

Exploring Mediated Instruction - TED-Ed Flip: Keys to Media's Hidden Codes

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## Exploring Mediated Instruction - TED-Ed Flip: Keys to Media's Hidden Codes

### Introduction

Can students be pushed to a higher level of thinking to truly grasp and apply content in an online environment? It is a question that researchers continue to try to answer as technology becomes more prevalent in education. Many scholars agree that simply providing the information is not enough. Assignments must be designed in a way that encourages thinking progression from simple recall to more “creative” outcomes (Alkhalifa, 2005; Astleitner, 2002; Seung-Youn & Stepich, 2003). Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) has moved into the education arena with “TED-Ed: Lessons Worth Sharing.” The TED-Ed website asks inspiring educators to collaborate with skilled animators to create short video lessons (TED-Ed, n.d.). Each video is less than ten minutes and is followed by a series of questions. The sequence progresses from “watch” to “think” to “dig deeper.” This paper is an empirical exploration of one such lesson: “[The Key to Media's Hidden Codes](#).”

### Watch: “The Key to Media's Hidden Codes”

Beaton, Dickey, LaBracio, and Lai (n.d.), present their video with a short written introduction in the “About this Video” section. It acts as an appropriate thesis statement for the current lesson and ends with the following sentence: “Learn to decode the intricate system of symbols that are a part of everyday life – from advertising messages to traffic signs” (Beaton, et.al., n.d.). The “flipped” lesson changes the current content substantially and thus requires a more focused introduction. The “flipped” “Let's Begin...” section now reads:

Media's Technical Codes can influence your actions, feelings and emotions. From colors to camera angles to logos – these codes are all part of an intricate system of symbols that have become a part of everyday life. Become more aware of how technical codes are impacting you by learning to recognize and decode these hidden messages.

The video begins with each image staying on the screen for a reasonable amount of time. It quickly moves into a style of fast editing so that images begin to flash on the screen for one

second or less. This style is effective in driving home the notion that we are surrounded by these media messages; many of the images that appear on the screen are recognizable from news footage, advertising, and films.

The creators claim that everyone is already an “expert” in decoding technical codes by simply living in this technology-driven time. One could argue this notion is false. It may be true that technical codes have a subconscious impact on the way we think and feel about products and ideas. However, if everyone is already an “expert,” in decoding these messages, there would be no need for a lesson to identify technical codes and their desired affects. The video goes on to explain what constitutes a technical code: it must be something that is understood by everyone and it must have a context to give it meaning. Then, the family tree of technical code is introduced with three sons: “symbolic, written and technical code junior” and their subsequent children (Beaton, et.al., n.d.).

In processing the images and listening to the message of the video, it is difficult to decipher its goals. Is it as the introduction states, to “learn to decode the intricate system of symbols that are part of everyday life?” Is it simply to share information about media’s messages and technical codes? At more than four-and-a-half minutes into the six minute presentation, the narrator and lesson creator, Ben Beaton states, “So is this video trying to manipulate you to buy something? Yes, an idea.” The stated idea is that understanding these codes is “fun and interesting.” Beaton goes on to explain that every image and statement used in the video has been “carefully crafted” to make viewers feel a certain way; to feel positive about learning to be engaged with every type of media that is consumed (Beaton, et.al., n.d.). Is this the goal of the video? A redesign of the video itself is impossible in the “flipped” lesson, but it should be noted that the video includes flaws. Most notable are the statement claiming viewers are “experts” in decoding technical codes and the lack of clearly identified goals near the beginning of the lesson.

The video is definitely eye-catching. It keeps one's interest for the full six minutes. However, in bombarding the viewer with fast-paced images combined with narration, it triggers an information overload. It becomes very difficult to concentrate on both the words being spoken and the images on the screen. In order to fully grasp concepts presented in the video and to feel comfortable moving on to the "think" section, it becomes necessary to watch the lesson several times.

### **Think: "The Key to Media's Hidden Codes"**

The first part of the "think" section consists of five multiple-choice questions. In Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive outcomes, these would all be classified under "remember," the lowest level of thinking (Stoner, n.d.). They ask the viewer to recall information presented in the video, but require no further application or analysis. For this reason, it was decided to eliminate all multiple-choice questions in the "flipped" lesson.

This section also includes three open-ended questions. The first question reads: "What are ways you have noticed different types of media shaping the way you think about the world? Do you think this is positive or negative?" (Beaton, et.al., n.d.). This question is promising in encouraging higher-level thinking. Beyond simple recall, it asks the student to come up with examples of a media message that influence thoughts and feeling. It then asks students to take it further by analyzing the process as positive or negative. The questions can potentially move students from a level of understanding to analysis in Bloom's Taxonomy. However, the wording is rather vague and could cause confusion for students. It could be helped by focusing on a specific type of media message. Because of the vagueness, this question has been eliminated from the "flipped" lesson. The idea has potential and will be explored further in the redesign of the "dig deeper" section.

Question two reads: “Why do companies invest billions of dollars in advertising? Do you think it makes a big difference?” (Beaton, et.al., n.d.). This question is a “common sense” question. The second part of the question can be answered with a simple yes or no – but the fact that it is introduced with a question that states that companies invest billions of dollars in advertising, why would anyone answer “no” to the second question? Companies would not spend billions of dollars on advertising if it did not make a big difference. Once that is established, there is not much more to say and there is no prompt to ask students to analyze their answer. For this reason, it has been eliminated in the “flipped” lesson.

The final question in the section reads, “What’s your favorite brand? Can you attribute your fondness to the advertising about the brand?” (Beaton, et.al., n.d.). Again, this question is vague so it is not as successful as it could be in promoting higher-level thinking. It starts with lower-level cognitive skills by asking students to identify a favorite product. It then attempts to move to a higher level of analysis, but the question is not explicit enough to encourage a robust response. This question has also been eliminated from the “think” section. However, the basic premise will be utilized to create a new question for this section.

The “think” section is the first thing students will encounter after viewing the video. It is appropriate to start with lower-level questioning in line with Bloom’s Taxonomy to allow students to build their knowledge. However, the current questions are “fuzzy.” They lack focus and have neither strong classification and strong framing nor weak classification and weak framing (Stoner, Higgins & Bonilla, 2012). They all start appropriately at the lowest level of thinking, but they lack focus and fail to adequately push students to think deeper to apply, analyze or evaluate their experiences with technical codes.

With the elimination of the multiple-choice quiz questions and all three open-ended questions, it has been necessary to create new material for the “think” section. Two big ideas that

are introduced in the video, but are only briefly touched upon in the original quiz section are recognition and context. The first new question in the flipped lesson addresses these concepts and reads as follows:

1. The video lesson discusses the importance of recognition and context when deciphering technical codes. It uses street lights as an example of universal recognition and two crossed lines becoming a “t” in the word cat to illustrate context. Give an example of other technical codes that fit these descriptions, one that is universally recognized and one that needs a context to give it meaning.

What would happen if your first example was not understandable by everyone? What happens to your second example when it is taken out of context?

This question moves student from simple recall into understanding in Bloom's Taxonomy. The student is asked to recall two examples from the video and then asked to identify their own examples of symbols with universal recognition and context. True understanding is gained by asking students to explain the consequences of codes not having these characteristics.

Question two in the “flipped” lesson also remains at the lower end of the cognitive outcomes of Bloom's Taxonomy, but it focuses on other big ideas of the video, touching on the family tree of technical codes. It is modeled after one of the original questions in this section and reads:

2. Think of one of your favorite brands or products that you use regularly. Now, think of an advertisement used to promote the item. Can you identify which “sons” of Technical Code are being used (symbolic, written or technical code Jr.)? Explain how you identified the codes you found.

These questions are appropriate in easing students into thinking critically about the information they have received in the video and how it might be applied in the outside world. This section is designed to prepare students to move their thinking to a higher level in the next section.

### **Dig Deeper: “Keys to Media's Hidden Codes”**

The “dig deeper” section is perhaps the most disappointing section of the original lesson as it does *not* require students to “dig deeper.” It does point the viewer to several outside resources including TED's Ads Worth Spreading, the ten most viewed advertisements on

YouTube in 2011 and some media literacy resources, however, it does not ask students to do anything with this new information. Given the fact that students have not been challenged to move into higher-level thinking in the previous section, they might look at some of the advertising resources listed, but very likely would not do much more with the information presented in this section.

The “dig deeper” section allows the most manipulation of content in the “flipped” lesson to support higher-level thinking. After seeing dozens of quick examples of media images in the video, this section gives instructors the opportunity to really examine some of those images more fully. Advertising provides an excellent focus to this section as examples are abundant and there has been much research on advertising's effects. In the “flipped” lesson, viewers are first asked to examine some outside resources and then asked to answer three questions. The new section reads as follows:

Sometimes media's technical codes and hidden messages can have damaging consequences. Explore these two resources and then answer the three questions below.

First, watch the trailer for the educational film: “[Killing us Softly 4](#)” by Dr. Jean Kilbourne, who has spent her career studying the effects of advertising primarily on women.

Now, read “[What is Body Image and Some General Facts About Body Image](#)” (section I and bullet A) on the about-face.org website.

Questions:

1. Find one print advertisement that promotes an unrealistic body image for women. Describe the technical codes the advertiser is using to influence the message. What function(s) do they play?
2. Now that you know more about deciphering technical codes and hidden messages, analyze your feelings about the advertisement. How does it make you feel? Would you buy the product?
3. Think about the advertisement you analyzed in question one of this section. How could you recreate the advertisement to use technical codes in a different way? Write a story-board with changes you would make. Include the technical codes you would utilize and the feelings you are hoping they will convey.

This section's questions build on one another, starting with understanding in question one, moving into analysis and evaluation in question two and ending with creation in question three. Students are asked to think more deeply about technical codes in advertising by focusing on outside resources aimed at raising awareness of the unrealistic portrayal of women in some ads. After watching the film trailer and reading some general information based on research, students are asked to think critically and understand the issue of advertising's role in perpetuating unrealistic body image by actually finding a print advertisement that fits this description. This understanding is pushed further and tied back to the video by asking students to identify the technical codes and their functions used in the advertisement.

Question two moves student thinking into analysis and evaluation, challenging them to examine their own feelings about the advertisement. Now that they have a better understanding of the technical codes used in the advertisement, the hope is that they will be able to determine whether the image and message affects them in the same way or differently.

Question three aims to push students to create, moving them into the highest level of thinking in Bloom's Taxonomy. In re-creating the same advertisement using different technical codes, students are asked to show they truly understand how technical codes function. They are asked to describe the codes that would be utilized and the feelings those codes are supposed to elicit.

### **... And Finally: "Key's to Media's Hidden Codes"**

The "flipped" lesson includes a section in which educators can leave viewers and students with final thoughts. The original lesson's "dig deeper" section would be more appropriate in this section. Even so, only two of the resources that are included in the original lesson promote a higher level of awareness through gaining media literacy skills. The redesign originally included a paragraph and several resources, however, those had to be excluded after



discovering this section only allowed 150 characters. The original redesign can be seen in Appendix A. The modified and final redesign of this section now reads:

Knowledge is power. Learn more about media literacy by trying these Google searches:  
["media literacy" site:.edu](#), ["media literacy" site:.org](#)

### **Conclusion**

The “flipped” lesson moves away from the “fuzzy” questions in the original content and attempts to create a more structured lesson. By asking students to apply the decoding skills they have gained from the video, the questions move students to more “reproductive” outcomes by instituting stronger classification and framing. Though the content itself might be considered more “productive,” the new, more focused questions add much needed structure to the lesson (Stoner, Higgins, & Bonilla, 2012). The changes are an attempt to eliminate vague questions and replace them with questions that ask students to show understanding by relating directly to the video’s content, then applying that understanding to outside resources. Students are asked to analyze and evaluate and to finally use their gained knowledge of media’s technical codes to create something new. The final section does what the original “dig deeper” lesson tried to accomplish by inviting students to explore other resources related to media’s messages and technical codes.

### References

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**Original Lesson:** <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-key-to-media-s-hidden-codes>

**Flipped Lesson:** <http://ed.ted.com/on/LJYMQaol>

Looking at big ideas of presentation:

- Every piece of media has a message
- Recognition and Context of technical codes is important
- Sons of technical code have specific functions
- Be aware of these codes to identify the impact the message is having on you.

**Text of Flipped Lesson:**

**“Let’s Begin...”**

Media’s Technical Codes can influence your actions, feelings and emotions. From colors to camera angles to logos – these codes are all part of an intricate system of symbols that have become a part of everyday life. Become more aware of how technical codes are impacting you by learning to recognize and decode these hidden messages.

**“Think”**

1. The video lesson discusses the importance of recognition and context when deciphering technical codes. It uses street lights as an example of universal recognition and two crossed lines becoming a “t” in the word cat to illustrate context. Give an example of other technical codes that fit these descriptions, one that is universally recognized and one that needs a context to give it meaning.

What would happen if your first example was not understandable by everyone? What happens to your second example when it is taken out of context?

2. Think of one of your favorite brands or products that you use regularly. Now, think of an advertisement used to promote the item. Can you identify which “sons” of Technical Code are being used (symbolic, written or technical code jr.)? Explain how you identified the codes you found.

**“Dig Deeper:**

Sometimes media’s technical codes and hidden messages can have damaging consequences. Explore these two resources and then answer the three questions below.

First, watch the trailer for the educational film: [“Killing us Softly 4”](#) by Dr. Jean Kilbourne who has spent her career studying the effects of advertising primarily on women.

Now, read [“What is Body Image and Some General Facts About Body Image”](#) (section 1 and bullet A) on the about-face.org website.

Questions:

1. Find one print advertisement that promotes an unrealistic body image for women. Describe the technical codes the advertiser is using to influence the message? What function(s) do they play?

2. Now that you know more about deciphering technical codes and hidden messages, analyze your feelings about the advertisement. How does it make you feel? Would you buy the product?
3. Think about the advertisement you analyzed in question one of this section. How could you recreate the advertisement to use technical codes in a different way? Write a story-board with changes you would make. Include the technical codes you would utilize and the feelings you are hoping they will convey.

### **“... And Finally”**

After discovering this section would only allow 150 characters it was changed to:

Knowledge is power. Learn more about media literacy by trying these google searches:

["media literacy" site:.edu](#), ["media literacy" site:.org](#)

### **The original “... And Finally” lesson read:**

You have taken the first step in becoming “media literate,” understanding media’s immense influence on our technology-driven world. Knowledge is power and the more knowledge you have, the more you will become aware of how media is trying to influence your actions, feelings and emotions. Explore these resources to become even more empowered.

### **ACME (Action Coalition for Media Education) - <http://www.acmecoalition.org/home>**

A description from ACME’s “about” section: ACME’s unique approach to media education involves teaching citizens how to more effectively access, analyze, evaluate and produce media.

### **Center for Media Literacy (CML) - <http://www.medialit.org/>**

A description from CML’s homepage: Dedicated to promoting and supporting media literacy education as a framework for accessing, analyzing, evaluating, creating and participating with media content, CML works to help citizens, especially the young, develop critical thinking and media production skills needed to live fully in the 21st century media culture.

### **Citizens for Media Literacy - <http://www.main.nc.us/cml/>**

A description from the homepage: Citizens for Media Literacy is a non-profit, public-interest organization linking media literacy with the concepts and practices of citizenship.

### **Project Look Sharp from Ithaca College - <http://www.ithaca.edu/looksharp/>**

A description from the homepage: Project Look Sharp is a [media literacy](#) initiative of Ithaca College that develops and provides [lesson plans](#), media materials, [training](#), and [support](#) for the effective integration of media literacy with critical thinking into classroom curricula at all [education levels](#).

## Flip Notes

Keys to media hidden message

- constantly absorbing messages

Technical Code - understood by everyone

Context

Symbolic Written Tech Code

Color objects Colors you buy words catch phrase Cam angles framing lighting

representation

Saying a lot w/ little

Video - sell idea

- understanding = fun & interesting
- need engaged w/ everything - products & ideas

\* fun & interesting 4:37

\* Make you more aware

4:58 feel + about idea that you need to be educated to engage w/ what you read, listen to & watch

By understanding - you'll be aware & able to ID impact on you  
find excellent examples & spread word

**Field Notes - Keys to Media's Hidden Messages:**

**Notes about video:** super overload with images. Sometimes it was difficult to concentrate on what the speaker was saying because images were passing on the screen in one second or less. That coupled with the closed captioning that didn't quite match the timing of when things were said verbally made it difficult to take everything in. I didn't realize until the third viewing that I could turn off the captions – which made my final viewing experience much more enjoyable.

I thought it interesting that the video didn't bring up its goals for watchers until nearly the end of the video, 4:37 and 4:58 of a 6:00 minute video. The stated goals – in the form of, "Is this video trying to sell you something?":

- The thought that deciphering media's codes is fun and interesting
- Gain positive feelings about being educated to "engage with" media so that you're more aware

**Original Let's begin:** Colors, camera angles and logos in the media can all prompt immediate associations with emotions, activities and memories. Learn to decode the intricate system of symbols that are a part of everyday life -- from advertising messages to traffic signs.

**Original – Quiz**

Through which of these channels do you absorb information?

- a Television
- b Movies
- c Magazines
- d Internet
- e All of the above

What's the first thing that constitutes a code?

- a It has to be recognized by all who read it.
- b It has to incorporate color, imagery, sound, and writing.
- c It must be in television, magazines, or movies.
- d At least a certain group of people must use it regularly.
- e It must be fun

Technical Codes Sr. has three sons. Which of the following is not one of his sons?

- a Technical Codes Jr.
- b Symbolic Codes
- c Written Codes
- d Verbal Codes

The idea that understanding the relationship between technical codes and the role they play in shaping your understanding of the world around us through the media we consume is ...  
a fun and interesting."  
b rarely important."  
c scary and dangerous."  
d a big made up lie."

According to Beaton, one of the most powerful advertising mediums in the world is:

- a Word of mouth
- b Modern art
- c Television
- d Oprah Winfrey

**My notes on quiz:** All questions are basic recall or remember questions. There is no push for higher-level thinking. I will choose to eliminate all quiz questions.

**Short Answer Questions Original:**

1. What are ways you have noticed different types of media shaping the way you think about the world? Do you think this is positive or negative?

**My Answer:** Media can have a profound impact on thoughts. We're in an election year right now so we're getting bombarded with messages from every medium. In this case, I think it is negative. There is very little "meat" to political messages. They're all very short and often times contain half-truths. The thing that makes them so scary is that few people actually take the time to seek out the truth so decisions are being made based on 30-second ads or 2-minute answers during a presidential debate.

**My choice:** Not sure – It ask you to come up with examples, more lower level thinking, but it then asks you to critique the message as positive or negative which could be seen as evaluative or higher level thinking. There wording is cumbersome though. I like where the author was going with this, but I think it could be better. I will use this idea in my "dig deeper" section.

2. Why do companies invest billions of dollars in advertising? Do you think it makes a big difference?

**My answer:** They invest billions because it works; it helps sell their products. Yes, I think it makes a big difference otherwise they wouldn't do it. People who feel an emotional connection to something are more likely to talk about, buy, promote, share with friends, all the things that help products become hits or misses.

**My choice:** Dropping – This question seems very common sense. If it didn't work, then companies wouldn't invest that kind of money in it right?

3. What's your favorite brand? Can you attribute your fondness to the advertising about the brand?

**My answer:** My favorite brand of vanilla ice cream is Breyers. I do remember a commercial where kids are trying to read the ingredients on a box of some other brand's ice cream and they come across a bunch of big hard-to-pronounce words. Then, a kid reads the Breyers box and it has milk, cream, sugar and vanilla. This ad may have contributed to my trying it in the first place, but now, I just think it tastes the best so I continue to buy it.

**My choice:** The flip indicates I can add my own questions in this section, so I will likely use the same idea, but rewrite to encourage some higher level thinking.

Possible rewrite: Think of one of your favorite brands or products that you use regularly. Now, think of an advertisement used to promote the item. Can you deconstruct the ad to identify which "sons" of Technical Code are being used (symbolic, written or technical code jr.)? How does the ad make you feel? Is the technical code working on you?

**Original Dig Deeper:**

**My view on this section:** It does point you to many other resources, but doesn't ask you to do anything with them. Some might look at the advertising, but probably not much else. The descriptions of the sites are taken verbatim from each homepage. I find that a little troubling as well.

Here are the resources the list:

TED's Ads Worth Spreading initiative finds ads that communicate interesting ideas with consumers. Think about how an idea can reset someone's worldview and even begin a domino effect as they pass it on to friends. <http://www.ted.com/initiatives/aws>

This article by AdAge lists the top 10 most viewed advertisements on YouTube in 2011.

<http://adage.com/article/digital/ads-entertain-youtube-s-top-spots-2011/231701/>

The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity is the world's biggest celebration of creativity in communications. As the most prestigious international creative communications awards, more than 28,000 entries from all over the world are showcased and judged at the Festival. It's a truly global meeting place for advertisers, advertising and communication professionals. .

<http://www.canneslions.com/about/>

Visit the Center for Media Literacy, an educational organization that is dedicated to promoting and supporting media literacy education as a framework for accessing, analyzing, evaluating, creating and participating with media content, CML works to help citizens, especially the young, develop critical thinking and media production skills needed to live fully in the 21st century media culture. <http://www.medialit.org/>

Project Look Sharp is a media literacy initiative of Ithaca College that develops and provides lesson plans, media materials, training, and support for the effective integration of media literacy with critical thinking into classroom curricula at all education levels. <http://www.ithaca.edu/looksharp/>

Dig Deeper rewrite:

Look at big ideas of presentation:

- Every piece of media has a message
- Recognition and context of technical codes is important
- Sons of technical code have specific functions
- Be aware of these codes to identify the impact the message is having on you.

2look at other resource – get info.

Do something with it

Killing us softly 4 trailer: [http://youtu.be/jWKXit\\_3rpQ](http://youtu.be/jWKXit_3rpQ)

Sometimes media's technical codes and hidden messages can have damaging consequences. Watch this trailer of "[Killing us Softly 4](#)" by Dr. Jean Kilbourne who has spent her career studying the effects of advertising primarily on women. Now, read the "[Some general facts about women and body image](#)" section on the aboutface.org website.

Find one print advertisement that promotes this unrealistic body image. What technical codes did the advertiser use to influence the message? Now that you know more about deciphering those messages, analyze your feelings about the advertisement. Would you buy the product?

3 Think about the advertisement you analyzed in question two. How could you recreate the advertisement to use technical codes in a more positive way? Write a story-board with changes you would make. Include the technical codes you would utilize and the feelings you are hoping they will convey.