

VIDEO AND ACTIVE LEARNING: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF FILMS IN TRAINING FUTURE DANCE TEACHERS

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Abstract

The formal education of future dance teachers seeks to focus on practical techniques and methods that combine body control, performativity, and pedagogy dimensions (Huddy, & Stevens, 2011). Even in the more theoretical subjects, these students continue to seek the practical application of the disciplinary study material in their learning, once imagery use is an important part of the comprehension and assimilation of movements. The study reflects on the incorporation of different strategies for raising awareness of professional teaching identity in dance pedagogy, particularly the analysis and sharing of different points of view about teaching roles, teacher-student relations, and classroom management, which can also be fruitfully taken into account in broader educational contexts. For that purpose, this case study uses a qualitative, interpretive approach, and seeks to reflect on the use of cinematographic works as an active learning strategy, with a view to greater student involvement in theoretical learning purposes. From the context of a curricular unit of Psychopedagogy with different strategies, which includes, in addition to the traditional reading of documents, the insertion of educational videos and practical group activities and exercises, in which each student participates in a committed way, the use of fictional films was proposed as a powerful tool to engage students, and to promote their participation in dance-films debate. The films analyzed can function as a form of speculative educational fiction, and as an analysis of the symbolic and fictional role of films in the formation of pedagogical identities, that is, of becoming a teacher. The approach with active learning methods involving films positively achieves the objectives and results aimed at successful learning, and peer feedback reinforces students' self-regulation and self-knowledge regarding their levels of competence and capability perception. The discussion in the classroom, and the statements left by the students who participated as subjects in this case study, prove what the literature has stated, that active learning combined with recognizing the significance of the symbolic representation, improves the quality of learning (De Graaff, & Mierson, 2005).

Keywords: *Active learning, higher education, teacher identity, fictional films, dance teachers.*

1. Introduction

Student-centered learning necessitates the meaningful and contextualized use of diverse learning resources, including printed, digital, multimedia, and other forms of information. In the context of higher polytechnic education, there is a more pronounced focus on experiential practices that aim to prepare students for professional careers. Therefore, among the objectives of developing competencies in these students is also ensuring that such learning functions effectively not only within the classroom context but throughout their lives, through both technical and practical dimensions. In the specific context of dance education, this requires body control, performance, and pedagogy (Huddy & Stevens, 2011). This study examines the implementation of an active teaching method in the course Psychopedagogy I, part of the curriculum for the Master's in Dance Teaching offered by the Escola Superior de Dança (ESD) at the Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa. As stated in its statutes, ESD serves as a center for artistic, technical, scientific, cultural, and professional higher education, dedicated to preparing individuals for highly skilled professional activities in the field of dance, while also promoting the development of artistic activities and professions associated with dance. Consequently, the institution is committed to higher education in dance, adapting to educational, artistic, and professional changes, fostering the technical and aesthetic growth of dance in Portugal, encouraging academic reflection, and maintaining connections with both the national and international artistic community. Students at ESD undergo intensive training in dance techniques, choreographic creation, performance, and teaching methods, within a collaborative and well-equipped environment. The curriculum, integrated into professional artistic education, aims to prepare future dance

educators for qualified entry into the job market, with both academic and professional recognition. The goal is for these professionals to engage critically and innovatively in the art of dance, through rigorous technical training, the exploration of personal expression in choreographic creation, involvement in the performing arts as performers or in production roles, and by learning and experimenting with teaching methods suitable for different age groups, techniques, and objectives in each context. The understanding of their future teaching role is an integral part of the educational objectives. Thus, knowledge in education and teaching, along with pedagogical skills, is promoted to ensure the rational structuring of educational resources to be employed in the application of artistic teaching processes. This forms a critical foundation for the development of the curriculum in this field, contributing to the formation of educators capable of integrating knowledge into dance education. The aim of this study is to describe and explain an activity focused on the reflection of teaching professionalism: how one becomes a teacher through training, experience, and social recognition, ultimately constructing a teaching identity.

1.1. Active methods

Recent research highlights the pivotal role of educators in fostering pedagogical innovation through intentional and strategic planning, emphasizing a student-centered approach (Paniagua & Istance, 2018). Teachers are positioned as creative professionals, with their practices reflecting a pedagogical model that promotes active engagement and participation. A meta-analysis by Hattie (2015) identifies 105 factors influencing academic success, including self-efficacy, organizational skills, peer evaluation, and clarity. Teacher behaviors such as lesson preparation, fostering discussions, and promoting independent thinking are equally critical. Schneider and Preckel (2017) further emphasize that academic performance is enhanced by meaningful learning achieved through clear, relevant, and cognitively challenging instruction. Effective teaching practices involve meticulous course design, clear objectives, and robust feedback mechanisms. High-performing students exhibit self-efficacy, conscientiousness, and strategic learning application. These findings align with active learning methodologies, which prioritize student engagement in dialogical and collaborative activities that apply knowledge in novel, real-world contexts (Danver, 2016; Christersson & Staaf, 2019). Active learning fosters autonomy, experiential learning, and self-efficacy, benefiting diverse educational settings. Numerous studies advocate its integration across disciplines and levels of education (Beichner, 2014; Freeman et al., 2014; Langley & Guzey, 2014). Freeman et al. (2014) confirm that active learning improves exam performance, elevates grades, and reduces failure rates—traditional classes demonstrate a 55% higher failure rate compared to those employing active strategies. These approaches support collaborative knowledge creation and goal-oriented learning, underscoring the transformative impact of active learning on educational outcomes.

1.2. Teacher films and pedagogy

Films have been used as a pedagogical strategy for teaching various subjects, notably having a positive effect on language learning outcomes (Ismail, 2017; Jalmav, 2022); in raising awareness about pre-existing beliefs or models about teachers (McCullick, et al., 2003; Dalton, 2010; Barbero Gonzalez, 2017); or even to explore social perceptions, positive or negative, about the teaching profession, allowing the relationships between teacher-student or between teachers and the education system to be addressed (Van Beveren, et al., 2018). These uses of films as triggers for discussion and reflection in teacher training are very fruitful, as they provide the opportunity, through a universal language, to discuss complex, sensitive and (inter)personal aspects of teaching among students who are also future students. teachers, exploring the relationship and recognizing the identification between the characters and the spectator's lives (Moraes, 1998). A previous study revealed that a combination of films about teachers, an interpretative framework and structured reflection potentiates change in future teachers' beliefs about teaching, allowing them to mitigate unrealistic expectations regarding their performance after training (Delamarter, 2015). In this sense, and as Calles (2018, p. 245) points out, “examining cinematographic works that deal with the different identities assumed by the figure of the teacher in school situations of formal education, allows us to determine how these subjects experience the experience of life and acting teaching professional”. In synthesis, films about teachers allow us to establish meanings and standards of action, verifying the complexity of the processes and social mechanisms in which these professionals are inserted.

2. Methods

This study explores future dance teachers' perceptions of the teacher's social role and the importance of reflection and professional development, adopting a qualitative, interpretative approach. Cinematic works were used as an active learning strategy to enhance engagement with theoretical objectives, offering meaningful educational experiences. Conducted within the Psychopedagogy I course, the study integrated traditional academic practices with multimodal methods, such as educational videos,

group activities, and practical exercises, fostering active student participation and reflection. A key strategy involved analyzing fictional films featuring teacher protagonists, stimulating debates on teaching identities and relational school processes. Students independently analyzed films, connected them to their learning, and presented their reflections in classroom discussions guided by critical questions. Reflective reports captured their perceptions of symbolic representations and their influence on understanding the teaching role. Data were collected through observations, discussions, and reflective reports, analyzed using content analysis to identify categories like (1) the symbolic portrayal of teachers in films, (2) teaching identity formation, and (3) the impact of active methodologies on self-regulated learning. Triangulation of methods ensured validity, highlighting the potential of films as speculative educational tools.

3. Results

The results derived from the qualitative analysis of the activities conducted by the students participating in the study are presented. The methodology involved prior reading of the chapter “The Teaching Profession in Cinema: Teaching Identities in the Teacher Movies Genre (Films about Teachers)” by Calles (2018), followed by the selection and analysis of a film relevant to the topic. As outlined, students had previously viewed the films they selected and engaged in discussions where they addressed the following guiding questions:

- How is teaching identity constructed in the film?
- How does the teacher present themselves in their relationship with students and the school community?
- What additional issues are raised in the chosen film in particular?

Students were instructed to identify the film, director, and year of production, and, where possible, provide a link to the trailer. After preparing their responses, each participant reviewed the contributions of their peers, facilitating collective and in-depth feedback in the subsequent session. This approach aimed to foster critical and collaborative reflection on the symbolic and pedagogical representations presented in the films, as well as their connection to teaching practices. A table summarizing all these results is presented.

Table 1. Synthesis of student reflections on the construction of teaching identity in films.

Film Title	Student's reflexion about Teacher's Identity
Monsieur Lazhar (2011)	The film constructs the figure of the teacher as someone with life experience but without formal qualifications, who uses empathy and personal experience to emotionally support the students. The teacher's identity is defined by their adaptability and their role in helping to resolve emotional traumas, such as the mourning of the previous teacher.
The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (2019)	The figure of the teacher is built around resilience, dedication, and encouragement of innovation. The teacher believes in the potential of their students and invests in the development of critical thinking, even in the face of material challenges.
Leo (2023)	Leo, a lizard, assumes an informal educational role, influencing students through stories and advice. His educator identity is constructed through the ability to teach via playful experiences and teachings.
The Substitute (2011)	Henry Barthes is a substitute teacher who initially keeps an emotional distance but soon becomes deeply involved in the students' lives. His teacher identity is constructed through empathy and the desire to help students overcome personal traumas and difficulties.
The Substitute (2022)	Lúcio's teacher identity is characterized by empathy and understanding. Despite facing his own personal issues, he takes responsibility for making a difference in his students' lives, particularly in a context of violence and poverty.
Freedom Writers (2007)	Erin Gruwell redefines her teacher identity by adapting to the emotional and social needs of her students, rather than following traditional methods. She strives to understand the students' life stories and uses this to build a learning environment based on respect and trust.
Billy Elliot (2000)	Mrs. Wilkinson, the ballet teacher, builds her identity as an inspiring educator who sees Billy's potential and encourages him to pursue his dreams. She acts as a mentor, helping him explore his abilities and fight for his future.
Good Will Hunting (1997)	Professor Gerald Lambeau builds his identity by recognizing the potential in Will, a rebellious and self-taught young man. He looks beyond Will's challenging actions and understands that his role is not only to teach but also to emotionally support the student, helping him overcome his traumas and reach his potential.
The Miracle Worker (1962)	Anne Sullivan constructs her identity through a deep commitment to teaching Helen Keller, who is deaf and blind. The film highlights her persistence, patience, and pedagogical competence, especially in a context of extreme difficulty. Sullivan is not just a teacher but an emotional and supportive figure crucial for Helen's development.
Dead Poets Society (1989)	Professor John Keating represents a break from traditional teaching. His innovative and charismatic approach challenges the rigid system of an elitist school, encouraging students to

	think critically and express themselves freely. He teaches not just literature, but about the importance of living fully with the philosophy "Carpe Diem."
Les Choristes (2004)	Professor Mathieu views education as a tool for personal and emotional transformation. Through music, he provides a means of expression for troubled students, creating an emotional bond with them and awakening their creative potential.
Whiplash (2014)	Professor Terence Fletcher is an unrelenting and demanding instructor who seeks to extract the utmost from his students, often employing questionable methods. His teacher identity is shaped by an incessant pursuit of perfection and creating constant pressure on students.
Battle of the Year (2013)	Coach Jason Blake assumes a leadership and mentoring role, seeking to teach not only dance techniques but also to unite and motivate his team of dancers. He demonstrates commitment to each team member's personal development.
The Wave (2008)	Professor Rainer Wenger begins with a conventional teacher identity, but his transformation into an authoritarian leader throughout the experience with his students reveals how the manipulation of power and group pressure can distort the educator's role.
To Sir, with Love (1967)	Professor Mark Thackeray, initially unprepared and disheartened, finds his teaching identity by applying respectful and firm methods with his troubled students. His approach centers on mutual respect and creating a healthy school environment focused on emotional and social development.
Coach Carter (2005)	Coach Ken Carter adopts an authoritative position, but simultaneously acts as a mentor and guide for his players, teaching them valuable life lessons beyond basketball. His educator identity is marked by values of responsibility, discipline, and commitment to the students' futures.

4. Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that the incorporation of films as an active learning strategy significantly contributes to the achievement of the pedagogical objectives set forth. Classroom discussions and student testimonies substantiate the conclusions of De Graaff & Mierson (2005), who assert that active methodologies, when coupled with the recognition of symbolic representations, foster deeper and more qualitative learning experiences. Furthermore, peer feedback emerges as a pivotal tool for enhancing students' self-regulation and self-awareness, enabling them to better assess their skills and capabilities. The films analyzed provide distinct portrayals of the educator's role as a leader and agent of transformation. Teaching identity is explored from various angles, with each teacher, in their own manner, striving to profoundly and meaningfully impact their students. Moreover, several of the films selected by students illustrate the positive influence of educators who dedicate themselves to the holistic development of their students, addressing not only academic growth but also emotional and social aspects. These educators assist students in overcoming personal obstacles and envisioning a more promising future, underscoring the critical role of education in both social and individual transformation. Thus, the majority of the examples presented here highlight that teaching identity transcends the mere transmission of curricular content, encompassing issues of leadership, responsibility, resistance, and transformation, aligning this finding with previous research (Calles, 2018). In all the works analyzed, teachers are depicted not only as conveyors of knowledge but as agents of emotional and social change. They assume indispensable roles in helping students surmount personal challenges, explore novel ways of thinking, and cultivate a deeper understanding of their responsibilities and interpersonal relationships.

5. Conclusions

The films analyzed demonstrate that teaching identity is constructed in a multifaceted way, through persistence, empathy and innovation, and that the relationship with students, built on trust and respect, is crucial for the positive impact of education. The films illustrate that teacher-student relationships are shaped by trust, empathy and adaptation to students' needs, highlighting the importance of educational strategies that promote intellectual and emotional development. Educators face difficulties such as a lack of resources or formal qualifications but, as this example demonstrates, these can be overcome by their dedication and ability to inspire significant changes in students' lives, reflecting the effectiveness of the pedagogical approach that combines empathy, commitment and innovation. Studies like this, although specific, demonstrate how active methods are essential. Discussion based on teachers' movies, particularly, as a pedagogical strategy, proves to have merit in the future of dance teachers. This study contributes to a better understanding of the transformative role of education, offering a view on how active methodologies, by integrating fictional elements, can enrich pedagogical training and promote a broader reflection on educational practices.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by National Funds through FCT-Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P., under the scope of UIDEF - Unidade de Investigação e Desenvolvimento em Educação e Formação, UIDB/04107/2020, <https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020>.

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