

MARILYN COHEN

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INTERVIEWER: TESSA JOLLS

(Quote)

When I look at the media today and I look at all the different factions and the media literacy movement, as you might call it, it just seems that some of us are at cross-purposes with each other rather than working together towards that which we are all trying to accomplish. There is such a need to work together; so many people in our country have no idea what this is all about. And yet people really need to know, and people, once they do know get excited, and go off in their own directions to make a difference, They will do things with the resources you provide them that will surprise you. That's exciting and that's just part of making stuff your own and that's what it takes to really make things happen. However, we are still a long way from creating that critical mass that can make a tremendous impact in this country. We need to work together toward creating that critical mass.

BIOGRAPHY OF MARILYN COHEN

Marilyn Cohen is Research Associate Professor, Educational Psychology, at the University of Washington in Seattle, and Director of the Northwest Center for Excellence in Media Literacy, within the College of Education. She was first chair for the first Research Summit for media literacy at the National Association for Media Literacy Education held in St. Louis, 2007, and has received major support through the years for her work in health issues such as teen pregnancy prevention, substance abuse prevention, violence prevention, nutrition and fitness. She began her career in special education.

INTERVIEW TEXT

Selected Questions:

How did you become attracted to media education, and what were your earlier experiences that led you to the media literacy field?

What are some milestones that you noted along the way, for yourself and for the field?

So what informed and inspired your work at that point?

What has surprised you along the way?

What were some other milestones you experienced, Marilyn?

At what point did you start the Center for Excellence in Media Literacy?

Thinking about the field in general, how far do you think the field has come?

What would you like to see happen in this field?

Schools are really being forced to address media and technology. So how do we really work with them to solve that problem that they have, that integration?

(Interview begins)

TJ: How did you become attracted to media education, and what were your earlier experiences that led you to the media literacy field?

MC: I started out from a different place but I guess for everyone who's in the field, most of us have started out from a variety of places. My area of expertise for many years was special education. I taught graduate students at the University of Washington. I was training both inservice and preservice teachers in classrooms focusing on several different types of special needs including autistic children, and mildly, moderately and severely developmentally delayed children as well as those with learning disabilities. All of those areas were ones I focused on at different points in my career in special education. During the time that I was doing this work, which spans quite a number of years, I got involved in working a lot with video because the university lab school in which I was working with undergraduate and graduate students, was a school that was extremely well equipped. In fact it had cutting edge equipment for video production. It also produced a number of high quality educational films for distribution across the country.

We had a person hired full-time just to work with capturing what it was that various people in the building wanted to do. I was one of the people who was most interested in working with the production crew so I got to make a number of educational films. Our program director was very interested in having me do this, and after a while I became the person who produced all of his educational films. Because he was highly renowned in the field of special education, he had many opportunities to speak all around the country and use these films, so I would do a lot of production for him. In addition, I did a lot of educational production for courses I was giving so I could individualize training for those graduate students who were coming to the lab school for me to train at various times, and really needing background. I actually worked up a whole individualized course on video, together with all the supplementary print material needed to complete the various assignments that went along with each lesson in the entire course. So that was the kind of work I was doing early in my career.

In 1989, I was given the opportunity to take over a project, a television project. I was very drawn to television from my earlier background, and I was being drawn more and more into the role of the educational video and television production side of things. This project which was a

television project fascinated me; it focused broadly on the entire area of early childhood education rather than solely on my area of specialization in special education but much of my training had prepared me for the kinds of material that this project covered. So in short, I became the director of this project. Shortly before I had become director, the project was actually given this large grant from the Northwest Area Foundation. The foundation awarded this grant in a unique way. Some of their staff came to Washington and asked the child care community basically, which consisted of all kinds of people, what would be the very best use of their grant money to do outreach for the purpose of providing education to the large number of individuals with vastly varying backgrounds that comprised Washington's early childhood community at that time.

They decided the best way to do that was through television, and so this project, without going into great detail about how it functioned, had a once-a-week television slot on each of our PBS stations across the state. In those few areas where we couldn't reach an area of Washington State through the PBS stations, we arranged with cable stations in that area to carry our programs. We were able to broadcast once every week at a regular time, educational programming designed to reach people in Washington's early childhood community which included parents. We also produced supplementary print material that accompanied each of the broadcasts. Some of the programming we aired had been produced outside our project; other programs we produced ourselves on the University of Washington campus with campus resources. Each week we produced the programs and distributed all the follow up material which we provided in answer to viewer requests.

One of the things that happened during the time we were airing a program series for parents was that the wife of the Governor of the state of Washington was approached by some of her constituents. She was told that there were these wonderful programs for parents that were airing once a week on television and she thought that these programs were just a fabulous way to provide parent education. So the Governor's wife became very interested in our project; she approached me and wanted to really help the project to reach out to parents and provide even more parent education. Her interest served as a catalyst for a study that we launched through our project to find out how parents would use parent education and what kinds of parent education they were seeking that would be most valuable for them and that could be offered over television. So we launched a series of meetings across the state to which people responded in great numbers. We were surprised by the response to these meetings; parents came out to these meetings in all various locations where they were held across the state. What turned out to be rather surprising, however, was that instead of trying to respond to the question we were originally posing, parents were really coming to these meetings to tell us how much they hated television.

Their comments were focused totally on the kinds of programming that was being broadcasted every day to their families. Of course we were conducting this study, yet as the result of what we were talking about at these various meetings, they would ask at the end of the meeting, "Now that we've told you all of this, what are you going to do about it?" We would of course say something like... "Well we're gathering all this information; we're doing it at the university and putting on these programs." But we recognized that we didn't have an answer to their question. We had planned to report the findings of our study yet they were asking for so much more! We found ourselves leaving these meetings feeling very inadequate to the outpouring of emotion that

we had encountered by just being out there and asking a question that got them speaking about that all-important subject: television.

So we went back to the university and compiled our findings but we felt like we had an obligation to do a lot more than this based on what we heard. We knew it was far beyond the scope of our research project to take the action that the parents desired. The television project I directed at the University had a carefully defined scope focused on providing quality educational programming for childcare providers and others interested in early childhood education across our state of Washington. This was a very large task and there was at that time little flexibility to take on new projects. It was clear to those of us involved in the research project with the parents however that we needed to find a way to address those issues we had uncovered so we decided to form a nonprofit organization outside of the university environment called The Foundation for Family Television. Those people who had learned about what we were doing and were interested in forming the Foundation then joined us when we reconvened meetings at the various locations where we had been asking our questions to say, "Okay, here are the findings and we'd like to let you know, if you're interested, that we would be happy to work with you to form local Academies of Family Television to really look at some of the issues you're raising. So this was the beginning of a brand new endeavor from which evolved some really interesting work.

TJ: What are some milestones that you noted along the way, for yourself and for the field?

MC: One of the things that happened in these Academies is that they decided that they would actually like to give their own local awards for television. So instead of saying everything that they felt was so awful about television, we decided to encourage people to start by saying "Let's show the local stations what we think is worthwhile." Many people who attended our various meetings when we were conducting the research had already said that they called their stations to complain about all the different programs. So we decided to change the conversation and ask them instead, "Well have you ever called to say, "Gee I really liked that." Posing the question about what they liked about a RV program proved to be a great challenge for the parents as well as for many professionals. While they could tell you how much they hated something generally, they were often hard-pressed to define exactly what they would look for in a quality program, one that they would want their children to watch. This effort to define those elements parents and service providers were looking for became our first early endeavor to engage people in Washington in a media literacy-based activity.

Once we were able to define what constituted the types of programming we wanted to see, we recognized that instead of calling stations around the state only when we wanted to complain, we should be also calling to recognize when a program we liked was aired. So, we decided it was time for us as communities to let our stations know what is was that we liked and why we liked it so as to encourage them to give us more of this type of programming.

So that's how our foundation launched this awards program called the PIXI Award. The PIXI was named for the Pixel, the smallest component of the picture and its magical connection to the child, the smallest element of the audience. The "I" in PIXI was for imagination--the creative link between the two.

The PIXI Awards required that each of these Academies of Family Television had to sit down and come up with criteria for how they would define a quality program; that was a tremendous question to ask because when we assembled groups of professionals as well as parents to come up with the answer, they really had to dig deeply to come up with any criteria as to what exactly they were looking for. That was one of the first questions, “What are you looking for? What do you consider positive, what would you like your child to see?” And we started combing through, not only the surface level of that question but much deeper. So that was really for us, our first media literacy experience with large groups of people; professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, we had teachers, social workers, we had the range of social service people as well as we had parents and community activists that really cared about programming. Some of these people had actually been in independent producing themselves or worked in journalism so we had a really broad cross section of people looking at this question and the results were very interesting.

And we really did hold the PIXI Awards, which were very festive events; some of them were mini-academy awards ceremonies. Local station representatives came to these events and we even had producers and directors of some of the programming fly in for a local event from wherever they were based, such as New York. We gave every recipient a special certificate. We had Peggy Charron come out to our first Pixie Awards and she gave us the great line, “You can’t turn on what isn’t there!” One of our early recipients decided that rather than attend a nationally recognized event where he was to be honored that our local award was far more meaningful to him. He told the audience about his decision as he accepted his award. Anyway, we had some really fun times, giving out these Pixie Awards, but The Foundation for Family Television morphed over time into what today is called the Action for Media Education which is still operating today as a nonprofit (www.action4mediaeducation.org). It’s totally separate from our work here at the University of Washington; it has a separate board, and its own separate funding. It has all of its own projects which include an annual video festival for young people.

So that was sort of the basis of my early roots, but I had never formally heard the word media literacy education until 1992 when Gloria DeGaetano, who is an educational consultant, and Robin Reidy Oppenheimer, Director of 911 Media Arts at that time in Seattle decided to put together a conference for people in our area focused on media literacy. They assembled different people in our state who were interested in media and how the media could be thought of a little more carefully than we were thinking about it. And of course with all our experiences in The Foundation for Family Television, it was just perfect. The work that I had already been doing at the University, thinking about ways to use the media as an outreach strategy, would also, of course, make this subject especially appealing to me. At the conference, I had the chance to meet with some people who actually had been working in the field and were considered leaders in the American media literacy world like David Considine and Liz Thoman, who were guest speakers. Both talked about what was called “media literacy” and this to me was eye opening...

I realized: “Wow! This is what I’d been working on, thinking about, but I didn’t know there was anybody out there who shared this interest!” I remember talking about the conference afterwards and saying “Gee, media literacy education, I mean people who are in education should be picking up on this and doing something in education.” A lot of people who were at the conference were not in education; they were interested in getting this into our schools but weren’t working in a school setting themselves. They weren’t educators. And of course, I’m a

lifelong educator, that's all my training, I had already spent years working in the classroom and training teachers. I had designed a lot of training programs, I had written a lot, my work focused on books for teachers. And this just seemed perfect; I mean it perfectly melded my whole educational background with my interest in writing curriculum, training teachers, everything I had done up to this point and combined it with the area about which I had become through my experiences so very passionate about, a field that I had gotten more and more involved in without ever having totally recognized it until this time.. This field also offered an important means of addressing a major concern I had always had as an educator and that was my major interest in Gardner's work and in appealing to multiple modalities when trying to design programs that will impact each individual child at the level on which he or she is currently functioning.

I decided that I really needed to find out a lot more about this thing called media literacy and what these people in education who were already working in classrooms were really doing about it. Nobody at the conference said very much about what's happening in American schools at that time, so I found out that of course, in Canada, there had already been a bunch of things happening in schools and Ontario in particular had led the way with the Association for Media Literacy. Curriculum that they already had and the standards they had developed for schools were already being published in 1989. It was just pretty amazing what I had learned. I thought about where I might go to get training from those with all this invaluable experience, where I might find other people who have really experienced media literacy in classrooms and have trained teachers who would be able to tell me/show me what they were doing.

TJ: So what informed and inspired your work at that point?

MC: I found out that there was a conference going on in 1993 in Toronto and so I went there and that was the greatest thing I ever could have done at this juncture in my career, because it pulled together everything that I knew and thought about, cared about at that point. So I met Barry Duncan and Chris Worsnop, and Neil Andersen, Carolyn Wilson, all leaders in this Association for Media Literacy and I was so impressed with these people and so many other Canadians that I met at that time but are too numerous to mention here. They were so incredible, so giving. They were eager to share their knowledge, experience and materials.

They encouraged me to take media literacy education back to our schools in Washington; they gave me a ton of resources and ideas, and their conference was just amazing. The people there were just so open about everything that they were doing. In 1994, I went back again; they had another conference in Toronto and it was just as wonderful as 1993 had been. Through those two conferences and the people that I met, I learned probably the basis of everything that I do today. That was really the beginning for me of everything that I do. Those were the people who really influenced me. In 1994, I knew when I went back to the second conference I would have an opportunity here in Washington, a big opportunity to really get media literacy into the schools, to bring the word to teachers for the first time.

TJ: What has surprised you along the way?

MC: The opportunity to further media literacy education in our state came about in a very unusual way. It came from the teen pregnancy group at our Department of Health. I worked with

a person at the University of Washington to do some research on teen pregnancy prevention. We showed kids PSAs prepared by a variety of groups all over the country on teen pregnancy prevention. We were asking kids to tell us what they liked or disliked about these PSAs because the state was going to produce its own PSAs. But this was a wonderful beginning to media literacy because of course the kids were telling us all these things they liked and didn't like about the PSAs. We were asking them to become little media critics. At the end of one of the sessions, some kids came up to me and said, "If this is the best you guys can do, well you're in real trouble." The kids were great. The research was really interesting, and the person I was working with was saying "Wow, these kids are just perfect for everything you told me that you really want to do."

While we were working on our research project, the state legislature was deciding to give money to our Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to support efforts in schools that would allow students to learn how to put together their own teen pregnancy prevention media campaigns. This new funding created what came to be known as the state's Teen Aware Project.

The Teen Aware Project gave me a direct opportunity to begin working with teachers across our state since teachers who were going to run these media campaigns knew nothing about media or media campaigns. This was an opportunity to teach them about media literacy, so I was able to put together curriculum materials for the teachers and do some trainings and start working in the whole area of media literacy and teen pregnancy prevention. Although this was an abstinence-based project which is a very controversial topic in itself. Abstinence was a real in-your-face message to the kids. I mean safer sex was not an in-your-face message. The general attitude was they knew all about how to protect themselves; they'd heard it since kindergarten (of course, without a doubt they needed to learn this information and there was much that they truly didn't know, but that's another story), but when you talked about abstinence, that was a whole different deal, "Like what does that mean; are you serious?" And of course, if you're talking about media, abstinence is an oxymoron so you really can do some wonderful things with a media literacy-based approach and leave the kids to come up with their own conclusions, which has to be the bottom line in any case. Your job as an educator is try to help them make an informed choice: whatever that choice may be, if they decide to become sexually active or delay having sex, they've got the information.

That was 1995 when I was working on the Teen Aware curriculum with the Office of the Superintendent. In 1996, with the Department of Health's support, we began what was called the Teen Features Media Network where we started to work on various kinds of media campaigns for teenagers, the first was focused on teen pregnancy. Teen Features Media Network provided a vehicle for promoting media literacy education across the state. The Department of Health was very interested in media literacy education and the way in which it related to health education and health promotion; consequently they allowed us to do all sorts of wonderful projects. We were able to put together our first Media Literacy institute in 1996, two of them actually. One of them was held here at UW in Seattle and the other on the eastern part of the state in Spokane. We were able to put together a series of institutes for people on media literacy and teen pregnancy prevention. These attracted a lot of attention and introduced many people across our state to media literacy education. People came to the institutes for a whole variety of reasons and the Department of Health was delighted because they found they could draw many people that had never demonstrated their interest in learning more about teen pregnancy prevention before and

now were learning how they could use this material in a variety of classroom settings as well as in community organizations

It was fresh and new and a way of getting people to pay attention to this area of teen health that badly needed attention. In 1996, following these very successful institutes, the Department of Health convened an interdisciplinary task force which wrote its first paper on media literacy and why it was a very important tool for people working in areas of health. This was a groundbreaking document for representatives of the state agencies to write collaboratively because it brought media literacy to the attention of all the agencies and really helped us reach out to their constituents. In 1997, this interdisciplinary task force put together its first in a series of teen health and media conferences. These were conferences that were not just about teen pregnancy but about a wide range of teen health issues as they related to the media; therefore it was the decision to call the first conference Images of Youth: Teen Health and Media. This was followed by more Images of Youth conferences in subsequent years.

These conferences were held alternately in the western part of the state or the eastern part of the state, so that people on both sides of the mountains would have a chance to really come and find out about media literacy education. They were able to really reach out to people all over the state and introduce them to media literacy education and demonstrate to them how it could be integrated with their work.

From these conferences and other outreach work we were able to do, a lot of people became interested in how media literacy education could apply to a whole variety of things that they were doing. And so that sort of jumps us forward to the 2000s where we not only were doing the conferences but also were starting to write curriculum for people. We were not only training people how to integrate media literacy education into their work with kids but we were actually showing them how to do it and giving them materials that made that possible. We also began at this time to train kids to deliver some of these programs to other kids. We would have kids teaching other kids about media literacy education, and using media as a hook to teach their peers about health issues. Our work really began focusing on that area and led to a whole variety of new endeavors.

With teenagers as teachers, that was probably one of the most fun things I've ever done. Each part of it has been great, but that's just been added icing to the cake because it's so terrific to see these kids become excellent presenters, talking about media and media literacy in their own special ways.

TJ: What were some other milestones you experienced, Marilyn?

MC: In 2001, we worked with NATAS (National Academy of Television of Arts and Sciences), on their CCV (Creating Critical Viewers) project. For this project, we wanted to get media literacy into a whole district so we approached the Superintendent of Seattle Schools who at the time was John Stanford, a pretty amazing guy who made considerable impact on this district. We managed to get an appointment with him that was to last 30 minutes. We took in our stuff and told him about media literacy education and that we would really like to teach media literacy in Seattle's School District and he said to us, much to our surprise, "Well let's make it happen!"

We just about fell over in a dead faint. He said “I’m sure you came here thinking that you were going to meet with all this bureaucracy, 20,000 committee meetings and all of that, but that’s not the way I operate.” He was just incredible; it was so tragic that he died a very untimely death about 3 or 4 years into his tenure as Superintendent. He did amazing things and he has been remembered as the type of person that you rarely see, but anyway, he called up right then and there one of his chief program administrators and brought her into his office while we were still sitting there. He told her, “You see these people here; you’re going to be working with these people and we’re going to make this happen!” As a result, we were able to work directly with several middle and high school teachers across Seattle School District at that time, providing media literacy education training and helping them to find ways to integrate the NATAS sponsored curriculum *Creating Critical Viewers* into their classroom schedule.

At that time, the national group of NATAS really wanted to introduce *Creating Critical Viewers*, a program created by Jerome and Dorothy Singer into the nation’s schools. NATAS named coordinators around the country who could work with *Creating Critical Viewers*. It was Seattle that really took the lead in getting into the schools because our Superintendent was so supportive. So that was 2001, and then in 2001 we also had our first online curriculum project. Our Office of the Superintendent initiated a few pilot online classes at this time and I was asked to be one of the first teachers and put together a media literacy education course. I really enjoyed this experience.

We can jump to 2006, when we just had another media literacy conference, our fourth. So we were continuing in various ways to keep media literacy out there, to keep refining the kinds of content because now we had people who knew what it was, and they wanted more information and more resources, so we wanted to move beyond the basic awareness level; you could go a lot further and move to a much deeper level with them. That was really wonderful! We also continued our focus on developing curriculum with an emphasis on health issues from a media literacy education perspective. As I said earlier, we started with teen pregnancy, and we continue to work on programming in that area focusing on a comprehensive approach to sex education (e.g. includes addressing protection, birth control issues); we’ve also addressed many other health issues such as tobacco prevention, school violence prevention, youth suicide prevention, etc. So we’ve continued to look at a wide range of different health issues, including obesity and overweight prevention. That brings us to today.

TJ: Marilyn, at what point did you start the Center for Excellence in Media Literacy?

MC: The Center was started in 2007 as an outgrowth of the conferences that we had been offering with the support of our state’s Department of Health and other state agencies. The idea was that, rather than run another state conference, why not try to go out and work more intensively in certain areas of the state? Of course much had been going on prior to the creation of the Center regarding media literacy as we have already discussed since we had been working on the University campus since the late 80s when we began our early efforts with the television project and throughout the 90s when we began working intensively on media literacy education with our state agencies, offering some of the first media and health conferences in the nation, along with numerous workshops, writing curriculum, conducting research, etc.

The Center was designed to provide outreach to various parts of the state and provide resources in training and curriculum materials to these areas. It also has served a much broader function; through the conferences it became a catalyst for activities, but now it could also be a place where people could come to direct their questions and seek help and advice. We could also produce and distribute material that would then be useful for these various groups that were seeking materials and resources. Teen Futures Media Network, one aspect of this Center, is probably our most active arm, although the Center doesn't just work with teenagers; middle and high school students have been a major focus but the Center reaches out to work with younger children as well. The Center broadly encompasses and works with all ages.

TJ: Thinking about the field in general, how far do you think the field has come?

MC: It's a highly interdisciplinary field. In my area in education; one of the last things I did that was totally education-focused before I became involved with media literacy education was to serve as interdisciplinary training coordinator for what is known today as the Center on Human Development and Disability at the University. I've always really worked on fostering interdisciplinary connections and with the work that we do today, we are involved in a lot of interdisciplinary work across all agencies, as I described to you. It's really important to find ways to collaborate across disciplines since we all have so much to give to each other. That sharing is really important and I think what has been surprising to me and a little disappointing is the way in which groups come together in the US is so much different from what I observed initially and what I was so excited about in those early years when I was becoming involved in media literacy education with the help and support of our Canadian neighbors.

What drew me so much into this field, and created such excitement was at last I found people who shared this passion, who really wanted to get out and do something. They weren't a huge core of people; they were substantial size for sure, but every person in Canada didn't know about them. But they realized that they had to work together to make any kind of difference. When I look at the media today and I look at all the different factions and the media literacy movement, as you might call it, it just seems that some of us are at cross-purposes with each other rather than working together towards that which we are all trying to accomplish. There is such a need to work together; so many people in our country have no idea what this is all about. And yet people really need to know, and people, once they do know get excited, and go off in their own directions to make a difference. They will do things with the resources you provide them that will surprise you. That's exciting and that's just part of making stuff your own and that's what it takes to really make things happen. However, we are still a long way from creating that critical mass that can make a tremendous impact in this country. We need to work together toward creating that critical mass.

TJ: Yes, it's all about that progression

MC: Yes it is but it doesn't seem like we are progressing very far, we have these groups that seem like they are each going in a certain direction, just how much stronger and bigger would we be if we spoke together in one voice or had a common language. And the field is growing, I mean the conference that you're at, the Digital Media Conference this is a group that has other interests, yet shares many of our same core interests. There are going to be all kinds of groups

that share a common core. And I don't think we're looking at that nearly as much as we should be. I think we are looking at let's stay as this group or let's stay as that; that group has a voice about this but not about that. And this person is much more important than that person, I mean one of the things I try to do, and I hope successfully, is that people in our state would say that they have learned this is the field that is open to all of you; you're each going to go about it in your own way but we need to help each other, we need to grow together. And I think that there isn't enough of that attitude. I know Marieli (i.e. Marieli Rowe, Director of the Telemedia Council and chief editor of its Journal of Media Literacy), I admire her for all the work she's done. I know her work has always been based on that, the idea of collaboration and sharing.

TJ: Of reaching out...

MC: I would see her as like the group in Toronto, the Association for Media Literacy that has tried so hard to reach out and bring together groups and individuals that share different perspectives about a wide variety of issues all of continuing importance to those of us in media literacy education.

TJ: What would you like to see happen in this field?

MC: Joining a variety of groups together to try to look at what they share...even examples like what does ACME share with NAMLE, do they have two such radically different messages, does nobody at NAMLE care about media reform, how about the whole media reform movement? What are they each saying that is so radically different? I mean yes, media literacy education isn't totally their message at ACME or is it the total message for Campaign for Commercial-Free Kids, for instance, or other groups I could mention. However, there's a core here in all of these groups that has a common theme and we don't seem to be searching for any kind of common theme anymore. And it's the common theme that our country really needs to hear.

We are a nation used to sound bites; we talk about the media but we're not very good at using the media to get out some standard messages and demonstrate that there is a strong core group here in the U.S that is supporting some of the same messages and demanding some much needed changes. Sure, each of our groups will take on a number of other issues that are of unique concern to only that group, but what do we share in common? There still aren't enough of us and we need to be spending more of our time and effort trying to find ways to collaborate with one another to achieve some common goals.

TJ: Exactly, because you know that whole role of media in society and how it's affecting us, what do we as consumers and producers, what are we able to do.

MC: Yes, it's an issue that concerns our public health. Everybody that I've ever worked with in the field of public health understands this as a core issue, and if they don't initially they soon do when you start to educate them. I mean it crosses all the different areas. It just seems as though we haven't thought broadly enough about this. And also, how is it going to be realistically implemented in our schools, it's still not a question that is taken up enough because media literacy education as an entity by itself is not happening. We're not going to have media literacy courses in our schools anytime soon I believe. Math, science...we are going have to find a way to focus on them, also our students are not doing well in a lot of other areas...such as reading and

writing. But how does all that fit with media literacy education? That's really the question; it's not can we teach you now about media literacy education -- that is not the way to go about it. And it's not the approach we've ever taken in our project because it has never worked that way. I can get people to think about media literacy education when I go to what they are thinking about...if they are thinking about science, that's where I have to be. If they are thinking about math, that's where I have to be. It's a different way of thinking, but it's where the country is, it's where we've always been.

TJ: You're saying that okay, if they're talking about math and science then we can definitely address math and science with media literacy, and combine those...

MC: Well, it's how can you make it stronger? How can it help what you're doing? Anyway, I think we need to do a lot more of that. I think that if there's any prayer of moving this forward we have to strive to integrate media literacy education with the subjects that are being stressed in the classroom. It's an approach that cannot be ignored because that's the reality of our educational system.

TJ: Exactly, and so for the field really to advance and continue to develop, we have to really go where the education system is...

MC: That's right. You have to look at it very realistically and listen to the people and all the problems they are dealing with, really work in the schools and find out what is it that they are dealing with, the realities of their day. What are their questions? It has to come from where the schools are instead of superimposing where we'd like the schools to be. Everybody is superimposing where they want the schools to be...and the schools are very used to this but that doesn't mean that they're listening any more than their kids are.

TJ: Well that helps; I think that gives some perspectives on where things might go, and what our next steps might be in this field. So I don't want to put words in your mouth but what I'm hearing is that in terms of next steps, we really have to continue to work with the education system and really connect with their needs so that we can provide the media literacy education and do it in a way that they can accept and that they can really embrace. Is this what you'd like to see happen?

MC: Yes. I can't start off by telling you everything that I have to offer and how important it is for you because schools have heard time and again how important everything is for them. They have heard that their kids need to have science and get it out of a certain book or they have heard that they shouldn't get books at all because it should be all experiential learning. They've been told to take this particular program and run with it and then a few years later, they've been told that this program has been found not to have merit and it's another program that's gained favor, etc. etc. Now you're coming in and saying okay now this is what media literacy is and this is how you teach it, and this is what you need to do. I mean think about that! It just doesn't fly. It can't fly. We need to remember the ongoing pressures that the schools are facing and get

grounded with what is happening in the schools. Now the kids are another story. When they can find how they can talk about media in the schools as part of the curriculum, they're loving it. They would love in many cases to help make that happen. They live in a media-rich environment and to them integrating media literacy education into their regular classroom activity seems quite natural and appealing. So how do you marry what your needs are and what their needs are?

TJ: It seems like now there's more of a demand in the sense that the schools are really being forced to address media and technology. So how do we really work with them to solve that problem that they have, that integration?

MC: They absolutely have that problem and they are totally having to face that now. They're just grappling with it and having huge problems and that's exactly where the rubber hits the road for people in media literacy if they are there. If they are cognizant about some of the various problems schools are now facing and if they are able to really help and make themselves available to help, there has never been a better time than now!

There are so many people who are in classrooms who are talking to the kids about media in one way or another and having many of their own questions about how to proceed. The kids are bringing issues to school that are media-related and schools have not had to consider some of these issues in the past. Many teachers would love to know and absolutely need to know that there is a whole field -- media literacy education -- out there and it has never been more important than right now!