
This qualitative case study explores teachers and students' perceptions of pop culture and its use in secondary English classrooms. I used thematic analysis to identify key themes addressed by teachers and students concerning pop culture. Teachers and students were surveyed and from there purposive sampling was used to select five teachers and eight students. Participants took part in individual and focus group interviews regarding their perceptions of pop culture use in the classroom as well as classroom observations. In my analysis of data I identified themes that both students and teachers shared such as the use of pop culture to build positive teacher-student relationships or make lessons relevant to students' lives. Additionally, the research shows differences such as teachers' trepidation of using pop culture effectively or not knowing where to find relevant references. Practitioner implications include: the importance of implementing pop culture to help build positive student-teacher relationships, professional development to help teachers implement pop culture in their classes, and more student voice in the pop culture selection process. Implications for future research include investigating the perceptions of pop culture use in other countries' school systems or socioeconomic school districts within the United States. Additionally, a longitudinal study into the potential of pop culture pedagogy on student success in secondary English classrooms, to include making such teaching inclusive and responsive, could prove significant.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The first mention of popular culture dates back to the 19th century when it was used to describe the growing number of “Penny Dreadfuls” (penny fiction novels) being sold to the newly literate population of London. These penny novels were described as, "Britain's first taste of mass-produced popular culture for the young" (Summerscale, 2016). The increase in literate populations, the growing consumerism, and an increased ability to travel via the railway created the market for cheap entertainment as well as the ability to circulate it easily. To meet this new demand those penny serials started being mass produced in the 1830’s.

On April 28, 2019 (nearly 190 years later), the weekend returns for Avengers: Endgame grossed a record 357.1 million dollars domestic box office and just over 1.22 billion dollars worldwide. Over that weekend it was shown in 4,662 theaters in 71 countries, both records for theaters and countries. Of those who saw the movie, 46.6% were under the age of 25. This is what pop culture has become. It is a force, not just in our local community or even our country, but worldwide. It is a medium through which we can connect and converse with people from all over the globe. Pop culture is what students are watching on TV or in the movies, what they are listening to on their IPods. It is what they are playing on the XBox, or filming on TikTok, and it is how they are communicating through social media.

What is Pop Culture?

The term pop culture is listed as being first used in 1854 by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). The definition put forth is not the most favorable: “Culture based on the tastes of ordinary people rather than an educated elite.” This goes with many other definitions that seem to set pop culture up against elite or high culture. The belief being that if something is
in the realm of popular culture it has “less” value. However, if we go back even further than the OED timeline of 1854, we can find popular culture referenced in an address about education.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1818) in an address to the British public states:

> It is therefore very essential that all means of instruction and development which the people are in want of should be brought to the utmost perfection, for it is obvious to me that the only way to introduce general improvement into the ordinary plan and concerns of domestic life, is to generalise and simplify all the principles of education. I see that it is impossible to attain this end without founding the means of popular culture and instruction upon a basis which cannot be got at otherwise than in a profound examination of Man himself; without such an investigation and such a basis all is darkness. (p. 7)

While this shows support, even 200 years ago for pop culture usage in the classroom, it still does not totally define what pop culture is.

According to Alvermann and Xu (2003) trying to give a full and perfect definition of popular culture is, “like nailing gelatin to a wall,” (p. 146). It is so hard because what pop culture is, is always changing. Most researchers defined pop culture as something that is currently popular: this includes the most popular music, slang, television shows, movies, comic books, graphic novels, and the Internet (Beach & O’Brien, 2008). Hagood, Alvermann, and Heron-Hruby (2010) separated popular culture texts from mass culture and folk culture, stressing that the meaning of popular culture is a construction that is developed between the artist and the reader. Fiske (1989) attempted to define pop culture as almost anything consumed or experienced in our daily lives (e.g., a school, a billboard, or even a supermarket). Storey (2001) offered six definitions of popular culture that I have paraphrased:

- Popular culture as something that is simply desired. For example, the recent Avengers movie mentioned broke the record for highest box office gross in the history of movies. At the same time merchandise, comics, and television shows with these same superheroes are flooding the market due to demand.
Popular culture as the leftovers after the upper class or elite culture has been determined. Of course, Storey does point out that this idea of both high and low culture is relative, recursive, and reciprocal. There are many works that were at one time or another thought of as inappropriate or rude and are now canonical and seen as high culture and yet also pop culture. Examples range from classic writers like William Shakespeare or Chaucer to a more “current” author in Mark Twain.

- Popular culture as “mass culture” (Storey, p. 8). This would be things that are produced and or manufactured for the masses and loved by the masses; mass culture gives no thought to value or quality.

- Popular culture as grassroots culture, culture that is created by people and enjoyed by people, such as folk art or folk songs. Of course, Storey points out the problem with this particular definition is the idea of who are “the people” and what makes one group more worthy or important than another.

- Popular culture as one of hegemony (e.g., those that are in power control the popular culture for subordinated groups).

- Popular culture as transcendent; there is no “high” and “low” culture. As Shakespeare noted in Hamlet: “…for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (p. 99).

It is important to note the varying view of what pop culture is and could be to both teachers and students. Personally, I believe that pop culture can be recognized by students while helping them be more actively engaged and understand numerous classroom lessons. The following terms are defined according to their use in this study.

Terms Defined

- **Digital competence**: This refers to the ability to explore new technologies in multiple
ways. This would require the ability to analyze, select, and evaluate data and information; and to use technology to represent and solve problems, share knowledge, and present ideas. It also requires an awareness of one’s responsibilities and the respect of reciprocal rights/obligations (Calvani, Cartelli, Fini, & Ranieri, 2008).

- **Facilitate learning**: This refers to (in this case with the help of popular culture) guiding students toward reaching a higher understanding of a particular subject.

- **High school**: This refers to Grades 9-12. For the purpose of this study, teachers and students interviewed are from 11th and 12th grade.

- **Miseducative experience**: This refers to a poor or unproductive experience in education that stunts or deters the growth of the student, especially, but not limited to the subject in which they had said experience. (Dewey, 1938, p 25-26)

- **Perception**: Perception is the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted (Oxford Living Dictionary, 2019).

- **Popular culture**: The set of beliefs, practices, or objects that are prominent or omnipresent in a society at a given point in time; also encompassing the activities and feelings produced from interacting with these objects. Or

  The everyday life and/or arts and artefacts of “the people” within a society. The practices and artefacts seen as reflecting the tastes and values of “ordinary people” (as opposed to the minority tastes of elite or high culture). Historically associated with traditional folk culture (especially oral culture as distinct from literary culture). British cultural studies originally defined popular culture as working-class culture. Contemporary sociology stresses the importance of the diversity of subcultures (e.g. black popular culture, teenage popular culture), as distinct from mass culture. (Oxford Reference Online, 2019).

- **Positive relationships**: This refers to a relationship built between the student and teacher to promote a sense of belonging and encourage active and cooperative participation in the class.
Student engagement: This refers to a multidimensional view of engagement dealing with the behavioral (Fredricks & McColsky, 2012), cognitive (Wang & Fredricks, 2013), and psychological (Wang & Fredricks, 2013) interest of the student in the class curriculum.

Generations of Pop Culture

To each generation, pop culture is unique. Pop culture reflects the customs, traditions, and tastes of the general population. Thanks to new technology in the 21st Century, popular culture has become increasingly more infused into the world culture and relevant on a world stage. Pop culture can be better described as a place of exchange where common ground is found among different cultures (Xu, 2005). With pop cultures’ all-encompassing presence our students are inundated daily with advertisements, perceived social norms, and other messages about what is “in” or “out”. It could benefit teachers to use their students’ knowledge of this media centered medium and the medium itself to support them not only in their academic classes but in their daily lives. Yet, while our students have this wealth of experience with popular culture that could benefit them in a formal education environment, a common concern among educators is whether this knowledge has a rightful place in the classroom (Alvermann, Huddleston, & Hagood, 2004).

Personal History with Pop Culture

Durham and Kellner (2001) state that there is, “no such thing as an innocent text” (p. 5) and I have held that quote to heart since first reading it as an undergraduate because it spoke to me and to my experiences in my educational journey. As a high school student, one of the best parts of my day was going into my English classes and learning not only about literature but about the world. My teachers made every day an adventure and allowed us to think outside the box in which so many students seem to languish. They each tried different practices and methods that showed their interest in helping students understand concepts in multiple ways. In a time
before endless testing, these teachers created innovative lessons that merged classic literature with more modern culture. A lesson on *The Odyssey* turned into creating a modern playlist to better understand the trials and tribulations of Odysseus's experiences and longing. For *Macbeth*, we were creating and writing a contemporary screenplay to make it more relatable to our modern time. Imagine my shock when I arrived at college and found, through various conversations with new friends, that their high school experiences were totally different from mine, often focusing on grammar lessons. It seemed my experiences in the high school classroom of wonderful and innovative teaching methods using popular culture did not mimic those of other schools around the state, nor even around the country.

Popular culture is not something I experienced only in the high school classroom. From a young age, I was inundated with popular culture. Growing up in the 1980s in New York, the youngest of six children, provided me the opportunity to learn from my older siblings about the world of popular culture. MTV (Music Television) played a significant role in this process as well and, being from New York, we received that channel right away with our cable package. I remember spending hours watching video after video (when MTV still showed videos) and how each was its own little movie. My brothers and sisters would play games remembering who the artist was or what album the song had come from. Furthermore, with our cable package came HBO, so movies tended to be a regular event in our household. I consumed everything I could watch, *Ghostbusters, Back to the Future, Pee-Wee’s Big Adventure, The Goonies*, and so on. My parents nurtured this love of popular culture as well by introducing me to their popular culture favorites like The Beatles or Billy Joel, and movies from when they were young like *The Awful Truth* or *North by Northwest*. They also took me frequently into New York City, which was and still is a pop culture mecca of sorts. Anything new, interesting, or “now” you could find in New
York City, and my parents made sure that I was part of it. In addition, video games and gaming became a staple of our household as my father purchased an Atari system when it first came out.

These experiences with popular culture led to my enjoyment of my English courses in High School (and would eventually inform my teaching practices). In high school my teachers used more and more popular culture, especially in my literature courses. Yes, we wrote essays, read books, and learned vocabulary, but we also created soundtracks, screenplays, and posters using the newest magazines, music, or movies as a way to support ideas and express unique perspectives on the works being read in class. As a student it made me think more critically about what I watched, listened to, and read in and out of the classroom. As I entered college, I looked to communications as my first major. Being obsessed with popular culture and wanting to be a part of it, I saw this as the correct route. However, I made the switch to education and have not looked back since. After switching my major, I did what I knew, using popular culture in coordination with whatever it was my professors wanted to teach me. I knew that doing this had worked for me in the past and surely it would help those future students that I would teach.

Professional Experience with Pop Culture

When I started teaching, I found my methods for taking popular culture and linking it to classics shunned by many older teachers. They saw this as a time-wasting technique and of no use to the students and their learning. Even students had sometimes indifferent or negative reactions to watching a movie or creating a soundtrack and relating it to the works we read. What had happened? The things that I loved so dearly in the past, my students seemed to dislike or not take interest in. Dewey states:

It is [the teacher's] business to be on the alert to see what attitudes and habitual tendencies are being created. In this direction he [sic] must, if he is an educator, be able to judge what attitudes are actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental. He must, in addition, have that sympathetic understanding of individuals as
individuals which gives him an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning. (1938, p. 34)

So, with this in mind I set forth on interviewing my students and discussing with them what I could do to make this a more meaningful experience. From these interviews I learned that my AP students wanted to just learn what they needed to pass the AP test and they did not see the correlation to the movies I was showing. Furthermore, my on-level students did not see the value in watching movies. When pressed further about how teachers have used movies, music, or other popular culture in their prior classes, both groups expressed that teachers showed movies to “waste time” or as a reward for finishing a long unit or novel (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009). When I asked my colleagues about how they used these forms of popular culture, the answers were surprisingly the same as the students. Sure, some teachers would show *Romeo and Juliet* while reading the play, or the updated version of *Of Mice and Men* when reading the novel, but none of the teachers did anything other than use the movie as a reward or way to keep the students entertained while they graded. These examples of not using pop culture to aid student understanding and instead as a “time waster” or “filler” is what John Dewey would call “miseducative experiences” with pop culture, which can alter not only how students and teachers view pop culture but also the value of popular culture within their lives.

These miseducative incidents above could be repeated in numerous schools throughout America which brings me to my current research. The purposeful use of popular culture in the classroom can lead to educative experience for the students. Seeing how popular culture is so prevalent in the students’ literacy practices at home in which they apply various literacy skills that are desirable in an academic setting, (Alvermann, Huddleston & Hagood, 2004; Alvermann & Xu, 2003), it seems only reasonable to want to use these experiences to foster learning and understanding within the classroom. However, why does it seem like this is not the case? Why
are there still teachers who dismiss the value of popular culture as nothing more than fluff or irrelevant to what the students are learning? Hobbs and Jenson (2009) posit that media literacy (pop culture literacy) is pertinent to students in the digital age saying:

Learning to analyze news and advertising, examining the social functions of music, distinguishing between propaganda, opinion and information, examining the representation of gender, race and class in entertainment and information media, understanding media economics and ownership, and exploring the ways in which violence and sexuality are depicted in media messages continue to matter as important life skills. (p. 9)

Pop culture is not irrelevant and as educators we must learn how to work with and use diverse pop culture experiences that have influenced our students and our world. By taking the time to recognize how our students construct their knowledge of the world via popular culture and technology we will be better able to have more educative and productive experience for our students in our classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

There are two main purposes of this study. The first is to provide insight into the perception of pop culture use in the English classroom in regards to teachers and students. The second is to discern how these groups’ perceptions of pop culture use influence both teaching and learning in the English classroom. My goal is to identify experiences and perceptions concerning popular culture in the classroom that can contribute to understandings around meaningful implementation of this resource.

Research Question

This qualitative study is guided by the following question:

- What are student and teacher perceptions of popular culture in the English classroom?
- According to high school students, what is the influence of pop culture on learning?
• According to high school teachers, what is the influence of pop culture on teaching?

Significance of Study

Over the past 30 years, there have been many studies on how, why, or should teachers incorporate popular culture into a teacher's curriculum and pedagogical practice. However, my study is unique in that it focuses not on how teachers should use popular culture in their classrooms, but on students’ and teachers’ perception of its use, and how those perceptions can influence both the instruction and education within the classroom. This focus on students’ educative or miseducative experiences with pop culture in coordination with the divergence in teacher expectations versus students’ experiences is a new angle and one that needs to be fully examined. In seeking to answer these research questions, the ultimate goal is to provide information that will support teacher decision making regarding pop culture. This has the potential to enhance classroom experiences that are engaging and educative.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The following literature review gives a history of pop culture and its origins in the classroom. Furthermore, I discuss the role of pop culture in supporting students’ success in reading, understanding, and making connections is a focus. In addition, I review articles focusing on respecting students’ culture, learning and keeping up with popular culture, along with how teacher, student and parent perceptions of pop culture can add or subtract value from its usage. Finally, I discuss how this study is different from those prior and how my theoretical lens supports this endeavor.

History of Pop Culture in the Classroom

When thinking of pop culture or in this specific case, film, TV, music, the Internet and other media forms, it is easy to focus on the last 20 years as the above have been so prevalent in society during this time. However, as mentioned earlier, even 200 years ago the use of pop culture to help educate the masses was something that was being considered. A deeper look reveals that 100 years ago the subject was seen as something that needed to be addressed and implemented correctly to help students learn effectively. In 1926 Nelson Greene wrote about the increased call for film in the classroom by none other than Thomas Edison. Greene’s article, *Motion Pictures in the Classroom*, in the 1926 American Academy of Political and Social Science, calls for teachers to become more aware of the importance of using visual mediums within their teaching. “The sense of hearing has been fearfully overworked ever since formal education began. Only the eye has been denied the opportunity of making its maximum and mighty contribution to the educative process. The eye's full opportunity could come only with
the invention of photography, hardly a hundred years ago” (Greene, 1926, p. 122). Greene continues to express why this “new medium” is so important for students. He states that things like posters or other visual aides are a “desirable end in education, namely, to let the mind work directly upon the realities of the physical world through facsimiles presented to the eye, rather than upon distorted images of those realities vaguely suggested to the mind by words” (Greene, 1926). The ideas, while standard thinking today, were more revolutionary in the early part of the 20th century.

Greene goes further in his beliefs by expressing ideas that are not held in high esteem until much later in the century. He discusses ideas about socio-cultural theory without knowing the term and even deals with some transactional theory nearly a decade before Rosenblatt discussed it. In modern society we have hundreds, if not thousands, of interactions that cause us to think about, alter or confirm our beliefs about a great many things. Our interactions with our friends, family, teachers, students, even barista at Starbucks are all part of a routine that we partake in and are somewhat generally aware of the influences a good or bad interaction can have on our day. However, there are other interactions that go unnoticed most of the time. When we watch a movie or TV show or even listen to a song, those interactions affect us. Greene points out that movies, even in 1926 would “influence opinion, attitude and conduct in every phase of human living.” He also called for action from teachers to understand the “vital importance today that teachers should reckon with the theatrical movie as a definite competitor, and frequently a dangerous opponent, of what they are trying to accomplish in the classroom” (Greene, 1926). As stated above, the transaction that happens between us and the chosen “work” can alter our beliefs, views and way we in turn interact with others.

In the early 20th century, film was seen as a teaching tool. However, these films were not
always selected because of their educational merit and were more used because they were “new” and seen as “the thing to do.” This led schools to find leftover footage and to “ransack the back shelves of the industry's vaults for superannuated reels which seemed to show any trace of being informative on any subject” (Greene, 1926). This is eerily similar to the view of Larry Cuban (2001) who wrote the book, *Oversold and Underused: Computers in the Classroom*. In his book, Cuban goes on to discuss how school districts nationwide were buying more and more computers because they didn’t want to be left behind and wanted to be seen as cutting edge. However, they did not provide teachers the educational background to use the technology effectively. As Cuban said, “Teachers and senior high school students across the country report they use machines mostly for word processing” (p.93). This use of technology would not be thought of as cutting edge or inventive.

As Greene brought forward in his study, film and essentially pop culture have an effect on students that can go unseen by teachers. Prior experiences and interactions shape who we have become. Each student brings with them something very special to each work that they “read.” As Rosenblatt (1938) states, “The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text” (pp. 30-31). This theory of transaction that Rosenblatt put forth over 70 years ago is not confined to words on a page. Transaction happens with each “reading” of media that students interact with on a daily basis, and in today’s society, that is more and more. Our students need to be aware of this and teachers need to learn how to use these new forms of visual literature to help students make connections not just between the media and the classic works, but between the media, the classic
works and themselves. This transactional triangle is not only important, but imperative to have students make solid and meaningful connections to all works involved and in turn learn something about themselves in the process.

From 1936-1947 film within the classroom boomed. According to Floyde Brooker (1947) in his article in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, film projector use in the classroom grew from about 6,500 in 1936 to roughly 50,000 in 1947 (p. 104). Brooker discusses how one of the main setbacks in his time period was that film, in an education application, was not made for education. It was made for the theater. He compares it to driving cars on roads made for horse drawn carriages. This lack of proper materials of course led to a lot of miseducative experiences for students with film in the classroom. Booker also called for teachers to “be trained in the use of these new materials, and this calls for their development and incorporation in the curricula of our teacher education institutions” (Brooker. 1947, p. 106). This new training would help teachers integrate this new technology into their classrooms providing positive and productive educative experiences that students could use to make meaningful connections.

Research on film and media in the classroom is sparse in the middle part of the 20th Century. As a matter of fact, most of the articles regarding it deal with using film to help teach things like theater or history. With the end of WWII and the advancement in technology, the cost of a lot of film equipment became lower leading to more schools being able to afford projectors and other multimedia equipment. This led to more films being used within the classroom. In 1953 Clarissa Flenniken did a study of her class for *English Journal* and her use of film in the classroom. She noticed that using film would “help in stimulating and developing interest in several directions” (Flenniken, p. 446). Flenniken realized that motivation is vital to the learning
process (Bandura, 1986), and as such made the connection that pop culture (in her case, film) may provide motivation to learners who might otherwise be lacking. Not only did Flenniken find that her students were more engaged in the lesson, but these educative lessons led to students exploring their own world and making connections to themselves and the literature.

In 1970 there was a huge leap in thinking about using film and in essence pop-culture in the classroom. This also coincides with many of the socio-cultural and social-literacy theories developing at the time. The idea that what we read, discuss, and talk about with others on a day to day level affects us and the way we view life, society, and in turn our transaction with other forms of discourse. Being aware of the effect the outside world can have on the development of a child is huge. An article by Roger Rollin (1970) in The Journal of College English entitled: “Beowulf to Batman: The Epic Hero and Pop Culture,” discusses how popular culture and what students read and watch outside of the classroom can in turn help students learn and understand works, ideas, and literary ideals from classic works of literature. This article can be seen as a tipping point for using film/pop-culture in the classroom, especially the English Classroom. Robert Barton, a professor of Literature at Rutgers University, responded to Rollin’s article and while at first Barton seems to not take Rollin’s idea seriously, he eventually expresses that not only does Rollin make good points, but “The question is not whether Beowulf is relevant, but am I relevant” (Barton, p. 313). Barton’s reflection on his place in society is one that is interesting and shows how teachers need to start evolving. Rollin’s original article also brings forth the ideas of sociocognitive theory that were just developing within the educational community, and, as seen in Greene’s 1926 article and in the work of Louise Rosenblatt, had been around from the early part of the 20th Century.

As the movies and media became more diffused throughout our society in the 1980’s--
thanks to cable television, VHS, cassette tapes, more suburbanization and growing population--
the use of movies and popular culture becomes something discussed and argued about within the
educational field. In 1981, *English Journal* had a debate with two professors of literature about
using pop culture in the classroom, Edmund Farrell from The University of Texas (the pro) and
Charles Davis from the University of Arizona (the con). While Davis longs for a more
“traditional curriculum in English” and voices his appeasement with schools supposedly going
back to that traditional tract, it seems like he also wants to do this without acknowledging that
popular culture is an important part of each student's life. Farrell expresses the idea that there is a
balance that needs to be had and that teachers need to be aware “most of us who listen to
Beethoven aren’t averse to listening to the Beatles” (Farrell, 1981, p. 8).

### 21st Century Teachers and Pop Culture

Today’s classrooms are besieged with standardized tests from the state and national level.
Although accountability in schooling is a broad and problematic matter that can be addressed in
many ways, it is widely recognized as the principle by which educational outcomes based on
student performance can be admired and/or blamed, usually by way of standardized tests (Au,
2007). Teachers, therefore, are more than ever adopting the idea that drilling students until
testing takes place is the way to go. In the end the students may know how to pass a test, but to
what end? “Students feel disconnected from the classroom works they are reading and the
material they are learning” (Visco, 2018). Kissell (2011) has argued that it is largely because of
this process that educational interest becomes overshadowed by out-of-school interests, such as
pop culture.

One worry Dewey (1929) had about “scientific” education, like the kind promoted by
standardized tests, was that “those who recommend science sometimes urge that uniformity of
procedure be its consequence’’ (p. 5). He continued by stating:

> When, in education, the psychologist or observer and experimentalist in any field reduces his findings to a rule which is uniformly adopted, then, only, there is a result which is objectionable and destructive of the free play of education as an art . . . This happens not because of scientific method but because of departure from it. (p. 6)

> When rules and recipes are forced onto teachers it basically turns them into “unskilled day laborers” (p. 6) rather than the critical and creative thinkers they should be. Unfortunately, many prospective teachers come into education looking for scientifically based “recipes” because science is thought to put “a stamp of final approval upon this and that specific procedure” (p. 7). What is forgotten is that the complexity of the classroom works against inflexible rules and methods. Educators must contend “with situations that never repeat one another. Exact quantitative determinations are far from meeting the demands of such situations, for they presuppose repetitions and exact uniformities” (p. 33). Again, the danger with “scientific” education is that the subjective elements of the classroom are either forgotten or else educators think they need to be oppressively controlled.

> As educators we know that finding a way to engage students by making our lessons relevant to their real lives is something we should strive to accomplish. Samina Mishra (2018) expressed it best saying, “Education as a process must be the window that opens up new ideas and spaces in the world for students, and it must also be the mirror that reflects their experiences of the world” (p. 112). With students today so inundated with technology (smartphones, tablets, and computers) and popular culture would it not make sense to incorporate these things into the curriculum? Teachers, especially in the humanities, tend to set up this choice between pop culture and the “high” literature/art/culture we want to teach. The thought that one might cheapen the language or literature being taught by tying it to a modern movie or a clip from *Key & Peele* may scare some teachers, but by thinking that are those teachers not giving the full
credit to those master works they are so diligently trying to protect? By linking those texts to popular culture it does not cheapen them, quite the opposite, it only illuminates their virtue all the more. Popular culture is one of the main and most effective bridges between what our students know and what we want them to know and it is one that we must build.

A study by Pew Internet & American Life Project, Lenhart (2015) found that 79% of teenager’s instant message their friends, 72% communicate via social media, 59% video chat with friends, and 52% play video games online with friends. According to Considine, Horton, and Moorman (2009), one of the largest contributing factors to children exhibiting poor reading comprehension is due to a lack of interest in the content material. What are we doing to help engage these students? Dewey (1913) maintained that interest facilitates learning, improves understanding and stimulates effort as well as personal involvement. What better way than connecting our curriculum to the popular culture they are so accustomed to in their day-to-day lives?

It is generally accepted now within the educational field that using popular culture in the classroom helps students learn. The use of popular culture in the classroom creates a dynamic of interest within the students, which, in turn, gets them in the mindset to become more knowledgeable (Alvermann & Xu, 2003; Vera 2011). Furthermore, the use of popular culture allows students the ability to interact with something they are familiar with. Teachers should use their students’ knowledge of pop culture as a doorway to help students understand new or different content (Hall, 2011). This promotion of learning through active engagement and participation (Alvermann & Xu, 2003; Vera, 2011) is something needed in everyone’s classrooms and teachers have the power to choose how much or how little to use it, but it must be used. A 2014 study by the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Stanford Center for
Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) found that technology - when implemented and used properly - can produce significant gains in student achievement and boost engagement, particularly among students most at risk (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014, p. 11).

Considine and colleagues (2009) posited that it is imperative that educators “acknowledge and respect the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that students bring with them to school and build on those to ensure success in the academic disciplines. Thus, students will become engaged and connected to the traditional curriculum while developing crucial technological skills” (Considine et al., 2009, p. 479). It is no longer acceptable to merely use technology as a tool. Rather, educators must be able to teach with technology in such a way that it is a vehicle by which students learn rather than an aid in the process of output. In this manner, educators will be able to develop pedagogically sound lessons, which will allow students the ability to harness the power of learning and become more motivated. “Regardless of how enthusiastically an English teacher presents printed texts, students will be drawn to multimedia texts. The degree to which students will be able to read critically these new and changing texts depends on the teacher’s ability to foster textual analysis skills using different media” (Muller, 2006).

Tisdell (2008) states, “[E]ntertainment media (as well as news and advertisement media) have an enormous effect, both consciously and unconsciously, on ‘what’ we think and ‘how’ we think—about ourselves and others, and about personal and social issues” (p. 48). As such we need to help our students, no matter the age, be prepared to work in this new and ever-changing environment. This means there are advantages in making a conscious effort to teach students about social media, critical digital literacy, and becoming global citizens. They need to understand that their knowledge of games, movies, and other forms of media are just as
important as what our traditional curriculum is and that in the 21st Century classroom it might be even more valuable. Our students need to “study” pop culture to be aware of its role in both influencing and challenging power structures in society and education (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Luke, 1999; Tisdell 2008). With the advancements in technology and the constant influx of popular culture that our students are becoming accustomed to, it is imperative that our students leave our schools prepared for the world at large. These skills will help students not only be well-meaning members of society, but critical thinking global citizens who can read, analyze, and interpret the world and media at large, not just the books they read.

According to Morrell (2013), “Teachers can liberate students’ hearts and minds with an empowering curriculum, showing them that they can enjoy and learn in a powerful way. Students need opportunities to read texts that are culturally relevant and academically challenging…that allow them to engage in higher-level conversations about critical issues” (p. 20). Taking students experiences into account and using them as a catalyst for learning can only help with the prior two issues of motivation and engagement. Forcing students to think critically about concepts and ideas using material they are acquainted with makes it easier for them to understand and engage. That engagement can lead to self-discovery and increased interest in learning. We need to encourage educative experiences with popular culture rather than miseducative ones, which can be a problem if not done correctly.

Pop Culture Literacy in the Classroom

It is imperative for teachers to bridge the gap between out-of-school literacies and academic literacies by making connections to both their interests (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), to their prior knowledge (Rogoff, 1990), and to familiar out-of-school text formats (Xu, 2005). Xu (2005) emphasizes that in order for teachers to work with today’s learners, it is important to
assist them to understand multiple literacies and to value and support students’ full range of literacy knowledge. While the idea of the “digital native” that Prensky put forth in 2001 has been for the most part debunked and turned away from, one thing he says is very true, “Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach” (Prensky, 2001, p. 1).

Students who appear to be low performing readers and writers, and disengaged from academic literacies, may be actively engaged in multiple literacies outside of school (Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brezo, & Vacca, 2004). For instance, Lenhart, et al. (2008) found that 97% of teenagers (ages 12-17) play video games. Gee (2003) determined that students have different views about the nature of learning based on their experiences with video games, and research suggests that use of multimedia can foster cognitive change (Mautone & Mayer, 2001). Thus, students’ learning styles and learning preferences may be changing due to the increased use of technology in their daily lives.

Popular culture is what formulates a large portion of students’ home literacy practices (Gainer & Fink, 2008). In turn, these practices within the home turn out to be the main component of a students’ primary discourse (Gee, 2001). Primary discourse as stated by (Gee, 2001) is one’s primary socialization and interaction with oral language in a literate community that allows them to examine and build beliefs about literacy. When students communicate in their primary discourse, they are actually using literacy in what might be considered their most assured and comfortable way. If a students’ home literacy practices include pop culture (Gainer & Fink, 2008), it could be presumed that they are indeed confident and familiar with the language, conventions, and background of this discourse. This home discourse is embedded in one’s thinking and plays a major role in the making of an individual’s identity (Gee, 2001). That
being said, if associating with popular culture is a part of a students’ identity, it would help students better understand the applications of a lesson to real life if there was a pop culture connection. It also allows students to use that primary discourse can help construct meaning within a secondary discourse (such as school).

Gee (2001) notes that this ability to employ secondary discourses is a key part of literacy. If popular culture is part of a students’ main discourse and if secondary discourse is that which is learned outside the home, then students’ interests in popular culture and their ability to relate to things within pop culture can be used to close the gap between discourses. When relationships are apparent between a primary and secondary discourse, the procurement and learning of the secondary discourse becomes more attainable (Heath, 1982). Educators need to help students succeed in learning secondary discourse while still understanding the importance of their primary discourse, as it is relevant to their academic success (Mays, 2008). Teachers can help students by making them aware of literacy skills they have developed through manipulating popular culture in their principal home discourse and apply these skills in their academic discourse. If not, students are likely to reject secondary academic discourse and revert to primary discourse when interacting in a school environment (Wolfram, 2000). This can have a detrimental effect on their educational experience and could cause a lifetime of disconnect to school. By applying popular culture in the classroom, teachers can help students make connections between knowledge they have in both their primary and secondary discourses.

It is imperative for educators to recognize how individuals obtain knowledge and how best to help students distinguish the skills they have attained. Students naturally procure knowledge when they interact with each other in formal and informal settings, and in their primary and secondary discourses (Larson & Marsh, 2005). When students involve popular
culture under these circumstances, they intrinsically gain knowledge and literacy skills necessary to comprehend information. In addition, these authors claim that learning is changing participation and that literacy knowledge occurs best in a classroom that focuses on cultural modeling (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Cultural modeling aids students in making a link between their primary and secondary discourses, and teachers use literacy as a tool for understanding culturally relevant practices in which different communities participate throughout their everyday lives and recognize them all as relevant (Larson & Marsh, 2005). If popular culture helps as a culturally relevant practice for a portion of individuals in which they apply a variety of literacy skills (Gainer & Fink, 2008; Xu, 2002), then teachers can participate in cultural modeling to help students identify skills they use when interacting with popular culture texts to support them in making connections between their home and school literacy practices.

All the above can only be achieved when educators give value to this aspect of students’ home literacies. Yosso (2005) mentions this phenomenon when discussing community cultural capital. It is described as a way of organizing foundations to build off individuals’ strengths, interests, home and cultural knowledge (Yosso, 2005). So, if teachers value this idea of community cultural capital, of which pop culture is a part, the teachers will use their students’ background knowledge to their advantage to benefit them. For example, some students might have certain family backgrounds in particular pop culture texts that could in turn be connected to content that the class is learning. The students can be presented as an expert on this certain topic and “teach” the other students. This can lead to a boost in confidence and acceptance from the students’ perspective and can in turn have other students looking into their own well of community cultural capital to make connections to the content in class because they are seeing their intelligences as being appreciated.
Each school is unique and has its own way of valuing intelligence and individuals. McDermott and Varenne (1995) contend that because of these circumstances it is a sliding scale to define who is disabled within a school culture. In addition, these authors argue that each culture defines who is provided power and taken into consideration (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). In general, pop culture texts are frequently seen as inadequate and absent of valuable academic stature (Gainer & Fink, 2008; Xu, 2002). This is a hindrance to those students who have an exorbitant amount of knowledge about those texts, and can often cause them to feel inadequate when it comes to school. If this deficit model of popular culture texts is abandoned by our educational system and instead school and teachers begin to value and implement pop culture, student’s knowledge in this area will not be seen as useless, futile, or needing to be altered to fit the mold of the academic setting. It will instead be seen as prevalent and useful knowledge which while making them more privileged learners.

Instead of the traditional “oppressive” control of the teacher in the classroom, Dewey talked about student-centered pedagogy and sociocultural identity as the best way for students to learn literacy analysis and retain what they have learned when discussing texts (Dewey, 1934). Furthermore, Dewey proposed that learning must be “the fuel of warmth of interest” (p. 323). He spoke at length of the importance of a scholar’s totality of experience, which happened inside their mind and body as well as outside in their community or their personal experiences (Dewey, 1934). If a scholar brought with him both intrinsic and extrinsic personal academic experiences, then those experiences become relevant and personal, making the criticism of the art in question meaningful to the scholar (Dewey, 1934). So, the question posed is how do we continue this process and allow for more educative experiences with popular culture and limit the miseducative experiences.
Classroom Perceptions and Usage of Pop Culture:

Planning with Pop Culture

While the aforementioned articles detailing the history of popular culture in the classroom provide reasons for and the applications of pop culture in the classroom there has been little research focusing on the perceptions of popular culture from the teacher or student perspective. It is important to take into consideration a student's lived experiences and use that experience to help them with education (Kolb, 1984). Researchers and teachers who intentionally and thoughtfully plan for instruction, consider students’ background knowledge of popular culture, including popular culture texts, observe that students’ literacy skills are strengthened (Alvermann & Xu, 2003; Dyson, 2003). For example, Morrell (2002) developed lesson plans incorporating popular culture texts (e.g., hip-hop music, movies) for a high school class. Students compared and contrasted popular culture texts to more classical texts, and engaged in critical discussions about those texts. Based on his experiences, Morrell (2002) explained that there is a need for students to critically analyze and evaluate popular culture texts in order to understand society, traditional literature, and themselves more deeply.

Respecting Students’ Culture

In another study, Skerrett and Bomer (2016) reported that Molly (pseudonym), a 9th-grade English teacher, successfully negotiated connections between the out-of-school literacies of low-income students and in school literacies. Molly became the student and the students became the teachers, instructing Molly on the intricacies of out-of-school literacies such as tattoos and tagging (the process of notating one’s name in graffiti art). Surprisingly, Molly had to convince the students that the practices they were involved in outside-of-school were literacy. By learning, confirming, and respecting students’ knowledge and experiences, Molly and the
students constructed curriculum that connected out-of-school and in school literacies (Skerrett & Bomer, 2011). Similarly, Gorlewski and Garland (2012) successfully created “literacy events” (p. 104) to teach high school students how to critically analyze popular culture films. Simply put, the researchers explicitly introduced film vocabulary, and modeled viewing movie stills and clips through the lens of a critical thinker. Ultimately, teachers integrated popular culture films into the English classroom, thus engaging students and enticing them to read the corresponding print texts.

*Learning/Keeping Up with Pop Culture*

Sometimes there is a lack of knowledge by the teacher that is the problem with using popular culture. Xu (2002) conducted a study that researched several teachers and examined their knowledge about their students’ interests and experience with popular culture as well as their own knowledge. The conclusion of the study was that those participating teachers had very little knowledge about the vast array of student popular culture as well as the different modes of texts and technology with which students choose to communicate. In addition, the teachers were disheartened to learn that their students did not often take part in traditional book reading in relation to popular culture, which supports the notion that print-based text is still one of the most valued forms of text in school (Xu, 2002).

In addition to this idea of lack of knowledge of popular culture, Savage (2008) researched a group of high school students and discovered that some students thought their teachers have not kept up with pop culture trends and have not embraced changing texts. Furthermore, one student stated in response to a researcher’s question regarding English teachers keeping up with current mass culture:

Oh yeah when you’re teaching pop you’ve gotta be involved, like to teach that stuff
you’ve got to be up-to-date so you know more than what the students know about it so they learn as well, otherwise the kids will be teaching the teachers (Savage, 2008, p. 61).

This quote clearly articulates the importance and relevance of teachers staying current with popular culture trends and knowledge as well as pointing out a certain perspective on how students view the importance of teachers’ pop culture knowledge.

*Perceptions Shaping Choice and Determining Value: Teachers, Students, Community*

Some teachers’ have a perspective that popular culture will alter traditional student-teacher roles. Lefstein and Snell (2011) present this thought in a research study focusing on one classroom teacher’s attempt to incorporate the idea of a popular talent show aired on television into a classroom lesson. The authors note that during the lesson, the teacher’s voice was not as dominant as the students who directly communicated with one another, paying little attention to the teacher’s suggestions. To some teachers, this may cause them to feel a lack of control for a number of reasons and therefore resist incorporating pop culture in their classroom as they may feel it is counterproductive (Lefstein & Snell, 2011).

On the other hand, there are those teachers who see popular culture as a means to help struggling or resistant learners excel. Leard and Lashua (2006) used this practice in a study with inner city youth in which they used rap music. The students in this study were actively involved in creating rap music, participating in oral rapping, creating remixes, and critically discussing music. Students reported a sense of achievement and a reason to come to school as they were able to build upon strengths they already had and participate in an activity they felt was meaningful to them (Leard & Lashua, 2006).

Students' perceptions of pop culture usage are just as important as that of the teachers, and have been studied previously as well. In one such study, Alvermann, Hagood, Heron-Hruby, Hughes, Williams and Yoon (2007) explored the students’ perspective of popular culture as a
motivational tool. This study focused on several struggling adolescent students who identified themselves as uninterested in reading. However, once these students were introduced to multimodal literacy and pop culture texts, they spent more time choosing to read and interact with multiliteracies. Pop culture texts provide relevant ways for students to engage with literacy and when educators recognize the relevance of a study like this, students are able to flourish. The students were excited about reading and their perception of what they were reading changed. However, the teachers were not asked about their perceptions of the pop culture texts nor about how they felt about what their students were reading.

In another study, Heron-Hruby, Hagood, and Alvermann (2008) researched critical literacy interactions and the student use of popular culture texts in and out of school (e.g., interactions between teachers, librarians, and secondary students considered to be struggling readers). Looking at the interactions through lenses of transactional and resistance theories, the researchers examined the advantages and drawbacks of the student-teacher relationships and popular culture texts (Heron-Hruby et al., 2008). The researchers stated that the teachers and the librarian could have used these conflicts and conversations to greater effect (e.g., if the teachers and librarian had reflected more deeply on their values and practices). However, the students in this study engaged more deeply in critical literacy as a result of the interactions and conflicts that stemmed from the conversations with the teachers and the librarian (Heron-Hruby et al., 2008). There were some suggestions for future research including investigating what individual schools might do at the local level to consider the thoughtful integration of popular culture texts in the classroom, despite the national standards and the politically motivated expectations of students in the twenty-first century.

A more recent article, “Literacy Learning: The Middle Years” (Heffernan, 2016), points
to a pop culture paragon, *The Simpsons*, and its usefulness in the English classroom as viewed through the eyes of teachers, students, and parents. Heffernan herself discusses her apprehension with using popular culture despite knowing the research states its value when added to the class. She decided to research if others (teachers, students and parents) had that same apprehension and how these teachers, students, and parents perceived the use of something like *The Simpsons* in a classroom setting. The study had teachers, parents, and students watch an episode of *The Simpsons* and then answer questions regarding the episode via surveys and interviews. Four of the seven teachers interviewed and all of the parents had a negative opinion towards *The Simpsons* in general and some of the teachers voiced an extreme dislike of the show overall as a reason they would not show this in class. The perspective from which one looks at the text being used can be important. It was interesting to discover that despite negative overall reactions from the parents and teachers, almost all the students who were surveyed after watching the same episode of *The Simpsons* found something educational or interesting that they could link to other forms of learning. The students' perspective, while not the focus of the study, was open to learning through pop culture medium.

Finally, a study from Australia is one of the only ones that address both student and teacher perceptions of popular culture in the classroom. However, this study was at a school for boys which does not account for a girl student perspective. Using a case study at an Australian high school for boys, Yeung and Curwood (2015) interviewed students to conclude if the students’ felt that the addition of popular culture texts into the curriculum was a motivating factor for them. Concurrently, teachers were interviewed about their perceptions of the use of popular culture usage in the curriculum. Both the students and the teachers specified that using popular culture texts in class was important; students felt more motivated to learn when teachers
used popular culture texts, and teachers believed that their male students were more engaged when popular culture texts were integrated. Sadly, the study also showed that as the standardized test date approached, both students and teachers felt that preparing for the test was more important, and indicated that popular culture text integration should not take precedence. While the study does a wonderful job of showing the perceptions of teachers and to some extent the students of popular culture, the study also does not discuss the possible use of dated references, how teachers are utilizing pop culture to appeal to students, nor what pop culture is relevant to the students overall.

The current study is different from those mentioned above. My study focused on both student and teacher perceptions of popular culture usage in the classroom, as well as using that data to possibly find a way to make that more useful to both parties involved.

Theoretical Lens

This study is situated within two lenses. One is a social-constructivist paradigm where the researcher is taking the position that human beings do not really find or discover knowledge, but rather make or construct it (Schwandt, 1998). This paradigm recognizes the complex nature of the multiple realities and that there is no single, unique “reality” but only individual perspectives. As Vygotsky (2004) states, “Any human act that gives rise to something new is referred to as a creative act, regardless of whether what is created is a physical object or some mental or emotional construct that lives within the person who created it and is known only to him.” (p. 7).

The other lens that best matches this research is that of experiential learning (Dewey, 1982; Kolb, 1984; McLeod, 2017). This cross section allows me the ability to see how prior experiences have helped construct perceptions about pop culture in the classroom.
Dewey (1982) stated that learners acquire knowledge through discovery and discourse in as natural a setting as possible. Furthermore, Dewey (1982) says, “the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child’s powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself” (p. 540). David Kolb (1984) developed a theoretical model that focuses on experiential learning that Dewey was discussing. In Kolb’s model, he represented these in the experiential learning cycle that involves (a) concrete experience followed by (b) observation and experience followed by (c) forming abstract concepts followed by (d) testing in new situations.

Figure 1. Experiential learning cycle dealing with perception (McLeod, 2017).

Figure 2. Kolb learning cycle (1984).
Kolb’s model, while still a viable resource, has been seen as too neat or simple to fully encompass what Dewey was discussing. Hence, why I also included McLeod’s model (which is a more advanced model of Kolb’s original). Both models helped me construct my observation protocol for my classroom observations (see Appendix I) as I observed each classroom session for concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active engagement in regards to pop culture usage. By using those experiential concepts set forth by Kolb, I was able to view the class through a more defined lens. Those 4 parts of the experiential learning cycle also allowed me to create questions for the individual interviews to see what the participants perceptions were in regards to pop culture usage in the classroom in each of those four specific phases.

Patton (2002) states, “We can conclude by emphasizing the basic contributions of social construction and constructivist perspectives to qualitative inquiry, namely, the emphasis on capturing and honoring multiple perspectives” (p. 102). These ideas matched my goal of looking at and capturing multiple perspectives of popular culture and taking into account that experiential learning piece that comes with using it in a classroom. As such my other interview questions were based within the participants constructed view of how they believed pop culture was used, its pros and cons, and pop culture's overall place in the classroom/school.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the history of pop culture as it pertains to the classroom. It addressed how pop culture has been used in the past and the importance of its use within the classroom today. The research cited provides a basis for what has been done so far with perceptions of pop culture usage in the classroom and situates the current study. The next chapter
discusses the methodology that was employed in collecting data, the site where the data was collected, the participants from which the data was collected, and a timeline of the overall study.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the use of popular culture in the English classroom. The goal was to determine what beliefs and experiences might influence the participants’ perceptions of the role of popular culture in the classroom and how these perceptions might be refocused to produce more meaningful experiences. Within this chapter I explain my methodology for the study, discuss the research setting, discuss how I chose the teacher and student participants for the study, and the methods employed for data collection and analysis.

It is important to understand that each person brings with them their own beliefs, history and experiences that mold how they perceive the world around them. As such there is no one true perspective, but rather multiple perspectives that must be addressed and acknowledged. Through these varying perspectives the data shows what the participants think and reveal their truth about pop culture use in the English classroom. It is the goal of this research to address the themes that come from those truths and create conclusions based on those themes.

Methodology: Multiple Case Studies

This study adheres to a qualitative approach. Qualitative methods are the best choice for this research because qualitative methods allow the researcher to listen to the views of the research participants, while focusing on the natural setting or context in which participants express their views. As Patton (2002) states, “Qualitative findings grow out of three kinds of data collection: (a) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (b) direct observation; and (c) written documents” (p. 4). In addition, I used the 13-step methodology of Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2010) as it gives a solid framework on which to build my study (see Figure 3).
Having made decisions per the first five steps of this framework as described in Chapters 1 and 2, Chapter 3 focuses on Steps 6-12. These steps are (a) determining my sampling, (b) the type of inquiry used within the research design, (c) the data collected, (d) the analysis of the data collected, (e) validating the analysis, and lastly, (f) interpreting the findings to draw a conclusion.

**Research Setting**

Eisner (1991) argued that appreciating what happens in a classroom must be understood within its larger context. I therefore begin by explaining the research context of the local area and the school. This study took place at a large high school in a major suburb in the state of Texas. The school, which I call Bayside High School, is located within the major city’s boundaries, but is, like all Texas communities, its own independent district. Taking place during
the fall of 2019, the study includes five different classes of English students ranging from gifted and talented learners to on-level learners. In all, eight students were needed for this study chosen from the classes as participants who mimicked the demographics of the school as a whole. In addition, the five teachers who allowed me to enter their classrooms were used as the teacher case study. Voluntary individual and group interviews were administered at the school. Pseudonyms are used throughout this study for the students and teachers to assure anonymity.

Bayside High School falls, as stated earlier, within the boundaries of a larger metropolitan city. The 1980s and 1990s saw a large population boom in these outlying suburban communities which is still continuing today. This boost in population was aided by the proximity to the local international airport, as well as numerous technology and manufacturing companies moving into the area during that time period. Even today the growth is at an all-time high in outlying suburban areas, and the city housing Bayside High School is no exception. Because of the new and often high paying jobs in the community, this particular school district is more affluent than most. The cost of living and housing prices are above the state averages and the socioeconomic rate of the students is higher than most as well. According to the school’s website, only 8% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged and only 16.6% are considered “at-risk.” Yet, despite this seemingly homogeneous population, Bayside High School touts an extremely diverse population of students. From the same webpage the school boasts a student population as majority Asian (40.8%) with Caucasian (36%), Hispanic (14%), African American (5%), 2 or more races (3.1%), American Indian (0.4%) and Pacific Islander (0.1%) of a student body that sits at just above 3,500.

As for the teacher population, that is decidedly different. According to the school’s webpage 87.2% of teachers are Caucasian with 5.7% Hispanic, 3.7% Asian and African American.
American (1.8%) being the next largest populations. The gender demographics of the teaching population are almost right down the middle with 48.5% of the teachers being male and 51.5% female. The experience level of the teachers is well balanced ranging from beginning teachers to those who have taught for over 20 years. The highest population is that of teachers in the 11-20 years of experience which is 35.1% of the teachers at Bayside. These are important factors when focusing on popular culture because obviously age, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, and other positionalities will influence what pop culture a teacher might be more likely to use or more likely to even know about. Likewise, the diverse population needs to be taken into account as some of the students might not be familiar with American popular culture if coming from another country, as well as the 2.7% of ELL’s at Bayside who might not be able to understand the pop culture references nor the pop culture (movies, music, etc.) itself because of lack of language proficiency or understanding.

Selection of Participants

Purposive sampling was used, which allowed me to determine the participants’ qualifications and ask those individuals to be part of the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). I employed case sampling (Patton, 2002), whereby I had potential participants complete a questionnaire (one for teachers and one for students) about pop culture and pop culture usage in the classroom. My sampling criteria included: (a) teachers who use popular culture in their classes, (b) teachers teaching high school level English classes, (c) students in those particular English classes and (d) students and teachers who had a knowledge of pop culture and could express what it means to them. I distributed the questionnaires and used the data to select a focus group of teachers and students with which to conduct in-person interviews and classroom observations.
Research Design

This study uses a multiple case study design (Yin, 2014). A case study is described by Johnson and Christensen (2014) as a “bounded system” (p. 434). In a sense, a whole case is formed from the components of other smaller cases. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2012) state: “A case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply be presenting them with abstract theories or principles” (p. 289). In this particular instance the teachers’ perspectives as a whole were seen as one case and the students’ perspective were seen as the other. Johnson and Christensen (2014) point out that a positive aspect of multiple cases being studied is that the researcher gets to examine more than one case thereby gaining multiple perspectives. I compared and contrasted the two cases looking at similarities and differences across themes. I used coding/thematic analysis with the data collected. I collected data in the following steps:

Step 1

I used paper questionnaires sent out to the teachers and the students that were completed in the classroom of the teachers who agreed to be part of the study. These questionnaires were returned to the teacher and subsequently brought to the front office in a sealed envelope for me to collect. (see Appendices C and D).

Step 2

After going through the questionnaires, I selected 8 students and 5 teachers to participate in individual and focus group interviews. They were chosen based on their knowledge of popular culture, their pop culture usage, and their ability to express what pop culture means to them. I then conducted one individual interview with each of the participants (students and teachers) and one focus group interview as a follow up resulting in 13 individual interviews in total and 2
focus group interviews. The interviews and focus groups centered around the same 12 questions (different questions for teachers and students) and focused on the participants' perceptions of popular culture usage in the classroom as well as how and if it might be used more effectively (see Appendices E and F).

Step 3

I conducted three classroom observations of each teacher and within those classrooms each student that has been interviewed, taking field notes of the class, the pop culture usage (if any), and the students/teacher interactions (if any) with pop culture.

Step 4

I used a reflective journal after each of the interviews as well as the observations documenting what I observed. Using multiple forms of data allowed me to support my data via triangulation and creating what Yin (2004) called, “converging lines of inquiry” (p. 120).

Data Collection

The sources of the data used for examining the research questions were:

i. A short paper questionnaire
ii. Face-to-face individual interviews with each subject, for a total of 13
iii. Focus group interviews with each group (teachers and students) for a total of two
iv. Personal classroom observation sheets from each classroom observation of both teachers and students in the classroom (three per teacher for a total of 15)
v. Reflective journal of the researcher after each interview session and classroom observation.

Data collection occurred in 4 stages as mentioned above and took five (5) weeks in total for the researcher to accrue the desired data. In Stage 1 of the process, participants completed the paper questionnaire (approximately 20 minutes). Stage 2 consisted of face-to-face individual
interviews with the selected teacher and student participants (approximately 30 minutes each). In stage 3 each of the two groups, students and teachers, engaged in a focus group for discussion. (Approximately 30-45 minutes). Stage 4 involved the researcher observing students and teachers during the course of three (3) class periods and taking notes on what was observed in regards to pop culture usage, verbiage, or discussion (approximately 75 minutes per class). To ensure that the data collected from the stage 2 semi-structured interviews reflect the participants’ perspective accurately, the section of the final report, which summarizes data for the individual participant, was sent to each respective participant for review, further input, corrections, and clarification.

Each of these parts was very important to the triangulation of my data. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) noted: “The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 3). Writing thorough notes during teacher observations also provided my research with more description of how teachers and students engage in pop culture opportunities. Furthermore, my reflexive journal was an asset to me as it helped me record my thoughts during the research process, and provided me a metacognitive space for my thinking (Kleinsasser, 2000). Each of these data inputs helped with the triangulation of my data and allowed for a more reliable outcome.

Participants

As stated earlier, purposive sampling was used to determine my participants. As Cresswell (2014) states, purposive sampling is the only viable sampling technique in gaining information from a very specific group of people. Whereas quantitative research relies on various random sampling methods, with this qualitative study, the researcher focused on the perceptions of a select group of individuals. In this case, the specific groups of participants were high school
English teachers and students who had varying degrees of knowledge of popular culture and use or have used popular culture in their English classrooms.

In order to identify and select participants, school administrators were contacted with information about the study and asked to send the information about the study and possibility for participation to all English teachers in the district. While I had projected a rather large response to participate in this study, I did not receive such a response as anticipated. In fact, I only received two responses after a week. Knowing I would need more than this I asked these two teachers to reach out and see if other teachers they know might take part in the study. Within the next week I had received three more positive responses and my teacher group was set. All used popular culture to some degree, all taught varying levels of high school, and there was even a diversity of participants that mimicked that of the school itself. After the teachers responded to my email with their completed questionnaires, I contacted the teachers and asked them to contact some of their students to participate. I was able to procure 15 student respondents that was narrowed to eight (8) due to scheduling conflicts and the ability to meet for interviews and the focus group. Again, my student group turned out to be fortuitously identical to that of the school’s demographics.

The participants for this study varied in age, race, and in the case of teachers, experience. See Tables 1 and 2 for student and teacher participant demographic information. As stated, my choices for participants were limited, but still of a high caliber and met the requirements for selection. I met with each participant individually either in their classroom or in a private area of the school hallway to conduct individual interviews. In addition, I met with all teacher participants as a group and all student participants as a group in a classroom for individual focus group interview sessions. Each interview lasted roughly 30 minutes mostly due to the availability...
of the participants. I also observed three classes each of each of the teachers (student participants were either in the class with one of the teacher participants or had one of the teachers previously) in order to get a feel of how they used popular culture in their classroom. An observation protocol based on Kolb’s experiential education model was used in order to document the pop culture experiences the students were having. Each classroom observation was roughly 75 minutes.

Table 1

**Student Participant Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian (Indian)</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Ms. Bliss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zack</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Mrs. Simpson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Ms. Bliss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian (Indian)</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Ms. Culpepper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Ms. Bliss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Ms. Wentworth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert (AC)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Mrs. Simpson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Mr. Belding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

**Teacher Participant Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bliss</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>11-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Simpson</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>7-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Culpepper</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Belding</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wentworth</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During my interviews with 5 teachers and 8 students for this multiple case study, I asked questions about their definition of popular culture, to which each participant provided what they believed pop culture to encompass. Furthermore, I asked them to express their beliefs about pop culture usage in the classroom and its place in schools. The participants were asked to share what they perceived the pros and cons of using popular culture to be as well. Lastly, the participants were asked to evaluate how pop culture was used in their own English classrooms and were encouraged to give examples via interview questions using Kolb’s experiential model as a foundation for four questions about specific experiences (see Appendix C and I).

I feel it is important to note that before my current position, I was a teacher for over 15 years, some of which was in the school district and high school where this research was taking place. This allowed me to relate to many of the classroom experiences described by the participants. I also knew a few of the teacher participants prior to them volunteering for the study. This made the interviews more comfortable for both of us to mutually share and deepen our conversations. It also provided me some credibility with the student volunteers who felt that their teachers would not allow just anyone to come into their classroom. This allowed the students to be more open and honest with their discussions as well.

**Thematic Analysis**

I analyzed my data (questionnaires, transcripts of interviews, reflective journal, and field notes) using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be defined as drawing out and deducing themes and patterns from data, e.g., interviews, observations (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). As Benner (1985) described, “The interpreter identifies common themes in the interviews and extracts sufficient interview excerpts to present evidence to the reader of the theme” (p. 10). The use of thematic analysis allowed me to detect
important patterns and themes as I read and analyzed the participants’ questionnaires, transcripts from interviews, field notes from observations, and my reflective journal. Spradley (1979) states, “Theme analysis involves a search for the relationships among domains and how they are linked to the culture as a whole. . . All of these types of analysis lead to discovery of cultural meaning.” (p. 94). Since I was coding themes in the interview transcripts, teacher observations, and student observations collected, thematic analysis was a productive match for my study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1:</th>
<th>Phase 4:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familiarization with the data: Read and re-read the interview transcripts and teacher observation protocols</td>
<td>Reviewing themes in conjunction with research questions: Reviewed and revised themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2:</td>
<td>Phase 5:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating initial codes: Created first-and second-cycle codes (Saldaña, 2013)</td>
<td>Defining and naming themes (generating clear definitions and names for each theme): Created definitions for themes and named themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3:</td>
<td>Phase 6:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation of themes: Read and analyze codes for themes.</td>
<td>Interpreting and producing the report: Constructed and revised the report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4. Braun and Clarke's phases of thematic analysis (2006).*

I followed the six-phase framework for thematic analysis as put forth by Braun and Clarke (2006). My coding of the data was driven by the research questions of the study. These questions, as mentioned earlier, were developed through experiential and sociocultural constructivist lenses to focus on how prior experiences and their own pop culture use helped construct the participants perceptions of pop culture classroom usage. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase process for thematic analysis consists of the following parts: 1. Becoming familiar with the data, 2. Generating your initial codes, 3. Search for themes, 4. Review themes, 5. Define themes, and 6. Write up findings (see Figure 4).
Phase 1: Familiarize Yourself with the Data

During this phase, I took the audio recordings of my interviews and transcribed them. After the transcriptions were finished, I took the time to listen to the audio recordings multiple times, while reading my transcriptions. During this process, I would type my thoughts and reflections, which would be added to my reflective journal. In addition, I typed up my field note observations and read the notes over multiple times before starting the coding process.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

During Phase 2, I coded the transcripts of all interviews (15 total, one for each individual and one for each focus group), as well as the field notes from my classroom observations (three for each participating teacher) using In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013). In Vivo coding is the process of extracting exact words or phrases from the data (Saldaña, 2013). Thereafter, I coded the questionnaire transcripts, the interview transcripts, the observation field notes, and my reflective journal employing process coding (Saldaña, 2013). When using process coding, the researcher studies the data, surmising actions (e.g., what is the participant doing?) and lists the verbs as gerunds (e.g., observing, comprehending; Saldaña, 2013). In Vivo and process coding were the first cycle of my coding process (Saldaña, 2013). First-cycle coding can be defined as extracting initial codes from the data.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

I engaged in second-cycle coding through my search for themes. Second-cycle coding can be defined as using alternative coding process to re-examine the data (Saldaña, 2013). I moved all the In Vivo and process codes to paper so I could more easily read and review the codes. I added my research questions to the top of my coding papers as an observable reminder, so that I might search for themes through the lens of the research questions. In addition, I wrote
down a list of questions to keep in mind as I investigated the themes within my data; Saldaña (2013) suggested keeping a list of questions for example, “What are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish?” (p. 21). Having these questions supported and focused my deducing and reflecting as I inspected the codes for themes.

**Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes**

As I reviewed the themes that arose from reading and re-reading the codes produced from the interviews and the teacher observation protocols, I reviewed and refined the themes by deleting some themes that did not totally align with my research questions, and by adding new themes as I continued to reanalyze my data and codes.

**Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes**

As I derived the themes developing from the data sets, I created definitions for each theme, incorporating relevant quotes from the interview transcripts and field notes from the teacher observation protocols. Concurrently, I created titles for the themes, using quotes from the data to revise and rename those titles as needed.

**Phase 6: Producing the Report**

I wrote this paper after I concluded and defined the initial themes, and I continued to revise as was needed until publication of this document.

While most of the data collected came from interviews and focus groups, a third important data set was my observation notes/reflective journal. Finally, I employed member checking by asking input from the participants (Miles et al., 2014). Specifically, I asked the participants to read the transcripts and defined themes to ascertain if the participants agreed that I
captured their responses correctly. Table 3 gives a timeline for the research process that took place.

Table 3

*Timeline for Research Project*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Tasks Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Week 1     | 1. Recruitment email to teachers was distributed.  
              2. Consent from teachers and students was obtained.  
              3. Teachers and students filled out questionnaires and were collected by me. |
| Week 2     | 1. Questionnaires were reviewed and specific participants were selected for interviews and focus groups.  
              2. Individual interviews with teachers and students were scheduled.  
              3. Some teacher/students interviews took place.  
              4. Interviews were transcribed.  
              5. Journal reflections were written after each interview. |
| Week 3     | 1. Teacher/student interviews took place.  
              2. Interviews were transcribed.  
              3. Individual interviews with teachers and students were scheduled.  
              4. Observations of teachers/students classes took place.  
              5. Reflective journaling was done after interviews and observations.  
              6. Member checking took place, allowing participants to review transcripts of the interview. |
| Week 4     | 1. Focus group interviews for teachers and students were held.  
              2. Interviews were transcribed.  
              3. Member checking took place, allowing participants to read over their portion of the transcript of the focus group.  
              4. Journal reflections were written after the focus group sessions. |
| Week 5     | 1. Material from interviews, focus groups, observation notes were read and reread/listened to, along with reflective journaling after each reading/listening experience.  
              2. Initial codes were generated from the data.  
              3. Data was searched for themes. |
| Week 6     | 1. Themes were reviewed.  
              2. Themes were defined. |
| Week 7     | 1. Final analysis of collected data collected performed.  
              2. Writing of the findings and conclusion of the dissertation was begun. |
Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility of my findings I had to consider the internal and external biases that may take place. I did this by being aware of the threats to credibility and using the triangulation mentioned above to help undercut those biases. To deal with possible distortions, I used my reflexive journal where I recorded thoughts, decisions, questions, and insights related to the research. This allowed me to look back on my notes, observations, and interviews in a more reflexive way. I also used member checks where participants read the transcripts of their interviews and made corrections as needed. Furthermore, being aware of my own positionality and bias allowed for a more trustworthy outcome.

Conclusion

This chapter described the setting where the study took place, the selection of participants, and the methods with which I collected and analyzed my data from sources ranging from individual interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, observations, and a personal reflective journal. These multiple sources support credibility and trustworthiness of the study. In addition to the multiple data points, the inclusion of member checking by the participants and constant awareness of my own positionality through reflection further helped ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected. Lastly, along with the details of the data collection process, this chapter provided a timeline of the research study itself. The following chapter details the findings from data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANTS, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS OF CASE STUDIES

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore high school teachers’ and students’ perceptions of pop culture use in the classroom and how those perceptions might influence education and instruction. The research data focuses on how the teachers and students perceived their past and current interactions with pop culture and what influence (positive, negative, or both) pop culture has on their teaching/learning. The data collected, therefore, responds to the research questions presented in Chapter 1:

- What are student and teacher perceptions of popular culture in the English classroom?
- According to high school students, what is the influence of pop culture on education?
- According to high school teachers, what is the influence of pop culture on instruction?

Findings

This chapter, as stated earlier, discusses the participants’ own perceptions of popular culture and its use in the classroom. The findings are arranged by case (teacher and student), and within each case, by individual. Each case and participant are discussed thematically, as the themes relate to the research questions, and finally there is a cross-case analysis focusing on themes. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym that would protect their identity. Each of the pseudonyms was chosen specifically for the participants’ to not be similar to their actual name nor linked to the participant in any way.

Case 1: Teachers

Each of the teachers were met in their respective classrooms either before school, after
school, or during their off period. The range in experience was from 2 years up to 12 years teaching. This was consistent with the demographics of the majority of the high school’s teachers. While I was not able to get an even number of female and male teachers (four female to one male), I was able to get at least one minority teacher to take part in the study. Seeing as the demographics of the teacher population of the high school are 87.2% Caucasian and the remaining percentage made up of Hispanic (5.9%), Asian (3.7%), African American (1.8%) and other (1.4%), my teacher focus group was close to mimicking those numbers as four of the five teacher were Caucasian and the other participant was Asian. I did not receive any responses from other minority teachers.

The teacher participants appeared open and receptive to my questionnaire and returned it promptly. They were open and honest in their answers during their interviews in regards to their usage of pop culture, their knowledge of pop culture, and the pros and cons of pop culture in the classroom. While most of the participants had a positive perception on pop culture usage and seemed to reflect on their own teaching practices during and even after the interviews took place, there was one that had a negative perception of pop culture usage and seemed very unsure of its value and what would pass as pop culture usage. Each of the interviews used the same 12 questions (see Appendix E) and led to some probing questions not only for that particular interview, but for both focus group interviews (teacher and student). Furthermore, my reflective journal helped me to focus on what I was thinking at the moment and allowed me to write down further questions for the focus group interview which was done after the observations.

The three observations of each teacher's classroom and teaching helped me to see how they were using pop culture, how their students were using pop culture, if there was pop culture not only in their teaching but also in their classroom, and allowed me to think of new questions
for our focus group interviews. The teachers were very accommodating and worked with my schedule to create times for me to come and observe their classes. Each observation was roughly 70 minutes in length and in order to make sure I was seeing a variety of students I made sure to observe On-Level, Advanced Placement, and Gifted classes. The data presented in this chapter comes from the aforementioned questionnaires, interviews, observations, and reflective journal.

Teachers Defining Pop Culture

One of the first questions asked of each of the teachers was to define popular culture. The consensus was that pop culture is whatever is relevant to students and in most cases that relevance is connected to entertainment, social media, music, sports, fashion, celebrities, and even the news. Ms. Wentworth stated in her interview, “I would say I define popular culture in terms of whatever is relevant to my kids or wherever they find relevance so a lot of times it’s anything that they see on social media or hear on the radio.” Mr. Belding echoed this with his definition stating, “The way I would define it (pop culture) would be anything that is relevant as far as entertainment goes. Like anything music, sports, celebrities’ stuff that is again relevant and entertainment related.” This idea of “relevance” was a major theme taken from the teachers’ data. It continually showed up throughout the interview process, not just in the question about defining pop culture, but throughout the interview process and even in their classroom application.

Teachers reinforced this definition by providing examples from their classes. Ms. Culpepper pointed to her wall where she had students create squares that represented themselves. Within each square were numerous mentions of pop culture. Movies, music, TV shows, celebrities, and sports heroes were all listed on the students’ squares. Ms. Culpepper stated, “I use those square to find ways to connect to my students. I saw they liked The Office, so I make
Memes in my slide shows that deal with *The Office.*” I saw this during one of my observations. Furthermore, Mr. Belding and Ms. Bliss both made specific mentions of using Pixar films in their class as a way to connect material to the lesson and make what the students are learning relevant.

Teacher Perceptions and Themes

*Building Relationships through Relevant Connections*

During the questionnaire, interview, and focus group process teachers were asked what they perceived the advantages might be of using popular culture in the classroom. While all the teachers had different answers, they all focused on the idea that using popular culture could engage students in their lessons, allow teachers to connect/build positive relationships with their students, and make the lessons relevant to the students. Only one of the teachers seemed to think of more drawbacks than advantages, but even she said that using pop culture would be a way of “meeting them halfway.” When I discussed this idea further in my teacher focus group, the teachers agreed that using pop culture was, as Mr. Belding put it, “a great way to connect with the kids and actually get them engaged in the lesson” (interview). However, each teacher in both the individual interviews and the focus group interview made sure to add that pop culture must be used, “with purpose.” This was a big point of emphasis from all the teachers involved, not simply using popular culture, but as Ms. Culpepper said, “being purposeful in doing it not just throwing in a YouTube video, but so that they know there’s a reason that you were using it too” (focus group). These perceptions of advantages reinforced the major theme of “relevance” as mentioned above. This theme has subthemes because the teachers are discussing and viewing relevance in multiple ways. Under the umbrella of “relevance” is that of “connecting to students’ lives”, “relationship building”, “fostering student engagement,” and “purposeful use.” So, when
the teachers say “relevance” they mean relevant to the student, to the student/teacher relationship, to the lesson, and to the learning goal.

When it comes to relationship building the teachers all believed that this was a key reason to use pop culture references if not within their lessons at least within their conversation with their students. As Ms. Wentworth stated, “I think pop-culture is used to bridge relationships with the students because especially being a teacher or an educator your viewed as an adult who doesn’t really understand the kids and what they’re going through so when we make that effort to cross that boundary with them they kind of are impressed” (interview). In each of the teachers’ classroom observations there were numerous references made either via students to other students or students to the teacher about something within pop culture (music, movies, TV shows, and sports). Each time something from popular culture was discussed there would be a noticeable increase in attention from some of the students whom to that point had not been paying attention or had been doing something else. Ms. Bliss made a reference to a Beyoncé song which got the children talking and asking about her musical interests (observation 1).

Ms. Culpepper used an Office meme which not only made the students look up from their tablets but also supported their understanding of the topic under discussion – analysis (observation). It was obvious from watching those interactions, as well as some others, that the teachers had laid the groundwork for solid classroom relationships (field notes 2). When asked again about relationship building, Ms. Culpepper said, “I think if they see that we care about their engagement, I think that’s the positive” (focus group). The other teachers agreed with Ms. Culpepper and Ms. Bliss added, “it’s relationship building first and then you can build off of that into classroom stuff” (focus group). In addition, Ms. Wentworth who does not use much pop culture in her class, recognized the relationship building taking place when she said, “whenever I
do use it they’re very surprised but they also thoroughly enjoy it. And I know that it makes their
day” (interview). I got to observe this during my second observation of her class when she used
the word “sus” meaning suspect (or suspicious) in response to a character’s reasoning for being
late to a dance in the novel they were reading. The students laughed hysterically and were
entertained and yet knew exactly what she was saying because she was trying to relate to them
using their pop culture.

*Fostering Student Engagement through Pop Culture Use*

While the classes and lessons I was able to observe did not readily lend themselves to
using popular culture, as they were focused on writing papers on novels the students were
reading, the teachers still managed to use some pop culture seamlessly with the idea of “fostering
engagement.” There were pop culture references via Memes (a picture of Eddard Stark from
*Game of Thrones* with the caption “Brace Yourself/An Essay is Coming!”) which I observed
seemed to make the students focus more on the presentation in question. As Mr. Belding pointed
out, “I have a lot of kids who check out when I start giving them lectures about how to write a
concluding paragraph. So, if I throw a meme up there, there is more of a chance of them actually
paying attention” (focus group). While observing his class, Mr. Belding showed memes of
Lebron James, Kylo Ren, and Sponge Bob each making the kids laugh, but also making them
read what was on the meme to help them remember the parts of a concluding paragraph he was
discussing (observation 3).

Ms. Bliss used music to get her students attention when coming into class during my
second observation. I observed the students quickly realizing the song that was playing from her
computer and interacting with Ms. Bliss because of it. She was playing *Everyday I write the
Book* by Elvis Costello and she quickly turned the interaction into the writing activity that they
were setting up to accomplish that day. I observed students who seemed interested in the topic because they were focused on the song and now had been quickly diverted to doing the work that was expected. While not the most topical of pop culture references, the idea still held firm that getting the kids engaged in some way was a good starting point to move them toward the teachers planned lesson.

Ms. Culpepper echoed this sentiment when asked about what she felt were the advantages of using pop culture stating, “I mean honestly engagement comes to mind. I know that kids want to talk about what they are engaging in outside of school while they are inside of school so I think engagement mostly” (interview). In addition to that Mrs. Simpson pointed out how many of her kids immediately pay attention when some pop culture reference is made saying, “They (the students) are like “oh my gosh I didn’t know you knew this” or “do you watch this” and they are immediately more engaged in whatever it is we are talking about” (interview). She was also quick to point out that this only happens if it is something that students are actually interested in and that if it is not something it might turn into something that could disengage some which brought up another theme, “isolation/disengagement of students.”

Despite that, all the teachers did seem to focus on how using things like movie clips, movie trailers, and pop music can help students in the moment, they also acknowledged that remembering those lessons can help them in the future. Mrs. Simpson noticed when she used movie trailers to discuss theme that:

Lightbulbs kind of go off with them when we are watching those clips and having those conversations. . . talking about theme and we just watch the trailer for it and said hey what are some big ideas that are coming up, and they were like oh teamwork, working hard, perseverance….and we were talking about themes for texts if they were really struggling I would refer back to that and see if they remember when we did this? It’s the same thing we’re just doing it with a piece of literature now. (interview)

Each of the other teachers had a similar explanation of using film clips, movie trailers, and music
in their class. Ms. Bliss summed it up best saying, “We do try to incorporate as many clips as we can just because it is more engaging for them (the students)” (focus group).

While the teachers expressed their perceived advantages, they were then asked about possible disadvantages of using popular culture in their classroom. This was one of the most diverse answers of the interview process. While 4 of the teachers had voiced support for using popular culture, they were quick to point out some of the drawbacks as well. The other teacher, Ms. Wentworth, was initially more pessimistic in her perception of pop culture and voiced this in her individual interview. In terms of pop culture being a distraction Ms. Wentworth stated, “Definitely. We put their phones up on the wall so they don’t have access to their phones and I do use Apple classroom to manage their iPads so if they’re off task I can lock them. But they still get on there so it is incredibly distracting” (interview). I had observed this in each class as each student had an assigned number and had to place their cell phone on the wall in a slot until the class was over. Ms. Wentworth also explained how pop culture has limited students' creativity in a way saying, “Their idea of originality is also somewhat warped now with TikTok, they take the same idea and just change one little element and think it’s original and that’s becoming a bit evident in their work they are turning in” (interview). It is important to note that Ms. Wentworth, after discussing pop culture throughout the interview seemed to change her point of view from negative to positive, but she continued to point out that teachers needed to make sure that what they were using was, “relevant to them (students).”

Obscuring the Lesson/Disengagement

When the question of disadvantages of popular culture being used came up the teachers were not short on opinions. The main themes taken away from the teachers were (a) “distraction/obscuring the lesson,” (b) “isolation and disengagement of students,” and (c) “fear of
choice.” With “distraction/obscuring the lesson” the teachers went back to the idea of using pop culture with purpose and making sure to explain why it is being used. In his interview, Mr. Belding seemed afraid that students might “be focused on the wrong things” if not properly told what to be looking for. Ms. Wentworth, in the quote above, pointed out how distracted students can become from using things like iPads and phones in class that they have to have students put phones in a hanger on the wall so they will not use them in class. In addition, Ms. Culpepper pointed out that sometimes using pop culture might, “disrupt the learning.” When pressed further she addressed the idea that some students, “just might not get it (the reference)” (interview). Mr. Belding furthered the discussion by talking about students just not being on task or again not focusing on the correct elements of pop culture being used. He stated, “If I play like a music video in class they might just start goofing off and looking at other stuff as opposed to finding how or what’s relevant to the lesson at hand” (focus group).

Through my observations I saw this theme of “distraction/obscuring the lesson” play out twice. In Mr. Belding’s class (observation 3) he attempted to lead a presentation via his projector and while he had a pop culture reference on the presentation the students were disengaged and distracted. Even when the presentation on writing a concluding paragraph was complete some of the students had no idea what they were supposed to do. This was due not to the presentation content, which was more than adequate, but because the students were using their iPad’s (a form of popular culture) to do other things. As I walked around the room, I saw students messaging one another, making memes, playing games, and one even watching a cartoon on YouTube.

The other time I saw this theme of “distraction/obscuring the lesson” take place was in Ms. Wentworth’s class (observation 3). She showed her gifted class a video on the word “okay.” The video was excellent and discussed the origin of the word and how it came into being. The
students were engaged and interested in the video which was what Ms. Wentworth had hoped for. However, once it was over the students started talking about planning on creating their own slang and coming up with a contest to see who could create a slang term that caught on in the high school. Both interesting and inventive ideas, but not Ms. Wentworth reason for showing the video which was not using slang in your papers and reinforcing the idea that abbreviations and “texting verbiage” is not appropriate for academic papers. While she took the time to address this after the fact, it might have been more useful to address it beforehand. In the end the students understood why she used the video, but watching the complete distraction of students going off on their own tangent about slang and seeing her purpose be obscured solidified this as an important theme in this study.

In addition, disengagement and isolation of students was something a majority of the teachers brought up as a disadvantage. Most of the teachers seemed readily aware that due to the schools’ diverse population some of the references they might be inclined to use could disengage and or alienate some students. Mrs. Simpson stated:

I think it just disengages them sometimes. I see them wanting to know what everyone else is talking about, like they want to be in on the conversation, and so they’ll be engaged in that sense, but I also see kids just check out. So, if it is not relevant to them, if I referenced something that they don’t know about, they just, it just inhibits their interaction with in the class. (Interview)

Ms. Bliss added to that sentiment by stating, “I mean if some of the kids haven’t seen it-- some the kids aren’t allowed to watch Netflix. Some of them can’t watch specific TV shows. So, if I make a reference to that they might feel isolated. So that could be a drawback” (interview).

Furthermore, Mr. Belding was worried that by using certain pop culture references we might be promoting things or people that the students’ parents might want them to stay away from or not watch. The teachers felt unsure about how to navigate those situations.
In addition, Mrs. Simpson focused on the diversity of the student population and talked about how ELLs and students new to the country could feel left out or isolated, stating, “especially ELLs, there are English Language Learners for sure and if I make references to those things (pop culture) it more or less shuts them down. Because they don’t know what I’m talking about and they feel left out” (interview). Though, a few teachers did say that visual representations, even if unknown to certain students, could be a benefit, especially to ELLs in their classrooms, there was still a fear of the students simply disengaging. Mrs. Simpson again stated, “if I referenced something that they don’t know about it just inhibits their interaction within the class” (interview). While this may be the case, it did not appear during my observations that students did not get the pop culture references or that they became disengaged because of them.

Fear of Choice/Lack of Knowledge

This fear of isolating students and having them disengage led to another theme that the teachers discussed, “fear of choice.” While all of the teachers eventually seemed to see the benefits of using popular culture, they all had very similar fears of how to use it and what to use. All of the teachers fear using “outdated” references. When asked about the perception of pop culture having to be right now and, in the moment, there was a distinction of how it was viewed. The younger teachers believed that their references needed to be within the past year or so. Conversely, the 2 older teachers felt that pop culture is timeless, as long as the reference is still culturally relevant it should not matter. As Ms. Bliss stated, “it doesn’t necessarily have to be present it can be classic movies, it can be current, it could be five years ago, it is whatever it is” (interview). One of the younger teachers rebutted that with the idea that making a reference to someone like John Hughes or a John Hughes movie could cause a, “disruption of the class
because then they want to know more information and so forth and so on” (interview). When I brought this up in the focus group setting, the teachers seemed to agree that often students can get sidetracked by little things which can again “obscure the lesson,” which is why they again discussed the idea of making sure what is being used is used with purpose and that the purpose is expressed.

Another fear brought up was fear of parents. One of the teachers’ voiced her concern of parental involvement as well as parental disapproval of choices that might be made. Mrs. Simpson said, “Because even if we were trying to relate to kids, parents might not be OK with those things that we are trying to relate to them with, even though they are relevant to kids and they’re probably hearing and saying worse things that their parents are OK with” (interview). Furthermore, in such a diverse district, the teachers seemed to fear possible backlash from teaching things like “Journey of the Magi” as half of the students (according to the teachers) might not know the story of Jesus or the Christian beliefs that the poem is based on. A lesson like that might lead to disengagement, could obscure the lesson as kids might take the conversation down different paths, and isolation, as students feel left out or even ostracized. While that particular poem is not pop culture, there are ways to link pop culture to it and yet the teachers all voiced a fear of what they could use that would be acceptable and appropriate (focus group).

From my observations in their classrooms I would not have thought this was a problem as many used current memes, videos, or references. However, as I looked back through my field notes and into my reflective journal and realized that many of their pop culture references are the same or are repeated (journal). While this is common for teachers to share presentations and works, it was a bit disheartening to see almost no variation in how they used pop culture in their classes. There is an obvious struggle for each of the teachers as they voiced how even if they
wanted to use more pop culture they were not sure exactly how to do it or where to find examples (focus group).

Furthermore, the teachers did mention using things such as Pixar movie clips or movie trailers to help students learn about theme, making predictions, and other plot elements (foreshadowing or flashbacks, for example). When asked about why they used Pixar clips (a Disney Company), Mr. Belding summed up the groups reasoning this way, “They (Disney films) are not like a niche market, there’s not like a specific group of people that would just appreciate it or those that would hate it. And you could watch something like Wall-E, that has very little in terms of words and then it does not matter where you come from” (focus group). This seemed to put forth the belief that these Pixar movies are safe to use and more generally viewed as acceptable. When asked if they all showed different movies or trailers, Ms. Bliss said yes and pointed out that she tried to use something different not only from other teachers, but something different for each class (focus group).

Connecting to the “fear of choice” theme above was a theme that developed through discussion of how or from where the teachers get their inspiration for pop culture choices. That theme was “lack of knowledge.” The English Department seemed to know what one another was doing within grade level, but when asked about how pop culture might be used outside of their classrooms/grade levels or subject they seemed unsure and unaware. Ms. Culpepper stated, “I am not sure. I wonder if….hmmmm, I am not sure how it is used in other classrooms” (interview). This sentiment was echoed by Mrs. Simpson saying, “I’m sure teachers use those references in their classrooms but I don’t really know” (interview). When reflecting on this it made me wonder about the use of learning walks during off periods to see how other classes do things and if this would be a viable option moving forward for them (journal).
When I asked how they chose their pop culture texts (movies, music, TV shows, clips, memes) they all focused on their own set of beliefs or picking up an idea from another English teacher. Mr. Belding discussed his vetting process consisting of: 1. School appropriate 2. Good visual quality 3. Relevance to the lesson (interview). In her interview, Ms. Bliss, when talking about using pop songs with *Romeo and Juliet* also made sure to point out her choices were, “school appropriate” and stated that she chose songs that she thought connected to the play and its themes. Mrs. Simpson talked about another English teacher giving her an idea to use a Netflix show in class to connect to a novel, but again this was wrought with the fear of students being possibly exposed to something inappropriate. In each of the initial answers from the teachers, students were not brought into the equation.

While some of the teachers addressed the idea of relevance, it was in terms of the lesson, not so much the students. When probed about if students were asked to be part of the process of selecting pop culture texts the answers were varied. Mr. Belding, despite his vetting process stated he asks for students input, “All the time.” Ms. Wentworth and Mrs. Simpson both expressed that they do not ask their students for pop culture advice or suggestions enough and were really reflective when thinking about the question (focus group). Ms. Bliss and Ms. Culpepper both seemed to rely on a passive approach and use conversations in the classroom or a getting to know you project the students did at the beginning of the semester to help develop ideas of connectivity (focus group). Some of this does fall back on the students as each of the teachers voiced the lack of student feedback when asked. Mr. Belding stated, “They haven’t really given me specifics, but they give me a general idea” (interview). This seemed to be what happens often, students will complain about a lesson or a pop culture reference, but when asked to add to the discourse they are not as open to do so. As Mrs. Simpson recalls, “we read a short
story and one of my kids literally looked at me and was like “Miss, this story sucks,” so I told her I’ll try to find something better, what do you want to hear? The child didn’t really care enough to give me input even at the end of the story” (interview). This interaction could be a reason for lack of inquiry by teachers to students as the teachers all had a similar story to this one.

In addition, the teachers did not feel as if they had adequate support from their school district in regards to pop culture implementation (focus group). While this particular school district is one of the more technologically advanced schools providing iPads, Smart Boards, laptops, and even in some cases Apple TVs (all of which are part of pop culture), none of the teachers seemed to be aware of how to use these on more than a basic level of showing presentations or locking students iPads. Ms. Wentworth voiced her frustration saying, “It’s hard because we don’t really know where to start. I don’t know where to start because I don’t have social media so I’m not sure how to do my research” (focus group). Each teacher brought up the idea of having professional development sessions on how to incorporate pop culture in their respective classes. Ms. Bliss stated she hoped her school might try, “finding other professional development opportunities that provoke those thoughts…” and Ms. Wentworth said she would want profession development because she would “like to see certain activities that could arise from using pop-culture mediums and also see the benefits, if there’s a case study I would love to read about it because I could actually justify like you guys were doing this because of the statistics” (interview). This want for professional development, tangible examples, and more documented studies is connected to the “fear of choice” as well as the “purposeful use” themes as they are unaware of more ways to use popular culture and even if they want to, they want to make sure that it is actually going to be beneficial, not just used for the sake of it. One wonder that came from my reflexive journal was what if the district had students run a professional
development for teachers on pop culture (journal)? While I did observe some of the teachers asking the students about what they were listening to when they came into class with music playing, I rarely saw any inquisition of what they could do via pop culture to help them understand this better or even ask students to make a suggestion or connection.

**Purposeful Use**

Throughout the data retrieved from my interviews, focus group interviews, and observations, “purposeful use” was an overarching theme. All of the teachers involved in the study made a point to discuss the “purposeful use” of pop culture. This was the reason they used movie trailers to discuss the ideas of theme, flashback, or foreshadowing. The use of pop culture there had a purpose as clear and defined. Ms. Wentworth when talking about that particular lesson, “those help with practicing and then we go from there so I think pop-culture is a great way to spark their interest and to segue into something deeper” (interview). Throughout my interviews the teachers express numerous uses of popular culture in their classes with very direct and purposeful uses. They want to make sure that the lesson they are teaching works and that the integration of popular culture is, according to Mr. Belding, “natural... as opposed to smashing in their face” (interview).

As I observed the teachers’ lessons, I saw this taking place. The use of pop culture was limited, but when used, it was used with purpose. As mentioned prior I did see some instances where the pop culture use obscured the meaning of the lesson, but that was less often the case. Mrs. Simpson’s reference to *Star Wars* to draw attention to fight of good against evil in the novel they were reading did not seem to be jamming in a pop culture reference just for the sake of doing so (observation 2). Rather, it was done with purpose and the students in mind. Similarly, when Mr. Belding played music in his class while his students were working on vocabulary, he
was purposeful in the music he chose (observation 1). He told me,

I read a study about how video game music, the reason kids are very focused when they listen to it, is because the point of the music is to enhance the experience of the video game and not take away from it and so it’s there to help to focus on the game and focus on what they’re doing not the music. So that’s why I play them because it helps them focus a lot more. (Interview)

In addition, I observed multiple teachers use updated memes with their presentations all of which helped focus the students and had important information on writing strategies and literary analysis. These were used purposefully and none that I saw were irrelevant to the lesson or seemed out of place.

The teachers appeared to be open and forthcoming in their answers to all questions and really took time to reflect and think about the answers given. Their perceptions of pop culture were, for the most part, in line with one another creating very clear and specific themes. The meaning behind the themes and the implications from those findings and the findings of my other case are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Case 2: Students

Each of the students were met in their respective classrooms or a private area in the school hallway near their classroom either before school, after school, or during their English class period. The age range of the students was 15 years up to 18 years old and consisted of freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. I did my best to mimic the overall population of the school’s demographics and despite a rather small response to be part of the study was lucky to get participants who did in fact mimic said demographics to an extent. Three of my student participants were Asian American (40.8% of the school’s population), another three were Caucasian (36% of the school population), one participant was Hispanic (14% of the school population), and the last participant was African American (5% of the school population).
was no demographic information available on the school’s website regarding the numbers of male and female students, but when asked the teachers stated there seemed to be far more females in the school than males which again mimicked my participants as I had 5 female and 3 male students take part in this research.

The student participants were all quick to answer the questions on my questionnaire and return it promptly to their teachers to take part in the study. They were extremely candid and truthful in their answers during their interviews in regards to their experiences with pop culture, their knowledge of pop culture, and how they perceived the pros and cons of pop culture usage in the classroom. For the most part all of the students seemed to have a positive perception of pop culture use in their classes. Most tended to reflect on their high school experience as a whole and think of lessons they had had in the past or teachers they currently had that used pop culture. Each of the interviews used the same 12 questions (see Appendix F) and led to some probing questions not only for that particular interview, but for both focus group interviews (teacher and student). Furthermore, my reflective journal helped me to focus on what I was thinking at the moment and allowed me to write down further questions for the focus group interview which was done after the observations.

The observations of the teachers’ classroom and teaching helped me to see how the students’ interacted with the teacher, their lesson, and used pop culture. The students were only aware that I was there observing the teacher, they were not aware that I was observing them as well. This was done to ensure they would not be influenced by my presence and would hopefully act more like they usually do. As mentioned earlier, each observation was roughly 70 minutes in length and in order to make sure I was seeing a variety of students I made sure to observe On-Level, Advanced Placement, and Gifted classes. I used the observation protocol (see Appendix
G) to observe the classes and teachers for the most part, but I did make reference to student participant interaction and observation as well. The data presented here in this chapter comes from the aforementioned questionnaires, interviews, observations, and reflective journal.

Students Defining Pop Culture

Similar to the teachers, the first task asked of each of the students was to define popular culture. The students seemed to come to the conclusion that pop culture is whatever is current in music, movies, entertainment, social media, fashion, celebrities, and technology. Students tended to focus on current trends in society and stated that, “Popular culture to me would be like what I see on social media, like what I would see on Instagram, what I see on Twitter, or like certain TV shows, to me like what I see on MTV, or like BET is like pop culture to me” (interview). In addition, one student, Stacy stated, “I believe the popular culture is anything that is popular in Western culture because I think that it mainly gravitates around Western society and the influences that we have on other places and countries” (interview). While not the focus of this particular study, the idea of representation within the pop culture used was a topic that came up and a theme that emerged through the interview process. The focus of what is popular now, in the moment, reiterated the theme of “relevance” that the teachers had expressed. To the students’ pop culture is what is relevant to them, now.

Students Perceptions and Themes:

Relatability/Relevance between Lessons and Students’ Lives

During the questionnaire, interviews, and focus group process students were asked what they perceived the advantages might be of having teachers use popular culture in the classroom. While the answers were different the students all seemed to focus around the same themes within their answers. One theme was “Relatability/relevance to lessons and students’ lives.” Lisa, when
discussing the advantages, stated, “it would be more relatable to the students, students will be more able to relate to things and probably connect to things more if there’s more pop culture in the classroom because that’s what we see all day so it’s something that we are used to” (focus group). AC echoed that statement and talked about for him when teachers use pop culture it is a way of, “making students understand more, if teachers used it more I feel like kids can connect to it, I feel I can connect to it” (focus group). In addition, Stacy echoed this idea of relevance and connection saying, “I always felt a disconnect and I’ll be sitting in like calculus class and thinking this is not relevant. I think that when they (teachers) use pop culture references, as someone who is more assimilated into pop culture, it helps me be able to relate to the content we are learning. So I really like it” (focus group).

Making learning relatable and relevant to the students’ lives was something that AC explaining he really helped him learn when his teacher, “somehow relates to what we are studying in the text and we draw a connection between what we are learning and real life” (interview). Jessie made the argument a little simpler saying, “I think it’s just easier to learn and better to focus when it’s (the lesson) related more towards us and we actually understand it” (interview). This relatability piece is something important to the students. They want to feel like their lessons have meaning beyond the class they are in. Stacy summed up all of the students’ feelings on the matter saying:

I think using pop culture in the classroom just makes everything more relatable and easier to understand and it also kind of motivates us because those are the kind of topics that we are more passion about or are the topics of things that we do in our free time or listen to or read. When those become kind of tied into education that is a true representation of our lives and I don’t think that education should just be the academics, not just math problems. I do think it should also be able to relate so it makes an impact on us and our lives. (interview).

When I asked students about specifics of prior experiences using my experiential
education protocol as a guide for questions it was clear that the students had positive experiences in relation to pop culture usage in these particular classes and that teachers were focusing on relating those experiences to the students. Stacy discussed a lesson that had the teacher and eventually the students use movie trailers to help them learn themes and concepts. She immediately recounted a story of her teacher using a scene from *Castaway* to discuss the theme of isolation and her group using the trailer for *Spiderman: Far From Home* to discuss foreshadowing. This helped me identify a concrete experience used by the teachers, helped me see how they were asked to make an abstract conceptualization, and then were asked to do a form of active experimentation by presenting a trailer themselves and aligning it to a theme or concept. This ability for teachers to make their lessons relevant and relatable to their students’ lives not only has implications for students learning, but from what the students are saying it increases engagement and can bring out a passion for learning in the students they might not have expressed otherwise.

*Student/Teacher Relationship Building through Pop Culture*

Similar to the teachers, students revealed the theme of relationship building. Students saw teachers who used pop culture as not only trying to build a relationship, but more approachable and easier to communicate with. Stacy stated, “I feel more connected to the teacher whoever is using those things and I also feel a lot more relieved because I feel this sense of sophistication or formality that I have to keep up with that teacher going down and I think that helps our communication a lot” (interview). This building of positive relationships seemed to be a major point for many of the participants. They wanted a teacher they felt comfortable with and could communicate with and part of that hinged on the use, or at the very least, knowledge of popular culture. Samuel brought up that using pop culture might, “welcome people more and make
people feel more comfortable in the classroom” (interview). In my field notes there were numerous references to each teacher welcoming kids to class, talking to them about what was going on in the world, or even making a specific pop culture reference to a song, movie, sports figure, or book that seemed to be used to help build a positive relationship with their students.

Throughout my observations I saw many positive relationship building moments taking place. The particular students in this study were not always part of this process, but it was easy to see what they were talking about. In Ms. Bliss’s class I watched Kelly perk up immediately with discussion of Beyoncé and get involved in a conversation. This was the same for Samuel in Mr. Belding’s class when Star Wars was discussed. The students’ body language (turning toward the teacher, smiles, and heightened attention) all spoke to what they had addressed in their interviews. When asked about how she feels when teachers use pop culture in the class Kelly stated, “I mean I feel like I could relate to them more. It feels like they’re cooler……you feel like you can connect with them and others (teachers) that don’t really ever mix any of that (pop culture) into their classroom. It’s just a regular classroom and you, you’re not dreading, but it’s just not as fun” (focus group). This was how all of the participants felt as they nodded in approval of Kelly’s point. Kelly’s quote also speaks to the prior experiences these students have had in classes and why there seems to be more positive feelings linked to those teachers’ classes who use popular culture and try to build a relationship with their students.

Teacher Effort in Using Pop Culture

Although connected to relationship building, this theme emerged as distinct within student perceptions. The students know that teachers work hard and that they are putting forth an effort to do their best. However, this effort of using popular culture to connect to the students is something that seemed to genuinely appeal to the students. That being said, this theme
encompasses teacher effort not only in using pop culture, but it focuses on the effort of teachers to learn pop culture, connect to students, create pop culture lessons, and build relationships. Jessie brought up that to her, teachers who use pop culture show they are making an effort saying, “I like when they use it because it shows that they’re making an effort to try and connect to us and not just doing a job but they’re actually wanting to build a relationship so I like it” (focus group). Lisa linked the effort with the relationship building stating, “To make an effort to relate to me and make me feel like I want to build a better bond with you and then I’m comfortable with you especially if you’re using pop culture in the classroom. I’ll automatically want to build a bond with you and want to attend your class” (focus group). When I probed further into this asking what happens when teachers are using pop culture incorrectly (using phrasing wrong, or making a stale reference) the students still voiced that the effort was what mattered most. Zach stated, “Even if you’re using it wrong, it’s just the effort that you’re putting in” (focus group). Stacy pointed out that this effort from teachers to use their students’ pop culture not only shows they care, but like Lisa had mentioned it makes her more comfortable with the teacher saying, “It shows that they’re making an effort to get to know you…it kind of creates a stronger bond and it makes me much more comfortable to talk to them” (focus group). These positive experiences of perceived effort have an influence not only on the student’s engagement, but on their well-being (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

This idea of effort goes further than just trying something in class. The students mentioned that the effort needs to be constant. As Kelly says, “If you want to implement pop culture into your classroom you really have to be dedicated in keeping up with pop culture. If you’re going to use it you might as well learn how to use it right and stay up-to-date” (focus group). This perception of effort, effort in creating a relevant lesson, knowing pop culture,
making connections, and caring for students, is a point that the students focused on as something that influenced not only how they viewed the class, but the teacher. As AC stated, “putting in the effort is important, just as the materials they are teaching, put effort into both of them so that we can learn more and feel connected” (focus group). In addition, the effort of teachers to seek help from their students was something mentioned. When asked about teachers not knowing how to use pop culture or using it wrong, Lisa voiced, “I will help you, I will help you to use it for the next class correctly . . . I will help you. I am just glad you are trying” (interview).

Students helping teachers was observed a few times during my time in their classes. In Ms. Wentworth’s class she was told how to use some slang, like the word “cringy” to discuss something uncomfortable or awkward (observation 1). She then immediately used it in class to the students’ apparent delight. This was a concrete experience that allowed the students to see that they could have an influence on the teacher and I believe it was beneficial for both parties. In Ms. Bliss’s class, she referenced a song from The Backstreet Boys and some of her students were quick to tell her not to do that and instead use a song from The Jonas Brothers. She quickly wrote it down and during our focus group she even mentioned that she had used that song in subsequent classes after she was told to by her students. When asked how it went over, she said, “great.” These positive experiences not only show the effort the students seem to be wanting from their teachers, but in turn continue to build those positive relationships that seem to be a priority on both sides.

_Distraction and Disconnection from the Lesson_

The students, while expressing that pop culture was something that they are all immersed in and understand, did point out one large problem with using it in the classroom. The theme of distraction/disconnection from the lesson was one voiced by each of the selected participants.
Stacy voiced that, “some drawbacks could be that pop culture for one person might not always be pop culture for another person and some people will feel a disconnect, or let’s say if they move from another country they might feel a little disconnected” (interview). Samuel did say that most teachers do a good job of being inclusive and he thought, “teachers that I have had, they really represented all cultures very well and made kids feel comfortable without anyone feeling like they are not the same as everyone” (interview). Others did not feel like the teachers were doing a good job of representing school demographics or diversifying their pop culture usage. Violet said that when teachers use references she does not know or are not explained in advance as to why they are being used it can, “create disengagement and just a lack of interest” (interview). In response to the comment about pop culture being different for different people, Kelly (a minority student of Indian descent), felt that while, “every teacher, like every teacher here is welcoming. No matter what” there was room for improvement when it came to things like pop culture implementation saying, “there’s a lot of Indian people at the school and I feel like they don’t really do as much for them. It is a lot of just American pop culture” (interview). However, when asked how she felt about that, Kelly had a very interesting take stating, “I don’t really care because we live in America. I’m like fine with it, and that’s what I find interesting and that’s where we, like our parents, we decided to move here and everyone knew that this was a white town, so” (interview).

The idea of distraction that is connected to that overarching theme was another point of emphasis from the participants. Lisa brought up the fact that, “a lot of teachers just don’t implement it and aren’t even thinking about it. Because a lot of them find it distracting or like kids can be off topic with pop culture being introduced into the classroom” (focus group). So, there is a student perception of what the teachers' perception of using pop culture in the
classroom will be. Agreeing with this sentiment was Stacy who said she believed that pop culture could,

\[\ldots\text{veer off and distract kids depending on the subject because it can distract our kids}
\]

\[\ldots\text{because a lot of kids in our class that might be a little bit more immature than other kids}
\]

\[\ldots\text{so instead of helping them it might impact them and make them veer off topic.” (focus}
\]

\[\ldots\text{group)}
\]

This was a concern for the students because each had felt disconnected before due to what AC had described as, “old teacher references” (focus group). However, it is not just old references, Stacy pointed out an incident earlier in the year where she was in her English class and, “we watched a clip of Game of Thrones in class and honestly I was one of those people who felt a little bit disconnected just because that’s not something I would naturally gravitate towards” (interview). However, she did go on to express that the teacher took the time to explain after the clip why it was being shown and how it connected, but before that she was lost. In addition, Lisa stated that in one of her classes when the teacher used pop culture it could, “take us off topic because we’re focused on the reference like the reference she’s trying to make for us a lot of kids can get off topic” (interview). This seemed to mimic what the teachers were saying about the potential pop culture distractions and how they can derail a lesson and send it down other paths.

In observing the classes and the students I did not see any of these participants overly distracted by any of the pop culture used. However, I did see many of their classmates become distracted, withdrawn, and in some cases unruly. Watching students who are supposed to be using their IPads for vocabulary instead turn to watching a video (Mr. Belding, observation 3) or who should be focused on a presentation and are instead were playing a game (Ms. Culpepper, observation 2) was exactly what these students were talking about. Even something as simple as music playing in the background became a slight distraction for some students (Ms. Bliss, observation 1). When I brought up music being a distraction during my focus group in one of my
observations of a class Kelly insisted, “music is an easy distraction because if you don’t like it, if
the whole class can’t agree on something then it’s not going to go well” (focus group). Stacy
placed some of the blame on the teacher and pointed out that pop culture in the classroom is not
for every teacher. She stated, “I think it takes the right teacher because you have to have control
of your class if that does happen” (focus group). When asked about their current experiences
with these particular teachers, the students all felt their teachers did a good job, but could do
more to limit distractions like explain why they are listening or watching certain things ahead of
time or express the specific connections they are supposed to be making.

Cross-Case Analysis

Each of the participants in this multi-case study was asked a series of questions via
multiple formats (questionnaire, interview, and focus group) that focused on their perceptions of
pop culture usage in the English classroom. From the data collected I coded and found themes
throughout each case and above explained those themes and gave evidence from the participants
as to how those themes came to be. A cross-case analysis compares and synthesizes the
responses of the two cases. The themes that have already been discussed are listed in Table 4.

Table 4
Coded Themes for Teachers and Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers’ Themes</th>
<th>Students’ Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships through relevant pop culture connections</td>
<td>Student/Teacher relationship building through pop culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering student engagement through pop culture use</td>
<td>Relatability/relevance between lessons and students’ lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obscuring the lesson/disengagement</td>
<td>Distraction and disconnection from the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful use/implementation of pop culture</td>
<td>Teacher effort in using pop culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of choice/lack of knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Defining Pop Culture

The participants were asked to define pop culture and give examples of what they believed pop culture to be. Both cases focused on entertainment, celebrity, technology (social media), fashion, and news as making up popular culture. They all believe that pop culture is always changing. However, there was a little inconsistency about when pop culture stopped being pop culture. According to Kelly, pop culture is, “the trend and like what’s going on right now, I don’t think it something that permanent it’s just always in and out” (questionnaire). The teachers, while tending to agree, did make the point that just because something is old does not mean it is not pop culture, such as The Beatles.

Building Relationships with Pop Culture Usage

Both the teachers and the students perceived pop culture usage as a way to build relationships. For teachers, they saw value in using pop culture in order to connect to their students on a different level. Ms. Culpepper stated, “I think it’s good for building relationships with them (students) because you are kind of on their level” (focus group). Ms. Wentworth echoed this idea saying, “I think if we want to connect with them and get them on board with what we’re teaching we need to meet them where they are” (focus group). All the teachers seemed genuinely interested in building relationships through pop culture. Every teacher had a pop culture reference in one form or another on their walls, desk, or boards. When asked why Ms. Bliss had Harry Potter memorabilia around her classroom she responded with, “it is one of my favorite books and it can instantly connect me to something my students like as well, so it can start a conversation” (interview).

The students also perceived teachers using pop culture as a relationship building piece. However, it is in a slightly different manner. The teachers were using pop culture to actively
open up and build relationships with students. Students did not use pop culture to do this with their teachers. Instead, students did acknowledge that having a teacher who used pop culture allowed them to feel more at ease within the class and in turn would make them want to form a relationship with that teacher. Lisa stated that when teachers use pop culture in class it, “makes me feel like I want to build a better bond with you and then I’m comfortable with you especially if you’re using pop culture in the classroom. I’ll automatically want to build a bond with you and want to attend your class” (focus group). The other students all agreed with this when it was brought up in the focus group. Kelly expanded on Lisa’s statement saying:

You can connect with them [teachers who use pop culture] and others that don’t really ever mix any of that into their classroom it’s just like a regular classroom and you, you’re not dreading, but it’s just not as fun for you….if you connect with them better you want to show them like your all and do your best in that class because you actually know them and something that you like, it’s like looking up to somebody. (focus group)

Lisa and Kelly’s responses are interesting because it is not just that there is a bond or relationship built based on pop culture use, but also the fact that it makes the students want to attend class and try harder in that class as well. While I was not readily able to observe this, when asked about prior experiences in other English classrooms, Lisa was very upfront saying that when she had teachers in the past that “didn’t try to relate to me or didn’t use something relevant to me or didn’t try to get to know me, I didn’t want to work in that class and didn’t really want to be there” (focus group). When asked how these prior experiences influenced her current or future experiences, she acknowledged that it probably makes her less likely to want to try, but positive experiences can reverse that and using pop culture is something that, “makes me want to come to class and try” (interview).

Fostering Engagement/Reliability and Relevance to Students' Lives

The teachers seemed extremely focused on the perception that pop culture could be used
to foster more student engagement. When asked about how the students respond to pop culture use, Ms. Bliss stated, “They are more engaged. Like when we show even 30 second clips and they have been looking down for a second are now looking at the screen and paying attention and hearing what I’m saying” (interview). In my observations I saw this play out numerous times and watched as a reference to pop culture within a presentation via Meme or even a verbal comparison by the teacher would redirect the attention of the class to what was being discussed. The main idea is to find things the students can connect with in their lives. Mr. Belding (and the other teachers) use Pixar clips in the classes. His reasoning, “It is an example they are used to and they can appreciate and connect with” (interview). Ms. Culpepper reiterated that idea of connecting curriculum to pop culture for the sake of the students saying, “I think that connections are huge, I think connections, connecting yourself to the curriculum is huge for them (the students) because if it doesn’t interest them, they are out” (interview).

The students also voiced the need to feel connected to the curriculum. The use of pop culture by teachers was a perceived way to do this for the students. Jessie thought it was just easier to learn when things are connected to her life saying, “I think it’s just easier to learn and better to focus when it’s related more towards us and we actually understand it” (interview). However, it was not always having teachers use pop culture, but rather allowing students the ability to use pop culture within their projects and even assigning more pop centric assignments. Lisa stated:

Maybe instead of finding videos that are already made, the teachers could create videos for us. Or maybe they could let us create our own video lesson which might help us learn. It would be better than what we have now which is just come to class and do what is on the board right now while you are in class and there is not a lot of hands-on learning. We don’t have a lot of say into what we are learning. (focus group).

Kelly discussed how the connections did not just make them more connected to the material, but
it allowed them to feel like it is something to relate to their lives, “It does make us want to work more and it gives us something that we can hold on to. It makes us feel that we’re not just in a classroom for eight hours and that it’s a job to learn” (interview). I observed students getting to put their spin on things creating a presentation that allows them to link the book they were reading with modern quotes, characters, or news articles (Mr. Belding, observation 2). Much like what was voiced, most students were engaged in the activity and seemed to enjoy finding relevance within their own lives.

**Obscuring the Lesson/Distraction/Disengagement**

While using pop culture to foster engagement is perceived by both groups as something important, the ability to do it effectively seems to be something even more important. The theme of obscuring the lesson/distracting from the lesson/disengagement from the lesson became a major theme that was discussed by both sets of participants as well. The teachers were constantly worried that using pop culture or making certain references could impact the students negatively. “It is incredibly distracting,” stated Ms. Wentworth when discussing technology in the classroom (another part of pop culture). Mr. Belding also pointed out the problem of teachers not knowing exactly what to use and was afraid that, “forcing it in the lesson” could turn more kids off. In addition, Ms. Wentworth stated that she perceived that when she used pop culture, her students “are kind of embarrassed when I make references because they’re like that doesn’t sound right coming from you” (focus group). Although she also pointed out that they (her students), “love it they really get a hoot out of it” (interview). However, she did fear that despite them loving it they might lose sight of what the purpose of the lesson was.

Mrs. Simpson pointed out that while pop culture use seems like a valuable tool, she was aware that some students will not get the references being made for numerous reasons. She
stated, “If it is something they don’t watch or they don’t like or they just have no idea what I’m talking about, again I think it has a negative impact because they aren’t engaged” (interview). This was voiced by all of the teachers who were worried that content such as dated references, songs, or clips might negatively influence engagement and learning. Furthermore, the teachers were worried about isolating and disengaging ELL students as well as students from different cultures, backgrounds, and countries. Ms. Wentworth did point out that this poses a large problem, but one that could be overcome if we asked our students more about their lives. She was adamant that teachers need to learn more about our students and not rely solely on what we perceive as pop culture. She states, “I think it ultimately falls to the students though just because that’s the demographic were trying to reach so in order to do that we can’t use our standards--what we grew up with--we would have to actively try to find out what they’re into and what they’re noticing” (focus group). Mr. Belding mentioned his use of Pixar video clips stating, “I do that probably because I have a lot of kids who are first generation ELLs” and Mrs. Simpson followed that up saying that visuals, “I think a visual representation actually might help, even if they don’t know what it’s talking about, if it’s something that’s relevant to our learning I think having visuals actually helps those students even more” (focus group).

The students are equally aware of the distractibility of pop culture usage. Lisa pointed out that sometimes pop culture can, “take us off topic because we’re focused on the reference” (interview). In addition, the students are aware of the teachers’ perception of distractibility that comes with pop culture and that being the primary reason why many teachers seem to veer away from using it in their classes. Violet pointed out that, “a lot of teachers just don’t implement it (pop culture) and aren’t even thinking about it because a lot of them find it distracting or like kids can be off topic when pop culture is introduced into the classroom” (focus group). This
perception of teachers seemed to be on target because when I brought it up to the teachers in our focus group, they agreed.

Both groups also point out that the distraction that can happen through pop culture use can also lead to disengagement. This often occurs with how the teachers use pop culture or what pop culture they are using. AC states that he has, “an old teacher who uses pop culture from their day and no one can relate and they are just like fine whatever you can’t relate” (interview). The use of aged references or older multimedia can distract the students more than help them. The disengagement can also be in the form of leaving people out. The students did not as actively express their concern in regards to disengagement of ELLs or minority students. When they were asked more specifically about it, they did acknowledge that pop culture could in fact make some students feel left out. Stacy states that some students can be impacted, “if they move from another country, they might feel a little disconnected, they might not, like my mom they might not be able to understand some of the things just because that’s not the environment they grew up around” (interview). However, AC did point out that as long as the reference was explained and the connection to the lesson was firmly expressed it was not a problem saying, “it (pop culture) needs to be on topic and kids need to understand what is trying to be said” (interview).

Purposeful Use/Implementation of Pop Culture

The teachers were very concerned that if they were going to use pop culture in their classrooms that it needed to be used with purpose and meaning. Ms. Culpepper pointed this out saying it is important to, “be purposeful when doing it not just throwing in a YouTube video to throw it in, but so that they (the students) know there’s a reason that you were using it” (focus group). In addition, Mr. Belding stressed not to force pop culture into a lesson, but to let it happen (or at least seem to happen) naturally. While the student data did not have this as a larger
theme it was brought up when Stacy stated, “I do think it’s about the way that it’s used. I think some teachers almost kind of force it on us and they might not understand the true reference behind it or the true meaning of it” (interview). So, it is important for the students that they do not feel that pop culture is being forced on them and one way to do that is by proper implementation and purposeful use. This purposeful use can also reduce the possibility of obscuring the lesson/disengagement.

As mentioned earlier, through my observations, the teachers seemed to do a good job of purposeful pop culture use. They have reasons for their videos, clips, posters, memes, and any other pop culture used. I witnessed direct connections made between characters in novels and those in *Star Wars* in Mr. Belding’s class. I observed Ms. Bliss use song lyrics to link a pop song to a poem. In both of those instances the teachers were direct and specific about why they were using these pop culture references. The students, for the most part, seemed engaged and to understand the references made because they were explained by the teacher and linked directly to the lesson at hand. One of the problems with purposeful use is that a lot of the teachers do not know where to go to find resources to help them. This leads to another theme solely in the teacher focus group.

Fear of Choice/Lack of Knowledge

While the teachers seemed eager to use pop culture and even perceived it as a way to get students engaged in their lessons, they were all unsure of where to find resources, ideas, and lessons that use pop culture. In our focus group Ms. Culpepper realized her class was lacking in pop culture references and stated, “I think like we just talked about it could be an engaging tool if used properly so I think I would like to use more of it in my room” (focus group). This was followed up by Ms. Wentworth who voiced her frustration saying, “I agree, but it’s hard because
we don’t really know where to start. I don’t know where to start because I don’t have social
media so I’m not sure how to do my research” (focus group). When I asked the teachers about
how they even got ideas to use things like Pixar clips to teach literary terms they said other
teachers. While other teachers seemed like an easy answer as to where to find new and
innovative ideas, those teachers are not teaching these teachers students and so there may be a
different outcome. When I brought forth the idea of asking students for their input, it was
interesting to see that most teachers admitted they did not do it enough. Mrs. Simpson voiced this
sentiment saying, “Not enough. I do, but definitely not enough” (interview). Ms. Wentworth was
even more blunt when asked if she asked her students for input stating, “No, to be honest”
(interview). I also asked about possibly professional development during the teacher focus group
and all agreed with Ms. Bliss when she stated, “finding professional development opportunities
that provoke those thoughts,” would be beneficial.

In addition, there was a lot of trepidation about choosing the right pop culture. This fear
was not only a fear of leaving certain students out (which was a fear voiced), but a fear of
upsetting parents or the district. Ms. Simpson openly voiced her displeasure of the parent
situation saying, “Sometimes in our district our parents are very interested in everything our kids
are doing and so sometimes those references parents may or may not be aware of those things
and so there could be some negatives with that. So, if the idea is relating to the kids, if the
parents are not okay with it there can be a problem” (interview). This anxiety of not only making
a choice that will relate to students, engage the entire class, but also be acceptable to all parents
is something that seems to play into teachers not actively pursuing certain pop culture use. In
addition, it seems to limit the teachers’ ability to come up with new and innovative uses of pop
culture in the classroom. When brought up to the students in their focus group they seemed to
understand the trouble that teachers can get into with this medium, but also said that it was important to them [the students] to see the teachers at least trying to reach them and connect the curriculum to their interests.

Teacher Effort in Using Pop Culture

This theme was specific to the students. While teachers are worried about what references they are using, is it relevant enough, is it new enough, is it cutting edge enough, the students are just happy that teachers are using it (pop culture). According to Lisa, “Even if you’re using it wrong, it’s just the effort that you’re putting in, that kind of says this person they want to make a connection with me” (interview). All of the students voiced that the teachers who make the effort to incorporate pop culture into their classroom and lessons are not only among their favorite teachers, but the classes that they are more apt to try harder and be more engaged. As referenced in the student case study, Jessie stated, “it (the use of pop culture) shows that they’re (the teachers) making an effort to try and connect to us and not just doing a job, but they’re actually wanting to build a relationship, so I like it” (focus group). What stuck out in this theme was that the students were not concerned about teachers making incorrect or wrong references. Lisa stated, “I will help you,” when asked what she would do if her teachers used pop culture incorrectly. She continued, “Just how they want me to learn I want them to learn too, I will teach you the proper way to use those references” (focus group).

The idea of effort never came up in the teacher case study. The teachers did not acknowledge the effort put into making their lessons with pop culture, nor did they address that they wanted the kids’ affirmation of that effort. The teachers were readily aware that effort would be needed as referenced above with their lack of knowledge and need for more input (professional development). However, there was never anything explicit about effort except from
the students. This perceived “effort of implementation” to connect to the students meant more to
the students than the actual pop culture being used. As AC said in the focus group, “putting in
the effort is important, just as the materials are for teaching, put effort into both of them so that
we can learn more.”

From observing the teachers, it seemed that effort was something that these teachers were
not lacking. They were constantly working hard and making meaningful connections to the
lessons and to their students. When I brought forth that students simply appreciated the effort,
the teachers were a little taken aback by that. When asked about how that made the teachers feel,
knowing that effort was so important to the students, Ms. Culpepper voiced the opinion of the
group stating, “I think positive. Just from what you’re saying is that they appreciate the effort. I
think if they see that we care about their engagement I think that’s the positive. That we do want
to connect with them on any kind of level honestly.”

Concluding Remarks

The perceptions of pop culture usage in the classroom of both teachers and students was
found to be quite similar in many ways. Using the medium to build relationships is something
that is important to focus on. A study by Oberle et al. (2014) showed that relationships with
teachers, as well as other adults in school are the strongest predictors of emotional well-being,
with children viewing school-based relationships as even more important than familial support.
This might be why the theme of showing effort, at least as perceived by the students, was so
important to them. The idea that someone cares and wants to make a connection means a lot to
the students. Furthermore, a study by Roorda et al. (2011) revealed that student/teacher
relationships were associated with academic grades and engagement.

Moreover, the perception of pop culture making things relevant was voiced by both
groups. Teachers saw it as a way to keep their lessons, and even to some extend themselves, relevant. Students saw it as a way to make something “old” or “boring” relevant to them. This use of relevant materials is connected closely to building those aforementioned relationships. By taking the time to authentically connect to students each day (Phillippo, 2012) and use culturally relevant lessons and practices (Emdin, 2016), teachers and students can and will develop productive relationships across cultural differences. All participants sensed that pop culture was a perfect way to create those bonds and make learning relevant to all parties involved.

The fear of disengagement of students and distraction from the lesson was a perception of pop culture that was voiced by both groups, though the teachers seemed much more concerned by it. There was a consensus that explaining why or how the pop culture will be used before using it might help the transition to its usage, especially at first. As the students pointed out, a lot of them would not understand the connections at first without it being explained to them. As far as engaging students from other backgrounds, countries, or cultures, with pop culture, it seems that the teachers’ efforts to develop a deep understanding of students’ cultures and life experiences in and out of school (Ladson-Billings, 2009) is really an important step to not only use pop culture, but to create that connection that both groups found so important.

The teachers also seemed at a loss for how to find ways to not just use pop culture, but where to find the pop culture to use, and in turn what might or might not be acceptable. The study found that the teachers would love to use pop culture more, but perceived its usage as a risky proposition. They all wanted some sort of professional development instituted that could help them and it seems reasonable that professional development to help teachers connect with students should include how to use popular culture in some aspect or another. Furthermore, students voiced they are willing and wanting to help teachers with their pop culture acumen. It is
important for teachers to use the resources most readily available to them, so why not work with students? This will not only help their practice, but it will in turn build that aforementioned relationship between teacher and student that helps boost student achievement.

Summary

Each of the participants in this study candidly shared the experiences that influenced their own unique perceptions when it comes to pop culture and its use in the English classroom. This study shared information about the participants’ perceptions of pop culture and how its use can influence interactions, beliefs, and relationships. In addition, these findings reveal conclusions and implications related to the themes that resulted from the data.

In the next chapter, I provide a summary of this qualitative case study and discuss the findings as they relate to the literature on pop culture use in the classroom, teacher perceptions of pop culture, and student perceptions of pop culture. I share implications of the study for teaching and research as well as recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In Chapter 4, the cases for the teachers and students from Bayside High school were presented with findings related to their own perceptions of the use of popular culture in the classroom. In this chapter, I restate the purpose and methodology for the study, and discuss the findings gleaned from my data and within the context of my research questions. The conclusions for this study are derived from the findings in Chapter 4 related to the themes discovered during my data analysis. Lastly, I discuss recommendations for further research, implications for practitioners, and share my final thoughts related to this research study.

Overview

The purpose of this research was to understand the perceptions of students and teachers in regards to the use of popular culture in the classroom. The current research in the field of education discusses the benefits of integrating popular culture into the classroom as numerous, yet there is a population of teachers who do not see the advantages of such an integration. In various studies researchers have implemented interview research, and often teachers responded that they could not see the value of pop culture, did not possess the appropriate knowledge of pop culture, or were concerned that colleagues would perhaps think poorly of a teacher who integrated popular culture (Gerber & Price, 2013; Marsh, 2006). Therefore, in this qualitative multiple case study I chose to examine the perspectives from a group of students and teachers to see not only where there were similarities and differences, but what implications those perspectives might have on future pop culture integration in classroom use. As such, the goal of the study was to answer and expound upon the research questions posed in Chapter 1:

- What are student and teacher perceptions of popular culture in the English classroom?
According to high school students, what is the influence of pop culture on education?
According to high school teachers, what is the influence of pop culture on instruction?

During my interviews with five teachers and eight students for this case study, I asked questions about their definition of popular culture, to which each participant provided what they believed pop culture to encompass. Furthermore, I asked them to express their beliefs about pop culture usage in the classroom and its place in schools. The participants were asked to share what they perceived the pros and cons of using popular culture to be as well. Lastly, the participants were asked to evaluate how pop culture was used in their own English classrooms and were encouraged, via interview questions I had developed from Kolb’s experiential learning model, to give examples of specific learning experiences in regards to pop culture use in the classroom (see Appendix C).

I analyzed the data (questionnaires, transcripts of interviews, reflective journal, and field notes), as mentioned prior, using thematic analysis. I searched for insights regarding the participants’ perceptions of pop culture as well as influence that these perceptions had within the participants’ classrooms in regards to both teaching and learning. In the following section, I discuss the findings from this data analysis.

Discussion of Findings

This study helps to build on the work of researchers such as Alvermann and Xu (2003) who discuss how using pop culture can help teachers be able to strike a balance between teaching students to be critical while at the same time allowing students to experience the pleasure of using something connected to them. Furthermore, my study brings new light to Alvermann and Xu’s (2003) 4 ways pop culture can be used in the classroom: as low-culture, as critical analysis, as pleasurable, and as self-reflexive. While some teachers still see pop culture as low culture this
study, as does the research of Alvermann and Xu, tries to dispel that notion. Additionally, the data found in this study aligns with Alvermann and Xu (2003) and their belief that using pop culture to allow students to be self-reflexive, as well as critical and enjoyable is exponentially important to helping students learn.

Moreover, this study points to the importance of purpose with using pop culture in the classroom. While it can be an important tool to use, it needs to be used appropriately and when it creates a potentially definitive link to the topic at hand. This connects back to Nelson Greene (1926), who pointed out that, “We do not use a piledriver to crack a nut, nor a hammer to dive piles. Part of the art of visual instruction is the selection of the right aid for the given purpose” (p. 123). Having teachers who know how and when to use pop culture in all of its many forms is a must for positive experiences to take place in the classroom. These positive experiences in the classroom with pop culture usage will inherently alter both the students and teachers view of pop culture usage.

To examine each classes pop culture usage, I developed an observation protocol using Kolb’s (1984) experiential education model consisting of concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The observations revealed examples of teachers and students using a tool that fit the task at hand. There was a lot of abstract conceptualization taking place, especially with the electronic interfaces the students had on their Ipads. The applications being used, Membean for vocabulary and No Red Ink for grammar, as examples, forced students to make numerous connections to not just pop culture, but because of a programming algorithm, a specialized pop culture just for that individual student. Some students encountered questions linking their work to The Simpsons, others had question about celebrities like Tom Cruise, while others had to make connections between a video clip of the
movie Castaway and the concept of isolation. This ability to make these conceptions not only helped students learn, but they genuinely seemed to enjoy it, at times laughing at questions or the videos that they were working with.

Students were asked to do reflective practices, like reading logs. While I do not know what was in their personal reading logs, they were using Ipads and Smartphones to not only write their reading log, but to upload it to be graded. In addition, teachers used pop culture to open up discussions about topics that were happening within the novel they were reading. Asking a question about what superpower or superhero you would want to be and then relating it to Beowulf allowed the students to use a concrete experience and then turn around and write about it in a reflective manner in their reading logs. Furthermore, the students were working on character projects and linking characters in the novel to modern quotes, characters, and news articles. While I was not there to see the completion of these projects, I did see students linking characters to those on popular TV shows and using quotes like, “I love you 3000,” from the most recent Avengers movie to express how they think Atticus feels about Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird. The experiences I witnessed all seemed positive and when discussed with students and teachers, they agreed that these positive experiences helped not just with learning, but with the building of a positive relationship.

This study brought to the forefront that teachers could use pop culture to create connections and build relationships with their students. The idea of building positive relationships to increase engagement in the class is backed by studies that link student relatedness with engagement (Connell & Wellborn, 1991), which in turn can have positive outcomes with student achievement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Roorda et al., 2011). Furthermore, teachers recognize the use of pop culture can help with the aforementioned student engagement
in their lessons as well as encourage participation. During my observations I watched students rush into Mr. Belding’s class in order to talk to him about movies they saw over the weekend. In turn I saw him take a seemingly genuine interest in his students lives and witnessed a positive relationship being built. Likewise, I observed in Ms. Bliss’s class students come in and start singing the songs she was playing and suggest songs while Ms. Bliss quickly wrote down the title and artist for future reference. This revealed a teacher looking to not only build positive relationships with her students, but keep her lessons relevant. Even if she never looked up the artist (which she pointed out she always does) taking that time to write down their suggestion relates to the students the want to build a positive relationship.

In addition to building relationships, the teachers using pop culture were perceived as more accessible. This accessibility allowed for students to want to build relationships with the teachers which in turn has the potential to make students want to perform to the best of their ability for those teachers. With this in mind, it is easy to see that a teacher’s relationship with their students is one of providing a secure base for exploration of the school environment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1979). Inherent in this relationship there is a hope that a feeling of mutual affection between teacher and student exists that can possibly curb feelings such as boredom, frustration, and anxiety, and promote student engagement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Wentzel, 1997).

Moreover, the data shows that keeping lessons relevant is of high importance. Not just relevant to the works or concepts themselves, but to the lives of the students. This finding coincides with Deci (2009) who posited that relatedness is the basic psychological need influencing well-being, self-regulation, and most importantly intrinsic motivation. The perception of participants was that teachers who are using pop culture were trying to reach them
and finding a way to help them learn. In turn, those students were then more likely to want to go
to that class because they saw what the teacher was teaching as valuable and related to their
lives. Also, the students voiced their desire to take part in the process of using popular culture in
the classroom. Making videos, making memes, or even just suggestion movies, clips, or music to
be played that pair with the work they are doing means a lot to students. This increased active
engagement will only benefit the students. As Jimerson, Campos, and Grief (2003) point out
students who are more engaged at school are increasingly likely to experience academic success
and positive development outcomes.

The idea of “effort” that arose from the data was something unexpected. Student
participants perceived a teacher using pop culture, even if using it incorrectly, as making an
effort to connect with them. This “effort” from the teacher not only endears them to the student
on a personal level, it can positively motivate the student to want to come to class, work harder
in that class, and bond with the teacher on another level. This has been stated above and has been
found in research by Cornelius-White (2007) who stated that positive teacher-student
relationships tend to lead to higher student achievement. In addition, Wang and Eccles (2013)
state that students who feel their teachers like them tend to perform better academically and are
more engaged in class.

However, pop culture is not a cure all for teachers, nor is it perfect. There was data from
all sets collected that pointed to distractions and disengagement of students. However, while
participants did perceive pop culture as a possible distraction, they did preface that idea with the
belief that this is not always the case and that proper planning and implementation could
alleviate that problem. There was a consensus that it takes a certain kind of teacher to use pop
culture correctly and that in order to use it the teacher must express why it is being used
otherwise most students are not going to make the connections on their own, at least at first. Even if you are not that teacher, the data suggests that it would behoove teachers who want to form positive relationships with their students to at least be somewhat familiar with the culture of their student population.

There was a larger lack of knowledge of popular culture than first expected, even from younger teacher participants. It was not so much their lack of knowing what their students liked and cared about, but rather how to use pop culture elements within their lessons and where to find updated references if needed. Participants also seemed to be worried that some other teachers might see them as not really teaching or that their class might be seen as less rigorous if they used pop culture more. As Bradbury (2011) posits, most critics of pop culture use in the classroom often dismiss popular culture as a trivial and “low-brow” focus. However, as Gay (2010) points out, using pop culture or other forms of culturally sustaining pedagogy is validating and affirming for students and can build meaningfulness between their school and home life and experiences. Participants agreed that professional development could help with this on multiple levels by not just helping them find the support they need for incorporating pop culture into their lessons but possibly taking the stigma off of using pop culture in the classroom that other teachers might have.

While the concept of isolation or disengagement came up as something that might hinder students, especially ELLs who might not be familiar with American pop culture, in a negative context, the participants indicated that this was not the case in this district. Seeing as these participants are located in a fairly diverse school district, they seemed keenly aware of this impending problem and made efforts to ensure that students were not influenced by it. Teachers expressed the belief that using things such as Pixar films that are more globally available or in
some instances do not rely on dialogue (see *Wall*E) can work no matter the demographic of the classroom. While Duff (2001) points out that it is important that teachers do not use materials that disenfranchise ELLs by assuming insider knowledge, the participants believed that it was still important to use pop culture to help connect lessons to their life. However, it was also expressed that without properly setting up the pop culture being used it could obscure the lesson’s meaning and most of the students may not understand what the teacher is hoping for them to take away.

The participants all expressed a want for more pop culture in their classes, but wanted to make sure that it was being used with purpose and meaning. This study adds to others that state that successful utilization of popular culture among primary and secondary school students helps to facilitate learning within topics such as literacy, diversity, languages, fluency, and social studies (Morrell 2002; Tisdell & Thompson 2007). This also goes back to Greene (1926) stating that you need to use the right tool for the job. The implication being that using pop culture can help when done correctly.

**Practitioner Implications**

While there have been only a few research studies that have looked into the perceptions of pop culture, the benefits of integrating it into the classroom include building relationships, student engagement, and bridging students’ home and school literacies (Gainer, 2007; Morrell, 2002). It would stand that teacher educator programs at the collegiate level and curriculum coordinators at a professional level should consider offering college classes or professional development where participants could gain knowledge on pop culture and be able to study ways to integrate pop culture into their curriculum (Peacock et al., 2016). While this might not be easy for current educators, another route might be using Open Educational Resources (OER) found
online. English teachers can also turn to practitioner journals, such as those found on the National Council of Teachers of English website or other websites to find more resources about using pop culture in their classes. Furthermore, schools could create professional learning groups within grade levels of subject areas and having those who are more pop culture savvy take a leadership role. Additionally, this could mean creating a forum for students to vocalize what might help them and allow them to take partial ownership of their learning.

Teachers need to want to build relationships with their students and be aware of the role relationships play in the learning process. The current research echoes prior research (as mentioned above) which shows students who have positive relationships with their teachers are more likely to perform at a higher level and be more engaged. However, there needs to be a desire by teachers to make those connections. Participants pointed out how pop culture can help students make a connection and can open a doorway to learning that might not have been open in the past. The implication being that it would behoove teachers to use pop culture in order to, at the very least, start to build positive relationships with their students and make their classroom a place students are excited to come and learn. In addition, teachers need to do things to form that bond beyond just showing a movie clip or playing a song. Getting to know your students and asking their input is an important piece of the relationship building process. This in turn dovetails with the concept of teachers staying relevant with their references and pop culture that is used. While students do appreciate the effort, eventually using dated material becomes a negative in their eyes. Teachers can utilize students and their ideas about pop culture usage in order to help maintain a relevance to their lessons while creating a positive relationship. If not, teachers risk the negatively addressed outcomes of distraction and disengagement which students pointed out can happen rather quickly.
Implications for Future Research

This study focused on teachers’ and students' perceptions of pop culture use in the English classroom. While the study was fruitful and the participants' responses led to the uncovering of some interesting and important themes, there is more research that can be done in regards to pop culture and education. Suggestions for future research concerning pop culture in the English classroom include:

• **Cross-case analysis from a low SES school**: While Bayside High School provided rich data and a diverse population of students, it did not provide much regarding insight to responses within a low socioeconomic school. Rather it was a largely affluent area in the suburbs of a large city. A future study could be to replicate this study in a low SES school and do a cross case analysis to see if the themes hold true across economic and geographic differences.

• **Cross case analysis from schools in other countries**: Are the themes and perceptions that students and teachers have of popular culture here in America a purely American thing? A future study could be set in another country to see if the themes found in this study hold true in other countries' school systems. It would be interesting to see the differences and similarities in usage, as well as the varying perceptions of teachers and students in a foreign country of what pop culture is and its use in the classroom.

• **Whose pop culture is being used?** The idea of power and pop culture came up with the teachers and the students in this study. Whose pop culture is being used in the classroom and how can that influence learning for those who may feel underrepresented or left out? It is an interesting question and one that this research was not able to fully address. A study of how minority students feel about the pop culture used in the classroom and how or if it impedes their
learning could be an avenue that would help teachers understand what they may need to do to be inclusive of underserved populations in their school community.

• *A longitudinal case study of individuals’ understanding of traditional topics in the English classroom via pop culture instruction:* This would allow the researcher to assess through student work and discussions the influence that pop culture might have on students and their learning outcomes. Furthermore, it would allow for the researcher to witness teachers’ uses of pop culture over a longer period and examine the process of selection, implementation, and reflection from an educator’s perspective.

**Conclusion**

The qualitative study originated from an interest in discovering the perspectives of teachers’ and students’ perceptions of pop culture usage in the classroom and how it influences instruction and education. Conversations revealed the lived experiences of the participants. The research involved participants in one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews to glean in-depth useful insight regarding their perceptions of pop culture usage. Responding to the interview questions allowed an opportunity for these select participants to share their views and experiences with me. One thought in particular by Ms. Wentworth, who originally had a negative perception of pop culture, left me with something to ponder moving forward:

I think that no matter what someone’s opinion is of it [pop culture] being good or not, I think that it’s important that we join this bandwagon because that is the language of our kids and that is where they find relevance. Maybe I’m forcing my views on people but I think if we want to connect with them [students] and get them on board with what we’re teaching we need to meet them where they are. If that means incorporating pop culture, why not use it? I feel like if we don’t change the way we teach we won’t be able to. They [students] get tired of learning, and they’re in high school now and they are encountering the same methods of being taught that they have been for year, so I could see how that decreases their passion for learning. I think as humans it is in our nature to crave, to want to know something more, to always learn we can spruce things up. And if we can do that by appropriating what is relevant to them [students] then that’s always good. (interview)
Discovering what works in terms of using pop culture in the classroom for our students and teachers is no easy task. As a researcher, conducting this study was both rewarding and enlightening. I have been afforded the opportunity to contribute to the larger body of literature in ways to support practitioners’ use pop culture in their classroom while also giving students a much needed and sometimes overlooked voice in the process. Furthermore, this research has shed light on future research that can be addressed to help serve all populations of students.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FOR STUDIES WITH ADULTS
Informed Consent for Studies with Adults

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY: Teacher and Student Perception of Pop Culture in the Classroom

RESEARCH TEAM: William Visco under the direct guidance of Dr. Janelle Mathis. Matthews Hall 206P. William.Visco@unt.edu or Janelle.Mathis@unt.edu.

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Taking part in this study is voluntary. The investigators will explain the study to you and will answer any questions you might have. It is your choice whether or not you take part in this study. If you agree to participate and then choose to withdraw from the study, that is your right, and your decision will not be held against you.

You are being asked to take part in a research study about perceptions of pop culture usage in the classroom.

Your participation in this research study involves filling out a questionnaire about your knowledge of popular culture. If chosen to continue with the study it will include an individual interview about pop culture usage in the classroom, a focus group interview with you and a few other teachers about pop culture in the classroom, and lastly, an observation of your teaching for a period. More details will be provided in the next section.

You might want to participate in this study if you are interested in seeing how students or other teachers use popular culture, or if you want to share your own experiences of using pop culture in your classroom. However, you might not want to participate in this study if you do not use pop culture in your class or if you feel you will not have the time to do a one on one and group interview.

You may choose to participate in this research study if you are a current high school teacher only.

The reasonable foreseeable risks or discomforts to you if you choose to take part is the loss of some of your planning time, which you can compare to the possible benefit of learning about your students perceptions of your teaching and allowing your voice to be heard on why and how you use pop culture. You will not receive compensation for participation.

DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY: The following is a more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of the study is to see both teacher and student perceptions of pop culture usage in the classroom. I am hoping to see how teachers' perceptions of pop culture can influence their usage of it and how their perceptions of what pop culture can influence what they choose to use. Furthermore, I am looking to see how students perceive this usage and if they might express a more meaningful use of pop culture in their classrooms.

TIME COMMITMENT: Participation in this study should not exceed more than 4 hours of your time over the course of a month.
STUDY PROCEDURES: The procedures will take place over a month period.

1. You will be asked to fill out a paper questionnaire on your experiences with popular culture and return it to the front office for me to pick up.

2. You will be asked to take part in a one on one interview with me regarding popular culture in the classroom. This can take place in your classroom after school or during your off period. It should take no longer than an hour. If at any point your wish not to answer a question or feel uncomfortable about a question being asked you can choose to simply skip the question and move on to the next question.

3. You will be asked to take place in a focus group with other teachers from your school who are involved in this study. This can be done in one of the teachers’ classrooms after school, during your planning period, or another time that the group is able to meet. Again this will take no more than an hour and if at any point your wish not to answer a question or feel uncomfortable about a question being asked you can choose to simply skip the question and move on to the next question.

4. After all my data is compiled you may be asked to look over some of it to make sure that your words, phrases, or opinions were perceived by me, the interviewer, as correct as to not have any miscommunication or misrepresentation.

AUDIO/VIDEO/PHOTOGRAPHY:

I agree to be audio recorded during the research study.
I agree that the audio recording can be used in publications or presentations.
I do not agree that the audio recording can be used in publications or presentations.
I do not agree to be audio recorded during the research study.

You may participate in the study if you do not agree to be audio recorded.

The recording will be immediately destroyed after transcription.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS: This study may benefit teachers and students alike. It has the possibility to open up a much needed dialogue between students and teachers. It also has the potential benefit of creating a more productive curriculum that infuses popular culture into it.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: This research study is not expected to pose any additional risks beyond what you would normally experience in your regular everyday life. However, if you do experience any discomfort, please inform the research team. If you experience excessive discomfort when completing the research activity, you may choose to stop participating at any time without penalty. The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen, but the study may involve risks to the participant which are currently unforeseeable. UNT does not provide medical services, or financial assistance for emotional distress or injuries that might happen from participating in this research. If you need to discuss your discomfort further, please contact a mental health provider, or you may contact the researcher who will refer you to appropriate services. If your need is urgent, helpful resources include [provide relevant 24 hour resource information and campus or community resources.]
COMPENSATION: There is no compensation for this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Efforts will be made by the research team to keep your personal information private, including research study, questionnaire, and disclosure will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. All paper and electronic data collected from this study will be stored in a secure location on the UNT campus and/or a secure UNT server for at least three (3) years past the end of this research. Dr. Mathis will house all files and information regarding this study in her office, Matthews Hall Room 206 P. Research records will be labeled with a pseudonym and the master key linking names with codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location.

Please be advised that although the researchers will take these steps to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality.

The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming you as a participant. The data collected about you for this study may be used for future research studies that are not described in this consent form. If that occurs, an IRB would first evaluate the use of any information that is identifiable to you, and confidentiality protection would be maintained.

While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records, as described here and to the extent permitted by law. In addition to the research team, the following entities may have access to your records, but only on a need-to-know basis: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the FDA (federal regulating agencies), the reviewing IRB, and sponsors of the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about the study you may contact William Visco or Dr. Janelle Mathis at 940-565-2920. Any questions you have regarding your rights as a research subject, or complaints about the research may be directed to the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at 940-565-4643, or by email at untirb@unt.edu.

CONSENT:
- Your signature below indicates that you have read, or have had read to you all of the above.
- You confirm that you have been told the possible benefits, risks, and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study; you also understand that the study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.

- By signing, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Please sign below if you are at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

*If you agree to participate, please provide a signed copy of this form to the researcher team. They will provide you with a copy to keep for your records.
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARENTS WITH MINOR CHILDREN
Informed Consent for Parents with Minor Children

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY: Teacher and Student Perception of Pop Culture in the Classroom

RESEARCH TEAM: William Visco under the direct guidance of Dr. Janelle Mathis. Matthews Hall 206P. William.Visco@unt.edu or Janelle.Mathis@unt.edu. This is part of the research requirement that will be included in Mr. Visco’s Dissertation to earn his PhD in Education.

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study. Taking part in this study is voluntary. The investigators will explain the study to you and will answer any questions you might have. It is your choice whether or not you allow your child to take part in this study. If you agree to have your child participate, and then choose to withdraw your child from the study, that is your right, and your decision will not affect your child’s education in any way.

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study about their perceptions of pop culture use in the classroom.

Participation in this research study involves filling out a questionnaire about their knowledge of popular culture. If your child is chosen to continue with the study, it will include an individual interview about pop culture use in the classroom, a focus group interview with other students in the school about pop culture in the classroom, and lastly, an observation of one of your child’s class periods. More details will be provided in the next section.

You might want your child to participate in this study if they are interested in popular culture, or if they want to share their experiences of how pop culture was, was not, or could have been used in their classes. However, you might not want them to participate in this study if you feel it will influence their studies or take up too much of their time.

Your child is being asked to participate in this study because they are currently a high school student.

The reasonable foreseeable risks or discomforts to your child, if you choose to have them take part, is the loss of some of their class time, which you can compare to the possible benefit of learning about allowing their voice to be heard on why and how teachers can use pop culture in their classes. This could in turn help not just their teachers, but teachers all over.

You and your child will not receive compensation for participation.

DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY: The following is a more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of the study is to see both teacher and student perceptions of pop culture usage in the classroom. The study team is [FS1] hoping to see how teachers perceptions of pop culture can influence their usage of it and how their perceptions of what pop culture can influence what they choose to use. Furthermore, this study is looking to see
how students perceive this usage and if they might express a more meaningful use of pop culture in their classrooms.

**TIME COMMITMENT:** Participation in this study should not exceed more than 4 hours of your child’s time all together over the course of a month.

**STUDY PROCEDURES:** The procedures will take place over a month period.

1. Your child will be asked to fill out a paper questionnaire on their experiences with popular culture and return it to their teacher who will put it in an envelope and leave it at the front office for the study team to pick up.

2. From there your child may be chosen to take part in a one on one interview with the researchers regarding popular culture in the classroom. Five (5) students will be selected from the group that submits their questionnaires to take part in the interview process. These interviews will be recorded and can take place before or after school, or during their English class in their classroom, in the hallway, or in the school library. It should take no longer than an hour. If, at any point, your child wishes not to answer a question, or feels uncomfortable about a question being asked, they can choose to simply skip the question and move on to the next question. Questions will focus on how they view popular culture in the classroom and how their teachers have used it in their classrooms.

3. Your child will also be asked to take place in a focus group with other students from their school who are involved in this study. This can be done in one of the teachers’ classrooms after school, during an assigned English period, or another time that the group as a whole is able to meet. Again, this will take no more than an hour, and if at any point your child wishes not to answer a question or feels uncomfortable about a question being asked, they can choose to simply skip the question and move on to the next question.

4. After all the data is compiled, your child may be asked to look over some of it to make sure that their words, phrases, or opinions were perceived by the interviewer, as correct as to not have any miscommunication or misrepresentation.

Allowing your child to participate in this research study will include this list of actions above that we will ask you and your child to consider before engaging in the research Please read carefully the parental informed consent and child assent, and be sure to contact the research team with any questions or concerns you may have.

**AUDIO/VIDEO/PHOTOGRAPHY:**

I agree to have my child audio recorded during the research study.

I agree that the audio recording can be used in publications or presentations.

I do not agree that the audio recording can be used in publications or presentations.

I do not agree to have my child audio recorded during the research study.

Your child may participate in the study even if you do not agree to be audio recorded.

The recording will be immediately destroyed after transcription.
POSSIBLE BENEFITS: This study may benefit teachers and students alike. It has the possibility to open up a much needed dialogue between students and teachers. It also has the potential benefit of creating a more productive curriculum that infuses popular culture into it.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: This research study is not expected to pose any additional risks beyond what your child would normally experience in their regular everyday life. However, if they do experience any discomfort, please inform the research team. If your child experiences excessive discomfort when completing the research activity, he/she may choose to stop participating at any time without penalty. The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen, but the study may involve risks to your child, which are currently unforeseeable. UNT does not provide medical services, or financial assistance for emotional distress or injuries that might happen from participating in this research. If you need to discuss your child’s discomfort further, please contact a mental health provider, or you may contact the researcher who will refer you to appropriate services. If your need is urgent, helpful resources include the University of North Texas IRB office (940-565-4643 or untirb@unt.edu).

Remember that you and your child have the right to withdraw any study procedures at any time without penalty, and may do so by informing the research team.

COMPENSATION: There is no compensation for this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Efforts will be made by the research team to keep [you and] your child’s personal information private, including research study, questionnaire, and disclosure will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. All paper and electronic data collected from this study will be stored in a secure location on the UNT campus and/or a secure UNT server for at least three (3) years past the end of this research. Dr. Mathis will house all files and information regarding this study in her office, Matthews Hall Room 206 P. Research records will be labeled with a pseudonym and the master key linking names with codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location.

Please be advised that although the researchers will take these steps to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your child’s fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming you as a participant. The data collected about your child for this study may be used for future research studies that are not described in this consent form. If that occurs, an IRB would first evaluate the use of any information that is identifiable to your child, and confidentiality protection would be maintained.

While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your child’s records, as described here and to the extent permitted by law. In addition to the research team, the following entities may have access to your records, but only on a need-to-know basis: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the FDA (federal regulating agencies), the reviewing IRB, and sponsors of the study.
CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about the study you may contact William Visco or Dr. Janelle Mathis at 940-565-2920. Any questions you have regarding your rights as a research subject, or complaints about the research may be directed to the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at 940-565-4643, or by email at untirb@unt.edu.

CONSENT:
- Your signature below indicates that you have read, or have had read to you all of the above.
- You confirm that you have been told the possible benefits, risks, and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that your child does not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to allow participation, or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits.
- You understand your child’s rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to allow your child to participate in this study; you also understand that the study personnel may choose to stop your child’s participation at any time.
- By signing, you are not waiving any of you and your child’s legal rights.

Please sign below if you are at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to allow your child to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT ‘S PARENT  DATE

*If you agree to participate, please provide a signed copy of this form to the researcher team. They will provide you with a copy to keep for your records.

Informed Consent for Parents with Minor Children
Assent for Child Participation – Ages 13-17

By agreeing to participate in this research study, you confirm that you have read or have had read to you the entire informed consent document, You understand that you can ask questions, or decide to withdraw your participation at any time without any penalty to you.

You indicate your participation is voluntary by completing and returning this form.

If you would like to be part of this study, please sign your name below.

Printed Name of Child

Signature of Child Date
APPENDIX C

TEACHER POP CULTURE QUESTIONNAIRE
Teacher Pop Culture Questionnaire

Name________________________

1. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
   ___ 0-2 years
   ___ 3-6 years
   ___ 7-10 years
   ___ 11-15 years
   ___ 16 or more

2. What grade or grades do you teach?
   ___ 9th
   ___ 10th
   ___ 11th
   ___ 12th

3. Describe what popular culture means to you:

4. Describe how knowledgeable (your awareness of) you are of current popular culture:

5. Describe how and to what extent popular culture is infused into your class and curriculum

6. Explain how or if your students have any say or input into the pop culture used in the classroom:
APPENDIX D

STUDENT POP CULTURE QUESTIONNAIRE
Student Pop Culture Questionnaire

Name________________________

1. What grade are you in?
   ___ 9th
   ___ 10th
   ___ 11th
   ___ 12th

2. Describe what popular culture means to you:

3. Describe how knowledgeable (aware of) you are of current popular culture:

4. Describe the first time you remember seeing popular culture used in a classroom:

5. Describe how and to what extent popular culture is infused into your current class and curriculum:

6. Explain how or if you, as a student, have any say or input into the pop culture used in the classroom:
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (TEACHERS)
Interview Questions (Teachers)

1. Share with me how you define Popular Culture:
   *probe for what they consider pop culture to be

2. What do you think the advantages of using popular culture might be?
   *probe for specific examples

3. What do you think the drawbacks of using popular culture might be?
   *probe for specific examples

4. What popular culture texts do you use in your class or have readily available to students?
   *probe for how they are used or if they are used

5. Explain how you think pop culture is used in other classes.

6. Describe how the school could better help you with implementing popular culture into your classes.

7. Describe how your students respond to your pop culture lessons.
   *probe for specific examples

8. Describe for me how you choose the pop culture texts you use in your classroom.

9. Tell me about how you use popular culture in your classroom in regards to Concrete Experiences (for example: readings, observations, ice breakers, discussion starters, debates)

10. Tell me about how you use popular culture in your classroom in regards to Reflective observation (logs, journals, rhetorical questions, thought questions, discussions)?

11. Tell me about how you use popular culture in your classroom in regards to Abstract Conceptualization (making connections, drawing on other ideas or theories)

12. Tell me about how you use popular culture in your classroom in regards to Active experimentation (Projects, real world applications, simulations, fieldwork).

13. Is there anything else you’d like to share?
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (STUDENTS)
Interview Questions (Students)

1. Share with me how you define Popular Culture
   *probe for what they consider pop culture to be

2. What do you think the advantages of using popular culture in a classroom might be?
   *probe for specific examples

3. What do you think the drawbacks of using popular culture in a classroom might be?
   *probe for specific examples

4. What popular culture texts have your teachers used in class?
   *probe if they consider them relevant and how they were used

5. Explain how you feel when you see a teacher using popular culture?
   *probe how others in class react

6. Discuss how past teachers' usages of popular culture have influences the way you view its use other teachers classes.
   *probe for specific examples

7. Describe how you would want a teacher to use popular culture
   *probe for specific examples

8. Describe for me how you would choose pop culture texts to use in the classroom.
   *probe for curriculum ideas or pop culture pairings

9. Tell me about how your teacher uses popular culture in your classroom in regards to Concrete Experiences (for example: readings, observations, ice breakers, discussion starters, debates)

10. Tell me about how your teacher uses popular culture in your classroom in regards to Reflective observation (logs, journals, rhetorical questions, thought questions, discussions)?

11. Tell me about how your uses popular culture in your classroom in regards to Abstract Conceptualization (making connections, drawing on other ideas or theories)

12. Tell me about how you use popular culture in your classroom in regards to Active experimentation (Projects, real world applications, simulations, fieldwork).

13. Is there anything else you’d like to share?
APPENDIX G

SAMPLE RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO TEACHERS
Sample Recruitment Email to Teachers

Dear [insert name],

My name is William Visco and I am a graduate student from the Education Department at the University of North Texas. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about the perceptions of popular culture in the classroom. You're eligible to be in this study because you teach 11th and 12th grade. I obtained your contact information from your school's website.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will answer a questionnaire, take part in a short one-on-one interview, and participate in a focus group with other teachers who have agreed to take part in this study. You will also allow me the ability to observe at least one class period during a day of your choosing. During each of the interviews I would like to record our conversation as to make sure I hear everything correctly and that way I can revisit your answers. These interviews will be used to come to a conclusion regarding teacher’s perceptions on pop culture in the classroom. There is no compensation for this study other than knowing you are helping me and hopefully your profession in the future.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at William.visco@unt.edu.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

William Visco
APPENDIX H

SAMPLE PARENT/STUDENT RECRUITMENT LETTER
Sample Parent/Student Recruitment Letter

Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by William Visco, a PhD student from the Education Department at the University of North Texas. I hope to learn about the perception’s students have of popular culture usage in the classroom. The findings will help me with my dissertation. Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because they are in 11th or 12th grade and their teacher has agreed to be part of this study.

Attached to this letter you will find a letter of consent as well as a questionnaire. I encourage you to read the consent form to learn more about my study and what it entails. If you choose to have your child participate, you will be required to sign the consent form and have it returned to your child’s teacher as soon as possible. After that, they will be required to fill out this questionnaire. From there I will be selecting 5 to 10 students to take part in both an individual interview about pop culture in the classroom as well as a focus group (made up of the other students I selected) to talk more about pop culture in the classroom and perhaps how it can be used to create a more memorable experience. I will ask to record the interviews and the focus group, but no names or personal information will be used in my study. None of the questions asked will be of a personal nature, they will be focused strictly on pop culture and its usage in their classes. These interviews will not be very long and can be done either at the teacher’s discretion during class, during their lunch period, or before/after school. While this research might not benefit your student right now, it might end up helping future students thanks to new ways teachers might utilize popular culture after hearing student’s perspectives on the subject. There is no compensation for this other than knowing they might be helping future generations of teachers and students.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Your child's identity will be kept confidential by using aliases. All transcripts, recordings, and questionnaires will be kept in a secure location on the campus of UNT for 3 years as is the Universities policy and no one but I and my lead teacher Dr. Janelle Mathis will have access to these materials.

Your child's participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to let your child participate will not affect your relationship with Coppell ISD, UNT, or their teacher. If you decide to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue your child's participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at William.Visco@UNT.edu or Dr. Janelle Mathis at Janelle.mathis@unt.edu. Any questions you have regarding your rights as a research subject, or complaints about the research may be directed to the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at 940-565-4643, or by email at untirb@unt.edu. This Office oversees the review of the research to protect your rights and is not involved with this study.

Sincerely,

William Visco
APPENDIX I

SAMPLE OBSERVATION PROTOCOL
### Concrete Experience

- Pop culture boxes - class discussion
- Use iPad to make posters of presentation

### Reflective Observation

- Reading log (availability) or make reflective observations
- Kids using iPads to take reflective notes

### Abstract Conceptualization

- Memorable music fragments
- Don't like the music on memorex
- Reference to Marx
- Force Camp/Cutty Slick
- Reference to Joseph in H and R and H and South Park
- Student looking up names to put in notes
- Make connection via visual representation of characters
- Brain closes to theme music
- Character in book

### Active Experimentation

- Student creating mini wands presentation via iPad
- Making a creative poster via iPad
- Visuals and written work

### Pop Culture References

- Class devoid of pop culture references
- Quotes as well, surround
- Discussion of mosh pit as connection to curriculum
- Discussion of the hero's journey, American Eagle
- Related to clusters of character in book

### Reflexive Thoughts/I Wonders

- Kids voice, why can't we play music?
- Could you use other forms of media to make examples of what's going on in the book
- Could a character development connection?
- Could you include a scene or image or something to your presentation?
- Could they use other visuals?
REFERENCES


Pestalozzi, J. (1818). *The address of Pestalozzi to the British public, soliciting them to aid by subscriptions his plan of preparing school masters and mistresses for the people, that mankind may in time receive the first principles of intellectual instruction from their mothers.* Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books?id=i6BDAAAAcAAJ&lpg=PT10&pg=PT10&hl=en#v=onepage&q&f=false


