

# **Four Decades, Three Songs, Too Much Violence: Using Popular Culture Media Analysis to Prepare Preservice Teachers for Dealing with School Violence**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since teacher education has morphed from normal schools into colleges of education, the goals of preparing teachers have expanded. While it is essential to prepare teachers to utilize scientifically proven methods as well as to read and use research in the field, there are ever-expanding other goals that must be met as well. For one example, with the increase of school violence taking place in the United States, it is imperative to include preparation for preservice teachers on how to prevent bullying and how to handle traumatic events, such as school shootings, with their future students. However, broaching such a sensitive subject is a challenge: how can teacher educators lead into such discussions without alienating students or raising overwhelmingly powerful emotions? This article examines one preservice educator's attempt to prepare preservice teachers for the worst; by using media analysis of songs and videos, preservice teachers can launch into discussion of societal recognition of school violence and thereby ease into discussion of how to prepare themselves. Included is an appendix of online resources available to help educators at all levels help their students deal with these tragedies.

**Keywords:** school shooting, violence prevention, teacher education, media studies

Columbine. Virginia Tech. Sandy Hook.

These were all horrible, senseless tragedies that struck at the very hearts of people in the United States. Thanks to a variety of factors, the media have ensured those names remain emblazoned in the memories of Americans. These factors include proximity to large media outlets (allowing quick access for camera crews) and demographics of the student population (largely white, middle class).

Red Lake. Northern Illinois. Oikos. Casper. Umpqua.

These were all equally horrible, senseless tragedies. However, they did not strike home with the same level of profound angst as those aforementioned. In sad fact, there has been a wiki page devoted to keeping track of acts of school violence. A glance at the School Shooting Timeline Wiki ("School Shooting Timeline") reveals the extent of shootings, including incidents about which some readers might have not heard. Indeed, in the years 2014-2015 the U.S. saw eleven incidents of school violence as well as one significant one in Kenya, and the assumption that "it can't happen here" is rapidly disappearing; the shootings that took place in 2013-2014 occurred in sixteen different states (California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia and Washington). In fact, it is easier to report the eleven states that have not experienced a school-related tragedy (Arizona, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Maine, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia) than those that have been impacted. This is not to say school violence is a uniquely American thing; three provinces of Canada and fifteen foreign countries on three continents have also experienced the tragedy. In addition, mass stabbings have become an alarming occurrence in China. This trend began in 2010; there were 18 children killed in four separate school incidents.

The point of this comparison is not to attempt to rank the scope and damage of these incidents; the loss of any human life, let alone that of a child, is always a tragedy regardless of where it takes place and what the social identity of the victim. The point is to demonstrate that there have been an inordinate number of acts of violence on public school and university campuses in the United States, seemingly growing every year. And, as the number of incidents continues to increase, more and more often teachers are being called upon to serve as first responders—if not to put themselves in the line of fire to save their students like heroes, such as Nevada's Michael Landsberry and Georgia's Antoinette Tuff, then to keep them safe during the event and help them heal in the aftermath.

However, there remains a stunning lack of any kind of institutional, bureaucratic support for the notion. This article presents one teacher educator's attempt at filling this void using popular culture to gain entrée into the greater conversation. This is intended to serve as a pedagogical tactic, not a formal research study of the effects of this approach. While there was no formal gathering of data, this piece examines the culmination of several semesters' use of this method. Beginning with a brief history of the development of teacher education in the United States, this article presents a media analysis framework useful for future teachers and details a series of lessons used by the instructor to get preservice teachers thinking about infusing anti-bullying throughout their future curricula and what to do if the worst happens.

This approach admittedly is somewhat limited. The ideal approach would be holistic in nature, providing preservice teachers (students enrolled in an education program on a path towards certification) with knowledge on bullying and school shooting prevention, intervention, active response, and recovery. Prevention should take the form of integrating discussion about the social, school, family, and personal dynamics of the majority into preservice curriculum. Preservice teachers also need to know how to work with at-risk students to intervene when warning signs are present and how to respond if an incident unfolds. Of utmost importance in preservice training is recovery. Those who witness and survive a school shooting suffer tremendous mental health issues with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder being a common outcome among survivors. However, due to the constraints of the course curriculum, the instructor used available

prefatory material and provided resources to the preservice teachers for future use. Due to its location in the Rocky Mountain region, each year there are preservice teachers enrolled in the class who are survivors—of Columbine, of Casper, of Umpqua or other incidents. With emotions and tensions raw, the topic must be somewhat eased into—and popular culture provides a means of doing such.

Unfortunately, the frequency of the incidents may be one factor leading to the lack of societal outrage over these events. For example, on the same day (April 13, 2013) that a shooter at New River Community College in Christianburg, Virginia, shot and wounded two girls on campus, online and print news media focused on the episode of *Glee* that dealt with a school shooting with the almost offensively flippant title “Shooting Star” rather than reporting an actual school shooting, at least in the outlets that chose to address the topic at all. For example, a simple Google search of “Shooting Star + Glee” returns 177,000 results, coming from both entertainment and more formal news outlets; a simple Google search for “New River Community College + shooting” only returns the relatively few 7,630 results, mainly from local news outlets. It seems as a society we are more comfortable talking about school violence when debating its entertainment value than in reality, one of the many reasons for the popular culture approach outlined in this article.

At the time of the “Shooting Star” episode’s initial broadcast, many critics lauded the producers of the show for taking on such a topic; however, the show failed to actually examine the issue of school violence in any meaningful way. Indeed, as argued by Kyra Hunting and Amanda McQueen (2014), the show simply used an accidental discharge of a gun—and the terror it caused—merely as a means of forwarding on its multiple serial plot lines and introducing one plot twist: “‘Shooting Star’ thus appears to center on a singular episodic theme, and one that is largely unique to teen dramas—the school shooting—but the episode blends that narrative with elements of comedy and melodrama to move serial storylines forward” (293).

While there was widespread praise for the episode, many articles written in entertainment blogs and websites questioned the morality behind the use of a school shooting to move plot elements forward. Typifying the criticism, Autostraddle.com detailed the failings of the episode and the media’s unwarranted praise. One blogger, writing soon after watching the episode, wrote a scathing indictment of the show and its intent:

Everyone is so busy praising *Glee* for the appropriateness and emotion with which they handled school violence that few seem to see that *Glee* didn’t address the issue of school violence at all. They held us captive to their characters emotions regarding the potential of violence, but in the end the students were never actually in danger. It just feels emotionally manipulative...I’m sorry, *Glee*, but you do not get to bask in your own glory just because you wrote an episode about a serious issue and showed shaky-cam crying kids. You do not escape criticism simply because you attempted to tell a story about something which is scary and fills us all with queazy [sic] dread. I refuse to jump on the bandwagon of praise. Here’s the issue: this country doesn’t have a problem with intellectually disabled students accidentally firing off guns in school. This country has a problem with students bringing guns to school with the specific intent to harm other students. To conflate the two scenarios is inexcusably offensive. (Lizz. “Why I Think Glee’s ‘Shooting Star’ Missed The Mark On Gun Violence”)

### **Why the Need? The Changing Face of Teacher Education**

While the media has lost sight of these tragedies, scholars across academe have begun to assume the mantle. Indeed, in recent years, much educational scholarship has begun centering around the topic of school violence. In the aftermath of the Columbine shooting in 1999, journal articles in the hard sciences (Beldean-Galea, et al, 2012; Fisher & Ketti, 2003; Johnson & Fisher, 2003; Jones et al, 2012; Olsen, et al, 2014), social sciences (Bon et al, 2006; Brown et al, 2009; Crews, 2014; Eitle & Eitle, 2003; Furlong et al, 2006; Hawkins,

2004; Shafii & Shafii, 2003), law (Lintott, 2004; Peterson et al 2002; Pierre-Louis, 2008; Time & Payne, 2008; Volokh, 2000), and even theology (Hartsig & Wink, 2001) began looking at the issue of school violence. Education journals took up the mantle in earnest: *The Journal of School Violence* began publishing in 2001. Beyond its scope, administrator journals looked at the legal and preventative issues (Blaya, 2003; Debarbieux, 2003; McCarthy & Webb, 2000), while theoretical journals debated the sociocultural elements involved (Ayot, 2000; Haselswerdt & Lenhardt, 2003; Malaby, 2007; Rutkowski et al, 2013; Speaker & Peterson, 2010; Watson, 2007; Willert & Lenhardt, 2003; Yablon, 2012).

Journals aimed towards PreK-12 and post-secondary practitioners as well as School Resource Officers (SROs) examined past incidents to develop best practice on addressing causes, prevention, and intervention in school shootings (Morrison & Skiba, 2001; Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002; Drysdale, Modzeleski, & Simons (2010); Robers, Zhang, Truman & Snyder, 2010; Doll, 2013; Pescara-Kovach 2015). Today's more progressive school administrators, SROs and educators follow the rules of threat assessment, which arose shortly after Columbine. Behavioral Threat Assessment is utilized by numerous institutions throughout the United States and beyond. In fact, threat assessment is now mandated in Illinois, New Jersey, and Connecticut. It involves an examination of the school, personality, social, and family dynamics in effort to reach a prospective shooter before it's too late. In truth, many incidents can be prevented if we follow the suggestions put forth in the practitioner journals.

Unfortunately, like many other areas of education, there often exists a disconnect between scholarship and classroom practice. While teachers are being called upon more and more often to prepare for the unthinkable, they are not being trained to fulfill this function: at the time of this writing (2016) neither of the two accreditation groups that oversee teacher education in the United States, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council, have coping with bullying or violence in their standards. In 2010, the two groups agreed to merge as one umbrella organization, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). While the group is still determining its standards for accreditation, a draft is available for review and comment. Of the five proposed standards, it is only Standard One that deals with Content and Pedagogical knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Within that standard, which demands that "Candidates demonstrate an understanding of the critical concepts and principles in their discipline, including college and career-readiness expectations, and of the pedagogical content knowledge necessary to engage students' learning of concepts and principles in the discipline;" there is no call for preparing teachers to understand their moral imperative to ensure the safety of their students if and when the worst happens ("Standard 1: Content and Pedagogical Knowledge").

Teacher education is a relatively new phenomenon when compared to the history of universities, or even the history of public schooling in the United States. As summarized by historian of education James Fraser, teacher education began with seminaries for women teachers beginning in the early 1800's but truly blossomed in the 1830's with the rise of normal schools, a means to try and standardize the preparation of teachers as much as a means to perpetuate the feminization thereof and summer teacher's institutes. The Normal School movement would see its heyday between 1870 and 1920 (Fraser 114). However, all of these movements were extensions of the nation's secondary schools; typically, normal school training would either be additional courses taken by high school students or an additional one to two years after high school done in teacher preparation. While some normal programs became affiliated with colleges and others evolved into

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[1] The other four standards are: Standard 2: Clinical Partnerships and Practice, which deals with practicum placements and student teaching opportunities; Standard 3: Candidate Quality, Recruitment, and Selectivity, which deals with admissions standards; Standard 4: Program Impact, which deals with collecting data from schools in which graduates teach to prove program effectiveness; and Standard 5: Provider Quality, Continuous Improvement, and Capacity, which deals with how the college uses data gathered to monitor and improve its program. ("The Caep Standards").

either junior colleges or small, liberal arts colleges in their own right, the majority had no postsecondary affiliation; there were no “colleges of education,” so to speak.

The aforementioned structure was prevalent until the turn of the Twentieth Century, when universities began offering four-year training programs to better prepare teachers. Generally speaking, these programs were organized differently for future elementary teachers and secondary teachers. Elementary teachers would do essentially two years of liberal arts education, followed by two years of training in education, including significant time in a practice or demonstration school. Secondary teachers would earn a degree in their field, their senior year spent in education courses and some practice teaching. As James Fraser further explains, it wasn't until the period between 1920 and 1965 that there was a push to get every teacher in the nation to earn a college degree, not just a normal certificate (174). It was this period that many normal schools became Teacher's Colleges or Schools of Education.

Out of this evolutionary process, a theme of disconnection between pedagogical theoreticians and practitioners emerged. As delineated by Fraser,

If being a member of a university faculty means being a specialist, education professors have tended to develop their own specialized research, and their own impenetrable jargon. They, too, have distanced from practice...[as a result] the deep commitment to the work of teaching and the success of teachers—has virtually disappeared from professional preparation in education. The words of normal school students and professors from a century ago often seem quaint, but their sense of passion for a high calling, a calling that included doing whatever needed to be done to ensure student success, would be a welcome addition to the curriculum of many a 21<sup>st</sup>-century school of education. (Fraser 5)

This critique is not new. Indeed, in his 1963 work *The Education of American Teachers*, James Bryant Conant warned that the trend in Colleges of Education and state departments of education could be accused of forming “a national conspiracy on the part of certain professors and their friends to use the processes of teacher certification as a device for protecting courses in education and for maintaining a ‘closed shop’ among teachers of the public schools.” The unfortunate byproduct, which Conant warned in 1963 and has arguably come to pass, is that “highly talented people are kept from the classrooms, and responsible laymen and distinguished scholars in the academic fields have been denied a voice in the formulation of programs of teacher education” (15). As a scholar of the foundations of education, cautions such as Fraser's and Conant's ring in my ears as I develop and design courses to help prepare classroom teachers. Regardless of the course I teach, I always keep one eye on the practical, giving students “real-world” examples and applications for their studies.

The course from which material in this article is drawn is titled “Teacher as Practitioner.” Accordingly it is programmatically the perfect place to achieve praxis—merging of theory and practice. In this case, students involved are at the junior level. At this stage in their professional preparation, they have taken a variety of coursework both foundational (child and adolescent psychology and development, social foundations) and practical (working with students with special needs, incorporating instructional technology). However, their junior year is where they begin to put the elements together; the course that this unit took place in, required of all preservice teachers elementary and secondary, is where they get their first exposure to elements of planning, instructional strategies, and classroom management. In addition, students spend an extensive amount of class time on practicum, working with one teacher/class for five weeks culminating in the preservice teacher presenting a lesson/unit to the class. With such an explicitly practical focus and extensive classroom exposure, it is a natural fit to begin preparing teachers to deal with crisis.

### Media Analysis Framework: Ohler and Postman

Teacher as Practitioner is loosely designed into three segments of five weeks each. The first segment, the most information intensive, is preparing them to enter classrooms. Topics therein include lesson and unit planning, instructional strategies, and classroom management, amongst others. The second five weeks are spent on practicum with students spending all their class time in PreK-12 classrooms observing and working with students. The third five weeks focuses on contemporary topics of importance for future teachers, but not necessarily specifically pertaining to pedagogy, curriculum, or management. It is in this final third of the course that students are introduced to the concept of thinking about themselves as the frontline of violence prevention and as first responders. Violence prevention is much needed in schools, as students deal with stressors brought on by normative and non-normative life events. Programs such as ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate) are drilled now required lockdown procedures in a number of states. As such, teachers must be exposed to the issues to better prepare them for school violence prevention and response.

It is also in this last third of the course that students are introduced to the media and technology analysis of Neil Postman and Jason Ohler. Students coming in to Teacher as Practitioner have completed a prerequisite course on instructional technology which provides students a good opportunity to work with a variety of software and hardware that they might encounter as teachers. However, what is not covered extensively in that course is approaching technology from a somewhat more philosophical point of view. In short, the preservice teachers get much information on *how* to use technology in their classrooms, but almost nothing on *why*, which becomes the starting point for the conversation in Teacher as Practitioner.

Cultural critic and media theorist Neil Postman highlights the philosophical utility of technology in teaching. In his book *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, Postman essentially argues that everything we need to know to be successful came about during the Enlightenment and that if we return to the lessons of that period, life will be much more effective. Each chapter deals with a different topic of analysis, from Progress to Language to Children to Education. However in his chapter on Technology, he provides a set of questions, echoing the work of Marshall McLuhan, to provide an analysis regarding technology. Postman argues that before adopting a new piece of technology, we must ask the following questions:

- Whose problem is it?
- Which people and what institutions might be most seriously harmed by a technological solution?
- What new problems might be created because we have solved this problem?
- What sort of people and institutions might acquire special economic and political power because of technological change?
- What changes in language are being enforced by new technologies, and what is being gained and lost by such changes? (Postman 45-53)

In classroom discussion, first I model applying the questions to instructional strategies regarding use of PowerPoint and daily music selections. Next, students working in groups apply Postman's questions to both classroom technology ("Do I need to use a smart board or class set of tablets to get this across?") and personal technology ("Do I really need that new smart phone or game console?"). Initially students struggle with the concepts in Postman's last two questions, which ask them to contemplate issues of economic and political power in ways that they have not and analyzing language with critical lenses; however, a robust class discussion typically helps to clarify.

Once students are comfortable thinking about the *why* behind technology, the conversations shift into a focus on how technology has created a new literacy. Jason Ohler explains that there are "shifts in literacy" taking place today that must be addressed by teachers. Ohler argues that we must redefine what it means to be literate in today's world: "being able to both read and write narratives in the media forms of the day, whatever they may be." We live in the age of digital expression, however, with three core assumptions: first,

“new media demand new literacies”; second, “new media coalesce into a collage”; and third, “new media are largely participatory, social media” (205-206). In short, educators must redefine the word literacy to include image and pictorial representations as well as letter and word. Ohler admits that his definition is ahistorical, as historians typically “object to the use of the word *literacy* to denote anything than literacy with one medium: letters.” Ohler continues: “Generally speaking, a literate person is still considered to be someone who has the ability to read, write, and understand words” (205).

As such, I try to design some lessons that tap into this new literacy, getting students to actively engage in messages that incorporate linguistic, visual, and auditory media to create the message. It is Ohler’s new literacy that dictates the methods and structure of the following lessons, getting students to begin thinking about the potential for school violence-related tragedy in their future practice. It is one of the times I am able to practice media analysis with my students. Part and parcel of this analysis is an exploration of how it can be effective; as explained by the editors of *Rethinking Schools*, “[e]ducators have a particular responsibility to take up media issues. We see the impact of media on young minds” (Marshall & Sensoy 16).

### **Bullicide: Shouldn’t It Get Better Now?**

To open the unit, students watch the teaser trailer for the documentary *Bullicide: The Voice of Complicity*.<sup>2</sup> Class discussion begins with an analysis of the trailer focused around a set of questions which they discuss in small groups:

- Which of the adults in the clip most resonated (positively or negatively) with you? Why?
- Which of the children? Why?
- Is bullying worse in this generation than in previous generations? If so, how/why? If not, why not?
- What is your job as teachers in regards to this issue?

This discussion becomes free ranging and widely divergent. Some students choose to reveal how they were victims of bullies or had siblings who were targeted. There is typically a wide discussion on the impact of social media and how the nature of bullying has changed from physical to relational, and whether current forms of bullying are equally or more traumatic to its victims than forms of the past. The class discussion tends to expand from the teaser trailer to discuss responses which typically surround bullying, whether in the form of comments to online stories or discussions with friends and family; as students point out, the all-too typical response of many posters is that kids just need to “get over it.” Students in the class question why so many people tend to believe this and whether “getting over it” is even possible.

This discussion feeds into an examination of the Center for Disease Controls’ work in preventing bullying, particularly via social media. Students often comment that the name of the documentary trailer, “Bullicide”, is a bit too harsh; however, when looked at in light of the work of the CDC, particularly in light of preventing violence to youth on social media (“Violence Prevention and Social Media”), students begin to soften their stance. Ultimately the conversation comes around to strategies in which they, as future teachers, can engage the students they will teach some day in their own classrooms to prevent this bullying in person. Part and parcel of this conversation are the legal and ethical limits to which they as future teachers can engage with their future students online.

Eventually and inevitably, at least one student brings up the “It Gets Better” project. Initially started by Dan Savage in an effort to combat the rising tide of suicides amongst LGBT teens, it became a movement in and of itself. From YouTube channel to its own webpage and project to a book edited by Savage and Terry Miller, millions of Americans have wanted to have their voice heard, that they had experienced bullying and

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[2] Later iterations of the lesson replaces the documentary with the video for the song by Rise Against, “Make It Stop.” As opposed to many other videos on bullying, while this one depicts three teens precariously close to committing suicide, all three get flashes of their potential futures; all three see themselves as having worth and therefore choose to live. It is extremely impactful.

violence, but that they persevered and life improved. The most popular testimonials on the website include those of President Obama, Chris Colfer of *Glee*, comedienne and actress Sarah Silverman, R&B artist Ciara, actor Zachary Quinto, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and pundit Stephen Colbert. While the celebrity contributions of *It Gets Better* are heartfelt and have resonated with the general public, it holds little in terms of practical applicability to preservice teachers. Issues of relatability proved problematic to the preservice teachers. For example, a student who grew up on a Montana ranch had little in terms of practical applicability to preservice teachers; issues of relatability proved problematic as well. For example, a student, hearing from Lady Gaga or Adam Lambert, David Sedaris or Al Franken is alien; when it comes to bullying, the power of celebrity holds no sway. In addition, all too often preservice teachers are left to wonder how it is possible that those who have wealth and fame could have been bullied.

### Shootings through the Ages

Once students have discussed bullying and potential anti-bullying elements they can infuse in their future classrooms, the conversation turns even more serious. One of the potential outcomes among those who externalize the pain of being bullied is the victim reacting violently, as happened in Littleton, Colorado, at Columbine High or in Fredericksburg, Virginia, at Virginia Tech. In previous semesters, I attempted to bring in numbers and statistics; however, it became apparent that the impact of the numbers was lost in white noise. I had to bring home the point to students in a powerful, yet meaningful, manner. Thus, Bob Geldof of the Boomtown Rats, Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam, and Mark Foster of Foster the People enter into the discussion. The songs are not chosen for being contemporary or even necessarily familiar; they are chosen for their powerful thematic elements that reflect the violence in U.S. schools.

Students are given handouts that include a timeline of school shootings and lyrics to three songs with quotes from the songwriters about the inspiration. After presenting an overview of the frequency of school violence, students are a bit taken aback. Then the discussion turns to social reaction and whether this has changed over time. To demonstrate this point, the first example shown is the video for the Boomtown Rat's song "I Don't Like Mondays." Released in the summer of 1979, we begin with this song for its historical significance: it was one of the first songs that achieved great popularity, particularly abroad, to look at the issue of school violence.<sup>3</sup> According to writer/lead vocalist Bob Geldof, he was making an appearance at a radio station when a news report came in over the telex machine detailing the San Diego shooting perpetrated by Brenda Ann Spencer, in which two adults were killed and eight children injured. When asked why she opened fire on an elementary school playground, Spencer's reply was "I don't like Mondays. This livens up the day." She is considered by many to be the "mother of such schoolyard massacres as Columbine and Newtown," and even admits in interviews to feeling "partially responsible" with each passing shooting (Bovsun, "Justice Story"). Geldof was shocked by the incident, as were most Americans at the time. As he later recounted in an interview with *Smash Hits* magazine:

I was doing a radio interview in Atlanta with Fingers and there was a telex machine beside me. I read it as it came out. Not liking Mondays as a reason for doing somebody in is a bit strange. I was thinking about it on the way back to the hotel and I just said 'Silicon chip inside her head had switched to overload'. I wrote that down. And the journalists interviewing her said, 'Tell me why?' It was such a senseless act. It was the perfect senseless act and this was the perfect senseless reason for doing it. So perhaps I wrote the perfect senseless song to illustrate it. It wasn't an attempt to exploit tragedy. (Clarke 6-7)

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[3] For another example, Harry Chapin's "Sniper" centers on the Bell Tower shooting at U of Texas in 1966. That song was released in 1972.



The video<sup>4</sup> features the band singing choir-like, in a schoolhouse, then moving to a stereotypical working class flat and watching themselves on television, then to an all-white studio wearing costumes that can best be described as very 1980's. Likely due to their regional and temporal unfamiliarity with many of the images utilized in the video, for the most part students believe Geldof was not trying to exploit tragedy but simply illustrate it. They agree that there is a sense of senselessness<sup>5</sup> not only about the images of the video, but the lyrics as well, particularly in the song's bridge: "And he can see no reasons/cos there are no reasons/what reasons do you need to be shown?" ("I Don't Like Mondays")

Once a tone of awe over the flippant nature of a perpetrator has been set, the second video is shown: "Jeremy," by Pearl Jam. Released on the band's 1991 debut album, *Ten*, the video would earn multiple awards—and would be the last video made by the band for almost a decade. Lyrically, the song is fascinating as it draws inspiration from two sources. The first was the story of a teenager, Jeremy Wade Delle, who shot himself in front of his second-period English class. At the time, the story didn't receive much national attention—typically a paragraph summary buried in newspapers in sections such as "Around the Nation"—which bothered singer/songwriter Eddie Vedder. In a 1993 interview with Seattle's KISW radio, Vedder commented:

It came from a small paragraph in a paper which means you kill yourself and you make a big old sacrifice and try to get your revenge. That all you're gonna end up with is a paragraph in a newspaper. Sixty-four degrees and cloudy in a suburban neighborhood. That's the beginning of the video and that's the same thing is that in the end, it does nothing ... nothing changes. The world goes on and you're gone. The best revenge is to live on and prove yourself. Be stronger than those people. And then you can come back. (Vedder, *Rockline Interview*)

The story also triggered negative emotions for Vedder: it reminded him of another incident with which he was familiar involving a junior high schoolmate. The boy, with whom Vedder had gotten into frequent fights, brought a gun to school and repeatedly discharged it into a classroom, though nobody was injured. These memories give the song a perspective not only of the senselessness of such tragedies, but also a taste of the perspective of the bully: "Clearly I remember/pickin' on the boy/seemed a harmless little fuck/But we unleashed a lion" ("Jeremy").

Beyond the power of the lyrics, this piece is chosen due to the incredible imagery of the video, which contains a videographic collage conflating images of the band (though save the singer not performing the song) intercut with images of Americana, religious typography, isolation and the neglect of a young boy. The overall effect is to create a troubling, discordant feeling in the viewer. Students watching the video, many for the first time, find themselves needing time to process and interpret what they just watched as they analyze the lyrics. The tenor of the conversation moves from shock to anger, even outrage, at a society that can create children willing to commit such acts.

The mood of the room changes, however, when the third song is cued. "Pumped Up Kicks" is ostensibly by the band Foster the People, though the recording featured the song's writer, Mark Foster, playing every instrument and mixing it himself. Initially released as a free download on the band's website in 2010, the song

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[4] All videos are found on the popular video sharing site Youtube.com.

[5] Admittedly, The stylistic choices within the video such as the temporal/clothing of a past era, the blurring of vaudevillian/choir performance to school, the British Hammer horror treatment of eyes/communal brainwash of audience, the sitcom-esque familiarity of the everyday being intruded upon by the band, etc. are far from empty signifiers. However, students are unfamiliar with these so the intent is lost upon them.

was quickly licensed for television and commercial outlets, leading to the commercial signing of the band. The song was then featured both on the 2011 EP *Foster the People* and that same year's full-length album *Torches*.

There has been some controversy to the origin of the lyrics. Foster argues that the lyrics are an attempt to get behind the mind of a young person that would be so isolated, so denigrated, or so tormented that they would either fantasize or act out a revenge fantasy. The lyrics to bear this out: "All the other kids with the pumped up kicks/better run, better run, outrun my gun/all the other kids with the pumped up kicks/better run, better run, faster than my bullet" ("Pumped Up Kicks"). In the aforementioned lyrics "pumped up kicks" is analogous to expensive shoes. To date, at least two of our nation's most notorious school shooters (e.g., Seung Hui Cho and Elliot Rodger) released videos, which criticized the wealthy, spoiled nature of their potential victims, prior to engaging in the Virginia Tech and University of California Santa Barbara shootings. There has been much speculation, hotly denied by Foster, that the song was based on an actual incident. In December 2007, 19-year-old Robert Hawkins entered a mall in Omaha, Nebraska, killing nine (including himself) and injuring five (CNN, "Police: Nine Killed in Shooting at Omaha Mall"). The song's opening lines, "Robert's got a quick hand/He'll look around the room, he won't tell you his plan" ("Pumped Up Kicks") seem to allude to this incident, though it could be coincidence.

This song is chosen because it is often familiar to the students, but most of them never paid attention to the lyrics or meaning. While lyrically, the song ruminates on the state of youth violence, the tonal contrast of mood proves anomalous. Driven by a catchy hook and up-tempo chorus, the song sounds downright chipper, leading one to question the significant disconnect between lyric and melody. In interviews, in spite of a band member being related to a Columbine survivor, Foster admits there was an element of flip-ness to the song: "'It's a 'fuck you' song to the hipsters in a way—but it's a song the hipsters are going to want to dance to'" (Doyle, "Band to Watch"). And it's this interpretation preservice teachers cannot quite get over; whether Foster intended irony or camp, the students become irate.

The cheerful tone is echoed in the video as well. In spite of the song being essentially recorded by a solo artist, the music video is an amalgamation of Foster and his bandmates playing live and having fun. They are shown drinking, dancing, playing Frisbee, and using a rope swing to dive into a natural pool. As students read the lyrics and watch the video, there emerges a sense of incongruity, even disbelief on some parts. Many students clearly—and angrily—see how youth violence has been commercialized and trivialized due to the flippant tone set by the video.

### Reactions and Conclusions

Students are often angry at the perceived shift away from outrage regarding youth violence. These lessons typically leave a stunned, silent classroom, unusual for this instructor; the preservice teachers tend to file out in quiet, thinking and digesting. However, as time has passed since I started these lessons, I have learned that for most students, the course topic moves into their daily lives. Dinner conversations, student group meetings, even their own postings on social media are all shaped by what was discussed in class.

In one case a student returned to class after the weekend and explained that the topic had become a discussion item in her sorority. She wanted to make all of her sorority sisters aware of the lyrics of "Pumped Up Kicks" and what it meant to her as a future teacher. In sympathetic response, her sorority agreed to a ban on playing the song at parties. In another case, a student approached the instructor and asked for the lesson to be taught as a professional development segment for a student group of which she was a member. In yet another, a student returned from a holiday break to tell the story of witnessing bullying of the student's younger brother—and how the student was able to teach the brother, and her parents, how to be proactive in combatting it.

I knew these lessons were impactful but didn't know how much until my teaching load changed. I was being asked to move from this course to its immediate predecessor, the course in social foundations. On my

last day of class, I asked students to complete an informal course evaluation, one question of which was if there were any lessons they believe I should put on my “must teach” list for the foundations course. Almost all students listed the lessons in media awareness and/or bullying and violence in this manner; therefore, while somewhat more condensed, these lessons are on my syllabus and will remain as such. For educators seeking help in these issues, a list of online resources is provided in an appendix to this article.

Far too often, the real impact of teachers upon their students is essentially immeasurable. Elementary school teachers don't see how the choices they make produce high caliber students once those students have moved on to the secondary grades. High school teachers don't see how the choices they make prepare students for careers, college, or both. And university professors, particularly those in professional schools such as colleges of education, don't see what an impact we have on the future professionals we produce. I have no idea if there will be a long-term drop in youth violence as a result of these lessons; I have no idea how many teachers will witness an incident of bullying and hear a few bars from “Jeremy” or “Pumped Up Kicks” in their mind as they make a teachable moment out of it. However, I can sleep well at night knowing that I have given the preservice teachers some of the tools they will need to make this impact and thank Bob, Eddie, and Mark for providing an entrée to the discussion.

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#### **APPENDIX: INFORMATIONAL RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS PREK-16**

1. University of Toledo Center for Education in Targeted Violence and Suicide ([http://www.utoledo.edu/education/centers/targeted\\_violence\\_suicide/](http://www.utoledo.edu/education/centers/targeted_violence_suicide/))
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Division of Violence Prevention ([www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention))
3. STRYVE (<http://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/stryve/>)

4. Stop Bullying ([www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov))
5. Surgeon General's Report on Youth Violence (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44294/>)

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