

The Official

Media Democracy Educational Resource

October 18th 2002
is the second annual international
Media Democracy Day.

Around the world, people will be
addressing the important question: Who
controls public communication?



This one-page document was created as a resource for educators to help them teach young people how the modern media system works and how it should be more democratic. Included is an overview of the subject, some suggested activity ideas, and links to useful resources.

How does our current media system work?

Our most common media are TV, radio, newspapers, billboards, websites and magazines. Huge companies provide **content** like sitcoms, stories, music, games, attractive images and news that keep **our attention**. Our attention is then **sold to advertisers** who use it to persuade us towards their clients' interests. In this **commercial media system, viewers are being treated as commodities sold to the highest bidder, and public interest takes a back seat to corporate profits.**

What is Media Democracy?

A democratic media system is one that **informs and empowers all members of society**. Media Democracy prioritizes diversity over multiplicity, citizen control over consumer choice, cultural development over commodity trading, community presentation over representation, and public discourse over public relations. Media democracy is about redesigning our systems of mass communication to best serve the community rather than the corporations.

Media democracy supports public, community and independent media organizations. It aims for **equal opportunity** to create and broadcast public messages. It uses systems of **deliberation** and **voting** to decide how the communication system should work and what kind of content should be promoted. Media democracy simply aims to include the public as media creators, not just consumers.

What Examples are there of Media Democracy?

Whenever a communication system approaches equal opportunity to participate in content creation and distribution, that system is a media democracy. For instance: **bulletin boards, city hall meetings and speaker's corner** are all examples of local media democracies. Bookshops that shelve many independently produced publications (aka "zines") and **community access cable** stations are also two forms of media democracies. On the **Internet**, anyone with the patience and inclination can contribute to the World Wide Web. Some of the most progressive news web sites invite any user to submit articles and then apply **membership voting systems** to collectively moderate and prioritize the content with tremendous success.

High quality democratic mass media is possible. With increased government support and public engagement, we can make public communication more inclusive, diverse and constructive for our community.

Some suggested media democracy learning activities:

Alternative proposals

Read and discuss some of the following proposals for public communications policies and agendas:

Adbusters Media Carta <<http://adbusters.org/campaigns/mediacarta/> >

The Media Channel has 19 proposals <www.mediachannel.org/manifesto/front.shtml>

The Zen TV experiment

1. Watch any TV show for 15 minutes without turning on the sound. 2. Watch any news program for 15 minutes without turning on the sound. 3. Watch television for one half hour without turning it on. What did you notice about the imagery and style? What did you think about and how did you feel?

Who Owns My Media?

Using the Media Channel resources <www.mediachannel.org/ownership/>, make a chart of who owns your favorite TV stations, movies, music, games, books and magazines. Which companies have the most influence in your life? How do you think that company perceives you? Who would you prefer to own your media and why?

Finding Independent News

Pick a popular story covered in two major newspapers. Then find at least two other independent news sources (i.e. not Associated Press, Reuters, etc) that discuss the same topic. Compare and summarize the differences, including: perspective, information, length, style and bias.

Deconstruct Advertising

Choose five different advertisements from popular magazines. Who are the ads aimed at? What are the techniques used to persuade the audience to buy the product and/or like the brand?

Making Democratic Media

Work together in large groups to make your own magazine for your class. Through cooperative discussion and voting, decide: what topics to cover, what kind of information to include and how much length to give each article. Use volunteering (and a lottery if necessary) to allocate writing and design jobs.

What is the Rest of the World Talking About?

Browse through regional news using <www.newsisfree.com> and make a list of the top stories outside your nation. What are the important world issues not being covered by your national media? Which stories should they cover?

What Is There To Talk About?

Go to your local magazine and newspaper store and make a list of the most popular topics discussed in the many publications. Now make a list of topics you think would be more useful for average citizens and discuss why.

What Are We Looking At?

Look through popular magazines and make a list of all the different kinds of images you see. Make a pie chart of the most common images, such as celebrities, attractive models, consumer products, etc. Discuss what might happen to people who frequently see this kind of imagery. What kind of imagery do you think would be more positive for society?

Learn about the 8 Key Concepts of Media Literacy:

Read and discuss the 8 Key Concepts of Media Literacy <www.reseau-medias.ca/eng/med/bigpict/8keycon.htm>

Work in groups to find and present an example of each concept.

Useful Websites

The Media Channel - www.mediachannel.org

Media Literacy On-Line Project - <http://interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/mlr/home/index.html>

Media Watch Youth - www.mediawatchyouth.ca

Media Education Foundation - www.mediaed.org

Media Awareness Network - www.media-awareness.ca

Media Democracy Day - www.mediademocracyday.org