

To the FCC:

We at Action for Media Education (AME) are gratified by the new FCC's willingness to explore Media Literacy, a process that has been our driving force and *raison d'être* for almost two decades.

Action for Media Education (AME) is a Seattle-based non-profit organization. Since our incorporation in 1991, AME members have been trailblazers across the Pacific Northwest in the area of Media Literacy Education. The purpose of Media Literacy Education is to help individuals of all ages develop the habits of inquiry and skills of expression that they need to become critical thinkers, effective communicators and active citizens in today's world. The organization includes teachers, health professionals, media professionals, professors, graduate students, community members and parents.

AME's mission is to move children and youth, as well as adults who are concerned with their well being, from a position of passive media consumption to one of interacting with the media as active, critical and creative consumers and producers. In order to accomplish this mission, AME promotes and supports Media Literacy Education in homes and schools, as well as in community groups serving youth.

We are encouraged (OK, excited!) by the opportunities this new Commission brings. We are particularly pleased that the new Commission now looks more like America, ending decades of estrogen shortage.

We at AME believe that the FCC needs turn to "Sesame Street" for a quick alphabet lesson: the FCC is **not the CDC**. What do we mean by that?

Simply this: TV and other forms of media are not diseases that people must be inoculated against. There is no magic cure for the problems of media consumption—not the V-chip, nor another useless series of letters (G, PG, M, MA, ML, MV, MLV, like random vitamins for the family remote control.) After all, what is PG in one household may be MV in another. The FCC needs a "game change." It's not just about the audience's age. It's about our children's comprehension of content. From here forward, we need to be all about **Media Education** and **Media Literacy**.

And the remote control needs to be seen for what it CAN be: a virtual, electronic library card; one that reminds kids that every single thing they've ever seen on TV is a result of WRITTEN WORDS combined with skills in visual arts--thus enthusiastically promoting reading, writing and critical thinking.

**Commissioners, technology has forced your hand.** Kids are shooting and dispersing their own videos to millions of viewers on YouTube and social interaction sites like Facebook. They can accomplish more with a laptop and a smart phone than TV producers in the early days of television could do with an entire studio. But without context, student productions merely copy what they see, and cater to the lowest common denominator. (Tune in to *Jackass* or any *World Wrestling Entertainment* (WWE) production if you need proof.)

We have a generation of children completely unfazed by the idea of creating media. (The same cannot be said of their teachers, and **that must change.**) But instead of just giving kids access to cameras, smart phones and computers, why not give them the reasoning skills to explore their world knowledgeably? Why not help them learn that media's purpose is to tell a story? Why not discuss the creative process with them, so they learn what works (and what doesn't)? Why not equip them with a toolbox of ideas so that they can set—and reach—their goals?

That's what Media Literacy can do. Media Literacy skills know no boundaries, and can be applied to any academic discipline. Students can visit a program's Web site, even during a show, in an activity called "enhanced viewing." They can learn that if a program draws their attention, the next step is to run, not walk, to a library or bookstore, or to Google the title, and most importantly, to *read more about it*. The possibilities are as endless as the airwaves themselves.

In fact, there is even a successful precedent for considering and implementing Media Literacy programs. In the late 1990's AME, with the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, successfully implemented a program called *Creating Critical Viewers* (written by Jerome and Dorothy Singer of Yale University) for use in the Seattle School District. Later, AME applied for and was awarded a grant from the Washington State Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee to develop a media literacy education program to address issues of media violence. This program received rave reviews from those teachers who participated in piloting the program in the Seattle School District. AME has also had considerable experience consulting on major projects involving media literacy education in our area schools. AME has held training sessions for teachers who then return to their schools and train others, so that **any** faculty member can integrate Media Literacy concepts into daily lesson plans. We do it. It works.

Students can also learn, through Media Literacy, that we are truly a global community—connected to the other nations on this planet, no matter their size or power. The recent earthquake in Haiti has shown countries joining together in an international relief effort, and social networking has raised tens of millions of dollars in a matter of days, spurred by the images and stories of loss and survival. Schools in Seattle, with an established Media Literacy Program promoted by former Superintendent of Public Schools, the late John Stanford, are in a unique position to inspire and involve students in creating their own messages promoting humanitarian aid, and to teach about the Haiti catastrophe in a national and global context (especially since our city is home to Mercy Corps and many other organizations now assisting the survivors.)

Just as sunlight is the best natural disinfectant, media education is the best way to enlighten America's families, so that they are more cognizant of the **huge role media has had in their lives**, and to better understand and adapt to its role in our present and future.

For years, we have been told what NOT to do about television programming in terms of age appropriateness. There were days—weeks, in fact—of stories about the exposure of Janet Jackson's breast during the SuperBowl; we obsessed about the spontaneous drop of the "F-bomb" at an awards ceremony, despite the fact that the word is heard incessantly in many of America's school yards. We have been so concerned with keeping things out of the American living room, via V-chips and an antiquated ratings system, that we have lost sight of the Big Picture. A program that qualifies for a "MATURE" rating when it debuts can, years later, be offered in syndication in an after-school time slot. We can tell parents to teach children not to

watch any “violent” programming—but that advice is ignored at home when *WWE* and *COPS* (and regrettably, MSNBC’s *Lockup* series, better known as “let’s watch minorities get busted”) claim an early-evening time slot.

“You can’t watch this” becomes, in a kid’s head, **“OK, I’ll watch this at my friend’s house.”** So Media Literacy needs to be as portable as a smart phone (with a constantly-charged battery of grey matter.) Children can even learn to use Media Literacy skills when they’re viewing programs that everyone else says are “bad.” Rather than being interested in finding out what the fuss is about (and going next door to watch it), kids who are media literate will be able to tell their parents why the program in question is a waste of air time.

Media Literacy could help kids better comprehend America’s role in the global community in terms of leadership, international commerce, technology, the arts, climate change, social justice, and the response to natural disasters. (Again, think: HAITI.)

Media have the power to influence people’s lives in the long-term. For instance, when 9/11 occurred **live** on TV, children saw the same horrific images again and again, and many believed that each viewing meant that there had been a new attack. Parents had to explain that each time the recording of those awful moments appeared, it was NOT A NEW ASSAULT. When the news came on, many parents simply changed the channel or put a children’s program into the VCR, rather than have to explain the visuals that were, by then, seared into the American consciousness. (One of the unforgettable images of that week came from a second-grade teacher who asked her students to draw what they had seen; one child’s picture personified the World Trade Centers with arms and tears, like injured friends, trying to hold each other up.) Media Literacy skills could have made a significant difference in how we absorbed that event in the days (and years) that followed, mitigating at least some of the nightmares and trauma that had exploded in our living rooms. Media Literacy and critical thinking skills might even have prevented the exploitation of our fears.

Media Literacy can teach our children (and their parents and teachers) to sort through political biases and posturing, by better understanding media messages. **We can teach our children ways to identify and debunk hate speech of every stripe and flavor through comprehension of how a variety of factions (political, racial, religious) use words and images to manipulate public opinion to their own ends.**

We now have the opportunity, through Media Literacy, to celebrate and inspire greater academic achievement, especially in math and science. President Obama recently held an astronomy gathering that invited the children of Washington, D.C. to see how technology can show them more of the Universe, and to promote its exploration. A White House Media Literacy program, for example, combined with efforts by the Department of Education, could use those images as a springboard to encourage boys and girls to “choose science” as a future career.

In response to America’s abysmal eating habits and addiction to junk food, we have a First Lady who used a healthy garden to promote wiser food choices—and did it with groups of kids, *including her own*. In addition to Michelle Obama’s terrific PSA about nutrition, a Media Literacy program in Washington, D.C. schools could have provided PSA’s written and produced by area school kids. In fact, the First Lady (a.k.a. “First Mom”) could challenge area middle schools to learn more about the food they regularly consume and create persuasive PSA’s about healthy eating. They could see who could produce the best one—with the winning PSA airing locally (and perhaps nationally.)

So here are some examples of AME members in action:

- Marilyn Cohen, Ph.D, AME's Executive Director, a Research Associate Professor at the University of WA, and also Director of NW Center for Excellence In Media Literacy, has dedicated considerable effort to her research in Media Literacy Education. The data her projects have been producing indicate the positive influences of Media Literacy Education on youth.
- Claire Beach, AME's former President, worked with Seattle high school and middle school students who had official press passes from Geneva for the World Trade Organizations (WTO) Seattle meeting in 1999. Not only did her students have to learn media production; they were expected to learn the details and background of each of the WTO's issues, by researching each one. When they were interviewing the WTO's Seattle Coordinator, they asked intelligent questions about those topics. In fact, when the interview ended, the Coordinator told them that NO other journalists-- from any country--had asked him such knowledgeable questions. (The mainstream media had only wanted to talk about the street chaos.) ***That is media literacy.*** Students intelligently and purposefully used the appropriate media to tell the story. And that experience changed those students' lives. (Three of them have gone on to Film School.) Also, Claire's middle school students stood shoulder to shoulder with professional mass media journalists when covering President Bill Clinton's visit to the WTO, **and the only interview he granted was to those students.** However, without helping them deconstruct what had happened at the WTO, they would have had a great "media production moment" (face time with a sitting President!)--but that would have been it. With Media Literacy discussions, the experience became a learning skill set that will serve them all their lives. That should be our focus: to give our children these critical thinking skills, so that they become well-informed citizens. Media Literacy skills ensure that we can create a better-informed democracy, capable of making informed decisions.
- A 15 year old girl in Tacoma (WA), inspired by reading a New York Times story about an Afghani girl whose face was burned by acid while she was trying to get to school (result of ongoing repression of educating girls and women under Sharia law.) She began a philanthropy effort that raised \$30,000 so that the injured girl (and others like her) could have reconstructive surgery. She used Media Literacy skills to make her case—it was all about telling the story of the young girl who courageously tried to become an educated woman in the face of truly violent opposition.
- Linda Kennedy Franklin, a former television reporter and anchor, used Media Literacy skills in engaging Somali families in an anti-smoking campaign. The kids learned about the fact that Philip Morris owns Kraft; that R.J. Reynolds owned Nabisco; and that there is a link between corporations and audiences manipulated by misleading images and claims. They made their own "stop smoking" PSA's; more importantly, they brought the messages about the dangers of smoking to their homes. In Somali culture, a father is never challenged—but these kids bravely took their projects back to their families, and even convinced some dads to become healthier, and make better choices—by quitting cigarettes. Linda's group also provided instruction and creative opportunities to Somali women and children, as they developed their own economic base while maintaining their cultural heritage. Linda continues her Media Literacy

work with African-American children enrolled in after-school programs sponsored by the Urban League.

- AME's members took our "Food for Thought" project to parents of preschoolers and elementary students, using Media Literacy to promote smart nutritional choices. This resulted in these young families' turning ordinary shopping trips into nutrition field trips—reading labels and critiquing an item's packaging and placement on the store shelf. One parent told us how it "hit home" when her young family looked at a box of cereal that boasted it contained "real fruit" and simply asked: "Could you really fit an apple in there?"
- Native American high school and alternative school students in the Pacific Northwest shot and edited their own video diaries about the effects of alcohol on their struggling communities, winning a statewide award, and leading peers and parents to more positive life choices. They also produced a two-minute, culturally and tribally specific piece on the issue of teens making responsible reproductive decisions. Their work was shown and acknowledged at the Regional Emmy Awards in 1992. They attended the event with pride.
- In the early 1990's, AME Founder Dr. Marilyn Cohen and Project Coordinator Barbara Johnson traveled to six different parts of Washington State (including urban areas and migrant worker communities) to investigate parental interest in nutrition and the barrage of junk food commercials targeting their kids on TV. They found that **parents were a lot more interested in learning about "what to do about TV" itself.** This study provided the basis for The Foundation for Family Television, now nationally known as Action for Media Education.

These are just some of the positive results—creating increased self-esteem. Such Media Literacy projects can change a student's outlook on his/her life far into the future. And a student with self-esteem is less likely to engage in questionable behavior than one who can't grasp critical thinking. We've seen these results in the nearly twenty years AME has been working on Media Education and Media Literacy.

While we are demonstrating the benefits of these two terms, it is important to recognize the subtle differences between the two. Media Education can teach production techniques and the nuts and bolts of assembling images and sound. But a Media Literacy program will teach the importance of context, because the student will know enough to ask and answer questions such as "How did you approach that scene?" "Why did you choose that shot (or that angle) over another one?" And most importantly, "How does this tell your story?"

**Change, as the President is so fond of saying, must come from the ground up. We have generations of kids who became desensitized to violence, disaster and racism, and Media Literacy will be useful to them in retrospect. As they become parents, they need to know that their children will have the skills that most of the rest of the world's children already have. Again, we are the only top-tier nation that does not offer its children these important critical thinking skills (and we are the nation that produces much, if not most of the world's media.) Our children need these skills to compete and thrive in the global community.**

So consider this A SPONGEHEADZ MANIFESTO. We are a nation of Spongeheadz—we absorb everything we see on in the media. If we are going to raise smart kids to make smarter choices, to undo the damage done to families who suck up media content without questioning it (as we have now!), to enlighten an audience that sits, unthinkingly, absorbing what is seen *on any screen* without questioning the visuals, their motivation, and the message—***we must begin now. We need Media Education that starts in Kindergarten and grows with the child. No matter how glitzy the techno-toys become, (we already have middle schoolers who shoot and edit in High Definition!) what matters is the content of the production, and the discussions before and after its creation.***

Media Literacy is the way forward. AME will be happy to lead this effort, along with the many organizations that are part of an informal but growing national network of Media Educators.  
***Let's get started!***

Respectfully submitted,  
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**And now, on to your questions.**

## **FROM THE FCC: TEACHING MEDIA LITERACY TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS**

**We seek comment on the availability and sufficiency of media literacy training for parents, teachers and children.**

### **1. To what extent is media literacy a required part of school curricula throughout the nation?**

Nowhere near enough!

Media literacy is currently being integrated into select areas of the school curricula in many of our states across the country. While it may be listed as a requirement in some of those states, without funding for curricula, teacher training, and other follow-up measures, these requirements can easily be overlooked in classroom implementation across our schools. Here in Washington State, AME's Founder, Dr. Marilyn Cohen, is also the Director of the Teen Futures Media Network, based at the University of Washington. Teen Futures has dedicated its effort to working with the Office of the Superintendent and the Washington State Department of Health to integrate media literacy education into health education requirements. It has also provided statewide media literacy education conferences, trainings and workshops, and written curriculum materials that demonstrate concrete ways in which media literacy can be integrated into the curriculum. As a result, media literacy is now a required part of the health curriculum and there have been many exciting developments across other areas of our classroom curriculum. There is still, however, a great deal more work to be done. There is extremely limited funding available to achieve the results we all desire.

### **2. Is media literacy education in schools particularly critical for those at-risk children whose parents are either unaware of the benefits and harms of media consumption or choose not to become involved in monitoring their children's media use?**

Media literacy shows ALL children how to look differently at what they watch. Learning to both critically read and write media are very valuable skills.

Teen Futures Media Network, University of Washington, continues in its work to demonstrate that at-risk children benefit greatly from this approach as they learn to "read" media more critically. In fact, the media have been found to be a wonderful "hook" in attracting and holding children's attention in the classroom. These same children have been found to become wonderful peer educators, sharing with their siblings and other members of their families the Media Literacy lessons they have learned.

AME's work has been focused on the "writing of media." In our "Images of Youth" campaign, students from a variety of communities (including at-risk kids) learn to express themselves using images; to tell their stories from a youth perspective; and to find empowerment in the hands-on experience of creating media. The parents of at-risk kids frequently do as much learning as their children, but the teaching of critical thinking skills will be a part of our children's lives going forward. And that is worth the effort in giving at-risk kids an outlet to document their communities, express their hopes and aspirations, and to set their imaginations free.

In the fragile time slot known as "after-school activities" (the prime time for at-risk youth to engage in troublesome or illegal behaviors) teaching those same kids to tell stories from their communities may actually prevent some of those activities from taking place. An at-risk youth who creates, on camera, the solution for a situation that troubles him/her can become a local leader in resolving problems (and the self-esteem factor is immeasurably positive.) We at AME

have seen this again and again as we teach kids to talk about their issues, and promote change on their own terms through media.

### **3. At what age should children begin to be taught media literacy?**

The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend TV viewing before the age of two; however, many parents introduce shows like *Sesame Street* around the first year of a child's life. We at AME believe that some of the concepts of media literacy can be taught in a simple and rudimentary form to pre-schoolers, whose natural curiosity about "how things work" may get them started on a better track of viewership than kids who simply soak up what they see. (This year, two AME members will create the first Media Literacy book for pre-schoolers, entitled **TV'S ABZ's**.) But by Kindergarten, basic media literacy concepts can be introduced and taught—in fact, it's critical to the child's development to do so. After all, who is more image-aware, more capable of visual learning, than a kindergartener? There is a reason that *Sesame Street* has worked for four decades!

### **4. Is it critical for such education to begin early in a child's development?**

**YES.** If this country is going to do anything at all to end bias and prejudice--**which are learned**—we must start with the youngest, so that by Kindergarten, children are already learning to question what they see on TV, and to not be subject to bias and prejudice around them. In the coming year, an AME member will be working to weave together Media Literacy concepts and tenets of social justice and non-violence, using the acclaimed "Teaching Tolerance" model from the Southern Poverty Law Center. Media Literacy can also teach students to identify and counter "hate speech" in all its forms, and to have the skills to combat ignorance and cruelty. **There should be grants made available in every school district for such projects.**

### **5. What roles do the Department of Education and other government or private organizations play in this area?**

The Department of Education and other government or private organizations could play a major role, serving as a catalyst in the effort to provide funding for innovative grant proposals focused on bringing Media Literacy Education into our schools. Currently, despite AME's and our University of Washington's colleagues' wide search for funding support, there continues to be little funding available. Media Literacy Education is currently an area that doesn't seem to fit into any agency's priority list.

Yet, it is ironic to note that despite the fact that Media Literacy is not on any agency's priority list, the United States remains the only major country in the western industrialized world that does NOT instruct its children in media literacy, even though we are the creators and purveyors of most of the media (especially commercials!) seen around the world.

### **6. Are there studies or data on the effectiveness of media literacy education and which approaches work best for particular demographics?**

Marilyn Cohen, Ph.D, AME's Executive Director, a Research Associate Professor at the University of WA, and also Director of NW Center for Excellence In Media Literacy, has dedicated considerable effort to her research in Media Literacy Education. The data her projects

have been producing indicate the positive influences of Media Literacy Education on youth.

Here in Washington, a great deal of work has been done through a collaboration with NW Center's Teen Futures Media Network, University of Washington and Washington State University. Their work has focused on Media Literacy Education as a vehicle for teaching middle and high school age teens about critical health issues. They have found that Media Literacy Education has been extremely successful with all of Washington's wide-ranging demographics (e.g. Latino youth, Asian American, Native American, African American, etc.)

In addition, in 2007 Dr. Marilyn Cohen, (AME's Executive Director and Director of the Teen Futures Media Network, UW) served as Coordinator for the first Media Literacy Education Research Summit. The Summit, sponsored by National Association of Media Literacy Education, and held in St. Louis, showcased a collection of research from across the country and from other parts of the world. The Summit highlighted work now underway in a variety of national venues, asking critical questions, and exploring areas of mutual interest among the Media Literacy Education community.

## **7. What are current best practices on teaching media literacy?**

We believe that students must learn how media are constructed; then they can comprehend how to de-construct media messages.

AME helped to develop and implement Washington State's Media Literacy programs. Here are the five Core Concepts of Media Literacy that we've used:

1. All media messages are constructed.
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people may experience the same media message differently (based on age, religion, region, culture, religion, etc.)
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

In addition, we teach our students to ask some key questions in order to de-construct media messages:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently?
4. What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent? (Who stands to gain?)

Boston-based *Better Viewing Magazine* suggests these five tips, and so do we:

TV has a point of view. Challenge it.

TV isn't real life. Spot the illusions.

TV manipulates. Identify its techniques—and your reactions to them.

TV is limited. Figure out what's been left out.

TV IS A BUSINESS. Understand your economic role—and your power—AS A VIEWER.

**8. Are there limitations on the value of teaching media literacy to children? For example, are there certain issues, such as the ability to understand persuasive intent in advertising, that children under a certain age lack the cognitive ability to comprehend?**

There are no limitations where learning is concerned, although it's important to keep in mind that Media Literacy Education, like all education, must be age appropriate. Years from now, perhaps the United States will adopt the European Union's practice of not targeting children under eleven years of age with commercial ad campaigns. (Most of us accept the fact that this is not likely to happen in our lifetimes, if ever.) We need to consider the Big Picture: making the world a better place for our children, who cannot distinguish fact from fantasy until at least the age of four, when they grasp the concept of "pretending."

"Saturday Morning Cartoons," once a hotbed of commercial opportunity (in the days when advertisers could pitch toys that "fly" and dolls that "move") have given way to entire networks ("Sprout," NICKELODEON, Cartoon Network, Disney Channel) that advertise to kids in a 24-hour "gimme/getme" cycle, depending on the child's geographic location and time zone.

What we know for sure: the smallest kids do not understand that sometimes a "kid show" is a half hour commercial (think: *Care Bears*) for a product that was developed before the program itself was created. The youngest audiences sometimes cannot tell where a commercial ends and the show begins. (Sometimes, neither can their parents, as anyone who has visited "Toys 'B' Mine" (a.k.a. Toys 'R' Us) during the holiday shopping season can confirm.) We believe that kids should have their own "arsenal" of questions to ask when a product targets them (and so should their parents.) This practical application of Media Literacy can mitigate "the fire to acquire," saving a family considerable money in these difficult times, and perhaps, some semblance of sanity.

**9. We also note that schools are responsible for children's media consumption while they are in school. How do schools determine whether to use media literacy and/or control tools to protect children while consuming media in schools?**

Teachers and librarians need to have the freedom to expose children to a wide variety of age-appropriate programming. However, schools generally find that they must be responsive to the community in which they are situated. While teachers have been at the front lines in the battle to keep science-based books in the classroom, the community sometimes intervenes (and interferes.) There have been examples, here in Washington State, where community members were initially afraid of the presentation of certain content to their children, but became much more amenable to presenting that content from a more Media Literacy Education perspective. **We firmly believe that the Commission needs to unequivocally support academic freedom AND Net Neutrality.**

Commissioners may be as surprised as most AME members were when we learned this sad statistic: in America's homes, **you are more likely to find two televisions than two parents.** At the very least, then, kids need Media Literacy to deal with "information overload" in their media-saturated lives.

## 10. What factors do schools consider in determining what is appropriate material for children to access?

AME promotes Media Literacy so that students can objectively assess TV and other media content. Educators are our guardians at the gates, and our allies in the war against ignorance, prejudice and bias. Here in Seattle, we are blessed with an innovative, progressive group of teachers and librarians who recognize that students live in an amazingly media-rich environment **outside of school**. They can access that media easily—but they don't truly understand it. If the point of education is lifelong learning, we cannot shelter students from media. Where else will they learn how to deal with what they've accessed?

We also believe in the importance of inclusion at all levels, particularly in regard to positive role models for not only boys, but girls as well. TV still has a long way to go in reflecting 21<sup>st</sup> century population data, in which women make up more than fifty percent of this country. But almost any show in an "action genre" can have a 35-to-1 ratio in favor of male characters (in some cases, it's even worse.) Sadly, this on-screen disparity reflects the situation in corporate media boardrooms as well.

This may sound radical, but there is absolutely no reason for programming that **always** features an all-male lineup (and usually all older white males, at that.) Until David Gregory began hosting NBC's *Meet the Press*, some women referred to the show as "Meet, Depressed," since women were excluded, and in many talk show formats, still are. The FCC can encourage stations and network affiliates to promote booking and featuring guests who come in a variety of colors, ages, viewpoints, sexual preferences and ethnicities. We hope to see an improvement—more balance--since many programs, balanced or not, are recorded for use in Media Education.

Please remember that children and students in any audience **want** to identify with characters or guests: **they ALWAYS look for faces like their own**. When all they see is older white males (in suits, and in positions of power), what are we saying to them? Given the changing demographics of this country, programming needs to look less like a script from a fifties sit-com—and more like America.

## 11. To what extent are schools blocking content that might be beneficial for children?

We live in a country that is still waging wars against librarians for stocking books that some school systems consider unacceptable or controversial. (Evolution, anybody?) Teachers need to be given latitude to present media that challenge and inform without fearing for their job security. Parents can have an opt-out capability if teachers let them know what TV programs will be used in certain curricula, and can then suggest other related resources. A high school history class teacher, for instance, needs to be able to show *Schindler's List* without ending up on a "contract-not-renewed" list of a School Board member with an (anti-academic) agenda.

## **12. Are there any studies or data available on the impact on long-range educational and/or career opportunities from limiting children's access to online resources?**

Why blindfold our kids? We need to be able to teach students to objectively assess sites for content relating to future study or future career choices. In the 2009-2010 economy, job hunting online is not just helpful—it is mandated by rising unemployment and corporate downsizing. Kids are seeing their parents lose jobs they have held for decades; the transition from a manufacturing economy to an information-based economy has left entire cities in the dust.

If, for instance, through the need for energy independence, America fully engages in the production of new energy technologies needing a manufacturing base, the information to train for and locate these new jobs will be online (and perhaps ONLY online.) Therefore, the more Media Literacy skills our students and children have, the more likely they are to succeed in finding the meaningful, productive employment that provides success. They will need to be able to create online portfolios of what they can do and how well they can do it. The students who can create an electronic resume with an impressive combination of graphics and WELL-COMPOSED TEXT (after all, it all gets back to reading and writing: literacy in its oldest form!) will have an advantage over those who cannot meet the high-tech expectations of their future employers.

## **13. Is there anything that can or should be done to assist teachers and schools in managing students' media consumption and promoting students' media literacy while they are in school?**

In Washington State, teachers who receive Media Literacy training are given Continuing Education credits, and then are able to train other teachers in their school or district. This promotes faculty discussion of beneficial uses of classroom media, while enabling some of the more hesitant teachers to bridge their personal “technology gap” through selective, positive use of media in the classroom. Media Literacy Education should not be offered **only** to teachers already in the field, who already recognize the relevance of Media Education. It definitely needs to be included as a key requirement in pre-service training programs for all who are enrolled in teacher training programs across this country. Currently, there are extremely few pre-service programs available for teachers in training. **This must change.**

Our students are already light-years ahead of us in adapting to and engaging in creation of media. Like the infamous French general who stated, “I must find out where my people are headed, that I may lead them,” we fear that the FCC may be somewhat behind the curve on some of these innovative media products, techniques and capabilities. The FCC needs to get out in front of the effort to educate students and parents in our media-saturated society.

An informed, media-savvy electorate is the heart of democracy, and a way to move America forward to join the rest of the world community, whose children—all except ours—already have the Media Literacy tools they need.

A critical part of teaching Media Literacy is that teachers must get ahead of the wave of on-screen violence that students deal with every day. A Seattle teacher recently told AME that her school's worst problem was no longer with boys, but girls—who texted each other to assemble at a certain place for a fight—which was then to be recorded on their smart phones and

uploaded to YouTube. The girl, who was eventually attacked, left the school in an ambulance, and nearly had her neck broken. Episodes like this bring “cyber-bullying” to a whole new level. Teachers must be prepared to counter-act the widely held teenage belief that ALL CONFLICT IS VIOLENCE. We believe that the proliferation of on-screen violence, whether it’s TV, computer or cell phone, underscores the need for our development of the “Teaching Tolerance” program (through the Southern Poverty Law Center). AME has held conferences that present student-created media using conflict resolution skills; such video projects, when screened for peers, can mitigate, and in some cases, **prevent** escalating violence.

#### **14. How are parents and teachers taught media literacy?**

As stated earlier, many parents learn about Media Literacy from their children, who are delighted to teach parents what they’ve learned about how media “work” as a source of information--locally, nationally and globally (media are not just an entertainment resource.) This is why Community Cable Access has begun to play a larger part in neighborhoods, where kids and parents can learn media skills together. Non-profit organizations like Action for Media Education (AME), the Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood (CCFC), the Media Education Foundation (MEF), Reclaim The Media, and dozens of other Media Literacy organizations, exist to enthusiastically bring these skills to parents and teachers. Sadly, in most parts of this country, if we ask a mom or dad “What is media literacy?” we are met with a confused, embarrassed parent who has never heard the term before.

That, too, must change. You can make it happen.

#### **15. Are there examples of media literacy programs that could serve as a model for teaching parents and teachers?**

The Northwest Center for Excellence in Media Literacy, based at the University of Washington, is one model that we would highly recommend.

AME can provide Commissioners with lists of organizations like our own, and can offer you sample copies of the myriad of materials we have developed, and we look forward to sharing these with you. Representative Jay Inslee (D-WA 01) is an enthusiastic supporter of Media Literacy and AME; he has attended many of our conferences and events, including the two appearances of the FCC in Seattle. We are asking his office to inform you of our willingness to testify before you, and to assist us in establishing and implementing this critical Washington-to-Washington connection.

#### **16. What role could or should the government, and the Commission in particular, play in ensuring that children, parents and educators receive appropriate media literacy training?**

Initially, this statement may sound surprising and contradictory, but the FCC will need the most creative minds to “market” Media Literacy concepts to the country as a desirable educational commodity. This does not mean a hard “sell”: we have found that parents, teachers and kids enthusiastically embrace Media Literacy, and quickly see its benefits (and our many focus groups on this subject support this conclusion.) We must, somehow, re-group, and learn to be pro-active rather than reactive. We must be aware that education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has

changed dramatically, as has the whole landscape of education, but our practices have not kept up with the pace of this change, Our kids are living in a media-saturated environment, and our schools need to factor this into their instructional efforts. The FCC must become a strong advocate of Media Literacy Education, if we are to embark on the transitions that are so urgently needed.

### **17. What role should the media industry play in this area?**

The media industry needs to know its role as content providers, and be encouraged (or mandated) to produce a much larger percentage of educational programming as a part of their mission. Perhaps it will take tax breaks and other incentives for large corporations to produce more educational programming, as they will not want to give up lucrative air time (the sale of the our children's' airwaves) to advertisers with billions of reasons to pay and play.

The media industry needs to remember that the airwaves belong to the people, not the corporations. This is why media conglomeration is so dangerous to an informed electorate, and why a big part of Media Literacy must be to constantly educate citizens, and protect against TV that offers limited views and partial information (depending on who owns them.) The media industry will have to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into this Age of Media Enlightenment.

Children must know that the airwaves belong to THEM. This is their electronic inheritance, their digital legacy to future generations.

If the FCC can get past the entrenched thinking of past Commissions, and act courageously in the face of partisan attempts to shut down media literacy as "indoctrination" or a "socialist plot" (you know, like evolution and climate change are treated even now) our children will be able to make "informed choices" in every facet of their lives. 2010 is an election year, and 2012 is on the horizon. Imagine the benefits of helping young voters understand the messages that political parties present to them! Imagine their being able to identify when a story or announcement is more spin than substance!

Finally, there is a "secret ingredient" necessary for Media Literacy: **PASSION**. Our teachers bring it; our students catch it; their parents celebrate it. Media literate students discover endless opportunities, and develop amazing new capabilities through their work in Media Literacy Education.

And all of us believe that the best is yet to come.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lynn Ziegler