The Balancing Act of Repurposing Feature Films and TV Series for University Teaching

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Contemporary educators have increasingly recognised the diversity of their student population and, hence, have attempted to use multimodal teaching methods for additional student learning benefits. One popular example is repurposing film and TV content for higher education pedagogies. However, integrating these materials into teaching effectively often proves more complex than lecturers might anticipate. This entry investigates the merits and challenges of using FF/TV in teaching to determine the factors that impact development of an effective FF/TV pedagogy for student learning, through an interdisciplinary review of the existing literature, followed by a qualitative survey and semi-structured interviews with lecturers across disciplines at Australian universities. Using visual literacy theory, cognitive load theory, and dual coding theory, data analysis reveals that the pros and cons of integrating film and TV in teaching are in fact interconnected, and the main role of the teacher is to pedagogically balance them. Evidence-based and theory-grounded suggestions for application are detailed throughout the discussions.

higher education   media education   multimedia learning   higher education pedagogy

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Contemporary educators often opt to use multimodal teaching methods to address the diversity of their student population regarding learning backgrounds, needs, and preferences. Yet, teachers without specific expertise in film or media studies do not always understand the complex implications of using mixed-media, and relying on self-taught or ad-hoc trainings to include films and television content may result in unanticipated outcomes [1][2]. Repurposing the fictional screentexts of feature films and TV series (FF/TV) for teaching is a common practice across all levels of education, but there is little rigorous research or academic development opportunities to establish whether educators understand how beneficial or detrimental this practice can be for student learning [2][3][4].

The literature on the use of FF/TV in teaching reveals that many educators tend to perceive merits and challenges as two separate domains [5][6][7]. Several scholars refer to the merits of integrating FF/TV representations into teaching disciplinary content, ranging from practical considerations—such as low costs, ready supply, and the reproducibility or adaptability of teaching methods for different courses—to pedagogical benefits in enhancing cognitive training, providing context, and improving student engagement [4].

For instance, FF/TV are generally noted to appeal to students through their senses and emotions, helping them relate more readily to the subject matter [8][9] by offering a visible life-like representation of abstract concepts and

real-life problems [9][10][11] and capturing multiple perspectives or dimensions of a topic (such as a medical case or a social problem) to showcase the complexities that are difficult for teachers to demonstrate in the classroom, for students to grasp verbally, or even for anyone to encounter in reality [10][11]. FF/TV can also enable the training of various cognitive skills from remembering to critical, analytical thinking, or creativity in problem-solving, perspective-taking, decision-making, ethics, and empathy training [8][10][11][12][13][14][15][16][17]. Furthermore, the multimodal nature of FF/TV pedagogy is also believed to assist with developing multiliteracies [11][18][19]. When screened in class, the shared film-viewing experience may reduce students' participation anxiety, improve group cohesion, and increase students' participation in class activities such as group discussion [9][20][21].

Including well-chosen FF/TV content in learning materials has also been found to make stressful and cognitively demanding subjects, such as mathematics [6] or theory writing [22], more inclusive and approachable or at least less intimidating for students [23]. In these contexts, the presence of FF/TV was found to help students feel more positive about the subject, enable more active engagement with other learning activities, and improve their performance in assessments. Additionally, integrating FF/TV into learning activities has also been suggested to create a 'safe zone' for exploring 'out there' issues [24] and an inclusive environment in which a variety of learning needs or preferences are accommodated [8][9][12][25]; this appears to be especially the case for learners who are new to the subject/discipline and for at-risk learners by providing a familiar or accessible entry point [5][26].

However, even the most enthusiastic advocates of FF/TV in teaching recognise their potentially detrimental side [8][9][12][27][28]. A key characteristic of FF/TV is their entertainment value, which can distract students from taking the represented issues seriously or mislead them about the actual scale of represented problems [9][27]. Since the craft of FF/TV allows for emotional manipulation of the audience coupled with high persuasiveness, FF/TV potentially provoke unpredictable reactions or interpretations from students [10][29][30] and negatively influence their ability to discern weak arguments [4][9][30]. Given the limited screen time within which complex, nuanced stories must be resolved, FF/TV also tend to oversimplify subject matter, which can sometimes lead to an inaccurate understanding [9][17][28][31]. FF/TV representations can sometimes be controversial or distorted, potentially confusing students. This may further worsen unhelpful student learning tendencies such as passive consumption of FF/TV's perspective [9][32]; reduced ability to discern bias, weak arguments, and inaccurate information [4][9][17][30]; low ability to transfer learned knowledge into real-life situations [15][33]; lack of knowledge about concepts shown in FF/TV that lead to invalid conclusions or generalisations [34]; and lack of background knowledge in audiovisual and film studies concepts [35].

Problems related to less effective teaching methods involving FF/TV are also part of the conversation in the literature [5][6][35][36]. These, however, mostly appear in articles that review primary studies reporting first-hand practice of FF/TV pedagogy and are often detached from the student learning challenges listed above; however, they do address the bigger picture of pedagogy development. In health sciences, for instance, Membrives and colleagues [35] observe that teachers seem to lack methods of assessment beyond their own subjectivity and that the learning outcomes embedded in FF/TV use can be difficult to measure. Through experimenting with inaccuracy-detecting tests in using historical films, Umanath and colleagues [17] warn that some classroom activities might not be effective due to FF/TV's overpowering impact on cognition and memory compared to other

instructional materials. Donnelly [8] asserted that much of FF/TV's educational potential remains untapped in teaching and learning due to the lack of training for teachers in using these media.

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