

Song Tools, Technologies and Democracy in Self-Directed Humanities Curriculum

Teaching Philosophy

The role of a teacher is to teach students in the manner that they best learn. This is best understood through a re-evaluation of what it means to be a ‘teacher’ and curriculum designer; due to many social and technological changes a teacher should now be charged with designing and initiating curriculum which elicits authentic inquiry from interested and intrinsically motivated students, a bottom-up approach to learning as opposed to top-down (Perkins, 1992). I personally will refer to this pedagogical philosophy as student-centered or self-directed curriculum design where students co-create course topics, and initiate technological and media uses within the classroom. It is the job of an educator to be more of a role model, counselor, mentor, and friend to his students than it is to be an authority on every type of technology or information that is accessed or harnessed in his classroom; no teacher can know everything, and sometimes students have valuable ideas, interests, skills or experiences be it culturally, politically, economically or socially related that should be invited into the classroom and incorporated into the curriculum inquiry. In many scenarios, in particular with new and available technologies, students have competencies beyond the skill set of the teacher. So, although I use it often, some might agree that the unidirectional term *instructor* is quite outdated considering the new role of the teacher in the information era; one might agree that the term *facilitator* is more accurate, a term which encourages an ongoing dialogue and often repositions teacher-as-learner and learner-as-teacher (Palmer, 1998).

Clearly, the advent of new sources of information and new technologies has created a rich and complex environment for learning unlike previous eras where the linear or typographic ‘biases’ discussed by Marshall McLuhan (2001) potentially yielded pedagogical practices or philosophies such as rote learning, philosophies that not so strangely mimicked the order of factory-style linearity which was commonplace to production and technological practices throughout various industries during that time-period. In a sense, those technologies and processes likely contributed to organizational meta-theory beyond the factory into places like schools, that positioned the instructor and textbook as the main or only source of information within the classroom in the conventional top-down, unidirectional or factory-style manner in which information was transmitted to the student (Perkins, 1992).

One major ramification of unidirectional teaching is the absence of democratic practices inherent to the classroom design. The instructor (as leader) maintains the power in the form of information, and disseminates that information as he sees fit, a direct contradiction to most curriculum ideals that advocate the promotion of community, democracy and active citizenry in a democratic society (Barbules & Callister, 2000). In other words, humanities instructors may teach democracy but fail to practice it in any real way themselves; classes are organized like dictatorships where the instructor decides what information is valuable, lectures, and tests students on the information that he is familiar with rather than the divergent perspectives that may exist or the information with which they are familiar. In a student-centered classroom this clear contradiction should not exist; students should have choices available to them, and they should be developing the critical skills to best evaluate their own academic and life options not merely the

options provided by the instructor, curriculum designer, or school administrators (Perkins, 1992).

A teacher should not just work to *promote* democracy in the class, but instead look to *practice* democracy in the class, where students work to create a list of their own rules to be fairly and equally enforced throughout the year. How better to learn the successes and failures of a democratic system than to actually practice democracy in class? And by practice I do not mean a ‘democratic simulation’ as many classrooms do by running fake elections for candidates, but instead to make real decisions in curriculum and classroom organization. Again, as practiced in democratic societies, those rules can be altered or changed according to new information, language or tool usages that come into play according to social or political trends. For example, use of slang [i.e. words like ‘cool’ or ‘phat’] or instant message symbols [i.e. signals like ‘ :) ’ or ‘ ;) ’ to denote smiley faces, joking or sarcasm] may be inappropriate to a curriculum involving formal essays or speech writing, yet appropriate to poetic, comedic, or non-formal writing which students realize after reading texts such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Waiting for Godot*, or blogs, respectively, as they engage with a variety of diverse language texts across subjects (Perkins, 1992). As such, the democratic ideals are practiced not simply to decide on classroom behaviors, which places disciplinary maintenance in the hands of the students who select and vote on a set of class rules, but to decide on things such as grading criteria from one curriculum or (even more individually) from one student project to the next as the student designs his or her own evaluation rubric according to his or her own project, interests, or needs.

In order to continue the democratic practice, a weekly class meeting time offers students the opportunity to express their concerns, ask questions, and receive feedback from both their fellow students and the teacher. In order to organize the meeting, I utilize a 'mail box' in the class so that students can write and place letters in it throughout the week; those students can request personal responses or group discussions based on the nature of the letter. Therein students can suggest a re-evaluation of class policies to be discussed at the meeting, or raise other classroom, school-wide, district-wide, or societal concerns as they affect them individually, as a class, as a school, as a district, or as a community; this shared idea of creating 'community,' in essence, is the cornerstone of American education (Barbules & Callister, 2000). Similarly, student journals are a wonderful way to interact with students. For those willing, online blogs promote various new literacies and provide an even better forum for students to share their ideas, because students and educators both can provide feedback. There are, however, inherent risks to blogging; at the start of the year students and parents should be asked to sign a release form explaining that student work will be displayed to the public, and that blog environments are open to be viewed not just by teachers but by parents and students alike.

A lesson concerning blog etiquette should assist students in better understanding the potential ramifications of posting inappropriate or racy material to the net. In my mind it is a necessary lesson regardless of whether or not students choose to blog as opposed to use journals; many students are making daily choices about the ways they represent themselves in places like online social communities, be it through images, text, or graphic design and should therefore consider the ways that potential audiences might

receive that personal information. The goal of mentoring parts of the online process, like attending sports or after-school events, is to connect with students on a personal level and to express interest beyond their education into parts of their extra-curricular and home lives; it is a goal that reflects the objective of shaping model citizens and successful, well-rounded individuals- thinkers that solve problems and engage the world around them (Perkins, 1992). In that vein, I also strive to have personal relationships with parents where available. Parent conferences can be held at any location or time, in their home or office, on holidays or weekends; similarly calls home should not be utilized merely when students misbehave but rather when they do positive things in the classroom as well. I aspire to stay in constant contact with parents through community, online exercises and the like, and to consult them about the interests and/or best ways to reach their children in order to foster collaboration and “an energetic culture of thoughtful teaching and learning” (Perkins, 1992, p. 13). It is my belief that in addition to allowing students to be co-creators of their own curriculum, it is having personal relationships, and an enthusiastic dedication to their successes that is the most effective way to motivate.

As an educator and motivator I utilize a variety of media and technological tools (including videos, music, internet, blogs, databases, speeches, radio, television, plays, magazines, journals, newspapers, news broadcasts and the like) in order to relate the more modern stories that students encounter daily to the ancient canonical ones provided via textbooks. It is my personal belief that students should learn critical analytical skills by accessing the media texts most relevant to their own experience and learn to relate those texts to the traditional classroom readings, in order to best navigate the mediated world within which they live. Principally, like life, the story themes remain the same

despite the era, and students often fail to realize those connections when merely subjected to media or writings of one era over another. Those archetypal themes consist of death and dying, the pursuit of wealth (greed), love and lust, altered mind states, and afterlife (rebirth) to name but a few, again, story themes that are historically consistent across space and time (Scholes, 1998).

Visually those themes should be well represented in the classroom images, colors and décor; my ideal classroom environment displays posters about ancient authors (i.e. Shakespeare), texts (i.e. Macbeth) or early film (i.e. Charlie Chaplin) just as it does modern stories (Star Wars) or storytellers (i.e. Notorious B.I.G). My media literacy perspective stresses the value of modern and ancient text alike and attempts to not make value judgments about particular texts or artists based on my own value system; sometimes less-than-perfect texts elicit critical analysis from students better than pieces historically noted for their merit (Scholes, 1998). By ignoring those messages educators sometimes ignore learning opportunities (Scholes, 1998). To continually practice the democratic and community ideals, group work most times should be elicited through circular or group organized desk patterns. Again, in my mind, the linear methodologies which likely resulted in desks organized in rows are outdated; unless problems arise or divergent methods of scaffolding become necessary it should be suggested that students organize their seating in the more inclusive manner of circles or groups of three or four to promote community or shared learning experiences (i.e. Barbules & Callister, 2000), although different exercises clearly call for different groupings and seating arrangements.

The best types of learners are the ones who feel safe and comfortable enough to explore various possibilities with their classmates, and are willing to take risks and make

mistakes; I encourage various types of exploration in my class, and therefore pride myself in finding some truth to a student's response as 'incorrect', zany or abstract as it may be, as opposed to concentrating on that which is incorrect. Comfort is achieved through this inclusiveness, and more importantly, when the various stages of Maslow's hierarchy of needs are fulfilled. Restroom and water breaks are necessary, and healthy snacks can ease hunger or various other physiological distractions so that learners can concentrate on learning and working well in their educational communities (Barbules & Callister, 2000). Self-actualization and learning cannot occur until those basic needs are accommodated.

As previously mentioned, my goal is to encourage group work and class discussion while limiting lecture time. I advocate group projects and shared learning experiences where other teachers' curriculums can be accessed through my own and vice versa, something Perkins (1992) describes as "distributed intelligence" (p. 12). In this manner I attempt to stress not only the importance of my own class, but of the other classes as well; by uniting curriculum and leveraging the teachings or relationships of other teachers, students better understand that teachers are united in their efforts and that they care about the successes of their students. It is important to me that my students do not just learn content, or understand something like the plot summary of a given work, but instead understand the universal or transcendent social message that the author, producer, or director is making in order for the students to apply that information to their own lives- a connection that should be worked out by the educator to identify course meta-curriculum as opposed to simply knowing lower-level course information without making those larger social connections (Perkins, 1992). Students should be charged with using the English language in a variety of ways, be it through writing, conversation, or

speech making (Perkins, 1992) and contributing to those practices by utilizing the new literacies and technologies available, tools that similarly contribute to the social narratives that surround our shared learning experiences (Nye, 2006).

The purpose of schools in the education process is not to teach ‘material,’ it is to teach students to be successful members and citizens of our democratic society and to help them learn the critical and analytical skills to reason through problems and to communicate effectively through various channels. By staying abreast on new thinking in education, by observing and consulting with others, and by constantly reflecting and self-critiquing with my students via journals, blogs, discussions and the like, I should be able to successfully *facilitate* instead of *instruct* my students’ learning, not only in their coursework, but in their lives as well. I rely not only on my own values and knowledge of education history, but on the new work and thinking of others (i.e. Perkins, 1992). More specifically, as I’ve mentioned, I rely, in large part, on the new work and thinking of my students in order to drive curriculum development and learning, as they practice the critical analytical skills necessary to navigate and succeed in the information era.

Curriculum Question

Can students use self-selected popular communications, such as modern song, in order to learn or practice critical analytical skills? Are students more likely to engage in social, cultural, political or economic discussions concerning topics when those topics are self-selected? Is “genuine intellectual inquiry” (Perkins, 1992, p. 11) elicited from their participation with those texts; is “retention, understanding, and the active use of

knowledge” (Perkins, 1992, p. 11) more likely during this authentic inquiry and during recall (Perkins, 1992); and are discussions concerning such things as values, sexuality, sexual orientation, artistic merit, race or gender more easily accessed if students personally select examples for discussion in order, first, to evaluate those texts individually, based on their own personal emotive and cognitive responses, second, to spawn a creative student-initiated and designed product (be it an essay, a website, a song response, a speech, etc.) which ‘artistically’ represents that inquiry, and third, as a text to be discussed, critically analyzed, or evaluated as a group? Students should be encouraged to design such a product with the intention of connecting their song or popular communication selection with other aspects of the curriculum such as other historical, literary (prose, lyrical or poetic) or media texts encountered in the course and in the world. This curriculum question is directed at secondary humanities (literature, English, or social studies) students.

Background or Model Information

The first step in the unit would be to share the curriculum question with the class and to show product models from previous classes. An educator might play the track selected by a previous year’s student, and display the painting that student designed after *reading* a song text such as Barbra Streisand’s “The Way We Were” and *representing* it through a visual watercolor depiction [Donna Alvermann (2000) has written on the literacy involved in *reading and representing* song and other media texts as a facet of new literacy]. The educator would explain the way the student had described her affinity for the song in her presentation as reminding her of her deceased father, and discuss her artistic choices for representing the song with a painted image of her father around a

decorated Christmas tree, a time she recalled her mother playing the “watercolor memories” lyrics via a record on an old turntable. To represent the “corners of my mind” excerpt from the song, the student had painted geographical representations of the places her father had been stationed which felt to her like the far “corners of the world” when she thought of him. Positioned on the corners of the canvas those regions represented his travels and service in the armed forces, prior to his death in Iraq.

The educator would then describe the discourse that ensued concerning her political or social perspectives about the war in Iraq and the way the class had engaged in that discussion thereafter, baring witness to the students who had initially snickered at her “outdated” song selection based on their own initial interpretation of the material, but who had come to better understand and appreciate that selection later. In following up on this discussion, the educator, in this instance, had asked the students to consider the technologies employed in the inquiry and creation of the material in which the student creator fluidly discussed the google map technologies she used to find the shapes of those regions she painted, the nature of the delicate paint brush in her hand as she softly shaped her father’s visage in watercolor as well as the feeling of psychological intimacy which overcame her [an emotion Barbules and Callister (2000) would afford to the nature of the soft tool as an extension of the human sense of touch or as an “extension of the arm” (Nye, 2006, p. 4) and its abilities], and the symbolic nature of the record player she remembered as different from when she had recently heard the song on compact disk [a change in technology which triggers a re-evaluation of social processes and the associated psychological experience (Barbules & Callister, 2000)].

The educator, in describing this project example to his new class would point out the many different social (i.e. nationalism, duty), political (i.e. war), economic (i.e. single parent), and cultural (i.e. Christmas celebration) topics that had been examined as well as the opportunity to discuss the merit of an artistic text amongst students with similar or dissimilar values, and who have unique prior experiences or cultural differences. He would then suggest that students consider those aspects while designing their own projects, for later class discussion.

Finding Information

Students have a wide variety of media channels to explore in order to find a song or popular communication choice. They might select a videotext via MTV or VH1, or a song text via iTunes or compact disk. Locating a song or popular communication choice should not be difficult, although a student would have to have access to electronic media in some shape or form, and be able to navigate one or several of those technologies. The educator should suggest that any student unable to successfully locate and acquire a song or popular communication text should schedule a visit in order to scan the web (to locate downloadable songs or lyrics on databases such as azlyrics.com), radio, or library together utilizing available school technologies. He should remind students that most libraries also have music on loan, just as they do films and books; this should alleviate any economic divides for students who do not own media technologies for viewing or listening. Additionally, because popular texts are sometimes dramatic, in that they advocate illegal or illicit behavior with violent, sexual or graphic language and images, it

becomes important for the teacher to set guidelines concerning the types of content students use in the classroom according to school policy. The educator should provide the school or district policy information to the class. Also, after making a selection each student should be required to get their text approved by the instructor prior to undertaking the exercise and sharing it with the class. Teachers should certainly be aware that many of the song choices may be explicit, and therefore should make sure to be informed on the school policy. If students have difficulties locating radio edits, in some instances permission slips (signed by guardians) may be required if they are to view or listen to those media texts in class. Because the use of popular media in the classroom as a *tool for learning* is less than common, educators should take all the necessary precautions. Undoubtedly, traditionalists who advocate the standard use of textbooks, as opposed to media texts or technologies for learning critical skills, will question the practice on whatever grounds they can (i.e. Berley, 2000).

After the instructor has walked the students through the selection process and deemed the student selections acceptable by school standards he should provide class time in which students utilize the internet to research the topics, themes, ideas, language, images or sounds present in the popular lyrics, video, or packaging of the popular text. It might be necessary to guide student inquiry on the best ways to use internet and search engine tools. A lesson concerning search and database options should assist the curriculum inquiry; the instructor should be familiar with search engines such as google and yahoo (or visit technical support departments to learn internet navigation skills), as well as with available databases from the school such as EBSCO or Academic Search Premier which have scholarly articles written on popular media. Again, students should

be supported in their internet search with knowledgeable staff and guidance where available, because technological availability in and of itself cannot bridge academic divides, but instead provides opportunities for new social and cultural learning experiences (Nye, 2006); and importantly, those students should be made aware of the body of academic literature existing which critically analyzes or discusses popular media where those popular texts reference cultural, social, economic, or political scenarios. Potential problems exist; students may have never used research databases (which are more complex than mere internet searches), or database articles may be too complex depending on the content and student ability (for this students should be directed to the Communication Abstracts database which summarizes articles in a basic fashion), therefore teachers should be prepared to walk students through this process during class time or to host an independent lesson on such usage.

Navigating scholarly databases is a valuable skill that should be learned with this research project because students should be aware of their own, as well as varying perspectives concerning their artist, text, genre or popular communication of choice. Use of these databases will assist students in future inquiry, because published scholarly works are quite credible while all websites are not. In conjunction with this curriculum inquiry an educator might include the development and practice of web-based as well as database navigation skills within the core objectives. The educator might find that school systems do not allow students to search pop-culture sites; special permission or pass codes might be required, or students might be limited in where they can search for song, artist, genre, or lyrical information. It remains important for the educator to expect these types of hurdles, and to encourage students to locate information as best they can within

those parameters. An exhaustive inquiry should not be expected, although the gathering of various pieces of information is quite attainable.

Evaluating Information

Unique to this particular exercise, www.urbandictionary.com provides information on lyrical references, as does the occasional Wikipedia article. Because information concerning pop-cultural texts exists in this sometimes non-formal realm, these social wikis will be valuable tools for students. The educator should instruct the students that these sites are acceptable sources to be cited only for this particular inquiry, and that community encyclopedias such as these can be used informally but rarely in academic papers or settings. The Cornell University library, online at <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/webeval.html> (H. Budin, personal communication, October 11, 2007) provides accessible information concerning the evaluation of website credibility. Educators should instruct students to evaluate web information according to the helpful criteria provided there, although at stages throughout the project the teacher should meet with the student individually to review the contributing texts they have selected in case additional class lessons concerning source evaluation are necessary. Also, the educator should meet individually with students to elicit poetic or artistic criticisms as well; the teacher might point out several of the poetic, linguistic or sound devices used by the author for some desired effect. Furthermore, the educator might suggest some of the themes available to them in the song; a Brittany Spears pop song might reference material goods, and a student might recognize that

Brittany is promoting her own brand of perfume in the song lyrics for advertising or economic gain. Last, because this project relies greatly on intrinsic responses to song or popular communication texts, educators should stress the importance of students reacting to the selection as it affects them personally- in addition to the social, political, economic, cultural or literary parallels they are asked to draw. Presenting a segment of Stanley Fish's piece '*Is There a Text In this Class?*' and hosting a class discussion on that piece should help students to trust their personal reactions, emotions or instincts concerning the analysis and representation of their selected text. When these various stages are complete the student should be comfortable that the information they have independently collected is correct, appropriate and usable.

Creating Information

As previously mentioned, teachers should scaffold students in their attempt at selecting and creatively representing the information, ideas, or perspectives they have gathered in order to make relevant personal, social, political, cultural, economic or literary connections. Humanities teachers might incorporate several in-class lessons (during the popular text inquiry) concerning the exploration of more traditional literary or poetic devices such onomatopoeia, alliteration, consonance, meter, rhyme scheme, personification and the like in order for students to be able to compare and contrast such usage in their song or popular text choice- an action which would work at "involving students in a rich range of writing and other language-oriented activities across subject matters" (Perkins, 1992, p. 11), and deepen the personal exploration via popular

communication texts by assisting them in drawing these language parallels, particularly for those students who will eventually choose to represent their text through a song, poem, play or creative essay of their own. Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* or *Macbeth*, Edgar Allen Poe's *Cask of Amontillado*, and Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* or *Don Juan* are interesting poems, present in the majority of high school literary canons, that collectively reference themes that will likely surface in the students' selections; those themes include, but are not limited to, altered states of being, death and dying, art, murder, revenge, greed, social advancement, sexuality, identity, and love. Similarly, the instructor might introduce recorded speech texts, such as Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream*, in order to scaffold students on the social and cultural ramifications of particular communications so that they might undertake a similar inquiry. It should be suggested that students consider vocalics (or voice devices) as well, such as intonation, pitch, speed, verbal pause and the like; the recording might elicit discussions on speech communication and human interpretations of sound which could be relevant to their song choice. Both voice and language use might be of particular importance to students selecting hip-hop texts who attempt to describe their affinity for a song's word play in addition to something like its evocative or dramatic nature. Similarly, an ancient Greek poem such as the *Iliad* might prove interesting to students hoping to find parallels to rap culture in terms of the boastfulness of heroic characters or the representation of women as sexual object or prize.

In creating their own information by synthesizing that which was gathered, the student should be helped to make social connections by applying that information to their own experience, possibly through organizational tools, spreadsheets or diagrams to

visualize the parallels in a program like Excel, or simply in a bulleted list using word processing or hand-written organizational skills via note cards. This step might call for some basic knowledge of word processing (Microsoft Word or Works); students who are not familiar with those technologies should simply organize thought in freehand, because use of technological tools are not always necessary and may cause more problems than they solve (Nye, 2006).

Analyzing Information

In an effort to make sense of the information they have organized, students should examine those ideas and begin pondering the best way to visually represent that information via technology or another such creative project. Also, because each project is unique, the educator should allow students to create their own project rubric for grading; this should help students to identify that which they decide is most important to communicate. Although they can make some adjustment to their own rubric to accommodate their particular project, students should be provided a model that might look something like this:

Popular Communication Inquiry (200 pts total)**Song Text (100 pts total/ 25 pts each):**

- 1. Is the song or its lyrics provided for students to read, listen, or engage with; and is the song text within the school guidelines of acceptable classroom material, or have prior steps been taken to ensure school guidelines have been met?*
- 2. Is it clear why the student has selected this particular song text as important to them, their perspectives, or experiences?*
- 3. Does the student clearly address the way this text is positioned in terms of other aspects of the course, including social, political, economic, cultural, sound or literary contexts?*
- 4. Does the student analyze at least 3 poetic or voice devices used in the text and discuss her interpretation of the effect of those devices?*

Project Design (100 pts total/ 25 pts each):

- 1. Is the watercolor painting creatively designed and visually appealing (in terms of color usage and spacing)?*
- 2. Is the watercolor painting displayed in an easy to view manner for the presentation?*
- 3. Are the painted items on the canvas significant to the personal experiences of the creator?*
- 4. Are the painted items on the canvas symbolic or representative of larger social, political, economic and cultural ideas?*

Designing the rubric should help students to focus their project and to view it within the context of the other issues presented in the course curriculum. Additionally, to alleviate any potential uncertainties, each rubric should be reviewed and adjusted by the instructor prior to advancing to the presentation stage of the project in order to ensure that students examine relevant course topics as well as their own emotive or cognitive reactions.

Presenting Information

Students who choose to represent their inquiry through technology should be thoroughly encouraged, yet expected to access, practice and learn those technologies on their own, be it through a song produced with beat-making software such as Garageband, a website using Dreamweaver, a video edited using Final Cut, a podcast using Sound Forge or a PowerPoint presentation. Where computers and production software are available in schools or in libraries the instructor should suggest that students access one of those technologies. If possible, technological support staff should be utilized in one or several lessons in order to introduce students to the available software- specifically for those students opting to use those technologies. In addition, the educator should continue to encourage students to seek outside resources or help in acquiring production skills while making it clear that support using those technologies may not be consistently available through the course. Successfully harnessing new productions tools might be an aspect students select to include in the rubric, a choice that should help to evolve the learner (Nye, 2006) as she thinks in new or divergent ways, because tools create new uses

and ways of imagining the world- they are not simply “fixed objects with a use and a purpose” (Barbules & Callister, 2000). Many traditionalists do not see beyond the nuts and bolts of a technology (i.e. Berley, 2000) to view it as a social or cultural story as Nye (2006) does. The idea that a tool helps its participants to co-create social narratives is one way to frame the discussion in order to make it more accessible to humanities educators. With this in mind educators should prepare for some criticism of English, literature, or social studies courses that teach production software and utilize hardware (i.e. Berley, 2000) rather than traditional texts, essays, and the like.

In moving forward, the instructor should reiterate the available hardware for screening or viewing projects, and students should be asked to deliver materials in a compatible form. To ensure smooth presentation transitions, the educator or school should provide and test all the necessary hardware devices within the class, including a DVD player, a CD player, an iPod base, as well as computer, internet, and Powerpoint access. Also, instructors may need to provide students with written documentation that allows them to carry CDs, DVDs, or iPods within the school building on that particular day. The technological interests, however, should not overshadow those students who have selected other more basic technologies such as paintbrushes or writing tools to portray or represent their ideas. The educator should ask that technological presentations be done on the first day, in case any compatibility problems arise, so that if something does not work it can be adjusted and retried the following day.

Finally, in a follow-up or concluding exercise for the curriculum inquiry, the students should be asked to write an essay that discusses the project as it relates to themselves and the course. A specific rubric, provided by the instructor, should ask

students to examine the information and evaluate the project design according to the social, political, economic, cultural, visual, literary and personal issues they have encountered with their media text. In that way the educator can designate and specifically elicit those themes relevant to the course by guiding students on what topics to cover. In some instances, students may miss the larger connections to course material in their oral presentations. The essay should provide students the opportunity to reflect on the topics and technologies with which they have engaged, as well as the connections they have made with other course information, their own ideas, and their classmates’.

The assignment and rubric for the essay might look something like this:

Popular Communication Inquiry Essay (200 pts total)
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Please write a 5 page typed reaction essay, double-spaced, that draws parallels between your popular communication project and some of the theoretical or scholarly ideas we have discuss in this course or from the text. You have practiced relating your own experiences to your coursework all year in your journals and blogs! Once again, class notes, previous class discussions, and your text should assist your reaction, however this time you must use specific academic or professional language as discussed within the text or course, and relate that information to your project experience. Please review your notes on literary themes such as death and dying, poetic devices such as consonance or alliteration, vocalics such as tone or pitch, economics such as advertising in the form of lyrical product placement, cultural issues such as religious or racial references, political issues such as justification for war, or social issues such as representations of the female body in the media or in hip-hop. Topics such as these are likely available for your discussion in one way or another and will help you to make connections between the popular communication you've selected, the piece you've created, other humanities texts you've encountered, and the technological or mediated world in which you live.

You might answer one or both of these questions or write your own essay that examines your popular communication and/or its representative piece:

How does your project experience relate to some of the major themes, issues, or ideas from the course?

How does the project assist us in better understanding the role of humanities texts and/or communicative technologies in our lives?

Rubric (200 pts)

25 pts. Is the language of the argument cohesive (i.e. does the essay flow from one idea to the next)?

25 pts. Is there a strong thesis to focus the essay, which includes at least three clear sections (i.e. vocalics, poetic device, & cultural issues), and do the topic sentences reflect the thesis?

25 pts. Does the introduction capture the interest of the reader, do the proof paragraphs make interesting connections, and does the final paragraph draw an actual conclusion about the project or society as viewed through the creator's personal experience with the media text, the technologies used, and/ or the representative project?

25 pts. Is the paper written and cited in correct APA or MLA format?

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