



What is comprehensive Media Literacy education?

Media literacy is "hands-on and experiential, democratic (the teacher is researcher and facilitator) and process driven. Stressing as it does critical thinking, it is inquiry-based. Touching as it does on the welter of issues and experiences of daily life, it is interdisciplinary and cross-curricular" - *The Aspen Institute, 1992*

Mass Media Literacy recognizes the breadth of approaches to Media Literacy education. We believe that a comprehensive approach addresses the structural and institutional components of the media industry and technologies. Comprehensive media literacy is grounded in a social justice framework that includes analyses of race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, violence; it explores the impact of media on cognitive development, the environment, and public health.

Why Media Literacy?

We believe it is critical that Massachusetts students learn Media Literacy skills because:

1. Consumption of media by children and youth continues to rise dramatically.

A [study released January 20, 2010](#) by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that the amount of time young people spend with entertainment media has risen dramatically, especially among minority youth. On average, 8-18 year-olds devote seven hours and 38 minutes to using entertainment media in a typical day – more than 53 hours a week. And because they spend so much of that time ‘media multi-tasking’, they actually manage to pack a total of 10 hours and 45 minutes worth of media content into those seven and a half hours.

2. Media messages are powerful. In the media, children are exposed to messages of sexualization, violence, bullying, unhealthy body images and gender stereotyping, as well as consumption of unhealthy foods, alcohol and tobacco. Media exposure influences children’s behavior and can contribute to aggression, violence and bullying, depression, body image issues, obesity, substance abuse, and other negative effects on physical and mental health.

[A February 2007 report by the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls in the Media](#) found that the sexualization of girls and women in the media is increasingly common and virtually every media form studied provides ample evidence of the sexualization of women, including television, music videos, music lyrics, movies, magazines, sports media, video games, the Internet and advertising. The APA found that girls’ exposure to such content is linked to mental health problems such as eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression, among other negative consequences.

Authors and educators [Jackson Katz](#) and [Paul Kimmel](#) have frequently written about how boys continuously receive messages through media regarding what it means to be a man. The messages they receive through WWE, violent video games, stereotypical television characters, music videos and other media contribute to the development of a hyper masculinity, one that reinforces sexism, heteronormativity,

and limits their ability to achieve their humanity.

Former elite model Nicole Clark, director of the documentary film [Cover Girl Culture](#), says young teens rank entertainment media as their top source for information regarding sexuality and sexual health. A commonly repeated statistic is that the average age for boys' exposure to pornography is 11 ½ years old and [public health officials are concerned](#) with how pornography negatively impacts the development of everyone's sexuality.

Actress Geena Davis, founder of the Geena Davis Institute on Media and Gender said the [institute's research](#) revealed that when female characters do exist in media, most are highly stereotyped and/or hyper-sexualized. Female characters in G-rated films wear virtually the same amount of sexually revealing clothing as female characters in R-rated films, and studies show that the more television girls watch, the more limited they consider their options in life; the more boys watch, the more sexist their views become.

An American Academy of Pediatrics [study released June 21, 2010](#) concluded that branding food packages with licensed characters substantially influences young children's taste preferences and snack selection and does so most strongly for energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods.

The American Psychological Association finds that in recent years the level of violence in American society and the level of violence portrayed in television, film, and video have escalated markedly; many children's television programs and films contain some form of violence, and children's access to adult-oriented media violence is increasing as a result of new technological advances; the conclusion drawn on the basis of over 30 years of research and a sizeable number of experimental and field investigations is that viewing mass media violence leads to increases in aggressive attitudes, values, and behavior, particularly in children, and has a long-lasting effect on behavior and personality, including criminal behavior.

3. Democracy is impacted by media.

Access to accurate information and a broad range of opinions is imperative for a healthy democracy. With the continued [consolidation of media owners](#), most information is now sifted through the lens of six large corporations. This impacts the quality of information the public receives.

4. Comprehensive Media Literacy can help children navigate these messages, their production and distribution, and is key to 21st century critical thinking and analyses skills.

Comprehensive Media Literacy can help children:

- Develop critical thinking skills.
- Understand how media messages shape our culture and society.
- Identify target marketing strategies.
- Recognize what the media maker wants us to believe or do.
- Identify the structures of the media industry and technologies.
- Name the techniques of persuasion used.
- Recognize bias, spin, misinformation, and lies.
- Identify stereotypes, racism, sexualization, homophobia, and other harmful messages.
- Discover what is not being told in the story.
- Evaluate media messages based on our own experiences, skills, beliefs, and values.
- Create and distribute media messages.
- Advocate for a changed media system that is equitable and just.

The APA supports the development, implementation, and evaluation of school-based programs to educate children and youth regarding means for critically viewing, processing, and evaluating video and film portrayals of both aggressive and pro-social behaviors.

Mass Media Literacy, in conjunction with comprehensive media literacy educators, understand that media are powerful and affect how we act, our emotions, and our thoughts. Being a consumer is not connected to citizenship. Understanding how media works allows students and adults to make decisions that are in their best interests and to participate in our democracy.

Recent research:

From the *Journal of Communications*

University researchers reviewed fifty-one studies of media literacy interventions that were intended to enhance students' critical analysis by increasing knowledge of the media, awareness of the influence of the media, and the ability to assess the realism of the media representation of reality.

Media literacy education was found to reduce risky or antisocial behaviors, increase negative beliefs about and negative attitudes toward such behaviors, and increase belief in oneself to avoid negative behaviors. Media literacy education was found to be effective for children and youth of all ages, for all topics – e.g. tobacco, violence, sex.

[Media Literacy Interventions: A Meta-Analytic Review](#)
[Volume 62, Issue 3](#), pages 454–472, June 2012

From the *Journal of Children and Media*

David S. Bickham & Ronald G. Slaby of **Center on Media and Child Health** found that a media literacy curriculum for elementary students developed by Media Power Youth of Manchester, N.H., is substantially effective in achieving its goals of helping young people understand and reduce the impact of unhealthy media messages regarding tobacco, alcohol, fast food and violence.

[Effects of a Media Literacy Program...on Children's Critical Evaluation](#)
[Volume 6, Issue 2](#), pages 255-271, Feb. 27, 2012