Using Film as Pedagogy to Explore Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs

Sheri R. Klein, Ph.D.
Professor of Art Education (Ret.)
University of Wisconsin-Stout

Urs Haltinerr, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
School of Education
University of Wisconsin-Stout

Abstract

This study investigated preservice teachers' beliefs about education through the application and analyses of Hollywood films in an undergraduate teacher education course. Hollywood films, as a genre of films, present teachers as lead characters in plots that center on classroom environments and relationships. As an instructional strategy, film pedagogy can assist preservice teachers in understanding a wide range of issues and events that may surface in teaching.

The research questions guiding the study were: What are preservice teachers' beliefs about education? What changes may have occurred to preservice teachers' beliefs about education over the course of a semester? What do preservice teachers learn about education from watching Hollywood films about teaching? The methods for data collection included pre and post surveys and worksheets; data was analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Findings suggest that watching and discussing teacher films helped preservice teachers to develop a greater awareness and a more complex understanding about teachers' roles and responsibilities. Limitations of the study and recommendations for film pedagogy within teacher education courses are addressed.
Introduction

Within teacher preparation programs, pre-service teachers are introduced to the profession through a progression of professional education courses in three discernible stages: introduction to the profession, immersion into the content and discipline-based readings, and practicum/student teaching experiences (Zulich, Bean, & Herrick, 1992). Stage one (introduction) is pivotal because it exposes pre-service teachers to foundational issues and topics relative to public education and the teaching profession. This stage is also intended to facilitate reflection about their chosen career path.

There is abundant support for pre-service teacher reflection within teacher education as a way to understand complexity inherent in teaching and classroom life (Galbraith, 1995; Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Klein, 2003; Schulte, Edick, Edwards & Mackiel, 2004; Schön, 1983; Zeichner, 1996; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Zeichner, 1996). Approaches to reflection that address multiple dimensions of teaching (emotional, moral, ethical, and spiritual) allow pre-service teachers to better understand teaching as complex and nuanced (Klein, 2008; Miller, Karsten, Denton, Orr & Kates, 2005; Palmer, 1993). Case study analyses and journaling can allow prospective teachers to “stand-back from taken for granted assumptions [and] frame problems from multiple perspectives” (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p. 322). Viewing, discussing, and analyzing Hollywood films about teaching can also accomplish these aims.

In recent years, “visual texts with moving images have become the dominant textual form of our contemporary global culture” (Dalton & Lindner, 2008, p. 2). Many educators view films as a form of pedagogy (Trier, 2007). There is support among many scholars (Bratlinger, 1999; Dalton & Linder, 2008; Edelman, 1990; Giroux, 2002; Joseph & Burnaford, 2001; Trier, 2003) that films about teachers provide an effective way for pre-service teachers to decode and interrogate the representation of teachers, students, administrators, and schools.

Pre-service teachers tend to demonstrate more common sense thinking (LaBoskey, 1994), that is, focused on self and/or subject matter, having short-term views, relying on personal experiences, seeing the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge, and making broad generalizations about teaching. Ottesen (2007) and others suggest that pre-service teachers become more reflective over time, and we have also found this to be true. While reflective thinking by pre-service teachers may be limited by age
and experience, we believe that film pedagogy as a curricular and pedagogical intervention can develop more critically aware and reflective pre-service teachers.

Through the use of drama and storytelling that is inherent in films, pre-service teachers can engage with powerful images and stories about teaching. The films may assist them to see that, while teaching is nuanced, complex, and fraught with challenges, it may also be rewarding. Dalton (2004) identified 100 films about teaching that are part of mainstream popular culture and Hollywood. Within teacher education, the integration of commercial films about teaching is a viable strategy for contemplation, interpretation, and interrogation of messages about teachers and public education. Furthermore, visual and emotive qualities of films can allow pre-service teachers to access their feelings and beliefs, and to engage in metaphorical and strategic thinking about teaching through the discussion of plots and characters.

**About this study**

This study is based on our shared beliefs about reflection as “reflective action [that] is bound up with persistent and careful consideration of practice in the light of knowledge and beliefs” (Noffke & Brennan 1988 in Hatton & Smith, 1995, ¶ 5). Throughout the undergraduate teacher education program at a Midwestern university, pre-service teachers focus on four areas of classroom practice in both theory and practice: instruction/pedagogy, curriculum/assessment, classroom environment, and professional responsibilities (Danielson, 1996) through guided reflection assignments that are embedded into the teacher education courses. Both of us were assigned to teach a required *Foundation of Education*, a 2 credit-course, that addresses the historical developments and philosophical, legal, and political issues impacting American public K-16 education. In our multiple roles within the teacher education program, as faculty and as program directors, we observed that reflecting on teaching is often a difficult task for pre-service teachers because they lack necessary classroom teaching experience. We began to talk about ways in which we could take the subject of ‘classroom teaching’ and problematize it in a way that fostered greater awareness about teaching and critical thinking about issues facing teachers. Our shared interest in films spurred further discussion about how we could integrate Hollywood films into this course to ‘tell stories’ about teaching. We speculated that watching, analyzing, and discussing films about teaching
could address many issues about classroom and professional practice that could not be easily understood through other means. Embracing the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), we allowed our own questions about our practice to emerge, and, in turn, viewed our own classrooms as spaces to explore these questions. Our discussions about films led us to write a research grant that was funded by the university to pursue this study; funds allowed us to purchase a variety of Hollywood films about teaching as well as other resources. Through this grant project, we were able to review, discuss, and select films about teaching, revise the course syllabus, and integrate films into the course.

Our research grant goals evolved out of a commitment to the SoTL in that we believed that to “take learning seriously, we need to take learners seriously” (Schulman, 1999, p.12). The goals of this study were: 1) to research and discuss films about teaching relevant to K-12 teaching; 2) to expose pre-service teachers to diverse and multiple perspectives about teaching and historical and contemporary public education through the use of contemporary films; 3) to encourage affective as well as cognitive student responses about education through discussion of contemporary films; and 4) to inquire as to what beliefs pre-service teachers have about K-12 education.

Our research grant goals two, three, and four were fulfilled through the implementation of the research. To achieve the first research grant goal, we met prior to the implementation and identified films that aligned with the Foundations of Education course objectives. We looked to the work of Dalton (2004) and Dalton & Lender (2008) and engaged in online research to obtain a comprehensive list of both Hollywood and independently produced films; slightly over 100 films were identified. The selected nine films met the following criteria: 1) they possessed breadth and represented a wide range of historical, societal, political, and cultural perspectives; 2) they illustrated a variety of teaching philosophies and perspectives, and 3) they possessed both male and female lead characters. The films listed in Table 1 represent the range of selected commercial cinematic works (ca. 1950-2007). While documentaries about teachers exist, we chose Hollywood films because they addressed a wider range of issues and scenarios about teaching.

Many of the selected films are considered classics and may be perceived inspirational in that they present teachers who overcome difficult circumstances with varying degrees of success. Through our
review of the films, we realized that most of the Hollywood films depicted urban settings, yet very few films addressed teaching in rural areas.

Table 1. Selected Films

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Films*</th>
<th>School Setting</th>
<th>Release Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Board Jungle</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Sir with Love</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up the Down Staircase</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October Sky</td>
<td>Rural (science education)</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay it Forward</td>
<td>Urban (middle school)</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music of the Heart</td>
<td>Urban (music education)</td>
<td>1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The film order reflects the sequence they were presented and discussed in class.

Methods

Research questions. To determine what effect, if any, the films might have on pre-service teachers’ beliefs about teaching, we developed the following research questions to guide the implementation, data collection, and analysis: 1) What are preservice teachers’ beliefs about education? 2) What changes occurred to preservice teachers’ beliefs about education over the course of a semester? and 3) What can preservice teachers learn about education as a result of watching Hollywood films about teaching?

Implementation. After developing the research questions, the films were introduced into two sections of Foundations of Education in the fall of 2008. The Foundations of Education course met for 55 minutes, two times per week. Due to scheduling changes, the study was implemented in only two sections instead of the intended four sections; both sections were taught by one researcher (Klein) who
collected the data during the course of one semester. The film assignment requirements (film viewing, participation in class discussions, and completion of worksheets and surveys) constituted 45 percent of the final course grade.

The participants in this study (n=54), referred to as ‘pre-service teachers’ and ‘students,’ were at the freshman and sophomore level. Non-traditional students included those students who may have transferred from technical or community colleges, who were undecided majors, or who were graduate students seeking a license in K-12 pupil services. Participants represented the following degree areas: Art Education, Business Education, Early Childhood Education, Family and Consumer Sciences Education, Marketing Education, Science Education, Technology Education, Special Education, School Counseling, and School Psychology.

Pre-service teachers were provided with an overview of the research project and, upon receipt of institutional approval for the research, and prior to data collection, students in both sections were asked to sign consent forms that provided permission for us to analyze data from the online surveys and to photocopy their worksheets. One student chose not to participate in the study and did not complete the surveys but did complete and submit the required worksheets. Students were asked to complete several surveys using Survey Monkey, a secure online survey web portal. As the course was web-enhanced, the survey links were posted within the course management tool and students could log in and click on the survey link.

**Viewing and discussing the films.** A final selection of films represented diverse plots, teaching contexts, student populations, teacher philosophies, and methods. The sequencing of films within the course correlated with the course objectives and major topics covered in the required text: historical foundations of education, school diversity, curriculum, and professional responsibilities. We determined that the students should view the films in their entirety to allow for a more complete understanding of plots and character development. Students were required to view the nine selected films outside of class; all films were on reserve in the university library. The films were between 1.5-2.0 hours in length, and it was expected that students would view the films prior to class and complete the accompanying worksheet. Films were viewed in the order presented in Table 1 with historical films preceding contemporary films. During the course of a 16-week semester, all the films were integrated into the course. Approximately 50
percent of each class time (25-30 minutes) was devoted to the film discussion. The worksheet was
developed to facilitate discussion and to record their observations and understandings relative to each
film. A total of 486 worksheets were collected, graded, and returned to students. Worksheets by those
students who consented to participating in the study were copied and names were removed.

Completing the surveys. Students were invited to complete a pre and post survey, using Survey
Monkey, at the beginning and end of the course to gain insight into their beliefs about teaching through
seven open-ended response prompts. The survey included open-ended prompts that invited students to
complete the following sentences: 1) I believe that schools… 2) I believe that teachers… 3) I believe that
students… 4) I believe that administrators… 5) I believe that classrooms… 6) I believe that curriculum…
and 7) Impact of people, places, resources and events on teaching…. The initial and post surveys
addressed research questions one and two.

Another online survey was administered after each film was viewed and discussed, totaling nine
surveys. This survey provided 10 prompts: nine prompts with a five point Likert scale rating and one
open-ended prompt. These surveys addressed research question three and attempted to understand
what students learned from each film. Class time was devoted to completing all of these surveys.

Data Analyses

After the implementation of the film pedagogy in the Fall 2008 semester, we regularly met
throughout the academic year to review and analyze all the data. We engaged in memo writing between
meetings to capture our “evolving ideas, assumptions, hunches, uncertainties, insights, feelings, and
choices” (Fassinger, 2005, p. 163), and that subsequently influenced further data analysis and
interpretation. The establishment of this “audit trail” allowed us to check each other’s coding, categories,
and assumptions (Fassinger, 2005, p. 163).

All data from the individual film surveys collected through Survey Monkey were analyzed; survey
items 1-8 facilitated the collection of statistical data. Open-ended survey items were analyzed through
thematic analysis informed by Van Manen (1997) and Georgi’s (1997) transcription process (Figure 1)
and that allowed for reading the responses to find emerging themes. Van Manen (1997) describes this as
“the holistic or sententious approach” (p. 94) where incidental themes gave way to more durable and
essential themes. According to Van Manen (1997), “the lacing of anecdotal narrative into a more formal discourse, if done well, will create tension between the pre-reflective and reflective pulls of the language” (p. 121). After refinement of initial themes, we returned to data to uncover any new themes and refine existing themes. It should be noted that the themes that emerged from the findings were not discussed with participating students as the data analyses occurred after the semester had concluded.

Essential themes were interpreted and supported with anecdotal evidence (students’ quotes) from worksheets, belief statements, and survey responses. Only one worksheet question was analyzed from the worksheet: What did you learn about teaching as a result of watching and discussing this film? Using the copied worksheets, we obtained a sample of the worksheets to analyze through random selection using about 20 percent of the total worksheets, or 100 worksheets. These worksheets were representative of all the films viewed and of students in both sections. Individually and collaboratively, we coded students’ responses to the worksheet question from the entire sample and collapsed themes.

Findings

Pre and post ‘belief’ surveys. The combined survey response rate was 91 percent for the pre- and post surveys. We looked at students’ responses from the pre-survey (before the film pedagogy) and their responses from the post-survey (after the film pedagogy). The analysis of these responses addressed our research questions relating to students’ beliefs: What are student beliefs about education? and What changes occurred to students’ beliefs about education over the course of the semester?

Table 2 provides an overview of the themes that emerged from the pre and post survey. We then compared the pre- and post themes and arrived at a theme that summarized or captured the shift in thinking that we found in the writings and experienced through class discussions. The last column identifies themes that reflect a shift in student thinking over the course of the semester about schools, teachers, students, administrators, classrooms, teaching, and influences on teaching.
Table 2. Comparison of Pre- and Post Belief Survey Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>2) Pre-Survey Themes</th>
<th>3) Post-survey Themes</th>
<th>4) Synthesis of Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe schools...</td>
<td>Schools should be safe, warm, and caring.</td>
<td>Schools are a community anchor; should be accountable.</td>
<td>Schools serve broad functions (academic, social, and emotional).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe teachers...</td>
<td>Teachers should be knowledgeable, fair, understanding, flexible, nurturing, role models, and keep curriculum “fun.”</td>
<td>Teachers should have high standards, uphold school and classroom rules; have the 'power to do good and bad’.</td>
<td>Teachers have broad roles and responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe students...</td>
<td>Students should be “ready to learn, tolerant, respectful of teachers”, “listened to.”</td>
<td>Students should have good work habits and habits of mind.</td>
<td>Students should be ready for active learning, but expect to be motivated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe administrators...</td>
<td>Administrators enforce rules and policies that govern teachers and students.</td>
<td>Administrators both manage and create positive and external agents of learning environments.</td>
<td>Administrators are internal and external agents of schools, leaders and managers, and role models.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe classrooms...</td>
<td>Classrooms should be safe and comfortable, warm and inviting.</td>
<td>Classrooms must be designed and maintained; impact teaching both positively and negatively.</td>
<td>Classrooms are physical, social, emotional, aesthetic, and pedagogical spaces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I believe curriculum... 
Curriculum should be logical, relevant, engaging, and appropriate. 
Curriculum should be meaningful and accommodate students’ learning styles. 
Attention to learners as part of curriculum process. 
Curriculum has multiple functions: Intellectual, psychological (emotional, motivating), practical (applicable to life/real world) and accommodates (diverse learners).

Impact of people, places, resources and events on teaching... 
All viewed as relevant and important. 
Technology viewed as very important resource today; 
current events very important 
Viewed as important and impacting positively and negatively.

**Individual film survey.** This survey was completed at the end of class discussion for each film. The nine prompts that students were invited to complete included: 1) This film helped me to think critically about the teaching profession; 2) This film presented an example of an inspirational teacher; 3) This film changed my beliefs about teaching; 4) This film offered me some examples of strategies to deal with learners; 5) This film provided me with some examples of strategies on how to create curriculum; 6) This film presented examples of strategies for how to work through moral and ethical issues in the classroom or the school; 7) This film offered me some strategies for how to work with administrators; 8) Overall, I would recommend this film to other students who are studying to become teachers; and 9) As a result of watching this film I have gained the following insight about teaching (an open-ended response item). Students were asked to rank each response using a Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were used to report the number of students who agreed with each survey item with respect to each film.
The films *Freedom Writers* (87%), *Up the Down Staircase* (44%), and *Blackboard Jungle* (44%) ranked highest with respect to helping students think critically about teaching. *Freedom Writers* (92%), *Blackboard Jungle* (78%), and *October Sky* (69%) ranked highest in presenting an inspirational teacher and helping students to understand moral and ethical issues in teaching. They often described the teacher, Mrs. G, in *Freedom Writers* as someone who "stuck to her guns," and "was strong, but flexible."

Students acknowledged the film *To Sir with Love* as a compassionate portrayal of a teacher. The teacher was described as "like a lion" who "brings hope to his surroundings." They also acknowledged that "love and respect are like flowers on the same branch." *Freedom Writers* (46%) and *Pay it Forward* (35%), ranked highest as the films that helped change their beliefs about teaching. One student commented, "Seeing how much of a difference Mr. Simonet [in *Pay it Forward*] made in students' lives really helps me see that we can do anything to help a student of ours go into the right direction." Another student wrote, "This film helped me to understand not to underestimate the ability of anyone, especially students."

*Freedom Writers* elicited comments such as, “teaching is tough but change is possible,” and “hopefully I will enter [teaching] with more confidence.” *Freedom Writers* (87%), *To Sir with Love* (54%), and *Blackboard Jungle* (46%) ranked highest as films that helped students to understand learners. Students shared that teachers should “really try to understand and respect each student to get them to understand.” Responses to prompt five suggest that *Freedom Writers* (50%) helped them to think about curriculum and that “relating subjects to every day life will help students learn better.” They also indicated that teaching requires understanding the contextual factors that impact student learning. Responses indicate support that *Freedom Writers* (90%), *To Sir with Love* (73%), and *Blackboard Jungle* (61%) provide good examples of teachers who are able to work through moral and ethical issues.

With respect to helping students understand strategies for working with administrators, the films *Freedom Writers* (61%) and *Music of the Heart* (43%) ranked the highest. In response to *Freedom Writers*, one student wrote “there is [administrative] support for the teacher as long as their methods are orthodox.” With *Music of the Heart*, responses included that “relations between teachers and administrators can be strained due to budget cuts,” but also that teachers and administrators sometimes "come together for a common cause," and that administrators are “supportive to a point.”
It is interesting to note that, while 50 percent of the films viewed and discussed ranked consistently high across all categories, *Freedom Writers* consistently ranked highest across all categories and was recommended by 98 percent of the respondents. Some of the other films recommended by over 50 percent of the students were *October Sky* (67%), *Pay it Forward* (65%), and *To Sir with Love* (63%).

Responses to the open-ended prompt, “As a result of watching this film, I have the following insights about teaching...” suggest that students became *more aware* of many dimensions to teaching: tensions that can exist within schools and in relationships; feelings of isolation, particularly in the face of unsupportive administrators (as in *Up the Down Staircase* and *Teachers*); the importance of having teachers as student advocates (as in *Pay it Forward* and *Music of the Heart*); and the importance of adapting curriculum to the needs and interests of students.

Students also began to understand the impact that stress can have in a teacher’s life, particularly for new teachers (as in *Freedom Writers*, *Blackboard Jungle*, and *To Sir with Love*). They also began to see that effective teaching can take many forms and embrace many styles and personalities; however, effective teachers are persistent in their attempts to reach students and embrace hope and change (as in *October Sky* and *Freedom Writers*).

**Film discussion worksheets.** Film worksheets primarily served as a means to help students prepare for class discussions but also assisted us in determining what they learned overall about teaching as a result of watching and discussing the films. Responses to the question *What did you learn about teaching as a result of watching and discussing this film?* were analyzed through coding and allowing the following themes to emerge: teacher dispositions, teacher expectations, and teacher attitudes. Table 3 lists these themes along with students’ quotes to support these salient themes. Overall, as a result of watching Hollywood films, pre-service teachers learned that teaching is personally and professionally demanding and is, plain and simple, hard work that requires both preparation and perseverance.
Table 3. Themes from Film Discussion Worksheets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Students’ Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher attitudes</td>
<td>you can’t make everyone happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you can’t help or change all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>even the best of intentions are sometimes not enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher dispositions</td>
<td>be inspirational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>think big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be selfless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teachers should take chances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teaching requires self-awareness, resiliency, courage, strength of character, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>motivating self-talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher expectations</td>
<td>adjust teaching styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provide consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>have good assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>try different methods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Themes and anecdotal evidence were reviewed across data that included the surveys and worksheets with respect to the three overarching research questions guiding this study: 1) What are preservice teachers’ beliefs about education? 2) What changes occurred to preservice teachers’ beliefs
What are preservice teachers' beliefs about education? An analysis of the pre- and post survey data themes (Table 2) and worksheet themes (Table 3) reveals that, after the film pedagogy, students’ beliefs relative to the roles of teachers and the function of schools shifted. They now viewed schools and school personnel as having broader functions and roles as well as demanding responsibilities that went beyond the local school context or just making curriculum “fun.” While many of the films depicted teachers interacting with parents and community outside of the classroom, students’ beliefs about teacher expectations pointed more directly to being effective in the classroom. By the end of the course, pre-service teachers’ views about K-12 students became more tempered in that they recognized that “some kids don't want to be fixed or helped,” but it is a teacher’s responsibility to continue to reach out, for “at any moment, someone might be looking for a mentor and you might be the key.” Finally, the pre-service teachers shifted in their thinking about administrators from just being local enforcers of school policy to having external responsibilities.

While many students expressed idealism about teaching, they began to see, from the films, that a teacher’s best intentions might not always be well received by students, parents, or administrators. Additionally, they began to see that many factors can impact teaching and learning, both in and outside of the classroom, and that teacher effectiveness, e.g. ‘getting through to students’ and creating an environment for learning, can be very challenging.

What changes occurred to pre-service teachers' beliefs over the course of a semester? In general, students’ responses became less generalized and more specific and articulate. Additionally, it is clear that they had a more realistic view about teaching as reflected in comments such as “teaching is not all fun and games.” Post-survey and worksheet responses reveal an awareness of the complexity and demands of teachers and administrators, the diversity of school climate and students, and the difficulties and challenges that can arise from student/teacher/administrator interactions. It is clear to see that they had awareness about the emotional and moral struggles of teachers from watching the films. As such, there was awareness that teaching can be personally and professionally demanding and that it requires self-awareness, resilience, courage, sacrifice, and ongoing motivating self-talk and reflection.
Students acknowledged that certain dispositions might be critical to being an effective and enduring teacher. The number of students' comments relative to 'dispositions' suggests that they view teaching as a construct of relationships and that these relationships (to self and others) are shaped by many influences.

**What can pre-service teachers learn about education as a result of watching the Hollywood films about teaching?** From the data analyses, we can conclude that students learned the following from film pedagogy: 1) that curriculum should be relevant to students' lives and 2) that teachers need to be idealistic yet realistic, to be able to adapt, and to be responsive to students and settings. In addition, as they watched the films, they became aware of how much time teachers devote to thinking about and meeting with their students outside of class. Finding balance between one's personal and professional life became the subject of many classroom discussions. Undoubtedly, the films helped the students to understand the importance of having a passionate commitment to students in ways that will not lead to a sense of hopelessness and despair.

Discussing the balancing of work and life was important as many of the students' comments reflected an idealist stance toward being a teacher. This stance is consistent with the portrayal of teachers as 'saviors' or 'heroes' (Burnaford & Hobson, 2001; Lowe, 2001) and the images of teachers in many Hollywood films such as *Freedom Writers*, *Blackboard Jungle*, *Music of the Heart*, and *October Sky*. Based on the findings from this study, it is apparent that film pedagogy can allow for reflection on the archetypal roles assigned to teachers in films and in the culture as well as opposing and stereotypical views of teachers (good teacher/bad teacher). Furthermore, film pedagogy may also permit the development of strategic thinking with preservice teachers relative to pedagogy and other professional responsibilities.

Films such as *Music of the Heart* and other films with female lead teacher characters can also elicit important discussions about gender and teaching. One of the limitations of the study was that discussions, worksheets, and survey questions did not specifically address issues of age, race, class, and gender relative to teachers. Additional guiding questions for future studies using film pedagogy may include: 1) How can films assist beginning teachers to better understand school culture and politics? 2) How do the images of teachers in films impact personal and cultural perceptions of teachers and
teaching? and 3) How are teachers perceived similarly or differently in films due to gender, race, and class? Hollywood films, as presented in this study, may be a starting point for further discussion with preservice teachers as they learn about their “political, ethical, [pedagogical,] and managerial roles” (Hobson & Burnaford, 2001, p. 231).

**Conclusion**

In taking a holistic look at the findings, it can be concluded that film pedagogy in this study allowed pre-service teachers to gain more awareness of their beliefs about teaching and to critically examine their views about education. Overall, students’ responses regarding film pedagogy were favorable; they appreciated seeing examples of teaching philosophies in action and learning about teaching through engaging stories. Hopefully, they will remember some of these powerful stories as they proceed toward becoming teachers.

As a result of film pedagogy in the course of one semester in an undergraduate teacher education course, we believe that the integration and discussion of selected films about teachers afforded preservice teachers unique opportunities to critically examine the four areas of responsibilities (instruction, assessment, classroom environment, and professional responsibilities). The number of films presented should depend on the type of course, the level of the course, the duration of course, the course content, and the allotted class time. Including fewer films may offer opportunities for more in-depth discussion and comparison of films; however, including more films, as it occurred in this study, may lead to a greater understanding of the genre of teacher films.

The online surveys were a convenient, safe/secure, and accessible way to document learning. Worksheets could also be posted online, within online course management systems, to allow for digital data collection and secure storage. Other forms of assessment regarding student learning about films could take the form of a course blog or course journals.

Film pedagogy in teacher education reinforces some national trends within teacher education that support early intervention and examination of pre-service teachers' beliefs in ways that can help them problematize the practices of K-12 schooling (NCATE, n.d.; Ryan & Annah, 2009). As Grauer (1988) concluded, pre-service teachers' beliefs are a strong indicator about their willingness to learn and be
open. It is, therefore, important that introductory education coursework and experiences present pre-service teachers with opportunities to both examine and re-shape their beliefs and think more critically about the multitude of roles, responsibilities, and challenges facing teachers, students, administrators, and schools.

Discussion-based strategies that are aligned with film pedagogy are recommended to enable the critical analyses of films. New films, such as *Social Networking* and even *Bad Teacher*, may provoke important discussions about the role of teachers with respect to technology and relationships with students, as well as how negatively teachers are often portrayed in the media today.
References


