

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.<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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 post-graduate 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 sub-field 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> For other discussions by adult educators about public pedagogy, see Clover & Bell (2013), Jarvis (2000, 2003), Jubas (2005, 2006, 2010), Mojab and Taber (2015), Sandlin (2007), Sandlin, Schultz, and Burdick (2010) or Sandlin, Milam, and Wickens (2007).



- <sup>2</sup> 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.

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*Kaela Jubas*  
*Adult Learning/Werklund School of Education*  
*University of Calgary*

*Nancy Taber*  
*Faculty of Education*  
*Brock University*

*Tony Brown*  
*Faculty of Education, Science, Technology & Maths*  
*University of Canberra*