Popular Culture as Pedagogy
Research in the Field of Adult Education

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Grounded in the field of adult education, this international compilation offers a range of critical perspectives on popular culture as a form of pedagogy. Its fundamental premise is that adults learn in multiple ways, including through their consumption of fiction. As scholars have asserted for decades, people are not passive consumers of media; rather, we (re)make our own meanings as we accept, resist, and challenge cultural representations.

At a time when attention often turns to new media, the contributors to this collection continue to find “old” forms of popular culture important and worthy of study. Television and movies – the emphases in this book – reflect aspects of consumers’ lives, and can be powerful vehicles for helping adults see, experience, and inhabit the world in new and different ways.

This volume moves beyond conceptually oriented scholarship, taking a decidedly research-oriented focus. It offers examples of textual and discursive analyses of television shows and films that portray varied contexts of adult learning, and suggests how participants can be brought into adult education research in this area. In so doing, it provides compelling evidence about the complexity, politics, and multidimensionality of adult teaching and learning.

Using a range of television shows and movies as exemplars, chapters relate popular culture to globalization, identity, health and health care, and education. The book will be of great use to instructors, students, and researchers located in adult education, cultural studies, women’s and gender studies, cultural sociology, and other fields who are looking for innovative ways to explore social life as experienced and imagined.
Popular Culture as Pedagogy
TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

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TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy’s (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity – youth identity in particular – the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.
If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education seeks to produce – literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.
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KAELA JUBAS, NANCY TABER AND TONY BROWN

1. INTRODUCTION

Approaching Popular Culture as Pedagogy

This is a text about stories, about stories that are made, conveyed, and brought to life through film and television. Of course, the characters in fictional stories are not really living in the way that we are. Still, the movies, television shows, music, magazines, novels, and comic books that audience members enjoy become part of our lives as we relate to them and care about the characters that they present. As we come to relate and care about them, we also learn about ourselves and how we might respond in new situations. We learn about how other people live, the dilemmas that they encounter, and the choices that they make. We might learn something about what is problematic or missing in our lives, and about the lives that we might lead.

Those ideas are consistent with scholarship that emerged in adult education decades ago and have become central in the field of cultural studies (see Williams, 1980). As many scholars now recognize, adults are not passive consumers of media; instead, we (re)make our own meanings as we accept, resist, and challenge cultural representations (Guy, 2007; Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2013). Furthermore, popular culture and media can be powerful and persuasive vehicles for helping us look at the world in new and different ways and thus can be used by educators to engage students and problematize societal issues (Brown, 2011; Jarvis & Burr, 2010; Tisdell, 2008).

Along with the other contributors to this collection, we as co-editors bring that sensibility to our chapters, and use various texts, concepts, and approaches to explore how, for its viewers, readers, and listeners – its “consumers” – pop culture both reflects and informs real-life. Often, this notion is referred to in scholarly literature as “public pedagogy,” a term popularized in educational studies by Carmen Luke (1996) and Henry Giroux (2003, 2010). We use the phrase “popular culture as pedagogy” instead of public pedagogy for two reasons. First, public pedagogy has become associated with Giroux’s writing, and not all of the authors in this collection draw on his work directly. Second, public pedagogy encompasses pop culture as well as other cultural plat/forms – including museums and galleries, social media, and culture jamming (see Sandlin, 2007). Our focus here is limited to filmic and televisual texts, which have been pivotal in cultural life throughout the 20th century and continue to occupy attention, in spite of changes accompanying the development of new social media and cultural technologies and practices.1

Research and analysis are themselves a kind of storytelling process, as scholars stitch together bits of data and ideas into a coherent narrative. They tell new stories.

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about the topics being discussed. As a collection, the chapters in this book use exemplars from pop culture and build on more conceptually-oriented scholarship to tell stories about how cultural texts, each of which is well-known in mainstream culture, operates pedagogically with and for their adult audiences. This book, then, is a text about stories and a series of stories about texts.

ONCE UPON A TIME…. THE STORY BEHIND THIS TEXT

Like any story, the chapters in this book say as much about their authors as they do about pop culture as pedagogy. In thinking about this book as story, we would like to introduce not just the book, but also ourselves as its editors. In particular, we think it might be helpful to say a bit about how we came to this project. We three are all based in the field of adult education, but are located in different places and have different backgrounds.

When she was hired into the specialization of Workplace and Adult Learning (later renamed Adult Learning) at the University of Calgary in 2008, Kaela Jubas wanted to attach her interest in public pedagogy to her workplace. She began to incorporate film, novels, and examples of “culture jamming” – the disruption of mainstream messages – into her graduate courses. The shows *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Scrubs*, both focused on experiences of interns, were unique in highlighting work-related teaching and learning, and quickly became the centre of a proposal. The story of how she came to investigate public pedagogy goes back before that, though, to her doctoral study of critical shopping as a source of learning about identity, globalization, and social change (Jubas, 2010). Before that, she explored a radio contest to ground an analysis of citizenship as a gendered construct, and a novel to ground an analysis of globalization (Jubas, 2005, 2006). Having returned to academe after working in the not-for-profit sector for some 15 years, she brought an interest in adult learning outside the classroom, and stumbled into the territory of culture and consumption. Initially feeling rather lonely in having that focus, she was heartened when she began to meet others who were attracted to the area – Jennifer Sandlin, Robin Redmon Wright, Libby Tisdell, and Christine Jarvis. At the 2013 conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE), she approached Nancy about the possibility of collaborating on this book. For Kaela, this project was about sharing and celebrating a burgeoning, world-wide community of adult education scholars who embrace questions about pop culture as pedagogy energetically and thoughtfully.

Nancy Taber’s (2007) dissertation work explored how mothering intersects with ruling relations in the Canadian military. She built on her own military experiences in her analysis of military policies and regulations. In so doing, she discovered children’s books written for and about Canadian military families. Nancy analyzed these books within the larger context of military popular culture representations (see also Taber, 2009). This analysis quite unexpectedly led her into a research agenda with a growing focus on popular culture as pedagogy. She has completed textual
INTRODUCTION

analyses of diary cartoon novels, award-winning books, blockbuster movies, and television programs/films based on fairy tales. Additionally, she has co-conducted several reading circles and media discussion groups with girls and women. In these groups, she has drawn on films (such as *Dark Knight Rises*, *Salt*, *Snow White and the Huntsman*, *Sydney White*, and *The Hunger Games*) and television programs (such as *Lost Girl* and *Revenge*) to engage participants in a societal gendered analysis (see Taber, Woloshyn, Munn, & Lane, 2014). As an Associate Professor at Brock University, Nancy also incorporates popular culture into her teaching, both in her classroom pedagogy and in student assignments, to highlight the importance of examining popular culture through a learning lens. For Nancy, editing this collection was an opportunity to highlight the ways in which scholars acknowledge and problematize adults’ learning in daily life as they interact with popular culture.

Tony Brown joined the Centre for Popular Education at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) in 2003 and one of the first projects he worked on was a Community Leadership development program in Mt. Druitt, a working class and ethnically diverse area in Sydney’s western suburbs. One of the strategies was to work with local groups to write their own stories and histories. Storytelling was already something intrinsic to the local Indigenous people and this approach was also developed using PhotoVoice to create a public exhibition of “Women of the West.” The power of storytelling for building social connection and confidence as well as a resource for teaching and learning was an eye-opener. In 2005, a new postgraduate subject (or course), “Using Films for Critical Pedagogy,” was introduced to the Masters of Adult Education program. It enabled a different way of teaching about difficult contemporary issues, such as unemployment, racism, HIV, privatization, and work. Films that encouraged students to examine common “truths” against actual social conditions, and probed beneath that accepted or prevailing wisdom, were chosen to develop critical understanding or ideology critique and facilitate a dialogic approach to understanding changes taking place in different parts of the world. The approach of using popular media and culture was then adapted for use in a subject on “Contemporary Work,” so that photos of work, and popular songs became central resources for developing critical awareness. This was further developed with the introduction of another new subject, “Narrative and Storymaking in Education and Change,” which focused much more closely on how narrative was used in an educative way in social change campaigns and the variety of media, images and frames that were part of those campaigns.

Together, the three of us started to map ideas for a collection of scholarly pieces that would help contributors and readers alike journey through some of the territory of popular culture as pedagogy.

EMBARKING ON A JOURNEY

We set out to develop a collection that was unique in four key ways. First, although there are other books in this area that include scholars based in the field of adult
education, they tend to be based in educational studies more broadly or in cultural studies. This book is positioned centrally within the field of adult education and emphasises popular culture as a form of pedagogy among adult audience members, connecting the research discussed in its chapters to theories and concepts of adult learning. Despite widespread interest in public pedagogy, this anthology responds to a noted paucity of relevant scholarship in the field of adult education, and to calls for greater attention to this topic among adult educators (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010; Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2013; Tisdell, 2008; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007). Despite its grounding in adult education, we believe that this book can be a valuable resource for scholars and students based in other fields, including cultural, media, film, and television studies or in other parts of educational studies.

Second, this book moves beyond conceptual and theoretical approaches to pop culture as pedagogy. We acknowledge the importance of more conceptually-oriented collections (see Burdick, Sandlin, & O’Malley, 2014; Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010), which undoubtedly propelled our work forward. At the same time, we and the other contributors to this collection have taken a decidedly different focus, bringing a research orientation to our pieces. Each chapter includes a discussion of methodological questions and decisions involved in using pop culture texts as data.

Third, unlike other anthologies that delve into public pedagogy, this collection focuses on television and film. As we noted above, public pedagogy is a vast subfield in cultural and educational studies, and scholarly articles explore a range of con/texts. At a time when gaze often seems to turn away from “older” cultural forms toward new social media and online texts, we believe that television and film continue to hold meaning and sway for their audiences. The concerted effort of contributors to this volume to concentrate on televisual and/or filmic texts confirms that point.

Fourth, although we were limited from the outset by our linguistic constraints and needed to restrict this collection to English-language manuscripts, we were committed to including pieces from various parts of the world. There are contributors from Canada, Australia, the United States, England, and South Africa.

In these four ways, this book provides a compelling glimpse at the complexity, politics, and multidimensionality of both adult teaching/learning and cultural consumption as they are being taken up by scholars world-wide.

ENCOUNTERS ALONG THE WAY

Soon after we began this book project, a paradox became evident to us: Although one of our priorities was to develop an international collection about public pedagogy grounded in the field of adult education – something that we saw as distinctive about our then-imagined book – we realized that most of the contributors were dealing with texts produced in the United States. That fact illustrates how
contemporary globalization involves the concentration of media production and the spread of popular culture, even as notions of national culture persist. Films and television shows reflect something about the cultural norms and values of the place where they originate (Armstrong, 2008). These norms and values infuse televisual and filmic texts so that they can be seen as taking on a national quality. People talk, for example, about Hollywood films, or French cinema, or British television; these monikers convey something about aesthetic preferences and directorial style, but also thematic preoccupations and representations of everyday practices and settings in particular countries. As they move from place to place, popular culture texts might be received somewhat differently, because adult audiences juxtapose them with somewhat different understandings. Of course, even within one place, individual audience members might take up a cultural text in diverse and unexpected ways.

At the same time as they cross national borders and develop an international audience, televisual and filmic texts produced in one place – often by studios based in the US – inform how values and norms are both represented and understood in other places. In short, place influences both production and reception, and consumption influences place. This is, we believe, an important conceptual point, because it suggests how globalization processes are affecting cultural production, as well as adults’ encounters with one another, whether as audience members or scholars, and with popular culture texts.

Conceptual points are about more than words and arguments, though. They are also about decisions and practices. Taking seriously our commitment to developing an international anthology, we were faced with questions beyond how to gather scholarly voices from different countries, especially given our constraint to contributions written in English. As we received and began to review submissions, we saw some subtle technical differences between them. As editors, we looked over the publisher’s instructions, and noted the expectation that chapters use American Psychological Association (APA) formatting for citations and references. In other areas, though, we needed more latitude. For example, instructions indicated that we could choose British or American conventions. We realized that variations in such technical matters extend beyond the UK and the US; Canadian English uses some British conventions and other American conventions. For Nancy and Kaela, it is rather common to use a “z” rather than an “s” in some words – “realized” rather than “realised.” And, this book includes submissions from Australia and South Africa as well. As a reader, you might notice these technical variations as you read from chapter to chapter; we want to assure you that these variations are not accidental or haphazard, but say something about how we might maintain a critical, collaborative approach to content, to process, and to one another. We needed to ensure both that the book was developed purposefully and logically, and that we were not applying standards in a way that seemed disrespectful of precisely the national and cultural breadth that we were trying to bring to this anthology.
THEMES OF LEARNING

The chapters stand alone as analytical discussions of particular pop culture texts, and stand together as examples of how television series and movies can be researched for their pedagogical importance among adult fans. In the next few paragraphs, we outline some of the themes that are most apparent across these chapters. Doing Research is an umbrella theme that encompasses the entire book. The others (Living in/Thinking about Contemporary Globalization, Health(y) Work(ers), and Social Identity) arguably overlap.

Doing Research

Part of what we wanted to accomplish in this collection is to develop a resource that moved beyond conceptualization, to suggest how adult education research in this area can be and is being conducted. The chapters included in this collection draw on methodologies and methods from adult education as well as cultural studies, women’s and gender studies, and cultural sociology, indicating the inherent interdisciplinarity of public pedagogy scholarship. Critical and feminist textual analysis and discourse analysis are prominent throughout the collection. These methodologies are gaining in currency and use, even as they continue to be developed alongside changing understandings of “the text” and its reception. Shades of other methodological approaches, including ethnography and case study, are invoked in some chapters. In her chapter, Kaela Jubas additionally echoes feminist sociologist Currie’s (1999) caution that cultural texts are not stand-ins for people’s lived understandings of and experiences with texts, and discusses her combination of textual analysis and qualitative case study. Every chapter devotes some space to a discussion of how the research question and central text were approached and investigated, so that what we as authors have learned as public pedagogy researchers is articulated.

Living in/Thinking about Contemporary Globalization

The book begins with Robin Redmon Wright and Gary L. Wright’s chapter, “Doctor Who Fandom, Critical Engagement, and Transmedia Storytelling: The Public Pedagogy of the Doctor.” They describe the social advocacy of the Doctor as he travels in his Time and Relative Dimensions in Space, or TARDIS, craft. They argue that the show disrupts hegemonic neoliberal, discriminatory ideologies, and suggest how adult educators can use it to engage students in critical learning about globalization, corporatization, and colonialism. Their chapter is followed by Elissa Odgren’s “Learning How to Build Community without Following the Instructions: Finding Pieces of Resistance in The Lego Movie.” She explores the film’s satirical edge as a gateway to considering the power and potential of two concepts taken up by many adult educators – communities of practice and transformative learning – in a critique of global capitalism. These two chapters demonstrate the ways in which
Western films and television shows are infused with both promotion and critique of contemporary globalization.

**Health(y) Work(ers)**

The next series of chapters plays on the ideas of good or “healthy” workers and health care workers. Tony Brown’s chapter, “Teachers on Film: Changing Representations of Teaching in Popular Cinema from Mr. Chips to Jamie Fitzpatrick,” maintains a focus in the previous two chapters on corporate globalization, and explores how images of and beliefs about teaching and teachers are being overtaken by neoliberal corporate agendas. The next chapter, Pamela Timanson and Theresa J. Schindel’s “Discourse Analysis of Adult and Workplace Learning in Nurse Jackie: Exploring Learning Processes within a Knowledge Culture” moves to a show about the nursing profession. It examines how that show portrays teaching and learning through clinical practice, as well as encounters with nursing’s knowledge culture. Kaela Jubas’ chapter, “Giving Substance to Ghostly Figures: How Female Nursing Students Respond to a Cultural Portrayal of ‘Women’s Work’ in Health Care” explores the problematic gendered representation of nursing in Grey’s Anatomy. Her analysis of conversations with participants illuminates how work-related learning occurs not just in professional education programs and placements, but also through cultural consumption. These chapters explore how work and the workplace is a sphere of important learning about contemporary trends and older questions of how to fit into a profession. Additionally, the chapters illustrate how audience members are set up to understand workplace issues such as scope of practice, workers’ rights (especially as juxtaposed with consumers’ rights), and the ongoing influence of gender.

**Social Identity**

As much as it deals with work-related learning and learners, Kaela Jubas’ chapter takes up the theme of social identity, particularly gender. Under this theme, race, gender, class, and nationality surface prominently. In her chapter on “Narratives of Illness in South African Cinema: What Can Popular Culture Teach Us about HIV?”, Astrid Treffry-Goatley examines the pedagogical elements of African post-apartheid films about HIV, and dwells especially on impacts of poverty and gender. In her chapter, “Pedagogies of Gender in a Disney Mash-up: Princesses, Queens, Beasts, Pirates, Lost Boys, and Witches,” Nancy Taber explores how gender is learned and portrayed in Once Upon a Time, a television program based on Disney fairy tales. Christine Jarvis, in her chapter, “How to Be a Woman: Models of Masochism and Sacrifice in Young Adult Fiction,” examines how constructs of womanhood are portrayed in Twilight and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. In these television programs or movies, there are many female protagonists who are strong women; however, they are also constrained by heteronormative storylines that direct women into roles as
mothers, lovers, and invisible caregivers, with racial, class and other stereotypes and relational effects also continually present. These chapters point to the importance of problematizing gendered and racialized representations in popular culture, and to how the ways in which gender and race relations are performed onscreen intersect with how they are performed and experienced in daily life.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In the televised story of Doctor Who, the twelve iterations of the Doctor travel through space and time in the TARDIS. They visit other dimensions, explore unfamiliar worlds, and encounter diverse people. When we began to write this introductory chapter, it occurred to us that this book is a learning TARDIS of sorts. On its pages – through the genres of animation, documentary, edutainment, fantasy, realism, science fiction, the medical drama, and the supernatural – stories of witches intersect with Lego figurines, nurses with vampires, teachers with HIV patients, Time Lords with medical staff. The book as a whole demonstrates that television and film reflects, complicates, and challenges social positioning. Doctor Who (Doctor Who) has been described as a social activist. Buffy (Buffy the Vampire Slayer) establishes the need for strength, connection and compassion. Emmet (The Lego Movie) defends citizenship from corporations but lives in a world that privileges men. Bella (Twilight series) is an unfortunate model of self-sacrifice who suffers domestic abuse, as does Belle (Once upon a Time). Meredith and other female characters (Grey’s Anatomy) devalue nursing because it is seen as women’s work, and real-life nursing students must figure out how to respond to such a disparaging image of themselves in a web of gendered, professional identities. Yesterday (Yesterday) raises awareness of HIV in South Africa, while perpetuating cultural stereotypes. Jamie (Won’t Back Down) advocates for her daughter in school while supporting an anti-union message. Zoey (Nurse Jackie) benefits from mentorship while enabling another nurse to hide her drug addiction.

The learning themes in the book, as discussed in this Introduction, centre on Doing Research, Living in/Thinking about Contemporary Globalization, Health(y) Work(ers), and Social Identity. The first theme of Doing Research was intentional, as we aimed for a collection that was grounded methodologically. However, we did not set out with the remaining themes in mind; they emerged from the work of the contributors. The following eight chapters and these themes that they raise demonstrate the ways in which scholars in the field of adult education apply their work to contemporary issues as they engage in popular culture analysis and pedagogy.

NOTES

Referencing and citing films and television shows or episodes can be challenging, given APA’s direction to use a combination of producers’, writers’, and directors’ names, which can be numerous for a given title. All authors have done their best to adhere to this protocol respectfully and responsibly. Some titles, which authors might mention in passing only, are not included in their References lists.

REFERENCES


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2. DOCTOR WHO FANDOM, CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT, AND TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

The Public Pedagogy of the Doctor

Whovians is the given name for Doctor Who fans. In order to be a true Whovian, enthusiasts must write at least one piece of Doctor Who fan fiction in which they subvert the series’ form to deal with a topical issue such as drugs, unemployment, child abuse.

~ TVCream.co.uk (in Jarman & Davies, 2010, p. 243)

As the opening quotation indicates, many Doctor Who fans care about improving lives and curing social ills. Meisner (2011) asserts that the Doctor is “an activist” who is “an example to concerned citizens everywhere” (p. 7). While scholars differ in their interpretations of the show’s texts, most agree that many episodes contain overt anti-totalitarian storylines, progressive social messages, and educative political parallels. The academic arguments are often over matters of the degree to which episodes critically address issues of global, social, and political importance, or the degree to which fans internalize those messages. As critical adult educators, we set a goal to find episodes that might serve as pedagogical examples around critical analyses of entrenched social injustices, institutionalized systems of oppression, and corporate and governmental power and control.

Any study of media must begin with some sort of textual analysis. For the purposes of understanding how educators might use Doctor Who in critical pedagogy, we chose to analyze episodes using critical content analysis, a “social-structural analysis, derived from Marxist sociology and political economy of the media” (Hartley, 2002, p. 33) and textual analysis (Larsen, 2002; Palli, Tienari, & Vaara, 2010). Specifically, we chose textual analysis involving “close critical reading ... derived from the traditions of literary critical reading” (Hartley, 2002, pp. 32–33). We chose these methods, in part, because, as Hartley points out, textual analysis is “accessible to non-specialists ... [and] a useful pedagogic and persuasive tool” (p. 31).

We began with multiple viewings of all episodes from the last four incarnations of the Doctor, looking for scenes that were typical pedagogical moments focused on a particular social issue (Berger, 2000). We then transcribed each scene for textual analysis. Because most textual analysis holds that meaning can be found in grammar and language use (Palli, Tienari, & Vaara, 2010), it is important to transcribe
verbatim with an emphasis on pauses, sounds, and mood. An analysis of such factors helped us interpret attitudes and assumptions in the text. We then looked for ways the texts relate to contemporary social structures and identified metaphors critical of those structures (Miller, 2010). Berger (2000) explains that textual analysis featuring such ideological criticism “bases its evaluation of texts, or other phenomena being discussed on issues, generally of a political or socioeconomic nature that are of consuming interest to a particular group of people” (p. 71). This chapter outlines the results of our analysis.

We chose Doctor Who for this study because fans are devoted; they become immersed in the pleasures surrounding the series. Television research “only quite recently recognized the full extent to which questions of [TV-watching] pleasure are implicated in many arguments ... about knowledge, information, the supporting of citizenship, provision for minority groups, and the relation of national to international” (Corner, 1999, p. 107). Because these topics are crucial to critical adult education, the discipline of adult education must recognize this point as well. The purpose of this study is to offer educators a set of illustrative examples for utilizing clips from the show to introduce, or to advance, discussion around a variety of topics related to critical social analysis.

“I AM AND ALWAYS WILL BE THE OPTIMIST. THE HOPER OF FAR-FLUNG HOPES AND DREAMER OF IMPROBABLE DREAMS.”
~ THE DOCTOR, “THE ALMOST PEOPLE” (GRAHAM & SIMPSON, 2011)

Doctor Who is the world’s longest running science fiction television series. Since its inception in 1963, the program has often rendered “significant representations of the postcolonial sociopathic abscess – the diverse but specific material uncertainties and horrors of contemporary existence that are attributable in some way to colonialism and its fallout” (Orthia, 2010, p. 209). Spawned at the BBC, and recently celebrating its 50th anniversary as a pop culture phenomenon, Doctor Who was initially projected against the backdrop of Cold War political ideology. Based on a vague idea for a children’s “sci-fi” serial from BBC executive Sydney Newman, the show’s premise was created by a committee from the drama department (Robb, 2009). Newman chose a 28-year-old Verity Lambert to produce the show, making her the first female producer in BBC history. Newman later told reporters that “she had never directed, produced, acted or written drama but, by God, she was a bright, highly intelligent, outspoken production secretary who took no nonsense and never gave any” (Robb, 2009, p. 32). Newman then appointed Waris Hussein, also 28 years old, as director for the series. As the first director of color to work for the BBC, Hussein understood Lambert’s struggles to be accepted and respected by her all-male colleagues. The team of Lambert and Hussein developed a children’s hero willing to fight for equality and justice.
BRIEF INTERLUDE

For the uninitiated, Doctor Who is a science fiction tale about a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey who calls himself “the Doctor.” The Doctor can travel anywhere in space and time in his space/time craft called the TARDIS (Time and Relative Dimensions in Space). If he is mortally wounded, he can regenerate, taking on a new physical appearance and a new personality, while preserving his memories of previous incarnations. This brilliant plot device allows the BBC to recast the lead actor periodically. The show ran for 26 years before it was cancelled, only to be resurrected 16 years later, in 2005, and dubbed Nu Who by fans. Nu Who introduced Christopher Eccelston as the ninth Doctor, followed by David Tennant as tenth, Matt Smith as the eleventh incarnation and, most recently, Peter Capaldi became the twelfth Doctor.

Ever since its introduction, the TARDIS has always appeared as a blue 1950s-style British police telephone box. This time machine, however, exerts a Jedi mind-trick type of influence on onlookers allowing it to blend in with any local environment. Furthermore, it is enabled by such Time Lord Technology to display unlimited space on the inside, boasting uncounted rooms, a massive library, closets filled with attire ad infinitum, and a swimming pool.

The Doctor always travels with a companion (or two) – usually human – because he values their perspective and their company. He is exceedingly brilliant and, in the current series, has accrued over 2,000 years of lived experience. He was forced to send his planet into a parallel universe hidden from everyone, even himself, in order to stop a war with the Time Lord’s worst enemy, the Daleks. That act left him alone – the last of his species. He abhors violence and never carries a weapon. He does, however, carry a sonic screwdriver that has the remarkable ability to open anything, measure anything, and analyze anything.

“KEEP IT CONFUSED. FEED IT WITH USELESS INFORMATION ... I WONDER IF I HAVE A TELEVISION SET HANDY?” ~ THE DOCTOR, “THE THREE DOCTORS” (BAKER & MARTIN, 1973)

McLaren and Hammer (1996) argue that television is the primary mechanism through which “capitalism is able to secure cultural and ideological totalization and homogenization” (p. 106). In The Saturated Self, Gergen (1991) posits television as 1) exemplary of self-reflexivity, 2) a creator of vicarious relationships, 3) a separator of families, 4) a symbolic community for like believers, 5) a producer of inchoate narrative, 6) a hyper-reality, 7) a representation of relatedness, and 8) a tool for terrorists. Mirrlees’ (2013) and Ventura’s (2012) research indicates corporate entertainment media, primarily through television and film, has created a neoliberal cultural empire. Television wields “incommensurable ideological power without interference” because it “tutors us in acceptance rather than resolve” (Wagner &
Charles (2007) argues that it shapes not only current ideology, but also that of the past. Television destroys history and stunts cultural evolution:

It is the cultural equivalent of the atom bomb: its confusion between the old and the new, between the archived and the live, has dissolved the distance between the past and the present – has killed history at the speed of light. This is more than anachrony: this is ahistoricality. This is more than nostalgia: this is denial. Its mode of preserving the past … makes television a particularly able medium in which a late imperialist nation might hearken back to its days of glory. (p. 114)

Television is a major part of a “neoliberal corporate culture” that naturalizes a growing wealth gap and “devalues gender, class-specific, and racial injustices of the existing social order,” while “subordinating the needs of society to the market” (Giroux, 2010, p. 486). Contemporary examples include Buist and Sutherland’s (2015) analysis of sexist stereotypes in popular TV police shows, as well as Brayton’s (2014) and Wright’s (in press) analyses of class in reality TV programs.

Television is also a powerful educator. According to Wagner and Maclean (2008), television’s pedagogical grip on its audience is all the more powerful because it convinces us that it is unimportant. It “is so self-reflexive, such a parody of itself, so continually broadcasting its unseriousness and meaninglessness” (p. 19) that academics often dismiss it as unimportant, and most viewers never consider the cumulative effect of its pedagogy. Scholars outside cultural studies often ignore television’s impact on their students and research participants or, worse, make unsubstantiated claims of its dangers. Television’s curriculum, of course, supports the status quo, fosters acceptance of neoliberalism, and promotes unbridled consumerism. It is the curriculum of a medium created to promote consumption. But it is also a creative industry, made up of writers, artists, and visionaries who enact a pedagogy of storytelling, and who sometimes create subversive, resistant tales.

Entertaining, engaging television stories capture the imagination and remain with audiences, enduring in their hearts and minds. Such captivating stories, with their gripping emotional scenes, occupy our thoughts and become part of our daily conversations. Romances and relationships are spawned from affinity for them, social groups are formed around them, and families relate to one another through them. Indeed, many times, they become the narratives that shape rather than reflect our cultures. Popular cultural narratives are embedded in our daily lives and seamlessly interwoven into our own developing and unfolding personal stories. Over the last couple of decades, these stories have grown tentacles, expanding into video games, internet communities, mobile apps, and Facebook pages. They introduce strangers and become the cement of friendship bonds. They are shaped into meta-narratives becoming so pervasive in our lives they begin to formulate our frames of reference.

Most of these contemporary cultural narratives depend on and, indeed, are promulgated by six multi-national corporations with goals dictated by stockholder
demands for profits and executives’ expectations of bloated bank accounts in the Caymans (Kunz, 2007; Miller, 2007). As Kunz (2007) points out, “with five corporations holding financial interest in close to 94 percent of the [U.S. television] program hours” and 90.28 percent of U.S. films owned by six conglomerates, “the level of concentration has reached a point that an oligopolistic structure exists” (pp. 222–223). In the US, rather than curtailing monopolization, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) acted as “head cheerleaders for this wave of conglomeration and consolidation” (p. 223). With the departure of the G. W. Bush administration, “most of the regulations that pertain to ownership of broadcast television networks or stations and cable television services or systems are gone” (p. 223). Moreover, “there is also an unprecedented interpenetration of corporate media power, via overlapping directories” with the “118 people sitting on the boards of the top media companies [also acting as] directors of 288 other national and global corporations” (Miller, 2007, p. 16). Not surprisingly, most programming reinforces a capitalist, neoliberal hegemony of systemic inequality and institutionalized oppression, along with an ethic of consumerism and competition. As consumers of these products, viewers accept and even demand such narratives which, by sheer repetition, become common-sense reality (Wagner & Maclean, 2008). Inequality is naturalized and disseminated – just as culture has always been – by storytelling. The production output of the modern television industry is saturated with stories that support and glorify the status quo. For example, women make up 51 percent of the US population, but only 39 percent of the speaking roles on US broadcast networks (Gauntlett, 2008). Most of those roles are stereotypically domestic, and those shows that do feature successful professional women “have focused on their quests for sex, pleasure and romantic love” (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 65). Reality TV shows proliferate on cable television and “depict the working-class and the poor as (1) content, even happy, to be poor; (2) proud of their ignorance and lack of social capital; and (3) undeserving of socialistic government programs that might provide opportunities for advancement, authentic education, and a robust social safety net” (Wright, in press). However, often within genres like science fiction or fantasy, there are texts that can be interpreted as resistant; there are programs with stories that explore alternative, more humane possibilities for human evolution. By such means, Doctor Who offers allegories to help viewers deconstruct assumptions, question established norms, imagine egalitarian possibilities, and probe our collective conscience.

“THE DOCTOR SHOWED ME A BETTER WAY TO LIVE YOUR LIFE ... YOU DON’T JUST GIVE UP. YOU DON’T JUST LET THINGS HAPPEN. YOU MAKE A STAND. YOU SAY ‘NO.’” ~ ROSE, “THE PARTING OF THE WAYS” (DAVIES, 2006)

Today, there is “a growing body of literature that explores the linkages between popular culture and world politics, arguing that popular culture, whilst reflecting political worldviews and current events, also plays an important role in producing and popularizing” (Van Veeren, 2009, p. 363) those same worldviews. Television’s
grip on culture and learning has increased exponentially, especially in the US, with unrelenting deregulation and escalating lobbyist influence. Yet, we argue that *Doctor Who*, which airs on BBC America, is one of those spaces of resistance embedded within popular television that sometimes provides a subtext of critical analysis, questioning the naturalness of the capitalist narratives currently produced by the Western media-military-industrial complex. *Doctor Who* offers possibilities for cross-generational living-room discussions and classroom visual aids, encouraging viewers to “take a stand.”

Fascination with the Doctor

Few television shows have led to the destruction of as many trees as *Doctor Who*. The Doctor himself, a friend to and respecter of trees, would be appalled by the sheer quantity of *Doctor Who*-related books, magazines, and other paper items continually being published. In addition to the novelizations of the series, there are 2000 plus other novels, inestimable short-story collections and novellas, as well as annuals, histories, anniversary specials, dictionaries, and encyclopedias. There are official BBC-sanctioned magazines, episode guides, special publications, and comic book series. There are also numerous unofficial biographies, continuity guides, anthologies, handbooks, and compendia. Equally prolific are volumes of fan analyses, fan narratives, fanzines, and fan autobiographies (Couch, Watkins, & Williams, 2005; Gulyas, 2013; Frankel, 2013; Thomas & O’Shea, 2010). Finally, *Doctor Who* and its fandom have attracted academic interest from a variety of disciplines (Booth, 2013; Butler, 2007; Chapman, 2006; Garner, Beattie, & McCormack, 2010; Hansen, 2010; Hills, 2010, 2013; Muir, 1999; O’Day, 2014; Orthia, 2013; Tulloch & Alvarado, 1983). Scholars and fans from myriad backgrounds have all found value – whether educational, motivational, pedagogical, or inspirational – in the resistant messages found both in classic and in Nu Who.

A Critical Sampling

It seems appropriate at this juncture to provide a few examples of critical analyses from disciplines other than adult education. As scholarly interest in the *Doctor Who* curriculum grows, so will the number of disciplines which value and investigate its effects. For this chapter, we briefly discuss a few studies that might be of interest or useful to adult educators and learners.¹

Scholars in media and television studies look at a wide range of topics around the show and much of their work touches on issues that concern the field of adult education. DiPaolo (2010) contends that close textual reading of both Classic *Who* and Nu *Who* reveals storylines that promote “secular humanism, cultural pluralism, and globalism,” while taking a “stance against imperialism, prejudice, willful ignorance, and the bureaucratic mindset” (p. 981). Charles (2008) asserts that Nu *Who* engages “contemporary political concerns” and argues “against the totalizing
strategies advanced by both sides in the war on terror” (p. 461). Robb (2009) points to *Doctor Who*’s political and cultural themes, including “satirizing consumerism and the influence of big business” (p. 222) and presenting contemporary health issues caused by “big-business exploitation” (p. 223). Gupta (2013) agrees that the Doctor deals with issues related to capitalism/consumerism and the environment, but also stresses the Doctor’s “assault on the class system and privilege” (p. 45). It is noteworthy that McKee’s (2004) qualitative study of *Doctor Who* fans in the UK found no such political interpretations. Fans interpreted the stories in ways that fit their already-held political beliefs, from Marxist left to extreme right wing. He concludes, then, that *Doctor Who* does not support any political ideology.

Critical race scholars like Orthia (2013) point out that *Doctor Who*’s “overt ideological frame” always “presents itself as opposing racist oppression, with varying degrees of success” (p. 293, italics in the original). Gupta (2013) affirms that the Nu *Who* has a racially diverse cast, but advocates for more proactivity, insisting that “what it needs to do now is to have story lines that do not blindly portray a race-free utopia but, instead, use the programme to meet the transformation of racial issues in the 21st century head-on” (p. 49). Most agree that Nu *Who* has made an effort to be racially inclusive.

Dixit (2012), an international relations scholar, argues that Doctor Who “can play a role in imagining our relations with those considered different or alien, rather than seeing them as threats to be eliminated” (p. 290). *Doctor Who* offers “possibilities for interaction and the politics of encounter” that should be studied by students of international relations (p. 292). Dixit proffers that *Doctor Who* reveals that the biggest threat to citizens is often their own government and, thus, “directs attention to the process of threat construction instead of seeing threats as external to the body politic” (p. 296). In an international war on terror, the Doctor “questions who is a threat and who is dangerous” (p. 297). As a pedagogical tool, *Doctor Who* provides a resource “for (re)imagining the study of international relations differently” (p. 304).

There are volumes written in the field of cultural studies about *Doctor Who* and its fandom, and they cover a wide spectrum of interests and issues. Amy-Chinn (2008) outlines how Rose, a companion to the Ninth and Tenth Doctors, is placed in a subservient position to the Doctor because her compassion and caring disempower her. But Magnet (2010) argues that Rose’s compassion, although a traditionally gendered characteristic, helps her rise above and “even exceed the Doctor’s abilities” (p. 155), although she goes on to admit that the second series “declaws” Rose and undoes any feminist progress she made. Yet, Wallace (2010) reads Rose’s “domesticity” as an indication that “the programme is moving away from its patriarchal nature,” and argues that Nu *Who* stories actually revolve around the new companions of Rose, Martha, and Donna, making it a “female led show” (p. 114).

On a vastly different contemporary topic, Gibbs (2013) analyzes how several *Doctor Who* storylines deal with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the wake of the recent long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This recurring thread reveals the
show’s “commitment to the depiction of more realistic responses to trauma” which “demonstrates certain ways in which complex theoretical material is refracted through popular culture and is, in turn, further propagated” (p. 268).

The general consensus of Doctor Who research is it has consistently displayed varying degrees of critical cultural allegory – depending on its writers. Scholars have primarily analyzed program content or audience response with a view to themes that run through seasons, decades, or Doctors. We agree with Hills (2008) that we should “consider what is at stake when we take seriously, as scholars, notable ‘moments’ of sf [science fiction] television” (p. 26). There are “moments” in Nu Who that can represent the concepts that Brookfield (2005) argues one must learn in order to develop as a critical, questioning adult. As adult educators, we have a responsibility to teach critical theory and critical reflection “with the explicit social and political critique, and activism this implies” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 373). The use of popular culture to introduce social and political critique can help lower emotional barriers that often arise when assumptions and learned beliefs are challenged. Jarvis and Burr (2011) call for adult educators to view and discuss popular television texts infused with social and political critique to help students “consider the wider social and cultural implications” (p. 178) of structural inequalities and systems of oppression.

Hartley (2002) points out that textual and content analysis of television can stimulate discussions around myriad issues – from politics and war to sexual identity (p. 31). While textual analysis has been legitimately criticized for not going far enough in understanding the cultural phenomenon of television, it can “tease out how pleasures mix with power, emotion with reason, information with ideology, in the very tissue of sense-making” (Hartley, 2002, p. 32). For the purposes of this chapter, we will provide examples of Doctor Who “moments” which might be meaningful for those learning to become critical citizens, recognize and challenge ideology, unmask mechanisms of power, contest hegemony, and practice democracy (Brookfield, 2005). We take these from the four most recent incarnations of the Doctor, beginning with the 2005 reboot and the ninth Doctor. Nu Who was brought back to the small screen by Russell T. Davies as executive producer and writer of many of the episodes. The ninth Doctor differed from his eight predecessors, discarding the trappings of the upper class – after all, he is a Time Lord – and donning the wardrobe, appearance, and accent of contemporary working-class Britain.

*The Ninth Doctor – Corporate-Media-Political Complex*

In a previous work, Robin (Wright, 2010a) describes her classroom use of video clips from the ninth Doctor episode, “The Long Game” (Davies & Grant, 2006), to illustrate the dangers of media monopolies and the need for adults to critically consume news and information. “The Long Game” depicts a future where the human race has been stunted; they have become xenophobic, vicious, and paranoid chiefly because all their news comes from a single source, Satellite 5, controlled by
a creature, hired by the banking industry, to manipulate the human race for its own ends. It is a thinly veiled critique of consumerism and allusion to Rupert Murdoch and his right wing pseudo-news propaganda organizations.2

Such commentary on media’s negative effects on humankind continues a few episodes later in the two-part season finale, “Bad Wolf” and “Parting of the Ways” (Davies & Ahearn, 2006a, 2006b). When the Doctor and Rose, played by Billie Piper, revisit Satellite 5, 100 years after shutting down the bogus news operation in “The Long Game,” they find the satellite broadcasting reality TV (RTV) programs on all channels, and humanity is again stunted. Hundreds of Big Brother houses, Weakest Link games, What Not to Wear episodes, and myriad assorted Survivor-type contests are broadcast 24 hours a day. Laws have been enacted requiring everyone to purchase access to the programming. Anyone may be selected to be a contestant at any moment – resistance incurs the death penalty, as does losing a game or being voted off a show. Humans live to watch RTV; their lives (and deaths) are controlled by it. Satellite 5 is owned by Bad Wolf Corporation which, the Doctor discovers, is controlled by the Daleks, the Doctor’s greatest enemy. Normally detached killing machines who oppose any species except “pure” Dalek-kind, these Daleks are religious zealots worshipping a Dalek-Emperor-God and killing non-believers. The Daleks, no longer the racist fascists of the Cold War Who, are now the embodiment of post 9/11 terrorists.3

Before confronting the Dalek-terrorists, the Doctor must contend with the Dalek front organization, Bad Wolf Corporation, which controls the government, summarily executes non-Satellite 5 subscribers, and directs private security forces to arrest, sentence, and imprison citizens without trial or appeal for resisting participation in the games. The parallels of corporate media’s insalubrious hold over humankind to global events in 2005, including coverage of Hurricane Katrina and the U.S. government’s appalling response to it, media reactions to the London bombings, and ongoing concerns about the U.S. involvement in torture of prisoners and unlawful surveillance of citizens, are evident to even the most casual viewer.

Just as “The Long Game” is not a negative message about proper journalism, but about the abuse of corporate power and lack of critical questioning by citizens, “Bad Wolf/The Parting of the Ways” is not so much a commentary on RTV as it is on humanity’s passive, uncritical acceptance of corporate entertainment media’s political power. Because the Doctor broke the ideological control of single-source news/propaganda 100 years earlier, humanity became susceptible to ideological indoctrination from corporate “entertainment.” Earth’s inhabitants ignored corporate abuses, immersing themselves in manufactured predicaments. The following moment from “Bad Wolf” emphasizes the point. The Doctor and Lynda, a fellow escapee from a Big Brother house, find their way to the observation deck and stand contemplating a horribly polluted earth.

The Doctor:  So the population just sits there? Half the world’s too fat, half the world’s too thin, and you lot just watch telly?
Lynda: [nodding and smiling] 10,000 channels all beaming down from here.

The Doctor: The human race – brainless sheep, being fed on a diet of – mind you, do they still have that program where three people have to live with a bear? [grinning broadly] – [serious again] I don’t understand; last time I was here, I put it right.

Lynda: No, but that’s when it first went wrong, 100 years ago, like you said. All the news channels, they just shut down overnight. There was nothing left in their place, no information. The whole planet just froze. The government, the economy – they collapsed. That was the start of it; 100 years of hell.

The Doctor: Oh, my – I made this world. (Davies & Ahearn, 2006a)

The risks inherent in uncritical consumption of corporate-generated information, education, and entertainment are clear. While corporations make unholy alliances and engage in environmental and human rights abuses for the maximization of profits, religious fanatics and intolerant extremists wield power by infiltrating corporate structures. All the while an uncritical public simply goes along, mindlessly supporting corporate monopolies.

The first season of Nu Who has many moments that explore the need for citizens to be critically educated and “to ignore it is to miss educational moments when we might use the undeniable pleasures of popular culture to propose disruptive alternatives [to neoliberal hegemony] and promote liberatory learning” (Wright, 2010b, p. 249). Using such moments in classrooms can provide inroads to discussions surrounding issues of power and democracy.

The Tenth Doctor – Human Resources

The second season of Nu Who ushered in a new Doctor played by David Tennant with Russell T. Davies still at the series’ helm as executive producer. Themes and subtexts were still culturally relevant and often critical of social inequalities, prejudices, and oligarchy. Moments from the episode “Planet of the Ood,” written by Keith Temple (Temple & Harper, 2008), are useful prompts for critical discussions about equality and choice in the workplace.

Set in the 42nd century, this episode, once again, explores corporate malfeasance via abusive labor practices directed at “foreign labor.” The Doctor and companion Donna Noble, played by Catherine Tate, arrive on the Ood-Sphere, homeworld of the Ood, a race of peaceful beings who are born vulnerable due to their biological design. Naturally, humans have enslaved them making them a species of servants, and for 200 years the family-owned corporation, Ood Operations (OO), has been processing and selling the Ood as labor for the military, individuals, and corporations. Ood are described as “happy to serve,” but after hearing the sales pitch, Donna asks “Don’t
the Ood get a say in this? – Are there any free Ood?” (Temple & Harper, 2008). The Doctor and Donna soon slip away from the “showroom” and discover that the Ood are whipped and abused. They investigate a warehouse where Ood are packed into cargo containers, reminiscent of illegal immigrants who are frequently discovered in ports today.

Upon opening a cargo container to reveal a shipment of Ood standing in formation like a contingent of Emperor Qin’s Terra-Cotta Warriors, Donna retches from the stench while expressing horror that humans are again building wealth by enslaving “the other.”

Donna: A great big empire built on slavery.

The Doctor: It’s not so different from your time.

Donna: Oi! I haven’t got slaves!


This moment makes the allegory clear. As the episode unfolds, corporate representatives and Mr. Halpen, the current patriarch and CEO of OO, advance familiar arguments for allowing such abuses – the Ood are better off as servants and soldiers. Solana Mercurio, OO public relations spokesperson chimes in, “We make them better” (Temple & Harper, 2008).

As the allegory unfolds, the reason for Ood acquiescence becomes clear. They are a telepathic species, born with a forebrain and a small external hindbrain, which OO removes when “processing” the Ood. The Doctor explains:

The Doctor: Like the amygdala in humans, it processes memory and emotions. You get rid of that, you wouldn’t be Donna anymore, you’d be like an Ood – a processed Ood.

Donna: So the company cuts off their brains –

The Doctor: [angrily] – and they stitch on the translator. (Temple & Harper, 2008)

A third factor in the Ood’s make-up is the Ood Brain – a large brain that is their telepathic center. They are a collective species by design. The Halpens have kept the Ood Brain under a dampening field since they arrived on the planet two centuries before. This kept the unprocessed Ood from communicating with the processed Ood. Educators can easily draw parallels to impoverished governments, strangled by debt, subjugated by powerful entities, and compelled to be complicit in the exploitation of their people and resources. The Ood serve in order to survive.

The Doctor saves the Ood, but he could not have done it without the Friends of the Ood, an activist group who have been working to uncover and expose abuses for decades. This hopeful subplot is positioned against apathy and willful ignorance in a conversation between Donna and Solana Mercurio.
Donna: If the humans back on Earth knew what was going on here –
Solana: Don’t be so stupid; of course they know.
Donna: They know how you treat the Ood?
Solana: They don’t ask. Same thing. (Temple & Harper, 2008)

Such moments afford adult educators an opportunity to broach conversations around global labor practices, consumerism, capitalism, neoliberalism, and responsibility.

The Eleventh Doctor – Our Best Hope

In 2010, Russell T. Davies and David Tennant left the program, and 27-year-old Matt Smith became the Eleventh Doctor. Steven Moffat replaced Davies as executive producer and head writer. Moffat focused less on global political issues and more on the complexity of personal relationships and individual consciences as citizens with agency. His is a more Habermasian view of what the Doctor can represent, with a focus on “common interest” and “inclusivity” of classes (Habermas, 1989, pp. 36–67). Habermas, unlike many critical theorists, felt that revolutionary change might not actually be possible, so people should “work to achieve realistic and specific social changes in particular contexts” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 222). Of course, for any positive change it is necessary to be reflexive and questioning of one’s own beliefs and motives, examining one’s complicity in hegemony. Moffat’s characters do that in spades. Self-reflexivity and challenging one’s previously held assumptions are major themes in Moffat’s Who.

The Eleventh Doctor travels briefly with a young woman, Amy Pond, played by Karen Gillan, but soon her fiancé and eventual husband Rory Williams, played by Arthur Darvill, joins them in their adventures. Rory and Amy’s relationship is a key thematic element throughout the Smith/Moffat years. Many other relationships are featured, including the Doctor’s marriage to River Song, played by Alex Kingston. Interracial, inter-species, and homosexual partner relationships, conspicuously visible in the Russell T. Davies years, are normalized by their plot relevance in the Moffat era, and the cultural marginalization of a variety of other pairings is also examined. The Kingston/Smith romantic pairing, for example, rejects the deeply engrained and sexist ageism so dominant in Western cultures, since Kingston is almost twice Smith’s age.

Moffat’s story arcs are complex and stretch over multiple seasons. Fans can and do discuss themes across media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, fan forums, and Meet-Up Groups; however, the complexity of the arcs can make it difficult to distill moments for classroom discussion unless all students are fans. Still, while critical political allegories are not as easily encapsulated as in Davies’ years, there are many scenes that offer provocative content and impetus for discussions around the Habermasian concepts of the public sphere and individuals working together for the common good.
In the episode “The Power of Three” (Chibnall & Mackinnon, 2012), for example, humanity is about to be wiped out by the Shakri, who “serve the word of the Tally.” The Tally is described by the Doctor as “Judgement Day or the Reckoning.” Humanity is to be erased before they “colonize space.” According to the Shakri, “The human contagion must be eliminated…. The human plague – raiding and fighting and, when cornered, the rage to destroy.” In fear of humanity’s savagery, the Shakri are killing humans using weapons designed as small boxes that appear across the globe and are capable of stopping human hearts. The Doctor responds:

So! Here you are, depositing slug pellets all over the Earth, made attractive so humans will collect them, hoping to find something beautiful inside, because that’s what they are. Not pests or plague – creatures of hope! Forever building and reaching. Making mistakes, of course, every life form does, but – but they learn and they strive for greater and they achieve it!…You want a tally? Put their achievements against their failings though the whole of time. I will back humanity against the Shakri every time. (Chibnall & Mackinnon, 2012)

The scene cuts to Kate Stewart, head of the Unified Intelligence Task Force (UNIT), a United Nations global organization created to protect the Earth from alien threats. The Doctor left her in charge of dealing with a planet in chaos. Speaking on the phone, Kate is firm: “Tell the Secretary-General, it’s not just hospitals and equipment, it’s people! Our best hope now is each other” (Chibnall & Mackinnon, 2012). When people are dying in equal numbers around the globe, governments are powerless. It is the earth’s citizens that must come together to save humanity. Human plague or best hope? Such reflexive questioning about potential choices for human evolution is a dominant theme in Moffat’s Doctor Who and provides imaginative fodder for discussions about the public sphere and the importance of community.


The most recent incarnation of the Doctor is played by Peter Capaldi, a Scottish actor in his mid-fifties. He replaced Matt Smith, who was in his twenties when he began his tenure as the Doctor. This provided Moffat with the opportunity to expand upon the subtext of anti-ageism that the Doctor’s marriage to River Song brought to consciousness. When the Doctor’s young companion, Clara Oswald, played by Jenna Louise Coleman, suddenly finds herself tumbling through the time vortex with a much older Doctor, she is openly disappointed.

The regeneration process is exceedingly disorienting. After regeneration, the Doctor struggles to remember who he is, who his friends are, even how to fly the TARDIS. In the premiere episode for the 2014 season, “Deep Breath,” Clara manages to get the Doctor back to his good friends, Madame Vastra, a homo-reptilian from the dawn of time, and her human wife, Jenny, Vastra, played by Neve McIntosh, and Jenny, played by Catrin Stewart, are Victorian private detectives loosely modeled
on Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, and are recurring characters throughout the eleventh Doctor episodes. When the three women finally manage to get the Doctor to sleep, Clara asks, “What do we do; how can we fix him?...How do we change him back?” (Moffatt & Holmes, 2014). Vastra gives her a cold look and leaves the room. Alone with the sleeping Doctor, Clara and Jenny discuss his new incarnation:

Clara: Why did he get that face? Why does it have lines on it? It’s brand new. How can his hair be all gray? He only just got it.

Jenny: It’s still him Ma’am, you saw him change.

Clara: I know, I really do. I know that. It’s just, if Vastra changed, if she was different, if she wasn’t the person you liked?

Jenny: I don’t like her Ma’am; I love her. And as to different, well, she’s a lizard. (Moffat & Holmes, 2014)

This sets up the next scene wherein the women convene in Vastra’s chambers:

Vastra: He regenerated, renewed himself.

Clara: Renewed. Fine.

Vastra: Such a cynical smile.

Clara: I’m not smiling.

Vastra: Not outwardly. But I’m accustomed to seeing through a veil. How have I amused you?

Clara: You said renewed and he doesn’t look renewed; he looks – old.

Vastra: You thought he was young?

Clara: He looked young!

Vastra: He looked like your dashing young gentleman friend. Your lover even.

Clara: [laughing nervously] Shut up!

Vastra: But he is the Doctor. He has walked this universe for centuries untold. He’s seen stars fall to dust. You might as well flirt with a mountain range.

Clara: I did not flirt with him!

Vastra: He flirted with you.

Clara: How?

Vastra: He looked young! Who did you think that was for?
Clara: Me?
Vastra: Everyone. I wear this veil as he wore a face – for the same reason.
Clara: What reason?
Vastra: The oldest reason there is for anything. To be accepted….I wear a veil to keep from view what many are pleased to call my disfigurement. I do not wear it as a courtesy to such people, but as a judgment on the quality of their hearts.
Clara: Are you judging me?
Vastra: The Doctor regenerated in your presence. The young man disappeared; the veil lifted. He trusted you. Are you judging him? (Moffat & Holmes, 2014)

Clara angrily denies her ageist reaction, but it is clear that Vastra has touched a nerve and has done so for a reason. While not prejudiced in her reasoned beliefs, Clara’s emotional reaction to an older-appearing version of the Doctor reflects the deeply engrained glorification of youth and denigration of age prevalent in Western cultures.

“NOT SURE IF IT’S MARXISM IN ACTION OR A WEST-END MUSICAL”
~ THE DOCTOR, “THE DOCTOR DANCES” (MOFFAT & HAWES, 2006)

To understand the power of the Doctor Who curriculum, it is important to understand the intense connections fans have to the Doctor. Fans participate in face-to-face fan groups, social media groups, Who-based craft circles, and Doctor Who conventions. They create fan fiction (fan fic), fan videos (vidders), and fandom-based blogs. They have created their own language, Whospeak, for discussion about the show (e.g., squee, shippers, anorak, fanwank, retcon and the Not-We). Jenkins (2006) defined this kind of media convergence as “transmedia storytelling.” Transmedia storytelling offers a “richer entertainment experience” because fans act as “hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels” (pp. 20–21). This includes not only the Doctor Who spin-offs, Torchwood and The Sarah Jane Adventures, where Doctor Who characters and even the Doctor himself make appearances, but also web-based free-to-play games like Doctor Who Adventure Games and Doctor Who: Worlds in Time. These games “introduce new facts to the expanding mythos of the fictional universe” (Perryman, 2014, p. 238) as well as educational nonfiction content about history and science. They even come with Teacher Resource Packs for use in schools (Evans, 2013). The BBC produced metatextual websites and blogs intended to “extend audience engagement and encourage a two-way interaction” (Perryman, 2008, p. 25). There were TARDISodes produced for download on mobile phones and computers (Perryman, 2008). Transmedia storytelling also includes
experiences in the UK such as Doctor Who Live (a touring stage show), Doctor Who Proms (the music performed live), and The Doctor Who Experience (an exhibition of props, costumes, and other related items). Of course, there are books, comics, and magazines. Transmedia storytelling creates a world for fans that can be accessed across platforms. Such a world, replete with critical messages in “moments” like those described above, offers imaginative educational potential for those willing to ponder it. The nature of transmedia storytelling combines the joy of discovery with possibilities for awakening critical consciousness in adults through discussions.

For adult educators, guided discussions of such moments can be powerful both to fans and to non-fans and casual watchers. It may also help create new fans who will bring their critical analytical skills to the emotionally vested members of the Whoniverse. As Orthia (2013) points out, “Doctor Who is not just one of the many cultural entities worthy of scholarly attention; there is something in particular about Doctor Who that matters to its fan commentators” (p. 295). Its fandom is an interactive, international and expanding community. Providing those fans with the tools for critical analysis, discussion, and reflection is a pedagogical imperative.

According to Adorno (1991),

The majority of television shows today aim at producing, or at least reproducing, the very smugness, intellectual passivity and gullibility that seem to fit in with totalitarian creeds even if the explicit surface message of the shows may be anti-totalitarian. (pp. 165–166)

Combatting cultural indoctrination is difficult and requires that viewers utilize tools provided by critical theory. But critical theory can be difficult, dull, and uninspiring to students. We live in a media saturated society where students’ expectations have been constructed by the immediacy of cell phones and iPads. Classrooms have become places to be endured. Adult educators need ways to adapt to the reality of those expectations and to infiltrate the evolving transmedia communities where meaning is being debated and constructed. What people learn through their involvement with televisual and transmedia texts “can bring about learning that is far more powerful, lasting and lifelong than learning in formal educational settings” (Wright & Sandlin, 2009, p. 135). Brookfield’s (2005) urgent call to teach adults the precepts of critical theory and ideological detoxification can be daunting. But there are creative, critical television writers whose work can draw the necessary pictures for us.

Marcuse (1978) advocates for withdrawing from popular culture’s influence in order to see the oppression it convinces us to tolerate. In today’s media-saturated world, such distance is impossible. But, as Barron (2010) observes, “the Doctor acts as a force for change … defeating political and cultural enemies, principally those of sexism, class prejudice, racism, and homophobia, which he can observe because of his alien identity” (p. 148). Through the Doctor’s eyes, we see ourselves as he sees us; that may be as close to Marcuse’s isolation as is possible.

We are not claiming that the Doctor can single-handedly awaken the human race to the devastating effects of unregulated free markets, social injustices,
naturalized bigotry, and undemocratic principles wrought by centuries of popular culture controlled by the owners of capital and ingrained in our collective cultural consciousness. Not single-handedly. But using *Doctor Who* moments in classrooms can help adult educators approach issues of citizenship and social action with joy rather than dread. Moffat recognizes the power of an intense, meaningful scene:

I love a good plot, a good twist, a good gimmick, but character and emotions are more important. And most important of all? Moments! Give them moments! People will forget over time – over a week – the story, the characters, and who ended up with who ... but moments cut through and live forever. *Doctor Who* specializes in moments. (Moffat as cited in Hills, 2008, p. 27)

Traditional textual analysis focuses on popular culture texts as a whole, but as McKee (2003) argues, people do not live their lives that way. They catch bits of songs, they remember snippets of dialogue; they remember particular scenes in movies. It is “moments” that people retain and reflect upon in their meaning-making processes. There are many *Doctor Who* moments worthy of analysis. Sharing those with students can be both clarifying and memorable. That is if we, *Doctor Who* fans and critical educators, call on the Doctor for help.

NOTES

1 For a more in-depth review of some recent *Doctor Who* scholarly anthologies, see Boald, M. (2014). *Bigger on the inside, or maybe on the outside.* *Science Fiction Film and Television, 7*(2), 265–286.

2 Rupert Murdoch is an Australian-American businessman worth over $13 billion who has grown, and continues to grow, an international media empire that includes News Corp, News of the World (UK), Fox News (US), and the *Wall Street Journal*. He has been a long-time supporter of conservative politics which are prominent in his media holdings.

3 We realize that the contexts we outline to describe useful moments in the episodes are necessarily superficial. Every episode is replete with history, allusions, intertwining subplots, intertextual references, story arcs, and intricate twists. Because of space constraints, we offer only enough detail for readers unfamiliar with the show to understand the scenes discussed.

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