

## [Call for Chapters: Education in Contemporary French and Francophone Film](#)

Announcement published by Rhiannon Harries on Tuesday, November 22, 2022

Type:

Call for Papers

Date:

December 19, 2022

Location:

United Kingdom

Subject Fields:

French History / Studies, Film and Film History, Teaching and Learning, Childhood and Education

Further chapters are sought for a proposed volume on education in French and Francophone Film. We have an informal expression of interest, based on an initial proposal, from an academic press and are seeking a further 6-8 chapters (6,000 words).

### **Volume outline**

There is a rich tradition of French and Francophone films about education, often set in schools, spanning fiction and documentary, and a range of styles and genres. Though dramatizations of teaching and learning proliferate across cultures and historical periods, in a Francophone context these issues are framed by the distinctive heritage of 'l'école républicaine' and a republican pedagogical imaginary organised around guiding principles that might be summarised as autonomy, equality, rationality and universalism. The last two decades have seen heightened attention to the school on screen, including international successes (and now curricular fixtures in Anglosphere French studies) such as Nicholas Philibert's documentary *Être et avoir* (2002) and Laurent Cantet's *Palme d'Or* winning *Entre les murs* (2008), both of which reignited public debates concerning competing visions of education and its reform.

The public discussions sparked by these films attest not only to the intense political investment in education's role in republican life, but also to the capacity of cinema and cultural productions to reflect and reshape such investments. Leon Sachs (2014, 2020) offers a comprehensive analysis of education's republican inheritance, and the conflicts to which it gives rise, that provides crucial context for understanding cinematic representations of education in French and Francophone contexts. Sachs emphasises tensions between *éducation* and *instruction* in the republican conception of the school, as well as the enduring idea of the school as a *sanctuary*, protected from outside forces (family, religion, and the contingencies of wider society). The idea of the school as a neutral place of sanctuary has been challenged in France since the 1960s as France has gone through significant intellectual, social, economic and demographic change. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's *La Reproduction* (1970) constituted a significant intervention, analysing the symbolic violence enacted by the school system in maintaining structures of social domination. Sachs also outlines a debate that emerged in the 1980s in response to questions of diversity and a perceived crisis in the

French school system. Poor performance and a decline in the authority of teachers in the classroom was blamed by 'républicains' on what they saw as the failure of the supposedly progressive, student-centred approach of the 'pédagogues'. This notion of crisis remains prominent in scholarship on film's engagements with education in recent decades. Alison J. Murray Levine, for example, connects a particularly intense post-2000 period of production of documentaries about education in France with a widely perceived failure of republican integration and the school's assimilationist role therein (2018). Meanwhile, in *L'École en crise au cinéma* (2013), Daniel Serceau, drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt, sees a crisis of authority reflected, somewhat bleakly, in the work of filmmakers such as Cantet.

Building on this scholarship, our proposed volume aims to elucidate the ways in which film and visual culture explore the short-comings, contradictions and dilemmas of republican pedagogical philosophies and methods, but nevertheless offer glimpses of emancipatory potential, in ways that often confound contemporary political and educational orthodoxies. In this regard, an important text for us in conceiving this volume has been Jacques Rancière's *Le Maître ignorant* (1987), which provides a provocative philosophical framing of the debates about education described above. Rancière rejects both 'républicain' and 'pédagogue' models of education, arguing that both are premised on a logic of inequality that the school promises to remedy, but in fact simultaneously reinscribes. Instead, Rancière offers the figure of the 'ignorant schoolmaster', who teaches without transmitting any knowledge, by forcing the student to exercise a capacity to learn that they already possess, involving an intriguing dynamic of authority, on the one hand, and intellectual equality, on the other.

While we anticipate that the collection will primarily explore films *about* schools, universities and other scenes of education, it will also broaden its scope to consider film (and potentially other visual media) *as* forms of education, taking in larger questions of aesthetics and politics in both theoretical and practice-based contexts. The collection aims to cover films spanning a range of genres from around the *Francosphère*, taking in both 'canonical' texts such as *Entre les murs* and less well-known films. Although questions of politics and identity entailed by the republican pedagogical model are the main focus of the volume, we are also interested in how French and Francophone filmmakers explore other aspects of education that exceed this framework, such as the psychic dynamics of teaching and learning. We are keen to include variety of theoretical approaches drawn from film theory, from philosophy, critical theory and theories of education.

Areas of enquiry, within post-2000 French and Francophone film (other visual media will be considered), might include but are by no means limited to:

- Institutional scenes of education; schools; universities

- Scenes of informal education; auto-didacticism; life-long learning; peer-to-peer learning; mentors; coaches
- Teachers; good teachers; bad teachers; 'le mythe du bon enseignant'; teacher as hero/outsider/parent; teaching as performance
- Space; classrooms; playgrounds; public and private spaces of teaching and learning; school environments and home environments
- Education and logics of colonialism; humanitarianism; neoliberalism
- Education across modes and genres; popular comedy; art film; documentary
- Education and the French language; tropes of reading/writing/speaking/performing
- Embodiment and education; intimacy; affect; vulnerability; erotics
- 'Non-dits' (Serceau) of education; failure; aggression; contempt; wasted effort; boredom; stultification
- Film *as* education; film form/style as pedagogical approach; film in the French education system and in French studies curricula beyond France
- Film in dialogue with thinkers of education (e.g. Arendt, Bourdieu, Freire, hooks, Rancière)

Some key questions we hope to address with the volume:

- What recurrent themes and concerns are expressed in recent Francophone films about education?
- How do films use the resources of cinema to capture a 'reality' of teaching and learning that is simultaneously enigmatic and quotidian?
- In what ways do films both reflect and participate in the distinctive and multifaceted French public debate on education?
- In what ways do films reflect and participate in philosophical reflection on teaching and learning?
- How do films from the *Francosphère* incorporate, modify, and potentially transform the generic themes of films about schools and teachers often associated with Hollywood cinema?

### Proposed Timeline

Please send chapter proposals (400 word abstract & your bio) by **Monday 19th December 2022**.

We will respond to all proposals by early January 2023.

We hope to make the process as collaborative and supportive as possible and plan to have a workshop (online and/or in person in Nottingham as suits) to share ideas and early drafts in the Easter vacation 2023, with first drafts due in summer 2023 and final drafts at the end of 2023.

For informal enquiries and submission of proposals, please email:

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Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *La Reproduction: éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement*(Paris: Minuit, 1970)

Jacques Rancière, *Le Maître ignorant* (1987)

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