



Teachers more than just a funny movie

By MATT WILSON

Something is desperately wrong with the way that big public schools are run, and the movie *Teachers* is out to tell us what that something is. You might think that since you don't attend a big public school *Teachers* has nothing to say to you. You'd be wrong on two counts. First, the fact is you do attend a big public school and second, the big public school you attend is suffering from essentially the same problems outlined in the movie.

Teachers is a special kind of movie. It is Black Comedy, a genre of film that makes its points with savage humour, in addition to content that is straightforward and dramatic.

If you've watched *M*A*S*H* or *Hospital*, you know all about Black Comedy. *M*A*S*H* was devoted to exposing the madness and stupidity of war, and *Hospital* was out to tell us that health care was being administered in a callous and inhuman way.

Either theme could have been pursued in a relentlessly serious way, but the results of heavy-handed denunciations are liable to be like the results of Billy Graham's sermons.

Teachers has enough hilarious scenes to be esteemed as a comedy far superior to the standard Hollywood funny movies. The audience has a very good time with

Teachers. There are zany, hilarious scenes that rank with Monty Python at its best. But *Teachers* is more. It's a serious movie with a lot to say to us.

The lead character is a social studies teacher played by Nick Nolte. He is caught between his obligations as a teacher and the pressures from the educational bureaucracy which would have him shirk his responsibilities.

Nolte's role is difficult, but his acting is superb.

His nemesis, the assistant principal, is played by Judd Hirsch, best known for his role in the TV-series *Taxi*. Hirsch, too, plays his role flawlessly. *Teachers* is worth watching for the acting alone. The lead actors are excellent and the minor players are every bit as strong.

Anyone who watches the way schools and colleges are run will agree with the major claim in *Teachers*—schools are run as if they are there to serve the faculty and the bureaucrats.

Schools are not run for the students, and any faculty member who sides with a student against the system is in for a very tough time. The movie is set in the United States in a big public school. Don't let that fool you into thinking that the problem the movie depicts stops at the border. There is almost nothing going on in *Teachers* that isn't happening every day at Dalhousie.

In *Teachers*, the high school is being sued by a graduate who cannot read or write. The case is based

on the school's system of soft grading and automatic promotion. The result is that students leave the school totally unprepared for life, lacking the skills that the school was supposed to teach them.

In *Teachers*, the biggest concern of the administration is covering up problems in order to avoid bad publicity.

Students are seduced by certain teachers, and the problem is covered up. Violence against students is met with indifference from the administration.

Teachers is not a perfect film. It runs for 100 minutes and is good for 90.

There are many things happening in the film. At least one sequence, involving a police shoot-out with a student, distracts from the story line and shouldn't be there because the police are an external element and *Teachers* has its hands full discussing the school system.

Teachers is playing at Scotia Square Cinema. □

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