Teaching Critical Reasoning, the MTV Way

Dr Charlene Tan
Assistant Professor
National Institute of Education
Nanyang Technological University
Email: charlene.tan@nie.edu.sg
Why MTVs?

• A music video or MTV is a video with visual images and music. MTVs can be classified into three main types (Tan, 2007).
• The first type features a videotaped rendition of a musician performing the song. This could either be a pre-recorded performance in a studio (e.g. Whitney Houston’s “How Would I Know”) or some outdoor venue (e.g. Westlife’s “If I Let You Go”).
• It could also be a taped recording of a live performance of the musician during a concert (e.g. Madonna’s “Blond Ambition Tour”).
Why MTVs?

• The second type shows the musician performing
  the song, but includes static or visual images
  interpreting the lyrics (e.g. Def Leppard’s
  “Photograph”).

• The third type is essentially a mini film featuring
  either the musician or actors acting out a story
  which illuminates the song (e.g. Pink Floyd’s
  “Another Brick in the Wall”).
Advantages of Using MTVs

By combining music and visual images, MTVs could enhance the students’ learning in a number of ways.

(1) Empirical studies show that music helps in promoting understanding and memorization in students especially children (e.g. Botarri & Evans, 1982; Calvert, 1991; Chong & Gan, 1997; Gfeller, 1983; Kilgour, Jakobson & Cuddy, 2000).

(2) Music has also been found to be effective in enhancing pre-reading and writing skills (e.g. Register, 2001; Standley & Hughes, 1997).
Advantages of Using MTVs

(3) By activating the learner’s prior knowledge, music also aids the learner in acquiring and digesting new information on that subject (Harris, 2005).

(4) Music also creates a conducive learning environment, reducing stress, increasing interest, and setting the state for listening and learning (Woodall & Ziembroski, 2005).
Advantages of Using MTVs

• But MTVs do not just rely on music to attract the viewers; the music is juxtaposed with visual images.

• By presenting various communicative situations, the visual images can generate interest and motivation and lead to successful learning (Guest, 1997; Longergan, 1994).

• The realism in the visual images also offers rich contextualised and cross-cultural information to the viewers (King, 2002; Summerfield, 1993; Summerfield & Lee, 2001).
Advantages of Using MTVs

- MTVs are accessible and popular with the masses, especially young people.
- Unlike full-length films, they have the added advantage of being concise and short, averaging at about five and 10 minutes.
- They are also an excellent tool to promote media literacy: the ability to critically analyse, evaluate and interpret the various forms of media (Center for Media Literacy, 2003).
Illustrative Examples

• Teaching Deductive and Inductive Arguments using MTV: Michael Jackson’s *Heal the World*
MTV: Michael Jackson’s
Heal the World

Critical Reasoning Questions:
(1) What are the premise(s) and conclusion? Identify them.
(2) Is this a deductive or inductive argument? Explain.
(3) Is this a good argument? Explain.
Michael Jackson’s Heal the World

Argument

Premise 1:
If you care enough for the living, make a better place for you and for me.

Premise 2: You care enough for the living.

Conclusion: Make a better place for you and for me.

• Deductive argument; valid (modus ponens)
• Validity versus Soundness
Illustrative Examples

• Teaching Epistemology (the Concept of Knowledge) using MTV: Avril Lavigne’s *My Happy Ending*
MTV: Avril Lavigne’s
My Happy Ending

Critical Reasoning Questions:
(1) What are the different types of knowledge portrayed in the music video?
(2) What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge?
What are the different types of knowledge portrayed in the music video?

Three types of knowledge are referred to in the MTV:

(1) “I know what they say. They tell you I'm difficult.” (Information)

(2) “But they don't know me.” (Acquaintance)

(3) The music video ends with Avril playing the guitar in a band. (Competence)
What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge?

• Knowledge versus Belief
  Eg. Avril told her ex-boyfriend in the MTV: “You were all the things I thought I knew.”

• Knowledge as Justified True Belief
  Eg. “I know what they say about me. They tell you I'm difficult.”
  = I know that they say that I’m difficult. (I know that x)
Pointers on Teaching Critical Reasoning Using MTVs

(1) Provide scaffolding
• Give background information on the MTV
• Link key concepts in critical reasoning to the MTV
• Provide guiding questions to help students apply the concepts learnt

(2) Plan follow-up activities
• Use active learning strategies (observing, doing, dialogue with self, dialogue with others)
• E.g. class discussion, journal writing, role-play, case study, game
Pointers on Teaching Critical Reasoning Using MTVs

(3) Reinforce learning with another MTV or film on the same concept / focus

- Recommended MTVs: Westlife’s *If I Let You Go* (deductive reasoning), Daniel Bedingfield’s *Friday* (inductive reasoning), Avril Lavigne’s *My Happy Ending* (knowledge as justified true belief)
- Recommended films / TV show: *Twelve Angry Men*, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, *CSI* (deductive and inductive reasoning, fallacies)

(4) Inculcate critical thinking dispositions or habits of mind (Ennis, 1985; Siegel, 1988; Marzano *et al.*, 1988; Case and Daniels, 2002)
Exemplary critical thinkers have the following habits of mind (Case & Daniels, 2002):

- are open to new ideas
- persist/ have staying power in thinking through a problem
- have empathy/ can appreciate others' viewpoints
- have courage of convictions/ not afraid to take an unpopular stand
- question ideas/ don't accept everything at face value
- don't jump to conclusions/ not hasty or rash in coming to a conclusion
- are flexible/ willing to change tactics
- don't take themselves too serious/ can laugh at themselves
- are willing to live with ambiguity/ don't need black-or-white answers
- welcome challenges
Recommended Text