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The Status Is Not Quo: Unraveling Music Videos

Gary T. Hanby

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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The Utah State Standards for media arts are general and therefore give teachers a great deal of freedom in how they present the content for media arts courses. How the teacher engages students and project assignments are left to the teacher as they walk the students through the process of making films. This thesis explores how an art teacher might use music videos to teach filmmaking techniques and engage students in the process of meaning making. My research hypothesis is that, by educating students to understand and interpret the messages they consume through media, I can help them recognize the hidden texts in visual culture. My curriculum provides students with learning activities that foster the development of critical thinking skills and also techniques for analyzing images. An important part of the curriculum for this unit is a critical study of music videos wherein the students examine music videos using semiotics and qualitative film analysis. The students explore filmmaking techniques and the processes needed to create their own messages in a music video.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, music videos, semiotics, cinematography, filmmaking
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Adolescents are immersed in visual culture, those aspects of our culture that are expressed through visual images. High school students have instant access to visual culture through their phones, tablets, and other electronic devices. One of the most influential forms of visual culture affecting youth of today is the music video. Music videos are molding the lives, behavior, and identity of adolescents (Taylor, 2007). Without realizing it, adolescents become puppets of a popular culture that promotes unrealistic or destructive lifestyles (Chung, 2007). Curriculum and instruction can give students greater autonomy over their choices. Students can become equipped with the skills necessary to make more critically astute cultural and personal choices through gaining a greater understanding of how popular visual culture can shape their values and sense of identity (Taylor, 2007). My initial premise was that if students understand the influence music videos have on popular culture, they can use that understanding in conjunction with their knowledge of video editing to create their own cultural commentaries. These videos will be their own interpretations of lyrics and be imbued with their own meanings and messages.

In music videos, adolescents are shown a world and culture that promotes distinct lifestyles and perpetuates particular stereotypes and social conventions. While viewing music videos from their favorite artists, they see people behave, dress, and talk in certain ways. Just as language immersion results in knowing how to speak without understanding the rules behind why we speak that way, adolescents are being taught how to speak and behave without understanding the social or individual implications of the language of visual culture (Chung, 2007). Without fully understanding the ramifications of their choices, they become indoctrinated with the behavioral norms espoused by the music video and adopt ways of living based on the images and culture that are being showcased (Chung, 2007).
Adolescents construct their identity, emulate their idols, and attempt to gain acceptance by mimicking the attitudes portrayed on their screens (Chung, 2007). It is not surprising that they would act in this way. There is something primal about music that reaches into the heart of everyone. Songs and rhymes are effective devices for aiding in learning and memorization (Mitchell, 2013). If a child can learn to read or recite the alphabet through a simple melody, might that same child begin to learn ways of behaving through other kinds of music? When listening to music, we may be conscious of the words but not necessarily aware of the fact that we are memorizing them.

I suggest that images associated with music are even easier to remember than words. We are living in a world saturated with images, and those images provide a powerful way to communicate meaning. Music videos convey their own meanings and messages to the youth who are viewing them. These messages can then become ingrained in their minds through an association with music (Rodesiler, 2009). Repeated viewings strengthen those memories and press those images deeper into the minds of those who consume them. Active viewers are aware of the media’s attempt to influence them, but how does passively watching videos influence viewers? I wondered what children were absorbing from the music videos they see.

I believe that most youth do not realize the extent to which the music videos they watch affect their way of thinking. I have witnessed the students at my high school adopt the personas portrayed in popular culture and music videos. There is a lot of posturing as they seek to create their own identity. During this time of development in which they are trying to decide who they are as a person, they are being told who they should be through the media they view. They adopt assumptions about power, privilege, gender, and sexuality that are expressed in these song lyrics and music (Chung, 2007).
Students who persist in such viewing habits may develop a skewed sense of how society operates. For example, the glorification of drug and alcohol use and abuse will be perpetuated as youth grow into adults who believe that partying and using illegal substances will improve their social standing (Taylor, 2007). Lack of modesty in dress and behavior will undermine efforts to fight back against the objectification of women (Chung, 2007). Without understanding the implications of their actions, students will grow up with a misguided view of consumerism and may become overly materialistic in their goals and aspirations. From my own experience and research, I have found that the messages in many music videos present a false sense of the value of material goods and how they are earned. Many of the hip-hop and rap music videos showcase artists wearing designer clothes and flashy jewelry, combining imagery with lyrics to misrepresent what goes into obtaining riches.

My response to the problem of students integrating negative character traits from media was to create a curriculum that will give my students the knowledge and ability to avoid the pitfalls of passively assimilating the norms being taught in visual media and more specifically music videos. My research explored the influence of a critical pedagogy on students’ understanding and responses to visual culture as well as how to effectively implement such an approach in an alternative high school setting. I designed a curriculum to test my theories on the use of critical pedagogy. With this curriculum, I had two goals in mind: First, I wanted to know how my curriculum and teaching would influence students’ understanding and response to visual culture. Second, I wanted to evaluate how effective my own teaching and curriculum is, with an emphasis on improving how I teach film in an alternative high school site.

As part of my evaluation of my teaching methods, I reflected on student participation and analyzed how this involvement relates to the effectiveness of learning activities. My curriculum
provides students with learning activities that foster the development of critical thinking skills and techniques for analyzing images. Students were taught how to critically examine the messages being sent through music videos and were given the tools to objectively analyze these messages for their intentions, assumptions, and values. The research examined how my students came to understand music videos as I helped them gain the vocabulary necessary to articulate their ideas and their discoveries of the meanings being created. Their ability to interpret meanings and discover messages was one measurement used to determine the success of the unit. My research also focused on an exploration into how my curriculum may affect my students’ understanding of visual culture, especially music videos.

I chose music videos as the focus of this curriculum due to their prevalence in the lives of most teenagers and their ease of access. They represent a rich site for evaluating prevailing norms in behavior and dress. Music videos are no longer tied down to a set time, place, or channel. With the increasing popularity of the internet, artists now create their own Vimeo and YouTube channels and post their music videos online for their fans to watch. Music videos can be accessed on computers, cell phones, tablets, and other portable electronic devices. Due to this omnipresence, I feel that students need to be able to critically examine and confront the messages being produced within popular media. By arming them with the concepts and principles necessary to interpret the images they are consuming, I am preparing them to interact with these media as a contributing member of society. Music videos are full of stereotypes and espouse the benefits of certain lifestyles. If the students don’t understand how to interpret and recognize the messages they are being fed, then they may adopt those messages tacitly and perpetuate those stereotypes and behaviors in contemporary society. By questioning the messages being touted by
popular culture, they are better equipped to make informed choices about their own behavior and beliefs.

I designed this curriculum both as a response to the problem of students’ lack of criticality in viewing visual culture and as an experiment to explore how students understand and respond to visual culture. I developed lesson plans for introducing the students to key concepts and principles of video analysis, interpretation, semiotics, and cinematography. I included music videos that I hoped would be interesting and relevant to their lives and personal tastes. Students were taught about critical theory and semiotics to help them analyze and interpret the music videos that I showed in class. The unit culminated in a final project, in which the students created music videos and shared them with the class.

My thesis concludes with an analysis and reflection on the effectiveness of the curriculum and how well it reached my goals based on my own observations and student responses.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Curriculum

Current theories on education have altered the way art is being taught in the classroom. Art educators like Olivia Gude (2004) are attempting to go beyond just teaching students about principles of design- or art-making techniques. Utilizing new theories in art education, teachers seek to create an engaging artistic experience to foster a deeper engagement from the students (Gude, 2004). Gude (2004) goes into further detail as she specifies three main tenets that drive her curriculum within her Spiral Workshops. She defines the criteria for her curriculum as “curriculum based on generative themes that relate to the lives of students and their communities; studio art projects based on diverse practices of contemporary art making and related traditional sites; art as investigation—understanding the art of others and seeing their own art making, not as exercises, but as research that produces new visual and conceptual insights” (p. 8). In her article “Postmodern Principles: In Search of a 21st Century Art Education” Gude (2004) relates how many of the current teachers are focusing too much on the elements and principles of art. Her own experiences have led her to comment that, “the elements and principles of art are enshrined in most art education textbooks today” (p. 6).

This was not always the case though. Arthur Dow and other art educators of the early 1900s taught elements and principles of design as a basis for studying visual concepts. They would study the art of other countries and draw attention to distinct characteristics that were unique to those styles. Somewhere down the line, these observations became streamlined into seven elements and seven principles that could be studied in order to know how to make art (Gude, 2004). For me and for many other art educators, the elements and principles of art
became the standard of how to observe and talk about art. This was my experience in my own high school art classes.

During my studies to receive my teaching credentials, I was introduced to Olivia Gude and many other theorists who sought to advance art education beyond the formulaic. By replicating contemporary art practices in their classrooms, they introduced their students to new ideas about how art is made. Borrowing from the postmodern ideal of investigation, there was a new focus on creating art that was more than just an exercise in making marks or drawing shapes. In her scholarly article “Principles of Possibility: Considerations for a 21st-Century Art Curriculum,” Olivia Gude (2007) confirms this claim by stating, “Contemplating the main topics of a curriculum ought to stimulate students’ and teachers’ anticipation and participation (p. 6). The aims of current curriculum are not necessarily to master particular skills or techniques, but to foster an atmosphere of investigation.

“Students should be able to sense, examine, and explain the structure of the art curriculum; these explanations should emphasize important ideas and themes associated with traditional and contemporary art making practices” (Gude, 2007, p. 6). As students work through their projects, they will learn those techniques and skills necessary to accomplish their designs. They will learn to realistically illustrate an object or recreate a color if that fits into their artistic goals. The educators I admire do not want to produce students that simply replicate and perpetuate canonical ideas. They are striving to develop the minds of adolescents to become critical thinkers who can investigate concepts and participate in cultural change and construction. They have the skills to think deeply about a topic and formulate opinions as they draw their own conclusions.
Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE)

In the 1960s art education started to move toward an emphasis on the disciplines that are part of art making including art criticism, aesthetics, art history and studio production. This was a response, in part, to the prevailing emphasis on personal expression as the primary goal of art learning. It was also a response to make art education a more significant part of the school curriculum as art education began to be deemphasized during the Cold War. In the struggle to maintain a supremacy over the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), the United States decided to increase economic productivity through the advancement of math, science, and technology (Gregg, 2016). Teachers and educators needed to prove that art education had a place in American schools that were determined to not fall behind the USSR.

Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) began as a movement to show that art had merit in the general education of students. W. Dwaine Greer (1984), in an attempt to define DBAE and provide an image of what art education could look like said, “the focus of discipline-based art instruction is art as a discipline within general education. Four parent disciplines—aesthetics, studio art, art history, and art criticism—mark notions about the practice and understanding of art as well as notions about professional role models, which can serve as touchstone for educational practice” (p. 213). The aim of this new focus in art education was to produce adults who had a sophisticated understanding of art and who would be able to respond to the artwork with articulate interpretations.

For these students to acquire these skills, DBAE curriculum implemented the study of “specific works of art, using activities designed to develop specific student knowledge and understanding. Yet, the specifics are not the final ends that are sought” (Greer, 1984, p. 214). Instead, the goal was for them to be able to internalize the concepts and be able to apply them to
any artwork they should encounter. This led to a more academic curriculum where the teachers would take on the task of “defining the content, concepts and procedures, and modes of inquiry that should lead to a sophisticated understanding of art” (Greer, 1984, p. 214).

We can see how this movement in art education inspired the use of critical pedagogy and cultural analysis when we understand that DBAE was hoping to teach students how to recognize the historical and cultural circumstances that help provide an artwork with its meaning. Art history teaches the students that the environment of the artist affects the art they produce. It also points out that art movements are often in response to cultural factors. Art criticism teaches students to examine symbols and attempt to interpret an artwork within the context of the art itself. Advocates of art education were stating that art was a “serious area of study worthy of attention as part of general education” (Greer, 1984, p. 217).

Structure

Many art classrooms around the United States are teaching art-making skills in a very structured way. There are good points and bad points with this approach. The good thing is that you are able to teach students art-making skills by introducing them to a new technique and allowing them to practice it. The bad news is that in some instances, it becomes too rigid. Students are being taught how to make art, but they are not necessarily focusing on any meaning in their art. Some of my colleagues, as well as prominent educators like Gude, have noticed that in some instances the students just replicate the same piece of art without any personal investment in the art itself. They are being taught how to paint, but not all of them are being allowed the opportunity to express themselves or explore ideas in their painting. The above-mentioned attributes of DBAE do a good job of providing a structure for teaching skills and techniques, but critics felt that it was too limited in the works of art it considered part of the content of art
education. In particular, some critics felt that the study of art should include Visual Culture studies.

**Visual Culture**

Visual culture is the imagery we encounter in our daily lives. In our modern society, we are bombarded by imagery from commercials, billboards, television shows, and music videos. Visual culture shapes the way we see the world and establishes our sense of culture. Due to its prevalence and how invasive it is, many educators have promoted the study of visual culture as an important part of art education.

In order for the students to properly navigate the world around them, they need to develop a visual literacy. This literacy will allow them to interpret the messages they find in the images all around them. Visual culture also promotes the idea that all art is a product of its time and background. As educators utilize visual culture in their classrooms, they are encouraging students to “engage in higher order thinking as they analyze works of art in relation to historical and societal contexts” (Heise, 2004, p. 42). This illustrates how educators applied the same approach they had been using to study art in DBAE to the study of visual culture. As students discuss their opinions about the artwork, any differences that arise in their interpretation can add to what Heise (2004) called the “valuing of diversity and other democratic concepts” (p. 46). The study of visual culture differs from DBAE in that it seeks to enlarge the definition of what can be considered art. Visual Culture recognizes that there is art all around us, which can be analyzed as a byproduct of culture as well as an artifact of culture.

**Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE)** is often used in tandem with a critical pedagogy. This critical pedagogy is used in a way that is designed to “encourage reflective self-examination of attitudes, values, and beliefs within historical and cultural contexts” (Heise, 2004, p. 42).
students are asked to analyze the images they see within the context of their own culture and interpret their meanings and messages. As they examine the examples of visual culture, the teachers often draw attention to areas where the messages may clash with beliefs held by the students. In fact, Lai (2009) stated that “an important purpose of VCAE is to call attention to problematic representations of gender, race, and class” (p. 15). Through a critical approach to the media around them, the students engage in a civil discourse of ideas and opinions. Due to how immersed the students are in visual culture, the curriculum tends to be more responsive to the social life of the students as well as their own lived experiences.

“VCAE supports the students critical examination of visual culture imagery to help students understand how dominant ideologies are at work in the dissemination of images, and thus how students’ self-concept can be shaped by visual culture imagery” (Lai, 2009, p. 16). Visual Culture is both a representation of what the public decides to admire and what artists, advertisers, and others want us to admire or desire. The images we see are reflections of the values of our society, what it wishes to keep and what it wants to discard.

Because of the nature of the subject, there may be times where topics are brought up that will be uncomfortable for some students. When we critique society, we often come up against such topics as racism, sexism, and objectification. With that in mind, teachers need to be considerate of their students to create an environment where everyone can share their thoughts freely and ask questions without being labeled. Lai (2009) states, “students may feel uncomfortable discussing sexism or fear being seen as sexist themselves. It will take time and encouragement for students to feel safe to share their reflections and critiques” (p. 18). Once everyone feels safe in expressing themselves, an open discussion can take place.
Curriculum Practices

Current curriculum development models often suggest that lessons focus on themes or an essential question (Walker, 2014, p. 293). This focus allows the students to make an in-depth inquiry into a topic and create art as they respond to issues and concerns they find along the way. These themes are referred to as “big ideas.” Dr. Melanie L. Buffington (2014), an associate professor of art education, explained, “Helping students to use big ideas and make meaningful connections with their learning promotes deeper engagement with concepts” (p. 10). The students see their art as having a purpose and the activities associated with art making are a legitimate means to an end. Buffington (2014) described big ideas as “overarching concepts central to a unit that help learners connect their knowledge in meaningful ways” (p. 10). The students are excited to engage with the content of the class because they understand its significance. These concepts and inquiries can also be very personal to the students and create an interest due to their more biographical nature.

Gude (2007) stated that, “unique curricular approaches should have in common that they investigate big questions about the uses of art and other images in shaping our interactions with the world around us” (p. 6). The purpose of the curriculum is to help students develop media literacy. We want them to be conversant in images and be able to communicate their ideas and thoughts clearly. With a structure based on big questions and big ideas, the students are being introduced to artistic principles and “strategies for understanding and making art today,” which will guide students in their acquisition of the “skills to participate in and shape contemporary cultural conversations” (Gude, 2004, p. 13). They will gain the skills necessary to analyze the messages delivered through images and make their own commentary on issues they find in
society. The critical thinking skills they develop will lead to future success in making choices as they navigate through society.

Art curriculum requires students to produce art so that students can practice and demonstrate those skills being taught. These art-making activities are typically called projects. Educators hope to create meaningful classroom projects that will support student learning and development. According to Gude (2007), “To design a meaningful project, one must carefully analyze the process of the artistic investigation and then structure similar investigatory opportunities for students” (p. 13). Art educators prepare activities to elicit conversations with their students. Thought and effort go into determining which artists to showcase and which themes to discuss. Questions are crafted beforehand to start the discussion of ideas and encourage the students to think critically about their own circumstances and experiences.

Walker (2014) believes that there are four points that need to exist in each “investigation” or studio assignment. They are (1) a prompt paper wherein the student responds with their own thoughts on the essential question, (2) a project proposal that lists the initial idea and includes preliminary sketches, (3) an artwork (some educators refer to the artwork as an artifact), and (4) a reflective statement about their artifact and the process they worked through to complete their artwork (Walker, 2014, p. 294). Throughout the entire project, the student is investigating and making decisions.

With the inclusion of projects as the primary artifact of student learning, it is important that the students are truly free to express their responses to the big ideas. In many of today’s classrooms, a prescriptive curriculum has been abandoned for a more emergent curriculum in which the students are free to make art that expresses their thoughts and experiences. Teachers have recognized the need to let the students “have a voice in choosing the destination for their
inquiry journeys” (Rabbat, 2014, p. 35). Such a practice dictates that students can only be truly creative if they are able to make real choices and determine their own outcomes with their artwork. This choice can also promote added interest in learning and increase student engagement with the topic being discussed (Buffington, 2014). Workshops on developing technical skills are then used as a practical guide to methods the students can use in creating their own art.

With choice comes uncertainty, as the end of the lesson may not be clear in the beginning. An emerging curriculum has been used in many classrooms to allow the students to be the masters of their own learning while they steer the class toward their own interests. When the students are interested in a particular topic, they will be motivated to learn more about it. The teacher can then guide students as they research their topic of interest. Joe Kincheloe, former chair at the Faculty of Education, McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, and fellow educator, Shirley Steinberg wrote extensively on the idea of students as researchers. Their view on education was that it should “prepare students as researchers who can ‘read the world’ in such a way so they not only can understand it but so they can change it” (1998, p. 2). The purpose of education is therefore, to help students to learn how to inquire into a topic and understand their findings so they can become active participants in society, not consumers but producers and agents of change. Once they have an understanding of the topic, they can choose to accept the way things are or to take steps toward changing it. They “read” the world by gaining an understanding of how to interpret the various information, texts, and clues that are present in society.

Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) further explained the role of the teacher in guiding student research when they stated, “Facilitating student research does not mean abandoning the
authority of the social role of teacher, nor does it mean never providing students with content knowledge. No teacher who teaches students research skills can maintain a passive, out-of-the-way status” (p. 17). What they mean is that the teacher is still very involved in providing knowledge and information where necessary while allowing the students to direct their own inquiries and dictate what needs to be learned. The students become engrossed in their learning as they look for relevant information and seek out answers to their questions. With this approach, the teacher strives to lead the students to finding their own answers instead of simply handing it to them. Ideally, the students should then be better prepared for life after school in which you have to find your own answers.

When the students are self-directed, they will still lean on the teacher to provide them with content knowledge where applicable. Technical skills and art-making techniques are taught in reaction to the students’ needs. The teacher acts more as a facilitator as the students grow in their understanding of the big idea they are researching. This is why the curriculum is considered emergent. The students are deciding what they need to know in order to reach their own goals. James Haywood Rolling Jr. (2006), a professor of art education, described it this way: “A curriculum may be considered emergent if it evolves in response to the initiatives and decisions undertaken by both adults and children” (p. 42). An emerging curriculum can be difficult to implement. It requires that the student relearn how to learn. “Today’s students, over-constricted by an education system that often focuses on knowing the one right answer, need guidance in reclaiming their capacities for conceptual, imaginative play” (Gude, 2007, p. 8). They need to be taught how to inquire about their interests and how to accept that there are no clear answers. Art is about expression and communication. Just as there are many ways to phrase a sentence, there are multiple ways to compose an artwork.
Criticizing Art

As teachers work with their students to analyze art, they should not accept all answers that are given as valid. When students give an answer, the teacher needs to make sure that they properly evaluate the validity of the student’s claim. Students need to be able to support their claims about an artwork with facts from the artwork itself. If they cannot produce evidence for their claim, then it is simply an opinion and not necessarily an interpretation. They need to contextualize their findings so that their claims are founded on some basis of evidence. As Gude (2007) expounded, “This is crucial to involving students in meaning making. . . . If teachers demonstrate that meaning making is not merely open-ended, but utterly arbitrary, why should students invest their time and energy in trying to make meaningful art or meaningful interpretations?” (Gude, 2007, p. 11). In this way, when critiquing artwork and discussing meaning, it is critical that the teacher guide the students toward evidence-based claims.

In his book *Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary*, Terry Barrett (2012) gave great insight into how artworks can and ought to be analyzed for interpretation. He stated that “interpretations are arguments” and that “all interpretations are not equal” (p. 121). Barrett goes on to state that these interpretations need to be grounded in evidence. Without evidence to back up claims about meaning or intent, art becomes arbitrary. When teaching students how to find evidence for their interpretations, you are teaching them that there are symbols and metaphors hidden within artworks that need to be examined and questioned. These images and symbols do not necessarily have one correct interpretation either. The important concept is that we need to be aware of the messages being created in art. Students will learn, through investigation, that “an artwork can generate many good and different interpretations” (Barrett, 2012, p. 122). With an understanding that the artwork can have different meanings, sometimes even contradictory ones,
it opens the door for further investigation into meanings that may not have been intended by the artists, but are present nonetheless.

Barrett (2012) described this when he said, “an artwork is not necessarily about what the artist wanted it to be about” (p. 123). He attributes part of this occurrence to the fact that artists are influenced by their environment and that “all art is in part about the world in which it emerged” (Barrett, 2012, p. 125). The idea that there is not a definitive correct answer when interpreting the art opens the way for students to more freely offer up their thoughts. Once they understand how to cite evidence to back up their claims, they feel confident in making their thoughts known during class discussions. Creating an open forum for the students to discuss ideas helps to shift the classroom to a collaborative learning experience.

The Teacher’s Role

Classrooms that use big ideas and emergent curriculum also shift the position of the teacher from one of master to one in which the teacher is part of the collective learning experience (Leake, 2014). No longer do art educators strive to be the sole expert in a hierarchical system, but they teach in a multilateral fashion in which they can learn from the students just as much as the students can learn from them (Leake, 2014). With this practice comes a feeling of worth for the students as they come to realize that their input is valid and powerful.

Curriculum based on big ideas, which allow the course to be dictated by the students, opens the students up to the risk of failure. Art educators are pushing students to try new things and investigate meaning making in their own way. Students are asked to express themselves in their art and make a commentary on some topic of interest. Proper scaffolding needs to take place in these classes so that the students can feel safe in taking risks. The teacher needs to establish a precedence in which failure does not result in a failing grade. Risks need to be
encouraged through assessments that are based more on their efforts and intentions than on their end results. Assistant professor Hsiao-Cheng Han explained, “If it is possible for students to have many chances. . . to submit an assignment or even retake an exam, they may take more creative risks and develop a more active and positive attitude towards learning” (Han, 2015, p. 261). These students become comfortable trying new things and experimenting with media. They learn that “artists do not know the outcomes of their works before they begin” (Gude, 2007, p. 8). The students can make plans, but be flexible in their application as they work through their concepts and formulate their artistic visions.

Art educators are working to help students develop their creativity and fashion their own creative processes. Art educators do not want students to simply replicate what they see. They want them to form their own ideas and create their own unique works. Using concept-based projects that focus on a theme or a big idea involves the students in a creative method that leads to self-reliance. Utilizing this method, students “no longer [look] to the instructor or classmates to initiate their artmaking” (Walker, 2014, p. 295).

**Bringing It Together**

Vincent Lanier (1991), a prominent curriculum developer and theorist, along with numerous other curriculum theorists have opened up new ways of viewing and interpreting art through the use of multiculturalist theories (Lanier, 1991). The aims of multiculturalism are to make the content more accessible to the students who may not be part of the dominant culture. It also seeks to broaden all students’ understanding and appreciation of other cultures and their art. Critical pedagogy assists in reaching these students as they work to deconstruct the images through multiple lenses. Educators, like Professor Ernest Morrell (2002), realize that the failure of some youth to develop “academic” literacy skills stems “not from a lack of intelligence, but
from the inaccessibility of the school curriculum to students who are not in the ‘dominant’ or ‘mainstream’ culture” (p. 72). By addressing issues of the “other” and recognizing that not everyone shares in a common culture, educators are making great strides to be more inclusive in their instruction.

Part of the purpose of critical pedagogy is to also help those belonging to the dominant culture to understand how they may unwittingly be complicit—or how the society to which they belong may be complicit—in the oppressive practices. Symbols and images are viewed from multiple perspectives and are discussed critically to discern the ways in which some groups may be oppressed. Being aware of the oppression present in certain phrases and images leads to quality discussions about equity and how we can move toward a more tolerant and understanding culture.

Not all art educators are on board with critical pedagogy or the use of big ideas. Some, such as Dustin Garnet (2012), believe that the time needed to create an environment where students feel comfortable enough exposing themselves to the classroom is too great. It is Garnet’s belief that you “cannot address complex personal and sociopolitical issues in the classroom without an immense amount of time” (p. 226). He stressed that contemporary art education theorists are not addressing the time constraints in the classroom and that the theorists ignore the desires of their students in favor of the contemporary curriculum. His concern is that students would lose out on time that could be used to build strong technical skills if a comprehensive curriculum were to be put into practice (Garnet, 2012).

This rebuttal to the use of contemporary methodologies raises valid questions. Based on my reading and experience, I would refute Garnet’s claims by adding that he perhaps misunderstands the stance adopted by such classrooms. An emergent curriculum would address
the desires of a student to build technical skills by conducting workshops on drawing or painting based on the interests of the students. Inquiry into big ideas and critical analysis of current issues would provide the impetus for students to engage in activities that would allow them to develop the skills they want or need.

In reaction to the claims that a critical pedagogy would somehow slight the students, it becomes imperative that teachers make sure to truly adhere to an open curriculum in order to meet the needs of every student. Although a critical pedagogy may be concerned with teaching the student skills and concepts outside of the realm of art, it doesn’t have to fail to meet other art-making concerns. Thus when it is combined with a study of visual culture, it is enhancing the students’ abilities to recognize the artistic skill and techniques that go into the images we see around us every day. Consequently, art educators will continue to provide their students with the best instruction in art-making techniques that they can. In this way, students will be confident in their ability to create meaning in their art and utilize the skills they desire in accomplishing those goals.

**Art Education Standards, Visual Culture, and Critical Pedagogy**

Despite art educators’ desires to have a free and open curriculum, there are still state and national standards that must be met. This was the cause of Garnet’s (2012) dissension from applying a postmodern methodology to her curriculum. Allowing students to create their own projects and lead the development of the curriculum brings up its own issues on how to ensure that the students are being taught those basic principles and criteria dictated by the standards for the class. To uphold the merit of a curriculum, it must document and explain how it meets the course standards.
It falls to art educators to “articulate categories of study worthy of being the day-to-day conceptual structure of a visual art curriculum” while maintaining a credible stance with the mandated goals for the content (Gude, 2007, p. 7). If the curriculum is too rigid in the way it meets the standards, then the content will suffer from a lack of authenticity and rigor. The students will engage in activities that may not stretch them academically. “It makes a lot more sense to plan a curriculum focusing on understanding the role of artists, artistic practices, and the arts in reflecting and shaping history and culture and to then incorporate objectives related to formal properties, analytic techniques, or media processes into these larger themes” (Gude, 2007, p. 7). Thus the standards can be met by tying them into existing learning experiences that will prepare the students for meaningful interaction with society as an adult.

The new national standards for art education are showing a harmony with the use of big ideas in the classroom. What were once called learning outcomes are now being termed “enduring understandings” (EU) and “essential questions” (EQ). This new structure works well in tandem with critical pedagogy as teachers assess students on how well they answer the major questions brought up in class. For example, anchor standards 8 and 11 from the National Core Arts Standards correlate with deepening understanding and relating the artwork to current contexts. Anchor standard 8 specifies that students should participate in activities that give them opportunities to interpret intent and meaning in artistic works. Anchor standard 11 asks the students to relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding. As professor of art education Robert Sweeny has described, teachers will be able to assess “whether students are able to articulate the significance of what they are doing—explaining why this skill is important for making or responding to art, and for other areas of living” (Sweeny, 2014, p. 7).
By requiring teachers to format their curriculum with EUs and EQs in mind, teachers will need to describe their methods in greater detail than providing a brief description of the activities the students will participate in. They will need to explain “what knowledge and skills the students will carry with them into future experiences” (Sweeny, 2014, p. 8). With a greater freedom to create unique artworks, students are not going to fit inside a generic rubric. Olivia Gude, in an interview with Sweeny (2014), sought to remind teachers that, “it’s not our job as art teachers to assess student artwork. . . . It is our job as art teachers to assess student learning” (p. 10).

The new standards are built to mirror the actual steps of creating and presenting art which students would engage in within a project-based curriculum. This means that teachers can focus more on their big ideas and overall themes and not be unduly concerned with whether their curriculum meets all of the standards. The major themes of the current art standards are creating, presenting, responding, and connecting. According to Sweeny (2014), a “single project can serve as a rich assessment task for a number of standards” (p. 8). The standards are also void of any mandate with regards to which media students need to develop skills in using. However, it is “suggested that a wide range of traditional media and digital media be included in any course in art” (Sweeny, 2014, p. 10).

Multipart assessment will be especially important to capture the students’ development as the new standards mimic the process of creation from initial conception to final product. These assessments should focus on concrete evidence of student growth and development. Each student will be required to demonstrate their learning through the projects they create and any written responses regarding their artwork. They should be able to articulate their learning and the rationale behind their choices.
Learning Activities

Learning activities should be aligned with the overall enduring understanding that is the basis of the curriculum. From my own experience, I feel that it is important to lay down some foundation of knowledge about the topic you want to investigate and explore. The beginning of the curriculum may have a few activities that are planned out with a specific goal in mind. It may be to teach them some technique, skill, or vocabulary. My reasoning for laying down a foundation is that I want the students to be able to have confidence as they explore their ideas. As the students are coming in with various backgrounds and familiarity with art, I seek to address any concerns they may have with their skills or abilities. No matter the rationale, it is important to remember that, with any activity, there should be a purpose with a sound reasoning as to why the students need to know that particular skill or technique. The EUs will provide the rationale for the implementation of those activities.

After the initial activities and introduction to the topic have taken place, the emergent curriculum will then prompt the inclusion or development of learning activities that match with the interests and direction of the students. To help foster the emergent curriculum, there needs to be options. If you only focus on one medium or art-making technique, then the students are going to continue using what you have taught them. Therefore, the students need to be introduced to multiple ways of making and be made aware of many other ways of creating art. Talking with the students and being open to their ideas will help them feel comfortable taking risks. If you demonstrate that you will accept divergent products as they fulfill their assignments, you will further bolster their confidence. The teacher acts as a guide to ensure that the EU is being met as the students engage in various conversations, research, and experimentation. Facilitating the students’ learning will become the teacher’s focus.
Determining the EU or EQ for your unit of study will help to pinpoint what you want the students to get out of the various learning activities that you plan. Each art-making task can be an “important opportunity for students to further their emotional and intellectual development, to help formulate a sense of who they are, and who they might become” (Gude, 2007, p. 8). Art educators are not just concerned with teaching students to appreciate or make art; they want their students to be better equipped to participate in society as a result of having taken their class. Engaging in a critical discourse in the classroom provides students with the tools to “effectively communicate, arbitrate differences, and form partnerships,” all of which “prepare them for living in a democracy” (Heise, 2004, p. 43).

Learning activities, while focusing on enduring understandings, can be aimed at increasing student engagement. The use of big ideas, as discussed earlier, is one example of increasing student engagement through specific learning activities. If the student can personally identify with the material being discussed, they are going to be more enthusiastic in participating in discussions, workshops, and assignments. Teachers elicit greater engagement from their students because “learning new skills becomes an important skill for exploring significant life issues” (Gude, 2007, p. 8).

The topic of the learning activity can help to increase student participation, but other factors may help to improve the students’ retention of information. Jessie Daniels (2012), a Senior Fellow at the Center of Health, Media, and Policy at Hunter College, concluded that, “Research indicates that students learn more deeply and retain knowledge longer from visual media than from spoken words alone” (p. 6). These findings have also been influential in promoting the use of popular culture in art curriculum. “Popular culture is often an easy pathway
to student engagement because it has already captured young peoples’ attention, and then instructors can scaffold more difficult concepts around that interest” (Daniels, 2012, p. 6).

Film, as an example of popular culture, is a great source for inquiry and learning if used properly. Unfortunately, the practice of using film in the classroom has been “viewed with disdain by some because it makes the students ‘passive’ rather than ‘active’ learners. Implied in this criticism are a number of interwoven ideas about book as text and the visual as text” (Daniels, 2012, p. 6). Some educators believe that students are actively engaged in reading a book in a way that they cannot be with visual media (Daniels, 2012, p. 6). Some educators may create passive learners while using film if they do not have a scaffold in place to assist the students in analyzing the film being viewed. From my own experience as a film student, I have come to understand that film is entertaining and can be difficult to learn from since some students will have to fight against their urge to simply sit there and enjoy the movie. Using a graphic organizer or having a clear purpose behind the viewing of the film can help to actively engage the students. In-film activities—such as writing down plot points, examples of foreshadowing, use of metaphor, mood created by sound, or use of camera angles—can encourage the students to be more active in how they view the film. It should be noted that, as assistant professor Mark Pearcy (2015) pointed out, the “purpose of in-film activities is not to guarantee student interest, but student engagement” (Pearcy, 2015, p. 42).

Based on my past experience with students at my high school, asking open-ended questions is an important starting point when beginning a new project. I strive to facilitate student inquiry so that they can be active participants in the new assignment. I discovered that when discussing symbols or working on interpreting images, it is helpful to walk the students through the process before setting them free to begin their own investigations. As they become
more aware of how meaning is made, they can begin to take steps towards creating their own meanings. Art educator Lisa M. Perkowski (2015) explained that as students engage in meaning making they will be able to “invest in their own idea development through exploration of materials and subject matter” (p. 37).

Practice in creating meaning further develops the students’ abilities to “recognize the cultural choices that underlie even the most mundane moments and actions of everyday life and consider whether these are the choices they themselves wish to make” (Gude, 2004, p. 8). The teacher at this point is assisting the students as they work through their concepts and determine the best way to convey the meaning they hope to create. Teachers can suggest the use of juxtaposition, re-contextualization, symbols, metaphors, or other methods that may be suited to the type of art or message the student is seeking to produce.

Critical Pedagogy

Many contemporary educators have adopted critical pedagogy, a teaching practice that supports students as they question and challenge the messages being created in society. At the heart of critical pedagogy is critical theory. Critical theory is an ideology that questions the exclusivity of knowledge and meaning. A critical pedagogy is thus interested in identifying and challenging the dominant views and understandings within the learning and teaching systems of a given culture.

VCAE has been pioneering the use of critical pedagogy as teachers have aimed to teach their students how to read the new text of the 21st century. Their efforts are rooted in a hope that students “will understand art images within the larger context of living in a society saturated with images, produced for a wide range of purposes” (Gude, 2007, p. 11). As students move into adulthood, they should be better prepared to engage and participate in society. Through engaging in a critical discussion of the images around them, they develop sensitivity to symbols and
become more perceptive, discriminate consumers who question the media they consume. They become cognizant of how their culture is trying to indoctrinate them with its values.

Inquiry into context and culture helps to inform students about the image or artifact’s message. This inquiry grants them access to the text of the image. This access relies on a critical literacy to fully understand all of the nuances found in images and their interpretations. “Critical literacy... is defined as the ability not only to read and write, but also to assess texts in order to understand the relationships between power and domination that underlie and inform those texts” (Morrell, 2002, p. 73). Once the dominant cultures are recognized, it is possible to recognize instances where that culture is being subverted or pushed back against by artists and media. Students who are unfamiliar with a culture or are perhaps too young to fully understand it often require background information to help them decipher the images they are consuming. In these instances, teachers are not “introducing extraneous ‘non-art’ content into the classroom because [their] business has always been teaching students to be nuanced observers of how meaning is made through images” (Gude, 2007, p. 13). As they grow to understand how meanings are made, students are better equipped to make choices on how they will create their own meaning.

Art educators understand that they are not just teaching students about art; they are teaching them how to participate with society. “These abilities to investigate, analyze, reflect, and represent are critical skills for citizens of a participatory democracy” (Gude, 2007, p. 14). If they are not fluent in the language of the present, how do we expect the students to succeed in the future?

**Filmmaking**

Visual media is the primary source of knowledge acquisition in this electronic age. Many adolescents gain their aesthetic experiences and learn about themselves and the world through
visual culture. The influence of film on the lives of youth has helped to raise awareness for the need of educating students on not only the process of filmmaking but also the ways in which meaning is created and delivered in film. Film has exploded into the mainstream of students’ lives due to its increased ease of access.

As Briggs (2009) stated, “Films are the novels of our time. They provide narratives and visual metaphors that function as tools for our imaginations and learning” (p. 44). I desire to help my students develop visual literacy, which will allow them to read these novels and interpret these metaphors. Images have become the preferred media for imparting information and knowledge. Students “need to understand how and why they are seduced by the imagery of everyday life” (Dias & Sinkinson, 2005, p. 146). Through practice and guidance, the students can gain the understanding they need and be able to appreciate the nuances of visual media. Since visual transmission of ideas is paramount in this day and age, it is more crucial for them to acquire these skills now. In like manner, to prepare students for entering society after graduation, many educators are adopting film as a means to educate their students on critical issues, trends, and philosophies.

Films are a site for exploring culture and critiquing our society. For example, “Laura Mulvey wrote ‘Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema,’ a landmark article using a psychoanalytical model to theorize the objectification of women in film that has since been applied to art and cultural studies and critiqued” (Dias & Sinkinson, 2005, p. 144). Mulvey’s theories on the “male gaze” in film ignited a new wave of film analysis. She asserted that most of the media of her time was positioned from the viewpoint of a heterosexual male. Thus, the way women were portrayed was through the eyes of a man interested in them as a potential sexual partner. Women were objectified to various degrees and the world of the films was highly
influenced by the ideals and opinions of men. Her theories have been adapted to current trends and they have grown to draw in the use of “semitic and psychoanalytical theory about spectators as subjects and the argument that they are ‘positioned’ through textual strategies in film” (Dias & Sinkinson, 2005, p. 144). My curriculum aims to help students become aware of this positioning and allow them to become more observant viewers.

The use of semiotics in film analysis can be highlighted in the use of costume coding. Costume designers make very deliberate choices when creating a character’s wardrobe. They are trying to generate an instant recognition of who the character is and help the audience make judgments on what they can expect from the character. Stereotypes are represented in many costume designs, but in some instances they can be challenged. Critically observing these instances can help the students pinpoint how films influence their thoughts and preconceptions. An example of analyzing costumes can be used from a class that watched the film Star Wars:

“Students explained that Luke and Leia, the heroes, wore light colors while Darth Vader, the evil force, wore black. Han Solo, the swashbuckling rebel assistant, wore a mixed outfit. Vader’s Storm Troopers who wore white armored uniforms accented in black undermined this stereotyped color-coding. However, like Vader, their helmets masked their faces, making them frightening. Students noticed that Vader’s threatening Imperial Officers wore costumes that looked like Nazi uniforms” (Briggs, 2009, p. 41). The students continued this analysis and were able to go into great detail about what they were being told through the costumes.

With current technological advances, filmmaking has become easier to implement as a tool for expression. “Technology no longer dictates the content or structure of the work like before” (Clarembeaux, 2010, p. 28). Students can create their own content in shorter periods of time and have access to editing software that allows for quickly putting together a film.
When studying film, the current consensus is to watch fragments of a film with a specific goal in mind for the students. For instance, highlighting a specific cinematic decision made by the director or discussing how the action was framed on screen. According to Clarenbaux (2010), director of the audiovisual center in Liege, Belgium, “DVDs offer useful teaching tools allowing you to jump from one sequence or shot to another to clarify, emphasize and compare. Comparisons are easily demonstrated this way, and this practice is especially useful with regard to timetabling and students’ limited attention span over long viewing periods” (p. 27). Educators can adapt and personalize the content they choose to show their students to meet the objectives and needs of a class. Showcasing instances where a particular style or trope is used in professional films helps build up students’ creative bank account to facilitate their use of such techniques in their own filmmaking endeavors.

**Critical Pedagogy in Filmmaking**

Film is a major site for witnessing the dominant culture’s influence on society. The images and the themes found in films often point toward maintaining the current hierarchy and establishing the dominance of those in charge. That is not to say that filmmakers or artists are always consciously striving to maintain the status quo, but that by growing up in that culture they often subconsciously perpetuate certain ideas due to their upbringing. Filmmakers are trying to tell a story. The types of stories they tend to produce typically align with the stories appreciated by the culture they grew up in.

When analyzing a film, it can be difficult to maintain focus, but it is important to remember that the film is a media object. It is a part of popular culture. Ernest Morrell (2002), after reading Jabari Mahiri’s book *Shooting for Excellence: African American and Youth Culture*
in New Century Schools, noted that “the critical teaching of popular culture is one way to make connections that are relevant to all students in diverse urban classrooms” (p. 72).

In discussing film study, associate professor of art education Judith Briggs (2009) wrote, “All films should be looked at critically. As art educators we need to question social knowledge and the power structures that lie behind them, noting its connection to race, class, gender, age, and ability” (p. 43). What are the dominant messages being conveyed to the audience? How are those messages being ingrained into their self-identity? Films can provide educators with a rich resource for exploring these issues because, if the audience is not careful, they can easily begin to accept and internalize the messages tacitly as a quiet observer.

Educators using a critical pedagogy as they investigate films have sought to encourage their students to “actively critique visual media rather than absorb it passively” (Pearcy, 2015, p. 41). A group becomes complicit in their own oppression when they accept their circumstance as the status quo. Instead of seeking to address the inequality, they passively allow their oppression to continue. A critical study of films attempts to point out ways that groups are being oppressed and how certain messages are being portrayed as normal. Films are as much primary documents as any traditional text, a “source of information about the time of their creation” (Pearcy, 2015, p. 42). Realizing a film’s potential to inform students about contemporary society, teachers are utilizing film more readily to teach students about the world they live in.

Just like in classical analysis, every detail of the film must be taken into account; the camera angles, the framing, the lighting, and so forth. Some, if not all, of these decisions are made for a reason, with a specific intent. Artists choose their colors and compositions for a purpose—and that is no different with film directors. “Analysis must take into account all that occurred before the film was made, focusing on the decisions taken by the director prior to
production” (Clarembaux, 2010, p. 27). With this background knowledge, a truly critical analysis can take place. Students can pick apart the various symbols, problems, and commentaries to reach a fuller understanding of what the film is teaching. With this understanding also comes the ability to question the assumptions being made by the filmmaker.

Many art educators, including Lin and Polaniecki (2009), believe that a “visually literate individual must have the ability to critically distinguish the quality of information” they are receiving (p. 96). “No matter what level of engagement with media they have. . . individuals must develop the ability to analyze and critique social conditions. . . and to question and examine the semiotics underlying various social practices” (Lin & Polaniecki, 2009, p. 96). Society is becoming increasingly more complex in their communications. Educators are seeking ways to enhance their curriculum to include the development of media literacy skills. Looking to the future, it is important to ensure that future generations are equipped with the understanding necessary to “participate in the global dialogue going on around them” (Lin & Polaniecki, 2009, p. 104). As Gude (2007) reaffirmed, “Students in a democratic society need to be able to understand and participate in important cultural conversations generated by the visual arts, film, and other image making practices” (p. 11).

Without proper exposure to concepts surrounding media literacy and critical analysis, students, when watching a film, will “ingest the historical inaccuracies of the film without question” (Pearcy, 2015, p. 42). Without practicing inquiry and critical analysis, the students are “likely to retain inaccuracies they gather from film” (Pearcy, 2015, p. 42). Classrooms that employ a critical pedagogy in the study of film attempt to avoid such calamities. These classrooms typically engage in activities that will give students opportunities to practice, allowing their abilities to develop through experience.
Music Videos

Professor Sheng Kuan Chung commented, “Contemporary art educators advocate the importance of fostering media/visual literacy in children through critically examining discursive cultural and aesthetic sites in the popular media” (Chung, 2007, p. 33). Music videos are seen as one of the most influential sites of visual culture to enter our society since the introduction of the television. Music videos can be accessed daily on computers, cell phones, and other portable devices.

“When such visual culture forms as the music video are brought into the classroom, they extend artistic inquiry and learning through relevant and critical social, political, cultural, and technical connections. Such criticality is inspired by provocative and challenging questions” (Taylor, 2007, p. 242).

Through a thoughtful study of music videos, the students are acquainted with just how deeply the images they view are internalized and subsequently imitated in their own ways of thinking and acting. For example, “hip-hop culture normalizes sexism as acceptable social behavior, delivering a message to youth that women have to engage in highly sexualized performances resembling those in hip-hop music videos if they are to be socially accepted or popular in a male-dominated society” (Chung, 2007, p. 37).

Art educators acknowledge that many of their students “do not have a full cognitive ability to differentiate between illusion and reality” when dealing with visual media (Chung, 2007, p. 34). Introducing a critical study of music videos opens avenues to help students develop cognitive ability necessary to “critically view what they experience every day in the media” (Chung, 2007, p. 37). Students can then recognize that music videos are not produced merely to “intensify viewers’ senses and persuade them to make purchases or consume products, but also
to communicate feelings, emotions, and ideas that eventually influence their perceptions and attitudes towards others and society” (Chung, 2007, p. 34).

“Music videos are designed to hold up to repeated viewings. As in any media form, some music videos are more successful and/or more aesthetic and meaningful than others” (Taylor, 2007, p. 231). This is ideal for an analysis in which you may need to re-watch the same sequence several times to fully grasp all of the nuances present. Students also maintain engagement since the media already appeals to them on a personal level.

When talking with colleagues about music videos, many have expressed concern over their relevance to students and mainstream popular culture. This opinion is based on stations like MTV, VH1, and CMT cutting back and even dropping their music video television programming. VH1 has stopped producing their Top 20 Music Videos Countdown that once aired on Saturday mornings. Many of these stations are now featuring reality shows, movies, or talk shows. However, music videos are still very much in the mainstream on such sites as YouTube, Vimeo, and Disney. Not only are professional artists producing and publishing music videos on these sites and more, but novice film editors are also posting their own versions of music videos to go along with their favorite songs. Taylor (2007) surmised that, “viewing music videos online gives viewers more control over what they see than television does because viewers can find and download particular music videos immediately rather than waiting for scheduled programming on television” (p. 231).

Music videos merit inclusion in filmmaking classrooms as examples of cinematic techniques. “Digital tricks in music videos can be connected with technique, style, media, and performance in visual arts study” (Taylor, 2007, p. 232). With music videos, there exists a relationship between the lyrics and visuals as well as the music and visuals. This relationship
states that the pace and tempo of the music will influence the style of the video that accompanies it. Similarly, the lyrics profoundly affect how the video is filmed as well as the content of the video in general.

Different genres have different tropes that dictate the types of images directors use. Genre doesn’t necessarily infer a difference though. Whether it is a rap song or a country song, if they are singing about love, they will have some similarities in their use of symbols. Comparing different genres can help the students understand how the same message can be crafted in various ways. It can also show that there are some symbols that are used across multiple genres or media. If students are having a difficult time paying attention to the images due to the lyrics being a distraction, muting the sound can help the students focus on the use of imagery and cinematography.

During analysis, it is also important to pay attention to the lyrics. Muting and paying attention to just the images is useful for one set of critiques, but the lyrics juxtaposed to the images can suggest “different connotations and contextual associations than one would interpret from the music and lyrics alone” (Taylor, 2007, p. 235). The video can add a different interpretation than the one the students originally envisioned in the lyrics.

When it comes to lyrics, there are songs that use profanity or offensive language. Rodesiler (2009) suggests that the selection of music videos should be done carefully, with the emphasis placed on what is to be learned from them. Just as some artists and artworks may not be school appropriate, Rodesiler (2009) points out that “music videos often push the bounds of conventional taste and may include adult content” (p. 45). With that in mind, I feel that my unit of study on music videos would be best implemented later on in the school year. This would allow me to judge the maturity levels of the students and establish a rough starting point for the
types of videos we could watch in the class. The maturity of the students will dictate which videos we can and want to view. As a result, there may be some videos that I can show during one semester that cannot be used with a new group of students. Having a large list of potential videos will allow me to pick and choose as I become acquainted with the environment of my classroom. I needed to become familiar with many different music videos and preview various videos to ensure that they are appropriate and meet the desired purposes behind viewing music videos in the classroom. Through this study of music videos, I was prepared to follow the students’ lead as they begin their own research into music videos.

In my preparations for conducting my research and implementing my curriculum, I began studying music videos extensively. I watched many different genres and did my best to become acquainted with the popular videos and music among the current students. In this way, I was able to preview videos that may come up as part of the student-driven exploration. Despite my preparations, there was a need to constantly view and evaluate new videos as the students bring them up in discussion or as part of their own personal research. In order for the curriculum to be emergent, preparation was needed to allow the course to go in multiple directions. Such preparation could include activities where the students are encouraged to explore multiple options, but a critical preparation would include the teacher’s own study of the topic. The teacher will need to anticipate different paths that the students may go down so that they can have answers and give guidance. There will still be times where the teacher won’t know the answer though. Here it is important to establish an environment in the classroom where it is okay for the teacher to not know the answer. Together the student and the teacher can then investigate the problem and discover the answers as a team.
Choosing which videos to use will be difficult because many educators don’t want to shelter the students (Taylor, 2007). There may be some instances in which teachers may want to expose the students to sexist portrayals or profanity. In fact, the students may demand that the examples being shown in class represent an accurate portrayal of the topics they want to discuss. As Taylor (2007) expounded, “In this way, the study of music video can epitomize the importance of approaching both art and visual culture through conscientious, critical, and contextually accurate approaches” (p. 243).

Critical Pedagogy in Music Videos

Art education professor Pamela G. Taylor (2007) said, “Pedagogy in the critical sense illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority, and power” (p. 234). The contextual study of music videos promotes criticality. It requires a methodological approach that questions the ways audience, voice, power, and evaluation work to establish particular relationships between various groups and individuals (Taylor, 2007). “A critically contextual approach to the study of music video involves activities that provoke students and teachers to analytically reflect on the images they see in the video as well as the way they perceive and interpret them” (Taylor, 2007, p. 240).

Critical pedagogy works with music videos to tease out the implications of a video through rigorous examination of its various contexts. Music videos can be approached in several ways, just like works of art. Different genres require a different set of questions and elicit different questions. Semiotics, social issues, artist intent, formal qualities, aesthetics, and so on are some of the strategies that prove useful in the analysis of music videos (Taylor, 2007, p. 240).
Questions are used to get students to think about the images they are viewing and how those images relate to the lyrics or theme of the song. What messages are being created due to the combination of music and image? As the students watch the music videos, asking questions helps to get them thinking beyond a passive viewing of the images. Another question might include this one posed by Taylor (2007): “What questions does this music video generate and what avenues of research might we take to answer them?” (p. 240).

Deciphering music videos can be difficult and cognitively demanding. It provides the students with an opportunity to “critically view and interpret the world around them as well as translate those ways of knowing into their own art making” (Taylor, 2007, p. 242). In order for this inquiry into making and deciphering meaning to occur, the final product of the projects must indicate critical and reflective inquiry. Students need to show that they applied what they learned and that they put thought into creating their own unique meaning.

The main objective in utilizing a critical pedagogy is to engage the students in a learning experience that will improve their media literacy and provide them with skills to navigate adulthood. Students should also develop the ability to recognize institutional oppression and be able to make a difference, even if it is only in their own lives. They can then act to rectify injustices and be an agent of change instead of a cog in the wheels of social norms.
Chapter 3: Methodology

My classroom became a research site in order to focus on two interests: (1) to explore how using a critical pedagogy would influence the students’ understanding of and response to visual culture and (2) to improve my teaching as I implemented new theories into my instruction. As my focus was more personal and directed toward a particular group and practice, I utilized case study methodologies and practice-based methodologies. These methodologies directed me to more closely analyze and inspect my teaching practices and reflect on the effectiveness of classroom activities. Observations, notes, and interviews played a key role in measuring the goals of my exploration.

Research Site

Polaris High School is the alternative high school for the Alpine School District in Utah County. The students come to Polaris for numerous reasons, but primarily they come due to deficiencies in credits. Some of the reasons that they are deficient include frequent absences, lack of motivation, or a failure to see the purpose in their classwork. Many students experienced setbacks and didn’t perform well in the traditional school setting and are hoping to improve in the alternative environment. They come to Polaris with the intention of making a last effort to gain enough credits to graduate.

Due to the nature of the student body, the teachers try their best to help the students find meaning in their schoolwork. Students often come to Polaris lacking either the motivation to participate in their classes or the support to complete their assignments or both. We as teachers don’t want them to slip through the cracks, so we are constantly looking for ways to engage students and to help them understand the material and meet the requirements for graduation.
Many of the students at Polaris have discipline and behavioral problems that also make it difficult for their teachers to reach them. Others are highly addicted to their phones. Teachers are incessantly telling students to put their phones away. One reason for students’ obsession with mobile devices is that they have their social interactions tied up in Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram. Another reason may be that they are bored in the classroom. When I talked with students, they revealed that they don’t see much of a point to the things they are being taught in class; they feel that their time is being wasted.

Some classroom management and behavioral issues stem from the students’ feelings of insecurity. There are some students who come to us with below-grade-level reading abilities. For whatever reason, they are behind in their ability to comprehend written passages. These students struggle to keep up with classes that require a lot of reading. Even simple assignments that require that they write short answers to written questions can be difficult. I have seen students that will choose not to participate in an assignment that involves reading because they don’t want others to know they can’t read very well. Some of these students act out in negative ways to draw attention away from their inadequacies, thinking that it is better to appear defiant than to look stupid. This mindset applies to other instances in which the students feel that they may be ridiculed for not knowing something.

One other issue we encounter with students is when they choose to not seek help. Some of these students don’t like to be challenged intellectually, so if class gets too hard they just mentally check out. Others, like those who can’t read well, don’t want to look dumb. They are afraid that if they ask for help they are admitting that they are stupid, especially if they feel that the question they have is something everyone else already knows. For this reason, it is critical that the teachers at Polaris roam their classrooms during the students’ work time. They can then
try to talk one-on-one with students who may be struggling, which helps them avoid publicly calling the student out for needing extra help. This individual attention is possible because the class sizes at Polaris are very small.

Small class sizes have positive and negative attributes. If the class is too small, it affects the type of group work that you can get done. On the flip side, you can spend more time with each student individually. With smaller classes, students stand out more. You can’t really hide in a class of 10 or fewer. It also means that participation is important to help discussions and other learning activities to occur.

Perhaps one of the most troublesome aspects of teaching a filmmaking class at Polaris is that the students are highly unlikely to be able to meet after school. The students come from all over the Alpine School District. It is the largest school district in Utah, spanning 787 square miles. The school district spans from Orem in the south to Alpine in the north and from Fairfield in the west to Cedar Hills in the east. If students were to get together to meet as groups outside of school, some of them would need to drive 30 minutes or more. The other hurdle to overcome is the fact that some students have jobs or have to ride the bus to and from school. For some students the bus ride takes up to an hour and a half. These circumstances have led me to decide that any films made in my class have to be filmed at the school. There is one exception: If the students can plan their film in great detail, then I can look into scheduling a field trip to film on location. We then make a day out of filming. This trip involves a lot of planning and requires that the students are on task the whole time.

When filming as part of a field trip, it is important that the students are able to complete their film. Because field trips require a two-week notice to schedule buses, it is difficult to plan
on filming again should the students not capture all of the footage on the day of the field trip. No matter where or when we film, the point is to help them understand the filmmaking process.

I structure my class after the industry standard production process. I teach the students about the steps and processes implemented in Hollywood and indie filmmaking. My goal is to make the lessons applicable to how they would create a film if they were on an actual set. I have felt that the students have not understood the purpose behind some of the planning processes necessary in creating a film. They are more interested in filming and having a finished product, but they lack the drive to spend time in the preproduction stage. By analyzing music videos the students may come to understand that great thought goes into the creation of films and videos. They should come to understand that all of the choices made about wardrobe, camera angles, extras, and props are all made with the intent of communicating some message to the audience. As they learn to interpret these images, they will gain a better appreciation of the work that goes into making a film while also catching glimpses of hidden messages.

**Case Study Methodology**

Conducting a case study allowed me to put considerable effort into exploring in detail my interest in teaching a curriculum that is especially applicable to an alternative high school setting. Using the method of case study, I was able to examine my research questions on how curriculum might influence student understanding. “Field notes, classroom observations, interviews with students, photographs of classroom activities, and copies of student video productions and journals” are all viable sources of data (Lin & Polaniecki, 2009, p. 97). As the researcher, I collected this data throughout the duration of my research process.

Case studies that have focused on similar topics or research goals have included “both participant observation and direct observation methods” (Lin & Polaniecki, 2009, p. 97). These
observations and notes resulted in a “descriptive narrative that reveals classroom activity” (Lin & Polaniecki, 2009, p. 97). The researcher sought out selected students to conduct semi-structured interviews at the completion of the project to discover their thoughts on the learning experience and overall effectiveness of the activities. I employed similar methods.

My methods included a preliminary survey to obtain baseline data, in-class observations and notes to gauge the effectiveness of classroom activities, and a closing interview with the students to ascertain how well the unit performed with regard to the learning goals and aims of the research. As part of the data collection for the observations, I took photos and video of classroom activities to record student involvement and participation. While students were working, I wrote down my observations and took note of any questions they asked. Written observations were also recorded directly following the class period while events were fresh in my mind (if I had been unable to take time to record them in the moment).

The methods of data collection were chosen based on how well they matched with the questions I wanted to answer with my research, which are (1) how my curriculum and use of critical pedagogy influences students’ understanding of and interaction with visual culture, (2) how effective my own teaching and curriculum is, and (3) how I can improve the teaching of film in an alternative high school site. Case studies lend themselves to the use of qualitative data. I explored how a curriculum that utilizes instruction based on a critical pedagogy approach can influence students’ understanding of visual culture. In the study I conducted, the data was a measure of how curriculum and instruction influenced students’ critical understanding of music videos and their relationships to choices about culture and identity and how these understandings are reflected in the students’ own work as cinematographers. Due to the nature of my research questions, I gathered and analyzed qualitative data.
Observations as well as pre-assessments of knowledge and attitude toward the material provided a means of establishing baseline data. Formulating questions required an attention to detail and a keen focus on what the overall questions were. To establish the effectiveness of learning activities, a more complex data collection and analysis were necessary. It was important to determine if the quality of the students’ understanding was improving. How well the students were able to analyze and provide evidence for their interpretations helped determine how effective the learning activities were. I looked to see if the time spent on learning those concepts and then viewing music videos was well spent. Interviews were useful in determining what students thought about certain portions of the curriculum. Keeping a record of my observations and entries written by students in journals helped provide me, as a researcher, with opportunities to gauge students’ levels of personal understanding of the issues concerning the interpretation and understanding of messages communicated through music videos, and then I could pinpoint areas in the lesson that could be enhanced or altered in response to student feedback (Bertling, 2015).

Since a case study is a bound system, the results may not be generalizable. By providing the specifics of my case in my notes and observations, I hope that others can determine how relevant my results may be to their own research or classrooms. The case description provides a context to justify my methods and provides a detailed picture of how I reached my conclusions at the end of the study.

**Practice-Based Research**

Practice-based research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice (Candy, 2006, p. 1). Practice-based research falls within the realm of action research and is concerned with advancing knowledge
within practice. This methodology has been used in many artistic fields, including art teachers’ classrooms. “This kind of research has given rise to new concepts and methods in the generation of original knowledge” (Candy, 2006, p. 2).

An integral part of this research process may include creative output or a particular practice being undertaken. To truly be considered practice-based research, the “practice must be accompanied by documentation of the research process, as well as some form of textual analysis or explanation to support its position and to demonstrate critical reflection” (Candy, 2006, p. 2). Using this methodology inside of a thesis should result in evidence of original scholarship and contain materials that could be exhibited in some fashion. The methodology is meant to push the researcher to critically examine their own practice and endeavor to improve their practice based on their analysis of their practices.

This type of methodology supported my efforts to improve student engagement in my classroom by critically looking at the practice I implemented in my approach to teaching. Carefully taking notes helped to pinpoint areas in my procedures or teaching philosophies that can be improved. Introspective and self-analytical reflections were written daily as I conducted the research. These reflections served as data to be analyzed at the conclusion of the unit as I determined how well my practice as a teacher had improved or changed. A central theme of this research was to determine how I could improve student understanding and critical thinking skills. By analyzing my observations of student behavior during instruction paired with my reflections on classroom activities, I determined whether my choices with regard to presentation and instruction were effective. As I implemented my unit on music videos and the critical analysis of popular culture, I learned alongside the students. My reflections will continue to aid me in future lesson planning and revisions of the unit in order to better convey the content and concepts to the
students. These reflections are purely qualitative as I compare my reflections during the unit with my thoughts on my previous practice and determine where growth occurred and which areas still need improvement.
Chapter 4: Curriculum

My premise is that curriculum and specific instruction can give students a greater understanding of how visual culture, such as music videos, influences their lives. The aim of the curriculum is to help them become more critically astute viewers of media and more analytical in the formation of their choices and assimilation of ideas found in visual culture. Through the curriculum outlined in this chapter, I hoped to determine how my students’ critical understanding and response to visual culture was influenced by this curriculum and instruction. I designed a curriculum to see how my students’ understanding and response to music videos was influenced by the use of critical pedagogy. Helping them to recognize the hidden texts or meanings in visual culture was at the forefront of my mind while planning lessons and materials.

My curriculum is connected to important historical and current trends in curriculum design, which focus on how to teach students to be critical thinkers. Part of my research looked back to Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) and the principles that were formulated during that time period. These principles and practices are still used in contemporary classrooms and provide a starting point for determining classroom activities and assignments. Even more relevant to my curriculum was a study of Visual Culture, which, in part, emphasizes the deconstruction of popular visual culture as a means to educate the students. This initial research into the concepts, practices, and theories utilized in contemporary curriculum design helped to inform my decisions as I began writing my lesson plans. Those plans are outlined later on with specific learning goals, essential questions, learning activities, and assessments.

In the curriculum I provide lesson plans for introducing the students to key concepts and principles. The curriculum is designed to use a critical pedagogy wherein the students are asked to question visual media and critically analyze the images they view. The learning activities are
meant to inspire student participation and engage them in learning how to create meaning in their films. Students are taught about critical theory and semiotics to better help them analyze and interpret the music videos that would later be viewed in class. The lessons begin with more theoretical discussions and some practice sessions analyzing music videos. We then move on to learning about specific cinematic skills that will help them in creating their music videos.

In the learning activities, I sought to engage the students in the learning process through the inclusion of music videos that I hoped would be interesting and relevant to their lives and personal tastes. Care was taken to ensure that the selection of music videos was appropriate for the classroom while not censoring the materials too prudishly. Students were asked to participate in the study of music videos by providing their own examples as well. When doing this, it was important to adhere to the school’s rules while not stunting their creativity and desires to contribute to the conversation. Guidelines were given for music video submissions before they began their personal searches. Class discussions were then held using the music videos found by students to help generate authentic interest in the topic and allow the students to voice their opinions and thoughts.

The curricular unit culminates in a final project in which the students implement the concepts and theories they have been learning about in the creation of their own music video. Students were provided adequate time to plan out their music video and complete the filming and editing processes. Further instruction on filming a music video was given to provide the students with the necessary skills to complete their assignment.

**Curriculum as Research**

The curriculum I have designed is meant to be an experiment to aid in my exploration of what might happen when implementing a critical pedagogical approach. The criticality is concerned
with adolescents and the influence that music videos have on them. The activities are designed to allow me to assess their understanding by analyzing their responses and providing them with opportunities to discuss how music videos are attempting to influence them. It is meant to work as a form of intervention that should increase the criticality with which they view music videos and visual media in general.

By implementing my curricular unit on music videos, I hoped to develop my students’ ability to think deeply about the images they view and to be active participants in their consumption of media. I observed the students during classroom activities and group discussions to obtain evidence of their understanding of the material, their thought processes during evaluation, and how the complexity of their thoughts changed. Not only was I able to gauge my students’ ability to interpret meaning in visual media, but I also noticed ways in which to improve classroom instruction as a byproduct of these observations.

As the research focused on developing critical analysis skills in the students, I carefully planned the lessons to build slowly and allow students to have ample time to practice using critical analysis, critical theory, and semiotics as applied to music videos. As I observed the students’ discussions and analyzed their written notes, I noticed their level of understanding and their critical analysis skills grow. The curriculum includes a final project that is meant to give the students a chance to showcase their learning and development through actively creating their own meaning in music videos.

The inclusion of an interview at the end of the unit helped me understand their thoughts on the whole process. The questions asked were intended to illuminate what areas of the curriculum fulfilled their purposes and if the overall goals of the unit and the research were achieved. The goal of the unit was to improve students’ critical understanding of visual culture.
and their responses to what they view. The goal of the research was to observe what happens when I put my curriculum and experimental teaching methods into practice in my classroom.

**Rationale**

Adolescents are in the process of forming their identity. They may be trying different identities out and experimenting with who they are while they attend school and interact with their peers. They are consuming mass media at rates and quantities that have never been seen before. They have mobile devices and cell phones that allow them to be constantly connected to media.

By utilizing the media students are invested in, I sought to provide them with the skills, attitudes, and dispositions required to interpret and make informed decisions with regard to popular culture (Heise, 2004). To assist in creating these authentic experiences and to improve interpretational skills, I used a critical pedagogy to encourage self-examinations (Heise, 2004). Critical pedagogy is an approach to teaching inspired by critical theory in which the teacher attempts to help students question and challenge societal norms and traditional practices. Through these self-examinations, students reflect on their own attitudes, values, and beliefs within a cultural context. They can then learn about the meanings being created around them and in turn create their own meanings.

In the past, my students have had a hard time engaging in the content of the filmmaking course. They have had little experience learning about camera angles, storyboarding, and script writing. Their focus has been on the creation of videos without wanting to exert any effort into the preproduction process. Based on the above conclusions by Heise, I believed that I could engage the students through a genre of film that is more in line with their interests.

By studying music videos, the students were able to engage in authentic learning experiences as they examined the cultural context and the meanings created in these types of
videos. The assumption that I explored was whether a critical pedagogy, in which the students ask questions about the media they are consuming, would deepen their understanding of the thought and process involved in making a quality music video. Through examining the details that can be used in analyzing videos, I was able to point out the importance of preproduction and planning. At the end of the unit, they created their own music video, which provided evidence to help determine their critical understanding of visual culture as they responded to the lyrics. The students were asked to utilize the concepts that they have discussed throughout the unit to insert their own messages and meanings into their video.

The curriculum is designed to promote critical thinking and a search for meaning in the images. Critical theory plays a major role in shaping the content and structure of the lessons. It is important that the students critically analyze the videos we watch and formulate interpretations based on connotations, denotations, and symbolism. I believed that making use of concepts and principles found in semiotics as well as cinematography would also enhance the students’ ability to interpret meaning from the music videos that we would view.

Students

Polaris High School is the alternative high school for the Alpine School District. The students at this school struggle to pay attention for even short periods of time. Many of them lack motivation to achieve academically and have priorities that are sometimes at odds with the conventional school system. The students often lack discipline and do not find academics to be very interesting, preferring to be on their phones than listening to the teacher. When given assignments, many of the students choose to do the bare minimum so that they can get back to other things that are more interesting to them, such as talking with their neighbor or returning to their phones.
My class had some students like those mentioned above as well as some of the more-motivated students (who are considered to be outliers). Past experience has shown that they do not desire to write a lot or engage in activities that they feel do not contribute to what they feel the class should be about. The more-motivated students recognize the intent behind the activities and are more willing to participate, while others need more urging and attention.

My students come from lower-income families. The class was 50 percent white, and 50 percent Hispanic. They are all native English speakers. Two of the students are openly homosexual. The students’ taste in music is varied, with many of them preferring nonmainstream bands. They listen to emo, rock, metal, and other genres of music that are not part of what I would consider popular culture.

Key Concepts

- Critical analysis is the systematic analysis of an idea, text, or piece of literature that discusses its validity and evaluates its worth.
- Critical theory is a philosophical approach to culture that seeks to confront the social, historical, and ideological forces and structures that produce and constrain it. It is a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole.
- Semiotics is an investigation into how meaning is created and how meaning is communicated. It is a study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation.
- Text is a media format that can be “read” and interpreted. Images can be a form of text, with meanings and interpretations.
- Symbolism is the practice or art of using an object or word to represent an abstract idea.
- Connotations are the idea or feeling that a word or image evokes in addition to its literal or primary meaning.
• Denotations are the literal or primary meaning of a word or image.

Essential Questions

• How is meaning created?
• How do we interpret meaning?
• How do we analyze an image?
• Why do we create meaning?
• How do music videos affect us?
• How does the media we watch affect us?
• How do we communicate with visual media?

Learning Goals

• Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work
• Organize and develop artistic ideas and work
• Refine and complete artistic work
• Perceive and analyze artistic work
• Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work
• Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work
• Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding

Overview of Curriculum

The curriculum is based on the concept of a critical pedagogy. The students were asked to question the media they watch and seek to determine how dominant cultures are propagating their ideals onto the masses. As students engage in the classroom activities, they grow in awareness of new meanings and messages found in music videos.
I implemented learning activities that are meant to increase how critically the students view music videos. The students were taught the principles and concepts behind critical analysis, critical theory, and semiotics as we interpreted meaning in music videos. The accessibility of watching multiple videos in a short amount of time promoted a pattern of viewing, critiquing, and discussing. This approach introduced a more critical way to view media for the students and allowed them to discover their own interpretations based on a critical analysis of the videos shown in class. Students were asked to look for deeper meanings in the music videos’ images and cinematography. These interpretations should lead to a better understanding of how meaning is generated in visual media and how such media can contain hidden messages. I gathered evidence of their understanding through students’ notes, personal reflection, and observation. This evidence was analyzed to determine student comprehension.

The final aspect of this unit of study dedicated to music videos culminated in learning the technical art of creating music videos. There are three main types of music videos: narrative, conceptual, and performance. Some music videos combine two or all three of the types. Other points of interest to teach the students were technical codes and media language used in analyzing music videos. These codes consist of categorizing the types of camera moves, shot angles, and staging of subjects. The media language deals with the language of music videos and how clichés and tropes have established themselves within the medium.

There are different styles of music video dependent on the type of music or lyric of the video. Rap music videos differ from country music videos, and a slow-paced song differs from a fast-paced song. The different types have their own set of tropes and conventions associated with filming. Since music videos are short, it is very easy to compare these genres and tropes in a single class session.
The students were taught to take all of this into account as they chose one song and, as a group, created a video for that song. Their final project required them to collaborate as a group to decide what messages they wanted to embed in their video and how they planned to convey those messages to their audience.

**Sample Analysis**

To illustrate the type of discussions I sought to have with my students, here is a sample analysis of a music video we watched in class. “24K Magic” is one of the latest singles from Bruno Mars and has a lot of imagery associated with wealth and partying. The class tried to analyze the video using critical analysis, semiotics, and critical theory. I will describe what that can look like and in the process illuminate how I hoped the students would be able to analyze videos in the future. In my explanation I will divide my comments into three categories to match how we approached the analysis in class.

*Figure 1: Screenshot A from “24K Magic” by Bruno Mars*
Using critical analysis, we try to evaluate what messages are present and think about how to break those messages down to study their parts. We can then make a value judgment on whether we support or disagree with those messages. There are two main messages that are being delivered. Those messages relate to how wealth is viewed and the objectification of women. In Figure 1 we see wealth showcased through designer clothes, jewelry, and parties. The fact that Bruno Mars has so much money makes it possible to party and spend his time in such idle recreation. The message to the viewer is that life can be a party if you have enough money. There are dozens of people who flock to Bruno, including his entourage of well-dressed men.

In both Figure 1 and Figure 3 we see Bruno and his posse flaunting their wealth as they strut around like peacocks, and in Figure 3 they literally throw their money around. With this showcase of wealth and how it is being depicted, it raises questions about our society. Should we clamor around those with money? Just because he is rich, does that make him a good person or someone who you would want to spend time with? How many of these people would still want to hang around him if he were poor?

The objectification of women is notable throughout the video. When we compare the way men are dressed as opposed to women, we see a stark contrast. The scenes at the pool show women in bikinis whereas the men are still in their designer clothes, which cover most of their bodies. It could be argued that the men’s wealth is what makes them sexy, but the women are blatantly used as objects for adoration. They are in the background and are simply there for the men’s amusement. This is most apparent in Figure 2, in which the camera pans across multiple women’s buttocks before stopping at Bruno Mars. He is sitting there just enjoying the scantily clad women and is very pleased with himself. He smiles at the camera as if to say, “They’re nice, right?” He holds his champagne glass and watches them. You might be able to say that the
reason why the women are in bikinis is because they are at a pool and bikinis are swimwear. This argument is lost when you think about how the men are not wearing swimwear. It never shows anyone getting into the water either, so it would appear that no one has any intentions of swimming. It would seem that the pool setting is just an excuse to have women in revealing clothing as they stand around and show themselves off to the men.

![Figure 2: Screenshot B from “24K Magic” by Bruno Mars](image)

The next step in looking for interpretations and messages in the video is to look for symbolism and metaphor in the images. This is where the students would use semiotics. We look at not just the images, what they are wearing, what they are doing, and where they are, but we look at how those things could have a symbolic meaning. The messages of wealth and objectification are strengthened through the images used. It also gives some new insight into how wealth can get you things that you might not otherwise receive. In Figure 3, we see the men riding down the hallway of a hotel. This can mean that wealthy people don’t even have to walk if they don’t want to. In fact, they have so much money that they are throwing it in the air. The silk
robes and jewelry are all signifiers for the wealth that they have. Even the hotel they are at is a subtle reminder that they are rich. The classy chandelier and the woodwork on the molding on the walls all showcase that this is a fancy, upper class, hotel. Looking back to Figure 1, we see that the men in Bruno’s entourage are crouched down while he is standing. This shows that he is the most important. He is the rich one that blesses them with his presence. They are there because of his wealth and are meant to support him. They are like a buffer between him and the outside world. This leads me to think about the lyrics meaning. 24 karats is the highest quality of gold. It is the purest and most expensive. It is also the softest and most delicate. This can be a metaphor for their masculinity and sense of worth. Their wealth could be like a penetrable armor that hides their insecurities. They put up a façade of having a good time, but we don’t see anything deeper or substantive from them. One last item of interest is the fact that the men are all wearing sunglasses at night. They are there for decoration since the sun is obviously not going to be bothering their eyes. The sunglasses thus become a symbol of wealth, as they are presumably an expensive brand.

We have already discussed the objectification of women in our previous analysis. Trying to reveal more about that topic through semiotics is difficult. Many of what I could say has already been mentioned. It is notable that there are always women in the background. They are being used as props for the music video. They are literally the same as objects that were brought in to help set the scene for the video. Although personal preferences might differ, the women are all very attractive. This in itself can be symbolic of how our society treats people who are not beautiful. Only beautiful people get to be on camera. Only beautiful women get to hang around the rich guys. It could be that rich guys only want beautiful women around them and send the
others away. Whatever the reason, it sends a message to the girls watching this video that they need to be beautiful in order to hang out with guys, get invited to parties, or have fun.

![Figure 3: Screenshot C from “24K Magic” by Bruno Mars](image)

Critical theory is the final lens through which the students will look at music videos. The song itself, along with its video, is very superficial. It is about partying and flaunting your wealth without really saying anything important. It is not very true to life either. This is the important point that needs to be understood by the students. Rich people don’t usually go around throwing money into the air. The video is all about spectacle. It also doesn’t show any consequences for any of their actions. This supports the analysis that the rich oppress the poor. In society, you can do what you want if you’re rich. The poor are left out all together or are left to clean up afterwards.

There is one thing that does come to mind when questioning the society depicted in the video. Why are there no wealthy women? Can women not be wealthy? I understand that the video is about a male artist flaunting his success and wealth, but the video leaves out rich,
powerful women. Even the lyrics talk about “players” as men who are in control and get all the women. Can women be “players” too? Often this question is answered with a no in our society. They are seen as sluts or hoes because they have so many partners. There is a double standard in society in which men are allowed to be promiscuous and have multiple women they are dating, but women are not allowed that same lifestyle. It isn’t necessarily a good lifestyle anyways, but the fact that there is such a discrepancy is something that is worth thinking about.

All of these analyses together help to create a deeper understanding of the images and their potential meanings. There is most likely even more that could be discussed as well. The important thing for this exercise is to try and get the students to think deeper about what they are viewing and try to be aware of the messages that are staring them in the face. The hope is that the students will take the conversation in a direction that is meaningful and personal as they seek to apply their own interpretations.

Lesson Plans

**Lesson One.** In this lesson, the students were introduced to the terms and concepts associated with critical analysis. They engaged in analyzing and interpreting a music video first through their own previous knowledge of interpretation and then through critical analysis as described in the lesson. The lesson utilized discussions and lecture to help the students familiarize themselves with the concepts and share their thought with their peers.

**Lesson Two.** Students were taught about semiotics and how to view visual media as a text with attached meanings. They discussed symbolism, metaphor, and juxtaposition as it relates to interpreting visual media. They watched a music video and used semiotics to decipher meaning. A class discussion took place after viewing the music video where students shared their thoughts and any notes they took.
Lesson Three. In this lesson, students were taught about critical theory and how culture and oppression are propagated through popular media. Students re-watched the video from the first day of the unit. They should utilize the concepts of dominant culture, propaganda, and oppression as they look for a deeper meaning in the video.

Lesson Four. In order to help get the student engaged in the learning process, the students were asked to find their own examples of music videos that we later watched as a class. The students chose their videos based on the criteria outlined in the lesson plan so that we could have a variety of videos to watch. These videos were ones that the students were familiar with or liked, so they were more inclined to view them and analyze them carefully.

Lesson Five. To help the students use the knowledge and skills that we had been developing over the past few lessons, the student began the process of making a music video. This lesson focused on the students working together to determine which song they wanted to develop into a music video. The class agreed on a song and began pre-production.

Lesson Six. Now that the students had a song chosen, they needed to start thinking about how they were going to film the video and what content they would include to create their own meaning and messages. To scaffold them in their development of their music video, we briefly studied music video tropes, camera work, and editing.

Lesson Seven. This lesson was to give time for the students to work on filming and editing their music video. They created a rough script or outline for their video. They completed the pre-production processes of gathering props, wardrobe, and developing their plan for filming. Storyboards were encouraged and the students were asked to make a shooting schedule to plan out how they would get everything filmed for their video. This lesson also included the students editing their footage together into a final music video.
Lesson Eight. The students watched their music video and took notes. They expressed what messages were being conveyed and explained their choices for various edits, camera moves, and staging. The video was then presented to the school by distributing it to the faculty to have them show it during one of their classes.

For a detailed explanation of the lessons and an outline of their procedures, see Appendix I. Handouts and other materials are provided with the lesson plans. Music videos and other visual media can be found on YouTube.

Final Project

The unit of study culminated with the students working together to create a music video of their own. This music video should utilize symbolism to create meaning beyond a simple literal translation of the lyrics. The students were asked to put into practice the concepts and principles discussed during the course of the unit in order to develop their idea and create a meaningful message in their music video.

The project began with the students choosing a song they wishes to make a music video about. As a group they then needed to decide on a message they desired to convey in the video. Through collaboration, they planned how they will create that message using the ideas and theories discussed as a class earlier.

Once the students had decided on a concept, they wrote a script and were asked to create storyboards to outline the shots they wished to use and work out how the camera would help tell their story. They also wrote lists of props and costumes that would be needed. Finally they created a shot list and shooting schedule to help them stay organized and on track to meet their deadline.
The students were given adequate time to film and edit their music video. They had access to digital cameras and editing software to help them complete this portion of the project. Once they have a final edit of the music video, they exported a movie file and we watched their finished project as a class. After they received approval from the administration, they were able to screen their music video for the school.
Chapter 5: Research Results

I began my research with certain assumptions. I believed that the media they watched was influencing the students at my high school, particularly music videos, and that they were not aware of the ways they were being influenced. I also held the notion that the students didn’t recognize the influence that music videos held over them because they lacked the skills to properly analyze and interpret them. Guided by these thoughts, I developed a curriculum to explore how their understanding and responses to music videos would be influenced by this curricular experiment.

Initial Questions

To establish the students’ level of familiarity and understanding of music videos, I began the unit with a questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions that asked the students how often they watched music videos, why they watched them, and what they thought about while viewing music videos. Other questions were meant to gauge how much they felt music videos influenced their behavior and to determine how well they recognized messages portrayed in music videos. Through this questionnaire, I discovered that none of the students felt they were influenced by the music videos they watched. Four of the questions asked were tied to what I believed would be an indication of influence.

Have you ever tried to emulate something you’ve seen in a music video?

Do music videos influence the clothes you wear?

Do music videos influence the way you talk?

Do music videos influence the way you act?

To each of these questions, every student in my class answered, “no.” There were only two exceptions. Timothy answered that he tried to emulate musical techniques that he found in
music videos. The other exception was Mark’s answer to clothing. He wrote, “it depends if your [sic] stylish or not.” Mark did not elaborate on whether he considered himself stylish, so I cannot draw any conclusions as to his clothing choices being influenced by music videos. With Timothy’s answer, it was not something that had any bearing on the intent of the question, so I can assume that his answer is also no.

Since I do not know what my students’ behavior was like prior to their engagement with music videos, I cannot determine if their feelings of not being influenced are accurate or if they are just not aware of how their behavior has been altered. It is also possible that their own assumptions of media’s influence over them may not be accurate. My rationale for using critical pedagogy is based on the premise that they are not aware of the influence that visual culture, music videos in particular, has on them. I learned that my particular students did not feel that music videos were affecting the way they lived their lives. Despite this revelation, it was still important to determine how well the students were recognizing and interpreting the images they see in music videos. If they could learn to point out the messages, then perhaps they may discover that they have been influenced after all, if any influence existed. Either way, my curriculum was concerned with teaching them to question the media they consumed. Even if no influence existed, I wanted my students to be able to interpret music videos. I wanted to see how critical pedagogy influenced their understanding and responses to visual culture.

Other important questions that were answered in the questionnaire revealed that the students in my class were split on how much attention they paid to the visual elements of the video when watching a music video. One question was, when you are watching a music video, how much do you pay attention to the visual elements of the video? To this I had two students answer, “I don’t” and “Not at all.” One student wrote “30%.” Three other students wrote they
pay close attention, with one student writing, “I more pay attention to the story and the meaning.” These findings helped me understand that some students are more passive than others in their viewing of music videos. For one of the students, Mark, who had said that he pays close attention, the reason might be because he is interested in learning filming techniques. Mark answered the question, “What do you think about when you watch a music video?” with “How did they do all that?” With these findings, the question still remained: how critically do the students watch music videos?

Watching and Analyzing a Music Video

After reviewing the students’ answers to the questionnaire, the aims of the music video unit were unchanged. The purpose of the unit was to teach the students how to think critically of the media they consume through the use of a critical pedagogy. Based on their answers to the questions dealing with visual culture, I understood that my exploration into the use of a critical pedagogy aimed at increasing their understanding of visual culture would still be possible. In this unit, they were taught critical analysis and interpretation skills to change the way they consume media. To this end, I proceeded to introduce the concepts of interpretation of music videos using critical analysis, semiotics, and critical theory. To help them recognize the difference between how they normally watch music videos and how we would be studying them in the class, I first had them watch “24K Magic” by Bruno Mars and write down their thoughts and what they saw. With this loose instruction, the students watched the music video, but no one took notes. Despite their lack of notes, the students were able to hold a discussion and tell me about things they saw or thought about during the viewing.

However, some students chose to not really watch the video either. I determined that they weren’t watching the video since I observed them talking with their neighbor or looking at their
cell phone as the class was watching the video. They would look up periodically, especially after being reminded to pay attention. Some of their comments about the video were, “sexy ladies”, “over compensation”, “showing off”, and “bad dance moves”. Part of their disinterest with viewing the music video may have been tied to their aversion to the genre of music in the video. Several students commented on their distaste for that type of music during the discussion we held afterwards. It felt like two students in particular were interested in trying to make fun of the music video instead of trying to analyze it. They wanted to make it known that they did not listen to that type of music. Other students were able to hold a proper discussion though. They mentioned that there was a lot of attention directed at the women in bikinis and that the guys were dressed fashionably and flaunting their wealth. This helped me to see that they were able to recognize the very blatant symbols and images. What they didn’t get was some of the more subtle commentaries that were being made about society. The analysis of how it relates to culture and society was going to come later, but this was a good indication that the students would benefit from that lesson when it came.

Once the discussion was over, we went over the definitions for the terms found in lesson one and introduced the concepts of critical analysis and semiotics. The terms are a list of basic vocabulary words necessary for critical analysis and the interpretation of images. The following class period, we used the concepts of critical analysis and semiotics while watching the music video a second time. To facilitate note taking and to give them a more structured goal for their comments, I provided them with a handout. This handout contained key questions and things to watch for in the video. The questions were meant to draw their attention to certain aspects of the video and to prompt them to think deeper about the images they were viewing. Some questions included: How are females represented in the video? How are the subjects of the video dressed?
What is the narrative or story behind the song? How is wealth defined in the video? While watching the music video the students took notes on the handout and everyone participated in the discussion afterwards.

Figure 4: Notes of students’ comments during analysis of “24K Magic”

This process was repeated with several music videos and the concept of critical theory was introduced. Based on their notes, the students were able to write more about the video and had more to discuss about the images after viewing the music video since they had specific questions they were asked to answer. In figure 4 you can see the notes I wrote on the board as we discussed their answers to the questions.

They recognized that women were being represented as “bitches,” “gold diggers,” and scenery (“background”). From this we were able to discuss how the male gaze is often imposed
on visual media. The viewer of this music video is placed in the position of a heterosexual man. Women are seen as objects to look at and ornaments for the rich. We were able to contrast this with the type of clothing the men were wearing. Their attire is outlined next to number 5. We see that they are wearing expensive clothes, “silk,” and jewelry, “gold chains and rings,” which are symbols of their wealth. The students said that the men were “fully clothed” as opposed to the women who were in revealing clothing or bikinis. Based on their comments and the notes they had written down, I knew that my students were capable of deciphering meaning from the videos if they were willing to put in the effort. Their answers showed that they could notice more elements of the video if they were told in advance what they should be watching for. Their initial viewing resulted in very few notes and a very superficial reading of the video. Guided questions helped them to dig a little deeper into the imagery.

Despite the more in depth reading about wealth noted earlier, the students rarely wrote more than one or two words in answer to the questions posed while viewing a video. However, there were three students, Samantha, Mark, and Timothy, who were more articulate in their writing. These students tended to show a greater attention to detail and at times cited the evidence behind their interpretations. For example, Samantha wrote, “They’re way over sexualized. I don’t think I saw one girl that wasn’t sexualized in one way or another.” This was in response to the question, “How are females represented in the video?” In response to the same question, Adam wrote, “As big butt items.” Samantha pointed out in the group discussion that many of the shots of women were ones in which the women were wearing bikinis.

**Videos Chosen by Students**

I had chosen two videos that we watched several times in order to practice using critical analysis and other interpretative techniques. After the students were familiar with the concepts and
principles behind these ways of interpreting images and deciphering meaning, I gave them an opportunity to practice using those new skills. They were asked to find their own videos that would perhaps be more interesting for them to watch and share those with the class. Due to time constraints, we only watched one video from each student. The students responded well to this set-up and were excited to view other music videos. They expressed that they were not fans of the types of music that had been previously shown and liked the idea of getting to watch something they were more inclined to listen to.

Throughout the entire process, I observed that the students would still choose to divert their attention or talk with neighbors while viewing music videos. During my observation of the students’ conversations at times when they were talking during the music video, they were not discussing the video. In an attempt to forestall such behavior I had them watch the videos individually during some of the class viewing sessions. They used their phones to access YouTube and watched the video by themselves. This helped to keep them from talking to their neighbor during the viewing. It also allowed me to more closely monitor student behavior to make sure they were on task and not simply wasting time on their phones. I walked around the room and checked as they were watching the videos to make sure that that was what they were doing. After watching videos in this new format, we were able to have a discussion on the videos as a class. The students were given time to write their responses and any thoughts they had about the videos before the discussion started. The students were able to have a discussion about their interpretations, but most of them still lacked a more substantial evaluation.

Many of their observations were just describing the literal images that they saw. Samantha was able to get a little deeper as we were talking about critical theory and looking at how the video was representing domination, oppression, and the statue quo. We watched a video
by Stephan called *Crossfire pt. 2*. In this video there is a depiction of several people in glass boxes. These individuals were representatives of oppressed or “hated” communities. There was a black man, a Muslim woman, a white businessman and a police officer. Samantha wrote more detailed evaluations and pointed out some of the ways that the video was questioning and pointing out oppression and societal ills. She wrote, “Oppression – there was clear ‘oppression’ against all the people in the glass boxes and in today’s world, there is a lot of oppression against people of color.” As a class we discussed how the video was trying to point out that we are putting people in these glass boxes and choosing not to truly know them. Instead, they are on display and we keep them at a distance. The video ends with the black man holding up a sign that says, “we are all human.” The students recognized this as a fight against the norm and how society is trying to make us see some of these minority groups. Through the guided questions and group discussion, the students were able think deeper about the meaning of some of the symbolisms used. There are still a few students who were only writing one to two word responses to the questions though. It is hard to tell if this is because they can’t see any deeper meaning or if they are just apathetic towards the activity and don’t want to spend the time needed to write down more detailed responses. When asked to elaborate, they seldom chose to add more than a few words of clarification.

**Students Create Music Videos**

The final portion of the curriculum was designed to have the students apply what they had learned about music videos and create a music video that contained its own messages with symbolic interpretations. We began by discussing camera angles and various cinematic shots. While watching a video on camera shots and movement, the students were not engaged and needed reminders to pay attention. The discussion of the meaning behind camera angles and
movements was also difficult. We specifically watched two videos produced by Film Riot, a YouTube personality. His videos specialize in showing do-it-yourself film work and giving tips on the entire filming process.

Figure 5: Notes during lesson on camera shots, cuts, and movement
The videos we watched were on coverage, the process of filming a scene from multiple camera locations to allow for cuts to make the scene more dynamic, and the meaning of camera movement. In the video describing camera movement, it explains that every camera move has a purpose and an intended meaning. Some of those meanings are very straightforward and utilitarian while others are more artistic or symbolic. After watching the videos, we discussed what they had learned. The students did not want to talk very much or share their thoughts. It turned into more of a lecture as I tried to draw some answers out of them while teaching them about the reasoning behind camera movement and location. We discussed how to film a music video and talked about cuts and shots. Timothy was very interested in the discussion and I observed him paying more attention to the videos than the rest of the class. Samantha wavered back and forth between paying attention and being distracted by those who were not on task.
Once it came time to start making their own music video, the students became more excited and showed a renewed interest in the class. They did not, however, choose to make good use of the planning time I provided. I observed and heard that the students were not interested in creating storyboards or making any type of plan for camera angles or movement. Tyson complained that they were not artists. Other students seconded his sentiment and wanted to forego making storyboards all together. In an attempt to adapt and accommodate them, I had them write down a brief description of the shots so that we could at least have something to go off of when it came time to shoot. My adaptations were made due to the fact that the school year was ending and I wanted to give them as much time to film and edit as possible. James commented that they would just “wing it” instead of making any plans. It was a struggle, but I was able to convince them to at least plan out what they were going to film for each scene of their music video.

This exchange is an important illustration of what I believe was the cause of their film not having much of a symbolic or deep meaning. Since they didn’t want to do any planning, they couldn’t put any effort into creating a meaning outside of just following the main character around as he sang. The camera angles were chosen based on a decision that was made on location and they were mostly a simple shot to capture the action. I became more involved than I wanted to be in their filming so that they could at least have some variety to their shots. I was constantly suggesting different camera angles and providing help with staging the characters in the scene. If we weren’t on a tight schedule to complete the filming of their video, then I would have let them work things out on their own more. Unfortunately, I didn’t have an abundance of time to offer them. Their film turned out better because of my help, but I definitely was not able to let them grow as much because they were not doing as much of their own problem solving.
The students did contribute their own ideas as filming progressed. They were the ones that came up with the shots in the library.

They were able to get a little bit done each day and eventually finished recording all of the footage they needed. Absences were a problem that hindered the filming of their video. Due to the absences of several students, filming took longer than originally scheduled for. Once filming was completed, the students worked together to edit their video and sync up the song from the film. While editing their footage, it was discovered that some of the lip-syncing was off and they had to reshoot some scenes in order to have the lips match up better with the audio.
Chapter 6: Discussion

I have two goals in mind. First, I want to know how my curriculum and teaching influences my students’ understanding and response to visual culture. Second, I want to evaluate how effective my own teaching and curriculum is, with an emphasis on how I teach film in an alternative high school site. While maintaining a focus on my goals, I carried out the plans outlined in my curriculum and took time to reflect on the progress of the students. I sought each day to analyze how well the students were able to grasp concepts and whether they were able to then assimilate those concepts into their viewing practices in class. The three major sections of the curriculum were introducing concepts, practicing interpretations, and implementing skills. These three sections were all part of one continuous path that was designed to take the students on a journey to deeper understanding of visual media. During this journey I also learned various ways in which I could improve how the instruction is structured and how to best deliver the information to the students.

Throughout the implementation of my curriculum I continued to gather data to analyze how critical pedagogy influenced the students’ understanding and response to visual culture. These observations and subsequent notes were different from the analysis mentioned above. With the two aims of the research, exploring the influence of a critical pedagogy on students’ understanding and responses to visual culture and analyzing the effectiveness of my teaching practices in relation to that curriculum, there were two sets of data to collect. In some instances there was some overlap as I was able to note areas where their understanding may not have been influenced as I had planned. These occurrences gave rise to opportunities to analyze how I could improve the instruction to garner better results in the future.
As has been noted previously and as it will later be shown, the students at my school struggle to pay attention for even short periods of time. There is often a lack of motivation among the students in general, with some being more difficult to entice into participating than others. There is also a general lack of discipline among the student body. Due to this, it is sometimes difficult for the students to maintain focus as they work on projects. It is also difficult for me, as the teacher, to maintain their focus, as they are prone to getting off-task. They would much rather be talking or playing than engaging in activities they have deemed boring. They consider activities that they feel do not contribute to their idea of what is useful to be boring. This observation contributed greatly to my desire to create a unit of study that utilized music videos. It was my belief that using a media that the students were already interested in would increase student participation. This strategy worked to an extent. The students were genuinely excited and thrilled to be filming a music video, but it did not engage them in the material as deeply as I had anticipated. This was caused by my own misjudgment of how much technical material was covered before starting the production process. I think I spent too much time on the introduction of concepts and analysis and the beginning and ended up stifled their enthusiasm to create a music video.

Student Understanding and Critical Response to Visual Culture: Introducing Concepts

When introducing the concept of critical analysis and interpreting music videos, it is important to properly scaffold the students’ learning experience. The first lesson was intended to help the students understand why learning about critical analysis and interpretation were important. To help illustrate the importance of these concepts, I had the students watch a music video with the simple instruction to write down their thoughts and interpretations of the images. I discovered that this was a little too broad of a request after I noted that no one bothered to take notes. This
suggested that they were overwhelmed with trying to find out what they should write down and thus were unable to write anything. I know that they were paying attention because they were able to talk about some of the images they saw and provide some evidence to support their vague interpretations. I say that their interpretations were vague because they only scratched the surface of the imagery. This was to be expected, I was planning on helping them to understand their own ignorance of interpretation principles. This “pre-assessment” activity was critical to my research as a means to support my assumptions that students were not critically analyzing or examining the videos they were watching. It was also meant to establish how the media was influencing their behavior without them being aware of its effects on their life. Aside from those affects, I was also gathering the data to help provide a starting point from which I could measure the growth of their learning and understanding.

After discussing the video, “24K Magic,” I then introduced the students to the terms and concepts associated with critical analysis and semiotics. I provided some examples and talked with the students about how they would apply those principles to their viewing of music videos. We then watched the music video again so that they could practice using the principles we had just discussed.

Reflections on Using Critical Pedagogy in a High School Classroom: Introducing Concepts

My intent was to improve my students’ ability to recognize and interpret meaning in music videos. I spent several days teaching them about various models of interpretation and applying those concepts to videos we watched in class. As will be noted later, I believe that the students never got further than a superficial breakdown of symbols and meanings. I believe this is due to the students’ lack of motivation to seek anything deeper than was it easily understood and described.
Speaking of motivation, I want to explain once again a little about the students at Polaris high school. All of the students at Polaris are there because they are deficient in credits. They won’t graduate from high school unless they somehow make up their missing credits. From my own experience, a major reason why students fail their classes and fall behind on credits is because they lack motivation. After talking with students about their motivation in the past, I have learned that many students don’t see the point of high school. They don’t plan on going to college and they have a job that they want to work which in some instances does not require a high school diploma. For those that don’t fall into that category of student, they lack motivation because they are not interested in the subject material.

I don’t know if they are lazy, but the students just prioritize things differently. They don’t want to put effort into something they don’t feel is worthwhile. Like most people, they don’t want to work at something that is difficult if they don’t think that the effort will have a good reward. I believe that this is related to the students not valuing education in general. They are content with the path their life is taking. As a result, the students had a hard time putting forth the effort to analyze the videos because it required effort they didn’t want to expend. They had to look at the images more closely so that they could find something new or interesting. It is hard work to think about symbolic meanings and attempt to figure out what can be interpreted from an image. It is much easier to just listen to the music or look at the obvious meanings.

We spent several days reviewing terms and meanings associated with the tools of interpretation. After the first two days, the students’ interest rapidly began to diminish. At the very start, the students were excited to watch music videos and talk about them. I believe they were expecting to just enjoy watching videos and take a break from studying. When they discovered that I was going to require them to work and think about the videos, they started to
lose their enthusiasm. Their diminished interest led the students to start just going through the motions of interpreting so that they could move on to the next activity. I had given them an overview of the unit of study at the very beginning and they knew that they would eventually be making their own music video, that was what they really wanted to be using their time doing.

With this in mind I have concluded that, in order to ensure that students make an honest attempt to utilize interpretative skills, the number of ways in which you interpret the videos should be reduced. I had tried to get the students to look at videos using three different ways of interpreting images, critical analysis, semiotics, and critical theory. The point was that I wanted the students to be more critical of the media they consumed. But by trying to cram too much into the ways they looked at videos, they became disinterested in analyzing and became impatient to move on. There are several different approaches that I have contemplated to help address this issue of disinterest.

In order to better reach the students and attempt to improve the way they view media, I feel that focusing on one aspect of viewing and allowing them to become adept at its usage would be more beneficial. I feel that it would be beneficial to implement a critical pedagogy by focusing on critical analysis for several days or weeks with an end project before moving on to a new way of viewing and interpreting images. In this way, the students master one concept and maintain an interest in the assignments.

Perhaps only spending a few days on critical analysis terms and practice would be sufficient. In which case, the unit would move along faster and the student would get to the filming portion sooner. The filming is what the students are most interested in after all. By acquainting them with the terms they need and then practicing them a few times, the students should have an adequate understanding to implement them in their own music videos.
Another options could involve creating a music video first and then critiquing their video using critical analysis. They would then become aware of how they insert their own meanings, hidden or blatant, into their films. It would then open up conversations about culture, indoctrination, and creativity. The students could then use this as an opportunity to look at other videos and learn to recognize their messages too. After engaging in this process and discussion, the students could then make a new music video with more intentional messages. They could plan out their messages and utilize skills gained in the earlier activities. The unit may end up taking longer as a result of going through two productions, but the first production may be hyphenated to produce a video quickly.

In trying to decide if there are other reasons for their lack of involvement with the issues of critical pedagogy, I have come up with a few possible explanations. First, the students were perhaps unaware of the work that actually went into creating a film. They thought that the class would just be about grabbing cameras and filming movies. Without understanding the process involved, they were not prepared for the work it entailed.

Academics may not be valued in their home life and they subsequently don’t see the point in applying themselves in a scholastic pursuit. When talking with students, several of them indicate that they are planning on entering the blue-collar workforce or some other occupation that doesn’t require university degrees. They have plans for their life that they feel don’t require the use of issues brought up in the critical pedagogy.

It may be that I just didn’t present the information in the best way for them. Had I perhaps presented the lessons in a different format or used different learning activities, I may have engaged the students more. This relates to my thoughts earlier about possible waking too
much time on the terminology and analysis. Had there been a better balance, the students may have maintained focus on the topics being discussed and presented.

Related to the idea that perhaps academics are not important to the students is the idea that perhaps the students don’t see the power relationships, objectification, or oppression represented in music videos as being as problematic as I believe them to be. I feel that there are certain social issues that are present in music videos that need to be addressed. The students may not see them as being a negative thing. They may not feel they are as big of a deal as I think they are. Since we have a different perspective on the issue, there is a disconnect in their interest in the material. The critical pedagogy is not effective because they do not see the need for critical analysis or critique.

**Practicing Interpretation**

An important tool for helping the students to take notes during the viewing of the music videos were handouts with questions for the students to answer. I had not previously intended to use such a format, but the experience of having them watch it the first time without specific questions to answer had resulted in a lack of quality notes. Observing this caused me to reevaluate how I was scaffolding the students learning experience. From my research into watching films in a classroom, I knew that having questions for them to answer is important to help them engage in the material. What I did not understand at the time was how critical it was for those questions to be written on a paper for them as opposed to giving a verbal prompt before the viewing.

I had watched the music video, “24K Magic,” multiple times in preparation for the lessons and had studied critical analysis in depth, so I was able to come up with some basic questions that would help the students focus as they watched the video. Taking notes would also
help them to be able to remember their initial thoughts and interpretations when it came time to
discuss them as a class. The questions they were asked to answer can be found in Appendix I:
Lesson 1. The questions were designed to draw attention to the visual elements and symbols
being used in the video and to make the students aware of how we perceive people and genders
through the way they are represented.

The results were much better. With everyone taking notes it improved the post-viewing
discussion. The students had more to say and were recognizing the existence of symbolism and
metaphor in the images seen in the video. As I pointed out in class, what is not shown can be just
as telling as what we do see. That isn’t to say that their first interpretations are not valid, but that
they rarely tried to come up with something more substantive or original. Like with the “24K
Magic” video, they could say that it was about flaunting his wealth, but they didn’t try to talk
about how that reflects on our society or what that says about depictions of what it means to be
wealthy. They could reach a deeper understanding or discover meaning in the videos various
visuals and metaphors when I pointed them out to them. As a class, we talked about symbolism
and how meaning can be created. I explained how props, wardrobe, and camera angles are
chosen to help communicate with the audience using various visual cues. Those cues are to be
interpreted and understood in order to deliver messages to the audience.

Unfortunately, after watching several music videos and conducting discussions, it became
apparent that the students were not very interested in doing an in depth analysis of the visuals.
They were able to get a superficial understanding, but I wasn’t able to get them to delve deeper
on their own. By superficial meaning, I am indicating that they were able to judge and point out
the very obvious messages created through the denotations of the images. For instance, they
would comment about the literal images they could see and attach the typical meaning associated
with those images. Without specific questions to guide them, they didn’t try to look at it from a
different perspective. With prodding and help, they could go deeper, but on their own I don’t
think they wanted to put in the effort. I was hoping that they would start to look past the obvious
and delve into deeper associations between lyrics, images, and props.

Although music videos are meant to showcase a song, I discovered that students could do
a better job analyzing camera edits and other visual elements with the sound muted. This was a
result of several students not wanting to listen to some of the songs that were chosen. One song I
had picked was “Huntin’, Fishin’, and Lovin’ Every Day” by Luke Bryan. I wanted to expose
them to various genres and country was one of them. I felt that it would be good for them to see
how various genres of music handle their music videos. My students expressed great displeasure
at having to listen to country music. I had chosen the video for its visual elements, but the
students were not interested at all. This being the case we compromised by watching the video
with the sound muted. This led to a discovery that sometimes it is good to focus on only the
visuals so that you are not distracted by the lyrics. It can also promote a better analysis of
metaphors and attaching meaning to props, wardrobe, or locations. The analysis of the video
with the sound turned off can then be compared to the lyrics to see if any new meanings are
generated through the juxtaposition of these two elements.

It can be inferred that the students have an understanding of the visual elements in music
videos. They understand visual culture insofar as they know that there is a message being
communicated through the visual images. They know that there are certain visual cues that help
to establish meaning. Now that they are more aware of the existence of messages, recognizing
meaning and drawing conclusions should become easier.
As I stated earlier, the students still struggled to look deeper into the visuals than what was readily apparent. I am not sure what the actual cause was for their lack of looking deeper, but I had hoped that they would develop those skills. At the very least they are able to interpret the more obvious messages being communicated. Perhaps I was expecting too much. Interviews with the students afterwards did clarify that, at the very least, the students felt that they were better at analyzing and interpreting visual media now than they were before the unit.

**Implementing Skills**

The culmination of the study of music videos was for the students to create their own music video that applied the skills and concepts they had been developing. Since the students had learned about symbolism and interpreting meaning, it was now time for them to put their knowledge into practice. The aim was for them to imbue their film with some meaning through the visuals they chose to include. In this way, I hoped to assess their critical understanding of visual culture. The song they chose was one that was made popular because of a viral video on YouTube. The aim of the assignment was to have them create some meaning with their visuals in the music video in order to assess their critical understanding of visual culture. I was interested in finding out if they could assimilate the concepts we had been discussing with regards to visual culture into their own creative works, so I asked them to pick a song that they felt they could do that with. Unfortunately, they had a hard time agreeing on a song and could only agree on the viral video’s song. The students in the class had a surprising variety of music they listened to and they had strong feelings against certain genres. For instance, there was no way they were going to do a country song. One student suggested the viral video and the other students suddenly became excited. No one had any complaints or objections. I allowed them to use that song because the students had struggled all year to make decisions and to work excitedly on a project.
Since they were so excited to work on this song, I wanted to let them use it. I still asked them to try and figure out a way to create some underlying messages using symbolic references in their video. I wanted them to be deliberate in their choices of wardrobe, camera angle, and locations.

In order to insert meaning into their video and have some messages present for interpretation, it was important that the students plan their shots, props, and wardrobe. However, the students were not interested in doing much planning at all. They were only interested in filming. They were mainly concerned with trying to make a video that was as funny as possible. Despite my efforts to convince them that planning was important, they persisted in saying that they would just “wing it.” As a result, there wasn’t much thought put into which camera angles were going to be used, what they were going to have the actor do in each shot, or which locations would be used. That being the case, I had to help them figure out some camera angles and prod them to eventually pick definitive locations for their scenes. Due to my persistence, they did decide to make their video a more literal narrative of what the lyrics were saying. Due to the limitations of only being able to shoot at the school, some scenes were adapted to illustrate the lyrics as best they could. For example, the students adapted their initial idea of having the main character get out of bed at the start of the video to having him sitting at a table with his head down and then raising his head as he sat up once the lyrics began. This corresponded with the lyrics, “As so I cry sometimes as I’m lying in bed.”

I feel that my goal was not reached in that I didn’t really help them create a video that showcased their learning in critical analysis or creating meaning. That isn’t to say that the curriculum was a failure, the students were able to create a music video and they did learn more about interpreting visual media. To improve the lessons for future classes, I would alter the way we watched the first few music videos. I had shown the videos in their entirety while they
watched and took notes, or didn’t take notes as was the case with some students. Instead, I would show a portion of the video and then pause it so that we could discuss a particular message or image. We could then discuss a smaller portion of the video in detail before moving on. This would allow the students to talk about their ideas while they are still on their minds as opposed to fading away as they engage in later images and ideas. I could also set the tone for what we are hoping to find and how we will be talking about those ideas. One improvement for the final project would be to emphasize my expectations and highlight the purpose of the assignment. In this way, the students would know that they needed to use images and cinematography to make a commentary which would showcase their understanding.

Through instruction and classroom activities the students became more adept at interpreting images and they became more cognizant of the messages found in media. They might not have gotten to the level that I would have liked, but I still feel that several of my goals were reached. As stated earlier in the interviews, the students felt that they learned more about interpreting images. Timothy had stated that the skills we learned could be applied to other fields as well, which means that he recognized the usefulness of the content and saw how it could be applied in other situations. Since each student is unique, I don’t know to what level the other students truly progressed, but I know that they all moved forward in their understanding, even if only a bit.

**Final Thoughts**

There is definitely room for improvement in the implementation of my ideas and theories. I am hopeful though. Timothy stated, when talking about viewing music videos in the future, that he’ll “definitely think more about them” and that he now “understand[s] more about what each shot or what each scene can mean.” The purpose of the curriculum was to get the students to be more
critical of music videos when they watch them, so Timothy’s comments really helped me understand that I was at least heading in the right direction with my lesson plans. Timothy also mentioned that the study of critical analysis would be helpful in more areas than just visual media. He said, “you can find the meaning behind anything or you can use [critical analysis] anywhere honestly.”

Instruction in critical analysis really did improve the students’ ability to view and recognize meaning in visual media. Samantha, when talking about how music videos have meaning, said, “they’ll use certain props to represent things that are going on in the song. And for me especially, like, when I don’t understand a song, I’ll go look at the music video to see if I can decipher anything about the song.” Other comments that Samantha made point out that she is now more aware of symbolism in music videos and that the directors of music videos make conscious efforts to communicate something to the audience.

Despite my disappointment over how shallow my students’ analysis of the music videos was, I feel that they were more engaged in the process and gained some valuable skills. I now ask myself, do the students need or are they ready to go deeper? Perhaps they know enough to properly navigate the visual culture they will encounter during their lives. These thoughts rise from the notion that perhaps I did too much analysis with the students in the beginning of the unit. Maybe their analysis is not as shallow as I think, or perhaps I expected too much from this group. I had a lofty target and aimed for a big payoff. My expectations may have been too ambition. If my ambition was not overreaching, then it may be that there were approaches that I did not try that could have worked better.

Through daily reflection, I have made notes on how I can better implement my ideas in the future and develop my curriculum further. I see the value of a critical pedagogy and the
importance of getting students to think critically about the world around them. My next steps are to refine my lesson plans and figure out a way to communicate the content and concepts of critical analysis in a more engaging manner. I will continue to work with my students to get them to question society and learn to work towards a better understanding of the world around them. In this way they can make their own choices instead of being led like sheep.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Lesson Plans

Lesson 1: Critical Analysis and Semiotics

Learning Goals:
- Students will be able to define key terms associated with critical analysis and semiotics.
- Students will be able to identify superficial meanings for the images in a music video.
- Students will be able to articulate their thoughts about what they saw in a music video.

Standards:
- Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work
- Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work

Standards derived from the National Core Arts Standards Artistic Processes and Anchor Standards found at http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/content/conceptual-framework

Art and Artists:
24K Magic – Bruno Mars
Breezeblocks – Alt J
Lazarus – David Bowie
Chandelier – Sia

Learning Activities:
- Complete questionnaire about current level of familiarity and involvement with music videos
- Watch music video twice
- Have students talk about their thoughts
- Discuss their thought as a class
- Teach students about critical analysis and semiotics

Procedure:
- Introduce students to the subject of today’s lesson
- Handout the questionnaire and have the students complete it at their own pace.
- Have the students watch “24K Magic” by Bruno Mars
  - While watching the music video they should be writing down quick notes about what the music video makes them think and what they see
  - Have them elaborate on their notes in writing after the music video is over
- Discuss as a class the thoughts the students had while watching the music video and what they saw
  - Write down some key points they mention on the white board
  - Call on students if no one offers their opinion freely
- Introduce the concept of critical analysis and semiotics
  - Describe and define critical analysis and how it is used when viewing and interpreting music videos
  - Define semiotics and how they are used in interpreting images
  - http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/sem12.html
Have students take notes on the handout provided as you define the following terms:

- **Text** – A piece of media (such as a printed advertisement, an animated cartoon or a radio news bulletin) that is in itself a complex sign containing other signs.
- **Analysis** – A detailed examination of the elements or structure of something, typically as a basis for discussion or interpretation.
- **Theme** – the subject of a talk, a piece of writing, a person’s thoughts, or an exhibition; a topic.
- **Evaluation** – Making a judgment about something, an assessment.
- **Effectiveness** – the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result.
- **Sign** – Basic unit of language consisting of two parts, the signified and the signifier.
- **Signified** – The concept of an object.
- **Signifier** – A sound or an image that is attached to a signified.
- **Symbolism** – The use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense.
- **Modality** – How true to reality a visual image is.
- **Likeness** – Quality of being alike, resemblance.
- **Analogy** – A comparison between two things, typically for the purpose of explanation or clarification.

Teacher copy of terms and definitions can be found below after the questionnaire.

Discuss as a class how the terms listed can be used in interpreting music videos.

- Discuss why it would be important, if it is, for the students to interpret music videos and other media they watch.
- Re-watch “24K Magic” by Bruno Mars.
  - Give the students the “Analysis Questions” hand out and have them take notes about what they see and their interpretation of the images presented.
  - Specifically have the students try applying the new concepts to their interpretations.
- Discuss as a class their thoughts and interpretations.
  - Talk about what was different the second time around.
  - How did the new terms affect the way they interpreted and viewed the music video?
- Mention that the next lesson will introduce a new set of terms and ideas on interpretation and that they will need to find their own music videos for the class to watch.

**Assessment:**

- Pre-assessment – Have the students complete the questionnaire.
- Formative – Oral exam where they will need to give definitions to words and demonstrate an understanding of their meaning.
- Formative – Students will discuss possible meanings associated with images they saw while watching a music video.
- Formative – Observation of students as they talk about their ideas.
Music Video Questionnaire
The following questions are meant to gauge your current understanding and familiarity with music videos.

1. Looking back, what was your first encounter with music videos?

2. When was the last time you watched a music video?

3. How often do you watch music videos?

4. Why do you watch music videos?

5. What do you think about when you watch a music video?

7. When you are watching a music video, how much do you pay attention to the visual elements of the video?

8. Have you ever tried to emulate something you’ve seen in a music video? What was it?

9. Do music videos influence the clothes you wear?

10. Do music videos influence the way you talk?

11. Do music videos influence the way you act?
Analyzing and Interpreting Images

Critical Analysis: A critical analysis is subjective writing because it expresses the writer’s opinion or evaluation of a text. Analysis means to break down and study the parts.

Semiotics: The study of meaning making, the study of sign processes and meaningful communication.

Analysis: A detailed examination of the elements or structure of something, typically as a basis for discussion or interpretation

Theme: The subject of a talk, a piece of writing, a person’s thoughts, or an exhibition; a topic.

Evaluation: Making a judgment about something, an assessment

Effectiveness: the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result

Text: A piece of media (such as a printed advertisement, an animated cartoon or a radio news bulletin) that is in itself a complex sign containing other signs

Sign: Basic unit of language consisting of two parts, the signified and the signifier

Signified: The concept of an object

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Symbolism: The use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meaning which are different from their literal sense.

Modality: How true to reality a visual image is

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Analyzing and Interpreting Images

**Critical Analysis**: A critical analysis is subjective writing because it expresses the writer’s opinion or evaluation of a text. Analysis means to break down and study the parts.

**Semiotics**: The study of meaning making, the study of sign processes and meaningful communication.

**Analysis:**

**Theme:**

**Evaluation:**

**Effectiveness:**

**Text:**

**Sign:**

**Signified:**

**Signifier:**
Symbolism:

Modality:

Likeness:

Analogy:
Analysis Questions

What is the narrative or story behind the song?

How are males represented in the video?

How are females represented in the video?

Who is more sexualized – men or women? Are there sexually explicit lyrics or messages?

How are the subjects of the video dressed?

What props can you see in the video?

Are there any hidden advertisements or brands?

How is wealth defined in the video?
Lesson 2: Interpreting Meaning Part I

Learning Goals:
- Students will be able to describe how meaning is created in a music video.
- Students will be able to critically analyze a music video.
- Students will apply critical theory and semiotics to their interpretation of a music video.

Standards:
- Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work
- Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work
- Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work

Standards derived from the National Core Arts Standards Artistic Processes and Anchor Standards found at http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/content/conceptual-framework

Art and Artists:
“24K Magic” – Bruno Mars
“Breezeblocks” – Alt J
“Lazarus” – David Bowie
“Chandelier” – Sia

Learning Activities:
- Review the terms and concepts from the previous lesson
- Discuss semiotics and how meaning is created through symbols
- Re-watch the music video from the last lesson twice
- Class discussion of their analysis and thoughts using the terms and concepts that were discussed and taught in the beginning of class and the previous lesson

Procedure:
- Write down the list of terms from the previous lesson and have the students define them in their own words
- Review discussion about why we interpret music videos and other media
- Discuss how meaning is constructed based on the last lesson and their current thoughts on the subject
  - Give the students the “Interpreting Meaning” handout and define the following terms
  - Connotations – An idea or feeling that a word or image invokes in addition to its literal or primary meaning.
  - Denotations – The literal or primary meaning of a word or image, in contrast to the feelings or ideas that the word suggests
  - Juxtaposition – When there are two or more elements in a scene that either contrast with each other, or one element contributes towards the other to create an overall theme.
  - Using the handout they just wrote their definitions on, have the students cite examples of the above terms in “Lazarus” by David Bowie
  - If time permits, re-watch the music video to point out examples
Assessment:
- Formative – Oral review where students describe terms and concepts taught in the last lesson
- Formative – Written notes where students provide their analysis of a music video and discuss their thoughts with the class
- Formative – Observation as students discuss their ideas and talk about music videos using the vocabulary from the previous lesson.
Interpreting Meaning

Connotations:

Denotations:

Juxtaposition:

Answer the following questions as they pertain to the music video.

What in the music video could be symbolic?

What are some of the connotations you see?

What are some of the denotations you see?

What are some interpretations you have of the video?
Lesson 3: Interpreting Meaning Part II

Learning Goals:
- Students will be able to define terms associated with the Marxist theory of interpretation
- Students will be able to identify instances of a dominant culture in music videos
- Students will be able to identify instances of oppression in the images in a music video
- Students will be able to apply the principles of Marxist theory to the interpretation of a music video

Standards:
- Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work
- Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work
- Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work
- Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding

Standards derived from the National Core Arts Standards Artistic Processes and Anchor Standards found at http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/content/conceptual-framework

Art and Artists:
- “24K Magic” – Bruno Mars
- “Breezeblocks” – Alt J
- “Lazarus” – David Bowie
- “Chandelier” – Sia

Learning Activities:
- Review terms and concepts discussed in the last class
- Discuss terms associated with critical theory and how they relate to interpreting images
  - A theory is critical insofar as it seeks to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them.
  - Critical theory states that ideology is the principle obstacle to human liberation.
- Discuss examples of dominant cultures and oppression in popular culture and visual media
- Watch a music video and use critical theory to interpret the images.
- Students will watch a new music video and write down their own interpretations as they answer the following questions.
  - In what way does the video serve as propaganda for the status quo?
  - Does the video undermine the status quo?
  - What does the video say about oppression; or are social conflicts ignored?
  - How do characters overcome oppression?
  - What roles does class play in the video?
  - What are the unconscious elements of the text?
- Students will discuss their findings and we will watch a selection of their music videos as they explain their reasoning

Procedure:
• Introduce critical theory
  o Explain what critical theory is and its application to criticism
  o Define the following terms
    ▪ Dominant Ideology – Denotes the attitudes, beliefs, values, and morals shared by the majority of the people in a given society; as a mechanism of social control, the dominant ideology frames how the majority of the population thinks about the nature of society, their place in society, and their connection to a social class
    ▪ Oppression – Prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or control
    ▪ Class – A division of a society based on social and economic status
    ▪ Power – The capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events
  o Discuss the implementation of critical theory in criticizing music videos
    ▪ What role does class play in the work; what is the author’s analysis of class relations?
    ▪ How do characters overcome oppression?
    ▪ In what ways does the work serve as propaganda for the status quo; or does it try to undermine it?
    ▪ What does the work say about oppression; or are social conflicts ignored or blamed elsewhere?
    ▪ Does the work propose one form of utopian vision as a solution to the problems encountered in the work?
• Re-watch “24K Magic” by Bruno Mars
  o Have the students use a Marxist approach to interpreting the images from the music video
  o Have the students write down their new interpretations
• Discuss as a class the new interpretations
  o Are they different?
  o What changed?
  o How is it useful?

Assessment:
• Summative – Written exam to test their knowledge of terms and vocabulary
• Formative – Class discussion of thoughts about interpreting the music video we watched as a class
• Formative – Written notes on interpreting a music video of their choosing
Lesson 4: Music Video Research

Learning Goals:
- Students will interpret the meaning of images in a music video
- Students will explain and defend their interpretations with sound reasoning and evidence
- Students will be able to articulate their rationale for choosing a particular music video

Standards:
- Anchor Standard 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation
- Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work
- Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work

Standards derived from the National Core Arts Standards Artistic Processes and Anchor Standards found at http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/content/conceptual-framework

Art and Artists:
Dependent on the videos found by the students.

Learning Activities:
- Give students an short written exam on the terms and vocabulary already taught in class from the previous lessons
- Explain that students will now find their own examples of music videos and write their interpretations down to share with the class
  - Explain the standards of what is and is not appropriate
  - Explain that they will write interpretations for each one and we will select from their music videos a sampling to watch as a class
  - Students will find the following music videos
    - Two that are a personal favorites
    - Two that they don’t understand
    - One where they like the song
  - Give students time to find music videos in class
  - They may need to find some on their own at home
- Randomly select several of the students’ music video selections and watch them as a class.
- Have the students read their interpretations and then have the class give feedback and offer their own interpretations
- Talk about cinematography as a precursor to the upcoming lesson

Assessment:
- Summative – Collect the students written interpretations and take notes of their in-class comments
Lesson 5: Finding A Song

Learning Goals:
• Students will be able to collaborate with a group to come to a consensus on their choice for a song to turn into a music video

Standards:
No specific standards are met with this lesson.

Art and Artists:
Dependent on the videos found by the students.

Learning Activities:
• Discuss metaphor, simile, and other literary devices
• Discuss the interpretation of lyrics and how to generate ideas for visualizing a song
• Explain the assignment of picking a song to turn into a music video
  o Song choice should be dependent on the one that best suits itself to a unique and interesting video interpretation, not on how popular it is
  o Each student will find one song to pitch to their group for consideration
  o Groups will review everyone’s pitch and decide on a song to use
• Group(s) will state their choice of song and their initial concept for the video to the class
• The teacher will suggest alterations if necessary to fit with school principles

Assessment:
• Students will pick a song and the group will discuss with the class their choice and how they reached that decision
Lesson 6: Cinematography in Music Videos

Learning Goals:
• Students will be able to identify various tropes used in music videos
• Students will be able to explain how camera angles contribute to creating meaning
• Students will be able to identify various camera angles and editing conventions

Standards:
• Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work
• Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work

Standards derived from the National Core Arts Standards Artistic Processes and Anchor Standards found at http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/content/conceptual-framework

Art and Artists:
Film Riot – Meaning Behind Camera Movement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDC8DiGfzrs
Film Riot – How to Shoot a Scene: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK21AE0-FUI
CineFix – 5 Brilliant Moments of Camera Movement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2c3JZ6X3f8
Paramore – Still Into You
B.o.B, - Magic ft. Rivers Cuomo

Learning Activities:
• Review camera angles used in cinematography and discuss their affect on the viewer’s perception of what they are seeing
• Discuss editing of music videos and camera work in music videos
• Discuss filming tropes used in various genre of music videos
• Watch three different genre of music videos and identify which tropes are being used
• As a class, discuss camera angles and their meanings
• Watch film clips with the class and have them identify the camera angle and why it was used

Assessment:
• Summative – Collect the students written interpretations and take notes of their in-class comments
• Formative – Students will provide short answers on various camera angles’ uses and contributions to creating meaning
• Formative – Students will watch various film clips and identify the camera angle or movement being utilized
Lesson 7: Creating Music Videos

Learning Goals:
• Students will implement the concepts and principals discussed in the previous lessons to create their own music video that carries its own meaning
• Students will generate ideas to visually represent a song with a music video
• Students will create storyboards to plan out their video’s visual look and use of cinematography
• Students will edit their film to produce a coherent final video

Standards:
• Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work
• Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work
• Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work
• Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation
• Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art

Standards derived from the National Core Arts Standards Artistic Processes and Anchor Standards found at http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/content/conceptual-framework

Art and Artists:
No specific art or artists are tied to this lesson

Learning Activities:
• Students are told the parameters of their final assignment that will be the culmination of all that they have learned and discussed in the previous lessons
• Students will Illustrate their music video(s) concept using storyboards for the song that they chose in the previous lesson
• Students will be given time in class to plan and prepare materials to film their music video(s)
• Students will be given time in class to film their music video(s)
• Students will report their progress daily and submit their plans and shooting schedules to make sure they stay on track to finish their films by the deadline
• Students will be given time in class to edit their music video(s) and shoot any extra footage they found they were missing

Assessment:
• Summative – Music Video(s) will be graded using a rubric
• Summative – Students will write or present an explanation of their artistic choices and the meaning they were aiming to create in their video(s)
Lesson 8: Screening the Music Videos

Learning Goals:
- Students will screen their music videos for the class and present their rationale for the camera work they used and why they chose to use certain props and wardrobe
- Students will analyze the presented videos for interpretation and critique

Standards:
- Anchor Standard 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation
- Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work

Art and Artists:
None

Learning Activities:
- Students will take turns screening their music videos to the class
- While watching the videos, those not in the group will take notes on their thought about the video and its interpretation
- Students will give a brief presentation about their stylistic choices and their intent of the video after their video has been screened
- The music videos will then be sent to the principal for approval to be shown to the entire school

Assessment:
- Summative – Students will take notes on the videos they watch
- Summative – Observation of the students