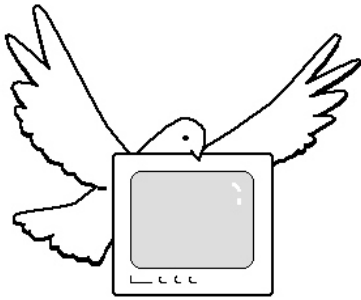


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Promising Practices to Protect Children From the Increasing Power of Big Media

Civil society in North America has developed strategies to oppose child abusing techniques used by the marketing industry. The struggle to reduce the influence of advertising and violent entertainment on kids and teens has led to victories that have obtained little or no coverage by the press.

Introduction

Over the last 40 years, while some industries polluted our air, water and food, the marketing industry increasingly poisoned children's cultural environment. After decades of efforts by civil society, governments have been forced to regulate pollution of air, food and water. But few governments have shown capacity to regulate the use of marketing targeting children. The increasing power of the media on public opinion has inspired such fear on decision makers that very few dared taking action. This has left the industry free to decide what children will watch on television, what products will be offered to entertain them, what strategies will be used to manipulate their wishes, desires and values. With concentration of ownership, less than 10 conglomerates control 85% of all media. (1) These conglomerates have become the «hidden Departments of Global Culture». (2) They control information, which gives them the privilege to decide what will be marketed to children. After witnessing the increasing amount of insidious and sophisticated advertising carried by television, more citizens have searched for and experienced ways to protect children from the media. The increasing power of the media over children has inspired resistance from parents, teachers, child rights advocates and citizens in all regions of North America. (3) Some underreported promising practices have been experienced in Canada and in the U.S.

The Purpose of Television

Television does not exist primarily to inform and entertain. Television is basically a commercial industry that sells spectators to advertisers. Patrick Le Lay, President and Director of French TV network TF1, declared in 2004 that the role of television is essentially to «sell brain time to Coca-Cola». (4) To maximize benefits, broadcasters constantly search for various ways attract and sell more spectators to advertisers who will then agree to pay more to reach them. This type of business is even more worrying when spectators for sale are children. (5) Advertisers have hired doctors in psychology (6) to learn how to attract children, how to keep them glued and addicted to the tube, how to portray their desires into needs, how to influence their preferences, and teach them how to nag their parents. To understand the importance of advertising for marketers, citizens need to know that commercial messages often cost up to 10 times more to produce than the program we watch despite the fact that they fill only 20% of airing time. In North America today, advertisers spend more than \$20 billion per year to reach children, which represents an increase of 2000% in less than 20 years. (7)

Advertisers use many techniques to influence youth, to manipulate 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. Advertisers battle over what they chillingly call “mind share” and some openly discuss “owning” children’s minds. » (8) Every year, an increasing amount of sophisticated advertising is used to reach children through television programs, movies, videogames and Internet.(9) As a result, parents and teachers have searched for efficient ways to protect children from marketing. Many have lobbied, petitioned, requested. Some of them obtained support from decision makers to adopt legislations. While some abandoned, others have created their own ways to protect children from mental manipulation and emotional desensitization. Fortunately, some of these efforts have allowed progress to help reduce the impact of commercial pollution on the cultural environment and the mental health of young citizens. But most victories have gone under reported.

Legislation Most Efficient Way to Protect Children

In all areas of human production and commerce, the most efficient way to protect children from child abuse by professional marketers is legislation. Whenever pollution of food, water or air increases risks for human health and safety, decision makers are requested to take action to protect the most vulnerable citizens. In the United States as well as in Canada and most countries, a vast majority of citizens support the idea of regulating advertising to children. (10) History has shown that other industries have tried to oppose legislation to protect citizens. The automobile industry, the tobacco industry, the food industry and the oil industry have all spent (and spoiled) tremendous efforts to deprive citizens and societies from protection. The problem with marketing is that the industry accused of abusing children has developed tight commercial links with the industry controlling public information, the media. Therefore, informing the public about child abuse by marketers has become very difficult. Very few countries or states have succeeded in regulating the marketing industry targeting children: Greece, Sweden and Québec are among them.

Legislation to Ban Advertising To Children

The success story in the Province of Québec is interesting since it was realised right here in North America. The law making advertising to children illegal in the province of Québec was a bipartisan issue and was voted unanimously back in 1976. It made consensus from both sides of the legislature. This type of legislation required not only vision and courage from political decision makers, but also strong support from the civil society. Otherwise, it would have been crushed by the media soon after its adoption. By 1980, the rules to make the legislation enforced and clearly understood by the marketing industry and the media were ready. The toy industry --Irwin Toys Limited-- chose to challenge the law up to the Supreme Court of Canada arguing that it restricted its own freedom of speech protected by the Québec Charter of Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights. After spending hundreds of thousands of dollars for lawyers, in April 1989, the industry received the verdict stating that the Québec legislation to protect children was fully constitutional. The judges worded their decision quite clearly and considered that the means chosen by the government of Québec were proportional to the objective.

1) There is no doubt that a ban on advertising directed to children is rationally connected to the objective of protecting children from advertising. There is no general ban on the
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advertising of children's products, but simply a prohibition against directing advertisements to those unaware of their persuasive intent.

2) The ban on commercial advertising directed to children was the minimal impairment of free expression consistent with the pressing and substantial goal of protecting children against manipulation through such advertising.

3) Advertisers are always free to direct their message at parents and other adults. They are also free to participate in educational advertising. The real concern animating Irwin Toys is that revenues are in some degree affected. » (11)

The Supreme Court decision takes 83 pages to describe pretty accurately (a) how children are vulnerable to sophisticated manipulation techniques used by the marketing industry, (b) why any provincial jurisdiction in Canada has constitutional legitimacy to protect children, (c) why children need such protection until the age of 13, d) how marketers and broadcasters are not restricted from advertising to adults. This legislation made Québec the first, and still to this day, 30 years after its adoption, the only jurisdiction in North America to protect children from advertising. This raises a few questions. Why did other State jurisdictions in the U.S. refuse to take action against child abuse by the marketing industry ? (12) Are Quebecers the only nation caring enough for its children to use legislation to protect them from very lucrative and powerful industries ? Whatever the answers, the Canadian Supreme Court Decision is in itself a rich media education lesson. (15) Analysis of the Irwin Toys Decision will provide important strategic insights to decision makers all over the world who will prepare to legislate and to lawyers who will have to defend the legitimacy of a similar legislation in court. Further research is needed to evaluate how the ban of advertising to children also impacted child obesity (16) and other MRD diseases in Québec. Statistics Canada has provided data showing that young Quebecers are less obese than other young Canadians and that Quebecers commit less violent crimes than the rest of Canada. (17)

Lately, the American Psychological Association requested a similar legislation for protecting children in the U.S. along with a coalition of organizations advocating in favour of children's rights. (18) The Washington Post reported about APA's position. (19) Survey conducted in 2006 showed that more than 80% of U.S. citizens agreed that advertising to children under the age of 9 should be prohibited. (20) Commercial Alert campaigns for a similar legislation to ban advertising targeting children under the age of 12. (21)

Has Legislation Reduce Quality Programs for Children ?

During the years following its adoption, while legislation to protect children from advertising was challenged before the courts, intensive lobbying by advertisers argued that children in Québec would be punished by this legislation since TV networks were prevented from selling (brain) time to advertisers. Lack of income would force broadcasters to reduce the quality and the quantity of programs for kids. Prohibition would punish children instead of protecting them. Fifteen years after the law was fully enforced, the Government of Québec decided to evaluate the actual impact of the law. Researcher from University of Montréal was mandated to appreciate the arguments of the industry. Have young viewers rush for U.S. networks ? Have young Quebecers been deprived of «educational opportunity» to become savvy consumers ? Has it been healthy to isolate Québec children from other young North Americans and have they « suffer » to be protected from commercial harassment. (13)

Research compared programs offered to children in two Canadian cities: Montréal, where advertising was illegal, and Toronto, where «freedom» existed. The study revealed that programming for children was richer, more diverse, better quality, and more educational in Montreal compared to Toronto. The percentage of young Quebec viewers watching programs from the U.S. never reached more than 10%. (14) The study revealed that ruling out advertising to kids had undeniably proven to be a very efficient and promising practice to protect children. Protection of children was not perfect but still better than other provinces and states.

Child Abusers Portray Themselves as Victims of Censorship

When request to regulate marketing to children is made public, the industry is prompt to report about it as if freedom of expression had come under attack. They quote «experts» who belittle damages to children and advocate in favour of free speech for marketers. The fact that more media now belong to fewer owners allows them to reach considerable amounts of viewers, listeners and readers. Rivalry between media conglomerates suddenly disappears and they rapidly join voices to make regulation look futile or suspicious and make the public forget that public airwaves belong to the public. Accusing child rights advocates of being pro-censorship is flagrant defamation because the use of marketing by big media has nothing to do with freedom of speech.

Opposing Violence as Marketing Ingredient

Let us consider the use of violence as a marketing ingredient. Violence is actually one of the most powerful marketing ingredient to lure children and teens. Gratuitous violence is actually a the result 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 ». (22) The first -if not the only- rule that big media agree to respect is the market's rule. Their argument is simple: whenever people are ready to watch violent programs, we, broadcasters, have the right to air them and NO government should interfere. Health, safety, and happiness of vulnerable citizens never seem to appear on their radar screen. If the transportation industry acted in a similar way, there would be no speed regulation in school areas, no traffic lights for pedestrians, and no interdiction of carrying dangerous chemicals in tunnels. Why would owning a big truck -or even thousands of them- give the owner permission to drive on public streets with no protection for children's health and safety ? Why would the artists who build beds for babies get the «artistic» freedom to fix the bars wide enough for babies to get strangled ? Broadcasting programs unhealthy and unsafe for children is the opposite of freedom. It is the power of the media to abuse vulnerable children. Between freedom of speech and children's safety, all civilized societies are expected to give priority to the most vulnerable.

Parents, teachers and child rights advocates requesting regulation of TV programs for children -and the sale of videogames to children- do not promote censorship, they oppose censorship by commerce. In 1997, the Dean Emeritus of the Annenberg School for Communication at University of Pennsylvania had monitored television for over 30 years. He found Saturday morning children's programs filled by four times more scenes of violence per hour than prime time television. He described this form of censorship. « 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 is (...) the product of de facto censorship: a global marketing formula imposed on program creators and foisted on the children of the world. » (23)

Labelling child rights advocates as enemies of freedom is motivated by the industry's own censorship. Its purpose is to make citizens forget that public airwaves belong to the ...public. The public has total legitimacy to rule child abuse out of public airwaves just like traffic on public streets is regulated to protect children. Big media do not defend freedom of speech, they intentionally impose silence on child abusers opponents. Violent programs are aired because censorship by the industry. The preference for violence is a decision made by somebody, elected by nobody, unknown to the public, whose boss expects him to give priority to cruelty, aggressiveness and hatred whenever it sells. That is why the Ninja Turtles, the Terminator and Fifty Cent have priority to come and fight in our living room instead of other healthy programs ? The broadcaster receives money for making that decision. Profits increase after airing violent programs. Censorship exists, it is controlled by the industry and millions of children pay the price every day because the child entertainer and babysitter also control public information.

Using Violence to Market to Children, Common and Immoral

Since the early 1980's, when toy manufacturers' chose to produce their own television programs to reach children, they used repeated violence as a marketing ingredient. In addition to advertising through commercials, companies produced their own TV programs and paid to have them broadcast on weekdays and Saturday mornings. In 1984, "GI Joe" carried 84 acts of violence per hour and "Transformers" 81. (24) This marketing strategy was so profitable that a toy manufacturer reused it in 1989 with the "Ninja Turtles," in 1993 with the "Power Rangers," and in 1999 with the "Pokemons." The primary purpose was to persuade children to ask parents and Santa Claus to give them Hasbro toys. Product placement in television programs for children include fantasies and stereotypes that support an aggressive culture of violence, sexism and war.

Public Airwaves Used for Child Abuse

Growing public awareness of the dangers of media violence aimed at young people has put pressure on governments to regulate it. In 1995, to prevent government regulation, Canadian broadcasters promised to regulate themselves and promised that gratuitous violence would be aired only after 9 P.M. Seven years later, two researchers who had monitored TV during a whole week, found that self regulation not only had failed to reduce violence but had helped private broadcasters increasing the number of aggressions by 432%. (26) Violence aired before 9 p.m. had gone up from 53% in 1995 up to 88%.

During these seven years, two developments helped to neutralize public concern. First, broadcasters provided funding for media literacy programs, on the assumption that by studying media in class, students would understand that media violence is not "real". Such funding has proven to be a smokescreen to help broadcasters project an ethical image of their industry while increasing toxic doses bombarded at children. A second development was the V-Chip offered to parents working full-time who cannot always monitor what their children watch. The V-Chip was supposed to allow them to block violent programs. The V-Chip has shown to help shifting responsibility for regulating TV violence away from polluters onto parents. Governments had given control of pollution to polluters.

Purpose of Violent Entertainment

Media violence is used by the entertainment industry for the main purpose of attracting more viewers. Consideration for their age is only to take advantage of their vulnerability. When providers of entertainment products target youth, the use of violence is certainly one of the most brutal 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. (27) They carry and promote values that help guide and inspire children's attitudes, behaviours, clothing, language and also, unfortunately, the way they relate with each other. Eminem, Fifty Cents, Marilyn Manson and Snoop Dog are used by the music industry to circulate hate propaganda against women and cash profit from it. Even if these singers and characters are often portrayed in music videos as rebels, analysis show that they are nothing but submissive tools for the ideology of profit. They are slaves, rich and famous slaves, but slaves anyway. After monitoring the music industry for decades, activist Valerie Smith wrote: «These guys 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 MTV. » (28) Music videos, TV programs and videogames have reached the top list of child abusive babysitters in North America. Much of their audiences are young people who naively believe that rudeness is an act of courage, independence, and freedom. It takes experience, knowledge, critical viewing skills and empathy to understand that these role models actually teach submission, frustration, humiliation, and anger. Misogyny, violence, fear, sexism, racism and consumerism have nothing in common with freedom and justice, they are the opposite. They have been enemies of humanity for centuries, for millenniums. How would children know that ? Damages are profound and the cost for society rises everyday.

Television Feeds Other Marketing Related Diseases

The marketing industry has scrutinized children's needs, hopes, fears, dreams and desires. (29) Increasing the audience means enormous monetary profits in the short term for these industries. But media exposure also has enormous short, mid and long term effects on children and 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, anorexia and other eating disorders, smoking, alcohol, attention deficit disorder and hyperactivity, compulsive consumerism, perilous car driving, etc. (30) What other industry can afford to generate so much damages to society without any consequences ? When bacteria ecoli is found in water, meat or spinach, the public is quickly informed about the risks. Why would research about MRDs be deprived of similar coverage?

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. After being informed that the use of violence in entertainment helps increase the pain for millions of children around the world, did the industry try to prevent damages? The answer from the marketers is simple: raising children is parents' job, not theirs. «I know that kid was 10, and yes he walked into my pawn shop, bought a fifth of liqueur and a gun, but where were the parents? It's the parent's job to keep him out! No other industry would try that line. The only other group of individuals who would say that are child abusers: "I know that little girl was 8, but it's the parent's job to keep me away from her." This industry is functioning with child abuser logic. » (31)

Size of the Effect Measured Scientifically, But Hidden from the Public

Research has allowed scientists to measure the correlation between what children watch and how they behave. Correlations have revealed that the effect of media violence is bigger than the effect of exposure to lead on children's brain activity, bigger than the effect of calcium intake on bone mass, bigger than the effect of homework on academic achievement, bigger than the risk of catching HIV when wearing a condom, bigger than the effect of asbestos exposure on cancer, bigger than the effect of exposure to second-hand smoke on lung cancer. (32) Some of these correlations had already been presented by Professor Craig Anderson in

his testimony before the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee hearing in 2001. Some new correlations were confirmed by Dr Doug Gentile in October 2006. Research confirmed short and long term effects. (33)

Video Games are Murder Simulators

«Video game revenues are 10 billion\$ a year, larger than that of television and movies, and increasing. Half of 4th graders play “first person shooter” (FPS) video games. After playing video games, young people exhibit measurable decreases in prosocial behaviours, a 43% increase in aggressive thoughts, and a 17% increase in violent retaliation to provocation. Playing violent video games accounted for 13-22% of the variance in teenagers’ violent behaviour. By comparison, smoking tobacco accounts for 14% of the variance in lung cancer. Active participation increases effective learning. Video games are an ideal environment in which to learn violence: a) they place the player in the role of the aggressor and reward him or her for success at violent behaviour; b) rather than observing part of a violent interaction, video games allow the player to rehearse an entire behavioural script from provocation to choosing to respond violently to resolution of the conflict – this is more effective learning than watching or rehearsing part of the sequence; c) video games are immersive and addictive – kids want to play them for long periods of time to become better. Repetition increases learning.» (34)

Videogames were used by the U.S. army as murder simulators for the purpose of conditioning young recruits to kill without thinking. «Videogames give kids and teens the skill, the will and the thrill to kill». (35) 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 found that video games did not stimulate the brain’s frontal lobe, an area that plays an important role in the repression of anti-social impulses. (36) 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. Professor Kawashima’s findings are supported by other studies. (37)

Media Violence Linked with Bullying and Crime

Time exposure to television is actually linked with bullying. Youngsters who spent a typical amount of time -- about 3½ hours daily -- in front of the tube had a 25 per cent increased risk of becoming bullies between the ages of 6 and 11. This is very clear independent effect of television on children's bullying. (38)

Since 1985, school authorities in the U.S. have noticed that violence has hit lower grades. «In California, from 1995 to 2001, rates of vandalism and other offenses dropped among elementary school students, while assaults nearly doubled. In Philadelphia, the first part of school year 2003-2004 brought the suspensions of 22 kindergartners. Minneapolis schools have suspended more than 500 kindergartners over the past two school years for fighting, indecent exposure and persistent lack of co-operation. Minnesota schools have suspended nearly 4,000 kindergartners, first- and second- graders, most for fighting, disorderly conduct and the like. In Massachusetts, the percentage of suspended students in prekindergarten through third grade more than doubled between 1995 and 2000. In 2001-2002, schools in Greenville, S.C., suspended 132 first-graders, 75 kindergartners and two preschoolers. (39) In the Province of Québec, the number of elementary school students with troubled behaviors has increased by 300% between 1985 and 2000. (40)

Media violence has shown to be 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. Surprisingly, young viewers watching more TV committed more crimes as adults. (41) In Canada, violent crime rate of youth is growing much faster than adults' and in the Province of Québec, violent crime rate of youth is now twice higher than adults'. (42)

Influence of Toxic Culture Censored by the Media

In 1977, the (Canadian) LaMarsh Commission Report (43) made the analogy to environmental contamination. During the 30 years following the Report, thousands of studies confirmed that violent entertainment influences children. In 1995, University of Winnipeg researcher Wendy Josephson found more than 650 studies linking real-life violence to media violence. (44) In 2001, only 4% of violent programs had a strong anti-violence theme [and] only 13% of reality programs presented any alternatives to violence or showed how it can be avoided. (45) Epidemiologist Brandon Centerwall estimated that TV violence accounts for half of real-life violence in the U.S. (46) Violent entertainment has three kinds of influence on children, depending on their age, how much they watch and whether they watch alone, with adults or peers. They mimic TV violence because they perceive it as approval for humiliating their peers, it encourages victims to accept the treatment they suffer without seeking help, and finally, it reduces empathy in the witnesses. (47) With increasing exposure to violence in entertainment, children become mentally altered and physically inclined to commit, accept, or enjoy watching real-life violence. Massive exposure to violent entertainment has shown to reduce empathy, the capacity of children (and their will) to rescue victims or report about what they witnessed.

Hijacking Media Education, Actual Form of Censorship

Investigating the funding sources of major public health groups revealed that after big corporations dump money into their budget, pretty soon, the groups start taking the line of the big corporations. (65) In 2006, MacDonald launched its own exercise program to prevent obesity. The PR strategy helped taking blame away from the impact of junk food on children's health. North Americans face a similar problem with media education. Organizations funded by media conglomerates promote a kind of media literacy that takes blame away from the media and helps put the blame on parents. During 3 decades, organizations were created and financed to help keep blame away from polluters. North American schools receive free kits, including «educational» tools, silencing the impact of media violence on youth and society. (66)

Various Responses of Civil Society

If society wants to reduce the manipulation of children by the media, and regulate violence carried by TV programs for children, increased legislation is necessary. The entertainment industry has actually marketed products to children that their own ratings do not consider appropriate for them. Children under 17 can purchase tickets for movies, music recordings and video games labelled as suitable «for adults only». Self regulation has clearly proven to be nothing but a smokescreen for the industry to keep marketing violence to children. (48) The marketing of violence targeting children contravenes with article 17e of the Child Rights Convention that makes obligation to all States to recognize the importance of the media and protect children from material dangerous for their well being. (49) If there is going to be attempts to legislate, it will require wide mobilisation. Coalitions of parents, health

professionals, education professionals, grassroots organisations and activists will succeed where legislators alone have failed.

Need for Parents Awareness

In 2002, researchers surveyed parental guidance over children's consumption of media violence and conclusion showed that it is weak or absent. Most parents have little or no knowledge of the harmful effects of media violence on their child. Parents are not aware of the amount of violence their children are exposed to on television, the Internet and video games. It is obvious that media education is needed for parents. «Families are important in reducing the harmful effects of media violence. Children themselves believe they should be protected. » (50) They need to know why using TV as a babysitter is perilous.

Developing Critical Viewing Skills

Powerful lobby opposing regulations have inspired some promising practices to protect North American children from media violence. A report sent to UN Secretary General as a contribution to the Study on Violence against Children highlights 20 such promising practices by civil society. (51) Among these innovative practices, the **SMART Program** and the **10Day Challenge** have proven to be very efficient. They have helped parents, teachers and students come together and oppose the increasing power of commercial media.

Student Media Awareness to Reduce Television (SMART)

The SMART Program was tested in 1996-1997 by Dr. Thomas N. Robinson in two elementary schools of San Jose, CA. It consists of 18 lessons for teachers preparing third and fourth graders -and motivating them- to turn off television and videogames for 10 days and to keep consumption under 7 hours per week during the following months. The research reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 2001, revealed that SMART had helped reducing verbal violence by 50%, and physical violence by 40%. (52) The SMART Program was made available in 2004 by the Stanford Health Promotion Resource Center (SHPRC) affiliated to Stanford University School of Medicine. (53) Dr. Robinson also proved that reducing television and videogames helped reducing another very damaging marketing related disease (MRD): obesity. (54)

In 2004-2005, the SMART Program was successfully experienced in Michigan. Principal Smajda can't prove that R-rated slasher movies provoked child aggressions but it 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. (55) 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. (56) The school district was allowed 2.3 millions\$ for sharing the program in 2006-2007.

The Delta-Schoolcraft School District, based in Escanaba, Michigan, was the first school district to use the SMART curriculum across the entire district. The 10Day TV/Videogame turnoff resulted in an 80% reduction in violence. Participating schools also witnessed 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. SMART showed to be effective at reducing violence in a double-blind, controlled experiment conducted by Stanford Medical School. In October 2006, the district had its fourth international conference to teach educators about the curriculum. All attendees were provided with the curriculum and given instruction in the implementation of the curriculum by educators and administrators who had first-hand

experience with it. (57) The SMART Program is surely among the most promising practices experienced in North America to protect children from media violence.

The 10Day Challenge, TV and Videogame Free

The 10Day Challenge was experienced for the first time in April 2003 in partnership with the Parents Association of the Québec City region. The Challenge reached all students in participating schools, from K to 12. For the first year, it received funding from the Public Safety Departments of both Québec and Canada. In May 2003, the Canadian Press (CP) covered the 10Day Challenge in St-Malachie where 100 students were offered to participate. (58) The Challenge was reported in the Green Teacher Magazine. (59) Since then, the Challenge has been experienced in over 50 schools in the provinces of Québec and Ontario. Everywhere, the Challenge obtained huge success, as shown in the evaluation by parents, students, and teachers from 6 elementary schools. (60) In April 2004, the Parents Association launched a 20 minutes video (in French) showing children parents, teachers, and principals before, during and after the Challenge. The Canadian Observatory on School Violence Prevention (COSVP) reported about it. (61)

In all regions or cities where the Challenge was experienced, it received extensive coverage by the media. In April 2005, three daily French newspapers covered the Challenge in 3 major cities of Ontario and Québec. *Le Nouvelliste* told the story in Trois-Rivières, *Le Droit* covered the Challenge in Ottawa, *Le Soleil* made its front page with the Challenge in Québec City. In the Spring of 2005, the Québec Consumers Protection Office added the Challenge on its list of recommended consuming practices and posted it on its Youth Page. (62)

The 10Day Challenge with Teens

In April 2005, commemoration of the 6th anniversary of the Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, CO, was the opportunity to analyse the factors around this dramatic event. Such an event deserves better attention than what was presented in Michael Moore's movie « Bowling For Columbine ». Despite efforts to take blame away from the entertainment industry, the media played an important role in the shooting as shown by further investigations in the lives of the young killers. (63) When the teen students in Louis-Jacques-Casault High School, in Montmagny, QC, prepared for the Challenge, media education showed that it could actually help reduce violence. One thousand teenagers attending the high school were offered to turn off TV and videogames for 10 days and half of them actually participated. Teachers, parents and students evaluated the outcome. Interviews with teenagers who participated in the Challenge were aired all across Canada by CBC radio and TV. Further evaluation confirmed the value of the 10Day Challenge as a « promising practice » with teenagers. The 10Day Challenge has shown to be a motivating approach, an efficient way to mobilize the entire community and improve protection from media violence.

In September 2005, Unicef Canada was mandated by UN Secretary General to prepare a consultation document for analysing violence against children in North America. The document states clearly that additional legislation is certainly among promising practices. (64) But legislation alone will show to be impossible without mobilization by civil society to counter the enormous power of the media, including the videogame industry.

What Parents, Teachers and Students said about the 10Day Challenge

In the school year of 2003-2004, 20 elementary schools in Quebec and Ontario offered media education workshops to prepare students and parents to turn off TV. Tabulation of participation revealed that 1354 students succeeded in saving 19377 hours of TV and

videogames. Students succeeded in turning off TV for an average of 7 days. In April 2004, one high school did the same with its 1,000 students. Two-three weeks after the turn off ended, an evaluation form was given to all students, parents and teachers. In 2005-2006, 10 more schools participated and evaluated their experience. More exercise, more reading, more time with parents, more time with friends, less fights and name calling at school and at home. In some communities, the reduction of verbal violence at home was more important than at school. Teachers noticed that homework was better and attention better in class. All partners say that they want to do it again, including parents, students and teachers.

Impact on the Whole Community

The fact that the Challenge is decided by parents is very important. 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**.

Preparation for the 10Day Challenge seems to be more important than the turn-off itself. Workshops for students, professional development training for teachers, conferences for parents, follow up activities by teachers and promotional activities in the community, all these ingredients help in making the Challenge a success. The involvement of communities in the 10Day Challenge increases the reputation of schools, the importance of education, and the children's sense of belonging. Since the challenge is perceived as an equivalent of an Olympic performance, communities express admiration and support for students and thus reinforcing youth's self esteem and pride.

Surprisingly, during and after the 10Day Challenge, students find themselves in the middle of intense media coverage, including on TV. Newspapers, broadcasters and magazines rush to cover their effort and report to their 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 SMART Program and the 10Day Challenge are great news for all North American parents. Success obtained with SMART in San Jose, CA, and in Escabana, MI, should be known all across North America. Success obtained in Québec and Ontario should be known across the continent as well.

Teachers appreciate this innovative approach to violence prevention. The reduction of exposure to TV and video game violence, along with lessons to motivate children and parents and increase awareness against media violence, have proven to be very efficient ways to prevent violence and bullying in school. All health professionals and education professionals in North America should be informed. By spreading information about these successes, the media can actually contribute to youth violence prevention in the global village.

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Biography

Jacques Brodeur has 30 years experience as a physical education teacher. In 1986, and again in 1988, he directed collections of war toys in schools across the Province of Quebec. Toys were reused to build two monuments for Peace in Montreal and Quebec City in October 1990. In 1987, he helped creating PACIJOU and participated in the writing of «Cessez-le-feu» (Cease-Fire), a teachers' guide to oppose violent entertainment and promote Peace education. He coordinated Peace Education activities for seven teachers unions in the Quebec City area from 1988 to 1999. In 1990, he helped founding PEACE (Positive Entertainment for Children Everywhere) and created the "Youth Vote", an empowering approach to media literacy. The Roy C. Hill Foundation honoured him twice for his pedagogical innovations -the war toys collection in 1987 and the Youth Vote in 1997- both relating to the culture of Peace. In 1996, the Physical Education Teachers Federation of Quebec awarded him its Health Education Award. In January 1997, he co-chaired the (Canadian) Coalition for Responsible Television. In March of 1999, he coordinated a collection of 35 000 shoes from thousands of schools across the Province of Quebec, to challenge the U.S. administration refusal to sign the Ottawa Treaty banning landmines. In January 2001, he became consultant, speaker and trainer for schools in Québec and Ontario. Since August 2002, he coordinated a community mobilization program called EDUPAX to help prevent youth violence and promote Peace education through media education. In April 2003, he created the 10Day Challenge (television and videogame-free) and experienced it along with the Parents Association of Quebec. Up to September 2006, the 10Day Challenge had been experienced in over 50 schools in Québec and Ontario.

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