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Language Arts; Nov 2007; 85, 2; Research Library
pg. 106

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A father and his daughter explore the potential power and tensions that exist in the lyrics of popular music.

You may say I’m a dreamer. But I’m not the only one. I hope someday you’ll join us. And the world will be as one.

—Lennon, 1989

In a faded T-shirt that reads “War is over if you want it,” nine-year-old Clara listens to the song “Imagine” (Lennon, 1989, track 9) on her iPod as she waits for her friend Lulu to arrive for a sleepover. Although Lulu, age eight, does not share Clara’s love of John Lennon, preferring instead a broad selection of punk rock artists, the two girls bond over their passion for music. Together they explore each other’s favorites, carefully listening to lyrics and debating meanings of songs. “Dad, what does he mean by ‘living for today’?” At times, when they are unable to make sense of a line or two, they ask me, the adult present in the house, if I can clarify. Clara and Lulu enjoy the transactional process of “everyday literacies” (Alvermann & Xu, 2003), deconstructing meaning while engaging with popular music texts.

I bet you want the goodies. Bet you thought about it. Got you all hot and bothered. Mayb’ cuz I talk about it.

—Ciara, 2004

Two thousand miles away, Clara’s cousin Sam, age ten, is in her bedroom dancing to “Goodies” (Ciara, 2004, track 1) playing on the radio. Like Clara, Lulu, and so many other children across the country, Sam delights in her music. However, rather than analyze lyrics too deeply, Sam prefers to sing along as she rehearses the latest dance moves she has gleaned from videos on MTV, BET, and VH1. Sam’s parents are concerned that she may be too young to listen to sexually explicit lyrics in popular music. Interestingly, Sam has made a conscious decision not to know what the lyrics mean in her favorite songs. It is not that she is a thoughtless child; in fact, quite the opposite is true. As Sam explained, “If I know what they are saying [in the song], I’m afraid I won’t like it anymore.” Sam demonstrates the tension that can exist between pleasure and critique when engaging with popular culture texts (Luke, 1997). Rather than allowing her music to be co-opted by didactic, adult-centered, finger-waving righteousness (pointing to the various isms that are promulgated in popular music—something I’m sure Sam’s parents would be more than happy to oblige), Sam opts for the cover of childhood innocence. She realizes that as a ten-year-old, she can still claim ignorance of the meanings and continue to enjoy her music thoroughly without allowing guilt to hamper the pleasure.

Clara and Sam share a love of music. However, they position
themselves quite differently as they engage with their favorite everyday texts. Is one girl critically conscious and the other a dupe of vulgar consumerism? The response to this question is not simple. Clara, who listens to the socially conscious music of John Lennon and relishes in the deconstruction of meaning, is no less of a consumer than Sam, with her fashionable iPod and her rock-and-roll t-shirt—the accoutrements she believes necessary for her construction of self as a “hippie.” At the same time, Sam, a fan of mainstream music, proves to be critically minded with her savvy preservation of a pleasurable experience. Both girls show agency and skill at negotiating their consumption of popular culture texts (Alvermann & Xu, 2003), in this case as engaged “readers” of popular music.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the complex literacy transactions that occur when children engage with popular culture texts, such as music. I wish to add to the growing body of literature that explores the power and the tensions that exist when space is opened for students to engage in critical media literacy using popular culture texts (e.g., Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Dyson, 2003; Evans, 2005; Marsh & Millard, 2005). Specifically, I focus on the tension between social critique and pleasure when teachers guide students to examine their everyday texts through a lens of critical media literacy (Vasquez, 2003). I use the example of my daughter Clara’s interest in popular music to illustrate the potential power and pitfalls such texts can become in helping students develop critical media literacy. Although the bulk of the action takes place in the cab of a truck and focuses on the transactions between one child, a few songs, and a father, I believe the implications reach more broadly to the many young people who engage in ‘multiple literacies’ with a tremendous variety of popular texts in our increasingly globalized and digitized world” (Siegel & Fernandez, 2000, p. 149).

**BACKGROUND**

Although educational policy, such as that of No Child Left Behind, generally holds traditional functionalist views, a growing body of research has broadened the discourse on literacy beyond the technical aspects of textual reading and writing to include an array of other issues (Dyson, 2003). Such aspects include deciphering meaning from texts, defined here as both print and non-print media. In fact, there is increasing emphasis on understanding the importance of learning about how children engage with everyday texts, such as popular music, and helping children learn to think critically when engaging with them. In the last three years, *Language Arts* has had two themed issues entirely dedicated to the expanding definitions of text (Vol. 81, no. 2; & Vol. 84, no. 1).

Multiple literacies research points to the benefits of opening space in classrooms for students to engage with a wide variety of text types. Such experiences provide students with a host of learning opportunities that are often neglected or even absent in traditional classrooms. Dyson (2003) and others (Comber & Nixon, 2005; Greenhough et al., 2006; Mahar, 2003; Nieto, 1999; Vasquez, 2005a) point to the power of tapping into students’ everyday literacies via expanded notions of text. In this article, I wish to highlight the power of words when using popular music as a text for critical media literacy learning.

**CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY AND POPULAR CULTURE**

Paulo Freire, whose name is often synonymous with critical literacy, advocated a problem-posing education (Freire, 1970). In this pedagogical style, the line between “teacher” and “student” is blurred, as both work together in dialogue to co-construct curriculum based on issues of social relevance. This collaborative relationship provides opportunities for critical thinking in which both students and teachers are learners who read the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

The term “critical” in education becomes problematic because many people have used it to refer to different, even contradictory, meanings (Lankshear, 1997). Peter McLaren (1995) objects to the stripping of ideology from the term “critical” to the point where it can refer to any pedagogical activity that involves thinking; such a lack of context implies political neutrality—an impossibility, according to McLaren. I find this perspective useful when thinking about critical literacy.

The ultimate goal of critical literacy is a “reading” of the politics of daily life that leads to a “rewriting” of the world in a more democratic fashion (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). Morrell (2002)
defines critical literacy 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” (p. 78). In other words, critical literacy must involve reading “between the lines and beyond the page” (Ladson Billings, 1992) in order to deconstruct language and images, and to analyze the socially constructed nature of texts. Doing so involves an ongoing analysis of how texts work, what effects they have, and who they serve (Vasquez, 2005b). This is further explained by Comber and Nixon (2005), who state that critical literacy “invites children not only to crack the code, make meaning, and use texts, but also to analyze texts—considering both how they work and what work they do in the world” (p. 128).

Applying these criteria to the phrase critical media literacy involves deconstructing, analyzing, and creating media texts (Trier, 2006). Since children engage with a variety of media texts, it is important to help them develop tools for questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions that are embedded in the messages, to reflect on their own reasons for engaging with such texts, and to have opportunities to use their developing critical skills to create their own media texts (Luke, 1997; Vasquez, 2005a). Engaging with media texts in this way, children can learn about how the construction of their identities are influenced by various forms of media and therefore become more adept at making decisions about how to live their lives (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999).

Morrell (2002) discusses the power of using popular culture texts in the teaching of critical media literacy, asserting: “Popular culture can help students deconstruct dominant narratives and contend with oppressive practices in hopes of achieving a more egalitarian and inclusive society” (p. 72). However, when applying critical media literacy to popular culture texts, one gets into the difficult issue of trying to define what is meant by popular culture. The term resists an easy definition; Alvermann and Xu (2003) liken it to “nailing gelatin to a wall” (p. 146). The difficulty lies in part with the constantly changing nature of popular culture. Alvermann and Xu, however, point out that how one defines such texts relates to the stance s/he takes regarding its value.

Rather than seeing people as passive, mindless consumers, this view attributes a more active role to the consumers of popular culture texts.

Over the years, there has been debate over the nefarious nature of popular culture versus the possible virtues of such texts. The argument has generally broken down along lines dividing so-called “high” and “low” art. This division serves to separate the “ignorant masses” from the more enlightened “intellectuals” (Dyson, 2006). In this view, the mass culture industry is a capitalist machine that seduces and dupes the “common people” with embedded hegemony of consumerist values. Others have romanticized “folk culture” and believe that popular culture represents the views of the “masses.” They argue that people derive pleasure from popular culture texts, and this should not be co-opted for purposes of the didactic messages of patronizing teachers who believe they have enlightened world views (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999).

More recently, cultural studies theorists have argued that the view of popular culture casting ordinary people as having “false consciousness” is a great oversimplification. Rather than seeing people as passive, mindless consumers, this view attributes a more active role to the consumers of popular culture texts. This is not to say that people are not influenced by hegemonic messages of mainstream media; rather, it adds a layer of complexity to the transaction. Instead of viewing it as a one-way act of “mind control,” this newer view recognizes popular culture as a site that also allows for pleasure and resistance (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Alvermann & Xu, 2003). Dyson (2006) exemplifies this view when she states, “Popular culture is a prime site for pleasure, for exploration of possible identities, and for negotiation and struggle” (p. xix).

A FRAMEWORK FOR CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY WITH POPULAR CULTURE

Given the complex transaction that occurs when people engage with popular culture texts, Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) devised an approach for educators to help students develop critical media literacy. I find this approach useful when thinking of instruction that taps into the power of what Pompe (cited in Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999) calls “potent texts,” because it takes into account the complex nature of the tex-
tual transactions of students. Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood use a constructivist framework, viewing students as active constructors of their own knowledge. With this framework, they posit that consumers of popular culture negotiate meaning as agents in the construction of their own knowledge. In other words, they can be influenced by the texts while at the same time resisting the dominant messages. Therefore, they recognize the importance of critically analyzing popular culture while being careful not to squash the pleasure that students derive from their everyday texts. This is easier said than done and requires what Luke calls “self-reflexivity,” striking a balance between teaching critique and acknowledging pleasure (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999).

Teachers who are self-reflexive while engaging students in critical media literacy using popular culture texts provide opportunities to “read” and “write” media. However, determining what texts to use and how to engage with them can create tensions. On one hand, advocates of new literacies argue that it is of utmost importance to allow children to engage with the texts of their everyday lives. Given this perspective, it is logical that students become the “experts” of their own popular culture and are allowed opportunity to self-select texts. However, this can become problematic when teachers wish to help students “read” the media (e.g., critically analyze texts for hegemonic messages), especially if the texts students find pleasurable are deemed worthy of heavy critique by the teacher.

Luke argues that it is easy for teachers to lead students to critical deconstructions of their favorite everyday texts; however, what the students parrot back to teachers is most often what the teachers want to hear and not what lies in the heart of the students who know what they like (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999). Instead, Luke proposes that teachers pick texts to deconstruct that are not the students’ favorites. Hence, a balance is created between social critique and allowance of pleasure; one does not come at the expense of the other. This delicate balance, sometimes referred to as “the politics of pleasure” (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Vasquez, 2005a), helps the “self-reflexive” teacher to validate the interests of children without co-opting them and making them “schoolwork.”

A powerful way teachers can help students become critically literate is to emphasize writing (production) of media texts. Steven Goodman, a media educator in New York, explains that one of the most effective strategies for teaching critical literacy is for students to create their own media (Goodman, 2003). In the process of creation, powerful opportunities arise where “students can understand how the media acts as a frame and a filter on the world while appearing to be a clear window” (p. 6). In other words, there are multiple layers of meaning present in text and students must understand how to critically appreciate this in order to be critically literate.

Some research studies have highlighted the integral nature of having children engage in the writing process while becoming critically media literate. Comber and Nixon (2005) demonstrate how writing can be an analytical tool for children as they construct “counter-narratives” that “disrupt traditional messages embedded in mainstream text” (p. 129). Comber and Nixon share examples of ways some teachers have used students’ background knowledge and life experiences to “reread” and “rewrite” their neighborhoods in ways that counter prevailing deficit views of marginalized groups. In one such narrative, a group of Afghani immigrant youth in Australia created a cooking show they called “Cooking Afghani Style.” The video they made is similar to cooking shows seen on television, but with some key differences. First, children rather than adults are the presenters of information. Second, it focuses on cooking Afghani food from an insider perspective. In other words, the food and culture are not “exoticized.” Comber and Nixon point out that this video made by children was intentionally political; it was created with the purpose of countering mainstream representations of the Afghani refugee community in Australia as “other” or, worse, nonexistent. If “reading” popular culture texts involves deconstructing meanings of often hidden hegemonic messages, “writing” new versions of popular culture texts can be “reconstructive.” Comber and Nixon discuss the hopeful potential of such texts. They state:

We describe these children’s work as re-design, re-write, and re-imagine to emphasize that such tasks give children the opportunity to re-visit, to
re-work, and to change the way things usually are. (p. 134)

Vasquez (2005a) also addresses the power of writing when children examine their everyday texts. Based on a three-year study that links literacy development to everyday texts, Vasquez highlights that powerful learning opportunities arise when the “official” and “unofficial” intersect. In the study, she demonstrates how texts popular with children, such as advertising and Pokémon, can be brought into the classroom curriculum. Vasquez argues that simply deconstructing issues critically is not enough. She gives the example of her nephew’s interest in Pokémon, a Japanese cartoon that has a variety of products associated with it, such as trading cards, shirts, and shoes. She shows that her nephew learned a great deal about the socially constructed nature of messages embedded in text when he engaged in the creative activity of designing new versions of Pokémon products. Given this potential, it is not enough to have children deconstruct meanings of everyday texts; they must also have opportunities to redesign them. In doing so, Vasquez states, children learn to “use texts as social tools in ways that allow for a reconstruction of inequitable worlds” (p. 102).

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE: CLARA READS AND WRITES IN THE “EVERYDAY”

My daughter, nine-year-old Clara, has a keen interest in popular music texts. She is particularly drawn to the meaning of the lyrics of her favorite songs. It is through my observations and interactions with Clara as she reads and writes her world that I have come to appreciate the power of words in popular music as a tool for literacy learning. Let me share an example.

It all started on a weekday morning just like any other—the darkness of night was giving way to dawn, and Clara was next to me in the pickup with her feet propped up on her backpack as we eased on down the road toward school. With the radio blaring, the old Toyota was thumping, and our heads were bouncing up and down to the beat. On cue, Clara and I excitedly joined in a duet. She was Fergie and I was will.i.am, the singers of the band The Black Eyed Peas. “Whatcha gonna do with all that junk? All that junk inside your trunk?” I boomed over the voices emitting from the speakers. “I’ma get, get, get, get, you drunk. Get you love drunk off my hump. My hump, my hump . . . my lovely little lumps,” replied Clara with perfect timing (Black Eyed Peas, 2005, track 5).

“Dad.” Clara’s voice switched back to that of a nine-year-old. “What do they mean by ‘all that junk inside your trunk?’” “Uh, err.” I fumbled, not sure how to best reply. I fancy myself the type of parent who is open to all kinds of discussion. Better she ask me than learn things from her peers. Since children are exposed to dominant Discourse on a daily basis (Gee, 2001), it is part of my job as a parent and a teacher to address the images and messages and help my daughter and my students to critically interpret them. In theory, that is. In reality, however, when opportunities arise for me to put my money where my mouth is, sometimes I feel a little squeamish. Besides, who really listens to the lyrics of popular music? I thought we were just rocking out to the beat. I took a deep breath and explained, “Well, the trunk of a car is in the back, right? So if you say a person has a lot of junk in the trunk, it is like saying they have a big behind.” Clara was by no means born yesterday, but she was still a little perplexed. “That seems like a dumb thing to sing about.” This was a perfect jumping off point for a conversation about the many, to use Clara’s terminology, “dumb” things we find in mainstream media. We discussed the way women are objectified in popular television shows and magazines, often scantily clad and rarely exhibiting strength or intelligence. We discussed how this is not only unfair, but completely inaccurate.

As the conversation continued, we thought about how funny it would be if the whole thing were reversed. What if there were a TV show where the women were the main characters and what they looked like was insignificant. They would be the focus of all of the action and the male characters would not talk much; they would just walk around in “tighty whiteys” (another of Clara’s terms meaning jockey briefs). Of course, neither of us was seriously considering this representation as worthy of broadcast; it was simply a mental exercise that helped us to make the familiar strange. Subverting the mainstream view by turning it inside out helped us distance ourselves from
the dominant Discourse just enough to analyze it with fresh eyes.

It worked. Clara started to deconstruct the meaning that she previously held as "normal" and never considered questioning. "Dad, why in weddings do they say, 'you may kiss the bride'?" I put the question back on her, "Why do you think?" Though she didn't share her thoughts on that question specifically, she had obviously been thinking about that ceremonial line. "I think it's sexist." Clara went on to explain in her own words that the line from weddings seemed similar to the focus of the television shows that position women as objects of male consumption. This led to a discussion about language and how patriarchy is so entrenched in society that it is embedded in our language and often goes unnoticed.

With newfound enthusiasm, Clara began to analyze her world. The next day, she set her sights on her favorite song, "Skaër boi," by Avril Lavigne (Lavigne, 2002, track 3). This song tells the story about a girl who, back in high school, turned down romance with a boy who was a skateboarder. She rejected him because they were from different social groups, and her friends did not approve of him. In the present tense of the song, time skips forward a few years; the girl has a baby and her life is dull. She finds out that this boy has become a big rock and roll star, and she blew her chance to be with him. The character telling the story, presumably Lavigne, is also a rock star and, unlike the first girl, she did not reject the skater boy; they are in love and expect to live happily ever after. This is a true pop-music fairytale—a little edgy on the outside, perhaps, but when you scratch the surface, all the characteristics of a mainstream narrative are intact.

Clara uncovered the irony that Avril Lavigne, who is a real life rock star, has created a song that makes the boy rock star the coveted center of attention. In this respect, the song character of Avril Lavigne is not that much different than the girl who sits home caring for a baby and pining away for a lost love: both assume classically traditional women's roles. Clara decided to create her own version of the song with the intention of subverting the message. In her rendition, Clara simply replaced "he" with "she" throughout the song.

It could certainly be argued that Clara's alternative version of the song is not very imaginative.

All she has done is change the gender of the two main characters. However, by doing so, she has turned the mainstream discourse on gender upside down. The boy did ballet and now cares for his baby while the girl became the rock star. The role of the female character is strong, independent, and successful. In this respect, her version is more true to life, since Avril Lavigne is a teenage rock star. Furthermore, Clara's version provides a counter-narrative that can be juxtaposed against the overwhelming majority of pop-rock music that features the exploits of strong men.

Clara's version of the Lavigne song is not a satisfactory ending point for critical media literacy. While it allowed her to acknowledge and object to the Discourse-stacking (Delphit, 1992) that she identified in the song and in society, inequity was left intact in her rendition. Substituting one injustice for another, or simply reversing the roles of the recipients of the injustice, is not an acceptable solution. The question is, then, once injustice has been identified, how can it be discussed thoughtfully? This situation cries for further discussion, and the role of the adult (parent or teacher) can be as a guide leading students past a simple identification of inequity and reversing it, to actively seeking solutions to the problems (e.g., "rewriting the world" in a more democratic fashion).

Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) call this taking "flexible roles," and outline three flexible roles that teachers assume when incorporating popular culture in the classroom. Teachers must learn to move fluidly between these roles if they are to effectively balance the components of "active audiencing," individual pleasures, and critical analysis. The first role is that of learner, "when they call on students to share their interests and pleasures" (p. 40). A second role is that of guide, when "teachers assist students in identifying and critiquing popular culture texts" (p. 40). Finally, teachers assume a role of authority, when it is necessary to protect students and "ensure that students' pleasures are respected and questioned" (p. 40). When teachers move fluidly between these roles, students do the same. This view of teaching and learning resists being placed in a tidy box labeled "constructivist" or "critical."

Clara and I have begun a dialogue that includes pleasure and critique around her favorite everyday texts. In this sense, we have been
engaging in critical media literacy using popular music as a text. However, our work is not finished. Through her rewriting of lyrics, Clara is developing her understanding of how to read the text on multiple levels. It is now time for us to look to the future with a sense of hope and a plan to improve the social world (Vasquez, 2005b). Perhaps Clara’s next song will be called *Sk8er Girls and Boys Rock Side by Side*.

**The Pleasure of Politics: Writing the Word to Righting the World**

Critical media literacy is sometimes seen as being at odds with children’s pleasure, even leading children to “lie” by criticizing mainstream texts in order to please the teacher. This is particularly likely when teachers bring children’s favorite everyday texts into the curriculum for critical analysis. Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) caution teachers about such danger and urge them to “be cognizant of the struggle that often emerges as a result of committing to both the pleasure principle and the process of critical analysis” (p. 31). Similarly, Vasquez (2005b) states that critical literacy is often equated with “cynicism and unpleasurable work,” but “critical literacy does not necessarily have to involve taking a negative stance, rather it includes looking at an issue or topic in different ways, analyzing it and hopefully being able to suggest possibilities for change” (p. 205).

Therefore, there is a chance that children’s pleasure can be interrupted by critical analysis of their popular culture texts, but critical work does not have to come at the expense of pleasure. In fact, sometimes pleasure is derived from the critical analysis itself. Vasquez (2005a) illustrates this, stating that children she worked with enthusiastically deconstructed and reconstructed texts because they dealt with “issues that mattered in our daily lives and with which we were passionately familiar” (p. 84).

The story of Clara and her deconstruction and reconstruction of popular music helps to illustrate the tensions that exist when children are given opportunities to critically analyze their everyday texts. What Clara exemplifies in her transactions with the lyrics of her favorite songs is how children can enjoy music without blindly accepting its messages. Children are active interpreters of texts who engage in a complex transaction where they are influenced by messages while at the same time resisting them. Self-reflexive teachers can help children to comprehend the multiple ways texts can be read with an eye toward envisioning a more just society. The pleasure–critique nexus is a way to describe the space that can be created when children engage in critical analysis of texts without sacrificing their pleasure from those texts.

Locating critical media literacy in the pleasure–critique nexus (see Figure 1) not only allows for the recognition that children can enjoy music while resisting and critiquing embedded hegemonic messages, it also acknowledges the pleasure that is derived from the critical deconstruction and reconstruction process. This pleasure, demonstrated by Clara when she analyzed songs by the Black Eyed Peas and by Avril Lavigne and then rewrote the latter, *Sk8er Girl*, is a joy that comes with developing a sense of agency linked to “writing the word and the world” (Christensen, 1998).

In the introduction to the book *Teaching for Social Justice* (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998), Maxine Greene writes of the importance of teaching “so that the young may be awakened to the joy of working for transformation in the smallest places, so that they may become healers and change their worlds” (p. xiv). When teachers open space in the pleasure–critique nexus, critical media literacy is dialogic, and pleasure is experienced on various levels. In such an environment, the politics of pleasure acknowledge the pleasure in politics, and children do not stop with the deconstruction of everyday texts; rather, they rewrite them in an effort to “right the world.”

**Conclusion**

As parents, teachers, and researchers, we need to observe children as they engage with popular culture texts. In doing so, we are able to better understand how young people accept and resist messages of mass media, as well as to acknowledge the pleasure they derive from it. On one hand, we must strive to learn together with our students how to decode and critically reflect on the hegemonic messages of popular culture texts. On the other hand, it is crucial not to oversimplify the transaction and ignore the multiple layers of meaning and the various pleasures that come from engaging with these texts.

The teacher of critical media literacy must be careful not to appropriate, or co-opt, children’s everyday texts for the purpose of an adult-centered...
Table: "Teacher as Learner" vs. "Teacher as Guide" vs. "Teacher as Authority"

- **Teacher as Learner**
  - Encourage students to bring popular culture texts to school
  - Listen to students as they explain and discuss their text selections
  - Ask questions to students about why they choose the particular texts
  - Be respectful of students' tastes (even when you do not appreciate, enjoy, or even approve of their selections)

- **Teacher as Guide**
  - Facilitate discussion of popular texts
  - Help students develop questions to analyze texts. Questions should include issues of what are the underlying messages in the texts, who is being heard, who is being excluded, what values are being promoted, do they agree with the messages they hear—why or why not
  - Model critical but nonjudgmental analysis
  - Share your tastes with students. Be sure to include problematic or even contradictory samples. Explain why you like them and what you object to about them
  - Guide students in creation of new media by providing time and space in curriculum as well as access and instruction with necessary technology. Ask them to explain the "whats" and "whys" behind their messages

- **Teacher as Authority**
  - Some things may not be permitted in school. The teacher must screen and filter texts and make judgments on what can or cannot be used in school setting
  - Ensure students are respectful of others
  - Make sure students' critiques are constructive and active (e.g., not reproducing stereotypes, deficit views, oppressive social structures)
  - Keep a positive atmosphere—don't allow students to lose hope in the pursuit of a more just world

**Figure 1. Strategies for developing the "flexible roles of teacher" (based on Alvermann, Moon, & Haggard, 1999)**

Critique. Rather, the teacher should incorporate children's interests into curriculum as a means to connect to students' lives and show the relevance of class work to their lives. While this means that teachers cannot take the traditional role of "expert," this role is shared with students; it does not imply that teachers adopt an "anything goes" response to media and popular culture. When engaging students with critical media literacy, teachers must try to move fluidly between roles, ranging from that of learner to that of guide, and sometimes "authority." This is a balancing act that opens space for pleasure as well as critique, and even the pleasure of critique. This is done with an eye toward imagining a more just social order. Therefore, critical media literacy that engages students with popular culture texts must navigate the politics of pleasure and acknowledge the pleasure of politics.

**References**


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**2008 DAVID H. RUSSELL AWARD CALL FOR NOMINATIONS**

This award recognizes published research in language, literature, rhetoric, teaching procedures, or cognitive processes that may sharpen the teaching or the content of English at any level.

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