

Media Mentor and Monitor

Teaching media-literacy skills is easy; just ask Frank Baker. by Terri Payne Butler

Many of us were glued to the TV while growing up. Frank Baker, a 2007 winner of a Cable's Leaders in Learning Award for his work as a media-literacy advocate, was no exception. "I knew the plot of every *Little Rascals* and *Three Stooges* show," he says. "Those were the days before parents knew that you weren't supposed to let your child plop down in front of the TV."

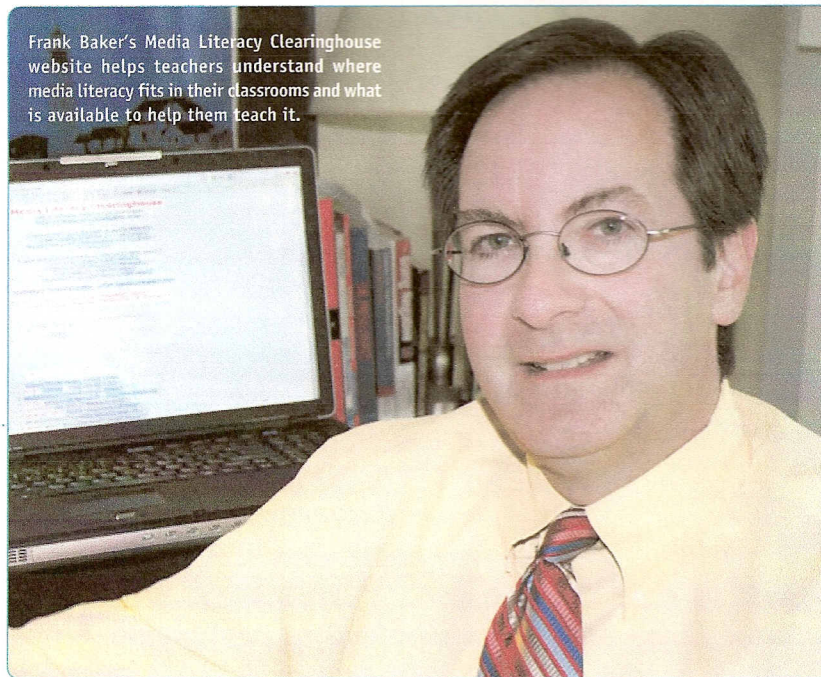
Welcome to the 21st century. "Today, we have media literally 24/7," says Baker, an independent educational consultant. "We have new media devices, such as cell phones and PDAs, that allow us to be connected every minute of every day. Everywhere I go, teachers tell me that their students believe everything they see, everything they read, and everything they hear. The pervasiveness of media demands that we teach media literacy."

The Need for Media Literacy

Baker began his career by working in media itself, spending nearly 10 years in local television as a weatherman, newscaster, and producer before moving on to a media-center position with a Florida school system. "I produced instructional programs and promotional videos, and that's where I caught the media-literacy bug," he says.

Today, that bug puts Baker on the road regularly with the goal of helping teachers connect the visual world of popular culture to the world of education. "Becoming media literate is a 21st-

Frank Baker's Media Literacy Clearinghouse website helps teachers understand where media literacy fits in their classrooms and what is available to help them teach it.



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century skill," he says. "It's about asking questions and applying critical-thinking and critical-viewing skills to the media we come in contact with every day. All media use languages with a set of rules all their own, and students need to understand those languages and how they can be manipulated. Media is what our kids pay the most attention to every day and it's incumbent on us to bring the study of it into the classroom."

A Helping Hand

But Baker's advocacy for media literacy extends far beyond workshops and presentations. His Media Literacy Clearinghouse website was named one of the 101 Best Websites for Secondary Teachers by the International Society for Technology in Education. Designed to help teachers

understand where media literacy fits in their classrooms and what is available to help them teach it, the site is a rich compendium of news, resources, and timely links.

"Dip a toe in," suggests Baker. "Choose one area that you are interested in; something you might have to teach. You're going to be shocked at the amount of information that's there."

In a 1999 seminal study, Baker found media literacy embedded in many states' standards for language arts, social studies, art, and even health. The standards are a good start, Baker believes, but the fact that his phone rings constantly leads him to believe that far too few states have put muscle into professional development. "Schools know they need to provide teachers with this expertise, but I'm optimistic. Slowly, the education community is starting to understand that, in the 21st century, media literacy is as important as reading and writing." ■■

Terri Payne Butler writes about education and technology from Lexington, Mass.



For More Information

For a podcast interview with Frank Baker, more on the 2007 winners and finalists of Cable's Leaders in Learning Awards, and information on the 2008 awards, go to www.leadersinlearningawards.org.

RELATED RESOURCES

Media Literacy Clearinghouse
www.frankwbaker.com