

“School Hard” and Traditional Education in the *Buffyverse*

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Buffy the Vampire Slayer was once heralded as a beacon of feminist power on television in a sea of one-dimensional wives, girlfriends, and supporting characters. Joss Whedon, its creator, has been hailed as a feminist icon and a lifesaver of kids and adults struggling with being different (Cochran). “Geeks love Joss Whedon” according to a 2012 *Wired* article: “His characters are smart and self-aware. He’s steeped in pop culture and has a clever way with twists and turns of science fiction tropes [...] plus, he writes female character who kick ass, which makes him so rare as to be sui generis in Hollywood” (Rogers). This has led viewers of his shows to engage in discourse on the images of the empowerment of women and other subordinated individuals, from the first scene in *Buffy* (1997-2003), where a blonde dressed as a Catholic schoolgirl, seemingly afraid of being caught after hours at her school, turns around and kills the boyfriend who has been trying to scare her (“Welcome to the Hellmouth” 1.1), to the last, where all potential Slayers at the time, all female everywhere are empowered (“Chosen” 7.22).

Though many were reluctant to admit it at the time, this feminist view seemed to lessen with his later shows and movies.

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From Cordelia Chase on *Angel*, who becomes pregnant from Connor, a person she considered her son (“Apocalypse, Nowish” 4.7), to the dolls on *Dollhouse*, programmed to be everything to anyone, work that had once been dissected and analyzed as genius became an example of how wrong we were. More recently, given the emotional abuse described by his ex-wife, the experiences of racism shared by Ray Fisher, and pregnancy shaming and abuse by Charisma Carpenter, more of us have come to question whether what we saw as deliberate commentaries were intended as such, whether they represented images and stereotypes that Whedon embraced, and whether we were too quick to overlook certain elements because of our faithful fandoms. But the art and stories remain, and we can, therefore, still learn lessons from what we see in them. In fact, understanding and sharing those lessons is our responsibility.

In contrast to the views on gender, commentaries on education in Whedon shows have not been dissected in the same ways. Though *Buffy* takes place in and around educational institutions, the other shows do not. Yet underlying long story arcs and monster-of-the-week narratives was a portrayal of our educational system and repeated themes of learning, teaching, and training. When mixed with race, “the sub-text here [...] rapidly [becomes] text,” (Giles, “Ted” 2.11, 6:05-09) and the struggle to gain an education for characters of color becomes intertwined with violence and loss. It is through these characters that Whedon presents progressive education as an ideal only available to the privileged, and when characters of color, primarily people of African descent, attempt to gain the knowledge of their progressively taught peers, they are violently punished. These ideas can skew the notion of who deserves education and how they deserve to receive it.

Progressive Education

“Enter all ye who seek knowledge” Jenny Calendar (“Passion” 2.17, 25:02-04)

“Education is a lifelong process” (Ballantine, Hammack and Stuber 4). It begins through the socialization that happens when a child’s parent teaches them the typical behaviors of their household and continues into late in life when they learn what it means to be an elder in their world. Education also occurs within educational institutions where access was often challenged by political and governmental bodies who have used characteristics such as class, religion, and race to determine who is deserving of education within schools (Tyner-Mullings). Once schools were available to a diversity of people, questions of access expanded to questions of equity and what kind of education was best for which students. The debates around vocational vs. academic education and segregated vs. integrated schools, especially in regard to students of color, continue even today (Tyner-Mullings). These questions of access, equity, and structure are studied within the sociology of education as reflecting the societies they are situated within and affecting the trajectories of the adults who attend them. Educational models have continued to be divided by race, class, and gender while also being situated within public, private, and charter schools.

Progressive education is a pedagogical model that can be found in each of these types of schools in different iterations. Although a larger progressive movement is thought to have begun in the early 1900s, John Dewey is often most closely associated with progressive education. For Dewey, progressive education “required a course of study which would reflect [a student’s] particular stage of development [...] [included] both

freedom and responsibility [...] [and] should reflect the community in order to help graduates to assume societal roles and to maintain the democratic way of life” (Semel, Sadovnick, and Coughlan 7). He saw progressive education as using students’ strengths and lives to build a curriculum collaboratively, rather than imposing mandates in a top-down fashion.

As the face of the *Buffy*verse, Buffy is a white, middle-class example of progressive education and demonstrates what Zoe-Jane Playdon describes as a “negotiated learning relationship” with Giles, Buffy’s Watcher and mentor (Playdon 125).¹ Buffy Summers, as Playdon describes, is educated through a progressive education model where a student is encouraged to question the lesson and involve herself in the formation of her own education. Paulo Freire, in the groundbreaking *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, sees this as a liberatory education model where teachers and students are both educators and learners. Those who have the opportunity to learn in this manner are allowed to experiment, interrogate, and to learn through experience. They are allowed to “mess up sometimes. Get down and dirty. How the hell else are they gonna learn?” (Faith, “Empty Places” 7.19, 26:01-04).

Freire notes that progressive education must begin by changing the relationship between teacher and student so that “both are simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire 72). In direct contrast to the way many of the other Slayers, for example, are trained, Freire also notes that “education as the practice of freedom [...] denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world” (Freire 81). Playdon builds on this and explains that “education takes place through conversation rather than courses [...] the point is to create a common world to which all bring their distinctive

contributions” (Playdon 125). This kind of education provides the space for students to engage in the world and make changes to it as agents.

Traditional Education

“Now I understand your energies were directed to the same place as ours, in fact. It’s only our methods that differ.”
Professor Maggie Walsh (“A New Man” 4.12, 6:08-13)

In contrast to more progressive pedagogical methods, Paulo Freire describes the banking method of education, which includes the insertion of knowledge into someone, rather than engaging with them and valuing who they are and what they know in the development of their education. “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits” (Freire 72). What is visible to many but frequently ignored by those who practice the banking method is the idea that in order to deposit your knowledge, you must often also remove something, whether it be language, culture, or understanding and pride in one’s own heritage. This is most starkly demonstrated in the examples of indigenous boarding schools, described below, but is also found in many traditional educational models that teach students that their language and history is less by subordinating it in the curriculum. This violent banking is also present in these shows in an overly literate, and often violating, way.

The difference in educational models is described in a conversation between Giles and Professor Maggie Walsh, the psychology professor who is also the head scientist for the Initiative, a paramilitary group that Buffy spends some time working with in Season Four.

Walsh: She's bright. All she has really been lacking is encouragement in the academic setting.

Giles: Now, um, I think it's best if we let a young person find their own strength. If you lead a child by the hand, then they'll never find their own footing.

Walsh: And if it's true about hiking, ergo it must be true about life.

Giles: Well, that's not...I'm just saying Buffy [...] well, she's not the typical student. Once you get to know her, she's a very unique girl. I hope you're not gonna push her to-

Walsh: I think I do know her. And I have found her to be a unique woman.

Giles: Woman, of course. How wrong of me to choose my own words.

Walsh: She is very self-reliant, very independent...

Giles: Exactly.

Walsh: Which is not always a good thing. I think it can be unhealthy to take on adult roles too early. What I suspect I'm seeing is a reaction to the absence of the male role model

Giles: Absence?

Walsh: Buffy clearly lacks a strong father figure. ("A New Man" 4.12, 9:51-10:53)

Walsh and Giles also show, in this dialogic, their own teaching methods. Prof. Walsh states that she doesn't lecture from a textbook ("A New Man" 4.12) but, from the scenes in her classes, we see that the class is entirely lecture-based with very little interaction from the students ("The Freshman" 4.1) and she regularly treats the students like the children we believe she thinks they are ("The Initiative" 4.7). Giles, in his negotiated learning interactions with Buffy, shows that he is willing to compromise and work against his better judgment if it means solving the problem. "I appreciate your thoughts on the matter," Giles tells Buffy, Willow and Xander; "In fact, I...well, I encourage you to always challenge me when you feel it's appropriate. You should never be cowed by authority... except, of course, in this instance, when I am clearly right and you are clearly wrong" ("I Only Have Eyes for You" 2.19, 17:16-26).

Professor Walsh makes the assumptions that are often made about students in poor or working-class families and taught in traditional educational settings. They need more structure, and their independence and self-reliance need to be curbed. Often these same politicians, educators, and administrators attribute this to the lack of a male role model, especially for men and boys of color, and the student's involvement in adult situations. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron describe this in their theory of social reproduction which reveals that schools teach students to behave in the classroom in ways that fit their expected role once they graduate (Bourdieu and Passeron). Their work, conducted in France in the 1960s and 1970s, concluded that schooling was designed in a way so that the knowledge taught to students whose families were in more elite social classes was valued more highly than those in the working class. Such schooling allows students from elite classes to be more successful in schools and

go on to occupations where they are in leadership positions above those classmates who come from poor or working-class families and who do not learn to question or explore. Although Paul Willis, researching in a small town in England, questions the direct structural link between external forces and the reproduction of the working class, he acknowledges that the members of those families in the poor and working class seem to be taught to be attentive and obedient to fit their promised positions in life while others are given the space to challenge and explore (Willis).

The Violent Nature of Traditional Education

“Cause the Black chick always gets it first?” Rona (“Potential” 7.12, 0:42-44)

Several authors have written on the problems with race in these shows (e.g. Ono, Kirkland, Fuchs, Lee) and while the number of characters of color in *Buffy* (1997-2003), especially, is problematic, their treatment in the shows amplifies any discussion of race. When examined through an educational lens, there is an even more distinct pattern that emerges and, though it is not only relevant to the characters of color, they also often feel the worst consequences from their quest for knowledge and/or a better life.

This intersection of education and race begins in the second season when we met another Slayer who was called when Buffy died “for like two minutes” (Cordelia, “Faith, Hope, and Trick” 3:3 16:26) in the first season. Kendra, we learn, was taken from her family as a child and trained to be a Slayer by her Watcher without any social bonds (“What’s My Line? Part Two” 2:10). Kendra’s background is not entirely clear, but she

speaks with an unidentified Caribbean accent and is played by African American actress Bianca Lawson.² She impresses Buffy and Giles with her knowledge of various books on Slayer lore and the Slayer handbook, of which the audience is unaware until she mentions it (“What’s My Line? Part Two” 2.10). But she has been taught to suppress all emotions, is docile and obedient with her superiors, and seems to lack the ability to make her own decisions (see also Helford). This mirrors the ways in which students of color are often silenced in school and work and where women of color, in particular, are told who they are and should be, and punished for current and past behavior, as well as behavior that is seen as unladylike or aggressive (Zimmermann, Morris and Perry, Winkle-Wagner).

Even with all the knowledge that has been deposited in her, Kendra must be further trained by Buffy, a peer. “Power alone isn’t enough,” Buffy tells her; “A good fighter needs to know how to improvise, you know, go with the flow” (“What’s My Line? Part Two” 2.10, 27:43-48). Kendra has never been taught to question authority or work with her environment. This traditional education forces her into structured activities and training while also taking something away from her. For Kendra, this loss was of her family.

Kendra: The things you do and have... I was taught to distract from my calling. Friends, school, even family.

Buffy: Even family?

Kendra: My parents, they sent me to my Watcher when I was very young.

Buffy: How young?

Kendra: I don't remember them, actually. I've seen pictures... but that's how seriously the call is taken

by my people. My mother and father gave me to my Watcher because they believed that they were doing the right thing for me. And for the world. Please, I don't feel sorry for myself, why should you?
("What's My Line? Part Two" 2:10, 26:20-59)

This is especially poignant for Black families, who, throughout American history, have experienced the sale or unjust death of family members and have struggled to build and sustain their family units (Stack, Gutman, Mullings). In contrast to the families from which enslaved Africans were taken in which "kinship was the most important organizing principle," slavery in the United States actively and systematically sold relatives away from each other and separated mothers from their children (Mullings 80-81). Because of this, many family units not only developed but relied on fictive kin—those not biologically related to each other (Stack). Kendra was isolated from her blood relatives as well as from the possibility of developing the fictive kin that Buffy had in her friends and Watcher.

When Kendra is killed at the end of the season, it could be to be a result of her inability to fight the domination that Drusilla, a powerful vampire, has over her ("Becoming, Part One" 2.21). Buffy resists these creatures at least partially because she learns from her mistakes and neither The Master in Season One nor Dracula in Season Five, both powerful vampires, can hypnotize her for too long or more than once. Kendra does not learn to adapt or think creatively, which is evident in her fight with Drusilla, as the vampire seems to block her almost every time. When Kendra thinks she has finally injured Drusilla and runs toward her, it turns out that Drusilla has broken the rules

of combat by only feigning hurt and is then able to choke and hypnotize her (“Becoming, Part One” 2.21, 40:41-41:40).

Another example of traditional education comes from The Initiative, the covert military operation that Maggie Walsh runs, which tries to capture, destroy, rehabilitate, or experiment on the demons that Buffy has been fighting for years. They enter the conflict in Season Four with a strong belief in their military tactics, which are closer to those of traditional classrooms than more progressive ones (“The Initiative” 4.7). In the Initiative, facts are what is important; the size, appearance, and even scents of a monster are what will lead them to be able to track and kill the creatures. There is no interest in facts beyond the obvious. “Questions,” Buffy says to Riley, a soldier in the Initiative and a significant other for Buffy, “An Initiative faux pas, yes?” (Buffy, “The I in Team” 4.13, 21:33-36).

This military-style educational model is highly associated with a low-income or rural lifestyle in addition to that of people of color. This is often the only route for many in poor and rural areas to get out of their towns and see more than the streets on which they grew up. For many, this is their opportunity to attend college, meet new people, and get jobs different than those their childhood friends occupy (Savell and McMahon). While we do not get background information on most of the members of the Initiative, we do learn that Riley, born and raised on a farm outside of Huxley, Iowa (“Pangs” 4.8), enters the military and trains through their ranks. Throughout Season Four we see how Riley has learned to obey orders, never ask questions, and maintain his position, no matter what. “I am how they trained me,” he tells Buffy; “In the military, you learn to follow orders and not ask questions. [...] I know all I need to know.” (“The I in Team” 4.13, 29:00-27). Examining the characters in this educational model, both Riley and Graham

Miller, another Initiative soldier, learn to adapt. In fact, they take the lessons they learned and end up working for another military operation that is more accepting of progressive pedagogy, asking questions, and working on the fly.

In contrast to them is Forrest Gates, the only African American member of the Initiative that we get to know. He ends up a victim of the banking model once he is fortified with parts from different demons and machines by Adam, another demon-human-machine hybrid. He tells Riley, “I’m surging with life and strength. Adam made me to be nearly as bad as he is.” Although Forrest refers to this as “the best thing that’s ever happened to me,” and that he is thrilled to be “free of all my weaknesses, my doubts,” (“Primeval” 4.21, 13:25-48), the knowledge and power that he gains here were at the cost of his humanity. His lack of questioning and critical thinking is part of what leads to his being captured and changed by Adam as he walks straight into Adam’s hands and fights him with an ineffective weapon over Buffy’s protestations (“The Yoko Factor” 4.20). While he is a better fighter and has more knowledge and power than Riley, his inability to question (“Why is Riley running?”) and adapt (“I should put down this canister of flammable liquid”) when the two fight later leads to his downfall (“Primeval” 4.21). Riley, on the other hand, is given the opportunity to grow through his interactions with Buffy and his mentorship from Walsh, while Forrest is forced to change, without choice or opportunity, and made to fit the role selected for him by the one “person” providing him with a better life, Adam. According to Buffy, Kendra is similarly “amazing! [her] technique, it’s flawless, it’s hmm, better than [Buffy’s]” but “still [Buffy] woulda kicked [Kendra’s] butt in the end” because Kendra has “no imagination” (“What’s My Line? Part Two” 2:10, 26:26-37).

During the same season where we meet the Initiative, the first Slayer is also introduced. Sineya (referred to as Primitive in the credits of the Season Four episode) is not given much time to tell her story in *Buffy*. We see her dressed in grey cloth, loosely situated around her body, with a full head of grey and black dreadlocks, and black and white war paint covering her face (“Restless” 4.22). She is played by Jamaican actress Sharon Ferguson.

Sineya’s voice comes through the Scooby gang as they cast a spell to harness her energy in the penultimate episode of Season Four (“Primeval” 4.21) but we do not see her until that season’s finale, where her story is told for her by Tara Maclay (“Restless” 4.22). In each situation, she is presented through the eyes or voice of one of the European or European American characters on the show. Sineya is one of the starkest versions of banking education and her education unfortunately mimics some of the stories about forced indigenous education that have finally been brought to light. In multiple countries, bodies have been found under schools where indigenous culture and life were forced out of First Nation students so that they might become assimilated into the cultures of the countries that stole their land. Recent stories have described First Nation children abducted from their homes and “abused physically, sexually, [and] spiritually” (Ling). While some made it home, having been stripped of everything important to them, other children were only identified by the unmarked graves found near the sites of these schools (Ling; Pember; Nieves).

In Season Seven, we learn that the first Slayer was also abused and turned into a Slayer by allowing demons to enter her body as she was tied to a post—a version of the banking education that is closer to rape than schooling (“Get It Done” 7.15). She experiences a literal process of knowledge and power

insertion, in the form of demons being forced into her through her ears and mouth. “This will make you ready for the fight” Buffy is told when they attempt to do the same to her. “By making me less human?” she responds (“Get It Done” 7.15, 32:51-55).

Sineya is given a very limited voice in the show, save a few sentences, most in one episode: “No friends. Just the kill. We are alone” (“Restless” 4.22, 39:22-30). The men who forced the demons into Sineya also note, “The first Slayer did not talk so much” (“Get It Done” 7.15, 31:41-44).

While in traditional education, “the teacher talks and the students listen meekly,” and traditional teachers would “never propose to students that they critically consider reality” (Freire 73), Buffy, more progressively educated, is in the position to decline knowledge that is not aligned with her needs, and so she does. “We cannot give you knowledge, only power,” the Shadow Men tell her (“Get It Done” 7.15, 29:40-45). “I’m already the Slayer, bursting with power, really don’t need anymore,” Buffy explains to them (“Get It Done” 7.15, 31:38-41). This is not the first time that she is able to resist a particular method of training. In the second season, Kendra tries to convince her to follow the more traditional methods that Kendra was taught and suppress her emotions by explaining that “emotions are weakness, Buffy. You shouldn’t entertain them.” Buffy argues against her and lets her know that her “emotions give [her] power. They are total assets” (“What’s My Line? Part Two” 2:10, 27:06-13).

“That’s all schools are, you know, just factories spitting out mindless little automatons.” Spike (“Bargaining, Part One” 6.1, 14:47-52)

Despite all the support, Buffy's formal education does not last very long as she enters college, drops out, and takes on more family obligations. Following her own death and resurrection, she tries out several different jobs including construction and fast food ("Life Serial" 6.5) and ends up in bad relationships with questionable people ("As You Were" 6.15). While this is a very stereotypical drop-out story (death and resurrection aside), Buffy is given a chance to educate "some thirty-odd pimply-faced girls [who] don't know the pointy end of a stake" (Caleb, "Chosen" 7:22, 12:29-31) in Season Seven of the show. She could teach them to be the Slayer that she was the one who questions, improvises and adapts, the one who does not die (or at least stay dead) like Kendra and Forrest, or end up permanently altered like Sineya and Forrest or to train the Potentials.

Rather than choosing one method, Buffy seems to move between the possibilities of both educational models. Her first word on the topic, after potential Slayer Annabelle runs from the Summers' home and is killed, embraces the educational model that led to Forrest's downfall—the military: "Anyone else who wants to run, do it now because we just became an army." (Buffy, "Bring on the Night" 7.10, 40:29-34). However, she then goes on to try to educate the potential Slayers using a progressive model by taking them out to practice their skills first to a demon crypt and then to a demon bar—and teaching them to know their enemy and learn to use their instinct and their knowledge to fight: "You have the potential. [...] You have strength, speed, instinct. [...] Instinct. Understand his but trust yours" (Buffy, "Potential" 7.12, 1:24-2:21).

Buffy continues to hedge her bets through much of the season as we also see the Potentials being trained with near-military efficiency with lectures and drills and no questions. We

even see Kennedy, one of the Potentials, acting as a drill instructor, calling another potential a maggot, and yelling at her to drop and give her 20 (“Get it Done” 7.15). After the loss of a second Potential, when Chloe, the “maggot,” commits suicide in the bathroom of the home where they are all staying, there seems to be a complete shift in Buffy as she moves from “[their] leader...as in follow the” (Xander, “Get it Done” 7.15, 18:35-37) to “[their] leader, as in do what I say” (Buffy, “Get it Done” 7.15, 18:37-39). As Buffy herself tells them “Look, I wish this could be a democracy, I really do, but democracies don’t win battles. It’s a hard truth but there has to be a single voice. You need someone to issue orders and be reckless sometimes and not take your feelings into account. You need someone to lead you. [...] Look, I’m willing to talk strategy. I’ll hear suggestions on how to break this down, but this is the plan.” (Buffy, “Empty Places” 7.19, 36:05-37:17). This is very much in opposition to her early stance as a Slayer when she tells Kendra, “I don’t take orders” (“What’s My Line? Part Two” 2.10, 9:56-57).

In addition to losing several students, Buffy’s shift may also stem from some disappointment in how her own education ended up. There are the smaller indications of her ultimate direction for the training of the Potentials, but one of the clearest signs is her exchange with Giles after finding out that he was distracting her while Principal Robin Wood, a new ally, took revenge on Spike, a Buffy ally and the vampire who killed Robin’s mother. When they find out he is not dead, Giles tells her, “What I told you is still true. You need to learn...” She responds with “No, I think you’ve taught me everything I need to know” (“Lies My Parents Told Me” 7.17, 41:11-23).

Among the Potentials is Rona, the only African American Slayer that we get to know and one of the main tertiary characters in the final season of the show. When the potential

Slayers have the first real test of their training, Xander loses an eye, having been neither officially trained nor educated, while Caleb breaks Rona's arm ("Dirty Girls" 7.18). Rona practices critical thinking, which is a characteristic common to progressive education, and is one of the characters most critical of Buffy throughout her training, asking multiple questions and challenging directives. While the other most critical Potential, Kennedy, receives a leadership position among the potentials, Rona continues to be punished for her excitement about the opportunity to apply her progressive education. In fact, when she expresses this in words, once Buffy is kicked out of her home, with "Ding dong, the witch is dead" ("Empty Places" 7.19 39:59-40:00), Dawn, just as several other of Rona's peers have, silences her with "shut your mouth" ("Empty Places" 7.19 40:01-02). Rona is both silenced and punished.

We also find out that Rona is the only one from within the first group of Potentials without a Watcher. Buffy had access to supporters and mentors throughout her time as a Slayer and a student. She not only had Giles and her Scooby gang, but she also had that one teacher who believed in her and supported her progressive methods, Dr. Gregory, who, despite his knowledge of Buffy's past troubles, tells her that he "can't wait to see what you're going to do here [...] but I suspect it's going to be great [...] You have a first-rate mind, and you can think on your feet. [...] I know you can excel in this class, and so I expect no less [...] and please don't listen to the principal or anyone else's negative opinion of you. Let's make them eat that permanent record" (Dr. Gregory, "Teacher's Pet" 1.4, 3:06-54). The work that the Slayer must do requires strong advocates and support. Mentors can be especially important for people of color as they are often in an arena unfamiliar to them or without any examples of success stories from those who look like them

or have similar experiences. A study of minority faculty mentors found that good mentors were the “champions” of the newer faculty and those that “genuinely invested their time and themselves in the success of the faculty member has a strong impact” (Zambrana et al. 57). This was absent in Rona’s experience.

Although Rona survives the final fight, like many of her potential colleagues, through the power of the scythe pushed into her turning them all from potential to actual Slayers, she seems more worse for wear than the other survivors and in fact, her last scene is another character slapping her and yelling, “this is nothing!” (“Chosen” 7.22 37:57-38:01). Vi, the slapper, had also believed her own arm was broken in an earlier fight but did not have her arm in a cast for the remainder of the series as Rona had and, in this final scene, Vi seems to be in a more powerful position than Rona was. In the end, Rona’s pain is denied and added to unnecessarily by those she fought alongside.

“Not the Only Freak” Kendra (“What’s My Line? Part Two” 2.10, 41:35-36)

Despite education being a much smaller part of the other shows, this pattern continues through the *Buffy*verse (as well as properties like *Firefly* and *Dollhouse* (2009-2010)). Charles Gunn, for example, was introduced near the end of the first season of *Angel* (1999-2004) and was, at the time, the only African American regular character on a Whedon show. He is discovered patrolling the streets to protect his neighborhood and the street kids who live in it. He worked hard to bring others in the neighborhood into his circle and provided food

for those who needed it, but he also fought vampires and took care of his younger sister (“War Zone,” 1.20).

Gunn becomes a member of Angel’s crew and during the last season of the show, he seems to be almost a different person. The audience watches him grow and change over the years and, in a surprise move, Gunn becomes a lawyer at the end when Angel’s crew takes over an evil law firm (“Conviction” 5.1). However, his legal training is another direct example of the banking method, in which knowledge is literally deposited into his brain. He is able to access case studies and legal precedents with uncanny speed and accuracy. He has “all the knowledge and deductive reasoning [...] implanted in [his] brain” (“Shells” 5.16, 21:00-04) and, like Forrest, he feels that knowledge was “everything that made [him] different...special” (Gunn, “Shells” 5.16, 23:21-24).

The knowledge, it turns out, is only temporary, and the loss of his newfound knowledge is dangled in front of him and used as a threat because “Nothing at Wolfram and Hart [the law firm] is ever free” (Gunn, “Shells” 5.16, 23:34-36). Gunn later tells Wesley that “I couldn’t go back to being just the muscle” (Gunn, “Shells” 5.16, 23:39-42). He wanted to keep what he had learned and was willing to do anything for education, and so he unwittingly contributed to the transportation of a god who eventually kills one of his friends, Winifred Burkle (Fred), in order to make “[his] cerebral alterations permanent” (“Shells” 5.16, 21:58-22:00). Fred, in her role as the female middle-class victim, also reinforces the idea that affirmative action and the Black man’s quest to hold on to the education he received has an unfortunate effect on those of European descent (“Shells,” 5.16). For her, Gunn is willing to give up all he learned: “Then take it back. Everything you put in my head the law, all the knowledge take it back. Everything. Take more. Leave me a

vegetable. I don't care." (Gunn, "Shells" 5.16, 22:04-12) But "For better or worse, [he] made a deal," and had to "learn to live with it" (Gunn, "Shells" 5.16, 22:35-40) In addition, Wesley, the white man who was once his ally and friend (but also his rival for Fred's affection), stabs him in the stomach for not more quickly coming to Fred's aid yet somehow maintains the moral high ground.

Conclusion

Traditional vs. progressive education has been in debate since the early 1900s with the publication of John Dewey's works and debates over whether low-income students should be educated to work in the factories or for the sake of knowledge. It still rages today, with schools that push standardized tests and methods clashing with those that practice more alternative pedagogies. The latter would agree with Xander that "these people can't tell from one multiple choice test what we're going to be doing for the rest of our lives" ("What's My Line? Part One" 2.9, 0:34-40). Problems in our school system have additive effects on students of color "through education policies and practices such as punitive school discipline, grossly inadequate funding, the segregation of school communities, testing and accountability policies, and a narrowing of the training, support, role, and agency of teachers" (Progressive Education Network). These characters are, unfortunately, only a few examples of how educational models and their methods and outcomes for students of color find a place in how we see the world and how we understand its presentation.

While we must all continue to interrogate our fandom in light of revelations about the artists who make the work we

adore, the changes in the acceptance of an artist can often allow us to be more critical of the art and, as it continues to exist, find a purpose for it in highlighting issues in our world and our images of it. Even the casual viewer can see that the way education is portrayed in these shows is not only steeped in racial and racist ideas about education, but also very violent ones. These shows are, unfortunately, also a warped reflection of the world outside of Sunnydale and Los Angeles. Racial and class-based disparities continue to plague our educational system (American Psychological Association) and were only exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic. Black and brown bodies continue to have violence perpetrated against them both within and outside of schools. Often these disparities are easier to illustrate through fictional portrayals. That these shows could be used to illustrate some of the problems in our educational systems and how we represent it, provides a place for work such as this in our scholarship.

Notes

¹ Playdon's name was misspelled as Playden in the 2001 edition.

² Lawson had turned down the role of Cordelia.

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