

CJEC Special Issue on Media Education

Introduction

Mary F. Kennedy, Guest Editor

When I first began the editorial task of assembling this particular journal issue over a year ago, I had nothing but a list of names from around the globe who were leaders in the area of media literacy/media education. My personal knowledge of the subject matter was dated — I had incorporated media studies in English courses in my former life as a high school teacher, and I had, until the late 1970s, read widely in the area. My only recent forays included the occasional team-teaching of a graduate course in television studies. According to the development of media education paradigms described by Masterman, I was entrenched in the second stage — the Media as Popular Culture paradigm.

I had assumed that the thrust of the papers for the special issue would be on the underlying theoretical frameworks of media literacy, on the relationship of media education and critical thinking skills. Instead I found that the authors are, for the most part, comfortable with the existing theoretical underpinnings, and they are now focusing on the more practical and operational tasks of implementing media education in the curricula and in the schools. Hence my decision to change the name of the issue from Media Literacy to Media Education — a somewhat subtle and yet important distinction.

The issue presents profiles of media education activities around the globe— from the United States, to England, to Denmark, to Australia, to South America and back to Canada. The authors describe their experiences in working toward the development, implementation, and evaluation of media education programs for students and for teachers, delineating the major accomplishments and the constraints faced in trying to establish media studies as an integral part of schooling.

The first article by Len Masterman traces the development of media education through three paradigms — (1) the inoculation perspective; (2) the media as popular culture perspective; (3) the semiotic/ideological perspective. Masterman calls for "the grounding of media education in the dominant visual - televisual experiences of students."

Bobyn Quin and Barrie McMahon focus on the evaluation of media education programs, indicating the need for identification and specification of learning outcomes. They describe a regional testing program in Western Australian

secondary schools, and describe how the results should inform media education practices.

The British Film Institute has been active in providing inservice programs in media education for teachers in England over the past decade. Gary Bazalgette delineates problems faced by the government's stand on the provision of media education without providing the support in terms of training for teachers, and describes the BFI's response - the development of a comprehensive distance education program in cooperation with the Open University and the BBC Production Unit.

Media education in the form of a television literacy course for undergraduate students is the thrust of the paper by Barbra Morris. She emphasizes the need for a focus on actual textual evidence, as well as an understanding that the viewing process is essentially an individual experience.

John Pungente traces the growth and development of media education in Canada. While there are signs of interest in some provinces, there are many areas where media education is not as yet an issue. The province of Ontario, however, has become a national leader, and indeed a recognized leader internationally in the area of media education.

The focus of media education in Chile is on teacher education. Miguel Reyes and Ana Maria Mendez describe the partnership developed by university teachers in faculties of education and teachers in the school system who access inservice education courses on media education. The Chile experience is in opposition to the model followed in many countries, where governments have mandated or at least approved media studies as part of the curriculum, but failed to provide the necessary training or resources for teachers to properly implement such programs. The Universidad de Playa Ancha de Ciencias de la Educacion is ensuring that there is a cadre of teachers interested in and trained to implement media education programs, in anticipation of such courses eventually being required in the national curriculum.

The Danish Folkeskole was the site of thirty-five experimental media education projects carried out between 1987 and 1991. Birgitte Tufte evaluated the projects, and describes the advantages and limitations of the special project approach to media education.

I have learned, through the development of this special issue, that media education is an accepted part of school curricula in a number of countries, and that even where there is acceptance and, in fact, intellectual support there are still numerous hurdles to be overcome. Teacher education does not include preparation for the teaching of media education, and most teachers charged with meeting media education objectives have little support in terms of resources and inservice training. I have also learned that those who are actively leading the media education movement are now functioning as doers rather than as thinkers. I do not mean this in an unflattering sense in any way. It is simply an acknowledgment, on my part, that there is much to be done to ensure that strong media education programs are available to all students, and these action-oriented activities are, for the time being, taking precedence over the more esoteric, theoretical issues.

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