

In This Issue...

Theme: Children and Media Literacy **02**

We are excited to offer another Voices of Media Literacy interview with media literacy pioneer and pediatrician Victor C. Strasburger, MD, Professor Emeritus, University of New Mexico School of Medicine.

Research Highlights **03**

Dr. Victor C. Strasburger has researched children and media for more than 30 years. He shares his insights and hopes for the future.

CML News **09**

Check out the 22 interviews with media literacy pioneers, featured in CML's Voices of Media Literacy project. Victor C. Strasburger is the most recent contributor to this important history.

Media Literacy Resources **10**

Find a list of resources for Children and Media Literacy.

Med!aLit Moments **11**

In this MediaLit Moment, students identify the creative techniques used in magazine covers from this season's presidential campaigns.

Theme: Children and Media Literacy

“Rote memorization should be a thing of the past. What we need to teach is much more about critical thinking, much more about how to decipher all this information that's available on the Internet, some of which may be accurate, some of which may not be accurate -- how to deal with tweeting, and texting, and downloading, and we're simply not doing that. I think teachers are making a huge mistake. A lot of schools think if they have a computer lab and they pass out iPads to all the students that they're keeping current, but that's just scratching the surface. Media literacy doesn't start with an R, but it has to be the fourth R.” – Victor C. Strasburger, [Distinguished Professor of Pediatrics Emeritus, University of New Mexico School of Medicine](#)

Victor C. Strasburger has added an important and consistent voice to the international movement for media literacy; his research, writing and pediatrics practice has influenced thinking on the field since the 1980's. Dr. Strasburger has authored ground-breaking policy statements by the American Academy of Pediatrics on children and media, and he continues his advocacy for media literacy as a doctor, researcher, author, father and avid media aficionado.

This interview of Dr. Strasburger by CML President Tessa Jolls is now part of [The Voices of Media Literacy](#) project, which is a collection of interviews that were conducted beginning in 2010 with 20+ eminent media literacy pioneers who were active in the field prior to 1990. These pioneers represent the English-speaking countries of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the United States. Their views not only shed light on the development of media literacy, but also on where they see the field evolving and their hopes for the future.

CML is privileged and delighted to feature Dr. Strasburger's viewpoint and work in this monthly issue of *Connections*.

Research Highlights

Voices of Media Literacy – Interview with Victor Strasburger, M.D.

Distinguished Professor of Pediatrics *Emeritus*

University of New Mexico School of Medicine

Interviewed by CML's Tessa Jolls

November 19, 2015

Tessa Jolls (TJ): Why did you become involved in media education?

Victor C. Strasburger (VS): I grew up with a TV set in my bedroom [chuckle]. And it was one of those big models, people don't see them anymore, but it was a huge box with a tiny screen. It was like the early computers. And I've always been a big fan of television and media. And when the American Academy of Pediatrics in 19... I don't know, '81 or '82, decided they wanted to have a task force on television and children, they somehow got my name, and that's what started my interest. But I've always been convinced, absolutely convinced, that television and movies and other media are a huge and under-recognized influence on the development of children and adolescents. So for me, it was a no-brainer. I love media, and I'm a pediatrician, and I'm convinced that media influence kids. So you have to do something with that.

TJ: What influenced you to pursue this work?

VS: Well, it goes back a long way. I'm a media person. I went to Yale for undergraduate work, and worked with Robert Penn Warren, who was the first poet laureate of the United States. And one of my teachers was Erich Segal who wrote "Love Story." I edited the Yale Literary Magazine, so I got involved with media on a variety of different levels. I met every famous American writer you can think of when I was a sophomore and junior in college, which is just amazing.

I was great friends with Erich Segal, so we would talk about his writing "Yellow Submarine," and going to Hollywood, and hanging out with the Beatles. Since I was editing the Yale Literary Magazine, I was in contact with a number of very famous American writers. So my interest in media really started there, and it wasn't in television (even though I'd grown up with television), it was books, and movies, and magazines and things like that. The American Academy of Pediatrics came along, and there were five of us who were commissioned to issue a policy statement on Children, Adolescents, and Television, and none of us knew anything. So we had to educate each other and ourselves. We engaged in a kind of fact-finding year or two between New York and Los Angeles. We talked to network executives in New York. We talked to TV and movie executives in Hollywood. We read the research. We debated amongst ourselves. It was an amazing experience. I haven't had any experience quite like that in my academic career. And we gradually became much more educated and literate about effects of media on children, and we became much more comfortable in issuing

recommendations to other pediatricians.

It was 1983 that the Task Force was commissioned and we issued a preliminary report in 1985, and since then, we've had about 20 different policy statements. I moved in 1987 to New Mexico, and very soon connected with Bob McCannon at Albuquerque Academy. Bob was the originator of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project. And Bob mentored me and tutored me on media literacy. He was absolutely a genius. He also tutored me in golf; he was a wonderful golfer and actually had been a terrific tennis player as well in his college career. We never played tennis unfortunately, because his knees and shoulders weren't up to it, but we played a fair amount of golf. And I just learned a tremendous amount about media literacy from Bob and brought him into the AAP where he then educated a number of my colleagues on media literacy. To date, he is the only non-pediatrician ever to be given the highest media award of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Holroyd Sherry Award which is for media advocacy.

TJ: Can you add some insight into the development of media literacy?

VS: My bottom line is, educators, schools, administrators are probably 20 years behind the times. I think 100 years ago, to be educated, you could read and write; now, to be educated means you can read, write, download, text, tweet, decipher this tsunami of information that's coming at you via the web and other sources. And we are simply not teaching kids to do that. So in addition to the 3Rs, we should be teaching media literacy and it should be right up there with the 3Rs, because to function in the next 100 years, you have to know how to deal with a variety of different media, and kids simply don't know how to do that. If they knew how to do that, we wouldn't be dealing with cyberbullying and sexting and all the other kind of health issues that we are still having to deal with.

TJ: What goals did you pursue through the years, to introduce media literacy as a pediatrician?

VS: I don't know that I set out with any specific goals. I like to write, I like to teach, and I like to teach in a variety of different venues. So, I've been on *Oprah*, I've been on *The Today Show*, on NPR, and so, I don't know that I had a specific goal except to inform pediatricians about effects of media and try to educate them about what they could do and to teach parents and teachers about what they could do. I'm not sure I've had any effects. I think I've had an effect on the American Academy of Pediatrics because I've written all these policy statements, but I don't know that I've had much effect on parents and educators, so that remains to be seen.

It's absolutely foolish when kids spend somewhere between six and 11 hours a day with media. Some of that is obviously multitasking. It is absolutely insane, a) not to devote more money to research on effects of media; and b) not to teach them how to use media wisely and appropriately. For example, my daughter, when she was a high school junior, came

home in tears one day after taking a test in American history on the Civil War, and she said, "All the teacher wanted to know was names and dates, and I didn't know them." Well, names and dates, I can get you in 10 seconds by Googling them on my smartphone.

Rote memorization should be a thing of the past. What we need to teach is much more about critical thinking, much more about how to decipher all this information that's available on the Internet, some of which may be accurate, some of which may not be accurate -- how to deal with tweeting, and texting, and downloading, and we're simply not doing that. I think teachers are making a huge mistake. A lot of schools think if they have a computer lab and they pass out iPads to all the students, that they're keeping current, but that's just scratching the surface. Media literacy doesn't start with an R, but it has to be the fourth R.

TJ: When you look back at it, do you feel that the media literacy field itself has moved in the direction that it needs to go?

VS: The media literacy field was initially divided into two organizations that were constantly battling each other, and still, to some extent, are like that. It's fragmented and composed of academics who still want to argue about the definition of media literacy. It just has not come into fruition as a powerful force in society to tell parents and teachers and Congress that we need this. Pediatricians can only do so much. We're busy worrying about media effects because the media can affect virtually every concern that pediatricians and parents have about kids, whether it's aggression or school performance or obesity or early sexual activities or substance use. The media help play a role, so that's where pediatricians come in. It's up to the media literacy community to convince schools and teachers and legislators that media literacy should be mandated as part of the curriculum in every school in the country. And you all simply haven't done that -- we haven't done that -- and it's really a crying shame.

And so the field itself is fragmented. It hasn't really been able to rise to the challenge of influencing the policy and the requirements that are really needed.

TJ: Are there some directions you would like to see the field go?

VS: Well, there are two avenues, I think, for the future. One was, I used to work with the National PTA, and that's the organization that we should be targeting in terms of convincing them of the need for mandated media literacy. And what I found was (and it's true of the American Academy of Pediatrics, too, but not nearly as much) it's an organization that has 35 issues that it's considering at any one time, and media is just one issue. I could never get them to focus long enough on media. Now, that hasn't happened with the American Academy of Pediatrics because it's such a popular issue, and pediatricians are so concerned about it, but it did happen with the National PTA. I think we need to come back to the National PTA and say, "Wake up people! You know, this is 2016, and the new millennium, and it's time to change the very nature of what it means to be an educated person."

The second thing, again, from the past, is that in 1982, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a comprehensive report, I think it was 11 or 12 volumes, on the total effects of media on kids. And it really jump-started a lot of interest, a lot of research funding. We haven't had a report since then. I think it's time for a 2018 or 2020 National Institute of Mental Health report that would do the same thing and would light a fire under Congress to say, "We need more research funding, we need a mandate for media literacy in all schools." I think that would be a tremendous help and a catalyst for the movement.

People have become -- and we know this from media studies -- desensitized to the influence of the media because they use the media so often, so they're so immersed in media. Desensitization is a well-known effect of media violence, for example. I think people have become desensitized to the impact of media on themselves and on their kids, and that's one of the reasons why we're doing very little about it. So I think if anything, it's going to be more of a struggle, an uphill struggle. Even cyberbullying and all of the well-publicized incidence of kids committing suicide because they've been cyberbullied -- you'd think that would have a role that would push people to examine influence of media, just as you think that school shootings would make people think about guns and media violence and things like that, but people get desensitized by all of this. And I really honestly think that's what's happening now and it's going to continue to be a huge struggle.

TJ: Have there been surprises for you along the way?

VS: Yes. I've been surprised by the lack of government interest in this issue, the lack of research funding, as I said, the lack of a new NIMH report. At the opposite end of the scale, I'm amazed when I go to movies these days at what parents are letting kids see. I go to PG-13 and R-rated movies, and there are little three, four, five-year-olds sitting in the audience. It just blows my mind that parents would do that and would be so clueless about the impact. There have been wonderful studies of college students. If you ask them, "Can you recall the first time you felt traumatized by a movie?" And virtually 100% say, "Yes, and here's the movie that did it." Whether it was the flying monkeys in *Wizard of Oz*, or the shower scene in *Psycho*, or *Nightmare on Elm Street*, or *Halloween*, every college student can remember the first time they were scared out of their mind by a movie, and often, it was at a very young age.

TJ: So you see the impact of media as profound?

VS: Absolutely. Media affects the spectrum from Congress, to parents, to everyone in between, and even teachers who still think it's okay to test people on when was the first Battle of Bull Run. Who cares? I can find that for you in 10 seconds. What I want to know about the Civil War is why was Lincoln a great President? Why did he wait until 1863 to issue the Emancipation Proclamation when he was anti-slavery his entire career? Why did the North win? Why did the South lose? How close did the South come to winning? It turns out that Britain and France were very close to coming in on the side of the South, and if they

had, the North would probably have lost. There's fascinating stuff about the Civil War that needs to be taught, but names and dates, no.

One of my teachers was George Gerbner, who is dean of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, Annenberg School of Communication. And he was a brilliant guy who said that people who tell the stories in society are some of the most important, and I think we're losing sight of that with new media. I have a lot of colleagues who are absolutely gaga over texting, and tweeting, and social networking sites, and what they're doing or not doing to kids, but social networking sites, and tweeting, and texting don't tell stories. TV, and movies, and video tell stories. We can't lose sight of the most important media, which will always be those media that tell stories.

TJ: Do you think that the new media are changing the needs for media literacy?

VS: Yes, there's the whole aspect of advertising. You haven't seen anything yet, because even now, you can be walking by a store and get a text on your cell phone, saying, "10% off if you stop in now." There's no doubt that advertisers are going to be reaching far into early childhood to try to create brand awareness. We already spend \$250 billion a year on advertising in the United States, much more than any other country in the entire world. People need to understand that media literacy can make kids more immune to harmful media effects like advertising for products that they may not need.

TJ: Are you working on some things now that hopefully can contribute towards these next steps?

VS: At the moment, I'm working on a book called "The Death of Childhood" which I hope will follow in the footsteps of Neil Postman and Marie Winn. But I really think that childhood is becoming endangered partially because of the media, partially because of schools not appreciating their true role, partially because of government and Congress being so inactive with children's issues and particularly, health issues. I think that childhood is threatened and so I'm starting to work on a book about childhood and how we could possibly resurrect it. I still work with the American Academy of Pediatrics. We're developing new policy statements that will take new media into consideration. I don't know what to do about the media literacy organizations. I miss Bob McCannon a tremendous amount. He was such a good friend and such a good mentor, and I'm still in Albuquerque and I think about him almost every day. He was such a powerful force and had such a powerful vision. If Bob McCannon were president, we wouldn't be having this conversation.

What I've tried to encourage the Academy to do is to form a consortium of public health groups that would include media literacy groups, to put much more pressure on Congress, on the PTA, on the entertainment industry to make constructive changes. I don't think the American Academy of Pediatrics can do it by itself. The American Medical Association has been missing in action; the American Public Health Association is also missing in action. I

think if some media literacy groups got together with the American Academy of Pediatrics and started interacting with the national PTA and with Congress, that would help. There's no media literacy lobbyist on Capitol Hill. There are hundreds of lobbyists for food groups. There are lobbyists for the entertainment industry. There are lobbyists for every industry you can think of, but there's no lobbyist for media literacy. I think we have to figure out how to put pressure on Congress, how to put pressure on the national PTA. I think that would be well worth doing.



CML Partners with *Journeys in Film* for Media Literacy Activity

The MediaLit Moments activity is part of the *He Named Me Malala* curriculum created by Journeys in Film and is available online with a free teaching guide. Find more information <http://journeysinfilm.org/films/he-named-me-malala/>.



Voices of Media Literacy

Want to read all 22 interviews from CML's Voices of Media Literacy project? Dr. Victor Strasburger is the most recent contributor to this important history. Read about the media literacy pioneers [here](#).



About Us...

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

Resources for Media Literacy

Resources for Children and Media Literacy

Center for Media Literacy (www.medialit.com)

Articles, activities, and lessons from the MediaLit Kit are just some of the sources available on the CML website to help parents become confident, thoughtful media literacy educators in their homes and communities.

Center on Media and Child Health (www.cmch.tv)

CMCH has been featured in more than one resources article in *Connections*, but it's the only organization we know of which applies current pediatric research to the questions and concerns of parents about their children's electronic media use. The site includes short, easy to understand articles which explain the health effects of children's media use over a variety of media, advice to parents, and links to current research. "Ask the Mediatrician" column features CMCH founder Dr. Michael Rich.

Common Sense Media (<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/>)

Common Sense Media's first contribution to the field was a wide selection of movie and DVD reviews written to help parents decide what to watch with their children. That selection has expanded to a wide range of games, television content, mobile apps and more. Now the site also presents basic information to parents on the entire spectrum of new media technologies which children are using today, tip sheets on individual topics, and advice for parents on each topic with specific parenting suggestions for children of all age levels.

Connect Safely and Net Family News (www.connectsafely.org, www.netfamilynews.org)

Connect Safely, directed by Anne Collier is one of the few internet safety organizations which emphasizes the capacity for children to create positive online experiences rather than focusing on those experiences which children should avoid. Net Family News offers intelligent, insightful commentary on new developments in the tech world and their relationship to children, parents, education and digital citizenship.

Net Cetera (www.onguardonline.gov/topics/net-cetera.aspx)

Net Cetera, a project of the Federal Trade Commission, is a comprehensive guidebook intended to help parents talk and "raise issues" with kids about living their lives online. The guidebook includes safety information on new media technologies and resources online.

Vodafone Digital Parenting Magazine (www.vodafone.com/parents)

Vodafone, one of the largest mobile phone service providers in Europe, offers Digital Parenting magazine. Articles cover the entire range of issues relating to children and their use of new media technologies, from data security to cyberbullying to teens' use of the Internet to search for health information. These include contributions from nearly two dozen widely recognized experts, and each is accompanied by graphics and tip sheets that can help families formulate concrete, reasoned strategies for parenting in a digital age.

MediaLit Moments

The Art and Craft of Magazine Covers

In this MediaLit Moment, students are encouraged to deconstruct a magazine cover from this season's presidential campaign. By looking closely at the design and purpose of a message, students discover that most media messages are constructed by professionals who are eager to sell a product or idea. Our thanks to Frank Baker for providing the images for this activity.

Ask students about the creative decisions made when designing political magazine covers

AHA! These covers were designed with a message in mind.

Grade Level: 6-9

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Materials: Computer with internet access and projector. Find the magazine covers by using this link: <http://www.frankwbaker.com/mlc/2016-presidential-candidates-magazine-covers/>

Activity: Put the covers up on the screen for all to see. Remind students that each cover started out blank—an editorial team working with a graphic designer collaborated to decide what goes on the cover. Have them take a moment to look at headlines, fonts, colors, photography, lighting, etc. Ask students which creative techniques attracted their attention? What did they see first when looking at the covers? Why were these particular photos, illustrations, fonts, headlines chosen? To sell? To entertain? To make a call to action? To encourage – or discourage -- a vote?

Extended Activity: As a class, agree on a topic and have students create their own magazine covers with image and headline.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, ©2002-2016, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>.