Adolescents learn to make links between health and media literacy

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Commercial media is often motivated by profit and is constantly bombarding us and our children with targeted information. Today’s youth get a majority of their information from the media, yet the school system has not emphasized teaching media literacy – the ability to understand whether or not the information is reputable, accurate and trustworthy. When we encourage children to think critically about media content, some of them are able to think analytically while others are not. There is a need for increased education in this area in order to help our children become well-informed and discerning media users.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

With most Canadian students in grades 4 and above having access to the Internet outside of the classroom, and many with constant access to Smartphones, the Internet has become a primary source of information for children. While the Internet can be a credible source of information, it also contains profit-focused messages about subjects such as food choices, substance use, and sexual practices. Since adolescents are active media users, they need to learn to think strategically about the purpose of a message. These critical thinking skills, known as “critical media health literacy” (CMHL), can be taught in the school system.

One of the expert recommendations is to integrate media literacy into the classroom using multimedia projects. By producing media themselves, students can improve their ability to critically analyze media messages. This research highlights the results of two previous studies that encouraged children to engage with media via the creation of multi-media projects and recommends future research directions involving critical media health literacy.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The researchers asked children ages 12-15 to create multi-media projects about their understanding of commercial media. First, the researchers gave a lesson on how to create multi-media projects, and facilitated group work and the sharing of final products. The students then participated in interviews with the researchers to critically discuss their work

• Study 1 engaged 27 youth in iMovie and Green Screen technology to create advertisements and puppets depicting gender stereotypes and power inequities in the media.
• In study 2, 6 Aboriginal youth wrote a graphic novel that captured CMHL topics interpreted through their traditional stories and cultural beliefs about health.
WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

When students were given the opportunity to consider media from different perspectives, some were able to come to critical conclusions, while others were persuaded by the advertisements’ messages.

- Multi-media projects can empower children to become aware of marketers’ ulterior motives.
- The Aboriginal youth who created the graphic novel included words and storylines that reflected their daily lives allowing potential readers to encounter CMHL concepts in culturally familiar settings.

CMHL education needs to be integrated into the general curriculum – it is not sufficient to teach it in one grade or subject. Learning opportunities beyond the classroom are key to creating critical thinkers – the more a child is exposed to the idea of thinking critically, the easier it will be for them to integrate CMHL into their lives.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Educate yourself and your children about critical media health literacy. It is important to be able to identify when information provided by the media is accurate, reliable and reputable. Remember that money motivates much of the messaging we are exposed to – so don’t believe everything you read, see, or hear.

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KEYWORDS

Media literacy, adolescents, health literacy, critical thinking

CITATION


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