

# Media Literacy

## By Frank Baker

---

### Why Media Matters

In early December 2008, a major study was released by the National Institutes of Health and Common Sense Media. It analyzed 173 previous studies, some dating back as far as 1980, which had examined the role of the media on youth health. The result: media exposure and screen-time impacts young people's food choices (obesity), alcohol and tobacco use, as well as sexual behaviors, among many others. That might not be a surprise to many, but it may be a surprise to others. I think this is definitely a wake-up call to educators, health care providers, and parents. The study's authors also had these recommendations: teach kids to be smart media users; and lawmakers should underwrite media (literacy) education efforts.

While we wait to see if there is any action on these recommendations, now might be a good time to examine your school or district's own role in promoting positive media use and media literacy.

The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills recently released a revised curriculum map for English Language Arts and it includes specific examples for how to incorporate media literacy into instruction. For example:

--in 4<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, it recommends that students understand how messages are constructed, for specific purposes, using special techniques

-- in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, it recommends students examine how values and points of view are included or omitted and how media can influence attitudes and beliefs

To read more go to:

[http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/21st\\_century\\_skills\\_english\\_map.pdf](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/21st_century_skills_english_map.pdf)

At its heart, media literacy is about inquiry--critical thinking (and viewing). Students should both analyze and create media, in all forms. They also need opportunities to question media makers and purposes. When students *are* given opportunities to deconstruct non-print texts, the skills they use transfer to their study of traditional print texts.

1. Teaching standards: Elements of media literacy are currently embedded in our standards. For example, in health, most teaching standards include looking at the role the media plays in health decision-making, and that includes everything from food advertising, to marketing of alcohol and tobacco, to body image and sexual media messages in movies and television. Too often, textbooks superficially address these issues. Brainstorm ways your

class might use youth media and culture to bring these topics to light.

2. Professional Development: I hear teachers all the time who say they *would* teach media literacy if they had the necessary training. Has your school or district offered any specific training in media literacy education? Standards-based, hands-on, interactive work that engages students works best. As an example, one of the workshops I conduct involves helping students learn how to read a print advertisement for tobacco, examining the ad as an “informational text” as well as identifying the common techniques of persuasion. Then, students produce a parody ad based on a real cigarette ad.

3. Books: When I am presenting, often inside school media centers, I take the time to scan the bookshelves of the library. Even though our young people are so enamored of the media, all too often, I won't find any books that deal with media. (That's one of the reasons I have authored two books on media literacy.) On my website, you *will* find a list of texts (both student and professional) recommended for school libraries.

4. Web 2.0 From blogging to Facebook to creating a digital video—students are learning how to do all of this *outside* of school. But they could be learning *inside* school, because Web 2.0 is a big part of the “new literacies” movement. Think about all of the ways students can create and produce projects using the media and technology tools they are already fond of using.

Let me know your thoughts: send me an email: [fbaker1346@aol.com](mailto:fbaker1346@aol.com) I will reply promptly.