

Media Violence: How To Oppose It And Win

**Presentation at the 3rd ACME Summit
Champlain College, Burlington, Vermont
6-8 October 2006**

Category: Media Education and Classroom Activities
Saturday morning, October 7, Champlain College in Burlington, Room: Joyce 203
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Introduction

Over the last quarter-century, violence in television programs, video games and other entertainment products has gradually polluted our children's cultural environment as effectively as some industries have poisoned our air, water and food. While society has agreed to regulate such pollution of air, food and water, governments have always shown little enthusiasm to regulate the use of violence in entertainment products for children. The increasing power of the media on public opinion has inspired such fear on decision makers that when having to choose between child rights and accusation of censorship, none dared putting their political party at risk. This has left the media free to decide what our children will watch, what values will be pushed down their throat and what cruelty will feed their fantasies. George Gerbner used to call the media the Secret Ministers of Global Culture. A handful of big media think they own freedom of the press and that it is their privilege to decide alone what will be aired on the global market. «The media have nothing to tell but a lot to sell». After witnessing the increased amount of violence carried by entertainment products for children, all citizens could ask if we are not letting our children being abused by the media.

Of course, not all TV and other entertainment programs are toxic to children; some informative and even inspiring programs provide positive stimulation and help children and teens to understand the world. But the fact is that an increasing majority of programs and movies do exactly the opposite. As a result, parents and teachers have searched for, lobbied, petitioned, requested and created ways to protect children against mental manipulation and emotional desensitization. Fortunately, some of these efforts have allowed discoveries to help reduce the impact of pollution of the cultural environment of young citizens.

Chapter 1. Influence of Toxic Culture

Studies since the landmark 1977 LaMarsh Commission Report¹ — where the analogy to environmental contamination was first drawn in Canada — routinely confirm that violent entertainment influences children. In 1995, University of Winnipeg researcher Wendy Josephson, author of *Television Violence: A Review of the Effects on Children of Different Ages*, found more than 650 studies linking real-life violence by children to violence watched on TV.²

In a 2001 study, the Media Awareness Network found that “only 4% of violent programs have a strong anti-violence theme [and] only 13% of reality programs that depict violence present any alternatives to violence or show how it can be avoided.”⁴ And University of Washington epidemiologist Brandon Centerwall estimates that TV violence could account for 50 percent of real-life violence.⁵

Violent entertainment has three kinds of influence on children, depending on their age, whether they watch with adults or peers, and how much they watch. Research revealed that children mimic TV violence because they perceive it as approval for hitting, bullying and humiliating their peers. It also encourages between five and ten percent of victims to accept the treatment they suffer without seeking help. Finally, it reduces empathy in the witnesses, who then prefer ganging with the aggressor instead of helping the victim.⁶ With increasing exposure to violence in entertainment, children become mentally altered and physically inclined to commit, accept, or enjoy watching real-life violence.

1.1. The Industry of Manipulating Children

In recent years, children have been increasingly exposed to violence through toy manufacturers' television programs and by video games. In the early 1980s, the toy industry currently used violence as a marketing ingredient. In addition to advertising through commercials, companies such as Hasbro produced their own TV programs and paid to have them broadcast on weekdays

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and Saturday mornings. In 1984, "GI Joe" carried 84 acts of violence per hour and "Transformers" 81.⁷ This marketing strategy was so profitable that Hasbro reused it in 1989 with "Ninja Turtles," in 1993 with "Power Rangers," and in 1999 with "Pokemon." Their primary purpose was to persuade children to ask parents and Santa Claus to give them Hasbro toys. Most of these programs, like many video games, include fantasies and stereotypes that support an aggressive culture of violence, sexism and war. Stereotypical "real" men are strong, insensitive, and solve conflicts by exterminating their opponents. Women are docile, victims or decorative trophies, incapable of solving problems.

Gary Ruskin, executive director of Commercial Alert, explained at a 2002 World Health Organization conference: «Advertisers use many techniques to sell to youth. Mostly these involve manipulating their needs during the stages of their growth into adulthood. Some of the more common needs that advertisers take advantage of to sell products include youth needs for peer acceptance, love, safety, desire to feel powerful or independent, aspirations to be and to act older than they actually are, and the need to have an identity. Much of the child-targeted advertising is painstakingly researched and prepared, at times by some of the most talented and creative minds on the planet. Ad agencies retain people with doctorates in marketing, psychology and even child psychology for the purposes of marketing to youth. Advertisers (...) sometimes discuss it in terms of the battle over what they chillingly call "mind share." Some openly discuss "owning" children's minds. ... In sum, corporations and their advertising agencies have succeeded in setting up their own authority structures to deliver commercial messages almost everywhere that children go.»⁸

Other aspects of this entertainment-induced social engineering project have also come under scrutiny. Apart from the tendency of video games to arouse aggression, researchers note that these games provide little mental stimulation. Professor Ryuta Kawashima and his research team measured the brain activity of hundreds of teenagers while they played a video game and compared the results with those of other groups who did math exercises and read aloud. The researcher concluded that computer games do not stimulate crucial areas of the brain, leading to underdevelopment and such behavioural problems as violence.⁹ The video game did not stimulate the brain's frontal lobe, an area that plays an important role in the repression of anti-social impulses; it is also associated with memory, learning and emotions. A lack of stimulation in this area before the age of 20 prevents the neurons from thickening and connecting, thereby impairing the brain's ability to control such impulses as violence and aggression. Kawashima's findings are supported by other studies: "Computer games do not lead to brain development because they require the repetition of simple actions and have more to do with developing quick reflexes than carrying out more mentally challenging activities."¹⁰

1.2. Public Airwaves Controlled for Private Interests

Growing public awareness of the dangers of media violence aimed at young people has put pressure on governments to regulate it. In 1994, to prevent such intervention, Canadian broadcasters promised to regulate themselves. Six years later, researchers of Laval University noted that self regulation had failed to reduce violence, and that violence carried by private broadcasters had increased by *432 percent*.¹¹ Two developments during this period helped to neutralize public concern. First, many broadcasters provided funding for media literacy programs, on the assumption that by studying media in class, students would discover that TV violence is not "real". While such programs seem progressive and useful, they have actually been used as a smokescreen to help broadcasters project an ethical image while increasing the intoxication of children. A second development was the V-Chip. Many parents work full-time and cannot always monitor what their children are watching. Devices such as V-Chips were supposed to allow them to block reception of violent programs. The V-Chip system depends on ratings that are made by the broadcasters themselves. The V-Chip has helped to shift responsibility for regulating TV violence away from polluters onto parents. Those who believe that government regulation of media is an attack on freedom of speech see nothing wrong with manipulating children. They consider this form of child abuse as their constitutional right. And Governments, by fear of being bullied, gave control of pollution to polluters.

1.3. Censorship

When citizens request regulation of the use of media violence in cultural products for children, the opponents are prompt to consider it as an attack on «their» freedom of expression. They speak about freedom of expression as if they owned it, as if they bought it. The fact that the media can reach considerable amounts of viewers, listeners and readers makes their views much more familiar to the public who quickly forget that THEY own the airwaves. The use of violence by big media has **nothing** to do with **freedom of speech**. Media Violence is the result of choices made by

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the industry, it is the result of **copyright controlled by the media**. The use of violence to attract more children is motivated by commercial interest.

Mary Megee presented a paper at the St-John's University (NY) International Conference on Violence in the Media in October 1994. She explained why gratuitous violence on TV is a form of censorship by commerce. « In the U.S., most cultural messages are strained through a commercial filter which uses gratuitous violence as an industrial ingredient to keep viewers tuned in, ratings high, and profits up. » The first - if not the only - rule that the big media agree to respect is the market. Their argument is simple: whenever people are ready to watch violent programs, broadcasters have the right to air them and NO government should interfere. For leaders of the industry, the law of commerce is the ultimate and most natural rule. All other rules and laws are viewed as obstacles to their interest and appetite for profits. Health, safety, and happiness of vulnerable citizens never appear on their radar screen. All activists, teachers and parents who have requested regulation of TV programs and videogames for children were rapidly ruled out with the CENSORSHIP stamp for the purpose of hiding the industry's own censorship. In 1997, George Gerbner was Dean Emeritus of the Annenberg School for Communication at University of Pennsylvania and a pioneer of research on television violence. He wrote: « The world that television presents is not a world of creative people with something to tell but a handful of global conglomerates with something to sell. We have monitored that world for over 30 years and found prime time television saturated by an average of 5 scenes of violence per hour. Over 20 scenes of violence per hours fill Saturday morning children's programs. (...) When you can dump a Power Rangers on 300 million children in 80 countries, shutting down domestic artists and cultural products, you don't have to care who wants it and who gets hurt in the process. Mindless TV violence, then, is not an expression of artistic freedom or of any measure of reality. On the contrary, it is the product of de facto censorship: a global marketing formula imposed on program creators and foisted on the children of the world. »

Citizens own the airwaves. Why should these owners restrict themselves to demand that it be healthy, free, and fair ? When any violent program is chosen to be aired, people aware of censorship should always ask how many other helpful programs had to be eliminated to give priority to violent behaviour, language and content. The preference for violence is a decision by somebody, elected by nobody, prisoner of a toxic culture, who knows that the authority expects him to prefer cruelty, aggressivity and hatred. Why did the program selector pick these Ninja Turtles to come and fight in our homes instead of other healthy programs for our child and his folks on our street ? He received money for that. Censorship exists, it is controlled by the industry and millions of children pay the price. And the price becomes higher every year as doses of TV violence keep increasing.

1.4. Purpose of Media Violence

Media violence is used by the entertainment industry for the main purpose of attracting more viewers, no matter their age, damages to their brains or cost for society. When used by providers of entertainment products for youth, media violence has become one of the most sophisticated and cruel form of child abuse. Pokemons, Terminators, Doom, Quake, Basketball Diaries, Grand Theft Auto, Howard Sterns, South Parks, Jackasses, all these cultural products have proven to damage children and teens across the continent. They carry and promote values that help guide and inspire children's attitudes, behaviours, clothing, and the relationships with each other. Eminem, Fifty Cents and Marilyn Manson are the products of the **music industry circulating hate propaganda** against women and cashing profit from it. These singers and characters are often portrayed as rebels. In fact, they are nothing but submissive tools for the ideology of profit. They are slaves, rich and famous slaves, but slaves anyway. They would still wine in their garage if it was not of the industry that gave them a microphone, print their lyrics, sell their albums and promote them on MuchMusic.

Music videos, TV programs and videogames have become the most lucrative child abusive babysitters in North America. Much of their audiences are young people who easily believe that rudeness is an act of courage, of independence and freedom. It takes experience, knowledge, critical viewing skills and awareness to understand that these role models actually teach submission, frustration and anger. Verbal violence, physical violence, sexism, racism and consumerism have nothing in common with freedom and justice, they are the opposite. These cultural products glorify violence, which has been the enemy of humanity for centuries, for millenniums. They glamorize submissiveness of women which has been fought by humanity for centuries, for millenniums. They trivialize verbal humiliations of others as if they were humoristic, acceptable, fun, natural, entertaining. Damages are profound and horrible.

1.5. Sophisticated Form of Child Abuse

When compared to famine, corporal punishment, human traffic, pedophilia, landmines, slavery and torture, at first sight, media violence looks minor. Many children seem to enjoy it and parents can do other things as their child keeps watching TV. When researchers study damages made to children by media violence, they see that television hurts millions of them very deeply and that most damages will affect them lifelong. More and more parents and observers actually consider the use of media violence as a cruel and sophisticated form of **child abuse** for the following reasons.

Since media violence is primarily used in entertainment to attract human beings, particularly the youngest, we need to ask the question: **Why does it work ?** Because human beings can hardly turn their head away when they witness their peers suffering or when they see pain inflicted on them. Using violence in entertainment for children is a very cruel form of child abuse because children **cannot make a difference between fiction and reality**. The process of making that difference starts at the age of 7 and is not over before the age of 13. For many teens, the process is actually completed much later. The Supreme Court of Canada has analysed the issue of children's vulnerability before the age of 13 and the 83 page Irwin Toys Decision is a fantastic media literacy lesson. www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/7b5_publicite/irwin_en.html The use of violent fiction to lure children before the age of 13 is clearly an unacceptable lack of ethics by one of the most lucrative industry of the world. Marketing targeting children has gone from 100\$ million in 1990 to two billion a decade later. That is a 2000% increase. This appetite for reaching children has allowed advertisers to compete and use various forms of hooking ingredients to lure children and put their parents to sleep. And violence is one of them, one of the most offensive and criminal.

1.6. Multiple Victims

Despite children's vulnerability, violence is commonly used by both the entertainment and the marketing industries for commercial purposes. These industries act like predators and use psychology to scrutinize children's needs, hopes, fears, dreams and desires. Increasing the audience means monetary profits in the short term for these industries. But the use of media violence has other enormous short, mid and long term effects for children and for society. Well over a thousand studies have linked television with numerous marketing related diseases (MRD) such as obesity, body image, self esteem, violent crime, physical and verbal abuse, eating disorders, smoking, alcohol, attention deficit disorder and hyperactivity, compulsive consumerism, perilous car driving, and other forms of addiction. Exposure to violent entertainment does not only show and teach how to act violently. In the child's inexperienced brain, it **links pain infliction with pleasure**.

No surprise when a child imitate the Ninja Turtles, the Power Rangers and the Pokemons at school during recess or at home with brothers, sisters and neighbours. As adults, we can all predict that when the child imitates these characters, another kid will experience pain, fear and injuries. The imitator might also hurt himself and get in trouble with teachers and parents. Media violence affects the child exposed to the scene, and the ones who will suffer from his behaviour. Let's agree that violence was certainly not created by the media, but the use of violence in entertainment by the media helped increase the amount, the damages and the pain for millions of children around the world. Does the industry try to prevent damages ? No way ! Every time accusations incriminate them, their answer is simple: raising children is parents' job, not theirs.

1.7. Size of the Effect

Research has proven that the effect of media violence is

bigger than the effect of	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- exposure to lead on children's brain activity,- calcium intake on bone mass,- homework on academic achievement,- asbestos exposure on cancer- exposure to second hand smoke on lung cancer.
Testimony before the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee hearing, by Professor Craig Anderson.	

- Short-term effects: aggression increases immediately after viewing a violent TV show or movie, and lasts for at least 20 minutes.
- Long-term effects: children who watch a lot of violent shows become more violent as adults than they would have become had they not been exposed to so much TV and movie violence.
- Long term and short-term effects occur to both boys and girls.

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Playing videogames have shown to deprive parts of the brain from electric stimulation and to be responsible for the atrophy of the frontal lobe. The frontal lobe is where humans control their impulses. The lack of stimulation at child age will affect humans all their life. « Videogames give them the skill, the will and the thrill to kill » (Lt Col Dave Grossman, co author of «Stop Teaching Our Kids To Kill»).

1.8. Bullying and Crime

- Research also revealed that time exposure to media violence is actually linked with bullying.
http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/7b8_television/Study%20ties%20TV%20time%20to%20school%20bullying.html

- School authorities have noticed that for the last 15 years, violence has hit lower grades.
http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/17_violence/School_violence_hits_lower_grades.html

- Media violence is also linked with later criminal activity as shown by this 17-year study in which 700 young people were tracked down into their adult lives. Hours of viewing were correlated with acts of aggression.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/11_recherches/3%20Articles%20on%20Influence%20of%20Tv.html

1.9. The Social Cost of Desensitization

The most worrying effect of exposure to media violence is desensitization, the reduction of empathy. Massive exposure to violent entertainment has shown to reduce the capacity of children (and their will) to rescue victims or report about them. Many young criminals often show and feel no remorse after committing horrible crimes. Increasing the punishments or hearing their trial in front of a court for adults has no effect. Early desensitization of young humans will carry heavy cost for the coming generation and the future of civilization. Massive exposure to violent entertainment reduces – if not destroys- the value of life and the power of solidarity in our societies.

1.10. Various Responses of Civil Society

All civilized societies show concern about child abuse. This concern also inspired reactions against the use of violence by the entertainment industry. Fortunately, civil society of North America has developed a wide variety of promising practices to protect children from media violence. These practices should lead to increased legislation to ban the glamorization of violence in TV programs for children. Other industries have opposed increased legislation to protect consumers. The automobile industry, the tobacco industry, the meat industry, and many others have spent efforts to deprive citizens and society from protection. The report sent recently to Secretary General of UN about the Global Study On Violence Against Children highlights well over twenty such practices experienced in Canada and in the U.S.

Copy of the report was posted on the Child Right Information Network (CRIN) website.

<http://www.crin.org/violence/search/closeup.asp?infoID=9187>

Among these innovative practices, the SMART Program and the 10 Day Challenge have proven to be among the most efficient to help parents, students and teachers come together and oppose the media culture of violence.

Chapter 2. Promising Practices To Protect Children in Canada

2.1. Legislation Against Advertising Targeting Children Under 13

Such advertising became illegal in the province of Québec in 1976. This type of legislation requires not only courage from political decision makers but also strong support from the civil society. The Consumer's Protection Law forbidding advertising to children under 13 became fully enforced in 1980. The toy industry (Irwin Toys) has challenged this law up to the Supreme Court of Canada arguing that it restricted its own freedom of expression protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights.

The court declared the Québec legislation fully constitutional. The Irwin Toys Decision takes 83 pages to describe pretty accurately (1) sophisticated manipulation techniques used by the marketing industry, (2) why any province in Canada has constitutional legitimacy to protect its most vulnerable citizens, (3) why children need such protection until the age of 13. This legislation made Quebec the first and, still to this day, the only State in North America to protect kids from advertising.

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During the following years, lobbying by advertisers argued that the children of Québec were punished by this legislation since TV networks could not sell advertising time. This lack of income had consequently reduced, they said, the quality and quantity of TV programs for kids. Fifteen years after the law was fully enforced, the Government of Québec asked Professor André Caron, from University of Montreal, to measure the impact of the ruling. The study revealed that programming for children was richer, more diverse and more educational in Montreal, Quebec, compared to Toronto, Ontario, where such protection does not exist. Ruling out advertising targeting kids has proven to be a very efficient and promising practice to diversify TV programs for kids and reduce their exposure to media violence.

The Canadian Supreme Court decision is posted at the address below. Analysis of the Decision gives important strategic insights for decision makers in other countries who will try to legislate and lawyers who will defend the legitimacy of the legislation in court.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/7b5_publicite/irwin_en.html

Commercial Alert campaigns for a similar legislation to ban advertising targeting children under 12. <http://www.commercialalert.org/pbor.pdf>

Lately, the American Psychological Association (APA) requested a similar legislation for protecting children in the U.S. along with a coalition of organizations advocating in favour of children's rights. <http://www.apa.org/releases/childrenads.html>

The Washington Post reported about the APA position.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/7b5_publicite/PUB_Information_or_Manipulation.html

More than 80-percent of U.S. citizens agree that advertising to children under 9 should be prohibited. <http://www.knox.edu/x7232.xml>

2.2. War Toys Campaign.

The war toys collection was organised for the first time in Canada by teachers in the school district of Charlesbourg in 1986. In 1988, PACIJOU and the Centrale des syndicats du Québec, (French Teachers Union, CSQ) organised it again and offered teachers across the province to participate. Well over 25,000 war toys were collected. Other organizations of the civil society agreed to become partners in this Campaign: the School District Federation, the Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale (acronym AFEAS, Women Association for Social Action), the Provincial Federation of Police Officers, etc. Children were promised that the war toys they gave would be recycled in the building of a monument for Peace. Parents supported the Campaign with enthusiasm. The War Toys Campaign helped raise questions in the civil society about the culture of violence in North America.

Why did children own war toys ? The vast majority of the collected war toys had been made popular by a marketing strategy known as « product placement ». The toy manufacturer Hasbro had marketed its products through TV programs known as *GI Joe* and *Transformers*. The company paid privately owned TV Station TVA, in Québec, to air its programs on Saturday mornings for French children. TVA received half of a million dollars per year to air Hasbro's programs. In the U.S., the program was broadcasted by ABC. In 1986, these programs carried a huge amount of violence in homes all across the United States and Canada. They were the most violent programs on the air. According to the International Coalition Against Violent Entertainment, (ICAVE) *GI Joe* carried 84 acts of aggression per hour, *Transformer* 81. The average program for children in the U.S. at that time carried 41 acts of aggression per hour. This is far more than any programs for adults. Children owned these toys simply because they had been manipulated by a toy company using a sophisticated marketing technique. Not surprisingly, Santa Claus and relatives of these beloved children had been manipulated as well. What parents would not want their children to open their Christmas gifts with joy ?

Why did violence have so much success as a marketing ingredient ? Because human beings worry when they witness their peers suffer. This is even more true when the viewers are children. They feel that they cannot turn their eyes away from abused persons, they feel guilty of abandoning the victim. When witnessing pain, humans feel that they should care. Empathy is a basic fiber of humanity, all psychologists know that. But the fact that the scene is watched on television or in a movie puts young viewers in the position of powerless bystanders. Using violence in TV programs for children is a very cruel form of child abuse. What makes it even more cruel is that children learn to see the difference between fiction and reality between the ages of 7 and 13. Psychologists

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know that. Research reveals that even at the age of 13, many cannot clearly see the difference between the two. The use of violence to lure children in TV programs, movies and videogames has been firmly condemned by 60 prestigious psychology and psychiatrists from major U.S. universities in 1999. They requested from the American Psychological Association (APA) to establish limits in the use of psychology to manipulate, harm, exploit, mislead, trick or deceive children for commercial purposes. They require APA to confront the use of psychological research in advertising and marketing to children and promote strategies to protect children against commercial manipulation and exploitation by psychologists. <http://www.commercialalert.org/issues/culture/psychology/commercial-alert-psychologists-psychiatrists-call-for-limits-on-the-use-of-psychology-to-influence-or-exploit-children-for-commercial-purposes>

Has the use of violence helped Hasbro increase the sales of war toys ? The use of violence helped Hasbro increase the sales of GI Joes and Transformers by 700% between 1980 and 1985. The use of violence also helped to sell toys like the Ninja Turtles in 1989, the Power Rangers in 1993 and the Pokemons in 1999. In violent programs for children, we always find the same script. The villains are bad, they make good people suffer. Talking with them has no effect. So the good guys have no other choice and **must** use violence to destroy or chase them away. The leaders of bad guys escape at the last minute and say they will be back to fight the good guys tomorrow at 4 PM. Guess who asks his mom to turn on TV the following day ?

Has the use of product placement been challenged in North America ? The address below will allow access to many articles about the efforts against the use of product placement in the media. <http://www.commercialalert.org/issues/culture/product-placement/editorial-memorandum-fcc-should-require-disclosure-of-covert-commercial-pitches-on-tv>

The War Toys Campaign made the sales of war toys decrease in the province of Québec from 1986 to 1991. A survey conducted by the daily newspaper Le Soleil just before Christmas 1990 showed that stores in Québec city had to ship their violent toys elsewhere to be sold. The War Toys Campaign has proven to be a very efficient way to reach parents and emphasize the importance of protecting children from advertising, from desensitizing them to real life violence, from refusing to use TV as a baby sitter.

2.3. Pedagogical tools for teachers. « Cessez-le-feu » (Cease Fire) was published by PACIJOU in 1987. It gave teachers activities to raise awareness among students about violence and sexism carried by toys and entertainment. GI Joe and Barbie were portrayed as unfair manipulative stereotypes to manipulate children. Research around the production of «Cessez le Feu» gave the authors the opportunity to explore the use of violence in other cultural products such as toys, games, sports, films, videos, songs, music videos and TV programs. These cultural vehicles were scrutinized, monitored and analysed in order to be used as activities for schools. Desensitizing children and teenagers to violence became a multifaceted health issue. The book was highly considered by teachers across the Province of Québec. Proposed activities have shown to be educational promising practices to address the roots of the problem and understand the deep damages of media violence. For teachers using « Cessez-le-feu », raising awareness about media violence became a major public health issue and helped reaching parents.

2.4. Monuments for Peace. In October 1990, two years after the war toys collection, 2 monuments were inaugurated in Montréal and Québec City integrating recycled war toys collected in 1988.

In December 1989, 14 months after the war toys collection and 10 months before the inauguration of the 2 monuments, all North America was shocked by the shooting in University de Montréal. Fourteen female students were killed and 20 wounded. The 26 year old killer shot only female students because he wanted to punish feminists for opening universities to women.

Well over 5000 students from elementary and secondary schools attended the inauguration ceremony of the monument in Québec City. It made the front page in the daily newspaper Le Soleil the next morning. The two inaugurations made the news in all media, including TV news across Canada, thanks to CBC coverage. The media coverage for the fund raising for the monuments and the two inauguration ceremonies have contributed to keep public attention during 2 years, including public support and parents awareness about TV violence. The building of monuments from recycled war toys is certainly a very inspiring and promising practice to help protect children from media violence.

2.5. Virginie Larivière's Petition in 1993. After the loss of her younger sister as victim of murder, this 13 year old girl launched a petition asking the Government of Canada **legislation to make violence illegal in children's TV programs**. After a whole year of campaigning, when presenting one and a half million signatures to Prime Minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney, Virginie made the news all across Canada, and overseas. If Unicef Canada and the S-G want, as they say,

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make actions realized by children to counter violence, Virginie's action is certainly a great example that deserves attention all across the world. On November 20 1995, the Optimist Clubs of the Québec City area hosted 500 persons to celebrate the National Day for the Rights of Children. The banner in front of the audience quoted the Convention concerning the Rights of Children.

Child Rights Convention, Article 17E. States recognize the importance of the media and the obligation to protect children against material dangerous for their well being.

After listening to Virginie Lariviere, the guests had the opportunity to hear the Secretary of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Council (CRTC), M. Keith Spicer, expressing gratitude and admiration for the young hero Virginie, calling her « **Our Joan of Arc** ». It made the front page in the newspaper the next morning.

Further history revealed that the industry lobbyists «convinced» the Government of Canada to give preference for self regulation. Self regulation has clearly proven to be useless for protecting children since violence has not stopped increasing since then. Between 1995 and 2002, monitoring of TV programs by two university researchers from Laval University revealed that violence broadcasted by privately owned TV broadcasters had increased by 432%. Experience showed that the only use of self regulation, TV ratings and the V-chip was to delay any government intervention to protect children from child abuse. Despite the fact that children consume TV well over 25 hours per week, broadcasters are the only providers of goods to refuse any public control over its products despite the enormous and deep risks for the health and safety of consumers. Despite hundreds of cases where children have been influenced by TV to hurt themselves or others, despite hundreds of studies linking TV exposure to violence and crime, broadcasters still argue that it is only parents' responsibility to supervise TV exposure. They intentionally abuse children who (they know) cannot make a distinction between fiction and reality, they constantly search for new ways to attract more of them, they allow the use of psychology to market to children and then say that any wrong doing by viewers is not their fault. They argue that any public intervention would reduce their own freedom of expression. Broadcasters believe that they own freedom of expression and refuse to consider any responsibility about the safety and health of Children. Today's media have hijacked the concept of freedom of expression to allow themselves the right to abuse children.

Nevertheless, petitions requesting the interdiction of violence in children's programs have shown to be a promising practice to gain public support, raise parents' awareness, mobilise children and civil society and express the need for legislation.

2.6. Positive Entertainment Alternatives for Children Everywhere (PEACE). This organisation was founded in 1990 in reaction to the University of Montreal shooting, December 6 1989. On the first year of its existence, PEACE launched an innovative program called the Youth Vote. It was created to help youth develop their critical viewing skills, express their own opinion and channel their parents' opinion up to the Federal Government of Canada. During the 9 following years, hundreds of volunteers members of the Optimist Clubs in Québec, New-Brunswick and Ontario contacted teachers and offered schools to vote using a video (renewed each year) where children could see nominees in the «toxic» and the «positive» categories. Each year, between 30,000 and 50,000 children and parents had the opportunity to practice their freedom of expression by voting for the most damaging and the most valuable production in 1) TV programs, 2) music videos, 3) film videos, 4) videogames, 5) advertising. In each community, after tabulating the votes, Optimist Clubs and schools were invited to put the results of the vote in the mail for the Government of Canada, the CRTC and a major broadcaster.

The mailing every year of the voting results helped to put and maintain pressure on broadcasters and decision makers. It reminded them, year after year, their responsibility to protect children. Each year, the Canadian Heritage Department, the CRTC and the broadcasters received hundreds of letters with the voting results.

In 1997, the « Youth Vote » Program was presented in Cairo, Egypt, at an international Conference on crime prevention. After the presentation, Justice Minister Allan Rock expressed his admiration for this original way to stimulate children's critical viewing skills. The vote, he said, is also a great way to promote democracy among young people ? The Youth Vote is certainly a promising practice to develop critical viewing skills, to maintain pressure on polluters and raise awareness among public health decision makers. In 1997, the creator of the Youth Vote received the Roy C. Hill

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Foundation Award for innovation in education. The Award was under the supervision of the Canadian Teachers Federation and the Federation of (Québec) Teachers Union.

In 2000, the Canadian Teachers Federation and CSQ took over the « Youth Vote » on their own. For the first time, children from all provinces of Canada could participate in the vote. In May 2001, the Toronto Star (daily newspaper in Toronto) covered the launching of the voting results in an elementary school of Ottawa.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/18_vote_jeunes/Youth_Vote_Toronto_Star_Coverage.html

The National Education Association (NEA) Magazine published an article on the Youth Vote.

In February 2003, the Green Teacher Magazine described this innovation in an article:

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/18_vote_jeunes/Art_GreenTeacher_final.htm

Since 2000, PEACE replaced the Youth Vote by a survey to help children raise their viewing skills and develop their own freedom of expression.

2.7. Coalition for Responsible Television (1996-1998). This Coalition was founded by the Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec and the Canadian Teachers Federation. During its short existence, the Coalition presented its own brief to the CRTC hearings in TV violence. The Coalition also reached a wide public and became well known using two promising practices.

A) The Complaint Line 1-900, allowing the public to denounce an offensive program. The plaintiff was billed 3\$ and the Coalition took care of filing the complaint to the Canadian Broadcast Standard Council (CBSC). This procedure had the advantage of avoiding the silencing of decision making by the CBSC and allowing the public voicing of disagreement between the public and the industry controlled CBSC.

B) The following year, the Coalition launched a boycott campaign against ultraviolent TV program "Millenium". The producer and broadcaster had proudly declared in the media that their sordid program would be aired at 10 P.M. on Fridays in order to reach an audience that did not have school the next morning. The Coalition wrote a letter to advertisers inviting them to withdraw their ad and financial support for the program. The majority of them did. The press release announcing the boycott campaign is posted here :

http://www.fradical.com/gratuitous_and_nauseating_storie.htm

The Coalition published the name of the caring advertisers and thanked them for withdrawing their support for the program. It also published, as promised, the black list of those who refused. The results of the boycott is posted here :

http://www.fradical.com/results_of_crtv_campaign_against.htm

[Boycott campaigns are certainly a promising practice, just like the «900 Complaint Line».](#)

2.8. Campaign to Counter TV violence (2003) was launched by the Montréal School Board and the Québec Federation of School Board with the partnership of a dozen organisations representing civil society including **all professionals in the fields of health and education**. The following associations joined in the Campaign : medical profession, pediatrics, psychiatrists, psychologists, teachers, parents, audiologists and orthophonists, psycho educators, professional orientation councillors, church, etc. The launching was announced at a press conference. The press release can be reached here :

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/7b7_televiolence/communiqué_en.html

In May 2003, daily newspapers *Le Devoir* and *Le Soleil* published the following letter undersigned by all organizations involved in the Campaign.

<http://www.ledevoir.com/cgi-bin/imprimer?path=/2003/05/05/26915.html>

Partners requested two measures to protect children :

- 1) The ban of violence in programs for children.
- 2) The airing of ultraviolent movies after 10 PM.

The campaign had 5 components.

A. Petition, in 8 languages, sent to all parents of children attending a public elementary school in Montréal.

B. Resolutions of support by school district authorities, parents' councils in each school, and many organisations from the civil society across the province.

C. A leaflet to all parents of elementary school students. 10 school districts other than Montréal used the leaflet. It can be reached in English at the following address:

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/7b7_televiolence/tvviolence.pdf

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D. Educational activities offered to all Montréal elementary and secondary school teachers to raise their students' critical viewing skills, their capacity of expression and their power of empathy.

E. A fact sheet (with frequently asked questions and answers) intended for decision makers, parents, health and education professionals. This fact sheet raised the importance of this issue for the future of our society.

<http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/campagne/Argumentaire%202005.htm>

All these tools were used during the Campaign and are still available on the Internet.

<http://www.fcsq.qc.ca/Dossiers/ViolenceTV/index.html>

In September 2003, thousands of petitions signed during the Campaign were carried to Ottawa by a delegation of 5th and 6th graders from Montréal. Petitions were delivered to a representative of the Canadian Government. Students were accompanied by representatives of the Montréal School Board, the president of the Québec School Boards Federation and the President of the Québec Order of Psychologists. The day of the ceremony, the following press release was launched:

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/7b7_televiolence/Communique_29_septembre_Ottawa.html

The 2003 Campaign helped hundreds of children and parents take position and act to counter TV violence. The following article gave a voice to children. It was published in the Nouvelles-CSQ Magazine, distributed to all teachers in the province of Québec.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/7b8_television/petition.htm

The «Campaign to Counter TV Violence» has proven to be a very promising practice for bringing together children, teachers and parents along with health and education professionals.

2.9. The « 10Day Challenge » TV and Videogame Free. The Challenge was experienced for the first time in April 2003 in partnership with the Association of Parents desiring the regions of Metropolitan Québec City and Chaudière-Appalaches. It received funding from the Public Safety Departments of both Québec and Canada. The Challenge was first experienced in Ste-Agathe-des-Monts and St-Malachie, in the Province of Québec, and also Russell, Ontario.

On May 21 2003, the Canadian Press (CP) covered the Challenge in St-Malachie and aired the following article across Canada.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/article_cyberpresse_030520.html

In Québec City, at Chanoine-Côté Elementary School, Nouvelles-CSQ Magazine interviewed children and teachers. http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/1_articles/Page29.pdf

The Challenge was reported in the Green Teacher Magazine.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/10_days_challenge.html

Since 2003, the Challenge has been experienced in over 40 schools of Québec and Ontario. Everywhere, the Challenge found huge success, as shown in the evaluation by parents, students, and teachers from 9 elementary schools. The Report posted at the following address was given to the Public Safety Departments of Québec and Canada.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/defi_acp0312/bilan_2003/Le_rapport.htm

In April 2004, the Parents Association launched a 20 minutes video (French) telling the story of the Challenge as it was experienced in 2 schools. The Canadian Observatory on School Violence Prevention (COSVP) posted the following press release in English on its website :

<http://www.preventionviolence.ca/html/Avideo.html>

In all regions or cities where the Challenge was experienced, it received coverage and support by the media. In April 2005, three daily French newspapers covered the Challenge.

Le Nouvelliste told the story in Trois-Rivières, Québec.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/Le%20Nouveliste%20Lancement%20du%20D%C9FI.htm

Le Droit covered the Challenge in Ottawa, Ontario.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/DEFI%20POUR%20LES%20JEUNES.html

Le Soleil made its front page with the Challenge in Québec City.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/Lecole%20Les%20Bocages%20a%20relev%E9%20le%20defi.html

In the Spring of 2005, the Consumers Protection Office added the Challenge on its list of « consuming promising practices » and posted it on its Youth Page.

http://www.opc.gouv.qc.ca/dossier/dossier_themtq_dev_dur.asp#top

2.10. The «10Day Challenge» with teenagers. Commemoration of the 6th anniversary of the Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, Colorado, was the opportunity to analyse the factors around this dramatic event. Such an event deserves better attention than what was presented in the movie « Bowling For Columbine ». The producer Michael Moore tried to show that violent entertainment was not among the factors. We believe that media violence was a major factor and the question was raised in the following article titled « Taking Lessons From Columbine », April 20

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2005.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/1_articles/Taking%20Lessons%20From%20Littleton.htm
The article describes how media education could help prevent teens' violence and youth crime. Also described how one thousand teenagers attending a high school in Montmagny, Québec, reacted to the invitation of turning off TV and videogames for 10 days. Teachers, parents and students evaluated the outcome of this Challenge. Interviews with teenagers who participated in the Challenge were aired all across Canada in French and in English by CBC radio and TV. Evaluation clearly confirms the value of the 10Day Challenge as a « promising practice » with teenagers.

The 10Day Challenge has shown to be a motivating approach, an efficient, and extremely promising practice to mobilise communities in improving child protection from media violence.

2.11. The Action Agenda: A Strategic Blueprint for Reducing Exposure to Media Violence in Canada was published in 2004 by the Office for Victims of Crime, an agency of the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General. This well documented document describes the many and profound damages to children by violent entertainment and makes powerful recommendations to governing bodies of Canada, provinces, teachers and parents. The Action Agenda was posted on its author's website: <http://www.fradical.com/>

Chapter 3. Promising practices experienced in the U.S.

3.1. Student Media Awareness to Reduce Television (SMART). SMART inspired the creation of the 10Day challenge created in Canada, in 2003. The SMART Program was tested in 1998 by Dr. Thomas Robinson in two elementary schools of San Jose, California. The research was reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 2001. Reducing TV and videogames helped reducing verbal violence by 50%, physical violence by 40%.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/SMARTAggressivity.pdf

Dr. Robinson also proved that **reducing TV and videogames also helped reducing obesity, which is the result of another form of aggression by the media against children**: junk food, sedentary way of life (lack of exercise) and advertising. According to the Stanford Study reported by the A.M.A Journal, reducing TV had a significant impact on obesity.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/SMARTObesity.pdf

The SMART Program was made available in 2004 by the Stanford Health Promotion Resource Center (SHPRC) affiliated to Stanford University School of Medicine, CA. Info about SMART is posted on their website. <http://hprc.stanford.edu/pages/store/itemDetail.asp?169>

The SMART Program was successfully experienced in Michigan. In 2004, Principal Mike Smajda learned that one of his first-grade pupils at Lemmer Elementary School had watched "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre." Not long afterward, the boy was playing in a leaf pile with a girl when he suddenly began kicking her in the head. Another boy joined in. "They felt it was part of the game," Smajda said. "They both kicked her until her head was bleeding and she had to go to the hospital." Smajda can't prove the R-rated slasher movie provoked the child but the November 2004 incident reinforced his commitment to an anti-violence program getting under way at his school. It challenged students to do without TV and all other screen entertainment for 10 days, then limit themselves to just seven hours a week. Other schools joined in over the next year. Administrators and teachers say short-term results were striking: less aggressive behaviour and, in some cases, better standardized test scores.

http://www.fradical.com/Michigan_kids_urged_to_kick_tv_habit.htm

The SMART Program was successfully experienced in 8 schools in 2005-2006. The school district was allowed 2.3 millions\$ for sharing the program in 2006-2007. The update about SMART is posted here: http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/Update%20About%20Smart.html

The SMART Program is surely among the most promising practices in North America.

Quote from the update by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, Director of the Killology Research Group. «In September 2006, the Delta-Schoolcraft School District, based in Escanaba Michigan, was the first school district in the world to use the Stanford 'SMART' (TV/video game turnoff) curriculum across the entire district. The pilot study was done in one school in the fall '04. They initiated the curriculum which culminated in a 10-day TV/video game turnoff which **resulted in an 80% reduction in violence in that school after the 'detox' or cold-turkey period.** In the Spring

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2005 semester, most of the district participated in the program. They received a statistically significant reduction in violence and bullying across the entire school district. The five schools who put the program in place before the state standardized tests received a 15% increase in math scores and an 18% increase in writing scores as compared to the seven schools which did not have the program in place at that point. This was the first district-wide application of the Stanford University "SMART" Curriculum, which was demonstrated to be effective at reducing violence in a double-blind, controlled experiment conducted by Stanford Medical School.

This school district has received a US federal government grant to be the national distributors of this information. In October 2006, they will have their fourth international conference to teach educators about the curriculum. All attendees will be provided with the curriculum, and they will be given instruction in the implementation of the curriculum by educators and administrators who have had first-hand experience with it. » More info on this conference: www.killology.com

3.2. The TV Turn-Off Week. Over 70 organizations have partnered with this creative initiative to protect children from TV and videogames. <http://www.tvturnoff.org/tvtowallies.htm>

3.3. Ruling the sale of violent videogames in Illinois. In December 2004, Governor Blagojevich from Illinois launched a website: www.safegamesIllinois.org. Info on the effects of violent videogames is posted and parents can file complaints and give names of stores that sell them to minors. The Governor also created the [Safe Games Illinois Task Force](#) to gather information on the impact of violent and sexually explicit video games, develop strategies for parents, and give recommendations to the Governor. Leaders have listened to parents about what is right for our kids, as opposed to listening to the games industry. "I thank the Illinois Legislators and the Governor for creating and passing the Safe Games Illinois Act," said Mary Ann Topping, Springman Middle School PTA President. "This legislation will help protect our children from the violent and negative influences of these video games. We as parents need support. The SG Act is a step in the right direction."

<http://www.illinois.gov/PressReleases/ShowPressRelease.cfm?SubjectID=1&RecNum=4170>

The Illinois initiative (law + website for parents) should be considered a promising practice.

3.4. California Joins Illinois and Michigan in Restricting the Sale of Violent Video Games to Minors. In October 2005, the Governor of California signed into law a bill restricting the sale and rental of violent video games to minors. Many had expected him to veto the bill (he had worked to defeat the bill before its passage by the California legislature), but, in the end, the governor bowed to public pressure. In signing the bill, California joined Illinois and Michigan, who recently adopted similar legislation. Considering that the courts have traditionally ruled against bills such as these, their passage is all the more remarkable and a testament to the growing public outrage against the violent media being marketed to children. The [Child-Responsible Media Campaign](#) worked to ensure the California bill's passage. The Entertainment Software Association intends to file a lawsuit in California against the enactment of the law, just as it has in Illinois and Michigan. The case will be appealed, probably all the way to the Supreme Court. So it will still be awhile before children benefit from the protections these laws offer. Nevertheless, their passage represents an important victory milestone in the ongoing struggle to protect children from commercial exploitation.

The videogame industry opposes any ruling of its products. The AMA faced powerful lobby of child abusers in California when asking for videogame labelling. Many video games are not appropriate for children, encouraging violence, aggression and deviate activities; the video gaming industry has failed to police itself and accurately reflect those videos that are more appropriate for mature audiences in their current self-chosen rating system. A bill addressing this problem recently failed to receive enough votes in the California State Legislature due to aggressive lobbying by the video gaming industry. The bill, which was strongly supported by the California Psychiatric Association, will be brought back to the Legislature this legislative session by the author. The American Medical Association will actively campaign so that these videos will be made available for purchase by adults only. The AMA supports all other appropriate measures to address and reduce television, cable television, and motion picture violence.

http://www.fradical.com/New_AMA_policy_on_video_games.htm

As mentioned by Unicef Canada, additional legislation is certainly among promising practices. But **legislation alone will show to be impossible** if there is no mobilization of the civil society to counter the enormous power of the media, the videogame industry in this case. That shows why other promising practices mentioned in this report need to be known and used if any legislation to protect children from media violence has to become reality one day.

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3.5. Independence of Media Education

The media need to prevent critics and blame for the increasing youth's violent crime rate in the U.S. and Canada. During 3 decades, organizations were created to produce «educational material» with the financial contributions of big media. Naturally, the funding helped keep blame away from the polluters and prevent accusations of child abuse. Regularly, North American schools receive free kits, including «educational» tools belittling the impact of media violence on society. This type of PR by the media keeps repeating that the influence of media violence is a «controversial issue». This myth was strongly denied by the American Pediatrics Association on behalf of 6 associations of health professionals in a «Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children» at the Congressional Public Health Summit in 2000. The health community is unanimous. <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/jstmtevc.htm> Dr. Sut Jhally, from Harvard University, described the industry's strategy this way. « Media literacy is so dangerous to media corporations that they have moved to hijack the movement as it builds momentum. The formation and launch of an independent media education organization must be considered as an important political moment. ».

In order to offer alternatives for such biased educational material and disinformation, academics and educators created grassroots organisations. The following have shown to be independent media literacy organisations.

3.5.1. Action Coalition for Media Education, ACME gathers educators, activists and media reformers, public health advocates, interested citizens, and independent media producers. ACME is dedicated to independence *from Big Media, its influence and its money, *from Corporate media 'literacy' and its PR Machine, *from Big Media's lies about violence, video games, racism, consumerism, debt, gender effects. <http://www.acmecoalition.org/index.cfm>

3.5.2. Alliance for Childhood, www.allianceforchildhood.net works for fostering and respecting each child's inherent right to a healthy, developmentally appropriate childhood.

3.5.3. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, <http://www.aacap.org/>
Purposes: promotion of mentally healthy children, adolescents and families through research, training, advocacy, prevention, comprehensive diagnosis and treatment, peer support and collaboration.

3.5.4. Commercial Alert. Its mission is to prevent the use of commercial culture from exploiting children and subverting the higher values of family, community, environmental integrity and democracy. It addresses the following issues: culture, education, government, health. <http://www.commercialalert.org/>

3.5.5. Center for a Commercial Free Childhood, CCFC. This coalition of health care professionals, educators, advocacy groups and concerned parents counters the harmful effects of marketing to children through action, advocacy, education, research, and collaboration. It supports the **rights of children** to grow up – and the **rights of parents** to raise them – without being undermined by rampant consumerism. CCFC is headquartered in Boston. <http://www.commercialexploitation.org/>

3.5.6. Media Education Foundation, (MEF), is a nonprofit organization devoted to **media** research and the production of resources to aid educators. <http://www.mediaed.org/>

3.5.7. Media Literacy.com, www.medialiteracy.com. ML is designed to increase awareness of the need for media literacy and the many resources available for teaching it.

3.5.8. New Mexico Media Literacy Project, provides media literacy CD-ROMS, videos and curricula that are used in thousands of schools, worldwide. www.nmmlp.org

3.5.9. Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment, TRUCE, Produces an Annual Toy Action Guide, a Media Violence Guide, «TV and Your Child» in English and Spanish. <http://www.truceteachers.org/>

Chapter 4. Media Violence IS an Act of Aggression

The following chapter is mostly an excerpt from the Consultation document prepared for Unicef Canada by Madame Katherine Covell. Unicef Canada was mandated by UN's Secretary General to produce a North American Regional Consultation Document for the Global Study on Violence Against Children. Chapter XI of the consultation document is titled «Violence in the Media», pages 33-39. The entire document is posted here: http://www.violencestudy.org/IMG/pdf/Desk_Review.pdf

(Please note that the summary, the underlined and the comments are by EDUPAX)

Children across North America are exposed to significant amounts of violence through the media. In defense of the pervasiveness of violence in the media in North America, the entertainment industry often has asserted that the amount of violence in the media merely mirrors the reality of violence in society (e.g., West, 1993). A comparative analysis of media violence and real-world violence by film critic Michael Medved (1995) demonstrates well how untenable such an assertion is. As Medved noted, if the murder rate presented during an average evening of television was real, "in just 50 days everyone in the United States would be killed and the last left could turn off the TV." (pages 156-157).

According to the National Television Violence Survey (Wilson et al, 1997; 1998), 61% of television programs (excluding the news) contain violence. In them, aggression is used as an entertainment device. Violence is glamorized and trivialized; it often involves humor, and rarely is it accompanied by negative consequences. Violence is even more pervasive and insidious in video games. Eighty-nine percent of 70 top-selling games contain violence with almost half being serious violence against other game characters. Moreover, in 41% of the games violence is necessary for the protagonists to reach their goals, and in 17%, violence is the major focus of the game (Children Now, 2001). In fact, success in many video games is dependent on the choice and use of violent strategies (Funk et al, 2004). It is important also to note that technological advances have increased graphic capabilities. Since the mid 1990s, violence in video games has become increasingly realistic (Gentile et al, 2004). Children have a daily diet of such violence. Statistics from the U.S. indicate that virtually all families with children have at least one television set, and that most subscribe to cable or satellite TV. The majority of children have a television set in their bedroom. Most families also have at least one VCR or DVD player, a video game system, and a computer (Anderson et al, 2003). A survey of Canadian children shows a similar pattern of media accessibility with almost half the children reporting a personal TV set and 35% their own VCR (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2003). In North America, children from infancy to age 6 years spend more time consuming entertainment media than they spend reading, being read to, and playing outside combined (Rideout et al, 2003). School-aged children spend more time consuming entertainment media than in any other activity other than school and sleeping (Roberts et al, 1999; Stanger & Gridina, 1999). Estimates range from an average of four hours each day (Woodard, 2000) to 6 or 7 hours a day (Gentile & Walsh, 2002; Roberts & Foehr, 2003), most of which is spent watching television (Roberts & Foehr, 2003). The extensive presence of violence in the entertainment media, together with the high rates of child exposure to it, has stimulated much discussion and much research about its impact. After decades of debate there is now a general consensus that media violence is a risk factor that, like other risk factors, interacts with characteristics of the child, the family, and the community, in contributing to the development of aggressive behaviors, fears, and sleep disturbances. And like other risk factors, the greater the level of exposure to violent media, the greater the likelihood the child will be affected by it. It is by now well documented that exposure to television and movie violence can perpetuate violence by desensitizing the viewer to violence and by increasing the likelihood of aggression. These effects are summarized in a report from an expert panel of media violence researchers that was established by the U.S. Surgeon General in 2000 (Anderson et al, 2003). Desensitization, in essence, implies that the viewer has reduced sympathy for victims, and reduced capacity for emotional arousal in response to violence. Increases in physically and verbally aggressive thoughts, emotions and behaviours are the short-term effects of exposure to media violence. Longitudinal studies indicate that frequent exposure to violent media in childhood is linked with adult aggression including physical assault and spousal abuse. Watching violent television in childhood has been identified as one of the most salient predictors of youth violence (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001), and of adult violent criminal behaviours (Johnson et al, 2002). Less frequently researched, but clearly very important to healthy child development are findings showing that exposure to violent television induces fears, anxieties, nightmares and other sleep disorders (Cantor, 2002; Owens, et al, 1999; Singer et al, 1998). The need for and the importance of research in this area is underscored by the increasing amount of violence in televised news and the paucity of information on its impact on children (Walma van der Molen, 2004). The limited evidence available shows that although only few children watch TV news, those that do report increased worries and fears for personal safety (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2003). Compared with the decades of research into the effects of television violence, the research on the impact of playing violent video games is in its infancy. At this time there are no long-term studies of the impact of playing violent video games. However, the research that has been undertaken suggests that the effects are comparable with or more intense than are those of televised violence. Playing violent video games decreases empathy and helping behaviours; it increases aggressive thoughts and feelings, and it promotes attitudes accepting or supportive of interpersonal violence (Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Funk et al, 2004). In particular, effects have been found in schools. Adolescents who play violent video games show a greater than average frequency of arguing with teachers and of becoming involved in physical fights (Gentile et al, 2004). Not surprisingly, they also show poor academic performance. As the body of research in this area grows, and as graphics continue to become increasingly realistic, we might expect the impact of playing violent video games to be more profound than that of the more passive activity of observing violence in television and movies. The

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video game player is both actively and intensely involved in creating, directing and controlling the levels and type of violence perpetrated on the character, and is reinforced for successful acts of violence (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Funk et al, 2004; Sherry, 2001).

A number of concerns have been expressed about children's and adolescents' access to the Internet. Although most young people appear to use the Internet for social purposes, email and chat rooms (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2001), the Internet is an unregulated and readily available source for all types of information including how to obtain a gun or build a bomb. Overall, however, at this time the data in these newer forms of media are neither clear nor consistent enough to draw conclusions. What we can identify are factors that moderate between exposure to violent media and its effects.

Comment by EDUPAX. Surprisingly, Unicef Canada does not mention the increase of pornography as a risk factor for children. Many children have access to pornography on the web. Many adults watch images with children being tortured and abused, which increases the probabilities of acting out by pedophiles and increases the danger for kids. Also, the UC document does not mention websites and chatting conducted by pedophiles, as reported by police and Interpol.

Especially Vulnerable Children

We first note that there are no apparent sex differences in the likelihood that children will be affected by media violence. In contrast to studies from the 1970s, recent research indicates that both males and females may be affected by media violence, although some sex differences do emerge. Girls generally prefer fantasy violence and boys generally prefer human violence; both are attracted to comedic violence (Cantor, 1998; Funk & Buchman, 1996). For vulnerable girls, exposure to media violence in childhood predicts the use of indirect aggression in young adulthood – e.g., lying and stealing with the intent to harm others. For vulnerable boys, exposure to media violence in childhood predicts the use of more direct physical aggression (Huesmann, et al 2003). Although children generally appear to enjoy violent entertainment media (Anderson et al, 2003), some children are especially likely to be affected by it. For those who are vulnerable, media violence may be (1) a short-term precipitating factor for the imitation of the violence observed, or (2) a long-term predisposing factor for aggressive behaviours that are learned through desensitization and observational learning (i.e. learning that the world is a hostile place and that aggression is an acceptable and effective means to social problem solving) (Huesmann et al, 2003), or (3) an agent of intensification of fears and anxieties (Cantor, 2002; Owens, et al, 1999; Singer et al, 1998).

Exposure to violent media has its greatest effect on children who are already at risk for emotional and behavioural difficulties. The research has identified the following mediators between violent media and aggressive behaviours: existing aggressiveness or antisocial tendencies (Anderson et al, 2003; Funk et al, 2002; Gentile et al, 2004), high levels of sensation-seeking (Slater, 2003), low levels of empathy (Funk et al, 2002; 2003), a history of physical abuse (Coie & Dodge, 1998) and poor self-concept (Funk et al, 2002a). Children with emotional difficulties (Funk et al, 2002) are more likely to experience increased fears and anxieties from violent media. In addition, low levels of parental supervision are associated with a variety of problematic outcomes for children who consume violent media (Gentile et al, 2004). As a group, these findings suggest that children with externalizing or internalizing behaviour difficulties are those most vulnerable to exposure to media violence. In turn, those most at risk for behaviour difficulties are those with poor socialization histories. There is some evidence of biological predisposing factors, but the preponderance of evidence shows family variables to be the dominant force in the development of behaviour difficulties. In essence, children who experience parental neglect, abuse, inappropriate punishment, harsh physical punishment, marital discord, parental depression, or parental substance abuse, are at risk for the development of behavioural and emotional difficulties (Kearney, 2003). The more media violence to which such children are exposed, the greater the likelihood they will be affected by it. That said, it is important to note that most aggressive children do not become violent adults (Anderson et al, 2003). Nonetheless, a significant portion do (Tremblay, 2000; Tremblay et al, 2004). Lessening the risk factor of media violence clearly is important.

Promising Practices (According to the author of the consultation document)

In both Canada and the U.S., efforts to reduce children's exposure to violence in the media have centered on facilitating parental monitoring through the provision of ratings systems and the V-chip technology, increased programming regulations, and parent and child media education. None alone has proven successful. A multi-faceted approach likely is necessary.

Ratings systems in the U.S. have been evaluated and been shown not to be very useful. Ratings for video games appear to be particularly useless. The system for rating video games has resulted in most being labelled as suitable for everyone, despite the pervasiveness of violence within them (Funk et al, 2003). Parental use of video game ratings is rare. 90% of teens say that their parents never check the ratings. Ratings for television programming appear to be under-used also. 32% of 10 – 17 year-olds said that their parents used the television ratings systems, 14% of parents could define 9 of 11 television rating symbols, 22% of those with children under the age of 10 years were able to name the ratings. In Canada, very few parents monitor what children watch (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2003).

A more fundamental flaw in the television rating system has been identified (Kunkel et al., 2000). First, it is noteworthy that news or sports, both full of violence, are not subject to ratings. In Canada, ratings are similar – the potential viewer is informed as to the nature, type and extent of violence. In both Canada and the U.S. children's programming is categorized primarily on the basis of the program-maker's intentions and the anticipated impact of the material on a child. The U.S. 'TV-Y' category, for example, is rated as suitable for all

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children and not expected to frighten young children. There is no information about the presence or type of violence. In Canada, the rating of 'C' is given for programming intended for children under the age of 8. Many younger children have difficulty differentiating the imaginary from the real, and 60% of all children's programs contain some violence. The V-chip technology is dependent upon clear ratings.

The V-chip is supposedly a parental control technology. The intent is to allow parents to block the child's access to inappropriate programming on the basis of ratings. When ratings are ineffective or misunderstood, the technology is of little value. Evidence shows that parents are unaware of the V-chip technology. Moreover, in Canada, parents must pay an additional fee for the V-chip from their cable providers. Because of such difficulties, the V-chip has shown to be an unsuccessful social experiment (Huesmann et al, 2003). The V-chip and the ratings did not stop child access to violent entertainment.

Children's Television Act. The use of ratings and V-chips represents efforts to balance free-speech concerns with the need to protect children from exposure to violence. An alternative approach is seen in the U.S. with the Children's Television Act (CTA) of 1996. Rather than attempting to ban programming expected to have a negative effect on children (bans tend to be resisted under free speech concerns), the CTA requires broadcasters to provide particular amounts of informational and educational television for children. The impact of the Act is described well by Calvert and Kotler (2003). The CTA's guidelines were useless to protect children. Broadcasters themselves decided which programs were educational or informational. Researchers soon identified distorted and inaccurate classifications. For example, GI-Joe was described by one broadcaster as educational and informational.

Comment by EDUPAX. As witnessed in Canada, strengthening of the CTA guidelines has given little improvement since the amount of violence carried by private broadcasters has shown to increase by 432% in Canada between 1995 and 2001. If so much violence finds its way up to Canada, it would be hard to believe that the situation is different in the US. English Canadians watch U.S. TV 75% of the time. French Canadians watch Canadian TV 75% of the time.

Increased legislation also has been recommended for reducing the marketing of violent entertainment to children. A U.S. Federal Trade Commission survey shows that the entertainment industry routinely markets products to children that their own ratings deem inappropriate for children. In addition, children under the age of 17 years frequently are able to purchase tickets for movies, music recordings and video games that are labelled as suitable only for adults (FTC, 2000). Overall, data show that the Canadian approach of encouraging industry self regulation is insufficient. Legislative changes are needed. Complement regulations with parent and child education is also needed. Families are important in reducing the harmful effects of media violence. The majority of children up to age 12 believe they should be protected from television programs, Websites, and video games that are disturbing or frightening (Media Awareness Network, 2004). Parents should 1) avoid purchasing toys that promote imitative play of violent programming, 2) monitor their children's video game habits, 3) and co-view and comment on televised violence.

Comment by EDUPAX. If there is going to be any attempt by Governments to legislate, all successful efforts must be prepared by energetic civil society mobilisation. Media have become so powerful to influence public opinion that Governments fear to intervene. Solid coalitions of grassroots organisations, activists, parents, health professionals, education professionals, can succeed where political deciders alone will fail. This reminds us that actual legislation efforts require the active and organized support of civil society.

Education. But these interventions require knowledge and motivation. Parents exert little control over their children's consumption of media, violent or otherwise (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2003; Gentile & Walsh, 2002). Knowledge of the harmful effects of media violence is lacking among most parents (Cantor, 2002). Parents also seem unaware of the amount of exposure to violence their children experience through television watching, the Internet and through video games (Funk, et al, 2004; Gentile & Walsh, 2002). **Education in each of these areas is needed.**

Definitions of Violence

Is defined as physical, psychological (psychosocial) and sexual violence to children through abuse, neglect or exploitation, as acts of commission or omission in direct or indirect forms (with an emphasis on intentional violence), that endanger or harm the child's dignity; physical, psychological, or social status; or development.

General comment by EDUPAX about Chapter XI of Unicef's Consultation Document

Unicef Canada is totally justified to consider media violence as a form of violence against children and to recommend increased legislation. In the process of globalization, legislation is often presented as a useless and negative way to solve problems. The problem here is that the entertainment industry is also owned or controlled by media that sends us the news. When deciders finally agree to prepare increased legislation, let's take care of who will inform our fellow citizens. Will should not let the media portray responsible legislators as censors and enemies of democracy? That is why the promising practices developed in Québec, Canada and in the U.S. deserve to be circulated and experienced in other regions and countries.

Ratings systems of programs by producers is useless. Just like the V-Chip, the ratings did not bring any positive results. Where experienced, parents found only deception. The ratings have

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given little or no protection to children from media violence. Producers who gave ratings have constantly tried to belittle the gravity of their own child abuse and denied any responsibility for protecting children.

The V-chip was a disastrous solution for child protection. It helped broadcasters avoid their responsibility and delay any intervention by the government. Eight years after self regulation, 85% of violent scenes were aired before 9 PM, compared to 53% before SR (1994). The V-Chip helped broadcasters to transfer responsibility on parents only allowing polluters to increase the toxic doses. Parents alone should now deserve the blame. Calling the V-chip a promising practice is unjustified from an ethical point of view.

While some excel at blaming parents for using TV as baby sitter, TV itself keeps trying new strategies to attract more children, using more sophisticated tricks, techniques and tactics to capture their attention and increase their addiction. Peer pressure is one of them.

Most practices described in Chapters 2 and 3 above have proven to be promising, efficient, motivating practices for parents children and teachers as well. They deserve to be known. Children spend more than 25 hours per week in front of the small screen, whether we like it or not. It is time for action. Children need protection from predators and our hope is that the practices described above will soon help the civil society mobilize to protect children from media violence all around the world.

Chapter 5. Evaluation of the 10Day Challenge By Parents, Students and Teachers

Evaluation by 6 elementary schools 2003-2004	Evaluation in one high school, April 2004
<p>In 2003-2004, 20 elementary schools in Quebec and Ontario offered students to turn off TV. Tabulation of participation revealed that 1354 students succeeded in saving 19377 hours of TV and videogames. In 6 of these schools, parents, children and teachers evaluated the benefits. The following evaluation is based on answers from 365 students, 27 teachers and 247 parents in April 2005. Students spent an average of 7 days away from the tube. Girls succeeded in turning off one day more than boys. 30% of children kept their TV turned off completely for the whole 10 days.</p> <p>Useful ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 70% of students found the Challenge «very or quite» useful, - 76% of parents found it «very or quite» useful, - 66% of teachers found it «very or quite» useful, <p>Benefits</p> <p>Time spent in front of the tube deprives children from time to develop social skills. What happened during the turn-off ? The Challenge has shown to increase,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - physical activity (62.2%), - time spent with parents (58.5%) - time spent with friends(45%), - helping at home (44.4%). - relationship with brothers and sisters(31.8%), - humor (30.2%) <p>Answers show that social relations and family ties</p>	<p>Only one high school has participated in the Challenge so far. All 1000 students participated in 3 workshops and were offered reasons to participate in a strike against the broadcasting, advertising and marketing of violent entertainment. 522 students participated in the evaluation, 168 parents and 32 teachers.</p> <p>Teens succeeded an average of 4.8 days.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 78% of students aged 12-16 say they participated in the Challenge. - 6% succeeded in turning off TV and videogames completely for 10 days, - 23% reduced consumption by 75%, - 36% by half and - 35% by a quarter. <p>Useful ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 80% found the Challenge very or quite useful. - preparation reached all students, including non participants; media literacy workshops helped them obtain some benefits anyway. - Two thirds of parents found the Challenge very or quite useful. - All teachers (100%) found the Challenge very or quite useful. - 86.2% of staff considered the profit very or quite important. <p>Benefits</p> <p>TV and videogames deprive teens of time that they could use to develop social skills. Self deprivation of TV had an impact on their quality of life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical activity increased (50%), <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 45% of students increased time spent with friends. - 25% spent more time with parents and increased help for tasks at home.

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<p>were influence positively. Participating families have observed :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Closer relations between parents and children, (more time together, encouragements to turn-off, help with home chores) - Improved relations between brothers and sisters, - Better relationship between school and community, - Community mobilisation to support children, - Reduced exposure to TV and videogames after the Challenge. 	<p>Influence of TV. 76% of parents say that they are conscious of it.</p> <p>New dynamics in the school. 63% of teens say that the Challenge improved it. Majority were girls. This element was the <u>2nd most improved</u> by the Challenge.</p> <p>New dynamics in the community. 58% of teens say it improved, mostly girls. It was the <u>3rd most improved element</u> witnessed during the Challenge.</p>
<p>Critical viewing skills. According to 52% of students, it is better or much better. This makes it the <u>3rd most positive benefit</u> in ES. 80.3% of parents, TV and videogames influence children « much or quite ».</p> <p>According to teachers, 100% say that their students' viewing skills have improved.</p>	<p>Critical viewing skills improved for 65% of teens, mostly girls. <u>This is the most improved element</u> among HS students. Six parents out of 10 (59%) say that they witnessed the improvement of their child's viewing skills. 9 teachers out of 10 say the same.</p>
<p>Violence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At home. Decrease of verbal violence witnessed by 54.7% of students. <u>This is the most important benefit from the Challenge.</u> Decrease of physical violence was witnessed by 54.2% of students. This makes it <u>benefit no 2.</u> - At school. Decrease of physical violence witnessed by 44% of students. Decrease of verbal violence witnessed by 40.5% of students. 	<p>Violence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At home. Verbal violence decreased say 39% of answering students, 38% say the same for physical violence. That is more than one third. - At school. Verbal violence went down according to 27% of students, 32% say the same about physical violence.
<p>Comments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decrease of violence seen by all 3 partners (students, parents and teachers) was significant for both physical and verbal violence, at home and at school. - Decrease of verbal violence has been observed by children <u>more at home</u> (54.7%) than at school (40.5%). Similar result with teens (39% versus 27%). - Decrease of physical violence has been observed by children <u>more at home</u> than at school (54.2 versus 44%). By teens (38 versus 32%). - Evaluation focused more on the sense of security than the actual number of aggressions. The Challenge has ameliorated that sense for 50% of children and 32% of teens. 	
<p>Repeating the Challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Half of student (52.3%) say yes. - Over 2 thirds of parents (69.1%) say yes. - 2/3 of teachers say yes. 	<p>Repeating the 10Day Challenge</p> <p>72% of students say yes. That wish is stronger in high school compared to elementary schools. The majority who want to repeat are girls (222/371). The majority of those opposing are boys (73/141). More vulnerable to violent entertainment ? Pedagogical approach should focus more on the influence of violent entertainment on masculinity. 8 parents out of 10 (79%) recommend other schools to try it. The strongest support for repeating the Challenge came from teachers (89.7%). Complete analysis of the 10Day Challenge in a high school: (10)</p>

The fact that the Challenge is decided by parents helped in the success. The Challenge is (and should) be presented as an adults' mobilisation to support children's decision and motivation. The Challenge has created a precious opportunity to value the Family Government.

The involvement of communities increases the reputation of schools and the children's sense of belonging and pride. Since the challenge is perceived as an Olympic performance, communities express admiration and support for students and that feeds youth's self esteem.

Surprisingly, during and after the 10Day Challenge, students find themselves in the middle of a media coverage, particularly on TV. Newspapers, broadcasters and magazines rush to cover their effort and performance ...positively. In areas where poverty is common, the media usually come to report about crimes and fights. This time, when students organize to stand up against the small screen addiction, they attract attention and admiration on their neighbourhood. All principals agree to consider the Challenge as an empowering exercise with parents, students, staff and the whole community.

The 10Day Challenge is great news for all North American parents who question exposure to media violence. It was inspired by the SMART Program from Stanford University, California. Success obtained with SMART in Escabana, Michigan, should be known all across North America.

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Teachers will also appreciate this innovative approach to violence prevention. The reduction of exposure to TV and video game violence has shown to be a very efficient way to prevent violence and bullying. All schools in North America should be informed. Many TV stations reporting about the 10Day Challenge made interviews with students, parents and teachers. All media expressed support, showing that they also can actually contribute to youth violence prevention.

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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.
http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/3_criminalite/violent_youth_crime_rising.html
- (2) Data about youth crime and links about the influence of TV violence are available in French from the Quebec School Board Federation. www.fcsq.qc.ca/Dossiers/ViolenceTV/doc/argumentaire.doc
- (3) Le Monde diplomatique, Malaises dans l'éducation, November 2001:
www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2001/11/DUFOUR/15871?var_recherche=t%E9I%E9+violence
- (4) "The Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children" - Joint Statement to the Congressional Public Health Summit, 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>
- (5) « How TV Violence Affects Children », TV Violence Fact Sheet from the Kaiser Family Foundation.
<http://www.kff.org/content/2003/3335>
- (6) Tools prepared by Dr. Tom Robinson are known as the SMART Program, "Student Media Awareness for Reducing Television". <http://hprc.stanford.edu/pages/store/itemDetail.asp?169>
- (7) Dr. Robinson's **article about aggressiveness** published by the Journal of the AMA.
http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/SMARTAggressivity.pdf
- (8) Dr. Robinson's article about the **impact of TV reduction on obesity** :
http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/SMARTObesity.pdf
- (9) The Challenge has been experienced in April, November and January 2003 with success. It can be done anytime during the school year, after adjusting with teachers planning. It is recommended to be held to fit with the TV-Turn-Off Campaign in the U.S., in the 2nd half of April. Information about the 10 Day Challenge and material to organize it in your school :
http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/4_defi/10_days_challenge.html
- (10) Complete analysis of the 10Day Challenge in Louis-Jacques-Casault High School, in Montmagny, Québec, Canada: http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/1_articles/Teens%2010Day%20Strike.htm