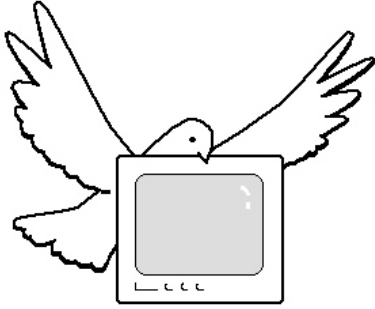


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Sending media the message

**Votes of youth across Canada protest images of violence, bigotry
Debra Black, Life Writer**

If Jacques Brodeur had his way, young people across Canada would learn from an early age to be critical of the images they see on television. Brodeur thinks they are by far too violent, too racist and too sexist.

These images have too much influence on the way children behave in the real world, Brodeur believes, and he wants to change that.

So he, the Canadian Teachers Federation and the Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ), have taken a Quebec program and launched it Canada-wide in an attempt to teach children across the country about media literacy.

In this first-ever national vote, 2,521 young people cast their votes by fax and by mail in five categories for programs that are too violent, too racist or too sexist, as well as programs that are positive and reflect good role models.

Winners of the dubious honour of most toxic television program, film or music video include: Power Rangers, South Park, American Psycho and Disposable Teens by Marilyn Manson. The most positive include: Magic School Bus, Friends, Chicken Run and Yellow by Coldplay.

Brodeur hopes that the program will make a difference in the age-old debate over violence in film, television and music. This month, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a report that suggested

violence in entertainment and aggressive behaviour in children have a closer correlation than second-hand smoke and lung cancer.

As a former teacher and an education consultant, Brodeur says he has witnessed kids acting out violence in the classroom and the playground.

That's why he launched the Youth Vote in 1990. And what began as a program for a few classrooms in Quebec City has grown this year to a national campaign. Now, the National Education Association, which represents 2.4 million teachers in the United States, is interested in holding a similar vote next year.

Brodeur hopes the vote will send a strong message to broadcasters, film, television and music video producers and videogame designers.

"We want to tell them that we've discovered what their product is doing to our children," says Brodeur. "The producers and broadcasters need to know they carry a strong responsibility towards the future of this planet. Making a few bucks now is not more important than respecting children."

What would Brodeur ultimately like to see?

"Children suffer neglect," he says. "They've been offered things to be happy. But what they really need is time with their parents. They need to wash the dishes with their parents, take the shovel and clear the driveway or cut the grass with their parents.... Children in Canada spend between 22 to 25 hours in front of the set or playing video games. They only spend 37 minutes a week talking to (their) parents."

By participating in Youth Vote 2001, "We're trying to get students to develop critical thinking skills and look at the underlying messages," says Doug Willard, president of the Canadian Teachers Federation.

"I think the single most important thing we can teach children is to be sceptical, to question the information they're given. So when children leave the school and are on their own and see something on television, they'll be asking questions themselves instead of sitting there and absorbing it."

Ottawa teacher Carol Sabean, whose class participated in the vote, agrees. She found her 30 Grade 5 students actively participated in discussions about violence and television. "I was amazed at how much they grasped what's negative in what they're watching," says Sabean, who has taught elementary school for 12 years.

"Most television shows are violent," says Leena Abou-Seido, a 10-year-old Grade 5 student in Sabean's class. "These years there are less TV shows for kids. Most shows are for teens and adults.

"I think the vote is perfect because kids across Canada get to express their feelings - for them to change things on television. So we can watch more. There should be a limit on bad shows."

And what are bad shows in Abou-Seido's mind? The Simpsons and Pokémon, she says emphatically.

Educator Sabean feels that the lessons in her classroom about violence on television and film will help kids stand up to any violence or bullying in their own lives. "Children have to be made aware that it's not appropriate for someone to be violent against them," she says. "The more we tell children its okay to do that and help them with strategies to do that, we can make the world less violent."

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