and clarify evaluation criteria. This can help guide student work and ensure all the objectives are covered. Checklists make expectations clear but like other rating measures cannot tell students about strengths, weaknesses, or how to improve. Other evaluative tools, which rely on observation analysis and symbolic communication, are better at communicating and enriching student success.

OBSERVATION ANALYSIS AS RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICE

Teachers are not only trained in the rigors of curriculum design and pedagogical practice, but also in research methodologies. By working through assessment and evaluation strategies teachers take on the role of research-based practitioners. Assessment strategies are research-based practices.

One research tool that teachers use everyday is referred to in research as observation analysis. Practices that require observation are very time consuming. Nonetheless, teachers are encouraged to keep written notes about student performance, describing such things as student engagement, confidence, focus of attention, persistence, sincerity, curiosity, attention to detail, pride, interpersonal connections, and self reflection. These are just some of the key performance indicators that can help teachers acknowledge and activate a larger range of symbolic responses.

Observation analysis allows teachers to track knowledge and skill sets, to recognize areas of strength and need, and to trigger symbolic modalities such as student responses to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic cues. When teachers engage in observation analysis they gather data that provides (1) clear evidence of intellectual growth, (2) detailed information to provide feedback about logical next steps for students, and (3) valuable points about instructional practices that might suggest how to further adopt curricular materials.

Observation analysis is identified in more traditional educational research in other precise ways. We highlight four related tools from traditional education research that rely on observation analysis: anecdotal records, running records, frequency scales, and developmental continuums.

OBSERVATION ANALYSIS AS RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICE

Anecdotal records are ongoing written notes recorded by teachers based on observations. Usually this is part of a daily classroom practice where teachers set aside time at the end of each day to describe their own teaching practice and observations about students. Anecdotal records are especially useful for providing feedback and detailed information to students about their learning.

Our chief concern with this traditional measure is its name; the term *anecdotal* suggests that assessment is subjective, unreliable, and untrustworthy. In fact, when a commitment is made to keeping such records, these notes function as impartial objects that remind teachers of their instructional and evaluative intentions.

Similarly, running records are particular kinds of anecdotal records, customarily used in reading performance to document errors and determine remediation needs. These notes are written after a one-on-one meeting between teacher and student. With each individual meeting, the teacher has a chance to generate data about the student to identify key aspects of learning. In media education, running records are particularly useful for meeting with groups to keep track of student-peer relationships, group dynamics, and how work is distributed.

OBSERVE CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Observation analysis is the strategy at work in both frequency scales and developmental continuums. These assessment tools help teachers design classroom activities that provide precise information that can be shared with students. Frequency scales efficiently assess both behaviour and learning skills and let a student know how frequently they demonstrate

a required behaviour or exhibit a desired attribute. However, the primary assessment of quantity rather than quality is inappropriate.

Developmental continuums rely on a model of education that follows particular stages of development. In media education, this often means that assessment focuses on skills.

This simple four-step continuum charts student media production skills:

(1) Recognition

The student acknowledges what needs to be done but has not yet managed to do it;

(2) Application

The student has begun to apply the processes or perform the activity required, but has yet to reach the appropriate skill level;

(3) Competence

The student demonstrates a consistent level of skill, achieving the desired outcome; and

(4) Mentorship

The student is enough of an expert to provide instructional assistance to others.

As this example suggests, performance indicators reward skills. In media education this often relates to technological proficiency and this emphasis on expertise, ability, and skill is often artificial and inauthentic. We urge teachers to pair continuum charts and frequency scales with other assessment tools to activate creative thinking and critical autonomy.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT MATERIALS: RUBRICS, EXEMPLARS, AND SCORING GUIDES

The key to understanding student thinking lies in their work. When teachers assign a numeric score to a piece of work they usually rely on an assessment tool that demonstrates practical standards. Professional support materials are tools of assessment that ensure the validity of classroom practices. To discover what's going on in the minds of their students, teachers often look to rubrics, exemplars, and scoring guides.

Rubrics contain sets of criteria and performance indicators that are arranged according to levels of performance. Rubrics clarify what quality work might look like and give detailed description of the expectations and the criteria used to assess the work. Teachers are encouraged to negotiate rubric criteria with students so as to demystify the evaluation process. Of course, rubrics are also used to assess the quality of student work.

Exemplars are student work samples. These are matched with the performance levels set out in a rubric. Exemplars are then used to create sets of graded anchors as models for professional development. Though these tools provide practical performance standards by providing models of quality work, anchors run the risk of limiting creativity or directing imagination in confining ways.

To increase the reliability of marking, scoring guides provide precise explanations of how marks are awarded for specific test questions or for performance indicators. These are particularly useful to foster discussions among teachers about their expectations for quality work but can also narrow the range of possible student responses. Scoring guides may limit creativity if followed too diligently.

To genuinely cultivate assessment strategies, support materials need constant revisiting augmented by ongoing professional development programs.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT

Media education is also an excellent opportunity for collaborative assessment. Sometimes called *teacher moderation strategies*, collaborative assessment helps teachers develop greater confidence with evaluation practices and procedures. If there is pressure to *teach to the test*, or particularly with media related activities, pressure to be *less subjective*, collaborative strategies can help alleviate the anxiety teachers often feel about their expectations for quality work. In this process a group of teachers, usually along with their principal or instructional leader, meet on a regular basis to discuss student engagement, curriculum, student progress, and teaching strategies. Each teacher evaluates a given piece of student work and assigns a grade using a particular scoring guide. The objective is for teachers to build shared experiences about measuring standards with each other. This isn't just about keeping each other in check, but about creating an environment where teachers can foster open, honest, and earnest dialogue about their expectations of students, student work, their fellow teachers, and themselves.

This kind of work cannot be accomplished as a one-off activity. This collaborative process requires an in depth examination of and discussion about (1) the curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy, (2) the performance, task, and/ or assignment structure, (3) the standards and evaluative tools, and (4) the work itself. When looking at the challenges of evaluating student

media work, it is important to begin this process with a particular task or assignment in mind. Well-designed assignments offer a window into student thinking, their knowledge sets, and the progress they are making. As teachers score the same work and talk about their methods for determining a particular grade, discourse is created about evaluation. This promotes an environment that is less concerned with performance indicators and more concerned with learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are best understood when there is a shared understanding of evaluative criteria and the tools used to measure standards and performance.

Teacher moderation should be embedded directly into every school's learning plan for it to really work as a student focused and collaborative measure. When a school makes a commitment to collaborative assessment, participating educators are given genuine opportunities to be both reflective and data-driven. As groups of teachers take a closer look at student work, teachers can see themselves working as research-based practitioners. The collaborative dialogue promotes metacognitive thinking about student needs and strengths, the appropriateness of the instructional practices, and possible next steps. Teacher moderation strategies are designed as professional development activities to foster discussion among teachers about their expectations for quality.

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. 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



We hope you will visit our learning community so you can participate in the discussion. Join the crowd! Add your voice! mediaeducationproject.ca

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



This work is licensed under Creative Commons. To see how you can use this work, visit: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca/>

ISSN: 1915-5255 Print Version

ISSN: 1915-5263 Online Version

OISE
ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



UNIVERSITY OF
GUELPH
HUMBER

CMCE
Centre for Media
and Culture in Education OISE / UT

[aml]
ASSOCIATION FOR
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] or by phone at 519-824-4120, extension 56049.

Funding and support for this monograph series provided by:



Canadian Teachers' Federation
Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants



CANADIAN COUNCIL ON LEARNING
CONSEIL CANADIEN SUR L'APPRENTISSAGE

MEDIA
AWARENESS
NETWORK



RÉSEAU
ÉDUCATION
MÉDIAS



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada