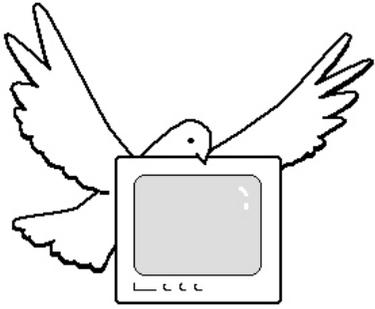


EDUPAX



6th anniversary of the Columbine High School massacre, Littleton, Colorado

April 20, 2005

Columbine 6 years after

The 20th of April 2005 marked the 6th anniversary of the Columbine High School massacre in Littleton, Colorado. The media have not missed the opportunity to repeat the names of the young killers, as if they needed to become famous. EDUPAX will try to point at the factors that have made this nightmare event possible. Many different reactions have been expressed. Youth crime has been a target. School safety raised many worries among parents. Why did such a horrible event happen in a high school? Why did these boys commit such a horrible crime? Who did they really target? What did they mean, exactly?

Michael Moore, the movie producer, analysed the drama in his own way. His movie, *Bowling For Columbine*, won the attention of huge crowds all over the world. For him, the culture feeding U.S. youth through television, cinema and video games is not to blame. He blames the availability of guns and the militarisation of his country's economy. In his movie, Moore attacks Wal-Mart and Charlton Heston, accusing them of predatory behavior in glamorizing the constitutional right to own and carry firearms. He also blames the media who have been feeding the fear of black men since slavery. To exclude the entertainment industry from any blame, Moore compares his own country to Canada; young people in both countries, he says, watch the same programs, (*South Park*), attend the same movies, applaud the same singers, (Marilyn Manson) and play the same video games. Since young people in the U.S. commit far more murders, he concludes that broadcasters and producers carry no responsibility and deserve no blame.

Moore does not mention that the violent crime rate in Canada has been going up for the last 20 years and that young Canadians now commit twice as much violent crime as adults. (1) Moore does not mention that our violent crime rate is still rising, while crime against property has been going down consistently for more than a decade. Moore does not mention that the rise of violent crime is much more rapid in the 15-25 year old age group than any other age group. Many sorts of non criminal aggressions, physical and verbal, are increasing, also, mostly among young Canadians, including elementary school kids. These aggressions create profound and various damages: distress, isolation, depression, suicides. Bullying by girls is also on the rise, faster than boys some say. That's what Canadian teachers and parents witness in many schools and families.

**Why are young people more and more violent, both in Canada and U.S.A.?
Why is the increase of youth violence also a major issue in Europe ?
Why has it become a major public health issue over there ?**

Why is the number of kids with troubled behaviour in our elementary schools also on the rise? In each Canadian province, education departments have recorded the phenomenon and researchers have evaluated the increase at 300% between 1985 and 2000. Why is the percentage of these troubled kids higher in kindergarten and 1st grade? The blame must not be carried by schools, but that is where we witness the phenomenon. Each year, our Canadian schools, just like schools in the U.S., succeed in socializing some of these kids. Not all, unfortunately. So, inevitably, some kids reach secondary school keeping their social skills underdeveloped. They then

become labelled "at risk teens". If their peers are not trained to respect and enjoy differences, if sarcasm and humiliation are common in their environment, frustration heats up and the media culture of revenge comes to the "rescue" and pushes these teens to act out. These kids' culture comes mostly from Hollywood and is spreading all over the world. In 1997, a UNESCO survey concluded that the hero of kids in 82 out of 83 countries was the Terminator. This culture of violence teaches our kids to kill, like Lt. Col. Dave Grossman said. Grossman is a retired psychology professor from the U.S. army, director of the Killology Research Group, and author of « Stop Teaching Our Kids To Kill ». He declared: "Videogames give kids and teens the will, the skill and the thrill to kill". Violence in movies, TV programs and video games has nothing to do with creativity. It is a marketing ingredient used by producers to lure, catch and addict the most vulnerable of our fellow citizens, the less experienced among them, children and teenagers. The will to kill, unfortunately, is only the tip of the iceberg.

Desensitization to real life violence that surrounds young viewers and video game players is a much more pernicious damage. Desensitization is what make teens become passive bystanders when witnessing one of their peers being physically and verbally bullied. In the video recorded the night before the crime, that is what the killers say has hurt them the most, the passive complicity of their peers when they suffered bullying by the "sport" guys.

During the shooting, in the cafeteria, some witnesses say that the boys seemed to enjoy the shooting. They were experiencing the "thrill to kill". Revenge, combined with the satisfaction of hitting the target, brought pleasure to these boys. Grossman explains that the shooting precision of the young killers (80% of the shots hit the head and upper torso) was better than most FBI officers. The boys got their training from DOOM, a murder simulator used by the U.S. army to train 19 years old recruits and condition them to kill without thinking. The two boys also listened to Marilyn Manson, known to ask his fans to repeat after him in his shows: « We love hate, We hate love ». That's the cocktail mix that pushed the two boys to act out in Littleton. Thousands of teens have similar media consumption and similar reasons to act out.

Prevention

Violence committed and suffered by kids and teens has helped create many violence prevention programs all across North America. Some programs include emergency plans for each individual school when a killer shows up. Others consider metal detectors, surveillance cameras or the hiring of security officers as prevention practices. Few of these programs, unfortunately, have targeted the influence of TV violence as a major factor in the increase of physical and verbal violence. The influence of TV on kids behavior is very well known and documented. In an article in the prestigious international weekly newspaper, *Le Monde diplomatique*, analysing problems witnessed in today's education, the author describes and blames the « lamination of children by television ». These children start school force-fed with TV, they have been exposed to the small screen since their birth, almost 5 hours a day, even before learning to speak. « The flood of their family space from this tap constantly open, from which an uninterrupted flow of images runs, has considerable effects on this young person's formation ». (2)

The Damages of TV violence

In April 2003, major U.S. professional organizations in the field of health (American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, American Psychological Association, American Medical Association) signed a joint statement. "At this time, well over 1000 studies - including reports from the Surgeon General's office, the National Institute of Mental Health, and numerous studies conducted by leading figures within our medical and public health organizations point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive

behavior in some children. The conclusion of the public health community, based on over 30 years of research, is that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children.” (3)

All parents of teens know that an increasing number of programs, movies and video games feed their imagination. Unfortunately, most parents do not know the extent of the impact of violent entertainment on their child’s mental health. The damage is real and deep. Heroes fascinate children and 95% of them solve conflicts with violence. Productions carrying these role models glorify revenge and cruelty. Meanwhile, the broadcasting of violence is on the rise. In 1994, Canadian broadcasters committed to self regulation to prevent any government intervention. Since then, private broadcasters increased doses of violence by 432% during the 8 following years. TV and video games have also damaged our children by keeping them away from physical activity while promoting unhealthy food, creating the increase of obesity. The influence of TV is gigantic, deep, well known, scientifically proven and well documented. For scientifically aware people, ignoring the contribution of TV to youth violence is now impossible.

Reversible Trend ?

Conscious of hundreds of studies about the toxic influence of TV and curious to verify if that influence is reversible, Tom Robinson, professor of medicine at Stanford University, directed an audacious research project with children in San Jose, California. He produced teaching tools for teachers who agreed to prepare 3rd and 4th graders to turn off television and quit video games for 10 days (4). That was in 1999. He measured before, right after and also 20 weeks later. He discovered that the reduction of exposure to TV and video games would make verbal (-50%) and physical (-40%) violence go down. (5) He also noticed that the most aggressive kids made the most progress (4). He also measured a significant reduction of obesity. (6) The Journal of the American Medical Association published his results.

The 10 Day Challenge, Children and Teens Performances

Informed of Robinson’s study, in 2003 and 2004, teachers and parents in 20 elementary schools in Quebec and Ontario became curious to see if a similar project could produce the same results with their students. The « 10 Day Challenge» without TV and videogames has been evaluated in 9 of these schools and results from kids, teachers and parents are available in French on the Challenge website. (7) On April 19, 2005, three more Canadian schools started the challenge and a total of 1,159 kids were offered to participate until April 28. (8) The 2005 Challenge will be evaluated as well.

Only one high school has participated in the Challenge so far and the evaluation follows in the addendum below. (9) EDUPAX wants to take the opportunity on the Columbine 6th anniversary to congratulate children, and thank parents and teachers who helped motivate them. These kids have faced their own addiction, one day at a time, and they deserve admiration. The reduction of exposure to TV and video game violence seems to be one of the most efficient approach to youth violence prevention and all schools in North America should be informed about it.

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(1) Violent crime rate of youth is twice higher than adults’ according to the Public Safety Department of the Province of Quebec: “Statistiques 2001”, page 24. Data about youth crime

and links about the influence of TV violence are available from the Quebec School Board Federation at this address: www.fcsq.qc.ca/Dossiers/ViolenceTV/doc/argumentaire.doc

(2) The article was published in *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2001: www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2001/11/DUFOUR/15871?var_recherche=t%E9I%E9+violence

(3) "The Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children" - Joint Statement to the Congressional Public Health Summit. http://www.fradical.com/impact_of_entertainment_violence.htm
The statement posted on the AAP website was endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, American Psychological Association, American Medical Association: <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/jstmtevc.htm>

(4) Tools prepared by Dr. Tom Robinson are known as the "Student Media Awareness for Reducing Television" Program (SMART). <http://hprc.stanford.edu/pages/store/itemDetail.asp?169>

(5) Dr. Robinson's article about aggressivity published by the *Journal of the AMA* is posted here: http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/SMARTAggressivity.pdf

(6) Dr. Robinson's article about the impact of TV reduction on obesity is posted here: http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/SMARTObesity.pdf

(7) Press release by 3 schools participating in the 2005 Challenge is posted here in French: http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/Communique_2005.html

(8) All information about the 10 Day Challenge is posted here: http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/10_days_challenge.html
The Challenge has been experienced in April, November and January 2003. It can be done anytime during the school year, as long as it does not interfere with the teachers planning. Usually, it is recommended to be held to fit with the TV-Turn Off Campaign in the U.S. Success is made easier in the 2nd half of April. To know more about next year schedule, please check the Challenge webpage at this address: <http://www.edupax.org/defi.html>

(9) Evaluation of the Challenge in a high school is also posted there. http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/Bilan%20des%20ados.html