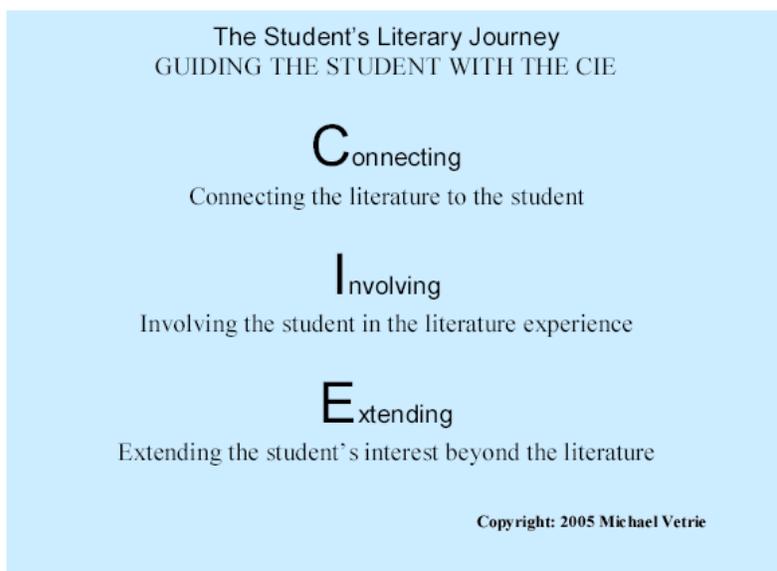


# Utilizing the film to Connect, Involve and Extend the Student's Literary Journey



The beginning step in almost any undertaking is to establish a link or connection. In something as simple as removing a screw, you must first position the head of the screwdriver correctly. In the classroom, if we can carry the analogy further, you must place the tool of learning in the correct position—*connecting*— before you begin to apply the pressure of turning the learning screw—*involving*. After you have *connected* and *involved* your students, the next step is to drive the screw home—*extend* their interest

beyond the literature and ultimately into the status of life-long learners. Successful *connecting, involving and extending* (CIE) results in highly successful teaching.

This framework was adapted from the framework originally conceived by *The California Literature Project* (CLP) (Brinton, Goodwin and Ranks, 1994), which involved concepts described as *into, through and beyond*. As taught in the CLP workshops I attended, the framework was applied in order for language arts teachers to move students “into” (and through and beyond) literature; that is, it presented a methodology to engage students effectively in a particular piece of literature in order to maximize interest in, understanding of, and memory of the events and concepts of the story. It was also used as a basis for prompting writing and discussion.

Over the years, the concept has been enlarged as well as simplified from its original application by literature teachers to other disciplines. It is now primarily used across curriculums as a review of what the students already know about the subject or have acquired or retained from previous lessons, an admirable goal no doubt, but one that limits the teacher in what he/she must do in order to engage students in any subject.

Because we have recently discovered so much about how the brain learns, a fresh look at *into, through and beyond* was necessary and a new vocabulary developed: *connect, involve and extend*. These terms were created in order to take a fresh look at why students attend, remember and store information.

The first and most important step in engaging students in the classroom is to begin a process I call *connecting*. In order to understand this concept fully, we must answer these three questions: *what are we connecting to, what exactly do we need to do in order to connect, and how do we know that we are successfully connected?*

In December 2004, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a series entitled, *A Writer Turns to Teaching*. It was a report about a young Ivy-League educated writer attempting to launch a career in teaching. With roots in a solid, middle class Latino family, the new teacher was assigned a high school class of mostly Latinos from working class and immigrant families. The new teacher failed, however, resigning his position after only the first semester.

In the article, one of his students had offered the teacher the key to being successful as an educator. A street-wise gangster and habitual truant tried to explain why the teacher failed to have an impact on him. "Look," he said to the teacher, "you don't know where I'm coming from. We're from different worlds."

Even though they were of the same ethnicity, they were from different worlds and each spoke a language that could be considered foreign to the other. "You don't know where I'm coming from," said the student. Why not? That should be the first effort any teacher makes in the classroom: finding the "world" the students live in and trying to understand it and the language that reflects it. In fact, approaching your students as foreign language speakers is not a far-fetched idea. Doing so could force the teacher to find a cultural common ground on which to stand as he/she attempts to introduce new ideas and concepts.

This is the *connecting stage* in the processing of all learning, the need to know and understand the background and experience of our students. And I don't just mean restricting your discovery to what the students know of the subject we are teaching on any particular day. It is important to discover whatever you can of that private world of our students that makes them susceptible to engagement.

When teaching a unit on the Big Bang theory of the creation of the universe, the teacher's primary goal for the *into* phase would be to discover what the students know specifically about the theory.<sup>1</sup>

In the original concept of the Literature Project, the *into* phase was to help the student to get "into" the literature. In the *connecting* stage, the attempt is to get "into" the students. In order to engage our students in any curriculum, we must attempt to understand and establish a bond to that "different world" our students inhabit, a place

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<sup>1</sup> "*Into*: In the first stage of the lesson, students' prior knowledge about a concept is probed. Typical into activities include reviews of previously learned content, the use

of content-related visuals, reaction journals, vocabulary previews, free association or visualization exercises, and anticipation reaction guides to assist students in accessing the new content material. The end goal of this stage is for students to gain an entree into the topic, recognize the depth of their own prior knowledge, and be better prepared for the new content materials they are about to encounter. (Brinton and Holten,(10).

Also see <http://www.yesmagazine.com/article.asp?ID=1006>: "Before introducing the new material it can be helpful to get students prepared to receive the new material – to get INTO the subject matter. Preparing students before the new material is introduced can increase their interest and motivation to learn, and create a positive and receptive atmosphere. Getting students INTO the new material can also be thought of as setting the stage for the learning experience, and it can be achieved in many ways. Decide what preparation is necessary for students to experience the work in a meaningful way.

- Do you need to build vocabulary?
- Should you stimulate curiosity or empathy?
- Is there some background information you can give about the ideas or people in the reading?
- Should you talk through the article in advance and overview or highlight key concepts?
- Can you relate material from previous assignments to the new material?"

See <http://www.yesmagazine.com/article.asp?ID=1006> and [http://www.ncteamericancollection.org/cora\\_intothroughbeyond.htm](http://www.ncteamericancollection.org/cora_intothroughbeyond.htm) for more examples of the use of into, through and beyond.

where a divergent language, almost foreign, is spoken, and the resulting Weltanschauung or worldview is not necessarily universal.

## CONNECTING QUESTIONS WE MUST ANSWER

### *1—what are we connecting to?*

Every student who walks into our classroom enters with a fund of knowledge that they bring to school from their experiences and life views. They see and respond to stimuli through the eyes of all their experiences. Those experiences gained through living are stored in what psychology calls the *schemata*, which are, simply stated, a group of organizational or conceptual patterns that have formed in the minds of our students from day-to-day living. Everything they experience in the future will be shaped by these patterns.

First, we all possess the same neurophysiology, there are similarities in the ways we pattern reality. Second, that neurophysiology is differentiated from individual to individual because of our unique experiences in life: Therefore, there are always differences in the ways we pattern reality (Calendrillo, 11)

We have learned that this stored pattern of reality is very important. The simple process of reading a book, for example, demands a sharing of these patterns between reader and author:

The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. Out of this complex process emerges a more or less organized imaginative experience. (Rosenblatt, 25)

But for the reader to successfully set up that *live circuit* and enjoy the *organized imaginative experience* (and that is what teachers hope to bring to their students), the

reader and writer must be on the same page. In other words, they must connect by sharing these organizational or conceptual patterns that we all create when living in the world.

Without that shared common ground between the reader and author, the author is speaking in a foreign language that the reader is trying to understand but doesn't speak. The teacher of literature, then, faces the daunting task of trying to establish a bridge from the *scheme* of one foreigner to the *scheme* of another foreigner without the benefit of a translator. That is why it is very difficult for students learning English as a second language to learn to read or write in their new language.

Instead of teaching *reading* to these students, teachers should begin by teaching *experience*. They should be immersing their students into the culture of English before attempting to have the students read or write in a new system of signs that arises, complexly, out of a culture they don't understand.

Once students are able to share a common experience with the teacher and the authors they will be asked to read, they will more clearly understand and be able to make meaning from the *pattern of verbal symbols*— what we call reading—because they are better able to infuse the rational and emotional *connect* that the reader must bring to the experience.

The film has been recognized (and sometimes cursed) worldwide as the dynamic purveyor of Western culture, especially that of our American culture. Since our goal as literature teachers is to set up that *live circuit* between reader and author, what better medium could we use than the film to give new English language learners an understanding, for better or worse, of our American culture, and thereby the basis for understanding the complex signs of our language? As was indicated in the first sections,

film is dynamic and explosive and speaks the language of our students. For better or worse, film is a mirror of our culture and our culture is the bedrock of our language.

In summary then, if we expect students to learn and remember, we must discover what they know and have experienced and design our curriculum to tap into or *connect* to that knowledge. When we do this, we usher our students into a *dynamic environment*, a place in which our students think about our lesson critically, express their opinions orally, and write profusely about it. Film can very effectively serve as that dynamic environment.

The *dynamic environment* is created when we tailor our curriculum to increase and expand the *schemata* each student carries into our classroom into a new *schema* that serves as common ground for us to function in as we attempt to teach our curriculum. Film can serve as the dynamic environment enabling us to make the connection from the familiar and well known to all that is new and unfamiliar. This includes reading and writing skills, as we will discover.

If the literature we are planning to teach is foreign, or drastically *outside the circle of experience* of our students, then the teacher must spend a great deal of time building a *connect*. In our literature classes, we might have to spend time teaching the *schemata of the characters* in our films or books and stories so that our students can see the connection between their world and the world found in the literature.

If we are teaching a story on the Holocaust, for example, we should seek to discover analogous areas between the experiences of the characters in the films and books and our students' experiences, but more than likely, we will also need to focus on the unique environment and circumstances that existed in the European states leading up

to the Holocaust for our students to fully relate. Perhaps by looking at some American Indian tribes who were uprooted and compelled on a long and injurious migration by our government, our students could find a *connect* between the experiences of the Holocaust and our own forced relocation of the American tribes. Also, there are striking similarities as well as important contrasts with our government's handling during World War II of the Japanese Americans' relocation as compared to the Nazi's relocation of the Jews.

We don't always have to spend time *teaching to the schemata* of the literature we are instructing. We can choose a direct route by choosing films or literature that *already engage* our students and has a relevancy in their lives. We can then use this "built in connect" to carry them into new areas of knowledge through the *involving* stage.

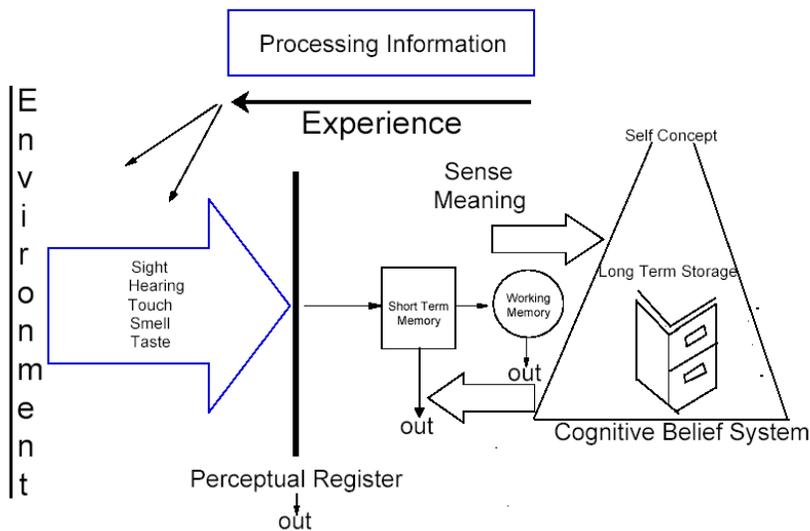
My language arts classroom included many Latino gang members. I discovered that films dealing with the struggle of new immigrants like *El Norte* (and films that featured Italian gang members like *Bronx Tale* and the *Godfather*) and books such as *Always Running*, an autobiography about a Latino gang member, had pre-established paths directly into my student's schemata.

It was a very easy task once that engagement took place to carry the lesson into subjects and areas that directly related to the book or the films. Many of my students read their first novel in my classroom after being introduced to films that had direct relevance to their lives, moving from their *involvement* in the film, then *extending* that interest to novels related to the film.

In summary then, we must teach this *connecting* phase by either preparing our students for the world our lesson will take them into or by choosing lessons that the

students have already connected to and thus are comfortable and willing to venture into new areas. In either case, we still must know and understand our students' schemata.

Either approach will lead to that *dynamic environment* we seek and from which we can effectively take the next step in teaching: *Involving*.



Modern research clearly emphasizes that for learning to occur, new information must be integrated with what the learner already knows.

The chart above illustrates how information moves from short-term memory to long-term storage. Brain based research indicates that two questions must be answered for the student to make that move from short-term to long-term storage: (1) Does this make *sense*...whether the learner can understand the item based on *experience*? Does it “fit” into what the learner knows about the world? And (2) Does it have

*meaning*...whether the item is *relevant* to the learner? For what purpose should the learner remember it? Here's another way of expressing this idea:

The brain not only wants to make sense of what it learns, but also wants to know that learning has purpose and value. Adler believes that people learn things, when they need to know them (1998). The search for meaning extends from deep-seated philosophical questions of the Eriksonian crisis (Who am I? What do I want? Where am I going?) to the rationale students demand for making sense of assignments. Simply put, the brain likes explanations. (Lombardi (<http://iteslj.org/Articles/Lombardi-BrainResearch.html>))

And again:

“...real life work” is important—students must see the connections between what they do in school and what takes place in the rest of their lives. Schools and classrooms must be “learner centered”—attention must be paid to student preconceptions, cultural influences, and individual learning styles. ([http://ali.apple.com/ali\\_sites/glefl/exhibits/1000804/](http://ali.apple.com/ali_sites/glefl/exhibits/1000804/))

Even the earlier researchers understood the importance of students validating what they are going to learn by seeing a *connect* to their personal experiences in life:

Beginning from student experience validates what students already know and is just good pedagogy that can influence the process of language acquisition, written expression, in short, the learnings that are currently grouped under the rubric of literacy. (Giroux; Simon; and Freire p. 217)

Demonstrating to your students that what they are to learn *makes sense and has purpose and value*, is the single, most important concept in this, the connecting stage. It is what separates the effective teachers from the ineffective ones. As Adler noted, “people learn things when they need to know them.” (<http://iteslj.org/Articles/Lombardi-BrainResearch.html>)

The *need to know* is strongest when it has been demonstrated to “fit” within the experiences of the students and thereby has value. This concept is the key to successful teaching in any field.

*Beginning from student experience...* is a key phrase from the Giroux quotation above. No matter how you say it, however, we must begin by either connecting to the schema of each student or we must select lessons or choose literature that has inherent interest and answers, “Does this make *sense...*?” or “Does it have *meaning...*?”

How do we do this? How do we discover what our students have experienced and value? That takes us to our second *connect* question:

## 2. *What Exactly Do We Need To Do To Connect?*

This is a crucial step, but one that is not suggested in most essays that I have read on the subject. Although the California Standards for the Teaching Profession denies that there is any relational importance to their listing of standards, they do begin with “Standards for engaging and supporting all students in learning,” and the first standard listed is: “Teachers build on students’ prior knowledge, life experience, and interests to achieve learning goals for all students.” They follow this up by noting that as teachers develop, they may ask, “How do I...” or “Why do I... ..help students to see the connections between what they already know and the new material?”

Well and good, but how do we know what they already know? This is the first question a new teacher in California should ask after reading the standards. *How do I find out what the students know in order to help them see the associations with the new material?*

What do they know? How do we find out? Do we just ask them: What are your life experiences? What cultural differences do you possess that the characters in this short story don't? Perhaps we can use a formal questionnaire: It might begin with, "Who are you?" If we simply ask our students what we want to know, will they tell the truth?

My experience indicates: not likely. They will not take the questionnaire seriously enough to even progress to the stage of telling or not telling the truth. So how do we discover this "unique" world that our students inhabit and most likely are reluctant to expose?

On one of my adventures as a mentor teacher, I advised a young woman who was not much older than the students she was teaching. She was hired to be an instructor in a continuation school, which in the state of California is a school in which all the failures in the comprehensive high schools are rounded up and sent to an options program where they are given a second chance to succeed.

I scheduled a time to go and observe her. It was our first meeting and my first opportunity to see her at work in the classroom. I arrived before class began and was surprised to find a woman who looked fragile and much younger than her age. I immediately had a fear that the street aware students in continuation would have her for lunch, but to my surprise (which should not have been a surprise had I been alert to her schemata), she had established a rapport with the students of such a magnitude that classroom discipline was not a problem. The students were engaged and alert as she maintained just the right level of camaraderie while preserving her distance as a teacher. How did she do it? She knew and understood her students. She was only a few years away from being one of her own students. She shared the same music, art, clothing and

films. Her language was very similar so they were not speaking a foreign language; on the contrary, she still knew all the intricacies of their youth-shared language.

Teaching a unit on literature, she presented a short story in the Directed Reading/Thinking Activity (DR/TA) format that reached right into the schema of each of her students, a story that featured the community rejection of a black student. It was a story she had written just for the purpose of connecting to her students. Since she had probably shared many experiences similar to her students' (She had an inner city background, also), she experienced instant credibility with her short story. The luck of the draw? No, I don't think so. She was close to her students in age and had an understanding of their world and wisely decided to share her common experiences by writing a story that she was sure would engage them. From this sharing of common experiences, she was able to gain credibility with her students that she utilized in other, more risky assignments.

Do I recommend that teachers write short stories to engage their students? Not necessarily. But the desire and concern she demonstrated to her students by going to the trouble of writing a story that connected with them could be gained by any teachers who demonstrated that they were going to great effort in their attempt to connect the literature to their students.

Being near the age of our students and thereby sharing their taste in music, clothing, art and film is not an option for most of us. So what do we do? How do we discover what is in that "fund of knowledge" that everybody seems to agree today is important? If we're not near their age and we can't simply ask them, what can we do to

find and understand their schemata? This is where popular culture, especially the film, can play an important role in the learning experience.

## THE ROLE OF POPULAR CULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM

Rosenblatt observed in *Literature in Exploration*, “The adolescent reader comes to the experience of literature out of a mass of absorbing and conflicting influences.” She then attempted to list some of these influences, only to finally note:

...one of innumerable possible variations upon this general picture of adolescent concerns will come into play. The particular community background of the student will be a factor; whether he comes from the north or the South, from city or country, from a middle-class or underprivileged home, will affect the nature of the understanding and the prejudices that he brings to the book. (Rosenblatt, p.94)

In seeking an understanding your student’s *mass of absorbing and conflicting influences*, look to the choices your students make everyday in what they listen to, what they read, how they dress, what they say, and, most importantly, what they see in the cinema or on TV. Another way of saying this was discussed years ago as it relates to the importance of knowing and understanding the popular cultures that influence our students. Many educators still do not heed this warning:

Educators who refuse to acknowledge popular culture as a significant basis of knowledge often devalue students by refusing to work with the knowledge that students actually have and so eliminate the possibility of developing a pedagogy that links school knowledge to the differing subject relations that help to constitute their everyday lives. Giroux, p. 217)

In other words, when we fail to recognize popular cultures like the film, music or video as a “significant basis of knowledge” in understanding our students, we fail to take advantage of a method of connecting our students to that *dynamic environment* in which

they will think about our lesson critically, express their opinions orally, and write profusely about it.

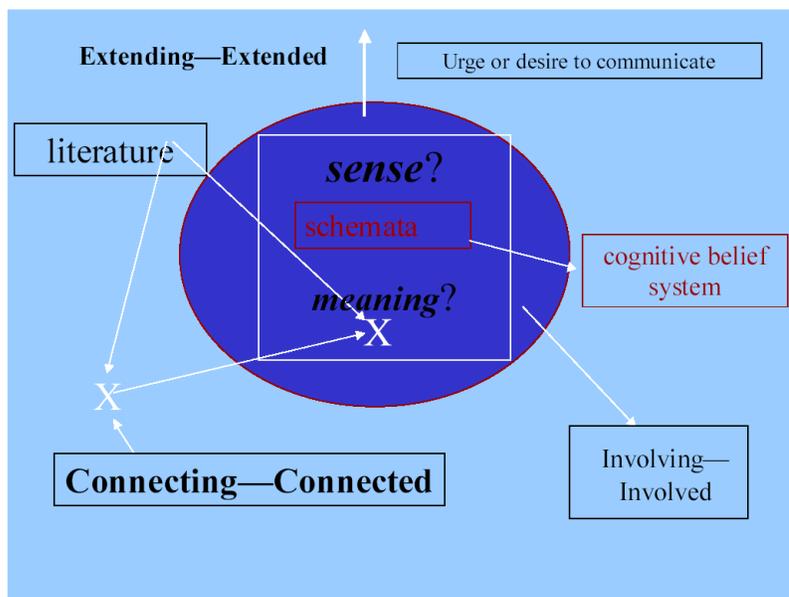
If we ignore the popular culture of rap music, for example, because we might consider it to be crude or obscene, we are missing an opportunity to engage our students.

If we ignore the music by the rap legend, Tupac Shakur, for example, we are missing an opportunity that could lead our students to an interest in Tupac's list of readings that include *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck; *Catcher in the Rye*, by J.D. Salinger; *Moby Dick*, by Herman Melville; *Art of War*, by Sun Tzu; *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, by Robert M. Pirsig; *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, by Maya Angelou; *1984*, by George Orwell; *Native Son*, by Richard Wright; *In Search of Our Mother's Garden*, by Alice Walker, just to name a few works on the rap artist's reading list.

How important is this? As a take off on the "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," my students admit that what interests their favorite rap artist also interests them. When Tupac was alive, my students wanted to know all I could teach them about Machiavelli because Tupac had changed his rap name to Makaveli. He said later, however, "It's not like I idolize this one guy Machiavelli. I idolize that type of thinking where you do whatever's gonna make you achieve your goal." As you can imagine, this led to interesting and at times heated discussions (as well as passionate essays) on what he meant and how it should or should not fit in to the lifestyles of my students.

What our students are listening to in terms of music, what they are reading (for those who can), what they are watching on television, what they are viewing in the cinema, and what they are logging onto in that great wide web of the internet, is also

what we, as educators should read, watch, view and surf, if only to better understand our students.



#### CHARTING THE CIE

The above chart illustrates what we have been discussing about the use of the CIE. If you take the round circle as being the background and experience of our students (Their *schemata*—who they are and what they are at this point in their young lives), it is simple to *connect* a piece of literature to our students if that literature already is *found within* that circle of their experiences. For a classroom of street gang-tough students,

literature involving the gangs of other cultures, like the Italian gangs, for example, would certainly do that.

If the literature is outside the circle of experience, then the teacher must spend time looking for ways to connect to the students, that is, find common ground between the literature and the students' experiences. To do this, we can move the literature *into* the circle of the student's schemata by seeking to find analogous areas.

Even more important in the educational growth of our students, we can *create* in the students (or give to the students) the necessary experiences for them to *connect* to the literature. In a piece of work on the Holocaust, for example, we can devote time to building our students' background in the causes and history of the experience.

As was suggested earlier, when this *connecting* happens, our students are able to answer the questions, "Does it make sense? (Does it fit within my experience?)" and "Does it have value? (Is it relevant to me?)" in a positive way.

*3. How do we know that we are successfully connected?*

We must know when we have connected with our students so that we can move on to the next step in the CIE, the involving stage. We think that we have been successful in this first stage: we have an understanding of our students' schemata and how they view our subject. We have indicated the value in what we are about to teach. Our students seem to understand how it "fits" into what they know about the world. It appears to make "sense" to them and we think they are engaged and ready to attend. How can we be sure? How do we know that we have been successful in this, the connecting stage?

We know when we are successfully connected to our students when we observe that they are in that *dynamic environment*, where everything you attempt works. They are

responding in certain universal and predictable ways: They listen and ask questions and appear interested in what we are saying. They are deeply on task. As one of my colleagues has noted, we could walk out of the room and they wouldn't even know we were gone. They might even laugh at our bad jokes (although not guaranteed). We have little or no discipline problems when we present our lessons, in fact, classroom management is no longer a concern. They respond to writing prompts that evolve out of the day's work by writing willingly and often and their writing skills improve. They passionately engage in energetic discussions when in whole group or cooperative learning groups. They are at school almost every day and absence rates decline in your classroom. They love school and think you are the greatest teacher they've ever had. They want to know more about the subject being presented and ask questions, lots of questions. And the icing on the cake? They come up with ideas for projects that evolve out of their interest in the lesson.

The language arts instructor can also discover how engaged students are by correctly assessing them. This could involve something as simple as discovering how much they remember about the events of the literature being studied. My approach is not necessarily to quiz them on concepts, themes or other complex aspects of the literature, but to simply ask for comprehension of character and plot that will allow us to move on to the *involving* phase of the CIE. In the *involving* phases we will be looking at the more complex aspects of the literature; at this point, we are only interested in whether they are engaged enough in the literature in order to move on.

If what they understand about the story indicates that they are not engaged to the degree that moving into more complex concepts can take place, then additional *connecting* to the schemata must occur.

The evaluation tool that you use to discover the degree of connectivity can be as simple as asking them to summarize the events of the story or recall specific events that might be necessary to understand in order to move on to more complex concepts.

If you are teaching a unit on irony, for example, and the literature that you have chosen is *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it is important for the students to remember that Boo Radley in the beginning of the story is a person the young people fear as a monster, but by the end of the story is the sympathetic hero. The students might neglect to mention this in a summary of the plot, but you could certainly ask a specific question about how the children in the beginning perceive Radley and how he is then perceived at the end of the story in order to assess the strength of this connectivity.

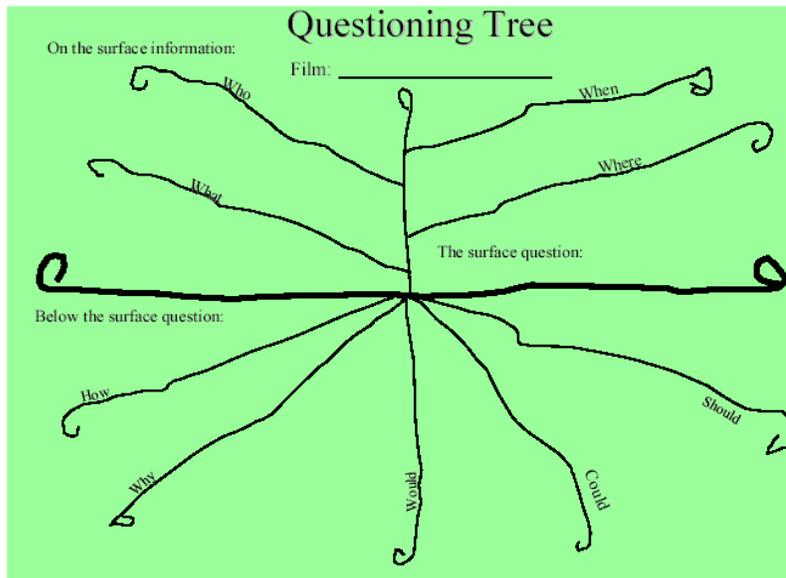
You might also adapt some techniques used in Reciprocal Teaching. One of my favorites is the Visual Questioning, found in the following illustration.

## Visual Questioning

Film: Cinderella Man

On the Surface Description	On the Surface Questions
	<b>Under the Surface Questions</b>

Students can work individually or in groups to complete the graph. The following chart shows the meaning of the *on* and *under* the surface descriptions and questions. The questions arrive out of the descriptions. Below the surface are concepts that are more complex on the Bloomberg scale.



This is a wonderful device that leads students from simple listings of the observations of the literature to simple questioning that comes out of the descriptions and then, finally, to the more complex questioning on the higher order of the Bloomberg scale.

However we assess our students, we must determine whether it is time to move on to the *involving* stage where we could deal with more complex concepts, (such as, in the literature class, the metaphor or irony), or remain in the connecting stage. If you wish the truth about your students' engagement in any lesson, don't give them an opportunity to prepare for the assessment; as a matter of fact, in general, all tests that students have time to prepare for are not effective in truly assessing what students are retaining from the curriculum. If your students are engaged, they will remember what they have studied

because it has been demonstrated to have value to them. When they are engaged, the results of your assessment will be pleasing, whatever method you choose.

### THE INVOLVING STAGE

Most of what takes place in the *involving* stage is what we all entered teaching to experience; it is what we visualized would happen but rarely does, except in that exceptional teacher's classroom, the one who intuitively seems to understand what I have outlined to this point.

In the *Involving* stage in the language arts classroom, students are enthusiastically engaged in the piece of literature; they are vigorously participating in discussions and are actively writing from challenging prompts; they make predictions and invest in the outcome; they are caught up in the emotional turning points of the plot, reacting emotionally; they want to talk about the concepts and themes of the literature and are willing, even anxious to write about them. With the right connect, this can happen in any classroom, regardless of ethnicity, gender or socio-economic level.

In this stage we are shaping and molding young minds. And they are willing recipients of all our efforts. It is the teacher's dream. With the right *connecting* and *involving*, it comes true.

The last phase of the CIE is *Extending*. In the language arts classroom, this is where the students want more than the literature can provide. They might want to know more about the history of the period in which the literature took place, or they might want to experience more literature by the same author. They have a strong urge or desire to communicate ideas from the experience of the literature and essays tied in to the theme of

the literature seem to work well. They do fine on assessments related to the literature. And most importantly, they want to repeat a similar experience.

But whatever success is gained from the CIE, it all must begin with stage one—*connecting*. You win or lose the battle at that point. Without linking the student initially in the literature or lesson, the student will never experience the *involving* or *extending* stages, which, for both the student and teacher, can be the most satisfying aspects of the educational experience. In many cases, the time spent *connecting* can be longer than the actual execution of the day's lesson, as I have indicated by spending most of this chapter on that stage of the CIE.

The use of film and other popular cultures as a way of *involving and extending* will be discussed more in the following sections. The feature film, as the most popular of our popular cultures, shown complete or in clips, offers a relatively easy way to make the bond between analyzing the schemata and connecting to it.

I hope to show that when used properly in the classroom, the film as literature will serve as a valuable adjunct to improving your students' literacy skills. Some writers on film recognize its importance in gaining our students' interest.

To bring film into the classroom, then, whatever the level on which we are operating, is to be pretty much released from the problem of initiating student response, just as it also is from the necessity either of offering instruction in basic skills or of generating interest in the first place. This is obviously one of the reasons that film is so often used as motivation. (Karolides , 79)

Yes, I agree with this comment, but as I hope to demonstrate, it is valuable in so many other ways as well.

## SUMMARY

Once students are *connected* to a piece of literature, we can then move to the next phase, *Involving*. We know we are in the *Involving* stage when the students are actively participating in writing and discussion prompts and are engaged in the piece of literature. They make predictions and invest in the outcome. They are into the literature and are caught up in the emotional turning points of the plot.

The last phase is the Extending phase. We know we are in the Extending phase when the students want more than the literature can provide.

But whatever success is gained from the CIE, it all must begin with stage one—connecting. Without linking the student initially in the literature or film, the student will never experience the involving or extending stages, which, for the student and the teacher, can be the most satisfying aspect of the experience.

As we shall see, the film offers a relatively easy way to make the bond between analyzing the schemata and connecting to it. When used properly in the classroom, the film is a valuable adjunct to improving your students' literacy skills.

## **FILMS WITHIN THE BLUE CIRCLE**

I have found the following films to be within the blue circle; that is, they tend to engage my students without much preparation. These films can be shown full-length or certain scenes can be excised from the films to use effectively in the language arts classroom, as I will demonstrate: *Amistad*, *American Beauty*, *American History X*, *Antwone Fisher*, *A Bronx Tale*, *Braveheart*, *Cider House Rules*, *El Norte*, *Erin Brockovich*, *Godfather Trilogy*, *Goodfellas*, *Forest Gump*, *Glory*, *L.A. Confidential*, *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Rings*, *mi familia*, *Mississippi Burning*, *Murder in the*

First, Platoon, Scarface, Shawshank Redemption, Silence of the Lambs, The Matrix, A Time to Kill, Toy Story, Traffic, Crash.

#### WHAT ARE OUR STUDENTS WATCHING AND WHY?

If the film is the most popular of our popular cultures, then how can we use it to find out how to connect to our students' schemata in order to involve them in literature? What if we asked them? Simply and straightforwardly asked? Perhaps something like the following could help.

## ANALYSIS OF MY FAVORITE SCENE IN A FILM

Title of the Film \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<p>In the box on the right, describe one of your favorite scenes from a movie that had an impact on you. You could have been moved to anger, to rage, to disgust, to humor, to tears, to whatever...</p>	<hr/>
<p>In the box on the right, explain why you think you reacted to this scene as you did. Use as much space as you need to explain this scene. Why do you think it had this impact on you? Do you think it was intentional?</p>	<hr/>
<p>How would you rate the overall quality of this film? (10-best)</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</b></p>
<p>Would you recommend this film to any of your friends? Why? Why not?</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Is this a film you would enjoy seeing again with members of your family, your mother or father or your siblings? Why? Why not?</p>	<hr/>

**Notes:** (Anything I'd like to say about this scene...)

What would a survey like the above teach us about our students? Would we have a better idea of the films that would fit within the blue circle in the earlier diagram of

what interests our students? If we were able to take a film our students recommended or one that came from my list of films I found popular in my classroom, wouldn't we be ahead of the game rather than trying to increase our students' schemata to the level of the literature?