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THE PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL AND TEACHER  
IN AMERICAN FILMS OF THE 1990s

A Dissertation Proposal  
presented for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree  
in the Department of Leadership & Counselor Education  
The University of Mississippi

by

ARLEEN B. DOWD

January 27, 2012

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined how public secondary schools and educators were portrayed in American films of the 1990s. Thirty films were selected for study that were produced and released in the decade of the 1990s. Content analysis and a “Film Analysis Form” produced answers to eight questions regarding the learning environments, portrayal of educators and students, the academic and life lessons taught, and positive or negative statements about education in the films of this decade.

The results showed a series of complex environments, educators, students, and academic and life lessons delivered. An assessment of the positive and negative portrayal provided more negative views of the public secondary school than positive ones.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All is right with the world now that this is done. And it could not have been completed without those who inspired me and encouraged me to forge ahead for that sense of accomplishment that comes with the completion of a life goal.

First, I appreciate my University of Mississippi academic team: my director, Dr. Timothy Letzring, my committee: Dr. Jim Payne, Dr. Susan McClelland and Dr. S. Ryan Niemeyer, my support logicians: Michelle Wallace, Kim Chrestman, and Ann Mason. Also, I thank the Oxford School District, my colleagues and the students of Oxford who encouraged me all the way.

Secondly, I thank all the outliers who have for a very long time charged me with the desire to learn and to explore education in film. Dr. Colby Kullman, my second birth mother and friend, my sister muses Marge and Clyde, Anne Steel, Warren Steel, Amy Beckham, Dr. Peter Rutkoff, Dr. Robert F. Mirabella, Ada Hopkins, Dr. Paul Goggans, Dr. Jack Barbera, Dr. William Leary, Dr. Ron Partridge, Bruce Iglauer, Virginia and Ben Smith, my Alabama National Guard brethren – especially Millsaps' RODD, the retiree's summer lunch club members, Ozma, Boon, and the Whippoorwill family of Honey Hill and Honey Mountain. Also, I am grateful to my parents, Tim and Linda Dowd. This collection of people was my cloak. Three amazing women, Paulette Logwinuk, Cassandra Shidler, Patricia Aschoff, went before me and possessed the goal of advancing their education. They were compassionate listeners and enthusiastic cheerleaders. As I realize this achievement, I must acknowledge how they guided me. I accomplish this goal now in their honor. The grand inspiration for the idea for this research

came from Bob King, my former principal. He showed the film *Stand and Deliver* at a staff development meeting at Oxford Junior High. At a break in the teacher's lounge, Bob told me to keep chopping apples. Jaime Escalante chopped apples as he grabbed the attention of his at risk students and taught them fractions. To me, this was Bob King's confirmation that my teaching, far from the traditional method, was working. This compliment was so rich and unusual from the quiet man who rarely gave praise.

I came to Oxford for the first time on Phyllis Laszlo's dime. She told me if I ever came here, I would discover that this is the place I should be. She was my teacher at Barry College in Miami. She allowed me to design a Southern Studies course that she taught, Faulkner heavy. She was right. When I came here, I knew that I had to stay, to go to school and to live in Oxford, Mississippi. I needed to be where Faulkner lived. Every morning I walk the square and bid good morning to the statue of Faulkner and the spirit of Faulkner as it overlooks the business of Oxford town. To myself, I say "almost." While my academic studies have strayed from the sole study of Faulkner, I have thrived in this town in part because of him.

Ultimately the greatest reverence must go to Martha Sellers Dowd, my mother—a Great White and a woman warrior. While she never attained all she wanted educationally for herself, she made certain that I had the opportunity to do so. With her death, she trusts me to complete the work she began in me.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Public secondary school and educators in American Films are a featured landscape of film now and since its creation as a communication medium. Film is an artifact of culture. This landscape reveals teachers and students in their natural habitat engaged or not in instruction and learning. The learning environment, its educators, and the educated may be depicted as negative or positive. The educational setting as portrayed in popular American film of the 1990s merits study as it reflects cultural values and expectations.

Over the last fifty years several authors have studied the portrayal of education and educators in film. Schwartz (1963) examined how American movies depict teachers, students, schools, and education in general from 1931-61. His detailed account of the world of education in film provided some information about whether the portrayals were favorable or unfavorable. He found that American films display unfavorable portraits of education more often than favorable ones.

In a six decade study of thirty-six films, Wells and Serman (1998) learned how Hollywood has portrayed both public and private K-12 school in feature films. Teachers, found as heroes, try to save students through motivation and inspiration. With a few exceptions principals are mean-spirited, incompetent, and not generally supportive of the process of



education. Public schools are dangerous and violent places while private ones are stifling places with emotionally effete students.

Hinton (1994) used a smaller lens and assessed the portrayal of higher education in films from 1960-1990. He studied the films, their critical reaction, and how each film may have expressed opinions about education. Like Schwartz (1963), Hinton found the portrayal of higher education to be a negative one. Furthermore, he contended that the higher educational experience to be anti-intellectual and not at its core educational.

Studying the portrayal of teachers in nine films from a fifty year time period, Epstein, Rosenberg, and Smith (1991) looked at the positive and negative qualities of the images. It was their thesis the images would be negative ones. Graduate students in Education completed a 27-item questionnaire and rated the teachers. Epstein et al. (1991) found that although teachers were portrayed as dedicated, they were often poorly trained and not inspirational to the viewers.

In another study, Dalton (1999) examined the curriculum of Hollywood films sampling films from a sixty year period that featured the educational experience. She combines a culturally based study with Huebner's (1975) five value frameworks of curriculum. Specifically, she identified two models: the good teacher and the bad teacher. Through these images, she then evaluated the pedagogy of the educators. Despite helping prepare young people for the world, the Hollywood teachers were not effective in working with students to effect a lasting change in the world. Dalton found that Hollywood has missed the opportunity to project an idealized teacher student relationship.

A comparison of the portrayal of teachers in a sampling of nine American movies with recent trends in the public perception and opinion of teachers was the focus of a study by

Thomsen (1993). Thomsen used a fantasy theme analysis by Bormann (1982). This fantasy theme analysis is a technique that communicators use to create myth that essentially engages the listener. The most recognizable fantasy type scenario is good versus evil. The good teacher fights against the evil of the world. Beyond this analysis, Thomsen looked at benchmark trends from the Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa polls 1969-1990 which indicated a less than positive perception of schools, teachers, and the teaching profession through the 1980s.

Raimo, Devlin-Scherer, and Zinicola (2002) indicated that films “can serve as a memorable way to convey information about the role of a teacher” (p. 314). In this study the authors categorized themes of the films, made implications for the education of teachers, and suggested both realistic and good roles for teachers in future films. They identified nine teacher types to include the teacher as guardian of culture and liberator and the teacher as maverick. Raimo et al. (2002) used twenty-two film sources from 1939-1999. They found that teachers do respond to their environment and work within these environments to effect change. But change does not always happen. Further, they said that films are not substitutes for real school life, but provide a vehicle for the discussion about the teacher and the teacher’s role. They conclude with a wish list of films yet to be made as they found much repetition in the cinematic teacher films.

Debunking the myth of the great teacher, Heilman (1991) described the juxtaposition of the great teacher in the white hat and an oppositional force, typically an administrator in the dark one. He contended that the cinematic great teachers are rarely spotted teaching on screen. John Keating of *Dead Poets Society* is the film upon which he based most of his discussion, although he also mentions Jean Brody of *The Prime of Miss Brody*. He said that instead of being great

teachers, these teachers are performers who play for the student masses and not for collegial praise.

This study will address the decade of the 1990s in American films. The decade is plentiful with films featuring the public secondary school and educators. Each of the films can be noted and analyzed for content about educators and education.

The study of each of the 30 films may reveal a change in the positive and negative conclusions of the aforementioned studies or simply reinforce the status quo.

### Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the public secondary school, its educators and students, as they are presented in commercially released American films of 1990 through 1999. In this study, 30 films, tragedies and comedies, are discussed by genre as well as positive or negative features, then compared and contrasted.

### Research Questions

1. How are the secondary learning environments—the schools, portrayed in films of the 1990s?
2. How are the educators portrayed in the films of the 1990s?
3. How are the educated portrayed in the films of the 1990s?
4. What academic lesson does the educator teach?
5. How does the educator teach the academic lesson?
6. What life lesson does the educator teach?
7. How does the educator teach the life lesson?
8. What positive or negative statements can be made about secondary public education when assessed through the lens of the films of the 1990s?

## Methodology

The method of analysis used in this qualitative historical study using a content analysis methodology was based on a review of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included the 30 films. Secondary sources included books and periodicals, dissertations and papers. Krippendorff (2003) has described content analysis of the text's images and symbols. Altheide (1996) has noted "documents are studied to understand culture—or the process and the array of objects, symbols, and meanings that make up social reality shared by members of a society" (p. 2). Multiple kinds of media, including film make up the documents about which he speaks. Films that feature the classroom and teachers are of relevance because these are experiences all Americans have shared. These are part of the common social reality. Mayring's (2000) three step process and Barone and Eisner's (1997) seven features of arts based educational inquiry have lent helpful ways of demystifying the film text. Content analysis of the film based on a researcher-made Film Analysis Form was the research technique employed.

## Limitations of the Study

Berger (1995) has noted "what a person sees in a film is determined, to a certain extent, by what he or she brings to the film" (p. 11). I bring twenty-seven years of secondary educational experience to the analysis of the films. My perceptions are from actual experience and not simply scholarly evidence. My experience as an educator is in the public school setting. My experience as the educated in kindergarten through college is Catholic. This mixture could be perceived as a limitation in this study.

## Definition of Terms

For the purpose of the clarification of this study, the following terms are defined.

Comedy	In this study, comedy has been defined as a film that treats theme and character with humor (Davies, 1980).
Commercially released	These are films that were widely distributed to mainstream movie theaters.
Educated	In this study the terms: the learners, the students, and the educated will be used interchangeably.
Educators	Teachers, principals, assistant principals, and counselors will make-up the discussed educator population.
Learning environment	This term includes the school, the educators, and educated.
Lesson	The purpose of the instruction taught by the educator will be identified as the lesson.
Secondary School	The public school grades will include 9 through 12.
Tragedy	In this study, tragedy has been defined as a work of drama showing protagonist dealing with struggle resulting in a tragic or unhappy ending (Davies, 1980).

### Organization of the Study

The study consisted of six chapters, the first being the introduction. In the introduction, I presented a case for studying commercially released films by decade. In Chapter Two, I provided a review of the pertinent literature about film study as well as the study of popular film in the 1990s. This literature gave an historical context of this decade and the rationale for the study of the 1990s decade. In Chapter Three, I described the methodology and the Film Analysis Form. In Chapter Four, I summarized the films. In Chapter Five, I analyzed these 30 films via

content analysis and the Film Analysis Form. I also provided an explanation of a positive or negative view of the learning environment. In Chapter Six, I made conclusions and recommendations for further reflection on secondary education, its teachers and students in American film. Decade comparisons with historical analysis may point to trends and forecast future themes and concerns displayed in school films.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

From antiquity people used pictures to tell their histories and their personal stories. Reading these pictures, anthropologists, historians, and philosophers, and other great thinkers have learned how lives were lived. These pictures have been drawn on varied venues to include the cave, the pyramid, the temple, the totem, the cathedral, the canvas, the wall, the page and the silver screen. These pictures have been drawn in many forms and genres: primitive etchings, hieroglyphics, characters, the masque, a diorama, the opera, the symphony, the soliloquy, the couplet, the novel, the hula, the ballet, and the film frame. With stone, brush, signature, note, word, step and celluloid, these stories have been told by their tellers—everyman artist, writer, composer, poet, choreographer, and film maker. These story makers have told of life and death, conquests, ceremony and ritual and many other facets of culture within a community. They have revealed the value of learning and in the modern era, an appreciation of and reverence for education and educators.

Film is an artifact of culture. Berger (1995) has noted that films “reveal or reflect about the societies in which they were produced” (p. 1). Films have social and political dimensions and have something to teach if analysis is applied to them. It is possible to analyze to the presentation of secondary school and educators from an ethical perspective. What is being done right or wrong, positively or negatively? If the analysis of the films is correct, Berger suggested, and then perhaps we can have a “more profound understanding of ourselves and our society”

(p. 18). Reinforcing the notion of the value of film, Hinton (1994) has said, “That films not only mold and reflect current opinion, they stand as living sociological documents, pieces of frozen time that preserve for the present and future concerns of the past” (p. 3). If films are a document of an era, a decade, then they merit study as if in a time capsule. Jarvie (1970) said that there is a relationship between the society that produces a film and a society created in the film. He questions the accuracy of the reflection of society in film and suggests content analysis must be conducted in order to understand the messages within films.

A content analysis of films portraying education and educators by decade has not been fully explored in the research realm and may reveal if the educational experience in film is a positive or negative one. One of the most common experiences Americans share is that of education. Films that deal with the educational experience are films a mass audience can relate to and will very likely be of a commercial success. Eight studies have been focused on education in film. Dalton (1999), Epstein, Rosenberg, and Smith (1991), Heilman (1991), Hinton (1994), Raimo, Devlin-Scherer, and Zinicola (2002), Schwartz (1963), Thomsen (1993), and Wells and Serman (1998) have cast both wide and narrow nets of inquiry, but none has focused on a decade to see where that research might lead.

Schwartz (1963) examined nearly five hundred films from 1931-1961. He looked at the ways teachers, students, schools and education in general are depicted in American movies. Using screenings and reviews, he found favorable and unfavorable portrayals. Education, Schwartz believed, is a social institution and the instructional process is part of the socialization process. Surveying the previous renditions of education in the mass media, Schwartz surmised the portrayals were unfavorable. He recognized teachers as the largest professional group in



American society and because of this merit deeper analytic reflection. Prior to 1963, Schwartz found that criticism about education in mass media was prevalent. The unfavorable appraisal, he contended contributed to problems within the institution which is a powerful conclusion. He provided several definitions of unfavorable portrayals of educators. His methodology was based on a clear and reliable definition of education as well as a systematic and descriptive analysis of film.

Schwartz (1963) appraised the school's unfavorable portrayal first by examining the goals of education in his collection of films. The first goal, presented in two-thirds of the studied films, is that the purpose of education was to train obedience and compliance with societal norms. For the remaining one third of the films the goal was education and professional and individual development. Teachers were tasked with inculcating the expected norms. When discovery education was the goal of the teacher, the result was often "physical danger and ostracism" especially in science fiction films (p. 37).

Schwartz (1963) noted problems in the school to include parental and community hostility, unsatisfactory facilities, and discrimination. Teacher and institution failed when prevailing wisdom about the world as a beautiful and good place met a challenge of that belief. Often teachers encountered political corruption and fought it with mixed results. Teachers often objectified limits by confronting community and parental objection to the freedom to teach topics disapproved by the community. Schwartz observed that persistent teachers did often find success. In some rare cases there were positive relationships between the school, parents, and community. Schwartz (1963) elaborated on another unfavorable category—inadequate resources and facilities. In instances where facilities were not up to standard, students sponsored events

rather than taxation afforded the change in the physical environment. The subject of discrimination based on race or ethnicity occurred frequently in the films 1931-61.

Discrimination toward someone whose beliefs diverged from the norm was also common.

Interpersonal relationships and activities such as sports and theatrical endeavors comprised another category. Students who participated in sports, a kind of rite of passage, changed their perception by others. But athletes generally embodied traditional values and beliefs, thus forcing outliers to join their ranks. Theatrical diversions unified student bodies. In these categories, education was more favorable than unfavorable.

Study and research as conducted by teachers and students was very different. Research by teachers often ended tragically or ended in the teacher/researcher's humiliation. There was a positive correlation between the student and his research which directly contradicted the portrayal of teachers and their research.

Schwartz (1963) disclosed challenges in the relationships within the educational setting. Teachers, administrators and students were not always in synchronicity. Often administrators erected obstacles for teachers that were later removed once the teacher's purpose was understood. More favorable than unfavorable relationships between teachers and students existed in several films. Teachers work in the parental or counseling role with students. With regard to discipline and violence, Schwartz noted harsh discipline, even cruelty in some films. Several films portrayed an exchange of violence between teachers and students. Nevertheless, Schwartz persisted in the contention that much of the relationship issue in the school setting was unfavorable.

Schwartz (1963) concluded that in all categories of inquiry the portrayal of schools was unfavorable. Unfavorable portrayals of teachers and students far outweighed favorable ones. Schwartz summarized that, “a content analysis of American film dealing with education is implicitly; therefore, an examination of the ways in which one social institution, education, is viewed by another, the film industry” (pp. 108-109).

With the school as social institution in mind, Wells and Serman (1998) began their research with an indictment saying, “if movies were our primary source of information on the state of American education, teacher shortages in urban schools would skyrocket” (p. 181). They concurred with Schwartz in the unfavorable view of urban schools. City schools teem with uninspired troubled kids on a down and out path in life. Their private school counterparts are filled with spoiled, arrogant children just as troubled in their own elite way.

In the school environment, Wells and Serman (1998) have observed that hope rests on the shoulders of the heroic teacher who must take on the whole system. The researchers expressed concern that those films can hardly be used as recruitment tools. On the contrary, these films might disengage anyone interested in the teaching profession.

Wells and Serman (1998) studied thirty-six films from 1939-1997. Their examination focused on American public and private K-12 institutions as present in popular film and studied the images of schools, students and educators. They found the heroic teachers as the central theme of the films over the near six decades. They noticed two general patterns: the teachers win despite various obstacles or the teacher makes a Pyrrhic victory—one riddled with set backs and hard lessons.

Schools, Wells and Serman (1998) reasoned, are dangerous places. The teacher heroes are idealists who often entertain resignation because of the difficult times and conditions they face. The instructional leader or administrator may watch the heroic teacher as he faces the gang members in the student body or otherwise delinquent members of school community. Sometimes administrators forced unmotivated teachers who need attitude adjustments. Conversely, administrators may be the most villainous beings on campus running a drug operation from the campus basement or simply abusing children psychologically with insulting remarks or harsh treatment.

Wells and Serman (1998) commented on both public and private institutions. Public schools are war zones while private ones are oppressive places. Public schools are infested with social problems: delinquents, minority issues, sex, drugs, rock 'n roll, and currently rap music. Teachers in these institutions are warriors. Private schools may not have the dangerous presence of criminal youth, but possess just as powerful a malicious force—the bully in the ivy edifice. They conclude with a discussion of the business of the film industry which Schwartz identified as a social institution. Wells and Serman maintained that the industry may oppose traditional educational values and put forth an unfavorable view of education for the commercial benefits and the prurient interests of the audience.

Schwartz (1963) and Wells and Serman (1998) covered what was a significant mass of films, then a lengthy time period, respectfully. Hinton (1994) narrowed the research approach to thirty years, fifty-four films, and a higher education rather than the K-12 interest. He conjectured that the institution of higher education had fallen out of favor especially after the upheaval that was in the sixties and seventies.

In discussing film, Hinton (1994) stated that media has the power to mold public opinion. Elaborating on that notion, he proposed that commercially successful film can change and direct beliefs and attitudes. He examined United States feature films from 1960-1990 and gave special attention to what the content of the films said as well as the film's reception by critics and the public. He asserted that "films function both as mirrors and molders of society's thought" (p. 6). Using several questions, he reflected on trends, the changing nature of higher education, character, and types of school experiences. Hinton summarized that movies have not been kind to higher education. In fact, films have been more negative than positive.

Hinton (1994) made five observations about higher education as presented in feature film. The classroom seemed to be a minor player in college life. A great deal of attention was dedicated to the personal problems of the faculty and the students. Some professors were not in touch with reality and thus failed to relate well to students. In higher education films, administrators were cold and unfeeling, obsessed by money and the university image rather than concerned about the students. The experience of college did not generally prepare students for the greater challenge of life.

Overall, Hinton (1994) reasoned that the repeated powerful images of a negative experience at the college/university level made for the collective force of that image. While some world changes are well documented in cinema, Hinton pointed out that higher education's diversity was ignored. Distrust for the higher educational institution was a theme. The extra-curriculum—that which transpired out of or around the classroom was of greater interest and

substance than the “in” classroom academic pursuits. Hinton (1994) declared how unfortunate a circumstance it is that higher education is not in popular cinema vogue when college is such a central experience in life.

So while Schwartz (1963) and Hinton (1994) looked at an ample collection of films, and Wells and Serman (1998) spread their scope over six decades, Epstein, Rosenberg, and Smith (1991) chose nine films spanning a fifty year period 1939-1989. Their survey and statistically based study began with a query of twenty in-service teachers. These teachers were tasked with arriving at a list of characteristics of a good teacher. Epstein, et al. developed a questionnaire about the portrayal of teachers pedagogically, didactically, and personally. They wanted to know if teachers were shown as earnest, dedicated, poorly trained, inept or dull. Additionally, they posed four yes or no questions about the film viewer’s knowledge of the type of teacher and the viewer’s desire to be like that teacher.

In the final assessment, Epstein, et al. (1991) found viewers not wanting to emulate the teachers portrayed and not desiring to become teachers based on the cinematic portrayal. Epstein, et al. determined that the overall assessment of the teacher portrayals was negative. While some survey responders might have liked to experience the classroom teacher, they felt that the genre of the teacher film would not convince them to be a classroom teacher. The researchers solely examined teacher portrayal and did not look at the portrayals of the other educators or at the educational institution or education in general.

Teachers and their curriculum were the primary interest of Dalton (1999). In her research, she explored fifty-eight films from 1936-1996. American films with commercial release were covered and included the following genres: drama, comedy, musical, horror, science-fiction and

action-adventure. When films were not readily available, Dalton used summaries and reviews. No particular distinction was made for grade level or the realm of public or private institution. “Knowledge [about education and the school] is created by constructs of popular culture played out in the mass media” (p. 2). Dalton believed that films about schools have their own “Hollywood curriculum” (p. 16). Using Huebner’s (1975) five frameworks of valuing curriculum, Dalton recounted the cinematic school curriculum through four interpretative lenses. She observed the good teacher, the bad teacher, the gendered teacher—the teacher from the gender perspective, and students and their pedagogy. Huebner identified five value frameworks of curricular thought: technical, scientific, aesthetic, political and ethical. These value frameworks provided multiple axes to explore teachers as they appeared in film.

Dalton’s (1999) good and bad teachers were in counterpoint. The good teacher was an outsider disliked by colleagues. The bad teacher was liked or not, but was in good favor with the administration because he followed the curriculum. Administrators did not favor the good teacher and tended to personalize the curriculum to make it pertinent to the lives of the students. Students of the good teacher were motivated and inspired to learn, while students of the bad teacher were bored and just getting by in their acquisition of knowledge.

There were more Hollywood teachers according to Dalton (1999) that functioned at a constructive level of greatness than to their bad teacher counterpart. These teachers jeopardized their jobs by not following school policies. They took the standard curriculum and transformed it to a one more useful to the students. Ready to take risks, Hollywood film teachers connected with students personally and tried to ease the transition from the school world to the real world. The students, often at-risk, were driven to change by the good teacher. The majority of

Hollywood educators in Dalton's work who are "good" are "painted against a backdrop of institutional woe" (p. 16).

Because of the contradiction of good teacher in the non-supportive educational environment, Dalton deemed the teacher as radical. While he may have newly shaped the children, the good teacher did little to alter the school environment. But Dalton (1999) assured the viewer that the power of this popular culture medium is significant to inspire those viewers and to allow a substantial reassessment of the educational experience for that same viewer. A continued study of the inspired and uninspired student, Dalton lamented is necessary to embrace the full gamut of the ramifications of the Hollywood curriculum on the learners.

Unlike Dalton (1999), Epstein, Rosenberg, and Smith (1991), Hinton (1994), Schwartz (1963), and Wells and Serman (1998), Thomsen (1993) expressed more research concern on the Hollywood message about teachers to the viewers of popular film. Using negative impressions from Gallup and Phi Delta Kappa polls from 1969 forward, Thomsen compared the public impression with his interpreted cinematic one. Thomsen bases the film analysis on E. G. Bormann's (1982) fantasy theme analysis and explores the great teacher myth. He suggested that media may be a catalyst strengthening myths that symbolically shape viewers impressions.

Ten films from a sixty year period indicated the propagation of the great teacher myth. How this great teacher approaches the educational mission changes dramatically from 1939's *Goodbye Mr. Chips* to 1988's *Stand and Deliver*. Let it be said that the film educator molds character, helps students to liberate themselves through learning, and tries to motivate students to make good educational and personal choices. Education from the great teacher's perspective is a transformative process according to Thomsen's analysis.



The public's perceptions, however, according to Thomsen (1993) are critical and negative, and may be influenced by Hollywood's cinematic portrayal of educators. Gallup polls indicated that schools are riddled with problems: discipline, drugs, finding good teachers, facility issues and funding issues. In the 1980s and to the 1990s, teachers were consistently viewed as uncommitted, ill-prepared, and incompetent. It was Thomsen's stand that this impression is based in part to the film portrayals of education and educators. If this is a viable contention, then the media's power in codifying the image may be another necessary realm of study. While there may be some great teachers, those are few in a sea of cinematic and actual mediocre educators today.

Positive or negative film characterizations of teachers, Raimo, Devlin-Scherer, and Zinicola (2002) suggested were a "memorable" way to convey information about the role of the teacher (p. 314). By memorable, Raimo, et al. mean that the teacher images have become part of the community consciousness. Raimo, et al. identified five teaching roles: mentor, counselor, information giver, disciplinarian, and motivation. Raimo, et al. used twenty-two films from 1939-1999. Virtually none of these films are different from the lists of previously cited researchers.

At the core, the teachers in these films embrace the unorthodox approach. The cinematic teacher of these films has the ability to plan for students' futures, transform the lives of the students, and change the environment and expectations of pupils and community members. Sometimes the cinematic teacher is a crusader who transforms the curriculum to meet the needs of the students.

Raimo, et al. (2002) hold that the films which feature teachers offer a starting point for reflection—a reflection that will deliver an opportunity to discuss why people choose to be teachers and ultimately how they contribute to the life of the students. Teaching is a highly personal, social activity, where success depends on education. Films of the future, according to Raimo, et al. must portray school reform in action with the power of the individual teacher who prepares and delivers stimulating lessons. Raimo, et al. call for films that illustrate social responsibility of film makers to depict teachers in a realistic setting who deliver pertinent lessons.

Heilman (1991) reflected on one specific type with the caveat that the type may be more common in film and on campuses of educational institutions. John Keating, the teacher star character of the 1989 film *Dead Poets Society* is revered as a great teacher, a maverick, and a Promethean hero. The hero status for this great teacher may be more mythical than actual. Heilman discovered an extraordinary audience response to *Dead Poets Society* that forced him to analyze this enthusiasm.

According to Heilman (1991), Keating was and represented a type of great teacher developed over time in cinema. While on the surface, Keating may seem a positive force of student and institutional change, Heilman claimed this is a myth. Keating was a negative force because he never teaches anything. He performs. He trades rapport with his fellow faculty for popularity with the students. Keating is charismatic and possesses the charm of the hero in the white hat. He works on the emotional needs of the students by supporting their general suspicions that institutions and societies should not be trusted. “Keatings” incite revolt and manipulate their students, but still fill a void in a world in need of educational heroes. Keating

probed consciences knowingly willing to be stirred. It is Heilman's contention that such types may be as necessary on campus as football for financial support and alumni interest. Even though the Keating type may resound as a popular type of teacher, Heilman sees the method of this film teacher as negative.

Other researchers have cast a narrower net upon analysis of schools and educators in popular film. Scull and Peltier (2007) suggested that scholars and educators alike may benefit from the closer study and reflection on films that portray educator and the school environment. Weaver (2009) and Ryan and Townsend (2010) give historical perspectives—the first on the early days of cinema, the second on the days of classic television and popular film. Using a lens based in Christianity, Kozlovic (2007) endorsed viewing film using the tenets of the Christian faith. Finally, Gale and Densmore (2001) engaged a significant and penetrating explication of three films employing the Bourdieu (1997) tool of analysis of fields.

Scull and Peltier (2007) made a case for the value of the study of films that portray educators in the school arena. They contended that viewing by scholars, professional educators, and the general population has a significant social impact. Analyzing, scholars read what film says about “our private and social selves” (p. 13). Scholars help researchers and educational professionals understand the role of teachers and teaching in society. The study of popular film at the undergraduate and graduate level enables future educators to realize society's expectations of teachers. While Scull and Peltier did not discuss how the general population experiences films about education, they attributed much relevance to the study of these films by professionals.

As a means of self-reflection Scull and Peltier (2007) contend, “popular films can help identify problems that educators might have in communicating what they do to the lay public”

(p. 13). As a genre, drama, in particular, was an effective medium for transferring information about the social realm of the school and the educators in it.

Further, Scull and Peltier (2007) gave a sampling with brief commentary of key teaching films that portray both public and private K-12 schools, as well as higher education. They considered the opinions of graduate education students requesting a list of films that focus on the instructors who really teach like in *To Sir with Love* (1967), *Conrack* (1974), *Stand and Deliver* (1988), and *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995). Since other professions have suggested film study of their fields like nursing and law, Scull and Peltier endorsed the same study of films by educators.

Weaver (2009) focused her research on the teacher-student relationship in early cinema, films from 1909-1939. She conjectured the relationship as a romantic one and one in which “teachers and students were beholden to one another, each charged with winning the other over” (p. 9). Inspired by the Academy Award winning 1936 *Our Gang* short, *Bored of Education*, Weaver observed the relationship between the teacher and students began in a classic romantic type with the children presenting the teachers with apples (they do not want to go to school) and the teacher tempting them with ice cream—a significant offering during the Depression era. The bribe worked and thus began an intimate relationship that for the *Our Gang* children is a substitute for family and needed adult companionship and mentorship. Weaver cites Bennett's (1888) notion of the “heart culture” of pupils (p. 39). This is a notion that came from a time when the deepening psychological needs of children were first noted in a scholarly way.

In the early days of cinema, Weaver (2009) noted the teacher-student relationship was an emotional one in which the role of the educator was to rescue the child and therefore, gain the favor and the recognition of the child. Both in drama and comedy, early film makers including

D. W. Griffith painted the teacher as “the student’s savior” thereby garnering and ensuring the student’s love (p. 10). “The presence of the teacher” made “the parents less important” (p. 11).

Often the teacher actually sacrificed his own life by saving the child from drowning, starvation, or moral decadence. Additionally, other risks were certainly characteristic of these teacher-student relationships. Despite barriers of age and position, the teacher-student relationship was portrayed in romantic terms. The teacher was the melodramatic hero/rescuer while the students were “attempting to win the teacher through wooing” (p. 16). This relationship is cinematically evident, but certainly not appropriate. With the Production Code of the 1930s came a sound policy statement about the proper relationship between children and adults that should be displayed in film. A gradual shift was born. A romantic kind of relationship was transposed in the nineties to a fierce mission-focused one.

Ryan and Townsend (2010) reflected on the representation of teachers and students in films and television of the 1950s. Initially they discussed the means of educational inquiry being teacher-centered and student-centered. Their concern arose from the current high-stakes testing phenomena of American education today. The 1950’s progressive United States policy on education was based on the transmission of education from the educator to the student. There is a discrepancy between that method and the discovery learning model endorsed today. Ryan and Townsend use Lindfor’s (1999) definition of inquiry “the act of turning toward another for help in understanding” (p. 45). To illustrate their point, the media windows they employ primarily are elementary school-related episodes of television’s *Leave it to Beaver* and the college setting of the feature film *Teacher’s Pet*. Through these two media examples, Ryan and Townsend

discussed the questioning techniques used by the teachers to illicit both learning and good behavior.

Ryan and Townsend called this the “pretender inquiry” (p. 46) and indicated that it yields positive behavior and some reflective thing by the student. Cinema students of the 1950s including those in *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) were also led to wonder—a process that demands a considerable bit of instructional time. Mr. Dadier, the teacher, makes a conscious effort to assist his students to be independent, critical thinkers through an analysis of “Jack in the Beanstalk” (p. 49). The teacher does not render his own opinion, but encourages the students to do so by giving their own opinion of the story.

Ryan and Townsend considered a small body of the cinematic school house of the 1950s and found the student-centered inquiry approach infrequently visited. They presented the examples of *The Affairs of Dobie Gillis*, *Merry Andrew*, and *Navajo*. In these media representations, the teachers teach using intellectual intimidation, achievement of perfect scores on standard exams and recitations—all of these are on the teacher’s terms.

Drawing on the research of Tyack and Cuban (1995), Ryan and Townsend agreed “that schools are often forces for social stabilization rather than change” (p. 56). What seemed to be emphasized in the 1950s, a caring and moral instructional leader, the teacher, has not changed very much in the modern era. Entertainment media has reinforced the notion of a “caring and generous” (p. 58) educator. Perhaps a reason for a dearth of classroom instruction on the screen in the 1950s is societal confidence in the “pedagogical expertise” (p. 58) of the teacher. This may also be an explanation of why films in the decades since the 1950s have dedicated little

screen time to the class room setting and more time on the teacher-student/teacher-administrator relational plot line.

Kozlovic (2007) directed his research treatise to a celebration of Christianity in the untapped medium of film. He strongly advocated the scholarly need, if not imperative to explore the “sacred cinema” as “a postmodern religious education requires the embracement of this communication media, not its rejection, employing discernment not denial” (p. 195). While he has not referenced any school related models, he did detail the biblical, moral themes, and symbols that have made their way into the plot line of popular film. What Kozlovic did well was discuss how film acts as “moving image culture” (p. 195) for the youth who are so plugged in and turned on to mass media resources this “techno-social reality” (p. 196) communicates and transmits Christian values. He viewed the use of the “pedagogic tool” (p. 196) as a Christian duty. He substantiated this contention by using quotations from the Bible including one from “the Apostle Paul’s advice in Romans 12:2 ‘And be not conformed to this world. But be ye transformed by renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God’” (p. 198). There has been not a particularly Christian angle to the discussion or analysis of films in this research on public secondary education and educators, but there has been an exploration of values society places in the educational setting and most specifically in the hearts, minds, and hands of its educators. American values and Judeo-Christian beliefs are intrinsic to the school setting. That fact cannot be dismissed.

Gale and Densmore (2001) examined in depth three Hollywood teacher film teachers: Johnson from *Dangerous Minds*, Kimble from *Kindergarten Cop*, and Keating from *Dead Poets Society* using a Bourdieu’s (1997) analysis. They support these cinematic pieces as close and

perhaps fully representative of the educational environment. According to Gale and Densmore (2001), Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) together developed field analysis of three fields: the field of the class room, the field of positions, and the field of stances. In each field there is discourse that reveals culture, the interaction of teachers and students, and the practices and expressions of teachers and students. The purpose of the analysis of fields is to query if within the democratic classroom, emblematic in these three films, that respect of individual cultural differences exists and are used to educate and motivate the learner. With Bourdieu's fields are three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. He relates them to *habitus*—attitude, disposition—outlook or tendency. “Cultural capital represents an individual's stored or accumulated ‘wealth of knowledge’ that can be drawn upon to produce more of this wealth” (pp. 603-4). Gale and Densmore acknowledge that not all cultural capital is valued in the classroom, cinematic or actual. The dominant culture can impede marginal groups and limit and constrain access to capital culture.

The three films, *Dangerous Minds*, *Kindergarten Cop*, and *Dead Poets Society* share a teacher new to the school who utilizes non-conventional instructional means to educate and control and an administration that is patently aware that the newcomer is an outlier. While fictitious, the class rooms do provide “the normative view” (p. 605).

Gale and Densmore (2001) called *Dangerous Minds* an “emancipating narrative” (p. 605) in which former Marine, Johnson, the teacher, offers escape from poverty and crime through the study of Bob Dylan's “Mr. Tambourine Man” with the ultimate movement to the more traditional Dylan Thomas' “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (p. 605). Johnson appeals to her students by telling them they have a choice to come to school rather than be victimized by



society. But Gale and Densmore concluded that choice is not available to those who “do not have the cultural capital to secure” it (p. 607). The ultimate state of the minority culture representatives in *Dangerous Minds* is little success and little failure. As Johnson speaks choice, Bourdieu (1997) alludes to games of chance which may offer hope of a miracle to escape “the cultural capital of the dominant groups” (p. 48).

The issue of classroom management plagues Kimble in *Kindergarten Cop*. “Institutional imperatives for physical behavior are not always highly valued by students who possess physical dispositions—bodily functions and behaviors—that are commensurate with their level of maturation” (p. 610). Bourdieu (1997) says “acts of labor are required to turn bodies into social entities” (p. 55) able to conform to school organizational culture. Kimble’s novel approach is to transform his police experience in a “reproduction strategy” (p. 55), a hidden curriculum of management and control of the kindergarteners. The strategy works and the children’s capital is changed as a result of compliance to Kimble’s powerful communication of the expectations and procedures.

In the third film example, Keating in *Dead Poets Society* targets male gender control of emotions. In this insulated and erudite world of the private school, the students are treated in a very civilized and formal manner. The social form of address in “Mr.” This and other formalized controls serve to seal the emotional capital and potential of the student body. But this is an opportunity for Keating to rage against traditional curriculum convention of teaching poetry. Keating inspires the students to feel the passion of poetry even though it involves a gesture of vandalism to the poetry text. Using Bourdieu’s (1997) theory, Gale and Densmore (2001) ranked Keating as part of the conventional group because he teaches within the traditional environment,

albeit using unique methods. Keating, through the students, by reviving the 'Dead Poets Society,' chooses not to conform or teach them to do so. But in the end, it is their choice to embrace a passionate stance in life which for at least one student, results in his death. Defying what is the control—the social capital of this private school environment results in the failure and ultimate removal of the teacher.

Films deliver stories that inform the viewer or reader about culture. Film can be a way of learning about how education functions in a society. It can be a way of teaching teachers how to teach and how not to teach. Upon analysis, films may reveal a positive or negative portrait about school, teachers, and students. The study of films that revolve around the school experience may confirm or dispute society's beliefs or provide a means for improvement or correction of an educational problem.

A content analysis of film that focuses on education and educators by the 1990s decade has not yet been done. Dalton (1999), Epstein, et al. (1991), Hinton (1994), Raimo, et al. (2002), Schwartz (1963), Thomsen (1993), and Wells and Serman (1998) have discussed many films in some cases spanning a sixty year period. The general assessment of education and teachers is an unfavorable one with some exceptions. Heilman (1991) took the specific example of Keating and developed a thorough discussion of type as it applies to teacher. Others have demonstrated perceptiveness in the study of school-related cinema (Scull & Peltier, 2007 Weaver, 2009), and the in depth analysis of fields of relationships between teachers and students (Gales & Densmore, 2001).

In studying the secondary public school and teachers of the 1990s, I have narrowed the lens for the purpose of magnifying the perspective of a concentrated historical era to determine its positive or negative attributes.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Design

This chapter includes a description of the methodology involved in this qualitative historically organized film study of commercially released American films which include a focus on American secondary school grades 9-12 education.

Content analysis has been executed in historical sequence using a protocol of eight questions. I addressed these using an investigator-made Film Analysis Form.

#### Data Collection

Film selection required considerable deliberation. Films selected for this study were released January 1, 1990 through December 31, 1999. A master list of films featuring education for the 1990s contains over eighty films (see Appendix A). I used two comprehensive film and video guidebooks, *Matlin's Movie & Video Guide* (2001) and *Halliwel's Film and Video Guide* (2000) to discover all films containing educational experiences. From this catalog of eighty films, I narrowed it to a list of 30 films set in the secondary environment. Other films now excluded from this study include films set in the following educational realms: elementary school, middle school, Catholic or another parochial school, private school, boarding school, reform school, military school, college or university, adult education, special education, and gifted education. The plethora of films suggested the need for further research. The parameters of this film study were American, secondary, and public.

Narrowing this study to American secondary public education setting made research sense for a manageable sample size of 30 films. Unlike Schwartz's (1963) thirty-year study, this one was more limited in scope. He too focused on Hollywood feature films commercially released in the United States. This study and that of Schwartz do not include documentary educational films. An educator and a student were featured in the American public secondary school setting. Educators were defined as teachers, principals, assistant principals or counselors. The educators educated in the formal academic setting, but may also have educated learners outside that realm.

It was logical and relevant to discuss each film chronologically through the decade to look for developmental themes or progressive educational notions. Positive or negative portrayals of secondary education were discussed in Chapter Five.

### Theoretical Framework

According to Krippendorf (2003), content analysis is the systematic reading and analysis of a text, its images, and its symbols to clarify its meaning. In the circumstance of this study, reading and viewing were used interchangeably as the text is film. For this study, content analysis was executed by examining the films in chronological order of commercial release. I summarized and explicated the answers to the film analysis form.

Feature film as text has merit and meaning as a communication medium. A film can be a cultural document containing symbols and meanings that make up a social reality. That social reality is shared by members of a society (Altheide, 1996). A feature film, while entertaining and commercial, communicates cultural beliefs and practices. Altheide has commented at length on electronic reality, TV and electronic media being such a part of everyday life. And as a viable

and thriving part of life, popular media is a part of actual reality. The media's pocket, one-touch availability enables a reader or viewer in this case, immediate, personalized and intimate connectivity to e-mail as well as expressions of popular culture like film.

In this content analysis, I noted qualities and relationships of the educator, the educated, and the educational setting. The positive or negative nature of those relationships was the subject of the analysis. Providing a model of qualitative content analysis, Mayring (2000) developed three steps of inquiry. Summary, explication, and structuring, the three steps, may be carried out independently or in a combination. The researcher-driven Film Analysis Form results were assembled. I focused primarily on summary, explication of the answers, and analysis.

It is worth noting that arts-based education investigation is viable and current. Barone and Eisner (1997) have explained seven features of arts-based educational inquiry, and by so doing have solidified the value of artistic media, in this specific case film. Their seven features make vivid and viable the questionnaire and its inquiry of these 30 films detailed in the Data Analysis section.

A theoretical framework for taking popular film and examining it as art and then confirming that it has merit in helping educators understand the perception of education may have the power to improve both the setting and transform the perception. Barone and Eisner's (1997) seven features are the creation of a virtual reality, the presence of ambiguity, the use of expressive language, the use of contextualized and vernacular language, the promotion of empathy, the personal signature of the researcher/writer, and the presence of aesthetic form.

In the creation of a virtual reality, Barone and Eisner (1997) talk about arts power to pull the person who experiences into an alternative reality. Eisner (1974), details the viewer's

experience of the virtual world whether the art is choreography or literature. The individual is likened to a traveler to a new world and back as if transported by the artistic work. Through this unique travel experience, the traveler is aware of a new outlook and perspective. “Back on Earth, the voyager is a changed person. Old ways of seeing are negated in favor of a fresh outlook, perspective, paradigm, and ideology” (p. 74). So the art, the narrative, and in this case, the film has the ability to move the viewer into and potentially shape a new vision.

With the presence of ambiguity, feature two, Isner’s (1974) notion that effective authors leave gaps in the text for the reader to become involved in the narrative. Bakhtin (1981) calls this “novelness.” This is a procedure that allows reader and viewer to “enter into a dialogue” (p. 75) with the text. The interaction between viewer or reader gives credence to the conviction that as an experienced educator, I will bring significant interpretive value to the analysis of the films.

In features three and four, Barone and Eisner (1997) describe the importance of expressive language and the use of contextualized and vernacular language. “Writers of literature use language that is metaphorical and evocative” (p. 75). It is writers who create the text for film whether a novel adapted as a screen play or a nonfictional account made into one. The language is literary and therefore reminiscent language. Language, Barone and Eisner contend, must enter the imagination for interpretation. Literary language contains symbols and metaphors; often these are effectively displayed on the cinematic screen. Another facet of artistic language is contextual and vernacular language. Contextual language is language that describes the rich context of the specific scene or locale. The use of words here is inextricably woven into the setting. “Vernacular forms of speech are more likely to be useful in expressing the meaning of school experiences” (p. 76). A marriage of these types of language—contextual and vernacular

as in a description of an educational setting makes for a vibrant and fertile field for the interpretation of the text or film. Discussion of the language of the films, its symbolic and metaphorical meaning, was integral to the analysis of the films.

In the fifth facet, the promotion of empathy, Barone and Eisner (1997) say that empathy can also be a result of arts-based educational inquiry. The reader or viewer in this case achieves inner subjectivity and the ability to promote reconstruction of an empathetic and vicarious view of the character and scenes of an artistic work. The film, as an artistic work, elicits feelings of empathy by connecting the individual viewer and forging for that viewer, a new world view.

It cannot go unnoticed that the author, writer, and filmmaker leave a particular signature on the artistic piece. In the sixth facet, Barone and Eisner (1997) explain that the author has a controlling insight or thesis. While the thesis may be a personal statement, it is a moveable and transforming one because the reader/viewer makes it so. The connectivity between the creative artist and the viewer is both unique and transformative to the viewer.

The final facet of the arts-based educational inquiry say Barone and Eisner (1997) is the presence of aesthetic form. As the author develops his thesis for the work, he arranges the order of the text. Since the format is typically a story, there is a basic pattern followed. Usually the pattern is “the framing of a dilemma” (p. 78), then a troubling circumstance erupts for the protagonist. Complicated events in the middle draw the reader/viewer into the crisis. And in the end, there is a resolution that is not always neat. “By the end of the story—or other kind of arts-based educational inquiry text—its format and contents will serve to create a new vision of certain educational phenomenon” (p. 78).



Barone and Eisner's (1997) seven features lay the theoretical framework for arts-based inquiry, and give a basis for knowing how to understand a work of art as it tells a story. "The two arts-based genres that have gained the most prominence and acceptance are educational criticism and narrative storytelling" (p. 79). Barone (1995) emphasized the power a story has to "entice the reader into a vicarious experience" (p. 84). A viable story can be told cinematically. This has not been a popular concept in the educational community as it is not a traditional research method or vehicle for understanding the educational experience. Novels are a way of telling a story, but so too is film. Barone and Eisner (1997) called the film *Schindler's List* a work of fiction that helps the viewer deeply understand historical events that have taken place. Critical scrutiny needs to be in place to analyze what cinematically has been represented. Similar to the pictures in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," films are ways of knowing and "might be used to help people understand what schooling is about, how teaching may proceed, or what students might be learning" (p. 91). While the medium of film may be a "new form of representation" (p. 91), Barone and Eisner (1997) submit that the new forms must be explored and exploited for greater understanding.

So with this theoretical framework as an axis, I examined 30 American films of the 1990s that focus on the secondary public education realm and the teacher. Analyzing these films has brought a greater understanding about the world of secondary public education.

### Data Analysis

A researcher-developed Film Analysis Form (See Appendix B), contains eight questions on which to base the content analysis of these films. One of the challenges of using these questions was the availability of the actual film. Since the 1990s was a very current era, I found

and watched all of the films. Barone and Eisner's (1997) seven features of arts-based inquiry inform and substantiate the research needed on the aspects of film that include the learning environment, the educational enterprise, the educated, and the positive and negative exchange between the educator and the educated.

I viewed each of the films and rendered summaries in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, I analyzed these 30 films via content analysis and the Film Analysis Form. I also provided an explanation of a positive or negative view of the learning environment. I described and discussed the ramifications of these secondary school cinematic portrayals of the 1990s. The Film Analysis Form contained the following queries.

1. How are the secondary learning environments – the schools, portrayed in films of the 1990s?
2. How are the educators portrayed in the films of the 1990s?
3. How are the educated portrayed in the films of the 1990s?
4. What academic lesson does the educator teach?
5. How does the educator teach the academic lesson?
6. What life lesson does the educator teach?
7. How does the educator teach the life lesson?
8. What positive or negative statements can be made about secondary public education when assessed through the lens of the films of the 1990s?

The summaries and the answers to these eight questions reveal much about the secondary school and teacher in American films of the 1990s.

## CHAPTER 4

### FILM SUMMARIES

I have executed a summary of the films here so that the reader may better understand the analysis that follows in Chapter Five. In chronological order, I have summarized by the film's release date noted to the right of the film title. For each summary, I have provided answers to the essential questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how.

*Class of 1999*

11 May 1990

In this Mark L. Lester film, students at Seattle's Kennedy High School are out of control and are under the supervision of the Department of Educational Defense. Custodial care from the D.E.D. means the experimental placement of three terminator type educators. DED programmed three to educate and discipline. Principal, Dr. Miles Langford willingly takes the placement of the educator droids at Kennedy where a violent incident happens every two hours and thirty-eight minutes. D.E.D. official and MegaTech scientist, Dr. Bob Forrest has reprogrammed these surplus automatons as their former mission was to be battle droid war machines.

*The Class of 1999* is set in a future time where gang ridden communities are located in fire free zones with no police protection. Gang violence and drug use and availability are rampant. The Razor Heads and the Black Hearts rage in and out of school. Recently released from prison, former Kennedy student and Black Heart member, Cody Culp has changed his gang ways and begins to recognize the new teachers have super human attributes to include beyond human physical strength. Cody recruits Christie Langford, the principal's well-behaved and unaffiliated to a gang daughter to assist in the unraveling of the mystery of the new educators.

Three super teachers, Ms. Connors who teaches Chemistry, Mr. Hardin who teaches History, and Mr. Bryles who teaches Physical Education, demonstrate their academic powers and physical dominance within the first few moments in classroom instruction. The gang banger students with a few exceptions conform quickly or die at the hands of the new teachers. As the plot progresses, the machines regress into their former war programming tactics to discipline and educate the students. An all-out war between the students and the three educators ensues.

*Pump Up the Volume*

22 August 1990

Allan Moyle's *Pump Up the Volume* features a teenage shock jock, Hard Harry, who in this persona remains anonymous as he listens to and celebrates albeit vitriolically teenage moaning and broadcasts in secret from the basement of his Paradise Hills, Arizona home. All is not paradise at Hubert H. Humphrey High School where typical adolescents attend or skip classes and experience normal anxieties and challenges.

On the surface, Mark Hunter, the night time DJ, is shy and retiring, but unlike his peer group, he maximizes the emotional turmoil of being a teenager in a most constructive way—broadcasting a radio program where teens may voice their dissatisfaction with their human condition. His radio program touches a need of the student body, but a nerve of the educators employed by the school. Principal Creswood and her staff focus their time and energy on keeping test scores high. In the process, she and her colleagues miss the opportunity to relate to the young people in a meaningful, life-altering way. Discipline is tough as students who would likely score low on the SAT are expelled the first week of school because of dress code violations. Clearly, the punishment does not fit the crime.

As Hard Harry's listeners grow, so too do their problems. One student writes that he is considering suicide and when Hard Harry talks to him on the telephone, he realizes that the kid is serious. Malcolm Kiser commits suicide. The school personnel, especially the guidance counselor, make a vain attempt to open doors to students who might need to talk. As the angst of the students is exacerbated, the principal involves the FCC to determine the identity of the young broadcaster, Mark Hunter who is also the son of the state's new high school commissioner.

*If Looks Could Kill*

15 March 1991

Director William Dear begins *If Looks Could Kill* with the 1991 graduation of Edsel High School in Detroit. As valedictorian Melissa Tyler makes her motivational speech, the student body appears uninspired by her words or by what may come next in life. But for Michael Corben, all students do graduate. He walks, accepts a diploma to which is attached a note that his high school education is incomplete. He failed French. To finish high school, Michael must attend summer school, but that is not an option at Edsel. His only option is expensive and to his parents' chagrin, is earning the missing credits by attending the French Club's trip to France.

The small group of French Club members, chaperoned by Mrs. Grober, make their way to Paris with one significant complication. There are two Michael Corbens—the first, a failed French student from Detroit, the second a highly trained special government agent who is sent to Paris to foil a plot to possess and mint all of Europe's gold to one currency. This plot is conceived by Augustus Steranko and Ilse Grunt.

Assassins kill agent Michael Corbens at the airport. Michael Corbens, the student, replaces the agent and proceeds to have a James Bond like experience complete with beautiful girls, a red Lotus and other spy paraphernalia, and luxury accommodations. In as much as Mrs.

Grober and the French Club members miss Michael, they carry on their misadventure with a collection of bus drivers connected to the plot developers. Nazi-like employees of Augustus capture the French teacher, misidentified as a double agent from the Cold War, and her students, the mercenaries and target them for elimination.

Michael, who by now has accepted part of his new identity, uses his spy tools to free the French teacher, his fellow student travelers, and avert the poisoned champagne conspiracy, aimed at all the European heads of state. Michael grows from his fatuous self to a more mature person who sets as his goal at the conclusion of the film to learn a little French.

*Class Act*

5 June 1992

Randal Miller directs *Class Act* beginning the story with the end in mind. Duncan Pinderhughes and Michael “Blade” Brown are new students at Higgins High School in a southern California suburb. Duncan needs to transfer from his ivy prep high school where he has achieved a perfect grade point average and ACT score to a school where he can take gym class and earn a pass/fail grade. Blade has just earned his ticket out of jail. The generous justice system gives Blade a chance to prove himself academically and stay out of jail. Formerly, Blade experienced no success in school. Accidentally, photographs attached to their records are switched, and so too are their identities and also their treatment by school personnel.

Once Duncan and Blade have accepted their fates, they agree to work together to achieve their goals. Duncan must pass physical education and Blade must maintain passing grades to stay out of jail. They assist one another by tutoring subjects like being a thug and being an intellectual. Principal Kratz and the other educators facilitate learning for each of the young men. Duncan experiences the less than hospitable “at-risk” curriculum environment and educators

while Blade learns in the honors and advanced placement environment with highly qualified instructors. A subplot of drug dealing within the school by student “Wedge” brings Duncan and Blade together as a force to change this dysfunctional part of their learning environment. In the process, Duncan and Blade become friends, rap together at an anti-drug rally, attain unlikely girlfriends, and graduate to attend reputable universities.

*Zebrahead*

23 October 1992

Frank Cody High School in Detroit, as director Anthony Drazen sees it, is like many other schools in America. It is a microcosm of the multicultural educational canvas that is America. While that is the case at FCHS, the tensions there are real and black and white. These animosities exist primarily within the lead character, Zach who is a white, Jewish male. His best friends are black. It is in the black community that Zach feels the most comfortable.

Social tensions at school and in the Detroit neighborhood arise from Zach’s affections for a midterm transfer student from Brooklyn, Nikki who is black. Principal, Mr. Cimino is more partial to white students than to black students. For what may be legitimate disciplinary reasons, Principal Cimino is tough on thugs who wear hats to school, slightly more tolerant of black students who are tardy, but more lenient to white students with relationship issues.

Administrators watch over discipline at CFHS with walkie talkies and whistles. Students receive ICE, in school suspension, by the day and sometimes at weeks at a time. In the end Principal Cimino does demonstrate an attempt at humanity when Zach’s friend, Dee is shot, and he advises Zach to stick to his own tribe. The only teacher who generates discussion of this catastrophic event, Mr. Modell, the Social Studies teacher, allows the students to vent their racial bias and concerns with great abandon. There is no clean or happy ending to *Zebrahead* as the

racial tensions exist. The film closes as an Italian student and the black intellectual fight in the empty hallways with no administrator or educator intervention. This is concurrent with Zach and Nikki coming together again in an affectionate embrace in the school hallways.

*Just Another Girl on the IRT*

19 March 1993

Chantel is the “another girl” in Leslie Harris’ *Just Another Girl on the IRT*. Set in Brooklyn, New York, this film tells the story of a street wise girl who has a voice and a goal to become a medical doctor. It is from Chantel’s mother that the audience learns that she has a powerful attitude to go along with that voice. At school she is smart and works hard, and achieves high marks. But she is not life savvy in her high school environment.

Her female peer group does not seem to be as well off in the planning department as Chantel. She does not want to live paycheck to paycheck as her parents do. She is industrious and ambitious in her library studies. Chantel works in a managerial capacity at her part-time grocery store job. But in most of Chantel’s life, it is her voice and the attitude that goes with it that prevent her from being successful.

In Mr. Weinberg’s social studies class, Chantel attempts to steer the lesson on the Holocaust to contemporary race relations. She is so forceful to include cursing in class that she is sent to Principal Moore’s office. Chantel wants to continue to take classes in an accelerated fashion to graduate and go to college early. Principal Moore is of the opinion that she is not mature enough for college. She does not trust the school adults who are in charge of her.

In the second half of the film, Principal Moore’s intuition comes to fruition. Two young men corrupt Chantel’s social practices at school and out of school by showing her affection. Careless intimacy with one of them results in an unwanted pregnancy and a dramatic change in



the rapid progress toward her goal to go to medical school. Given \$500 to pay for an abortion by the father, Chantel and NaNette, her best friend go out on a shopping spree. Still, however, after the birth and near disposal of the child, Chantel comes to a greater age and speaks on camera of her attendance at a junior college and her being back on track in life.

*Only the Strong*

27 August 1993

*Only the Strong*, directed by Sheldon Lettich, tells the story of a former Green Beret sergeant, Louis Stevens. Stevens has spent the last few years fighting against the powerful drug cartels in Brazil and learning capoeira—a form of martial arts that combines dancing, acrobatic moves, with strong fighting kicks and strikes. He returns to his neighborhood in Miami and his graffiti covered Lincoln High School where he learned important lessons from his eleventh grade social studies teacher, Mr. Kerrigan. The school is filthy and loaded with kids who are disrespectful and using drugs.

While Mr. Kerrigan is attempting to teach a lesson on Darwinism, he has no success and his former student, Stevens witnesses this with great unhappiness. The students are noticeably disinterested in the educational process. As Kerrigan and Stevens talk, it seems that his teacher is burned out as an educator. When Stevens departs, he becomes involved in breaking up a drug related gang fight on campus. The student body is riveted as they watch the confrontation and the display of the unique capoeira fighting technique.

Kerrigan convinces Stevens and arranges for him to meet the principal and the faculty to discuss a special physical education class for twelve of the worst students at Lincoln. Principal Donald Cochran agrees to try the program and so begins the training of males of multiethnic backgrounds in the fine martial art of capoeira.

As the training intensity increases, so does the relationship among the students and Stevens, their teacher. A gang war complicates this situation. Near the end, a rebellion between gang members and Stevens' students ensues. A finale of a one-on-one fight between Silverio, the gang leader, and Stevens makes for an ideal match between evil and good. Stevens is victorious. In the last scene, all students graduate including the at-risk students of Louis Stevens. They perform a tribute to Stevens via a martial arts ballet.

*Dazed and Confused*

24 September 1993

*Dazed and Confused*, Richard Linklater's teen-focused film, is set in 1976 somewhere in Texas at Lee High School, home of the Fighting Rebels. A collection of students led by Randy "Pink" Floyd is having its last day of school. At Lee, the students come and go as they please, smoke in the latrines, and gamble in the hallways, and some students actually study. The football coach, Mr. Conrad has a strong and progressive agenda for the football team. This includes having all athletes sign an anti-drug and alcohol pledge or not play ball. Randy, the quarterback, rejects the coach's proposal.

Even on the last day, some students are engaged in classes. In shop class, the students are fully occupied with making paddles to use to haze the incoming freshman after the school day. The shop teacher is snoozing at his desk. In a short view of the soon-to-be freshman's last day of eighth grade, Mr. Payne, the Science teacher who is a Vietnam veteran, laughs at his students for their future in high school.

At Lee, the students are unaffected by the routine of the school day except at dismissal time. The students begin their annual hazing tradition with abandon. Girl freshman are told to lie down on the ground while ketchup and mustard are squirted on them, and then they are sprinkled

with flour. High school boys pursue soon-to-be high school boys in speeding cars, capture the boys, and paddle them ruthlessly. Upper classmen and new freshman drink alcohol with abandon. The evening concludes as the students smoke joints on the fifty yard line of the football field and reminisce about their high school years. Coach Conrad is called by the police for some corrective guidance. He tries again to convince Randy to sign the pledge, who agrees to play, but not to sign the pledge. Summer decadence begins and concludes the film.

*Billy Madison*

11 February 1995

Billy Madison has the temperament of a young child, but the body of a man. Tamra Davis directs this story of a child of privilege who has never had to grow up or be responsible. Billy's father, Brian is ready to retire and pass on his hotel business to his son. To convince his father that he can accept this huge responsibility, Billy offers to return to school and repeat first through twelfth grades in two week segments. His father revealed to him that during his actual schooling he paid the teachers for good and passing grades. Billy decides that he wants to prove to his father that he can learn and pass his classes on his own.

What Billy learns in elementary school is about relationships with his emotional peers and his educators. These seminal relationships especially with first grade teacher, Miss Lippy, third grade teacher, Miss Vaughn, and elementary principal Max Anderson give him the courage to proceed and be successful in secondary school.

Initially, Eric Gordon, his peer equivalent and dad's business associate, foils Billy. Eric wants to win the leadership position of the Madison conglomerate at any cost. Eric blackmails Principal Anderson who he uncovers is not really trained as an educator, but spends his spare time as a mask-wearing wrestler. The principal lies and tells the press that Billy Madison has

bribed him to pass his elementary classes. With this news, Brian Madison is willing to give up his corporation to Billy's competitor, Eric. Billy steps up and challenges Eric to an academic decathlon—ten academic events with the top scorer winning the Madison Business.

Decathlon events include solving complex math problems, cooking in home economics class, running for gym, performing a chemistry lab experiment, playing music, and acting a dramatic monologue from *Hamlet*. The final competition is a jeopardy-like competition where Billy reigns victorious and Eric pulls a gun. *Billy Madison* finishes with a one man high school graduation complete with a doctoral gown and a baseball cap. The ending is made more poignant when Billy announces that he wants to go to college to become a teacher.

*Clueless*

19 July 1995

*Clueless*, directed by Amy Heckerling, focuses on the life and times of Cher Horowitz whose main occupation is being in fashion and being popular in high school. Cher's daylight hours are spent at Bronson Alcott High School in Beverly Hills, California. When report cards are distributed in Mr. Wendell Hall's class, Cher is horrified, knows her dad, fierce litigator Mr. Horowitz will be too, and sets her mind to a plan to change those grades. While she is not the best debater in Mr. Hall's class, she does know how to argue her own case.

The process of negotiating her grades with her teachers takes some critical and devious thinking. First, she explains to Coach Stoeger that she has just broken up with her boyfriend because she discovered that he is a jerk. Coach Stoeger whose sexual preference is not men, declares that she really understands and raises Cher's grade. The social studies teacher, Miss Toby Geist, a teacher wall flower by Cher's assessment, agrees to raise Cher's grade after Cher promises to write letters to her congressmen about violations in the Clean Air Act. Mr. Hall, the

debate teacher, is absolutely inflexible with Cher's grade of "C." So the queen of makeovers devises a plan to make Mr. Hall divinely happy by matchmaking him to the single Miss Geist.

Cher is successful in bringing Miss Geist and Mr. Hall together and envisions the effort as a kind of public service. Cher is civic minded. With her own personal life, she is less successful. When she adopts a new student, Tai and gives her a makeover, their friendship takes a negative turn. After a short interlude with an almost boyfriend, Christian who turns out to be gay, Cher realizes who she really cares about. She does good work in bringing together the lonely Mr. Hall and Miss Geist who marry at the end of the film.

*Dangerous Minds*

11 August 1995

*Dangerous Minds* is John N. Smith's screen adaptation of the book *My Posse Don't Do Homework*, an actual account of a teacher in a classroom. LouAnne Johnson is a former Marine, recently divorced, and an all but student teaching qualified English teacher hired for the Academy Program at Parkmont High School near Palo Alto, California. This Academy class of sophomores has already been through three teachers and substitutes. Friend and colleague, social studies teacher Hal Griffith recommends Johnson for the teaching job when she is divorced and left unemployed. Desperate and willing to facilitate an emergency certification, assistant principal Carla Nichols offers Johnson \$25,000 salary, the curriculum, and the class schedule.

The student body at Parkmont is a microcosm of its multicultural community, but Ms. Johnson's students are special. This is a group that has never experienced success at school and seems bent on continuing that trend until they meet Ms. Johnson. She gets their attention by teaching them karate and poetry. Emilio, Callie, Raoul, and Durell have challenging home situations and live in dangerous neighborhoods. Johnson befriends the students, gives them

incentives like candy bars, motivates them with a trip to an amusement park, and provides a poetry contest. She also begins to care about them. Principal George Grandey and Assistant Principal Nichols caution Johnson about her lessons and methods, but she continues divert from the approved curriculum.

Johnson becomes personally attached to her students. She breaks up a fight between Emilio and Raul which results in her learning the culture of the students. Parkmont has strict disciplinary measures for the fighters. She learns that achieving a deeper trust by her students is going to be more work. All of the students begin to work hard to keep the A she gave them on the first instructional day.

Using the lyrics of Bob Dylan and the poetry of Dylan Thomas, Johnson empowers her students to think differently about their futures. She tells them that learning is the prize and so too is graduating from high school which few if any Academy students ever do. When Emilio is shot, Callie leaves school because she is pregnant and being made to transfer. Durrell quits because his grandmother does not like Johnson's lessons. Johnson begins to reassess her commitment to the job for a second year. On the last day of school, Callie returns and the Academy students convince Johnson that she must stay and continue to be their teacher as she is the only person who cares about them.

*National Lampoon's Senior Trip*

9 September 1995

*National Lampoon's Senior Trip*, directed by Kelly Makin, takes place at Fairmont High School in Columbus, Ohio and in Washington, D.C. At Fairmont the majority of students are focused on frivolity while only a few are concerned about their academic studies. Principal Todd Moss seems a traditional school leader who greets his students as they enter urging them to be

punctual. It is clear from the anti-drug assembly presided over by Student Body President, Steve that the students are out of control. Mr. Bloom the keyboarding teacher says he hates school and that life is a joke. Later he dies while calling out letters to be typed and the students do not even notice. The school secretary is so senior that she uses a walker to get around school.

The second half of the school day is eventful when Dags and Reggie, the senior misfit leaders arrange a party to be held at the principal's house without his knowledge. As the students are partying, Principal Moss discovers invitations to this party and realizes it is being held at his home. When he arrives there and witnesses the chaos and mess, he gives all of the students Saturday detention.

The principal assigns a 500-word letter to the students in detention. The recipient of the letter is the President and the topic is educational reform. He then turns over the detention duty to Mr. Diplo who proceeds to show the students a film about sexual protection and unwanted pregnancy. Lisa Perkins, a serious student in the group, takes the assignment to heart and writes an excellent letter that gets the attention of the President. As a result, the students are invited to Washington, D.C. to meet the president and speak before the congressional committee on Education.

Before the students leave for the field trip, a new typing teacher, Miss Tracy Milford arrives and agrees to help chaperone the field trip. The school bus arrives at Fairmont equipped with a driver named Red who seems to have had his best days in the 1960s. The trip to Washington, D.C. is riddled with accidents and pranks most facilitated by the students and a Treki school crossing guard who decided to follow and terrorize the travelers, especially Dags and Reggie. Upon arriving in D.C., the students make such a disturbance that they must go to

another hotel that rents rooms by the hour. After the students drug Miss Milford and Mr. Moss, they witness an inappropriate relationship between them, tie up Steve the Student Body President, and crash a party of political dignitaries at a luxury hotel. The students uncover a plot by their Ohio senator to make the President, Fairmont High School, and Principal Moss look like fools and are able to stop that plot by speaking before the congressional committee. The students return to Fairmont victorious and graduate.

*Mr. Holland's Opus*

19 January 1995

Stephen Herek directs *Mr. Holland's Opus*, a story about a music composer and conductor who falls back on teaching as a short term gig, but spends thirty years doing it. In 1965, John F. Kennedy High School in Portland, Oregon is a traditional high school. Principal Helen Jacobs and Vice Principal Wolters keep Kennedy in sound and steady working order. Mr. Holland has been hired to teach music appreciation and to conduct the fifth period orchestra class. But he learns on his first day that he must also advise students and submit his lesson plans two months in advance.

Holland's elective teacher associate, football coach Bill Meister and he become long term friends as they work together to help the students. Meister shares that he never has a free moment when Holland tells Meister that he is hoping teaching will give him time to continue to compose his music. Holland and his wife Iris, who is a photographer, make a four-year plan to save enough money so that Holland can quite teaching and resume his full-time composing passion. Holland and Iris change the plan when they discover they are expecting a baby.

Holland teaches and critiques the students' performances musically and academically. He tutors Gertrude Lang, a clarinet student and Louis Russ, a drum student who really is an athlete.



All the while, he is building relationships with students. Principal Jacobs reminds Holland that he has two jobs at Kennedy High. The first job is to fill the students' minds with knowledge. The second job is to be a compass for them. While early in his career he believes he has made no impression on the students, he makes a greater commitment to the school by teaching driver's education in the summer, so that he and Iris can afford a house for their growing family.

American music is transformed by Rock-n-Roll and Holland uses this music to make a connection with his students. The administrators question his judgment, but support him once they see results. They ask him to take on another responsibility by organizing and leading a school marching band. Coach Meister sees that he needs help with the marching and steps up to help since he did some marching in the military. Meister does this in exchange for Holland's assistance in tutoring Louis Russ in music, so that he can pass an elective class and become a part of the wrestling team. After the first marching band parade, Holland and his wife discover that Coltrane, their son is deaf and must attend an expensive private school. Holland continues to dedicate and obligate himself to teaching demands at Kennedy.

When Principal Jacobs retires, she gives Holland a gold compass and tells him that he is her favorite teacher. He continues to teach for thirty years and has only limited time to work on his musical compositions. When Principal Wolters calls in the fine arts faculty and tells them that electives must be cut to trim the budget ten percent, Holland speaks before the school board, but is not successful in changing the decision. He admits that he was dragged into the teaching profession kicking and screaming, but knows now that it is the only thing that he wants to do. At the conclusion of the film, Holland's last school day, Holland's former students treat him to a

first performance of his musical composition. Among the former students is Gertrude Lang who had become the governor of Oregon.

*The Substitute*

19 April 1995

Shale, also known as Mr. Smith is the substitute teacher in *The Substitute* directed by Robert Mandel. Set at Columbus High School in Miami—Dade County Public Schools, this film shows a corruption facilitated at the top by Principal Claude Rolle.

Juan Lacas, leader of the Kings of destruction gang, threatens Jane Hetzko, who is a social studies teacher and girlfriend to Shale. When she reports the threat to the principal and requests that Juan be transferred, the principal says there is not enough evidence for the school board to agree. She does not lose her life, but her knee is broken by Johnny Glades, a Seminole Indian affiliated with the drug operation at Columbus High. Her friend, Shale comes to her aid and later arranges to be her substitute at Columbus with a plan of retaliation. Known at Columbus as Mr. Smith, Shale has a special set of paramilitary skills and has been working *sub rosa* as a mercenary for hire. He recruits his mercenary associates for this cause, but does not promise any financial reward. The team begins to plant listening devices as well as cameras to watch for what might be going on behind the scenes. Many of the students have cell phones, pagers and are driving \$50,000 cars, so something must be going on at this school.

In the meantime, Mr. Smith meets Darrell Sherman, a graduate of Columbus and teacher there, and librarian Hannah Dillon, and comes to enjoy teaching history to the students. Initially, Principal Rolle seems grateful for the good job Smith is doing in the classroom. But as Smith learns more about Principal Rolle's extracurricular activities, the tensions between them rise.

Principal Rolle and the Kings of Destruction are allied in a drug operation headquartered in the basement of Columbus High. When a drug and money exchange goes wrong, Smith takes the money and buys schools supplies, equipment and passes those out at school. Angered, Principal Rolle, Juan and Johnny plan a retaliative strike against Smith and his team. In an all-out confrontation between the gang and principal and Smith's team, Smith and his team are victorious and rid the school of the principal and gang control.

*High School High*

25 October 1996

In Hart Bochner's *High School High*, Richard Clark gives up his prestigious history position at the upscale private school, Wellington Academy to take a more challenging job at Marion Barry High School in Inner City, U.S.A. Clark's father is the headmaster at Wellington and believes Clark will fail at the Inner City school. Clark has not fully realized the rewards of teaching and wants a change. Marion Barry High School has a plethora of problems to include gang activity, drug abuse, premarital sex and pregnancy, and academic failure. A bumper sticker on a car in the parking lot boasts that the parent is proud that his child has a D average. Principal Evelyn Doyle says the school has been a holding area for the dysfunctional children in the community.

Principal Doyle, who wields and uses a baseball bat in the hallway, has been at MBHS for twenty years and accepts that all the bad kids are dumped there. Her administrative assistant, Victoria Chappell is less jaded by the difficult learning environment and immediately welcomes the positive manner of Richard Clark. He has replaced Mr. Riley who was beaten to death. Clark is assigned a classroom in a horrible state of disrepair, but does not let those circumstances hold him back from doing his best for the children. He meets other teachers in the teacher's lounge

who are wearing bullet proof vests or having a cocktail before going to class. Mr. Arnott, the kidnapped assistant principal, has been missing for two months; his picture appears on a milk carton.

Academically the students are failures. The legislature has passed a state law: Three F's and you're out! The school population is dwindling, but the problems remain. In two months the students will take the eight-hour State Proficiency Test. Students wishing to go to college must take it and do well. Principal Doyle makes it clear to Clark that the students always fail this test.

On Clark's first day, his car and lunch are stolen, his desk is set on fire, he is covered by spit balls, and at the end of the day he is chained to his desk. But his evening ends well as he is invited by Ms. Chappell to be a chaperone at the Back to School dance. When Clark breaks up a gang fight between Grif, a former gang member and Paco, a gang leader, he inadvertently arranges a "chicken" car race off a cliff. Clark tries to stop the race and goes off the cliff, but survives. This survival does earn him temporary respect of the students the next day. He continues to have difficulty with the students' positive appraisal of the social studies curriculum.

Clark recognizes that Grif has significant power among the students and works to convince Grif to be a better student. Grif wants to go to college and Clark tells him that he can do it with his help. Grif begins to work in class and the other students follow his lead. When standardized test preparation and execution occurs everyone works very hard. Gang leader Paco wants to sabotage the success of the students, and breaks into the school to exchange the test papers for test papers with failing scores. When the principal announces the failing test scores, she fires Clark who leaves in depression and disbelief.

Grif goes back to his gang ways. Clark and Chappell save him by foiling a drug deal between the major supplier DeMarco and the mysterious, Mr. A. In a surprising revelation, Mr. A is really Principal Doyle who is then arrested. Clark becomes the acting principal of Marion Barry High School and presides over the graduation of the five-person class of 1996. Grif is the valedictorian with a GPA of 2.35. Mr. Clark concludes the ceremony by encouraging the students to work hard and do a few hours of homework so they too can be successful.

187

20 July 1997

The police call for a homicide is 187. In *187*, directed by Kevin Reynolds, Trevor Garfield teaches high school science at Roosevelt Whitney High School in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. During class instruction, Mr. Garfield discovers 187 written on every page of Dennis Broadway's textbook. Since Garfield knows that Broadway has a gangster reputation, he reports his concern to the administration. Garfield does believe his life is being threatened, but that belief is dismissed by the administration. He is directed not to take it seriously. Dennis Broadway stabs Garfield twelve times when he leaves the office.

Fifteen months later Mr. Garfield has moved to southern California where he has signed up to be a substitute teacher. Garfield is called to John Quincy Adams High School for a four-day assignment in Bungalow 86. The Bungalow instructors teach the at-risk students while the A building teachers work with the students who are at less risk. His collection of students represents various ethnicities and ability levels to include emotionally disturbed students.

Three students represent a great challenge to Garfield. Benny Chacon is a convicted felon whose condition of parole is to stay in school; he wears an ankle monitor. Cesar Sanchez is a

leader in the K.O.S. “Kappin’ Off Suckers” gang, a thief and is nearly illiterate. Rita Martinez, a Chicano student, has academic ability, but uses her body as currency for gang members and one of the high school teachers. After a science experiment during which Garfield uses his pocket watch for time keeping, Cesar steals it and hides it in his locker. When Garfield accuses Cesar and his buddy Stevie of the crime, all parties are brought into Principal Garcia’s office for an investigation. Garcia does not want to risk any kind of law suit and dismisses the investigation when no watch is found on either student.

As Garfield attempts to teach these students, work with their abilities and disabilities, make home visits, he realizes his traditional approach to instruction is not working. Colleagues Ellen Henry and Dave Childress have very different views. Henry who teaches computer science lives in fear of Benny since she had to testify against him in court. Social Studies teacher Childress is a very experienced teacher who is depressed in his Bungalow teaching assignment. He wears a weapon to school and keeps one in his desk drawer as well. Garcia has never been a teacher and enacts his administrative role in pursuit of avoiding lawsuits.

Garfield is asked to stay for the rest of the semester and begins to act out of the classroom to correct permanently the behavior of Benny and Cesar. Benny, after an overdose of morphine, is found in the Los Angeles River. With a poisoned arrow, Garfield drugs Cesar as he is spray painting graffiti on a highway bridge and cuts off his ring finger. By currier, Garfield delivers the finger to the hospital to that it can be reattached. Garfield tutors Rita and helps her to improve her English essay. She does care about her grades and offers her body to Garfield in exchange for the tutoring. Garfield does not accept her offer.

Shortly after a school faculty and community meeting, Garcia decides to release Garfield before the end of the semester because of the community talk about his potential connection to Benny's murder and Cesar's attack. Cesar and his followers are certain that Garfield is responsible as well. Cesar, Stevie and Paco shave their heads and go to Garfield's house to kill him. In an effort to deliver a final lesson to them, Garfield leads the way in a display of courage in a game of Russian roulette as modeled from the ending of the film, *The Deer Hunter*. Garfield and Cesar shoot themselves after taking turns with the weapon. The story ends as Rita reads her essay about Pyrrhic victory at the graduation ceremony. She makes a tribute to Garfield and the students graduate.

*In & Out*

19 September 1997

Howard Brackett teaches English Literature at Greenleaf High School in Greenleaf, Indiana. Greenleaf's welcome sign boasts that it is a great big small town. In *In & Out*, a film by Frank Oz, Brackett must decide if his newly publicized sexual preference is accurate. Brackett's former student, Cameron Drake accepts his Academy Award for Best Performance by an Actor and includes a thank you to his gay English teacher, Howard Brackett. This announcement comes as a huge surprise to the Greenleaf Community, Brackett's fiancée Emily Montgomery and his parents, as well as the principal and students of the high school. Everyone at school loves Brackett, so this news comes as a big surprise even to Brackett himself.

Since this announcement is the talk of the town and the country, the media descends on the town to uncover more about the gay teacher. Peter Malloy, the reporter assigned to the story, reaches out personally to Brackett and reveals that he too is gay. In greatest distress, Emily

continues to prepare for her wedding since he assures her that the wedding will happen. Principal Halliwell says the wedding must happen or Brackett will lose his teaching job.

Brackett reflects and realizes he is gay and announces this during the wedding ceremony during the exchange of vows. Emily is devastated and the community is shocked again. The principal fires Brackett from his teaching job one day short of graduation. Cameron returns to reconnect with his teacher. Even though not employed by the school, Brackett feels he must go to the graduation since he has had such an important impact on the lives of the students.

During the graduation ceremony, the principal announces the winner of the teacher of the year, Mr. Edward Kenrow. The crowd shudders as they believe the teacher of the year should be Brackett. In a sign of support, members of the student body, Brackett's parents and brother, and other audience members stand up and announce that they are gay. By the end of the ceremony, everyone stands up to support Brackett. The story ends with a party where everyone is celebrating the graduates and their love of Brackett.

*Wild Things*

28 March 1998

In *Wild Things* John McNaughton tells the story of guidance counselor, Sam Lombardo and Blue Bay, a wealthy community in South Florida, which is filled with beautiful people. Lombardo, an award winning Educator of the Year seems to be a good school counselor. High school student Jimmy who is unable to afford the fees for the sailing class is supported financially by Lombardo's generosity. Lombardo sponsors a Senior Seminar Guest Speaker series to enhance the social learning and awareness of the students. Detectives Duquette and Perez are guest lecturers on the subject of sex crimes like date rape. Lombardo supports the senior fundraiser—a car wash. But since he will be away for the fundraiser, he still buys a ticket



and invites Kelly Van Ryan and her friend to come wash his jeep at his house on the day after the fund raiser event.

Lombardo's relationship with Kelly is personal. Another student, Suzie Toller, is often in trouble with drugs and calls Lombardo when she is taken to jail. Lombardo's relationship with Suzie is personal. Both girls accuse Lombardo of rape and he goes to trial. Suzie breaks under stern defense questioning and admits the whole thing was a story she made up with her friend Kelly. Though exonerated, Lombardo still loses his job at Blue Bay High School. Sandra Van Ryan, Kelly's mother, is horrified by her daughter's actions and wants to settle out of court. Eight million dollars later, Lombardo is rich, his lawyer Ken Bowden is rich, and his girlfriends, Kelly and Suzie are revealed to be co-conspirators. Lombardo has for quite a while been having inappropriate relationships with these girls.

In a series of blackmail incidents and double crosses, Lombardo has multiple illegal and inappropriate relationships with the two school girls and detective Duquette, who is also in on the plan. Lombardo's goal is to become rich, buy a sailboat, and sail away with Suzie Toller. Suzie feigns her death earlier. Detective Perez remains suspicious and continues the investigation. She learns from Suzie's mother, owner of the fishing camp and alligator wrestling business, that Suzie's IQ is beyond exceptional and that she could accomplish anything she wanted.

At the end of *Wild Things*, the casualty list is lengthy and includes guidance counselor Sam Lombardo who is drown as the victim of Suzie's careful planning. She sails to an exotic port where she is greeted by Lombardo's former defense attorney, Bowden and a suitcase full of money.

Spike Lee's *He Got Game*, set in Coney Island, New York, is the story of a father and son, Jake and Jesus Shuttlesworth. Jake is in Attica for killing his wife. Jesus is on the brink of the biggest decision in his life. A senior at Abraham Lincoln High School, he is the number one draft pick in the country for basketball. As it turns out, the New York governor loves basketball and wants Jesus to attend his alma mater, Big State. Through the prison warden, Marcel Wyatt, the governor offers Jake a reduced sentence if he can convince his son to play for Big State.

Released on a kind of probation, Jake wears an ankle monitor. With very limited time, he must court his son's favor. Jesus wants nothing to do with his father and questions his family's loyalty as well. Uncle Bubba and Aunt Sally do seem to care, but Uncle Bubba tries to advise him to go to the place that will give him enough money to support them as well. Number thirty-four for the Rail-splitters, Jesus had been an excellent team player. Coach Cincotta, his basketball coach, advises him to take his time with his choice. The coach cares and even offers Jesus his home phone number should Jesus want to discuss his decision.

Jesus is courted by the press, college coaches, professional organizations, and sports agents. His girlfriend, LaLa, who at first seems a loyal ally in Jesus' taking his time, begins to push him to make a choice that will be financially beneficial to her as well. Jesus' decision is also complicated by the fact that he is raising his young sister, Mary. When his father appears mysteriously out of prison, Jesus is even more conflicted. While he wants to disregard his father's concern for him because Jake killed his mother, he also knows his father is the reason he has all the talent. Jake taught Jesus everything he knows.

Just days away from the announcement, Coach Cincotta has a second meeting with Jesus. He inquires again as to where he wants to go, but Jesus is still uncertain. Then the coach offers him \$10,000 with instructions to take it and use as he might want to. Coach has given him money before, but said it was a loan. But now Jesus understands the generosity in a different way. Coach explains that Jesus received a better calculus grade and better living arrangements because of his generosity. Coach Cincotta compliments him and says he was the most coachable kid of his career. Jesus had not been aware the coach was buying his favor.

Jake has a few hours left to convince his son to sign with Big State. In a one-on-one competition, they agree if Jake wins the eleven point game, Jesus will sign with Big State. If Jesus wins, he can do as he wishes. Jesus wins and he watches Jake leave in the custody of his parole officers. He decides to sign with Big State. Jesus knows that decision might help his father, but in the end it does not. Warden Wyatt tells Jake that he must be patient and wait for the governor to act on his behalf.

*Disturbing Behavior*

24 July 1998

In director David Nutter's *Disturbing Behavior*, Dr. Edgar Caldicott is the guidance counselor at Cradle Bay High School somewhere in the Pacific Northwest. He sponsors a special program for students with behavior and academic problems. His program completely transforms these young people in a positive way. The Blue Ribbons benefit from the wholesome programming of Dr. Caldicott.

The social groups at Cradle Bay other than Blue Ribbons are diverse and include the motor heads—the mechanically inclined, the micro-geeks, the skaters and the heavy metal kids. Steve Clark, new to Cradle Bay, Rachel Wagner, Gavin and U.V. become friends who begin to

notice and question the unusually clean behavior of the Blue Ribbons. Gavin learns that his parents have signed him up for Blue Ribbon membership, and makes a short film for the others should the real him disappear. The film reveals his concerns about the special programming by counselor Caldicott. After Rachel and Steve watch the film, Rachel does some research on the previous educational experience of their guidance counselor.

Dr. Caldicott has been involved in psychological research in a facility across the bay where his teen age daughter suffers in her own psychosis. Through a surgical procedure he developed, a small computer device which is inserted into the eye. The device makes its recipients stronger, brighter, more wholesome, and polite. The school custodian, Dorian Newberry, who pretends to be mentally afflicted, becomes friends with Rachel and Steve and discovers a machine he uses to keep rats out of the school sends a signal that disables a Blue Ribbon student.

Dr. Caldicott and the Blue Ribbon students capture and ready Steve and Rachel for surgery. The Blue Ribbon students pursue them after they escape. Custodian Newberry loads his vehicle with many anti-rat machines and leads the doctor and his students into the dam losing his life, but saving Rachel and Steve. In the final scene, Gavin who was a recipient of the counselor's device is shown in a classroom as a student teacher. It seems that he will continue Dr. Caldicott's work.

*Apt Pupil*

23 October 1998

In *Apt Pupil* director Bryan Singer focuses on the relationship between Kurt Dussander, a Nazi War criminal hiding in Santo Donato, California and high school senior Todd Bowden.

Bowden is a sixteen year old senior who has advanced in high school because he is a gifted student. In a week long study of the Holocaust in social studies, Bowden becomes fascinated. The teacher directs students who are curious for more study to the local public library. As Bowden researches, it is clear that he is becoming obsessed by the Holocaust. When he is riding a public bus home from the library, he notices a man on the bus who seems to resemble one of the Nazi soldiers from the photographs. After a month-long investigation to include taking fingerprints from Dussander's mailbox and validating them with a database about Nazi War criminals, Bowden concludes that Dussander was a Nazi soldier.

Bowden visits Dussander with this information and demands that he tell him everything about the Holocaust he did not learn at school. If Dussander does not accept this challenge, Bowden will report him to the Israeli authorities. So the tutorial relationship begins. Bowden's parents believe that their son has volunteered to read aloud to Dussander because his vision is failing. Dussander tells stories about the camps, the gas chamber, and the condition of the victims especially when the gas did not work efficiently.

As Bowden becomes more enthralled with Dussander's stories, he wants to make it even more real. He brings a Christmas box to Dussander that contains a replica of a Nazi uniform. He forces Dussander to wear it, do facing movements and march. In these few moments, it is clear that Dussander is remembering with reverence his time as a Nazi soldier.

As Bowden is dedicated to the pursuit of this knowledge, he loses his edge at San Donato High School where he has been an honor student. Guidance counselor, Edward French sends a letter home to request a parent conference. Bowden is frantic and knows his parents will be in shock. He asks Dussander to forge a letter that contains an explanation for the lower grades.

Without Bowden's knowledge, Dussander goes to school pretending to be Bowden's grandfather, Victor. He meets with French and Bowden and explains that Todd's parents are having job and alcohol problems. French arranges for Bowden to study at Mr. Dussander's house every day. He also makes a deal that he must have all A's at the end of the term. French will speak with Bowden's teachers about omitting the other grades. He also offers Bowden his phone number to call if parent things heat up.

Bowden is furious that Dussander has the upper hand in their arrangement. Also both Dussander and Bowden have independently acted in a violent manner. Dussander burns a stray cat in his gas oven and Bowden kills an injured bird with a basketball. When Bowden's all A's are in, he is relieved. In celebration, Dussander decided to tell him one more story. He describes a twelve page document he has written which details his relationship with Bowden. Dussander says he has secured the letter in a safe deposit box. Officials will open the safe deposit box at the time of his death. Bowden wants the key, but Dussander does not give it to him. Their relationship temporarily ends.

Bowden resumes his normal life and graduates the valedictorian of Santo Donato High School. Dussander calls Bowden for help as he has had a heart attack and needs medical attention. Dussander had a heart attack after he invited in a homeless man, stabbed him, and pushed him into the basement. There is a mess and he wants Bowden to clean it up. When Bowden sees that the homeless man is not dead, he beats him to death with a shovel.

Dussander goes to the hospital and Bowden buries the man in the basement. When Bowden asks again for the safe deposit key, Dussander says it does not exist, that his story was a lie. Post surgery, Dussander lies in bed and begins his recovery. His roommate, an elderly man

who wears the tattoo of a concentration camp survivor, recognizes Dussander and reports him to the authorities. The FBI and Israeli officials come and tell Dussander he will be moved to Jerusalem for trial once he is better. As anti-Nazi protesters revolt outside the hospital, Dussander blows air into his IV tube and kills himself.

Bowden's story does not end with Dussander's death. The guidance counselor sees the newspaper stories and recognizes Dussander as the man who acted at Bowden's grandfather. French goes to the house to discuss these matters with Bowden's parents. They are out, but he tells French to let this go. When French says he cannot do this, Bowden threatens to reveal that French has been trying to have a relationship with him and may be homosexual. If he does this, French could lose his job. Astounded, French walks away from Bowden.

*American History X*

28 October 1998

Director Tony Kaye's *American History X* is the story of brothers Derek and Danny Vinyard who reside in Venice Beach, California with four other members of the Vinyard family. Both are left fatherless when Dennis, a fireman, is shot and killed in the line of duty. Derek is second in command of a white supremacist organization and wears tattoos proudly to prove it. He begins to initiate his younger brother into the racist practices of the organization led by Cameron. In the middle of the night, three armed black men come to the Vinyard home to steal their car. When Danny alerts Derek to this, he loads his weapon and goes outside shooting. Derek kills all three men and goes to Chino State Prison. He serves over three years. Prison officials release Derek early, in part because of his former teacher, Dr. Sweeney's intervention.

Danny attends VBHS and is an excellent student concurrent with Derek's serving time in Chino. The principal, Dr. Sweeney is stepping up to be Danny's teacher as well. Danny has

written a social studies paper about *Mein Kampf* in which he tributes Adolf Hitler as a civil rights hero. Mr. Murray, the social studies teacher is very distressed by this and goes to Sweeney. Sweeney calls Danny in and assigns him another paper and a tutorial class he calls American History X which Dr. Sweeney will teach. Since Dr. Sweeney knows and taught Derek, he instructs Danny to write a new paper about his relationship with his brother. He tells him to analyze the relationship and explain the impact Derek has had on his life. The timing of this new assignment is right since prison officials released Derek from Chino early that morning.

As Danny writes the paper, he has flashback to events showing the development of Derek's racist beliefs and practices. Ultimately, Danny realizes that his father had many of these same beliefs as well. Under Cameron's tutelage, Danny wants to be just like his brother. Sweeney visits Derek in prison and sends him books to read. During this time, Principal, Dr. Sweeney also becomes part of a gang task force in Venice Beach.

Derek is a changed person as a result of his prison experience. He has learned a new set of rules and beliefs—to include a complete backing away from the white supremacist mentality. Derek wants to protect his brother from this environment. When he explains his time in prison, a violent assault by another white supremacist, the consolation of another inmate who is black, and Sweeney's efforts, Danny seems willing to relinquish his ties to the organization.

Danny finishes his paper at 5:40 a.m. Derek takes him to breakfast and walks him to school. Before Danny turns in his paper, he goes to the restroom. There a black student with whom he had an altercation shoots and kills him. Danny's paper ends with a quotation from Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address. The quotation is about not being enemies and becoming a union.



*The Faculty*, a film by Robert Rodriguez, begins on the Herrington High School football field in Ohio. Coach Willis is pushing the team hard and uses language to challenge the team to do better. At the end of practice when the players have left the field, he bends down to adjust a sprinkler head, and at that moment has been the recipient of commutation. An alien parasite has invaded his body.

At Herrington High, the educators are overworked and the school is underfunded. Mrs. Drake, the principal presides over a faculty council meeting and announces the football uniforms and equipment will be fully funded by the school board, while new computers and the high school musical will not. Various teachers teach at different functional levels, but the students are cooperative and generally respectful in the class room setting both before and after the invasion of parasites. Education holds a high value for the educators and the educated at Herrington. The social studies teacher, Mr. Tate seasons his coffee in the teacher's lounge with a shot from a flask of alcohol, and then demonstrates his inebriated state as he begins the social studies lesson in a previously-covered chapter. The very sickly school nurse, Rosa Harper reports to work when sick and saves her sick days for when she feels better. The shy, but determined English teacher, Miss Burke does a formidable job of leading a discussion of Daniel DeFoe's *Robinson Crusoe* claiming the real theme of the book is the fear of isolation.

It would seem the typical middle class middle American high school until alien parasites needing human hosts land in the football field simultaneously with the arrival of a new female student from Atlanta. Mary Beth begins to make friendships with the students who will ultimately face and kill the queen parasite, thus facilitating the return to normalcy of the faculty

and students of Herrington High. Her new friends include five students who are intellectuals or are in the process of valuing the intellect rather than the athletic realm. Casey is the bullied nerd. Stokely is the science fiction reading Goth girl who is accused of being a lesbian because she has no friends. Her sci-fi prowess is behind the uncovering of the alien plot. The beautiful newspaper editor, Delilah initially joins the search because she is looking for a headline. Her former love interest, Stan quits the football team inspired to do so by a teacher who changed his D grade to an A because of his successful football performance. Stan wants to be appreciated for his academic performance, not his athletic one. To add to this curious microcosm, Zeke is the fifth year senior who deals illegal ids as well as caffeine-high drugs that he develops in his own basement chemistry lab. It is clear that he is savant-like in a scene where he identifies parts of the parasite that the science teacher, Professor Furlong cannot. Each of these students represents a kind of outsider in the educational setting, but still outsiders who seem vested in education.

In a process called commutation, the faculty, beginning with Coach Willis, the Hornets' football coach, is occupied by the parasites. Hydration is key to the sustainment of the parasites within their hosts. Then the students are systematically called to the office for ear examinations that result in their occupation as well. The outsider group of students then seeks to unravel the mystery and destroy the plot. In the penultimate scene, the big game, and with Pink Floyd's "We Don't Need No Education," as the sound track, it becomes patently clear to the outsiders that the alien parasites are taking over everyone's bodies. A search for the queen results in the discovery that the ultimate outsider, Mary Beth is in fact the queen and Casey, the victim of bullying is responsible for destroying her with a powdering of Zeke's diuretic drug.

One month after these events, the teachers are back to their normal selves. The outsider students are friends and Casey, the queen parasite's assassin, is a celebrity who now dates Delilah, the cheerleading captain and editor of the school newspaper.

*October Sky*

19 February 1999

Joe Johnston directs this true story about Homer Hickham's teenage years in Coalwood, West Virginia in the 1950s. Homer and friends Roy Lee, Quentin, and O'Dell are students at Big Creek High School. Miss Riley, their science teacher, allows the students to listen to the radio broadcast of Sputnik on October 5, 1954. When Miss Riley does this, she inspires the students in her class, especially Homer.

Homer lives in Coalwood, home of the Olga Coal Company where nearly all the residents are working in the mines. Elsie and John Hickham, Homer's parents live in the company house because John is the mine administrator. Homer's brother, Jim is a star athlete on the Big Creek football team. While Homer's future is destined to be in mining, he has designs on being a rocket engineer and going into space. He cannot do this on his own, so he enlists the help of his best friends.

Along the way, Homer is encouraged by Miss Riley. Homer even writes his hero, Dr. Wernher von Braun about the development of his rocket making. Elsie Hickham, herself as an artist, supports Homer's interest, but John Hickham does not. He believes this rocket obsession is a waste of time.

Homer and the rocket boys launch their first in a series of many rockets, getting help from welders, Ike Bykovsky and Leon Bolden who work at the mine. Quentin, the new friend in his group, knows chemistry and trigonometry, and gives substantial knowledge to the project.

The police believe one of their rockets started a large fire, so they arrest and handcuff the boys. For a time, this incident discontinues their rocket making.

When Homer's father is injured in a mining accident, Homer is forced to leave high school and then take a job at the mine to help the family. This greatly disappoints Miss Riley. When Homer learns that Miss Riley is very sick with Hodgkin's disease and has been going to Welch for treatments, Homer visits her. She tells him not to give up on his dream. So he begins to use her gift, *Principles of Guided Missile Design* to figure where the missing rocket did fall. He does not believe it started the fire. With Quentin's special mathematical assistance, they figure out where the rocket fell and find it in the woods. The boys find the stray rocket and prove their innocence. Principal Turner then invites Homer back to school so that he can participate in the Science Fair.

When the boys go to the fair, they win first place and an opportunity to go to the National Science Fair in Indianapolis. Big Creek can only afford to send one student, so Homer goes and wins first place. All of the boys receive college scholarships as a result of this first place award. In the final scene, Homer and the rocket boys send off their final rocket that they have named in honor of Miss Riley. Homer's father comes to watch for the first time. Homer offers his father the opportunity to push the launch button and his father accepts.

*10 Things I Hate About You*

31 March 1999

In *10 Things I Hate About You*, Gill Junger retells the Shakespearean story of the *Taming of the Shrew* at Padua High School in Seattle. Katarina Stratford is a senior and her sister Bianca is a sophomore. Like their literary counterparts, Kat has a wicked tongue and Bianca has beauty. Life at Padua High is typical except that Ms. Perky, the school counselor is writing sexually

provocative novels even when she is counseling students in trouble. English teacher, Mr. Morgan raps Shakespeare's sonnets and dismisses Kat to the office every time she critiques his class. His manner of discipline is dismissal rather than confrontational. Kat flashes her breasts to Coach Chapin, the detention monitor, and Patrick Verona escapes.

The divorced Walter Stratford, an obstetrician, heavily monitors and restricts home life and school life for Kat and Bianca. He tells the girls they cannot date. He knows Kat has no desire to be involved or to date, so later the dad adjusts the rule. Bianca can date in high school when Kat does. Mr. Stratford feels safe with this arrangement.

Padua students are involved and motivated at school. Several social groups exist: beautiful people, coffee heads, white Rastas, cowboys, and the Ivy League kids. Michael accompanies the new student Cameron to show him around. In the process, Cameron falls in love at first sight with Bianca. Michael helps Cameron by making a deal with yet another student, Joey to pay Patrick Verona to date Kat. Joey thinks by doing this he will be able to date Bianca himself. Joey is a super model hand has plenty of money to spend. Patrick likes the challenge and the money, and very soon comes to really like Kat.

In a series of date and exchanges of cash, Patrick demonstrates that he cares about Kat and the feelings are mutual. In the meantime, Bianca and Cameron have found each other. At the senior prom, the revelation of the financial arrangement is within ear shot of Kat. Hurt and humiliated, Kat leaves the prom. Back to school on Monday, Kat presents her English assignment—an original version of a Shakespearean sonnet in Mr. Morgan's class. This is the first time that she has spoken and not been sent out of the class by the teacher. The poem makes

clear her affections for Patrick though she does not mention his name. After school, Kat and Patrick reunite in the parking lot.

*Election*

23 April 1999

*Election* is Alexander Payne's story of a student government campaign and election at George Washington Carver High School in Omaha, Nebraska. Social studies teacher and student government advisor, Jim McAllister supervises three students who are running for president: senior, Tracy Flick who works over time at being perfect and thorough, senior Paul Metzler who is an injured athlete and a humanitarian, and sophomore Tammy Metzler whose campaigning attitude is who cares. Tammy, Paul's sister, believes the election is a waste of time since student government does not do anything anyway.

McAllister is a valued colleague, a three-time recipient of the teacher of the year award, a good listener, and a loyal employee to Carver High School. Early in the campaign, Flick runs unchallenged. This greatly upsets McAllister for two reasons. Flick had an affair with Dave Novotny, McAllister's dear friend and math colleague. Novotny was fired. The second reason is that a one-person campaign does not represent the democratic process he teaches in his government classes. To Paul he suggests that the campaign needs a competitive second candidate.

Flick is favored to win because everyone likes her and she has proven how responsible she is by serving in leadership positions. McAllister continues to pump up Paul. Out of school, McAllister is helping the recently divorced Mrs. Linda Novotny with house chores. She threw out her husband after the affair. Since the Novotny family and the McAllister family are close, it

seems very natural for McAllister to help Linda. When he begins to be attracted to her and then act on that attraction, his home life and school life fall apart.

On campaign speech day, each of the candidates presents heavily stylized orations. Flick is presidential, Paul is simple, but kind in his written speech and Tammy is apathetic about the whole matter. Principal, Dr. Walt Hendricks goes to the microphone when the students are unruly and urges the students to give the candidates the respect they deserve. Because Tammy has been so irreverent in her speech, Principal Hendricks, Vice-principal Ron Bell, and McAllister meet and suggest that Tammy receive three days of suspension. When votes are later cast, Flick has one more vote than Paul. When McAllister verifies the count, he throws away two ballots as he cannot accept a Flick victory. Student vote counters suspect dishonesty. The custodian finds two ballots for Flick in the garbage can. He loses his job, his wife and moves to New York City. He finds a new life there and gets a job at the Museum of Modern History as a docent. He also finds another love interest.

*This Is My Father*

7 May 1999

Kieran Johnson is a Chicago High School social studies teacher in Paul Quinn's *This Is My Father*. The frame for this story is Mr. Johnson's experience and effectiveness in the classroom. The middle is the story of his mother and his father, he learns, in Kilronan, Galway, Ireland. Johnson has assigned his students to trace their family history and to write about its connection to the twentieth century. As a student delivers her thoughts about her personal history, Johnson looks out the window and seems to be distracted. It is the critique of the students that he is a bad teacher. He reiterates the assignment and tells them to spend their spring breaks redoing the assignment. Johnson reads an article that details statistics on the success of

teenagers before he dismisses them. He encourages them to think about the choices they are making.

Upon his arrival home, it is clear why he has so much on his mind. His mother, Fiona Flynn has had a stroke and is unable to speak. His sister Betty cares for her, and his nephew Jack is failing three high school subjects. Quite by accident, Johnson finds a book of Yates' poetry and a photograph given to his mother. He does not know until later that the man in the photograph is his father, Kieran O'Day. This prompts him to make a trip to Ireland; he takes Jack as well.

In 1939 Ireland, Fiona and Kieran O'Day were never married. They find one another near Galway after Fiona has been sent home from Catholic boarding school. Kieran was an orphan adopted by the childless, Maney couple who raise him and treat him as their son. The story of this romance comes by way of Mrs. Kearney, the Innkeeper, who tells fortunes and stories from the past for some silver. She heard the story directly from pregnant Fiona shortly before she leaves Ireland for America. As the story is told, it is apparent that these young people really love each other, but the Catholic Church will not condone a marriage as Fiona is only seventeen years old. O'Day commits suicide by hanging himself. Kieran Johnson never knew anything about his father or this heritage until this trip.

When he and Jack return to Chicago, Johnson tells his story to his students and shows the photograph of his parents. The students are respectful and attentive to his story.

*American Pie*

9 July 1999

In *American Pie* Paul Weitz tells of four high school seniors, Jim, Oz, Kevin, and Finch and their pact to have sex before graduation from East Great Falls High School in Michigan. At



the start of the story, Jim is in the privacy of his own room when his parents come in and discover that he is masturbating. From that moment, Jim's father, Mr. Levenstein gives all kinds of words of wisdom about sex to include comparing a woman to a warm apple pie.

Once at school, Jim and his friends discuss their sexual frustrations and make an agreement to have sex by graduation. Each of them goes through training about how to talk to a girl and convince her to have sex. Oz, the lacrosse player, joins the jazz choir as he feels there is an untapped population of females there. The choral teacher is happy to have him. Oz begins to fall in love with Heather whom he meets in jazz choir. Kevin gets the advice of his college brother and learns of a sex bible hidden in a secret shelf compartment in the school library. The bible is filled with illustrations and instructions about how to satisfy a woman. Kevin plans to use the bible to have sex with his steady girlfriend Vicky. Jim continues his friendly efforts and Nadia, an exchange student, accosts him. She comes to his house to student, but discovers his pornographic magazines and becomes aroused. When Jim enters the room, Nadia asks him to strip. This entire encounter is broadcast to his fellow students. Actually, he has his first experience with Michelle who does nothing but tell band camp stories. Finch has more sophisticated tastes and is entertained by Mrs. Stifler on a pool table at the after prom party.

Coach Marshall, the jazz choir director, and the English teacher supervise and advise these boys, but not on the matter of sex. Coach Marshall encourages the lacrosse players to score for points. The jazz choir director motivates all her students, but especially Oz and Heather to rehearse for their duet at the state competition. The English teacher talks of the coming of age of Henry in *Henry IV Part I*. In the end, each of the boys fulfills the pact, but not all the boys are willing to discuss the particulars of their encounters.

In *Teaching Mrs. Tingle* director Kevin Williamson tells the story of social studies teacher Mrs. Eve Tingle and three of her students: Jo Lynn Jordan, Leigh Ann Watson, and Luke Churner. Mrs. Tingle teaches at Grandsboro High School—a school she herself attended in her younger days. She has a reputation for being cruel and manipulative. The students dislike and fear her. Principal Potter, Miss Banks—the school secretary, and Miss Gold—the school counselor despise her.

Mrs. Tingle has assigned a history project which is to be well-researched and based in historical fact. As students complete their presentations, Mrs. Tingle both insults and ridicules the students. At issue is Watson's needing an A in Tingle's class to be the recipient of a college scholarship. She is competing against Trudy for this honor. Watson, Jordan, and Churner are friends. While Watson and Jordan are working on graduation seating arrangements, they discover that Churner has a stolen copy of Tingle's final exam. Watson, who is an honorable person, criticizes Churner for stealing the test. At that very moment Tingle appears. Watson tries to hide the exam, but Tingle grabs it out of her back pack and goes directly to the office. Watson's academic integrity is suspect. Since Principal Potter is gone for the day, Tingle will have to report it the next day.

Watson, Jordan, and Churner go to Tingle's house to convince Tingle that Watson did not take the exam. Both Jordan and Churner threaten Tingle. When Churner picks up a medieval-style crossbow, it goes off and grazes Tingle's forehead and knocks her down. The students must come up with a plan. It is their decision to keep her tied up to her bed and make some incriminating photos with Churner. When Coach Wenchell visits Tingle, the students learn they

have a relationship. The students blindfold Winchell; he thinks Tingle did it. They ply him with cabernet and carry him to Tingle's bed where these photographs are taken. They deliver the coach back to his own front porch.

Tingle complicates the dynamic because she is able to hone in on each of the student's weaknesses, especially those of Jordan and Watson. At the finale, Tingle has escaped and is chased around the house. She picks up the cross bow and aims it at Watson. Tingle fires, but it goes through the glass door into Trudy's yearbook and knocks Trudy down. Trudy has come to complain about her B grade on her history project. Watson changed her own grade and Trudy's so that she would have a higher ranking. At that moment Tingle believes Trudy is dead and that she has killed her. Principal Potter walks in and Tingle admits all of her misdeeds. He fires her saying he has wanted to do so for twenty years. At graduation, Watson does receive the scholarship for which she worked.

*Light It Up*

10 November 1999

In Craig Bolotin's *Light It Up* six students take over Lincoln High School in Queens, New York. Before the take-over, Ziggy, a student who lives in the school, is playing basketball, making a hamburger in the cafeteria, and painting. He lives at school because that is where he feels safe. With 2,300 students, Lincoln is overcrowded. At the height of winter, the school is cold, the roof is leaking, and there are not enough books for the students. A new policeman, Officer Jackson has just been hired to keep peace in the hallways during the school day.

Ziggy is sitting in the stairwell and sketching as the first bell of the day rings. Officer Jackson tells him to move, but he does not move immediately and the officer becomes

aggressive. Lester who is Ziggy's protective friend comes to Ziggy's aid and has a confrontation with the new officer. Ziggy helps Lester to solve the problem peacefully and move on to class.

In class, Mr. Ken Knowles teaches a class in journalism. Today's topic is media coverage of a social movement. During the class, one of the windows breaks and snow begins to come into the class room. Knowles goes to Principal Alan Armstrong to ask for an alternate classroom, but there is not one. Principal Armstrong tells Knowles to take the students anywhere. So Knowles takes the students to a coffee shop near school and continues to teach his class. While at the café, a man wearing ski mask and carrying a shot gun enters to rob everyone. Knowles recognizes the student and reminds him that he was his teacher. Then Knowles punches him.

Back in the school office, the principal gives Knowles administrative leave for taking the students off campus without permission, but there are many witnesses to the contrary. The superintendent just happens to be there and observes the student revolt. When the principal says he will call everyone's parents, Ziggy runs out of the office. The principal sends Officer Jackson after Ziggy. During the confrontation, Lester again comes to Ziggy's defense. Ziggy unholster's Officer Jackson's gun and shoots him in the leg. Still trying to defend Ziggy, Lester grabs the weapon and points it at the principal.

Lester makes his first demand—that everyone leave the school premises. The fire alarm is pulled the building; all evacuate the building except for six students and Officer Jackson who is their hostage. When detective and negotiator Audrey McDonald and Lieutenant Monroe arrive, they suspend a school invasion. In the meantime, the students have padlocked and chained all the doors. Initially McDonald tries to convince the students to walk out. The six students include Ziggy—an abused boy who lives at school and is an artist, Lester—an athlete

who maintains a 3.5 GPA, Rodney—a known thug who stays to avoid being shot by a gang member outside the school, Rivers—a gifted science and math student, Lynn—an intelligent girl who has just found out that she is pregnant, and Stephanie—an honor student. While the media suggests all of the students are misfits, that is not the case.

As the students occupy the school, the police are trying to find Knowles. Once the detectives uncover what happened that morning, they begin to understand the students' motivation. They learn that the NYC police shot and killed Lester's father while he was reaching for his asthma inhaler. Officials now understand the resolve of the students. They make a list of demands that includes the return of their teacher, the repair of the windows and leaks, and the availability of textbooks for every student.

The police begin to invade the school. Ziggy takes the students and Officer Jackson to his hiding place—an attic room where he lives. Ziggy has covered the ceiling of the room with art in modern mural fashion. He likens his work to that of muralist, Jean-Michel Basquiat. The students are surprised at his ability. Officer Jackson says the paintings are beautiful.

Knowles calls Lester on Rivers' cell phone and warns him that the police are moving in and know where they are. Lester takes Officer Jackson to the roof for the purpose of shooting him, but he cannot. A sniper in a helicopter will shoot Lester, but Officer Jackson blocks the sniper's view. Ziggy comes to rescue Lester and the police shoot Ziggy. The result of these events means jail time for Rodney, Lester, and Stephanie. Rivers goes to the army. Lynn leaves NYC after having her baby. Stephanie and Lester finish their jail time and go to college. Stephanie and Lester make yearly pilgrimages to the attic of Lincoln High to tell of Ziggy's story and to show others his art.

## CHAPTER 5

### FILM ANALYSES

In Chapter Four I summarized thirty film plots as a resource for readers who may be unfamiliar with the films. Using the eight question Film Analysis Form, I have examined each of the films. The questions include queries about the learning environments, the educators and educated the academic and life lessons, and the positives and negatives presented about secondary public education in the films of the 1990s.

1. How are the secondary learning environments – the schools, portrayed in films of the 1990s?
2. How are the educators portrayed in the films of the 1990s?
3. How are the educated portrayed in the films of the 1990s?
4. What academic lesson does the educator teach?
5. How does the educator teach the academic lesson?
6. What life lesson does the educator teach?
7. How does the educator teach the life lesson?
8. What positive or negative statements can be made about secondary public education when assessed through the lens of the films of the 1990s?

I discuss films individually and in chronological order. In Chapter Six, I draw conclusions about each question for this catalog of films and suggest further study for the twenty-first century.

### *Class of 1999*

In the *Class of 1999* the secondary learning environment is in chaos. Armed guards with gas masks and automatic weapons guard the school. A flashing sign outside of school reads “Respect. Learn. Obey.” Not only is the facility in a state of ill repair, the environment is not one where learning takes place easily. The Razor Heads and the Black Hearts, two rival gangs, conduct their hostile business at school. Drugs are available and well-used. Metal detectors identify all manner of dangerous weapons. Violent incidents occur every two hours and thirty-eight minutes. The school population is 3,287 students, 2210 of those are gang members, and 1077 are not affiliated.

Educators are of human and super human types. Dr. Miles Langford, the principal, is desperate to find a way to solve the school’s social and academic problems. He agrees to the Department of Educational Defense’s experimental placement or field testing of robotic teachers: Ms. Connors, Mr. Hardin, and Mr. Bryles. These droid teachers are army surplus and have been reprogrammed to be teachers. Ms. Connors teaches chemistry, Mr. Hardin history, and Mr. Bryles physical education. When faced with resistance from the students, these three educators are capable of firm to severe physical correction of bad behaviors. The students are portrayed as misfits, mostly disengaged from the educational process and more interested in gangs, drugs, sex, and gambling. Cody Culp who is recently released from jail is much more serious about learning than he was in the past. His new friend and daughter of the principal, Christie Langford is a very serious student.

Ms. Connors, Mr. Hardin, and Mr. Bryles begin their classes raising the academic bar, but spend an inordinate amount of time on the life lessons of good behavior. They demand conformity to rules of respect for authority. When a sarcastic student voices his lame opinion in chemistry class, Ms. Connors physically restrains him and beats him into submission. This lesson is not lost on his classmates who sit up in their chairs and begin to listen to instruction.

In the *Class of 1999*, the condition of secondary education is terminally negative. The existence of the Department of Educational Defense indicates that many schools are in trouble and in need of oversight and protection. Using terminator type teachers to both teach and discipline proves fatal for the disruptive students. But for Cody and Christie, the robot educators are a physical challenge they overcome through will and planning. In a lengthy battle scene, the students destroy the robots and blow up Kennedy High. The future of education at this Seattle school is unknown, but now has nothing to do but start from scratch.

### *Pump Up the Volume*

In *Pump Up the Volume*, the middle class learning environment is academically excellent, clean, organized, and full of good discipline due to the extraordinary efforts of assistant principal, Mr. Murdock. With 1200 students, Hubert H. Humphrey High boasts the highest SAT scores in the state of Arizona. The educators include Mrs. Cresswood, the principal, Mr. Murdock, the assistant principal, Miss Emerson, the young English teacher, and Mr. Deaver, the guidance counselor. Principal Cresswood rules with a mighty hand and voice from the top and is possessive and proud of the high honors bestowed on the school for the best SAT scores. Assistant Principal Murdock polices students off the busses, in the courtyard, and in the hallways for minor offenses like dress code violations and suspends them. The hidden agenda is to remove



all potentially lower scorers on the SAT from the school population. Miss Emerson reaches out to her students in her writing class and asks them to express their feelings in their compositions. Mr. Deaver spends the first half of the story being an ineffective counselor to the students who really need him. When student Malcolm Kiser commits suicide after having announced the idea on Hard Harry's radio program, the counselor makes and erects a sign that reads BIONIC—believe it or not I care. He keeps office hours and maintains a hotline for student issues during school hours only. But the students would rather talk to Hard Harry than to the guidance counselor because Harry understands their problems and knows how to listen.

The educated are more caught up in the problems of growing up than focused on their academic studies. They are dealing with parents pushing them toward academic success and Ivy colleges, depression, homosexuality, and failure. Mark, Hard Harry on the radio, is shy and socially inexperienced. His parents are caring and aware, but do not even realize their son is broadcasting a radio show from the basement. The radio persona gives Mark the courage to speak his mind, listen to the frustrations of his peers, and provide a venue for them to relieve their angst albeit anonymously.

With the exception of Miss Emerson's efforts in composition, the only academic lesson is the administrative directive to maintain those high SAT scores. The administration targets those who might function low on the test and suspends them for minor rule infractions. School image and prestige are very important to Principal Cresswood. She would prefer not to have to deal with the at-risk population. When Mr. Deaver opens his door to communications with the students, he does so as a formality, not out of a legitimate concern for the children's welfare.

In *Pump Up the Volume* there are both negative and positive remarks made about secondary public education. Miss Emerson is a caring teacher, but is not the instructional focus of the story. She does make an effort to influence the faculty and administration, but not with any success. Hard Harry's program makes teenage problems at Hubert Humphrey High known to the public as well as to the administration. His broadcasts force them to be attentive. Negatively speaking, the school and the counselor should have been addressing the academic and school social problems of the students as that is the mission of school. Principal Cresswood and her staff should insist that all students achieve academic success even if some cannot achieve the highest scores on the SAT. Mr. Deaver, the guidance counselor, should counsel the students who are faced with life challenges when those interfere with their academic success. The administration in *Pump Up the Volume* fails the students. The students, through Harry's program, teach the educators to take notice.

### *If Looks Could Kill*

For the most part, the learning environment of *If Looks Could Kill* is not a typical one as the students are on a summer school field trip for the French Club. While the students are well-supervised by Mrs. Grober, the chaperone, the foreign locale makes the environment out of the control of the school and its administration, Edsel High School in Detroit. Mrs. Grober, a serious and passionate French language educator, is traditional and formal in her interactions with the students. She speaks French and expects the students to do so as well. The purpose of the trip is to learn and practice French as well as experience the culture of France. The educated in this story are led by Michael Corbin, a student who has accidentally assumed the identity of a special government undercover agent whose mission is to stop Augustus. The other students are

motivated world travelers. Once Michael has embraced his new spy identity, he enjoys what adventure France has to offer, and in the meantime is acquiring his credits to graduate from high school.

Mrs. Grober facilitates the academic lesson's delivery. She models courtesy and politeness for the children towards their French hosts. She also focuses the children on the hectic agenda of the trip. She accepts the challenge of steering the students through the countryside of France under the watchful eye of rogue drivers employed by Augustus. Augustus is informed that she is a double agent from the Cold War and brings with her a gang of mercenaries. She rises to the leadership challenge and dons a terrorist costume and attitude. The children follow her lead. Michael is away from the group on his own spy mission, but remains loyal to the group and frees them from the capture by Augustus. Michael grows a conscience on this trip and saves the international monetary coalition from Augustus' poison champagne. He also saves his classmates and teacher.

If the purpose of education includes both an academic lesson and a life one, then Michael Corbin has certainly benefited from the French Club trip. The positive perspective of secondary education is that students have the opportunity to learn in the world classroom, not just the ones provided at Edsel High. Off campus activities require much energy and stamina by those who supervise. Mrs. Grober embodies the responsible and concerned educator. As a result of this world experience, Michael realizes that he wants to learn more about France and French.

### *Class Act*

The secondary learning environment of *Class Act* reeks of bias and prejudice. Students who have established themselves as excellent are treated to the best instructors and a higher

order curriculum on the hallway marked “Advanced Students.” Those marginal, low achieving students are given a curriculum that matches their perceived mediocrity. On the first day for Duncan and Blade, the school secretary drops their records. When she picks them up, she accidentally switches the photographs. Each of these students is tracked on a curriculum matched to society’s actual perception of them. Principal Kratz provides Blade and Duncan with radically different orientation sessions on day one. The principal inspires Duncan to compete in the Knowledge Bowl, and later threatens Blade with a baseball bat. He conditions them based on what he believes are their abilities. Miss Simpson, the advanced Latin instructor, is so honored and star struck by Duncan that she can barely instruct the class. In Blade’s English class, the teacher delivers an unexciting lesson in an unstimulating fashion on transitive verbs and affixes while the students are inattentive. This kind of tracking may reap what it sows.

The educated in the academically gifted classes are highly motivated learners and researchers. The students who are not offered the accelerated curriculum are more occupied in the hallways with bullying, sex, drugs, and gang activities. The academic lessons Duncan and Blade experience actually draw on their strengths. Duncan becomes a star athlete because he understands and uses the rules of physics to kick field goals in football. Blade uses his intimate knowledge of the mechanics of a motor vehicle engine as a metaphor to explain human reproduction in science class. Despite the biases of their introductory orientation, each of these students has used the life skills they already possess to foil the system.

The secondary learning environment of *Class Act* is negative in that students are tracked based upon their perceived ability rather than on their potential. Little opportunity exists for students who have academic potential to advance. Educators perform instructionally with their

own prejudices as well—giving their best performance for the honors students and their most mundane for the at-risk learners. What is positive in *Class Act* is the students' ability to overcome society's expectations as delivered by the educators at Higgins High School, and to ascend to a level of greatness unexpected by them.

### *Zebrahead*

The secondary learning environment in *Zebrahead* is a well-integrated public high school in Detroit. Principal Cimino supervises students at Frank Cody High School firmly and greets them with genuine care. He awards trouble makers with multiple days in ICE—in school suspension. Students Zach, a Jewish white male, and Dee, a black male, are best friends who act more like brothers. Nikki, Dee's cousin transfers from her Brooklyn school. She is a thinking, conscious student who cares about her education and is aware of her racial identity. Zack, in particular, loves music and records and sells music to his friends at school.

Other than Principal Cimino, social studies teacher, Mr. Modell opens communication via unstructured discussion in his class room so that students may vent their racial frustrations after Dee is shot. Nut, a troubled black student, shoots Dee at Skateland during a school function. Mr. Modell does not present the issue of race as an academic one, but as a social one. He asks the students to think about why this shooting happened. Principal Cimino pulls Zack to the side in the hallway advising him to stick to his own kind so he will know who he (Zach) is. Zach does not agree, nor does he argue with Principal Cimino's message. Instead, he continues his quest for a relationship with Nikki.

The students are generally well-supervised in the hallway. There is one exception when two students who have been participating in the discussion of race in Mr. Modell's room leave

his class and fight in the hallway. Despite this, Frank Cody High School is a safe place with a stimulating learning environment. The principal imparts a negative and non-progressive lesson about race, while the social studies teacher uses his classroom to provide a nonjudgmental venue for a conversation about the topic. This is a positive statement about secondary education. It disintegrates negatively and quickly when Mr. Modell does not step in verbally or physically to stop the fight between the Italian student and the black intellectual one. This suggests perhaps that racial arguments and sentiments are continuous and integral to the educational setting and to society in general.

*Just Another Girl on the IRT*

The secondary learning environment portrayed in *Just Another Girl on the IRT* is a complex and challenging one. Most students are at-risk and this fact elevates the tension at this Brooklyn High School. Principal Moore and social studies teacher Mr. Weinberg do all they can to counsel and educate Chantel. Chantel is an outspoken teenager who is self-possessed, articulate, confident and academically driven. She plans to graduate early and go to medical school. When Mr. Weinberg presents the Holocaust lesson, Chantel interrupts requesting a discussion about contemporary issues as they are more pertinent to her development. Her all me mentality elicits a strong response from Mr. Weinberg who says he will not be interrupted; he will stick to his lesson plan. Chantel is disrespectful and curses at him.

Mr. Weinberg sends Chantel to the principal. In his most nurturing way and ignoring Chantel's cursing, Principal Moore counsels Chantel to be a lady, to tone down her mouth, and to listen. In the spirit of a life lesson, he cautions her about rushing into college. He urges her to

be patient with the educational process and learn as much as she can. Chantel is not a listener. She ignores Mr. Moore's advice.

Because Chantel is socially naïve and not adequately supervised by her parents, she becomes involved in a relationship that yields an unwanted pregnancy. When the father gives her five hundred dollars for an abortion, Chantel takes her best girlfriend out on a shopping spree. This action seals the reality that Chantel is very immature. The advice of the principal is lost on Chantel. Principal Moore's counseling efforts are certainly within the parameters of his job as principal. One could say he goes above and beyond by handling Chantel's outburst with genuine concern. He certainly could have pushed this event off to the counseling department. His advising effort is positive, but the student does not listen to or comply with his recommendation. The personal result for Chantel is negative. She becomes a single mother. But in the end, her personal choice does not obscure her goal for medical school. It merely delays it.

### *Only the Strong*

The secondary learning environment of Miami's Lincoln High in *Only the Strong* is dangerous. Not only is the school covered with gang related graffiti, it is filthy, and filled with students who are more interested in drugs and gangs than in academic lessons. Mr. Kerrigan, the social studies teacher is depressed and uninspired even when he is teaching his lesson on Darwin. Mr. Cochran, the principal, readily steps up and supports any program to reach the at-risk students, the school board, and the local press for positive publicity. The new and special physical education educator and a former student of Mr. Kerrigan's, Louis Stevens has recently left the service of the military after a tour of duty against the drug cartels in Brazil.

Disenfranchised, the educated simply go through the motions of attendance. They find nothing of meaning in their educational experience. Mr. Kerrigan tells Louis some are worth saving, as he was, but 75% bring weapons to school, 45% are high, and 81% come from single parent households. School is such a dangerous place that special guard fences have been built within the stairwells to prevent students who are on drugs from leaping to their deaths as they attempt to fly.

Mr. Stevens breaks up a fight on campus using his unique skills of capoeira, and Mr. Kerrigan convinces him to apply for a position to work with troubled students there. The principal hires Mr. Stevens, and then chooses twelve of the most delinquent students, most with juvenile records for this special physical education curriculum. Since there is no space at Lincoln, Principal Cochran arranges for a satellite campus location—an old fire station. This becomes the physical education school house for the twelve misfits. Mr. Stevens teaches Brazilian capoeira, a combination of martial arts and modern dance that is designed to disable the opponent.

In the beginning the students are resistant, but Mr. Stevens convinces them by demonstration that capoeira works. As a teacher, Mr. Stevens expresses patience and encourages success. As he does his work and Mr. Kerrigan watches, he too becomes re-inspired to do better in the classroom. Capoeira merges self-control, confidence, and purpose in life. The academic and life lessons are taught simultaneously. Loyalty and trust grow among the educated ones as a result of the teacher's influence.

This special physical education instruction has an overwhelmingly positive effect for the students and the school community. As a result of the program's success and the student's ability



to protect themselves and the school, they eliminate the power of the drug lords at Lincoln. The students graduate and perform a ceremonial capoeira tribute to Mr. Stevens and the graduation audience. He will return as an instructor and teach capoeira classes to more students.

### *Dazed and Confused*

Lee High School on the last day of the school year hardly resembles a learning environment. Students are almost entirely unsupervised and as a result engage in raucous behavior to include smoking, gambling, and skipping classes. Students roam the hall and leave the school at will. Educators are few, but include Coach Conrad, a sleeping shop teacher, and a social studies teacher who warns the students of potentially outrageous 1976 summer celebrations for the 1776 anniversary. Coach Conrad wants his players to sign a pledge not to use drugs or alcohol in order to play football. While students are actively engaged in making paddles in shop class to haze the new freshmen; the shop teacher sleeps at his desk. This violates safety procedures for this class.

Most of the students at Lee are not focused on academics. Mike, Tony, and Cynthia are the only intellectuals and are portrayed as socially awkward. The rest of the population anticipates the after school antics of hazing the new freshmen girls and boys. These hazing rituals are a tradition and the new high schools students are very willing to accept this abuse. The lesson taught: stay away from drugs and alcohol. The students have such fun working against the adult message. Perhaps Coach Conrad is not only trying to make sure he has a clean football team, but also expressing his concern for the safety of his students. Randy “Pink” Floyd refuses to sign the pledge on the grounds that he does not think it is appropriate for the coach to demand this of him or the other players.

Only negative statements can be made about secondary public education in *Dazed and Confused*. The lack of supervision, guidance, and concern for the students at Lee even though it is the last day is inexcusable. While there may not be a loss of life, any fights, or other catastrophic events, the students are without rules that typically govern a school environment. Since the school is the guardian of children during the school day, Lee High fails miserably in its duty and mission.

### *Billy Madison*

In *Billy Madison*, Billy begins his education in first grade and it ends in high school. The environment of the school is traditional. It is important to note that Billy did not pass through school the first time on his own merit. His wealthy father, Brian paid his teachers so that Billy could advance in his grades. The integrity of the educators is in question before this story begins, and to some extent, foreshadows the integrity of Billy's new teachers. Billy learns his elementary school principal Mr. Max Anderson is not a qualified administrator. Instead, he is a popular and masked wrestler who hides in his school administrator role.

As a student, Billy is silly, but determined to succeed in every grade so that he can take over his father's business. Socially, Billy has the most difficulty in high school with bullies and students who are superior to him in knowledge. In fact, he returns to his elementary classmates, as these friendships, he has learned, are long lasting and sincere. There are few educators who make an impact on Billy in high school. The high school principal presides over an academic decathlon between Billy and Eric, his competitor for his father's business. The decathlon includes challenges in mathematics, home economics, physical education, chemistry, music and

drama. The lessons Billy learns he learns on his own, and not with the help of any of the educators who pass through his accelerated educational program.

More negative statements can be made about secondary public education in *Billy Madison*. Before he begins his re-education, he learns that his teachers could be bought by his father. His elementary school principal Mr. Anderson falsifies his administrative credentials. Elementary educators, not secondary ones make the deepest impression on Billy. What is positive about the experience Billy has had in secondary education is that he now knows he wants to attend college to become a teacher. In Hollywood films about education this is a happy ending.

#### *Clueless*

A fine institution, Bronson Alcott High School in Beverly Hills is filled with high quality students who live a life of privilege. Students are too comfortable at school and use their cell phones in the hallway, but experience no reprimands. This is a safe and fun school to be attending. Educators, Mr. Hall—debate, Coach Stoeger—physical education, and Miss Geist—social studies, are dedicated and respected teachers who are firm and care about the students. The learner focus is on Cher Horowitz whose primary interests are social. When she receives unsatisfactory grades in three classes and a notice of thirty-eight tardies, she must give herself a grade makeover.

Educators here are easily manipulated by the students under their supervision. Cher persuades Coach Stoeger to change her grade and enlists her sympathy by explaining that she has recently broken up with her boyfriend. The coach understands and expresses her own dissatisfaction with men to Cher. Cher volunteers to write her congressman about the Clean Air

Act and this is enough to sway Miss Geist to raise her grade. Cher plays on Miss Geist's social conscience. Cher is unable to convince Mr. Hall to change her grade. He is very serious about debate class and assigns topics such as "should all oppressed people be allowed refuge in America" and "violence in the media." These topics are far too serious for Cher. Because he is inflexible, Cher must approach her quest for a better grade by doing what she is best at in life—makeovers and match making.

Cher is a master of manipulation and negotiations, and outwits Mr. Hall by playing on his emotions. He is a lonely man. Cher is successful in bringing together two solitudinal teachers, Miss Geist and Mr. Hall is a relationship that culminates in marriage.

While this school is an amiable place for the students, it is not the most fulfilling place socially for the educators who work there. It can be said that this school environment has a negative and personal effect on the educators who are lonely and isolated. With Cher's assistance, Miss Geist and Mr. Hall find one another, but matchmaking socially challenged educators is certainly not the goal of secondary school.

### *Dangerous Minds*

Parkmont High School in *Dangerous Minds* is over-crowded, understaffed, and ill equipped to handle the challenging kinds of students in the Academy Program. What becomes Ms. Johnson's class has been through several substitute teachers. Administration is so desperate for a teacher that it willingly excuses that fact that Ms. Johnson never did her student teaching. Assistant Principal Nichols offers her emergency certification, a salary of \$25,000, a copy of the curriculum and a class schedule. In addition to the assistant principal, other educators: Principal Gradney and teacher and friend to Ms. Johnson, Hal Griffith work closely to help Ms. Johnson

adjust to her teaching life. While delighted to have an educator present in the classroom, the principal offers caution to Ms. Johnson about the methods she employs and the lessons she teaches to the students. Hal Griffith, though haggard from the job and a chain smoker, is dedicated to teaching his students. He offers Ms. Johnson encouragement after she learns about the kind of students she must teach. Once she develops a strategy for teaching the Academy students, she is a force that cannot be stopped. The educated, a collection of students of various ethnicities all from bad neighborhoods, are wild and untamed. On the first day, the students ignore Ms. Johnson as they continue their talking, listening to music, and bickering. It seems that the educational system has ignored learners Emilio, Callie, Raoul, and Darnell, as well as the rest of their classmates. Many like them and before them have dropped out of school.

Ms. Johnson teaches sophomore English and life. Initially she gets their attention by teaching the students some karate moves she learned as a Marine. Once she has their attention, she empowers the students with the poetry of Dylan Thomas and the music of Bob Dylan. She tells them if they can handle and decipher the code of poetry, they can handle any learning challenge. She motivates them by giving all students an A to keep by working hard. She, too, is shown to be a tireless educator and she spends time reading books to help her better reach this population. She arranges field trips and makes home visits to help students to stay in school. She goes above and beyond what many educators do. She discovers how intelligent they are and finds true satisfaction in her work until the personal lives of these students compromise their school success. Durrell drops out because his mother does not like the lessons on poetry and hope. Callie transfers to a high school for pregnant girls. When Emilio is shot, Ms. Johnson reconsiders her dedication and commitment to this job.

Both positive and negative statements can be made about education in *Dangerous Minds*. One negative is the prevalence of a disinvested, dismissed population in school that often learns from the least qualified educators. In this story, it works. These students may be more difficult to teach, but they do offer insights and demonstrate abilities as extraordinary as gifted students. Ms. Johnson is both an effective English teacher and an advocate for the Academy students. More teachers who accept and embrace the challenge of teaching, wrestle the curriculum with administrators, spend many out of school hours, make home visits, and open their own pocketbooks to treat students are clearly needed.

#### *National Lampoon's Senior Trip*

At Fairmont High School, the learning environment is comic. The educators are easily duped by the students or tired from the rigor of the job of teaching. Mrs. Winston, the school secretary is so senior that she uses a walker. Students roam at will, are so mischievous, and plan a party at the principal's house concurrent with the school day. The educators are Principal Moss, Mr. Bloom—the keyboarding teacher, Mr. Diplo—the Saturday detention teacher, and Miss Milford—the new keyboarding teacher. The principal encourages punctuality at the start of the school day by greeting the students. In a monotone voice, Mr. Bloom calls out letter for the students to type in keyboarding class. He says his life is a joke when his method of teaching surely is. When he dies in the midst of class, not one of the students even notices. The principal leaves the students in Saturday detention to Mr. Diplo's care. He proceeds to show films about prophylactics and unwanted pregnancy. Enthusiastic Miss Milford, a new and young teacher, replaces Mr. Bloom and gladly accepts the role as chaperone on the school trip to Washington, D.C. Led by Dags and Reggie, the educated are fatuous and rude. Their activities are more

appropriate for middle school students than for high school seniors. Only two students are painted as studious and serious, Steve the student body president, and Lisa Perkins an honor student.

Principal Moss assigns the only academic lesson to the students in Saturday detention. They are to write a letter about educational reform to the President of the United States. While every student but Lisa is watching the films, Lisa takes the assignment to heart and writes an excellent letter to the President. The President and Ohio Senator Duffield welcome the correspondence and invite the students to Washington to speak before Congress. The academic lesson reaps a big reward for the students who are mostly undeserving.

Chaperoned by Principal Moss and Miss Milford, the students go on their senior trip on a school bus. Along the way, Dags and Reggie coordinate all manner of sabotage to include leaving the principal in a public restroom with an overflowing toilet. Despite the consistent courtesy and compassion of the educators, the students deliver prank after prank to include spiking a gift box of chocolates for Miss Milford. Eating the chocolates, Miss Milford and the principal become drunk and have inappropriate relations while the students are watching. When the students crash a party of Washington dignitaries, some of whom will be welcoming Fairmont students to Congress, they uncover and foil a plot to embarrass the school and principal.

There are more negatives than positives in *National Lampoon's Senior Trip*. The positive, of course, is the students' having the opportunity to make a trip to Washington, D.C. Ultimately, they rescue their school and principal from humiliation. They graduate. The negatives include a complete disregard from the conventions of rules and courtesy by the students, failed supervision by the principal and Miss Milford, and a lack of regard for the important task of education. If

Fairmont represented the mainstream secondary environment, public education would be in worse shape than it actually might be viewed through the lens of 1990s cinema.

*Mr. Holland's Opus*

The secondary learning environment of John F. Kennedy High School for the thirty-year time span of this story is conventional, orderly, well-managed, and safe. The educators portrayed in *Mr. Holland's Opus* are Principal Jacobs, Vice Principal Wolters, Mr. Holland, and Coach Meister. The Portland Unified School District School Board makes a brief appearance at the end of the story. Principal Jacobs welcomes Mr. Holland telling him that he has two jobs—the first to impart knowledge to the students, the second to be their compass. Acting as an enforcer and in a no-nonsense manner, Vice Principal Wolters firmly and consistently executes school rules and procedures. Coach Meister teaches physical education and coaches football and wrestling. Beyond these responsibilities, he assists Mr. Holland with techniques of marching for the marching band. He has marching experience from his time in the military. He helps, not only because he and Mr. Holland are friends, but because he views his job is more than coaching. Mr. Holland earned a teaching certificate as something to fall back on; he tells Mrs. Jacobs he never thought he would teach. He sees himself as a composer. He begins teaching music appreciation classes and a symphony class. Over the course of his thirty years as an educator, he also teaches driver's education, marching band, and solo performance. In a short time and because of the students, he becomes a dedicated, passionate educator. The educated ones are middle class, multi-ethnic students, many of whom enjoy learning music from Mr. Holland despite his occasional acerbic wit. Mr. Holland's students include Gertrude Lang who becomes the governor of Oregon and Louis Russ who completes school, joins the military, and dies in the line of duty.



Mr. Holland teaches his students to read music, to listen to music, and to play music with feeling. As a life lesson, he challenges his students particularly the ones he tutors, to uncover their personalities and grow in confidence through the expression of music. He inspires his students in the classroom, on the field in the marching band, and in tutorial. As he develops as an educator, he talks with the students in a respectful and nurturing manner. His students succeed as a result of his caring for them.

In John F. Kennedy High School is a consistently positive secondary education environment evidenced over a thirty year period. Administrators and teachers commit to their jobs for a lifetime. They are passionate and view the profession as a calling. Teachers are expected to teach and to mentor their students. These high expectations yield great results for the students. When the school board appears at the end of the story, it decides the fate of the fine arts curriculum at JFK. A certain negative trend is that budget cuts force school districts to modify or eliminate their fine arts and elective offerings. Mr. Holland retires earlier than he might have because of this fiscal necessity.

### *The Substitute*

Columbus High School in *The Substitute* is a dangerous learning environment riddled with drugs, gangs, and a corrupt administration. The educators featured here are Principal Claude Rolle, social studies teacher Jane Hetzko, her colleagues Darrell Sherman and Miss Hetzko's substitute, Mr. Smith. Mr. Rolle is a self-possessed and sophisticated school leader. He believes power perceived is power achieved. As an administrator, he does not always support his teachers if doing so interferes with his hidden agenda. Miss Hetzko likes her job despite the student population she teaches. When she is physically threatened by a student, Juan Lucas, the leader of

the Kings of Destruction (K.O.D.) and reports it to Principal Rolle, he says there is not enough evidence to support a student transfer. Juan acts on his threat and arranges for her knee to be broken by Johnny Glades, a Seminole involved in transporting drugs. Mr. Sherman supports Miss Hetzko, goes to the principal with her, and maintains loyalty to Columbus High from which he graduated. Mr. Smith substitutes for Miss Hetzko while she is recovering. Mr. Smith is actually Shale, Miss Hetzko's mercenary boyfriend. Shale does not inform her that he is her substitute. He is a military trained mercenary who uses his special investigatory, intelligence gathering skills, and his mercenary team to find out what is wrong at Columbus. In the midst of his undercover operation, Mr. Smith comes to delight in his teaching responsibilities and relationships with the students.

The educated are desperate for education or are more drawn into the worlds of drug abuse or gangs. The school population represents every ethnicity one might expect to find in the south Miami area. Mr. Smith lectures the students about modern warfare, his time in the jungle, Vietnam, and makes connections between the warriors there and the gangs in Miami. He encourages them to think about the choices they are making in their lives and the students listen to him. Students Jerome and Lisa feel empowered by Mr. Smith's words. When Mr. Sherman, who discovers the school drug operation, is killed, Mr. Smith knows Principal Rolle, Juan Lucas, and the K.O.D's are responsible.

Principal Rolle breaks every cardinal rule of education by collaborating with the K.O.D.'s and running illegal drugs at school for his own profit. Both negative and positive statements can be made about education in *The Substitute*. First, it bears repeating that the Principal has lost all educational integrity and respect for the law. Even when he seemed a

forthright school leader albeit corporate in nature, he failed to believe Miss Hetzko had been threatened. The task of administrators includes protecting and serving those in their care. It is positive that Mr. Smith discovers the rewards of teaching even in a school with a challenging population. Perhaps it is negative to believe that the only way to clean up a dysfunctional administrator and school is with a paramilitary plot and staff who succeeds in killing the major player evil doers.

### *High School High*

At Marion Barry High School in *High School High* every possible learning problem and crime thrives. This learning environment is by far the most corrupt institution of all the secondary schools in this study. Surrounded by a large fence, the statue of Marion Barry in front of the school smokes a crack pipe. The school has its own cemetery and parking spots for Johnny Cochran and a SWAT team. A bumper sticker celebrates a child with a D average. The school nurse gives out free condoms and lessons on how to use them. Teachers drink cocktails in the lounge and wear bullet proof vests to class. Social studies teacher, Mr. Riley was beaten to death and Mr. Arnott, the assistant principal has been missing for several months. His photograph is on a milk carton. Marion Barry High School provides a secondary environment that is not appropriate for learning.

The educators are Principal Evelyn Doyle, administrative assistant Victoria Chappell, and the newly hired teacher, Mr. Richard Clark. Mrs. Doyle carries a big stick as she patrols the hallway and announces “you screw up and you die.” She realizes that every bad student in the district is sent to her. At the welcome back assembly, she cautions the children to wait a week before they hurt the new teacher. Principal Doyle is also the infamous Mr. A—a known drug

trafficker in the community. She uses some of the students to do her drug deals. Mr. A is arrested at the conclusion of the story. Miss Chappell has not been jaded by Mrs. Doyle's brand of administration. She is positive and open to new ways of interacting with the students. When Mr. Clark arrives from his Wellington Academy private school job, it is clear he is ready to embrace the students at MBHS. His license plate reads CAL 2 TEACH. Mr. Clark overlooks the bad behavior of the students and interacts with them respectfully and compassionately. Even on the first day, his car and lunch are stolen, his desk is set on fire, he is covered with spit balls, and is chained to his desk. These events only strengthen his resolve to educate the children at this school.

As for the academic lesson, Mr. Clark tries to teach a lesson about the Bill of Rights, but the students are not interested. If they are to follow him, he must build trust and rapport with them. And they are responsive to his persistent efforts to see them as "good." When he survives the car chicken race, he earns hero points with the learners. By far his greatest achievement is having faith and confidence in Griff, a former gang member, and power broker at MBHS. Griff has dreamed of going to college and Mr. Clark convinces him that can happen. Having garnered the students' trust, Mr. Clark prepares the students for the state standardized test. In the end, Mr. Clark succeeds with his students and presides as principal over a graduation of five students including Griff. In his remarks, he encourages the students who have not yet graduated to apply themselves and work hard on their homework.

Perhaps more positive remarks can be made about secondary public education than negative ones by the conclusion of this story. While MBHS is by far the worst school, with a drug lord wielding a large stick as the administrator, it is dramatically transformed by one

educator Mr. Clark, who believes in the infinite goodness of the children. The power of one individual educator makes a significant difference.

*187*

Two secondary learning environments are presented in *187*. Both high schools are treacherous places—the first is Roosevelt Whitney High School in Brooklyn and the second is John Quincy Adams High School in southern California. Each school is riddled by all the social issues in high schools, but both are filled with violence, gangs, drugs, and sex. At Roosevelt, student Dennis Broadway stabs teacher Trevor Garfield twelve times in the hallway. At John Quincy, administration segregates the A list students from the troublesome component in what is called the Bungalow classrooms. Crimes happen daily in or near the Bungalows. At least one teacher has a gun in his desk drawer.

What each of these schools has in common is Mr. Garfield, high school science teacher. Other educators include the principal of Roosevelt, Principal Garcia of John Quincy, computer teacher Ellen Henry, and social studies teacher Dave Childress. The principal of Roosevelt tells Mr. Garfield to ignore Dennis Broadway's written threat. He has written *187*, the police code for a homicide on every page of his science textbook. Shortly after Mr. Garfield reports the vandalism and threat, he is Broadway's victim at the change of class. Mr. Garfield is tenacious and is a consummate educator. He recovers physically and moves to California to start a new life. He signs up to be a substitute teacher. Mr. Garfield suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, but does not know it. Mentally and practically, he crosses ethical lines that other teachers would not consider.

Principal Garcia has never been a classroom teacher, but has been an administrator for ten years. His leadership suits a corporation rather than a school. He wants to avoid litigation. Ellen Henry teaches computer and key boarding skills. Benny Chacon's presence in her class makes her uncomfortable. She testified against him in court. Afterwards, he threatened her life. One of the conditions of his parole is that he attends school. He is placed in Miss Henry's class again. She teaches her computer lessons, but lives her life in fear. Dave Childress teaches social studies in the Bungalows. He instructs with fearlessness and abandon, keeps a loaded gun in his desk, and has sex at school with Rita Martinez, a student taking his class. He does not question the integrity of his sexual relationship with the student or the placement of a gun in his drawer. Since Mr. Childress has a blurry vision of his role as educator, his students do not respect him or rely on him.

The educated in *187* is a troubled, neglected lot. Their home situations, their lack of supervision, the absence of a moral compass in their lives, and their disregard of public education makes them an angry and despicable group. Back at Roosevelt, Dennis Broadway has been identified as a troubled student, but the system only facilitates his continued attendance even after he has threatened a teacher. He stabs Mr. Garfield twelve times and leaves school without being stopped. At John Quincy, Benny Chacon wears a monitoring ankle bracelet, has a criminal gang-related record, but is still allowed to attend school and threaten Miss Henry. Educators at John Quincy have identified Cesar, Stevie, and Paco, students of Mr. Garfield, as having learning issues; these students prefer to spend their time spray painting graffiti or using recreational drugs. Rita Martinez wants an education and is intelligent, but her social life is wrapped up in the cultural and relational connections with these bad boys. She has sex with her

teacher, Mr. Childress mostly because she wants to be liked. She does offer her body to Mr. Garfield in exchange for tutoring, but he does not accept. For Rita, her body is a commodity to be shared. The learners are a disturbed, misdirected group of children.

Initially, John Quincy hires Mr. Garfield as a short term substitute. When he arrives at Bungalow 86, he begins serious science teaching. He stays for the rest of the semester when the other teacher takes medical leave. The students threatened that teacher as well. He tells the students that anyone can be a scientist, runs experiments with a live mouse, assists Rita with improving her essay writing, and makes home visits. He realizes these students require more than academic lessons and systematically gives them life lessons that are in some cases fatal.

With vengeance and to protect his friend Miss Henry, Mr. Garfield gives Benny a drug overdose. He finds Cesar alone as he is spraying graffiti, drugs him with a poisoned arrow, and severs his ring finger. He arranges for the finger to be delivered to the hospital emergency room where doctors will reattach it to Cesar's hand. At the conclusion of the story, he plays a game of Russian roulette with Cesar derived from the conclusion of *The Deer Hunter*. The objective of the game is to determine who has the most courage and honor. Mr. Garfield takes what is supposed to be Cesar's turn and kills himself. Watched by Paco and Stevie, Cesar insists on taking the next shot and kills himself as well. This is an extraordinarily negative outcome and suggests an extreme to which this teacher might have to go to teach a lesson. A perverse positive is that an educator was willing to make the greatest sacrifice. Secondary education demands much of its educators, but currently does not ask for the ultimate sacrifice.

## *In & Out*

The secondary learning environment of *In & Out* is the very nearly perfect Greenleaf High School in Greenleaf, Indiana. There are no behavior problems or concerns about students' learning. The playing field is level. The educators, Howard Brackett and Principal Halliwell are colleagues in a harmonious teacher-administrator relationship. Mr. Brackett teaches English literature and poetry. His students adore him. Principal Halliwell leads in a traditional, conventional manner. The educated are college bound happy students. Graduate, Cameron Drake, who during his time at Greenleaf lived and breathed theater, disturbs the school's equilibrium when he announces in his Academy Award acceptance speech that his high school English teacher mentor is gay. Mr. Brackett, Principal Halliwell, and the student body are transported to a confused state with this announcement.

Mr. Brackett teaches English literature expressively and passionately. He advises students and they confide in him. He has been the teacher of the year. When Drake publically acknowledges Mr. Brackett's homosexual preference, the principal tells him that his job depends on his acting on his heterosexuality. He must follow through with his promised marriage to Emily, his fiancée for three years. As an administrator, Principal Halliwell acts as a traditionalist trying to protect the students and community from controversy. Outside the classroom, Mr. Brackett spends time trying to determine who he is sexually. He engages in a mail order tutorial about how to be a macho man. He listens to the counseling advice of reporter Peter Malloy who is himself gay. If anything, this education and reflection affirm that he is gay. Of course, being gay means he loses the job he loves, in the community he loves.



The homophobia scare that spreads through Greenleaf High as a result of Drake's revelation gives a narrow and negative view of the positive environment this school has. Hope springs eternal at graduation, when the students, teachers, and parents stand individually and announce they are gay as well. In this gesture, they affirm their love and respect for an excellent teacher whose sexuality is no longer an issue. Within this story, the school and community have grown in a positive direction and have opened their minds about what it means to be a teacher who happens to be gay.

### *Wild Things*

The secondary learning environment at Blue Bay High School in *Wild Things* is one of privilege and high society. The campus is well-manicured and orderly and without many of the typical behavior issues in high school. High crime happens here. Sam Lombardo, the guidance counselor, is the educator focus of this story. As educator of the year, Mr. Lombardo has coached the sailing team, supported students in dealing with their personal problems, and given extra time to desperate students. He cares about the emotional development of his students and arranges a speaker's series to include a session by local police detectives about date rape.

The students with whom Mr. Lombardo has his closest relationships are two senior girls: Kelly Van Ryan and Suzie Toller. Portrayed as a spoiled and rich daughter of a very provocative and promiscuous mother, Kelly is capable of great manipulation and vulnerability. Kelly's intelligence is apparent, but her neediness is even more evident. Since her father committed suicide, she has become close to Mr. Lombardo. Suzie has gifted intelligence, but comes from an Everglades village and often finds herself in jail. Mr. Lombardo has been her ally and confidant.

By arranging for the speaker series, routinely counseling students, and financially supporting student activities like the sailing club and the senior car wash, Mr. Lombardo has earned the respect and admiration of his school community. But the life lessons he imparts to Kelly and Suzie are completely inappropriate for a counselor and student, for an adult and a minor. He is intimate with both girls both individually and together. When he is accused of rape by Kelly and then by Suzie, he goes to trial and loses his counseling job. When the girls reveal they made up stories about Mr. Lombardo, an out of court settlement that makes him very rich results. All of this was part of his plan and also includes a future living in decadence with Kelly and Suzie in the Caribbean.

Mr. Lombardo's breach of educator and human integrity result in his death. Suzie's intelligence is superior and she victoriously acquires the money, the boat, and the trust of the lawyer. Mr. Lombardo's greed is a negative and mitigating factor in his inappropriate relationship with these students. As a result of his crossing the fine line of integrity, he loses his life. Perhaps this can be viewed positively as justice is served in his demise.

### *He Got Game*

The secondary learning environment of *He Got Game* is obsessed with athletics, in particular the number one basketball draft pick in the country—Jesus Shuttlesworth. The Rail-splitters team, the community, the coach, and Jesus himself are in a fever about the potential college choices. Lincoln High School's Coach Cincotta supports and encourages Jesus to take his time and make the right choice for him and his sister. Coach Cincotta's first appearance makes him a paternalistic presence in Jesus' life. A senior, Jesus is mature for his young years. His

well-developed sense of responsibility to his sister whom he is raising and to himself is fierce.

He is alone because his father killed his mother and is serving time in Attica Prison.

Coach Cincotta teaches no particular academic lesson to Jesus. He does tell him that he was very coachable and that he is an excellent team player. The life lesson coach Cincotta teaches Jesus has a greater moral and ethical impact. The coach has been giving Jesus money to take care of his sister and to live in a better place away from Aunt Sally and Uncle Bubba. Jesus thought the money was a loan. When Coach Cincotta gives him one last pep talk about making his college decision, he offers Jesus \$10,000. He also tells him that he purchased the good calculus grade for Jesus. At this moment, Jesus realizes that Coach Cincotta has been trying to buy his favor. And at that juncture, Jesus realizes the person he perceived as a self-less advisor, a father figure, is not at all selfless. Jesus has learned that money is a tool used to buy people and things. Jesus is not for sale. This gesture of business dehumanizes and depersonalizes Jesus' relationship with the educator he trusted most, his coach.

When the focus of education is a star athlete's college choice and not the high school graduate's intellectual potential and career direction, then this is a very negative statement about secondary public education and its athletic programs.

### *Disturbing Behavior*

The secondary learning environment at Cradle Bay High School is experiencing a positive transformation because of a special and innovative program. The Blue Ribbon program allows typical teens who are not developing to the satisfaction of the parents to become more patriotic, wholesome, and studious. Dr. Edgar Caldicott, the guidance counselor, identifies low performing students who engage in bad behavior, invites their parents to an orientation about the

Blue Ribbon program, and then has the already vested parents vote on the candidacy of the proposed child. As an educator, Dr. Caldicott has ascended to a powerful and admired position at Cradle Bay High and in the Cradle Bay community.

The educated at Cradle Bay include the already transformed Blue Ribbon boys and girls, the motor heads, the micro geeks, the skaters, the heavy metal kids and some fringe dwelling students who do not associate much with the others. According the Dr. Caldicott, each group possesses some unusual qualities that present obstacles to their being good citizens and volunteering. They rarely refrain from having sex and are not academically excellent students. The fringe dwellers include new student Steve Clark who joins Rachel Wagner, Gavin Strick, and U.V. These learners are intelligent observers. Their concern for the change in their school environment and their sleuth work leads to the bizarre clarity of Dr. Caldicott's mission.

Dr. Caldicott teaches no academic lesson to the students. Instead, he works on the psyche of the parents whose children are unfocused and mischievous. Once he has counseled the parents and they agree, he implants a special computer device in the retina of the child. The device is designed so that students behave in a morally ethical manner, dress in a conservative blue sweater, and perform with substantial prowess academically. Because the device is experimental and under development, it does not always function properly. Some students act out of rage to correct the bad behavior of others. At least one female student gives way to her hormonal drives to become physical with a male student. The device is designed to pacify any sexual desire.

The negative statements about secondary public education abound as interrogatives. Will it take a computer device to solve the problem of teenage aberrant behavior? Is technology the only answer to helping children to be successful socially and academically? Is the potential of

creating a good and moral population of teenagers mitigated by scientific experimentation on teenagers? Mark, Rachel, and U.V. do not experience the implantation of the retinal device. These are students who are neither dysfunctional nor low achieving. Clearly, such a device is not necessary for all students to manage their behaviors. Old fashioned talks with parents and high school counselors may work just fine.

### *Apt Pupil*

The secondary learning environment in *Apt Pupil* is portrayed in three phases. The first is San Donato High School; the second is the public library, and the third is Mr. Dussander's home. In these three environments, Todd Bowden—the only student discussed here receives his inspiration, begins his independent study, and advances into a tutorial relationship with Mr. Dussander. Three educators are featured: the high school social studies teacher, Todd himself, Mr. Dussander, and Mr. Edward French, the guidance counselor.

After a week of social studies instruction about the Holocaust, Todd's teacher suggests that students pursue their research interests at the public library. At the public library, Todd does his independent research on the Holocaust and in the process becomes obsessed with it. There, he is his own teacher. Once he discovers and meets Mr. Dussander, he forcefully coerces Mr. Dussander to be his tutor on the *lived* realities of Nazi Germany, concentration camps, and the Holocaust. Since Mr. Dussander wants to retain his anonymity, he agrees to educate Todd about his time as a soldier. Mr. French, at first is a nurturing and compassionate educator who speaks with Todd and the person he believes is Todd's grandfather to counsel them about how his grades can be improved. Not understanding the subtext of their relationship, Mr. French arranges for Todd to study at his grandfather's (Mr. Dussander's) house every day after school.

At the conclusion of the story, due to the publicity about the presence of a Nazi war criminal, Mr. French realizes there must be a relationship between Todd and Mr. Dussander. He confronts Todd at his home shortly after graduation. Todd is a gifted, precocious, and resourceful learner, but he becomes a malevolent person. He pursues his interest in the Holocaust independently of his high school social studies teacher, systematically and conclusively proves that Mr. Dussander is a war criminal, and manipulates the man into educating him.

The academic lesson is the Holocaust. The life lesson for Todd and Mr. Dussander is control of others and power over others. Mr. French's life lesson is one of kindness and then later, integrity. These lessons are taught by lecture, discussion, questioning, researching and counseling. What is positive about *Apt Pupil* is the portrayal of a young man whose mind is curious, even manic about acquiring education and information. The manner in which Todd follows through on his academic obsession results in his having crossed a line of appropriate human behavior, manipulating Mr. Dussander, and in part, killing him, as well as intimidating Mr. French and threatening the security of his school counseling job.

### *American History X*

The secondary learning environment of *American History X* is Venice Beach High School, a melting pot for all ethnicities and beliefs. In Venice Beach there is also a potent white supremacist community that works as a hostile gang to undermine the peaceful coexistence of all kinds of people. The educators include Dr. Bob Sweeney, teacher and principal, and Mr. Murray the social studies teacher. Dr. Sweeney has a strong, authoritative, and nurturing presence. Shown as a concerned educator with high standards, Mr. Murray reports what he believes is an

inappropriate response to an assignment to Dr. Sweeney. Danny Vinyard, a high school student has written a research paper proving Hitler a civil rights hero.

Danny began his grooming for a position in the white supremacist organization under his older brother, Derek's direction. Since Dr. Sweeney taught Derek, he feels uniquely qualified to counsel him about the inappropriateness of the first assignment, give him an alternate paper topic, and conduct a tutorial class he calls American History X. The alternate assignment is a first person narrative about his relationship with his brother who that day is released from prison. Danny is unaware of Dr. Sweeney's continued and special relationship with Derek while he is in prison. He has written him, sent him books, and visited him. This educator goes above and beyond societal expectations for him as an administrator or a teacher. Over time, he has tried to help Derek and now, Danny to think differently about people and relinquish the white supremacist philosophy.

Both the academic and life lessons are intimately integrated and powered by Dr. Sweeney's passion for these learners. Positively speaking, Derek is changed by his relationship with his teacher and his prison time. Danny, too, changes as he writes the paper and relates to his new brother, but this is the more sad when Danny is shot at school by a fellow student.

### *The Faculty*

The secondary learning environment at Herrington High School is traditional like several of the previously presented schools. This high school is not teeming with gangs, drugs or rampant teen age sexuality. The educators include Mrs. Drake, the principal, Coach Willis, Mr. Tate, Miss Burke, Miss Olsen and Nurse Harper. Before the alien commutation process over takes the faculty, each of the faculty members acts in a predictable manner.

During a faculty meeting, Principal Drake is frustrated with budget reductions and announces that all athletic activities will continue to be funded. Once she submits to occupation, Principal Drake is even-tempered, patient, and exceedingly gracious. Coach Willis, the first host of the alien creature, is before commutation a power house of rage and coaching madness. After the invasion, he is much more understanding and nurturing as an athletic educator. Mr. Tate seasons his coffee with alcohol from a flask before he goes to teach his social studies class. He is perfectly content to drink only water after his occupation. Miss Olsen, the drama teacher and the young English teacher Miss Burke are quite the schoolmarms and good at doing their jobs. Once inhabited, they become outspoken, assertive, and voluptuous. Nurse Harper reports to work every day even when she is sick; she saves her sick days for when she is well. When her body is taken over by the aliens, she is a passionate and attentive nurse. She attends to every student with an ear exam—thus making it possible for the aliens to invade the student bodies as well.

The educated include the population of Herrington High, but most specifically the new student Mary Beth, an often bullied student, Casey, the newspaper editor Delilah, former football quarterback Stan, Goth girl Stokely, and fifth year senior Zeke. Each of these students is portrayed as intelligent in varied subject areas. They pool their wits to determine what is happening to the faculty and the students at their school.

The lesson is simple—allowing an alien to use the body as a host will improve human existence, academic performance, and relationships with others. The commutation process is not voluntary, but once completed, the recipients are happier and more amiable human beings. The commutation process happens easily and painlessly through the ear via an injection. A physical and psychological transformation results.



In order for secondary education to improve, aliens must occupy the bodies of the educators and the educated. As hosts for the aliens, teachers and learners will ingest a substantial amount of water. While the hydration is certainly positive, the occupation of an alien is negative. There are perhaps other ways to improve education. The students identify a way to dehydrate Mary Beth, the alien hostess—a diuretic drug that Zeke has developed in his basement. Their ability to work as a team with their intellectual, scientific, and science fiction knowledge facilitates Herrington's return to normal for the faculty and the students. Normal seems to work just fine.

### *October Sky*

In the 1950s, the secondary learning environment was very different than in the 1990s; it was an exceedingly traditional, conservative, and safe environment. *October Sky* is a curious part of this study because it was released in 1999, and portrays the 1950s in an authentic and reflective way. Big Creek High School, a small school in Coalwood, West Virginia runs under the firm authoritative direction of Principal Turner. Principal Turner believes the teacher's job is to give the children an education, not false hopes. Until the end, he discourages the students, argues with Miss Riley about her methods, and generally criticizes the lofty ambitions of the rocket boys. His philosophical counterpoint is science teacher, Miss Riley who rejects the expectation that most of the students will graduate from Big Creek and will work in the coal mines. The educated are Homer Hickham, Quentin, Roy Lee, and O'Dell. These young men are country boys who are respectful and well-behaved at school. They do not consider transcending their Big Creek environment until Miss Riley inspires them to do so.

Miss Riley explores the students to the idea of space exploration by playing the live transmission of the Sputnik launch and flight. Concurrent with that academic lesson, she teaches life lessons of hope, curiosity, and exploration. She wants the students to know that a space program will test the limits of the universe and human imagination. She wants the students to test their ambition limits. Miss Riley's style of instruction is inspirational and motivational. She uses the technology of the day, a desk top transistor radio, and rivets her student audience. When she is done, Homer Hickham wants to build rockets that go to space.

Miss Riley's effectiveness is absolute and immediate. Homer never lets go of that dream and that is especially apparent at the National Science Fair. Instructionally speaking, Miss Riley has accomplished what an educator dreams of doing. Homer's passion for rocket building and going to space attracts three loyal friends Quentin—his math guru, O'Dell and Roy Lee—his technical assets as well as adult technicians at the mine. The academic and life lessons, as well as the friendship among these young men, make a successful future possible for each of them.

Even though set in the 1950s, *October Sky* makes a very positive statement about secondary public education today. An inspirational teacher can make a significant difference in the lives of students whose future seems programmed by where and how they live.

### *10 Things I Hate About You*

The secondary learning environment is the very positive and orderly Padua High School. There are cliques, but none of them is driven by the violence of gangs or the distraction of drugs. Actually the students are content at their castle-like school. Ms. Perky, Mr. Morgan, and Coach Chapin are the featured educators. Miss Perky's primary assignment as guidance counselor is to counsel those students who have behaved badly and award them demerits or detention. Her

secondary occupation is writing sexually provocative novels while she counsels the students. This is, of course, completely inappropriate, but she continues to do it unchecked by administration. English teacher, Mr. Morgan raps Shakespeare's sonnets and has a low tolerance for criticism by the students, especially Katarina, Kat. Coach Chapin monitors in-school detention and is understandably distracted when Kat reveals her breasts to him. Her hidden agenda is to free Patrick from detention and she is successful. Each of these educators is one dimensional and does not personally get involved with the learners.

The educated include Kat, her sister Bianca, Patrick, Cameron, and Joey. Among these five students are the social dramas and agendas of typical high school students. The social groups at Padua are the beautiful people, the coffee heads, the white Rastas, and the Ivy League kids. Most, but not all are affiliated with a group. Kat is stubborn and dares to be her own person unaffiliated with any of the groups. Patrick is new to the school. Miss Perky delivers no academic lesson, but she does teach a life lesson. If you are disrespectful in class, you will either get detention or a few minutes with Miss Perky while she is more attentive to her sex novel. Mr. Morgan's class is rich with academic lessons on Shakespeare's sonnets, poetry, and Hemmingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. He also maintains the students' attention with his comic wit and rapping style of instruction. He does not take criticism well and will dismiss quickly those who try it. Unfortunately, Coach Chapin monitors detention inefficiently as Kat's distracting gesture does free Patrick from detention.

Despite the lack of adult interaction in the student's personal drama, the students are faring well at Padua. This is positive. Adolescent angst goes on whether or not educators

intervene, supervise, or assist. Sometimes educators can help to ameliorate the stress and anxiety associated with teen dilemmas.

### *Election*

On the surface, the environment of George Washington Carver High School is wholesome and constructive to adolescent development. No drug or gang problems are present. Most of the students seem to enjoy school and the teachers enjoy doing their jobs. The educators include Principal, Dr. Walt Hendricks, Vice Principal, Ron Bell, social studies teacher Jim McAllister, and math teacher Dave Novotny.

As principal, Dr. Hendricks has to make difficult decisions. He fires Mr. Novotny for having an affair with Tracy Flick and he fires Mr. McAllister for fixing the results of the student government election. He and Vice Principal Bell collaborate and work as an administrative team. Mr. McAllister, a three-time teacher of the year award recipient, is portrayed as the consummate school-loyal educator, a compassionate counselor of students and colleagues, and an ethical sponsor of the student government organization. He is considered an educator with integrity until he throws away two ballots that would have made Tracy Flick the winner. His agenda is personal. He wants revenge for the torrid affair she had with his best friend, Dave Novotny. His moral decline at school is made easier by the fact that personally he is considering an affair with Dave's ex-wife. Mr. Novotny was a well-liked math teacher until he strikes up an intimate and totally inappropriate relationship with Tracy Flick.

The educated are Tracy Flick, and her campaign adversaries Paul Metzler and his sister, Tammy Metzler. Tracy, a senior, strives for perfection in every deed whether in class participation or in preparation of cupcakes for all voters. The student body likes her and knows

she works hard at everything she does. Also a senior, Paul Metzler, an injured athlete, has little extracurricular to do. He, too, is beloved by the student body. While Paul has no political aspirations, Mr. McAllister convinces him to run for president so the campaigning will represent the true democratic process. Otherwise, Tracy runs uncontested. His sophomore sister, Tammy Metzler joins the campaign just because she can and somewhat out of spite. Her special girlfriend begins to date Paul. Tammy is a woman scorned. She does not care about student government. She says her first order of business as president will be to disassemble student government because it is a do-nothing organization. Each of the educated is radically different from the other.

Both Principal, Dr. Hendricks and Vice Principal Bell lead with audacity. When two teachers forfeit their integrity, these administrators are forced to act in the most profound way by firing them. Since administrators are stewards of student safety and faculty integrity, they can only make this decision. Mr. McAllister's academic lesson revolves around ethics and the democratic process of elections. He definitely wants to teach the learners in the classroom and with the practical exercise of a campaign and election. Ideally, he hopes Tracy to learn the life lesson that she cannot win everything she attempts. His effort is foiled when he tosses out two votes making Paul the winner. Mr. McAllister is caught and Tracy does reign victorious as student government president. As for Mr. Novotny, his academic lesson is simply math, but when he widens his sphere of influence to include an intimate relationship with Tracy, he fails as an educator.

Both positive and negative statements can be made about secondary public education. Educators dedicate themselves to teaching both academic and life lessons. Mr. McAllister is not

perfect; he is real, but his breach of personal ethics and the breach by Mr. Novotny are inexcusable negative statements about how educators can fall from grace. Their motives were personal, not for the common good.

### *This is My Father*

The secondary learning environment in *This is My Father* is one Chicago high school classroom. This classroom is the frame of this story. Educator of social studies, Kieran Johnson gives an assignment to trace family history. As the students are talking about their research, Mr. Johnson is distracted and looks out of the window. The students read his reaction as disinterest and call him a “shitty” teacher. Mr. Johnson does not react to their criticism. Instead, he reads an article with vital statistics about teenagers, their successes, college, their failures and employment and unemployment. The educated are nameless and are portrayed as disinterested and not vested in the lesson of this social studies class.

The academic and life lessons are inextricably bound together here. Mr. Johnson directs the students to find out from whom and from where they came. As a way of grounding himself and becoming more authentic to his students, he makes a trip to Ireland for the purpose of personally fulfilling the requirements of the assignment. His experiential knowledge, he translates for his students as he tells the story of his parents in Ireland in the 1930’s. He uses the visual aid of an old photograph—the only picture he has of his mother and father. The story grips Mr. Johnson. He is able to use the story to garner the respect and academic investment of his students. *This is My Father* presents a very valuable and positive lesson to remember as an educator. In giving an assignment, the instructor should do it as well and share it with the class. The students will have a model to follow and will also know the teacher really understands the

process he is asking them to follow. In this way too the students may respect the teacher more. Teachers who are willing to share their personal stories as a vehicle for instruction make for a very positive learning environment.

### *American Pie*

The secondary learning environment at East Great Falls High School is traditional, but not conservative. The students there seem to be obsessed with sex. In the context of this story, the educated have very limited time with the educators. Three educators: the jazz choral teacher, Coach Marshall, and the English teacher encourage the students to compete, to score, and to understand the social development of young Hal in *Henry IV Part I*. The choral teacher wants the choir to rehearse beyond the expected time so they will win at the Michigan State Choral Festival. Coach Marshall wants the team to win the lacrosse game. When Oz leaves his playing position to go and sing, Coach Marshall is disappointed in him. The English teacher wants the students to enjoy Shakespeare, but also hopes that they will relate to Hal. The focus is much more on the students Jim, Oz, Kevin and Finch, and their senior pledge to have sex with a girl before graduation. Everything they do is connected with that goal.

The academic lessons of the jazz choral teacher and Coach Marshall are to practice, to compete, and to win. The academic lesson of the English teacher is for the students to understand the classic Shakespearean coming of age story. The fact that the students spend most of their waking day at school focused not so much on learning academic lessons, but on fulfilling what might be considered a life lesson is a negative statement about secondary public education. There is so little direction by educators at East Great Falls High and that is disconcerting. But a case

could certainly be made that this kind of objective is completely within the normal realm for adolescents.

### *Teaching Mrs. Tingle*

The secondary learning environment of Grandsboro High School is traditional and orderly. The educators and the educated are focused on the business of the school day. The educators are Principal Potter, Miss Banks—the school secretary who substitutes for Mrs. Tingle, Miss Gold—the counselor, Coach Wenchell and Mrs. Tingle. Principal Potter is a dynamic and present school leader. He interacts with the students and the teachers in a constructive and positive manner, but his relationship with Mrs. Tingle presents him challenges. He is only too delighted to fire Mrs. Tingle when she admits to hostile treatment of her students. At this point, Mrs. Tingle also believes she has killed a student. Cheerfully, Miss Banks steps up to substitute for Mrs. Tingle during her captivity by the students. She instructs Mrs. Tingle's social studies class with a flare for metaphor and a sense of humor that Mrs. Tingle would never show. Miss Gold, the school counselor, encourages Leigh Ann to be positive about her chance for the college scholarship which rests on the grade Mrs. Tingle gives her. Miss Gold also tells Leigh Ann that Mrs. Tingle hates everyone. Even though he is married, Coach Wenchell quietly courts Mrs. Tingle and acts the buffoon especially after the students have plied him with cabernet.

Mrs. Tingle, a secondary social studies teacher for more than twenty years, commands with significant authority. She has extraordinary power over the students as well as fellow teachers. Her manner is grave, her tongue is hostile and she delivers every word with venomous pleasure. Principal Potter and Mrs. Tingle's colleagues except for Coach Wenchell dislike her.



Mrs. Tingle and Coach Wenchell have an understanding of intimacy on her terms. The students are afraid of Mrs. Tingle in part because of her ruthless judgment and intimidating vitriolic manner.

The educated, Jo Lynn Jordan, Leigh Ann Watson, and Luke Churner are bright and precocious students. Jo Lynn is dramatically creative, but not bent on achieving an A average. Leigh Ann wants to be number one in her class and earn the college scholarship given to the valedictorian. Luke Churner is the law breaker. Even though he is quite intelligent, he gets by academically and works more on his sarcastic wit than on his GPA. These learners are friends and take the same social studies class with Mrs. Tingle.

Mrs. Tingle is the only educator who formally teaches academic lessons and informally teaches life lessons. She urges the students to practice integrity, to research thoroughly their social studies projects, and to present them with authority and confidence. Since Mrs. Tingle is exceedingly perceptive about character, she finely hones her critiques of the student's presentations to reduce them to dust rather than to build them as superior historians. As for life lessons, Mrs. Tingle teaches Jo Lynn, Leigh Ann, and Luke how transitory friendship and trust are. She is able to constructively undermine and disturb their friendship by pointing out their worst qualities or their weaknesses. Most of the life lessons Mrs. Tingles spins, tied to her bed. It is testimony to her potency that she continues to wield great leverage from what seems a position of vulnerability.

The fact that an educator who is herself miserable can continue to teach and humiliate students unchecked presents a very negative view of secondary education. Routine teacher evaluations allow for commentary about this manner of interacting with students. The principal

does step up to fire Mrs. Tingle after she admits her cruelty. The students are devious and creative even though what they do is wrong. Mrs. Tingle does set the academic bar high and this is positive. Her malevolent way runs as a negative counterpoint to her success as an educator.

### *Light It Up*

The secondary learning environment at Lincoln High School is at its worst. With 2,300 students, the school is overcrowded, understaffed, and in a state of horrific disrepair. It is winter and there are classrooms without windows or heat. The roof leaks and there are insufficient materials including text books to issue to students. As a result of gang violence in the neighborhood and at school, the school district has hired a new school resource officer to police the hallways.

The educators are Principal Alan Armstrong and journalism teacher Ken Knowles. Principal Armstrong is the principal, but he does not have control of Lincoln High School. The overwhelming school population combined with a complete degradation of the physical plant makes for the worst, most tense academic environment. Mr. Knowles, a well-respected and caring teacher, attempts to teach his lesson as winter literally breaks into the classroom window. As the heat does not work, he asks the principal for an alternate and more comfortable location to conduct his class. Exceedingly frustrated and seemingly helpless, Mr. Armstrong tells Mr. Knowles to take the students anywhere. In an effort to be resourceful, Mr. Knowles takes the students to a café where he conducts his class. Mr. Knowles persists as an educator. The instructional topic is the media coverage of a social movement. A robber enters the café when the students are there. Mr. Knowles recognizes the voice of the thief as that of a student he

taught. He walks up to the robber and punches him. The result of this courageous act is administrative leave. This heightens the already anxious nature of his students.

The educated includes a microcosm of eclectic students: Stephanie—an articulate honors student, Lynn—an intelligent student who has just determined that she is pregnant, Rivers—a wise math, science, and technology student, Ziggy—an abused student who lives in a secret attic in the high school and paints murals there, Lester—his protector and also a recent victim of violent crime—he watched his innocent father get shot by the police, and Rodney—the only thug in the crowd. Once Officer Jackson is shot by accident and taken as a hostage by these students, the group begins to work as a unit to take over the school, evacuate it, and make requests for the school's basic needs. Most of all, they want their teacher, Mr. Knowles back to work.

Mr. Knowles effectively teaches his lesson on media coverage of a social movement via lecture and question and answer. The students use what they have learned from him regarding the importance of television and the internet to gather support from the community. As a life lesson, Mr. Knowles teaches them to be resourceful, to use what they have learned, and to work together. He also demonstrates his care for these students when he calls and warns them that the SWAT team is invading the school. Principal Armstrong does not teach an academic lesson, but does teach a life lesson by demonstrating a lack of stability and responsibility as he is tasked with the school leadership position. The learners recognize his weakness and impotence. It is perhaps his failure of leadership that is the catalyst for the social movement the students enact.

It is positive that these students have been empowered with the knowledge to act in a way to improve their school. It is unfortunate that they have broken the law and lost a classmate in the

process. One wonders if the suggestion of students taking up arms to improve schools is really viable.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Film has the ability both to entertain and to reveal the culture of a society it portrays. A study of films that feature the educational setting, its educators, the educated, and academic and life lessons may convey an understanding the perceived condition of the school from the cinematic lens. Analysis can identify or discredit a societal belief about education or suggest a method for amelioration of the educational problem.

Since film is an artistic product of a culture, a film can tell much about the society that generated it (Berger, 1995). And through study, film can deliver an understanding, Berger continues, “of ourselves and our society” (p. 18). Hinton (1994) called films “living sociological documents that acknowledge a period of history” (p. 3). Jarvie (1970) submitted that there is a kind of dialogue that goes on between the screen text and the viewer.

#### Conclusions

This study affirms that the films of the 1990s are a window into the condition of American public secondary schools. Viewing a film is reading it both for its surface and embedded meanings.

In the study group of thirty films, there are three distinct categories: comedy, ten films, science fiction, three films, and tragedy, seventeen films. The science fiction group may be considered a subcategory of tragedy as the scientific means used or described is serious and dramatic in nature and merits inclusion in the that category. That being the case, a two to one ratio exists: two tragedies for every comedy. A comedy is defined as a film that treats theme and

character with humor (Davies, 1980). The comedies are *If Looks Could Kill* (1991), *Class Act* (1992), *Dazed and Confused* (1993), *Billy Madison* (1995), *Clueless* (1995), *National Lampoon's Senior Trip* (1995), *High School High* (1996), *In & Out* (1997), *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), and *American Pie* (1999). A tragedy is defined as a work of drama that shows a protagonist dealing with struggle resulting in a tragic or unhappy ending (Davies, 1980). The tragedies include *Class of 1999* (1990), *Pump Up the Volume* (1990), *Zebrahead* (1992), *Just Another Girl on the IRT* (1993), *Only the Strong* (1993), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1996), *The Substitute* (1996), *187* (1997), *American History X* (1998), *Apt Pupil* (1998), *Disturbing Behavior* (1998), *The Faculty* (1998), *He Got Game* (1998), *Wild Things* (1998), *Election* (1999), *Light It Up* (1999), *October Sky* (1999), *Teaching Mrs. Tingle* (1999), and *This is My Father* (1999). One might presume the portrayal of the educational environment, educators, the educated and the lessons to be very different between these designated categories, but these films demonstrate that is not the case.

Whether comedy or tragedy category, the films speak the same language of concern for secondary education. Schools crumble physically from disrepair and overcrowding as well as understaffing. Instruction delivered is a tremendously challenging feat, compounded by an epidemic of social dysfunction in the lives of the students and sometimes in the lives of the teachers. The educator's mission of delivering the academic lesson is complicated by the demand for the achievement of minimum standards and the satisfactory achievement on high stakes tests. Students with learning issues, the disenfranchised student body, are relegated to separate and unequal environments to be dealt with by mediocre or "green" teachers who are sometimes clueless about how to handle the students' academic and social problems. Administrative leaders

do not always support or understand educators who use alternative methods to garner the interest and secure the learning of the students. In a few rare and bizarre futuristic scenarios within the science fiction subcategory, schools need methods based on technology, weird science, or aliens to both educate and control the unruly student body.

So many of the lessons are lessons of character—life lessons, not algebra, geography or reading. Most of the cinematic educators are caring, driven, dedicated, passionate people who want their students to succeed and live lives filled with satisfaction and virtue. A few are ignorant about how the students feel and act. Some students learn those life lessons, others come to enjoy learning and continue post-secondary education, and still others experience the catastrophic or fatal outcome of a life lesson learned despite the comedy or tragedy category. The cinematic students' emotions range from engaged to belligerent to completely apathetic about the educational process.

Lessons of character appear with great frequency in the films of the 1990s. In *If Looks Could Kill*, teen Michael Corben reluctantly accepts the reigns of adult responsibility to be a secret agent, save the European Union's currency, and his French class group of fellow travelers. As a teen, he learns of adult responsibility and comes to enjoy the burden of it. In *Only the Strong*, Mr. Stevens teaches self-discipline through capoeira to twelve students who could have been extras in *The Dirty Dozen* or *Kelly's Heroes*. These students begin to respect their teacher, their school, and one another. In the climax of the film, they save their school from the drug dealers who have been operating within the school. In *American History X*, Dr. Sweeney works on the characters of both Derek and Danny Vinyard. For both of them, Dr. Sweeney tries to teach tolerance of others, specifically those of other races. In *Disturbing Behavior*, Dr.

Caldicott's goal is to transform the typical moral character of teenagers to that of outstanding patriotic and asexual adults. In *187*, Mr. Garfield challenges Cesar to a game of Russian roulette with a loaded pistol. He and the students take turns firing the pistol and Garfield takes the bullet meant for Cesar. So out of honor and perhaps pride, Cesar takes the next one, and dies. This is the first instance that Cesar demonstrates valor and integrity. He has learned these virtues from Mr. Garfield. These represent a few of the many lessons of character prevalent in the films of the 1990s.

Administrators in the films in the 1990s range from ethical and honorable to downright despicable. By far there are more disagreeable, criminal administrators than law abiding ones. The discrepancy between good and bad is overwhelming. Principal Jacobs in *Mr. Holland's Opus* is the epitome of goodness. She charges Mr. Holland with the mission to educate and to be the moral compass for the students. She symbolically codifies this charge by giving him a gold compass. Diametrically opposed to Principal Jacobs is the buffoon, Principal Moss in *National Lampoon's Senior Trip* and Mr. Anderson in *Billy Madison*. He is not even an administrator; he is a masked wrestler hiding out as a school administrator. At the very dark end of the portrayals is Principal Turner whose skepticism and negativity almost foil the hopes and dreams of Miss Riley and her rocket building students in *October Sky*. By far the most evil are Principal Doyle also known as Mr. A in *High School High* and Principal Rolle in *The Substitute*. Both of these administrators distribute drugs from school premises and use students to do the selling of these illegal substances. By far, administrators appear more unfavorably than do the teachers in the films of the 1990s.



## Discussion

In this discussion, I reiterate the theoretical framework which supports this content analysis of film and assess the results of the answers to the Film Analysis Form questions. The theoretical framework which supports research on media images includes Krippendorf (2003), Altheide (1996), Mayring (2000), and Barone and Eisner (1997). These four scholars provide thoughts on a viable foundation for content analysis of thirty secondary films of the 1990s. Content analysis of the text, images and symbols, according to Krippendorf (2003), helps to clarify the meaning of the text. Film is a cultural document containing a social reality. Altheide had commented that popular media is product of society (1996). It can and should, therefore, be read as what society looks like. Hollywood's cinematic reality looks bleak. Film reality presents the educational setting as overcrowded, underfunded, and in disrepair, the educator as diligent or fatuous, and the educated as at-risk and belligerent, but needy or simply disinterested and hostile. Life lessons are presented far more often and successfully than academic lessons.

Two scholars address ways of demystifying the text. Mayring (2000) suggests a three-step way of understanding: summary, explication, and structuring. I have summarized and explicated these thirty films in chapters four and five respectively. Instead of structuring, I have analyzed the text, images, and symbols for an understanding of the secondary school. The fourth aspect of the theoretical framework is Barone and Eisner's (1997) seven features of arts-based educational inquiry. The seven features include the creation of a virtual reality—the world of the film which invites the viewer into a new reality. In the second feature, the presence of ambiguity, gaps in the story, require the viewer to begin a dialogue with the text. Features three and four focus on the language of the text, in this case the dialogue present in the film. In the fifth feature,

the promotion of empathy, the story evokes from the viewer and emotional response of compassion, sympathy, or empathy. The sixth feature marks the film with the artistic signature of the writer/director. And in the seventh feature, the presence of an aesthetic form, there is an acknowledgement of a pattern of a story. Barone and Eisner's (1997) seven features and Mayring's (2000) three-step way of understanding helped to bring this research to the previously mentioned conclusions.

The secondary learning environments of the schools in the films of the 1990s are mostly urban. A few schools are located in the suburbs and fare better perhaps as a result of that location. The school populations are large. At the majority of the city schools, overcrowding becomes an obstacle to a successful learning environment like in *Class of 1999*, *Only the Strong*, *Dangerous Minds*, *187*, and *Light It Up*. The physical plant is in disrepair, with a few exceptions in *Billy Madison*, *Clueless*, *Mr. Holland's Opus*, *Wild Things*, *October Sky*, *Teaching Mrs. Tingle* and *10 Things I Hate About You*.

While each school represented has physical challenges with its structure, several of the schools have fiscal issues for faculty, textbook procurement, and funding of fine arts programs as in *Dangerous Minds*, *Light It Up*, and *Mr. Holland's Opus*. Almost all of the schools have safety concerns due to the community in which the school stands or due to a prevalent part of the population being working class or poor as well as gang affiliated. In the *Class of 1999*, *Just Another Girl on the IRT*, *Only the Strong*, *High School High*, *The Substitute*, *187*, *American History X* and *Light It Up*, daily acts of violence are the norm. A few safe schools are represented in *Clueless*, *In & Out*, *Mr. Holland's Opus*, *October Sky*, and *American Pie*.

All in all, the secondary learning environment in the films of the 1990s is in jeopardy. It struggles physically and fiscally. Because of large school populations, schools are unable to adapt quickly to the population growth and ill-equipped to monitor and adjust to the kind of dysfunctional population attending the school. Secondary educators and learners are in real trouble in these disintegrating environments.

All manner of educators are portrayed in secondary education films of the 1990s. Most are tenacious and compassionate experts in their fields who live lives of integrity, especially in their professional capacities. Some have little teaching experience or are new to their schools. Still others live outside moral standards and legal ones. They are the corrupting forces at work within the educational setting. A few educators are fatuous and unaware of student behavior or intent. Core teachers of math, science, English and social studies appear with regularity. Elective teachers included in the films represent the subjects of music, French and Latin, athletics, journalism, debate, computer, and drama. By far, social studies educators appear in greatest number. There are fifteen: Mr. Modell in *Zebrahead*, Mr. Hardin in *Class of 1999*, Mr. Weinberg in *Just Another Girl on the IRT*, Mr. Kerrigan in *Only the Strong*, Miss Geist in *Clueless*, Miss Hetzko in *The Substitute*, Mr. Clark in *High School High*, Mr. Childress in *187*, Mr. Murray and Dr. Sweeney in *American History X*, Mr. Tate in *The Faculty*, Mr. McAllister in *Election*, Mr. Johnson in *This is My Father*, Mr. Dussander in *Apt Pupil*, and Mrs. Tingle in *Teaching Mrs. Tingle*. Administratively, principals, assistant or vice principals are present in these films. These guidance counselors: Dr. Caldicott in *Disturbing Behavior*, Mr. Lombardo in *Wild Things*, Mr. French in *Apt Pupil*, Ms. Perky in *10 Things I Hate About You*, and Miss Gold

in *Teaching Mrs. Tingle* make a significant showing as actual or prurient listeners, counselors, or manipulators of the students.

Overall, the educators care about their students and the schools. They work long and hard days, and in some cases for years beyond their physical abilities. In *National Lampoon's Senior Trip*, the first keyboarding teacher—Mr. Bloom, a seriously senior gentleman, dies while teaching. In that same film and in *High School High*, some teachers do not grasp how disturbed the educated really are. Administrators either demand very high standards as in exceptional SAT scores, like Principal Cresswood requires in *Pump Up the Volume*, or demand high, yet conservative moral standards as Principal Halliwell does in *In & Out*. He requires Mr. Brackett to continue his plans to marry Emily to confirm to the community that he is a heterosexual male in order to keep his job. It is apparent by the conclusion of the film that the community does not care about Mr. Brackett's sexuality; the community cares about Mr. Brackett, the teacher.

Several administrators who serve are unqualified to do so or grossly misuse their school leadership positions. Principal Anderson in *Billy Madison* is not qualified to be a school administrator, but he is a successful wrestler who wears a mask. Principal Rolle and a local gang lord in *The Substitute* run a drug distribution operation from Columbus High School's basement. Principal Doyle in *High School High* seems upon first meeting a strong and tolerant disciplinarian, but she is also known as Mr. A, a locally infamous drug trafficker. All other administrators are portrayed as trying to do their jobs with integrity and effectiveness despite physical and fiscal obstacles, and student frustrations.

Several educators continue to work in the profession even after being assaulted, and this is a testimony to their dedication. In *High School High*, Mr. Clark is attacked on his first day at Marion Barry High School, where he is pelted with spit balls and chained to his desk.

Miss Hetzko in *The Substitute* returns to her class room after recovering from the broken knee cap she suffered in an attack by Seminole gang member, Johnny Glades. Mrs. Tingle in *Teaching Mrs. Tingle* might have returned to her rigorous class room if she had not admitted in front of the principal that she was cruel to her students. At that point she believes she has killed one of them with an arrow. By far, the most extreme example is Mr. Garfield in *187*. After Dennis Broadway stabs him twelve times, Mr. Garfield recovers, but is not healed emotionally. He moves from Brooklyn to southern California to begin teaching again. He wields a moral yardstick and proceeds to teach science and life lessons to some of the most dysfunctional students. He uses primitive and cruel means; drugs, a bow and arrow, and a pistol. He ends his career with what one of his surviving students, Rita Martinez, calls a Pyrrhic victory. He gives his life in a game of Russian roulette with his student, Cesar.

The educated are portrayed as bright, at-risk, tracked, sexual, violent, drugged, and affiliated with gangs, disconnected from many of the adults who supervise them in the educational environment. Most of the students possess a desire to be educated, to be within their school's social setting, to be cared for by adults who know and understand them. In *Class Act*, for example, Duncan and Blade represent the bright, at-risk, and tracked portrayal. Their backgrounds are radically different from one another. Duncan comes from a well-to-do family, in which both the parents carefully monitor and guide the development of their child, but the justice system has been parenting Blade. Despite their sociological differences, these students

become friends and learn from each other—the strengths the other possesses. The premise of their relationship is their accidentally exchanged identities upon registration into school. Both young men are gifted in their fields: Duncan in academics, excluding athletics, Blade in crime, punishment, and mechanics. In their senior year—the time period of the film, they overcome their being tracked by their assumed backgrounds, graduate and attend college.

Most of the films of this study portray or suggest the educated as sexually active teenagers. In *Pump Up the Volume*, Hard Harry is the teen disc jockey who feigns masturbation while on air. Chantel in *Just Another Girl on the IRT* comes from a good family with a strong moral compass, but ignores guidance, which might have prevented her unwanted pregnancy. In *Clueless*, Cher works less on her own coupling than on that of her teachers, but proves that she is a successful matchmaker. In *Dangerous Minds*, Callie is sent out of the Academy system to a special school for girls who are pregnant. The only problem with this is Callie is a very gifted student who should remain in an academically challenging environment and under the care of educator Ms. Johnson. In *Wild Things*, grossly inappropriate sexual relationships abound between high school students Kelly and Suzie, and their guidance counselor, Mr. Lombardo. In *American Pie*, Jim, Finch, Oz, and Kevin have made a pact to have sex before graduation. They competitively work at this goal as one might hope that they would work at preparing for the ACT or SAT. Sexual restraint may not be part of the secondary students' nature, and that point is well-made in the films of the 1990s.

Within the thirty films is a trail of students who use drugs, sell drugs, engage in violent behavior or live in violent neighborhoods, and are affiliated with gangs or special interest cliques. In *American History X*, the gang is a white supremacist organization in Venice Beach,

California. Hate and the execution of that belief system with dangerous weapons pervade the lives of Danny and Derek Vinyard. In *Light It Up*, Rodney, a known gang member, joins in the lock-down at Lincoln High School, in part to avoid an assault he anticipates if he leaves the school building. Ziggy, the ultimate victim in this story, lives at school because he is emotionally abused and beaten at home. He has many physical scars, which he hides from his peers. Intellectually, Rodney can certainly fit into the microcosm of the intelligent students who steward this rebellion, but he has a short fuse born out of self-protection. Juan Lucas, in *The Substitute*, works with Principal Rolle to operate a drug distribution point from Columbus High School. The students in *Dazed and Confused* spend a decadent night imbibing alcohol and watch the sunrise while smoking marijuana on their football field. Where there was little sexual restraint, there is no hesitation when drugs or alcohol is available.

These educated are frustrated with their relationships with the educators. In the case of the students of *Dangerous Minds* and *Class Act*, for example, the teaching has enabled the school districts to get by with minimal standards for the marginalized students. In a few examples, the students build a strong bond with their teachers: Mr. Stevens in *Only the Strong*, Mr. Dussander for Todd in *Apt Pupil*, Mr. Clark for Griff in *High School High*. All relationships are not lost, but many are in jeopardy. The at-risk students, in particular, are the most hungry for adults to teach and love them.

For the next two sections, I chose to pair the questions about academic lesson and its method of delivery as well as life lesson and its method of delivery. It made sense to discuss these together as they are inextricably bound by content and purpose.

The educator teaches various academic lessons in what can be called a traditional lecture and discussion method. There are just a few exceptions to that model. In *Pump Up the Volume*, Miss Emerson charges the students to explore their adolescent feelings through composition. The English teacher in *Class Act* teaches the remedial students grammar by reading an explanation of transitive verbs and affixes. The students do not attend to his instruction. With panache and style, Mr. Brackett teaches English literature and poetry in *In & Out*. Miss Burke's first English lessons in *The Faculty* include an exploration of Robinson Crusoe, but after she is invaded by an alien creature, she becomes more interesting looking and sounds more assertive in her instruction. Mr. Morgan uses rap in his Padua High School English class room in *10 Things I Hate About You*. In *If Looks Could Kill*, Mrs. Groeber uses a field trip to France—the language immersion method—for the students to become stronger masters of the language. Ms. Johnson, by far the most creative of the English educators, creates a Dylan-Dylan contest in *Dangerous Minds*. She challenges the students to understand the poetry of Dylan Thomas and analyze the poetical lyrics of Bob Dylan. She empowers them with the notion that a person who can decode poetry can take on any academic task.

Mathematics and science educators instruct through lecture, practice, practical examples, and experiments. Mr. Novotny in *Election* uses the lecture technique, and then directs the students to apply what they have learned. In *187*, Mr. Garfield tells all the students that they can be scientists. He runs experiments in the classroom and all the students participate. Miss Riley in *October Sky* uses media via a transistor radio in her 1950's class room to play the live broadcast of Sputnik. This inspires Homer and his fellow students to act on that interest and begin to build



and test rockets. Homer represents his team at the National Science Fair and wins first place for his rocket.

Instruction by elective teachers is well-represented in this study group. Physical education taught by coaches is rigorous and sweaty. Coach Cincotta in *He Got Game* takes Jesus Shuttlesworth, who was well-taught as a young child by his father, and makes him the number one draft pick for basketball. Coach Willis in *The Faculty* becomes a compassionate and encouraging coach after he is inhabited by an alien. Mr. Holland teaches students to read, love and play music in *Mr. Holland's Opus*. Unfortunately, the shop teacher in *Dazed and Confused* violates safety procedures and falls asleep during instruction, although no student is injured. The computer teachers, Miss Henry in *187* and Miss Milford in *National Lampoon's Senior Trip* engage the students with their enthusiasm for technology. Miss Henry really impresses the students when she demonstrates her ability to detect the origin of a threatening e-mail sent by a student sitting in her class. Mr. Hall in *Clueless* assigns debate topics like violence in the media and expects students to exercise their ability to research.

While fifteen social studies educators appear, their lessons are conservatively safe topics with the exception of race and the Holocaust. Mr. Modell in *Zebrahead* attempts to direct an informal discussion about race in America. As a negative result, two intellectual students, one African-American and one Italian American take their physical fight into the hallway and are not stopped. Three teachers discuss the Holocaust: Mr. Weinberg in *Just Another Girl on the IRT*, the social studies teacher in *Apt Pupil*, and Mr. Murray in *American History X*. Mr. Murray assigns a research paper; Danny Vinyard delivers a tribute to Adolf Hitler as a civil rights hero. By means of a forced tutorial, Mr. Dussander teaches Todd in *Apt Pupil* via his experience as a

concentration camp guard. His tactical knowledge of concentration camps becomes Todd's academic obsession. In *Only the Strong*, Mr. Kerrigan tries to teach a lesson on Darwin that only becomes real to the students when Mr. Stevens, his former student, teaches them capoeira, the Brazilian combat dance. They fully understand survival of the fittest, when they fight a local gang to keep drugs and gangs away from the school. Mr. Smith, Shale, in *The Substitute* uses his military experience to compare gangs in Miami with the factions at war in Vietnam. Mr. Clark in *High School High* teaches the Bill of Rights, but gains credibility with the students when he helps them to attain their right to an equitable education at Marion Barry High School. Teaching the American political system of elections and sponsoring the student government organization in *Election*, Mr. McAllister is revered by students and colleagues. This ends when he violates the integrity of the ballot box by throwing away two votes for Tracy Flick. He loses his job as well as the respect gained over a long career of teaching social studies.

Life lessons abound in the secondary films of the 1990s. The life lessons range from modeling common courtesy to sacrificing one's life to educate students about moral courage. As with the academic lesson questions, I have paired the life lesson questions as well. In content and purpose, the lesson and the method of delivery are related.

The educated learn life lessons in a profound and dramatic manner, and often as a result of a catastrophic event. In *Class of 1999*, droid instructors teach through verbal, then physical force, often killing victim students. Ms. Connors, Mr. Hardin, and Mr. Bryles are part of an experimental government design to improve secondary public education. Mr. Deaver, the guidance counselor in *Pump Up the Volume*, has been unavailable for students with problems at Hubert Humphrey High School, but begins to care after Malcolm Kiser commits suicide.

Principal Cimino advises Zach to stick to his own kind in *Zebrahead*. Zach, who is Caucasian, has been seeing Nikki, an African-American transfer student. Principal Moore counsels Chantel in *Just Another Girl on the IRT* to be a lady, listen, tone down her mouth, take her time and not rush into college. She does not respond well to his counseling style.

For the twelve at-risk students in *Only the Strong*, Mr. Stevens and his instruction of the Brazilian capoeira dramatically changes their lives for the better. At first they are not receptive, but because they desire to learn, they do begin to respond to his instruction. Capoeira helps them to build self-confidence, trust, and loyalty. They grow individually and as a team. Coach Conrad in *Dazed and Confused* wants the students to sign a pledge to be drug-free athletes. While Randy refuses to do this, other players commit to the pledge. Billy in *Billy Madison* learns from repeating all grades that he wants to go to college and become a teacher. The students in *Dangerous Minds* learn that Ms. Johnson not only wants to teach them, but also wants to care for them as human beings. Ms. Johnson builds relationships with the students because she has intuited that is how the lesson is taught. Mr. Holland and Coach Meister collaborate to build a marching band program. Mr. Holland knows the music; Coach Meister knows marching from his military experience. Their working together in front of the students teaches the students the importance of friendship and cooperative learning.

In *High School High*, Mrs. Doyle, the principal, does not wish to build relationships. But when Mr. Clark comes to Marion Barry High School, he immediately begins relating to the students and trying to grow their trust. The students learn that one teacher can make a difference; that one teacher is Mr. Clark. Once the drug-dealing principal is arrested, Mr. Clark takes over as principal. In *187*, Rita, Paco, and Stevie, who survive the extreme education of Mr. Garfield,

have a chance at a better life because of the sacrifices Mr. Garfield made. Jesus learns from Coach Cincotta in *He Got Game* that favor can be purchased, but resigns himself never to be bought. In *Apt Pupil*, Mr. Dussander teaches Todd about how cruel human beings can be to one another. Todd learns this lesson well and practices on Mr. French. He threatens to reveal that his guidance counselor is a homosexual who divorced as a result of his relationships with high school boys. In other words, Todd threatens Mr. French's career and is triumphant. He has learned cruelty from Mr. Dussander who practiced cruelty as a lifestyle as a Nazi concentration camp guard.

In *American History X*, Dr. Sweeney is very influential in teaching racial tolerance to Derek and is nearly fulfilled in doing so with his younger brother, Danny. Dr. Sweeney visits Derek in prison, sends him reading material about tolerance, and patiently listens as he describes his physical trials in prison. To Danny he assigns a paper to explore his relationship with his brother. This paper will replace his tribute to Adolf Hitler as a civil rights hero. Miss Riley in *October Sky* teaches her students to ascend to the heights of their dream and never to give up on them. Homer grows up to be a NASA engineer; his associates also go to college and thrive as well. Mr. Johnson in *This is My Father* assigns a genealogy project which he, quite by accident, does as well when he goes to Ireland, his ancestral home. When he returns with his story and research, he reveals himself to his students as he never has. The life lesson of understanding family history as a vehicle to proceed in life as a more self-actualized person is validated.

Several positive and negative statements follow about secondary education when assessed through the eyes of Hollywood and the lens of the films of the 1990s. From the positive perspective, academic and life lessons are taught in the secondary school. Despite more negative

than positive views on essence of hope lives within these films. Life lessons are taught far more than academic ones and are needed more by the students. Schools in good, less urban neighborhoods have fewer problems with gangs and drugs. Most of the educators are dedicated and compassionate. They see their work as a mission to forge new citizens and point them in the right direction. By leaving the notion of education in the control of the states, the Founding Fathers were, I believe, suggesting the importance of education for Americans. The quality of that education was and still remains in the political hands of each state. Perhaps that goal is embedded in the presence of so many portrayals of social studies educators.

From the negative perspective, schools are physically disintegrating and are teeming with students. Skilled educators for these secondary schools are fewer. Good teachers do not often choose to work in at-risk environments. Education is separate and definitely not equal for gifted or advanced students when compared to marginalized or struggling students. Some administrators use their administrative power to conduct inappropriate business at school, therefore endangering the school community as well as forfeiting their own integrity.

#### Implications for Further Study

Since film study is a relatively new terrain for research, I believe there are a myriad of topics yet to be researched. I have three recommendations for further film study. Studies by decade to complement this one may yield some interesting historical trends in the portrayal of secondary education. With regard to the 1990s, research on films about education at the elementary level, middle school level, college level, in a private or boarding school location as well as films about the education of the students with learning disabilities, might give a fuller perspective of education at all levels and in all realms of the 1990s. Public schools can be

compared to private ones. I limited my study to secondary education as this seemed a manageable research study group. Appendix A contains a list of all the films of the 1990s by educational realm. Research on this list has not yet been exhausted.

Still another area of research can include comparative studies of decades and levels to understand how the film perception of education has changed. For example, a comparison of secondary education post-WWII in the 1950s with secondary education of the 1990s –the end of the century, could prove interesting. A trend study of special education in film for a thirty-year period including the time of the adoption and implementation of ADA could make for a dramatic revelation of the short time span and huge change for special needs students. Yet another possible area of research exists in a comparison of media coverage of crimes and scandals in schools along with actual plots and scenarios replicated in school films. It could prove quite interesting to see how many of the dramatic and dark stories in secondary school films come from events that have transpired in schools rather than from the creative genius of Hollywood screenwriters.

Whatever the case, commercially released film is a ready field for reflection about the institution of education. While marked by Hollywood's flare and sometimes sensationalistic subject matter, the school as seen through the film lens is still a topic to which all Americans can relate.

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## List of Appendices

## Appendix: A

## Appendix A

### List of Films

#### Secondary, Public (Study group)

1. *10 Things I Hate About You* 1999
2. *187* 1997
3. *American History X* 1998
4. *American Pie* 1999
5. *Apt Pupil* 1998
6. *Billy Madison* 1995
7. *Class Act* 1992
8. *Class of 1999* 1990
9. *Clueless* 1995
10. *Dangerous Minds* 1995
11. *Dazed and Confused* 1993
12. *Disturbing Behavior* 1998
13. *Election* 1999
14. *The Faculty* 1998
15. *He Got Game* 1998
16. *High School High* 1996
17. *If Looks Could Kill (Teen Agent)* 1991
18. *In & Out* 1997
19. *Just Another Girl on the IRT* 1993

20. *Light It Up* 1999
21. *Mr. Holland's Opus* 1996
22. *National Lampoon's Senior Trip* 1995
23. *October Sky* 1999
24. *Only the Strong* 1993
25. *Pump up the Volume* 1990
26. *The Substitute* 1996
27. *Teaching Mrs. Tingle* 1999
28. *This is My Father* 1999
29. *Wild Things* 1998
30. *Zebrahead* 1992

#### Elementary School

1. *Kindergarten Cop* 1990
2. *Little Buddha* 1993
3. *Little Man Tate* 1991
4. *Major Payne* 1995
5. *Matilda* 1996
6. *The Mighty Ducks* 1992
7. *Music of the Heart* 1999
8. *Searching for Bobby Fisher* 1993
9. *Simon Birch* 1998

## Middle School

1. *Dutch* 1991
2. *Man Without a Face* 1993
3. *Milk Money* 1994
4. *This Boy's Life* 1993
5. *Welcome to the Dollhouse* 1995

## Catholic, Private, Parochial, Boarding, Reform, Military

1. *Basketball Diaries* 1995
2. *Imaginary Crimes* 1994
3. *Mermaids* 1990
4. *Renaissance Man* 1994
5. *Rushmore* 1998
6. *Scent of a Woman* 1992
7. *School Ties* 1992
8. *Sister Act* 1992
9. *Sleepers* 1996
10. *Superstar* 1999
11. *Toy Soldiers* 1991

## College, University, Graduate, Adult Education

1. *Flatliners* 1990
2. *Forrest Gump* 1994



3. *The Freshman* 1990
4. *Good Will Hunting* 1998
5. *Higher Learning* 1995
6. *The Mirror Has Two Faces* 1996
7. *The Nutty Professor* 1996
8. *Oleana* 1994
9. *Patch Adams* 1998
10. *PCU* 1994
11. *The Pelican Brief* 1993
12. *Rounders* 1998
13. *Waterboy* 1998
14. *With Honors* 1994

One-on-One Instruction, Mentorship, Special or Gifted Education

1. *American History X* 1998
2. *Apt Pupil* 1998
3. *Carried Away* 1996
4. *Dutch* 1991
5. *Good Will Hunting* 1998
6. *Little Man Tate* 1991
7. *The Man Without a Face* 1993
8. *The Pelican Brief* 1993
9. *Scent of a Woman* 1992

10. *Searching for Bobby Fisher* 1993

11. *Stanley & Iris* 1990

12. *This Boy's Life* 1993

## Appendix: B

## Appendix B

### Film Analysis Form

1. How are the secondary learning environments – the schools, portrayed in films of the 1990s?
2. How are the educators portrayed in the films of the 1990s?
3. How are the educated portrayed in the films of the 1990s?
4. What academic lesson does the educator teach?
5. How does the educator teach the academic lesson?
6. What life lesson does the educator teach?
7. How does the educator teach the life lesson?
8. What positive or negative statements can be made about secondary public education when assessed through the lens of the films of the 1990s?

## VITA

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