

# The Challenge of Introducing the Cinema in the Teaching of the Biohealth Sciences

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It has been a decade since in collaboration with Rosa Medina we published our views about the potential of fiction films as a tool for the teaching of history of science in general, and of medicine in particular, in *Conecta*<sup>1</sup>. In that work, we focused on our several years of experience at the School of Medicine in Granada; an experience that benefited from the trend that since the end of the eighties vindicated the use of cinematic productions as a teaching resource within the sphere of the biohealth sciences<sup>2</sup> and for teaching about the actual history of science<sup>3,4</sup>.

The balance of this last decade has been especially important within the remit of the biohealth sciences, as can be seen in the doctrinal corpus generated, the variety of initiatives developed in different teaching scenarios, and the support from the *Journal of Medicine and Movies*, which since its inception has focused on the diffusion of teaching practices and the generation of materials for the training of physicians. This commitment to promote the use of films in medical training that pervades the *Journal of Medicine and Movies*, together with many of the reflective thoughts appearing on its pages, are of particular relevance at a time when the new University degrees are appearing in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and are facing up to the challenges that this represents from the point of view of teaching models. The fostering of self-learning and of a critical and reflexive attitude of students, con-substantial with the acquisition of competencies and skills of the new model, has a supreme ally in the use of the cinema. The seventh art as a teaching resource has by now definitely accredited its usefulness in the field of the biohealth sciences. Audiovisual language, with its unrivalled ability to represent, its ability to give meaning to things, and its creation of symbols is a powerful aid in exploring the cultural and social dimension of disease and the experience of being ill. Moreover, films help to make the knowledge learned more significant, in the sense of incorporating concepts that have been acquired through our

own experiences. The need to apply theoretical tools to the analysis of the events posed in films make us interlink and provide cohesion to what has been learned; to bring what has been learned closer to practical contexts, thereby encouraging the attribution of meanings by students. Just as coping with patients implies that medical knowledge is being updated constantly, to learn through the cinema acquires a stimulating élan, to which should be added the enjoyment involved in working with images.

The two contributions addressing the use of the cinema as a teaching tool included in the present issue of the *Journal of Medicine and Movies* provide an analysis of the penetration of this practice in English teaching methods and an example of the fruitful use of the cinema in the teaching of bioethics in Spain, respectively. The authors of *Cinema in Medical Education – Has it penetrated the mainstream?*<sup>5</sup> propose a preliminary enquiry, although one of great interest, as regards the implementation and use of this tool among British teachers of medicine at both graduate and post-graduate level, linked to the Royal Bolton Hospital in the area of Greater Manchester. By means of a qualitative questionnaire distributed among the different professionals involved in medical training, both in hospitals and outside them, the authors explore the use made of films in their teaching activities, the type of experiments carried out and the ends to which they have been applied; the advantages and drawbacks involved in the use of the cinema in such a scenario, and the responses of students in such teaching activities. The results suggest a usage of the cinema that is still somewhat reduced, especially among teachers working in hospitals, although the experiences of those who have used this tool and the feedback provided by students seem to be highly satisfactory.

The exploration of physician-patient relations and the bioethical issues raised are topics in which the use of the cinema has proved to be especially useful in the sense of sti-

mulating debate among students of the biohealth sciences. The second contribution, *Use of Popular Films in the Teaching of Bioethics in Studies of Biology*<sup>6</sup>, offers us an experience in the field that was developed over a three-year period at the Pompeu Fabra University. It should be remarked, as mentioned by the authors of that contribution, that films form part of the teaching resources implemented in a regular, although diverse, way in the biology studies offered at Pompeu Fabra. This is an initiative that has received recognition in the field of teaching quality. The activity described revolves around the analysis of three films - *The Doctor* (1991) by Randa Heines, *Miss Ever's Boys* (1997) by Joseph Sargent and *Extreme Measures* (1996) by Michael Apted. A considerable body of experience has been garnered concerning the potential of these films for the teaching of bioethics. The structure of the teaching activity, the experience of the teaching staff and the degree of acceptance by students, who are familiar with the use of films, have contributed to the success of the experience.

A reading of both contributions brings us to the paradox in which the resources of films in University teaching seems to have become entrenched: i.e. full satisfaction among biohealth sciences teachers and students involved in the varied use of such resources, contrasted by the fact that their use does not seem to have really convinced a fairly large sector of the teaching staff.

At a time when the available technological resources (internet, intranet, the easy digitalization of film materials, etc) have made the development of teaching activities using films more accessible and less costly, and one in which the advantages of their use to contribute to the new teaching model demanded the incorporation of Spanish Universities into the EHEA have been sufficiently accredited, it is even more urgent to identify the pitfalls that continue to prevent the proper implementation of such resources in our classrooms.

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