Recognizing Information Bias in Curriculum Resources and Mass Media

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Why Search for Bias?

Critical Thinking
Citizenship Education
QCCs

6 Language Arts
- Recognizes bias and stereotypes

9-12 Language Arts:
- **Topic:** Speaking/Listening **Standard:** Evaluates messages and effects of mass media (newspaper, television, radio, film, and periodicals).
- **Standard:** Uses appropriate criteria to evaluate the messages and effects of mass media.

9-12 Social Studies
- **Topic:** Propaganda Bias Public Opinion **Standard:** Assesses the influence of propaganda and media bias in the formation of public opinion.
- **Topic:** Public Opinion **Standard:** Evaluates the impact of the media on public opinion.
“We cannot leave behind our critical conscience. It must always be at hand, especially at critical moments. The power that rules the world has yet another advantage over us. It requires of us that we be permanently alert, with a kind of epistemological consciousness” Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970
Why "study" the media?

- Numerous psychologists and political scientists conducting research involving media have concluded that it can change the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of its readers, listeners, and viewers (Bandura, 1986; Bartels, 1993; McBride, 1998; Robinson, 1976).

  - Most psychological theories were cast long before the advent of enormous advances in the technology of communication. As a result, they give insufficient attention to the increasingly powerful role that the symbolic environment plays in present-day human lives. Indeed, in many aspects of living, televised vicarious influence has dethroned the primacy of direct experience. Whether it be thought patterns, values, attitudes, or styles of behavior, life increasingly models the media. (Bandura, 1986)
Why “Study” The Media?

- Research indicates that most students (about 80%) believe the information they receive from media sources (IEA study on Civic Education, 2000; McBrien, 2002).
- Incomplete and unbalanced news, contributing as it does to the formation of attitudes and behaviors, can lead to prejudice and discrimination.
- Teachers can unknowingly contribute to stereotypes by uncritical use of classroom media materials.
Textbook Bias

Seven forms of bias


Invisibility: Complete or relative exclusion of groups from representation in text narratives.

- EX: Women, though 51% of the U.S. population, represent about 25% of the persons/characters mentioned in textbooks (IEA, 2001).
- Sadkers' 1989 research of elementary language arts texts found two to three times as many pictures of men as women. One 631-page elementary history text had only seven pages related to women, two of which were devoted to Samantha Smith, the fifth grade girl that visited the Soviet Union (in Spring, Joel (2002). American Education (10th ed.), New York: McGraw-Hill.)
Textbook Bias (con't.)

- Imbalance and selectivity: presenting only one interpretation of an issue
  - European settlers in the New World emphasized, while origins and heritage of other settlers are omitted; history of relations between Native Americans and federal gov't described in terms of treaties and "protection," omitting broken treaties and government appropriation of Native American land; "Westward expansion" as positive only.

- Stereotyping
  - African-Americans as manual workers, athletes, troublemakers; Mexican-Americans as non-English speakers and migrant workers; men in traditional occupational roles, women in supportive/nurturing roles.
Textbook Bias (con't.)

- **Unreality: ignoring unpleasant facts**
  - People of color and women as having economic and political equality with white males

- **Fragmentation and isolation: treating certain groups separately or on the periphery of society**
  - Boxes on "Ten Black Achievers in Science" or "Women in Medicine"; depicting Asian Americans as only interacting with one another.
Textbook Bias (con't.)

- Linguistic Bias
  - Women were "given" voting rights; Native Americans as "wandering," "roaming," or "roving" across the land; they sign treaties that "grant" them land; use of "forefathers," "mankind," "businessman"

Cosmetic Bias: well-balanced look on the surface

- Eye-catching multi-ethnic picture on the text cover but little balanced content
Textbook Research

- The *Journal of Black Studies* (1/2002) found that Blacks are overwhelmingly portrayed as contemporary poor yet not represented among Great Depression poor.

Textbook Research (con't.)

- *Social Education* (1996) criticizes most history textbooks for presenting a single perspective with few conflicting ideas.

- *Business Communication Quarterly* (1996) finds that although the number of times men and women were shown in photographs in business communication textbooks was balanced, the physical appearance and role portrayals perpetuated traditional stereotypes of men and women in the workplace.
Avery and Simmons (2000) analyzed U.S. civics texts for diversity. They concluded,

- "Women receive significantly less coverage than men in civics textbooks. . . [and] rarely highlight women as political or governmental role models" (p. 122).
- "A number of the women who are discussed have marital ties to political leaders" (p. 124).
- "The immigrants' role in shaping the 'story' of the United States is conveyed . . . [but] individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, as well as individual women, are unlikely to be seen as significant historical or political figures" (p. 127).
At the end of the war, governments quickly removed women from the jobs they had encouraged them to take earlier. By 1919, there were 650,000 unemployed women in Great Britain. Wages for the women who were still employed were lowered. The work benefits for women from World War I seemed to be short-lived as men returned to the job market.

Nevertheless, in some countries the role played by women in the wartime economies did have a positive impact on the women's movement for social and political emancipation. The most obvious gain was the right to vote that was given to women in Germany and Austria immediately after the war. (In Britain, women had obtained this right in January 1918.) Many upper- and middle-class women had also gained new freedoms. In ever-larger numbers, these young women took jobs; had their own apartments; and showed their new independence by smoking in public, wearing shorter dresses, and choosing new hairstyles.

1919, his claim seemed justified. Four major European states and a host of minor ones had democratic governments. Moreover, in a number of states, women could vote. Male political leaders had rewarded women for their contributions to World War I by granting them the right to vote (except in Italy, Switzerland, France, and Spain, where women had to wait until the end of World War II for the right). In the 1920s, Europe seemed to be returning to the political trends of the prewar era—parliamentary regimes and the growth of individual liberties. However, it was not an easy
A father and his son are in a terrible car accident. The father is rushed to one hospital. The son, whose injuries are much worse, is rushed to a different hospital in another part of the city.

The son is finally prepped for surgery and is being wheeled to the operating room. When he arrives, the surgeon takes a look at him and says, “Oh, no. I cannot operate on him. He is my son.”

How can this be?
Clips One and Two

- Write where you think the scene takes place.
- Write the feeling you get from the clips.
- How do you think your students would respond to these clips?
Clip Four

- Write the feeling you get from this clip.
- What might your students take away from this film? How would it differ from what they would learn from the previous clips?
"Nonwhite racial groups remain underrepresented in the mass media — both in terms of employment and portrayals — but they have also been equated with violent crime across the programming spectrum, from entertainment to the nightly news."

The mass media do not cause racism, of course, but neither do they offer a value-free medium for the exchange of ideas and information. They are marketplaces and we are both their consumers and a product sold to advertisers.

Chon Noreiga, "Race Matters, Media Matters," at http://viewingrace.org/content.php?sec=essay&sub=1
Sites on the web

Questions students must learn to ask:

- Who created the site? What is its purpose?
- Whose interests does it serve? What is the source of the information?
- Who is the intended audience?

Imagine that your student (or your child) is creating a presentation on smoking. She comes across [http://www.forces.org/index.htm](http://www.forces.org/index.htm). What do you do to teach about this site?
Finding Sources

- Balancing US and International news sources (Internet)
- Foreign films
- Non-profit organizations
- Internet searches
  - media bias, gender bias, racism
- Media education organizations
Final Thoughts

- During the course of their daily lives, people have direct contact with only a small sector of the environment. Consequently, their conceptions of social reality are greatly influenced by vicarious experiences—what they see, hear, and read in the mass media—without direct experimental correctives. The more people's images of reality depend upon the media's symbolic environment, the greater is its social impact. *Bandura, 1986*
Final Thoughts

- We cannot hand ourselves over to the television ready to accept whatever comes. The more we sit in front of it...the more we risk being confused about the real nature of the facts.” Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*

- Gandhi teaches a child about sugar
References
Films:

The Arab World, 1995, Knowledge Unlimited.

Bang, Bang, You’re Dead, Showtime, 10/13/2002.
   http://www.sho.com/bbyd/index-flash.cfm and
   http://www.bangbangyouredead.com/

   http://www.the-n.com/ntv/tv_show_episodes.php?ipv_
   showID= 66&ipv_sectionID=44.


Breakthrough: Mann Ke Manjeere (Indian music video),
   http://www.letsbreakthrough.com/
Films (con't.):

(http://www.sonyclassics.com/colorofparadise/index.htm)


http://movies.yahoo.com/shop?d=hv&cf=info&id=1803248877

Youth and Violence: Students speak out for a more civil society. 2002,  
Families and Work Institute,  
http://www.familiesandwork.org/press/youthandviolencerelase.html
Media literacy organizations:

Alliance for a Media Literate America, www.amlainfo.org

Center for Media Literacy, www.medialit.org

Media Literacy.com, www.medialiteracy.com

Media Literacy Review, http://interact.uoregon.edu/medialit/mlr/home/index.html

Viewing Race, http://viewingrace.org/