Chapter 69

"I Will Never Look at This Movie the Same Again":
Using Critical Literacy to Examine Popular Culture Texts Helps Adolescents Critique Social Issues

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes self-study research that used qualitative methods to examine how films were incorporated into the secondary classroom. The study documents how popular culture movies were used in an urban high school history class to facilitate students' critical literacy. By viewing the film Enemy of the State, students were able to bridge their inside-of-school experiences with their outside-of-school practices. Incorporating popular culture movies into the history curriculum helped students shift their perspective of films from entertainment to sources of knowledge. Linking the film to the history curriculum helped students see how past events helped to shape contemporary life. Students were able to ask questions about broader social issues and engage in research to further explore topics raised in the film.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching history presents teachers with an ever-present curricular challenge: whether they should use traditional texts to teach topics or move beyond the curriculum, and if it is the latter, how to do so effectively. Text selection is integral to teaching because texts can be used to facilitate discussion and serve as an entry into topics that may otherwise be too abstract for some students. In discipline-specific courses such as history, teachers need to consider ways students can learn about practices used by experts in the field. Working with different kinds of texts can help prepare students for discourses they will likely need when they encounter professionals in the real-world. With that said, the rapidly changing context

of 21st-century spaces suggest literacy curriculum in high school classrooms should move beyond the skills attributed to discipline-specific domains, to include the implications of using a disciplinary lens to position that subject within a boarder social context (Moje, 2015). This can help to enhance the curriculum and allow students to connect content knowledge they are acquiring with broader notions of civic engagement and critical literacy. In history class, one way that students can do so is through an exploration of the individual's relationship to the institutions and social structures in society.

When moving beyond the curriculum, a strategically selected text can help students examine themes from multiple perspectives and think more deeply about the world around them. For example, purposeful use of films as core texts in secondary history classrooms can allow students to make these connections. Viewing a film is not passive but an active engagement in critical thinking decoding and encoding. Today, students interact with a plethora of visual texts outside-of-school: websites, memes, emojis, YouTube videos, videogames. For many students using visual and media literacy skills in school provides access to texts, such as primary sources, allowing students to build background knowledge about discipline-specific content (Pardieck, 2011-2012). Using films with structured links to the curriculum helps to scaffold, and clearly define the goal for students' critical analysis and understanding of concepts in the content area.

This chapter describes an action research study about integrating films into a 3-week curriculum unit taught in a high school course called U.S. History and Government. Positioning this study within the discourse of teacher research provides further evidence of how theory and practice connect in real classrooms. This investigation was a self-study guided by two questions:

1. How does using movies as a pedagogical approach support disciplinary and critical literacy practices?
2. What opportunities for culturally responsive practices do movies present in a secondary classroom context?

First, starting with an overview of the theoretical framework, this chapter grounds the research in Disciplinary Literacy, Critical Literacy, and Culturally Responsive and Relevant Teaching, to examine how these perspectives intersect when using films as text in secondary classrooms. Next, the chapter describes methods, context, and practices used to incorporate movies into the history curriculum in one class to support the critical literacy development of adolescents. Evidence from the research study is used to document examples of theory in practice. The chapter concludes with strategies for using movies for secondary instruction.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Disciplinary Literacy

Disciplinary literacy has expanded discussions about content area reading, adolescent literacy, and secondary reading instruction (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Also, disciplinary literacy instruction has emerged as a plausible solution for developing adolescents' literacy skills in the content areas (Moje, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012) and better preparing them for college expectations (Hotchkiss & Hougen, 2012). Rather than emphasize reading for information in content classrooms, disciplinary literacy suggests that a habit of mind, strategies, and approaches students use, should reflect practices used by experts in the field. Therefore, it is important to clarify how it expands upon previous practices

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