



The National Association for Media Literacy Education's
Journal of Media Literacy Education 11 (1), 75 – 96
<https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2019-11-1-4>

Media Literacy and American Education: An Exploration with D etournement

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ABSTRACT

Many competing voices are speaking about the state of American education and how it should be reformed in the best interest of students. Topics such as teachers unions, charter schools, and standardized tests are at the center of many of these discussions. How do we decipher what to believe amid such conflicting perspectives concerning these topics and others like them? To progress American education in a direction that benefits students and democratic society, today's educational stakeholders must adopt a critical stance in their evaluation of issues at the center of American education; lessons that encourage the development of critical media literacy skills are vital to this effort. This article explains how using *d etournement* in the classroom contributes to this goal, providing a historical background of *d etournement*, exploring a *d etournement* created by the authors, and sharing practical applications for teachers. Practical considerations are drawn from the authors' experiences implementing *d etournement* in the context of a master's level Disciplinary Literacies course for preservice teachers. The *d etournement* creation process in this context provided an opportunity for preservice teachers to cultivate skills in digital video composition as both critical media consumers and critical media producers. Resources and practical applications shared within the article can guide teachers in implementing *d etournement* in the classroom to help students adopt a critical stance toward the media they regularly consume.

Keywords: *d etournement, critical media education, American education reform, digital video composition, teacher education, disciplinary literacies*

The climate of American education today features many competing voices about what is true, what is needed, and what is best. Perhaps there is no simpler explanation for why this is the case than the fact that these voices are speaking with different interests—some with the interest of what is best for students, others with the interest of what is best for themselves, for business profits, or some combination of both. What makes this situation complicated is the reality that all these voices claim to have students' best interest as the pinnacle of their platform, regardless of whether this is truly the case. Those serving their own interests and those serving

students' interests end up preaching the same message: our ideas are right and theirs are wrong; join our cause and together we can give our students the education they deserve.

This is not a malicious battle on all fronts; some are adhering to misguided philosophies simply out of ignorance or a lack of criticality toward false narratives. Others, though, are willfully circulating false narratives to further their own agendas at students' expense. Some of the topics at the center of these discussions include school vouchers, charter schools, standardized tests and accountability, the state of public schools, teachers unions, virtual schools, government spending in education, teacher pay, and teacher quality, among others. How do we decipher what to believe amid such conflicting perspectives?

To progress American education in a direction that benefits students and democratic society rather than self-interested entities, today's educational stakeholders must adopt a critical stance in their evaluation of issues at the center of American education; lessons that encourage the development of critical media literacy skills are vital to this effort. This article explains how using *détournement* in the classroom contributes to this goal, enabling stakeholders to challenge the false, destructive narratives often found in popular media portrayals of education. Additionally, it offers practical advice on how teachers can use *détournement* to help their students adopt a critical media literacy stance toward issues as complex as these.

DEFINING DÉTOURNEMENT

Originating from the work of the European collective known as the Situationist International in the mid-twentieth century, *détournement* ([*detuʁnəmã*]) was “the main method that the situationists developed to critique and challenge the alienating, separating, pacifying, spectator-inducing, socially controlling forces” that were circulating from those in power (Trier, 2013, p. 72). Taken from the French language, *détournement* has been translated into English as “turnabout” (Chung & Kirby, 2009; Dewhirst & Kozinets, 2015), “a turning around” (Harzman, 2015; Lasn, 1999; Warner, 2007), and “detour” or “diversion” (Harold, 2004); subtleties in the original French from which it comes go even further to characterize *détournement* as a “hijacking” (Phillipps, Schözel, & Richter, 2016; Wark, 2009) because of its deliberate repurposing of the original sender's message. The spirit of each of these translations is the same, that the act of *détournement* turns people's attention away from the original content toward a critique of said content.

Closely tied to the concept of *détournement* is culture jamming, a term that originated in the mid-1980s from a San Francisco band called Negativland, who used the term to describe the audio-collage and billboard alteration methods they employed (Darts, 2004; Sandlin, 2007). Lambert-Beatty (2010) traces the historical development of culture jamming to the strategies of cultural critique developed by antifascists in the 1930s, continued by the Situationists in the 1950s, Yippies during the Vietnam War, and HIV-AIDS activists in the 1980s and 1990s. Most scholars

cite Lasn (1999) as they construct their definitions of culture jamming (Chung & Kirby, 2009; Harzman, 2015; Ibrahim & Eltantawy, 2017); Lasn (1999) himself defines it as “a metaphor for stopping the flow of spectacle long enough to adjust your set” (p. 107)—“spectacle,” in this case, referring to the various forms of media that captivate and permeate virtually every aspect of culture as described by prominent Situationist, Guy Debord (1970), in his *The Society of the Spectacle*. Dewhirst and Kozinets (2015) define culture jamming as “a subversive practice designed to expropriate and sabotage the meaning of commercial messages” (p. 22). There is the clearest way to define culture jamming moving forward as this definition most closely aligns with détournement as conceptualized by Debord and the Situationists. There are three essential elements to culture jamming: artifact (the cultural “text” that is “jammed”), distortion (the “jamming” of the artifact), and awareness (drawing people’s attention to the issue being “jammed”) (Harzman, 2015). Synonyms such as “guerrilla semiotics” and “subvertising” have also been used to describe culture jamming (Dery, 1990; Harzman, 2015).

As it relates to culture jamming, détournement can best be understood as the ultimate goal that culture jamming aims to achieve, that people would encounter the “jammed” cultural artifact and engage in the mental process of critiquing it from a critical perspective (Lasn, 1999; Sandlin & Callahan, 2009; Warner, 2007). The process of creating détournement simply involves taking preexisting elements from one artifact and repurposing them into something new (Elias, 2010); consequently, détournement can also be conceptualized as a form of remixing (Burwell, 2013; Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). While it has traditionally taken the form of “subvertisements”—a term associated with the ad parody work of culture jammers in which advertisements are modified for critical purposes to subvert the advertisement’s original intent (Chung & Kirby, 2009; Harold, 2004; Sandlin, 2007)—in recent years détournement has assumed a video form in which various media clips are taken from their original contexts and juxtaposed against other media clips that point viewers to a critique of the messages contained within the original contexts (Trier, 2014). This is the form that détournement assumes in the context of this article.

APPLYING DÉTOURNEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

As one who currently works with preservice teachers (Seth), and one who has recently graduated from the University of Arkansas’s Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) program (Jacob), we see strong potential for using détournement to help teachers—both preservice and in-service—and students adopt a critical media literacy stance toward complex issues in the media-saturated world we inhabit. As future leaders in the profession, preservice teachers must practice media literacy skills—especially toward voices speaking about education—regardless of the speakers’ positions of authority. The nature of détournement as a critical media literacy art form can help bring about such criticality both efficiently and effectively when accompanied by thoughtful discussions. Teaching these media literacy habits to our students and teachers is imperative; together they will

shape the minds and media literacy habits of future generations, which will have a profound impact on our world.

Our personal experience provides insight into what this process can look like practically. During the fall of 2017, Seth had the opportunity to teach one section of a 16-week Disciplinary Literacies course as part of the University of Arkansas's M.A.T. program; Jacob was a graduate student at the time enrolled in the other section of Disciplinary Literacies. The course is required for all preservice teachers enrolled in the University of Arkansas's M.A.T. program; its aim is to teach the integration of reading, writing, and new literacies within the disciplines and across disciplines. In this course Seth constructed a six-week *détournement* project that required students from various disciplines to work alongside one or two of their disciplinary peers and select a topic within their discipline that warranted a critical exploration from a media literacy stance; students then constructed a *détournement* video to share with their peers, future students, and other educators in their discipline. The project aligns with the course's aims in that the process of creating a video *détournement* requires students to apply both media literacy practices and digital literacies practices as they select media content and strategically compile it into a video format—both of which connect to the integration of new literacies. The [détournements they produced](#) were remarkable, especially considering the fact that this project represented, for most of them, the first substantial media creation project they had completed throughout their P-16 education.

Following the course's conclusion, Seth worked alongside his doctoral advisor to research the *détournement* creation process from the student perspective, an endeavor which, despite *détournement*'s near 70-year existence, had not been previously explored. Of the 14 groups of students enrolled in both sections of Disciplinary Literacies, nine groups were interviewed; in the context of these interviews, participants were presented with the following questions and discussion prompts: (1) Tell us why you chose this topic, and would you do it again if given the chance? (2) What was the most difficult or challenging aspect of creating a *détournement*? (3) Compare the collaboration you did in creating the *détournement* with collaboration you've had to do with past projects; (4) Discuss any experiences or skills gained prior to this project that helped you create the *détournement*; and (5) How would you implement this practice in your own classroom, and what would that look like? A thorough analysis of findings from this research transcends the scope of this article and will be shared more fully in future writings; nevertheless, what follows is informed by student insights. After we present the video *détournement* we created, we share a collection of practical insights for teachers to consider as they implement *détournement* with their students.

When Seth first introduced his preservice teachers to *détournement*, he started by assigning them to read Trier's (2013) "Challenging *Waiting for Superman* through *Detournement*" prior to their class meeting because it provides a simple explanation of *détournement* and explains how *détournement* can be applied in the classroom to engage students in conversations that challenge status quo thinking. Depending on the age group of one's students, assigning this text may

be too complex, in which case the teacher can still use portions of the text as a means of simplifying the concept of *détournement* for their students. The article also serves as a fitting accompaniment to the [Waiting for Superman détournement](#) that Trier created, which Seth shared with his preservice teachers when he introduced them to *détournement*. Building on Trier’s example, he also showed students two *détournements* he had created—“[Challenging Claims in American Education](#)” and “[Welcome to America](#)”—so they would have multiple models to imitate as they constructed *détournements* of their own.

CLAIMS IN AMERICAN EDUCATION: A DÉTOURNEMENT

Seth and Jacob chose to create a *video détournement* entitled “Claims in American Education Detournement” (French, 2017) to challenge contemporary claims concerning American education. Realizing the nature of our visually stimulated world and the ease with which visual messages can be accessed and shared via social media, we believed a *video détournement* circulated through YouTube and our social media platforms was the best way to share our work with a wide audience as expediently as possible. Second, having first been introduced to *détournement* as a critical media literacy art form through his master’s program, Seth had experience creating *détournements* and felt equipped to compose one again in fulfillment of an open-ended final project assignment for their American Education in Film graduate course at the University of Arkansas. [Since the video détournement is hyperlinked within this article](#), we recommend that readers watch it either before or while reading what follows in order to best understand the points we discuss.



Claims in American Education Detournement

We organized our video *détournement* by considering four general claims that are connected to public debates about education. We acknowledge that these claims cover only a small portion of the aspects within a very nuanced public education debate; the topics featured were the most represented in source material we investigated. The claims that we chose to problematize through the *détournement* all relate to the first claim: that “public education in America is failing.” The second, third, and fourth claims all stem from the first, and offer analyses or solutions. The claims include:

1. Public education in America is failing...?
2. Teachers unions are the problem...?
3. Charter schools are the solution...?
4. We need more standardized tests and accountability...?

We used *Trier’s détournement* (Senta, 2011) that he created in conjunction with his “Challenging *Waiting for Superman* through *Detournement*” (2013) article as a model for our process as he is one of the most prolific contemporary writers on *détournement*. We juxtaposed the clips into four distinct segments—one for each claim—followed by a flurry of conflicting sound bites and a series of text slides to conclude the *détournement*. Each segment is introduced by a text slide featuring the claim under examination, followed by a delayed “...?” to emphasize the *détournement’s* critical nature of the claims being made.

Our final product lasts precisely fourteen minutes and contains forty-one clips from twenty different sources, most of which we found on YouTube. Within each segment, sound bites which we found particularly important for viewers to focus on due to their troubling implications are repeated at various points. The following four sections explain in greater detail each segment of our *détournement*; each section is titled with a quote from the segment it examines that aptly characterizes the segment’s dominant theme. Table 1 shows a detailed list of claims, visual sources, and stances used in the production.

Claim 1: “It’s the Big Lie; They Are Wrong!”

The public education debate in the United States is complex and takes on many forms, but most people engaging in these debates generally fall on either one side or the other of the first claim presented in the *détournement*: that “public education in America is failing.” All other claims presented in this *détournement* to some extent reflect a tacit acceptance of this position for any of the others to be valid. There are a few assumptions reflected in this viewpoint. First, that there exist problems inherent to public education that are systemic by nature and reflect some kind of ineptitude within the system itself. Next, evidence of these problems can be found within the comparison of the test scores of students in the United States vs. elsewhere in the world. Lastly, this viewpoint assumes that the system is so “broken” that the only viable solutions to its problems exist outside it (Berliner & Glass, 2014).

The validity of these assumptions is immediately called into question by the first clip from a segment produced by the Young Turks, an online news source that explores topics related to politics, pop culture, and lifestyle. The anchor addresses the claim that American schools are failing and that this assertion is based on the relatively poor performance of U.S. students against their international counterparts; he then briefly mentions the results of a study which seem to refute the claim. The entire clip is not shown, but the anchor hints that not all may be as it seems, and the on-screen graphic reading “The Great Education Myth” only contributes to that suggestion.

The next section features Diane Ravitch, a professor, analyst, and historian, who fleshes out for the viewer the claims associated with this myth: public schools are “failing” and “obsolete,” and they spend more with no increase in achievement. Ravitch claims that school reformers are “laying the groundwork for privatization,” all while attempting to sway the public in their favor by claiming that schools in the U.S. are in an “unprecedented crisis” (AFTHQ, 2012).

After Ravitch emphatically claims, “It’s the big lie—they are wrong!” we’re immediately shown the emotionally manipulative perspective from the reform movement: the camera pans up to a young girl about to step outside her house, presumably for school. Understated but emotional piano music plays in the background as a young woman’s voice asks a seemingly heartfelt and reasonable question: “When it comes to choosing the best school for her, why do we lose that choice?” (PragerU, 2017). This is followed by statistics (sourced rather vaguely from a website and The American Federation for Children) bemoaning the failure of the public education system and proclaiming the supremacy of school choice. The iconic all-school brawl scene from *Mean Girls* next puts a chaotic face on the somber statistics we were just left with and highlights a perspective about public school that has stood the test of time in Hollywood: It’s a jungle out there, and who could learn anything in all that cacophony?

The conflicting perspectives are now at a fever pitch, but Diane Ravitch is back to address the issue of U.S. test score performance compared to that of other countries. She discusses the “only valid, longitudinal measure of academic achievement”, NAEP, or the National Assessment of Educational Progress (AFTHQ, 2012). According to the results of that test, American students are scoring higher now than at any point in history. This may come as a surprise to someone who’s just watched *Won’t Back Down*, which is the source of the next clip. Exasperated public school teacher and reluctant activist, Nona Alberts (played by Viola Davis), addresses a crowd of equally exasperated parents outside an elementary school. She paints a dark picture of the students’ prospects, with the prison industry analyzing the school to know how many prison cells to have open for the eventual drop-outs who will seemingly turn to a life of crime inevitably. All of this is happening, of course, because the school and the system that controls it are irrevocably broken, or so it would seem.

Claim 2: “The Machine Isn’t Designed to Produce Better Schools”

So, if public education is failing in the United States, what caused it, or what is currently causing it? In the public education debate, and sometimes in popular depictions of education in the media (e.g., *Won’t Back Down*, *Bad Teacher*, *Here Comes the Boom*, and *Waiting for Superman*), the enemy of reform and the enemy of students is often purported to be unions that represent teachers. They are presented as self-interested money-grubbing opportunists who care nothing for education or their students, and instead focus unilaterally on the working rights of teachers, typically to the detriment of students and learning.

The section opens with a Fox News clip in which teachers unions are being discussed, with the anchor noting that the issue of teachers unions is beginning to cross party lines, no longer remaining a solely Republican issue. This video cuts immediately to a new video clip which shows a vague graph of reading scores over time before asserting the claim from which the title of this section was chosen: The Machine (referring to the relationship between teachers, unions, and politicians) “isn’t designed to produce better schools; it’s designed to produce more money for unions, and more donations for politicians” (ReasonTV, 2012).

As a rebuttal, we next see a similarly designed informative Internet video, this time with the opposite message. It claims that the demonization of teachers unions by the reform movement is based in myth. The clip lists a few countries with strong teachers unions that are among the highest performing countries in the world. The video then cuts to Terry Moe, a Stanford professor and Hoover Institute fellow who poses a question that harkens back once again to the original claim. This video is produced by PragerU, an online video service founded by conservative talk show host Dennis Prager. Moe asks why American public schools are failing, a question which to him must be rhetorical, or at least a foregone conclusion. His immediate response is, “A complete answer, of course, would be very complicated,” after which he spends the remainder of the video solely blaming teachers unions for the perceived failings of the education system.

Diane Ravitch is back again with the opposing perspective, citing the villainization and demonization of teachers unions by the reform movement, describing efforts exactly like we just saw in the PragerU clip. She poses some questions of her own, pointing out that those charter school advocates criticizing unionized teachers as self-interested conveniently forget to mention their own interests. Terry Moe apologetically retorts each time that “a complete answer of course would be very complicated” as the clip is replayed. Pressing on, Ravitch explains that the data show there is no evidence of union obstructionism in public education, and in fact the states with strong teachers unions perform much better than states in which the unions are weaker. To end the segment, Ravitch points out that low academic achievement has been shown to correlate positively with one factor above all others: poverty. Ravitch claims, however, that this fact is cited as nothing more than an excuse by the school choice movement. Terry Moe’s response? “It’s complicated.”

Claim 3: “If It’s Run Like a Business, It Can Be Done Profitably”

So, if, for the sake of argument, the system truly is broken, and the current status quo of the relationship between public schools, teachers, and teachers unions is the problem, what can be done to fix it? The answer from the reform movement is school choice. As a previous clip wondered, why shouldn’t we be able to choose the schools we send our children to, even going so far as to leave the public school for a charter school? Privately and independently run schools couldn’t possibly be any more self-interested than the evil unions and their money-hungry political backers, could they?

This section introduces the charter school option with a clip showing David Brennan, a charter school founder, explaining his model of educational success: “Education is first, last, and always a business. If it’s run like a business, it can be done profitably” (LastWeekTonight, 2016). Not exactly encouraging, but the détournement has already moved to the next clip. This time, John Oliver enumerates the specifics of charter school funding and control (public and private, respectively). He also explains the origins of charter schools: special institutions that served as authentic experiments in different teaching styles and philosophies of education. He ends by sharing that 6,700 charter schools educate nearly 3 million students in the United States.

No discussion of charter schools in the media would be complete without another mention of *Won’t Back Down*, and the next clip features the main characters as they discuss starting a new school. This clip condenses quite succinctly the narrative currently being supplied by the reform movement: a parent at her wit’s end teaming up with a stagnant and unsatisfied teacher to change the public school system for the better. John Oliver returns in the next clip and has more facts to supply about charter schools. Though at least one study reported slightly better than average scores from charter school students in reading, the scores were flat elsewhere, and the study acknowledged uneven performance across different states. In fact, many charter schools have closed in the middle of the year, or even the middle of the day, and several clips show local news broadcasts reporting on schools that have done just that.

The clip of David Brennan plays again, this time to set up a contrast between his ideology of running education “like a business” and “profitably” against another clip of a former charter school teacher disputing those practices, saying education cannot be run like a “restaurant” that can be closed any time. Oliver returns to discuss the possible implications of a school run like a business: “By the time it’s obvious the school is failing, futures may have been ruined” (LastWeekTonight, 2016). Footage from The Ellen Show is then shown celebrating charter school success in standardized testing and college admission but is immediately followed by a clip discussing a sweeping study by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) about charter school performance. It claims that charter schools such as KIPP Academy have learned how to create the “illusion of student improvement” by manipulating their data (Senta, 2011). For example, proficiency ratings go up as time goes on, but don’t account for the number of students that leave the Academy.

We return to Diane Ravitch, now commenting on Betsy DeVos's nomination for Secretary of Education. She reiterates the point that the top performing students in the world are from countries that have strong public school systems and lack a free market school system. At this point, it may seem as though we intentionally sought clips that would include Diane Ravitch as she is present throughout much of the détournement; however, this was simply not the case. In our research efforts concerning these topics, Ravitch was consistently at the center of many of the discussions, suggesting that her perspective is widely regarded as authoritative, albeit controversial in some spaces. According to Ravitch, the facts do not seem to support the idea that charter schools lead to educational improvements in students, so what exactly are they doing? David Brennan answers us a final time. "If it's run like a business, it can be done profitably."

Claim 4: "All They Know How to Do Is Take Tests"

"We need more standardized tests and accountability...?" This claim begins the final segment of our détournement. Although we used this phrase to open the segment for its brevity, a more thorough description of the claim would be, "Holding schools and teachers accountable for student achievement through more standardized tests will lead to positive outcomes for American education...?" An adequate discussion of what makes this claim problematic is beyond the scope of this article, but perhaps Ravitch sums it up best when she asserts:

You need testing for information, but we're using testing now as punishments [...] There is just a huge body of research that says that when you tie incentives to test scores, the tests themselves become invalid because you then start teaching kids how to take the test [...] And when they get into a community college, they don't know how to read, write, or do mathematics; all they know how to do is take tests. (laborvideo, 2012)

The segment begins with John Oliver explaining that the "explosion of testing can be traced back to the '90s" when international tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicated that American students were scoring "near the bottom" in comparison to other countries (LastWeekTonight, 2015). This led many to believe that American education was in crisis and desperately in need of reform, despite the reality that these test scores tell quite a different story when examined through a more appropriate lens. When the American students' results are divided by students' socioeconomic backgrounds and then compared with other countries whose students come from similar backgrounds, students in the U.S. have consistently scored at or near the top—a more "apples to apples" comparison than "apples to oranges," if you will.

Juxtapose this with Chicago Public Schools' chief accountability officer, John Barker, stressing the importance of holding teachers accountable through standardized tests, followed by Betsy DeVos's confirmation hearing as America's education secretary in which she repeatedly chirps, "I support accountability"

(Stallman, 2017). It should be noted that Barker's and DeVos's mentions of accountability here are not one and the same; Barker refers to holding teachers and schools accountable for student achievement, while DeVos refers to holding all schools equally accountable for how they spend taxpayer funding. The terms are the same, but the surrounding issues are not. Our hope in juxtaposing the two uses of the term with one another is to acknowledge the confusion that discussions of these issues can create, especially for those with only a minimal understanding of what the issues are. Secretary of Education DeVos herself even shows confusion when she claims to "support accountability" one moment and then attempts to explain why all schools receiving taxpayer funding should not be held equally accountable, undermining her previous claim.

Next, we see Ron Clark (played by Matthew Perry) from TNT's television film *The Ron Clark Story* encouraging his students to be confident in their preparation for the upcoming standardized tests, tests which serve as a focal point throughout much of the film. "I support accountability," chimes DeVos. John Oliver then acknowledges the necessity of standardized testing to an extent, while maintaining, "The problem has been the implementation," pointing to the problematic nature of mechanisms like value-added analysis which grade teachers on students' performance. We then see Ron Clark anxiously waiting beside a colleague for students to finish their tests. Though he claims not to be nervous, he contradicts this when he eagerly accepts his colleague's offer for an antacid. In his defense, what teacher wouldn't be nervous when his rating is being determined by his students' test scores? "It's just what people want," interjects John Barker, referring to standardized tests.

Barker doesn't specify who these people are, so John Oliver steps in to clarify: "As of 2012, [Pearson] had more than forty percent of the testing market, almost triple their nearest competitor" (LastWeekTonight, 2015). "The way of the world is a standardized testing world," interrupts Dr. Joenile Albert-Reese, principal at Pritzker Elementary School, resigning to this apparent reality rather than challenging whether this reality is the way it should be (The School Project, 2015). "It's just what people want," reminds John Barker. Oliver interjects:

Pearson has a shocking amount of influence over America's schools, so much so, that at this point a hypothetical girl could take *Pearson* tests from kindergarten through at least eighth grade—tests, by the way, that she studied for using *Pearson* curriculum and textbooks taught to her by teachers who were certified with their own *Pearson* test. If at some point she was tested for a learning disability, like ADHD, that's also a *Pearson* test. And, if she eventually got sick of *Pearson* and dropped out, well she'd have to take the GED, which is now, guess what, also a *Pearson* test (LastWeekTonight, 2015).

Table 1
Overview of Claims, Sources, and Stances Featured in the Détournement

CLAIM	SOURCE	STANCE
#1: Public education in America is failing...?	The Young Turks (2013)	American schools are not failing
	Diane Ravitch (AFTHQ, 2012)	American schools are not failing
	PragerU (2017)	School choice will save our children from America's failing schools
	<i>Mean Girls</i> (Movieclips, 2011)	"It's a jungle out there" (satire)
	<i>Won't Back Down</i> (Movieclips, 2012)	America's public school system is failing
#2: Teachers unions are the problem...?	Fox News (Mass Tea Party, 2012)	Teachers unions are an issue that is crossing political party lines
	ReasonTV (2012)	Teachers, teachers unions, and politicians don't want to produce better schools
	AFTHQ (2013)	The demonization of teachers unions is based in myth
	Terry Moe (PragerU, 2014)	Teachers unions are to blame for America's failing schools
	Diane Ravitch (moistjester, 2011)	There is no evidence that teachers unions obstruct American public education
#3: Charter schools are the solution...?	Charter school founder, David Brennan (LastWeekTonight, 2016)	Education is a business
	John Oliver (LastWeekTonight, 2016)	Education cannot be run like a business
	<i>Won't Back Down</i> (2012)	Public school is failing children
	Charter school teachers (TheEllenShow, 2017)	93% of this charter school's first graduating class are now attending college
	The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) (Senta, 2011)	Some charter schools manipulate their data to create the illusion of student improvement
	Diane Ravitch (Schoolhouse Live, 2017)	The facts do not support the idea that charter schools lead to educational improvements
#4: We need more standardized tests and accountability...?	John Oliver (LastWeekTonight, 2015)	Standardized tests may be benefitting testing companies more than students
	Chicago Public Schools' chief accountability officer, John Barker (The School Project, 2015)	Standardized tests serve to hold teachers accountable
	Betsy DeVos (Stallman, 2017)	All American schools should not be held equally accountable for how they spend taxpayer funding
	<i>The Ron Clark Story</i> (Berroteran, 2013)	Standardized tests produce teacher anxiety
	Elementary school principal, Dr. Joenile Albert-Reese (The School Project, 2015)	Standardized tests are simply the way of the world
	Diane Ravitch (laborvideo, 2012)	Students are being taught test-taking skills to the exclusion of more valuable academic skills

The segment concludes where this section began, with Diane Ravitch explaining how testing *should* be used as opposed to how it is being used currently.

“All they know how to do is take tests.”

“All they know how to do is take tests.”

“All they know how to do is take tests.”

Concluding the Détournement

“And that’s because ‘the Machine’ isn’t designed to produce better schools.”

“Hands off our kids!”

“Education is first, last, and always a business.”

“It’s the big lie—they are wrong!”

“They don’t have a self-interest; only you have a self-interest.”

“Well a complete answer, of course, would be very complicated.”

“I support accountability.”

“It’s just what people want.”

“Futures may have been ruined.”

With so many voices sharing such conflicting perspectives toward education, it is understandably difficult to discern what to believe. This leads many to subscribe to whichever perspective affirms their own beliefs, regardless of how firmly said beliefs are based on verifiable facts. What must we do, then?

“Be informed... Be critical... Beware of your biases...”

These brief admonitions near the end of our *détournement* represent our attempt at an answer to this question. If we adopt a media literacy stance by analyzing and evaluating the media we consume, then acting on our analyses by questioning the validity of claims made despite our biases, we can hopefully move forward with more equitable, realistic, and helpful solutions to the problems facing American education (National Association of Media Literacy Education, 2018). Martin Luther King, Jr.’s concluding statement in our *détournement* demonstrates a perspective that should unite all of us concerning education, regardless of where we stand on the issues that have been discussed: “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education” (1947).

STRUCTURING THE PROJECT

Once the teacher has introduced students to *détournement*, the next step is to structure the project in such a way that students can progress with as much support as possible. When Seth assigned the project to his preservice teachers, he shared the following five steps and a timeline of when they should expect to accomplish each one in order to finish the project on time: 1) Brainstorm possible

topics with group; 2) Decide topics, assign roles, and organize your communication platform; 3) Collect videos/images and begin organizing the détournement; 4) Finalize détournement organization and begin video editing process; and 5) Finalize the détournement, post to YouTube, and prepare to share with the class. The following guidelines should enable students to work together most efficiently as they construct their détournements.

Dividing Tasks

The number of students within each group will vary depending on one's class size; however, each group should ideally have at least three students in order to fill each of the three vital roles: clip collector, video organizer, and video editor. The clip collector's role is to gather as many relevant clips as possible to include in the détournement once the topic has been chosen. The video organizer then takes the clips gathered by the clip collector and sequences them as logically as possible so that the détournement can begin to take shape. Finally, the video editor is responsible for putting the organized clip sequence into video editing software and creating the final product. While each group member can and should provide input at every stage of the project, to ensure the most equitable use of each person's time, each group member should primarily work within their assigned role.

Selecting Topic and Content

To prevent unforeseen obstacles along the way, the topic students select for their détournements should meet each of the following criteria: 1) the topic must have at least two opposing perspectives; 2) the topic must be relevant in contemporary culture; and 3) the topic must have ample video coverage from which to draw clips for the détournement (e.g., from news sources, television shows, advertisements, and movies). Once the topic has been selected, students should strive to find a balance between having too much and too little material to work with. With too many clips to choose from, the video organizer and video editor's roles will become much more difficult; on the other hand, with too little content, the détournement will seem incomplete. Additionally, finding clips that address the multiple perspectives on the topic is essential.

Collaborating Effectively

The nature of this project demands that students work collaboratively, much of which will occur when students are not physically with one another. Seth's preservice teachers primarily utilized Google Docs as their communication platform for organizing the structure of their détournements. Regardless of what platform students choose to use, the teacher should ensure that the platform updates in real time and is accessible by all group members. Throughout the project, it would be wise to include checkpoints along the way so the teacher can monitor how each group is progressing toward completing the détournement; accompanying these checkpoints with a bit of structured in-class work time would benefit students as well.

Scaffolding and Sharing Resources

While there may be no way to prevent students from feeling intimidated at the outset of the détournement project, here are some ideas based on student feedback for scaffolding the assignment to help students feel more equipped to complete the project successfully.

Several students commented on the important role that examples (i.e., mentor texts) played for them as they created their détournements, noting characteristics of what they considered “effective” détournements that they wanted to imitate in their own, such as repetition of a phrase or clip, transition techniques, and overall structure. Others, envisioning how they would apply the détournement project with their own students, suggested both preceding the project with smaller media creation projects and lowering the expectations for how long the détournement should be (the preservice teachers’ détournements in the Disciplinary Literacies course had to be between four and ten minutes long).

Any media creation project will require multiple digital resources to complete, so Seth provided his students with several when introducing the project and, along the way, encouraged them to share additional resources they encountered to expand the resource base. Table 2 contains this list of resources and how each resource can be applied when creating détournement.

COMMON OBSTACLES AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Creating détournements of high quality inevitably comes with its share of obstacles. During interviews with preservice teachers, participants provided insights into which obstacles were the most daunting for them throughout the détournement creation process, the most common three of which are briefly expounded upon below along with solutions for overcoming them. Other obstacles encountered, though not part of the most common three, include: time demands of the project, topic selection, copyright issues, and technical difficulties.

Editing the Détournement

This was the most commonly identified obstacle for students during the détournement creation process. Perhaps the greatest challenge that lies with this obstacle is that the editing role can really only be reserved for one person in each group; while others can provide input, only one person can do the clicking. If this person has limited experience using the technology, this can make editing all the more difficult and time-consuming. Teachers can help students overcome this obstacle by assigning editing roles to the student in each group with the most digital composition experience. Teachers should also make this student’s responsibilities much lighter in the beginning of the détournement project to compensate for the amount of time s/he will be spending near the project’s conclusion; in other words, groupmates with non-editing roles should assume the majority of the workload at the beginning of the project. If it is within the teacher’s power to allot structured work time for students to edit during class as projects come to an end, this would most certainly be welcomed by students as well.

Table 2
Software Tools for Video Editing

Resource	Description	Cost
Adobe Premier	video editing software; useful for editing the détournement	7 days free, then \$20.99/month
Archive.org	Internet archive housing three million videos, including one million television programs; useful for gathering clips to include in détournement	free
ClipConverter.cc	online media recorder application that enables users to convert nearly any audio/video URL to common formats; useful for converting files	free
iMovie	video editing software for Apple devices; useful for editing the détournement	free for Apple users
iSpot.tv	online repository for popular TV advertisements; useful for gathering clips to include in détournement	free
MovieClips	YouTube platform with over 15 million subscribers that houses popular movie clips; useful for gathering clips to include in détournement	free
PowerPoint	presentation software that can be utilized for video composition; useful for editing the détournement	see online Microsoft store for pricing
PowToon	online animation studio for novices; useful for creating portions of the détournement, such as transitions	free
ProCon.org	online organization that organizes and simplifies the conflicting perspectives on controversial issues; useful for helping students decide a topic for their détournement	free
Sample Google Docs Collaboration	online Google Doc that illustrates the remote collaboration process when creating a détournement; useful as a model for students	free
SaveFrom.net	online application that enables users to paste an audio/video URL and save as a file to one's device; useful for downloading clips to use for the détournement	free
Screencast-o-Matic	screen recording software; useful for recording clips to use in détournement	see website for pricing
Snagit	screen recording software; useful for recording clips to use in détournement	free trial or \$49.95
Yout.com	online application that enables users to paste an audio/video URL and save as a file to one's device; useful for downloading clips to use for the détournement	free
YouTube	online repository for billions of videos; useful for gathering clips to include in détournement	free

Limited Experience with Media Composition

This was the second most commonly identified obstacle for students creating détournement simply because most of them possessed little media composition experience, and this project requires a fair amount of skill in this respect. Students must start somewhere, though, and this assignment is one that will boost their skills and confidence in media composition. Teachers can help students overcome this obstacle by either shortening the parameters for the length of students' détournements or by assigning a series of smaller media creation projects prior to this one that will equip students with the skills they need before they create a détournement. Hopefully, when the projects are complete, students will echo these words shared by one female student:

“But, afterwards, it felt really successful. Like, we didn't know this technology at all. We didn't know how to upload things to YouTube and do all this rigmarole, and we figured it out together and gained something from it.”

Selecting Content

Selecting the content that would comprise the détournement was the third most commonly identified obstacle from students' perspectives. Some students shared that this was challenging because they had too much material to choose from, while others were challenged by the fact that they had too little. From the latter perspective, some of these students found it difficult to find content that represented the multiple perspectives on their topic as much of the content that was easily accessible represented the perspective of the status quo. Teachers can help students overcome this obstacle by being actively involved in the topic selection process at the beginning of the project; guiding students in the direction of topics that have ample video footage from multiple sides of the issue will serve them well.

Insights from Student Interviews

Insights gained from student interviews provide further guidance when introducing students to détournement. While the task at the outset can seem daunting, especially for students who have little or no experience with digital composition, successfully completing the détournement project can lead to unexpected skills gained and even enjoyment with the process.

“It was very new, and it was kind of intimidating at first.” One female student shared this perspective when asked if any experiences or skills gained prior to our course helped her create the détournement. Having never completed a media creation project like this before, she shared that she acquired multiple media composition skills through the détournement creation process, including composing video, editing video, and adding voice overlays onto video content. This pattern was not uncommon among the students interviewed, as many of them would agree that at the outset of the project the task seemed rather daunting due to their

lack of prior experience with media composition; nevertheless, here are some of the thoughts they shared during their interviews:

But it actually was a really fun project for us to do, and I think it was just a good time to get to do something that a persuasive essay or research project would achieve in a way that was way more appealing to the eye and to the audience.

I feel like I've gotten better at trying to figure out how to find videos and how to use them, and I figured out how to download videos. So, I feel like that's a useful thing to be able to do. I'm glad I have that skill now.

I really did enjoy making it. I was stressed about it leading up to it but once I jumped in and got in the zone, it was a lot of fun.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Perhaps it goes without saying, but once students' détournements are complete, they must have the opportunity to showcase their work to their classmates (as well as others outside the class, if possible). By the time they are finished, students will have invested many collective hours into their détournements, so they need the opportunity to see how others respond when watching their creation for the first time. Additionally, since the projects will be publicly available on YouTube, students should be encouraged to share their détournements on their social media platforms as well to expand their audience and start more conversations surrounding media literacy.

There is no silver bullet when it comes to teaching students media literacy—no lesson or assignment or project that will transition students from being media “illiterate” to being media literate. Teaching students media literacy is an ongoing process that requires engaging students in conversations about how media shapes the way they think and interact with the world and equipping them with the tools and skills to be media creators themselves. Détournement is one of many possible approaches to enacting media literacy in the classroom, but it is the most impactful approach we have implemented in our experience thus far. The excerpts from student interviews that have been included in this article depict only a small portion of the impact creating détournement had on this group of preservice teachers. By the time interviews were conducted, several of them had already incorporated détournements they and their classmates had created into their internship experience, thus finding immediate applications for the project by engaging their own students in conversations about critical media literacy.

While benefits within the classroom are perhaps obvious, the détournement project's reach extends beyond the classroom as well. The topics students are challenged to confront in creating détournement are inherently social issues that have profound impacts on the world around us; the Disciplinary Literacies students

tackled topics such as climate change, vaccines, book banning, immigration in the United States, and the misrepresentation of statistics in the media. We live in an era in which today's students have an unprecedented ability to effect social change for future generations. Because of this, it is paramount that they be equipped with the skills needed to both decipher between conflicting truth claims and insert their voices into the conversations. Creating détournement equips them to do both—to act as critical consumers of media as well as critical media producers. The world needs more students like this.

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