

Patterns of Representation, Patterns of Practice: Exploring the Influence of Popular Films on Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT: Several scholars have described the ways in which films can participate in shaping patterns of practice at colleges and universities. Often drawing on the notion of film as public pedagogy (Giroux 2008) such work emphasizes that pop culture texts conduct a persuasive form of teaching, potentially exerting an impact on viewers' understanding of higher education (HE) and influencing the ways in which students and educators approach their roles (Gregory 2007; Vandermeersche et al. 2013). In so doing, these representations also perform important social and political work, often reproducing conceptions that align with dominant ideologies or reflecting social anxieties about educators and education systems (Carens 2010; García 2014). Given this significance, and in line with recent calls for attention to a wider variety of questions within SoTL (Bloch-Schulman et al. 2016), further investigation of the functioning of filmic representations of HE is needed.

In particular, while some existing work analyses the representational patterns offered by films themselves, little research has examined the ways in which viewers—including faculty and students—take up and respond to these films. The present research, which was designed and conducted by faculty and students working in partnership, aims to contribute to filling this gap. In a previous study, we analysed 11 films released in 2014 that feature HE prominently, and traced 3 themes across this corpus: the purposes of HE, relationships between faculty and students (Healey, Flint, & Harrington 2016), and the nature of academic identities. Building on that work, this session will present preliminary results from follow-up research that draws on focus groups with faculty and students to assess the ways in which they experience the interplay between filmic representations and their approaches to teaching and learning. We will compare participants' responses to the texts to the themes emphasized in the first phase of our study, and thereby unpack trends in the popular depiction of HE and consider how these are taken up by teachers and learners. The session will thus align with the conference theme of transforming patterns through SoTL, considering intersections between patterns of popular representation and patterns of teaching and learning, and laying the groundwork for further inquiry that responds to those trends.

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