

Cinema Therapy and “The Movie Making Process”©
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A well-made film can change an individual's perception of the world. Why does a filmmaker sometimes manage to do it in two hours, while it takes months for a psychotherapist? What mechanisms are triggered inside us when we watch a movie? And how to make watching a movie a personal therapy?



Watching movies, which reflect our current issues, can change our negative thoughts and bad habits and positively impact life events and overall health. (Dumtrache, S.D. 2000) Comedies make us laugh, and sad movies can make us feel better, which means cinema therapy has a tremendous potential therapeutic success. (Peake, T.H. 2004) Movies are an excellent way of escaping reality. (Barker, P. 1996) Since human beings learn from what we see, movies can have a significant impact on our lives.

Cinema therapy is like a mirror, allowing you to see yourself, your loved ones, and your actions in the movie characters and scenes. (Teague R. 2000) It offers a glimpse of a problematic situation from the outside, assesses what is happening, draws conclusions, and leads to decision making. (Mann, D. 2004)

Psychoanalysts of the last century began to talk about the noticeable influence of watching movies on personality, compared films to dreams. Hollywood is called the "dream factory," not without reason since movies directly affect our unconscious. (Wolz, B. 2005) Thus, movie directors often use the sound of the heartbeat, which we are not aware of. The audience's heartbeat is synchronized with the sound in the movie, and when the director speeds up the sound in the film, our hearts do the same. We don't notice that we are already worried, anxious, or empathize with the character during this process.

Cinema Therapy is a tool for assessment.

The entire film industry is focused on immersing the audience in another reality. (Foster, L.H. 1989) The camera is as moving as the human gaze, while the music intensifies a particular emotional state. In this altered state, we begin to experience the same things as the characters in the movie and thus cope with conflict and trauma together with them, experiencing strong emotions and releasing accumulated tension safely. (Fredricks, A. 2011) We wholly or partially assume the other person's characteristics (the movie hero), unconsciously imitating him to assimilate a new way of thinking and acting and later make

it part of our own personality. We usually, without noticing it, sympathize most with one of the movie heroes who are somehow similar to us. Passing through the challenges together with a movie character, we feel ourselves becoming wiser and more decisive. (Pur, I.G. 2009)

Movie therapy deals with the problems of life and death, freedom and responsibility, love and alienation, meaning and meaninglessness, humanity, society, and choice. (Solomon, G. 1995) It can help with depression; fears; loneliness; addictions, including workaholism; obsessive thoughts and actions; desolation and suicidal behavior; grief and loss, crises and life failures, indecision and loss of reference points, etc.

A human being can be what they choose to be. As human beings, we always have an opportunity to go beyond ourselves in the form of a decisive leap forward through our dreams, aspirations, desires and goals, decisions, and actions. (Warmuz-Warmuzinska, E. 2013) However, Cinema Therapy is limited in its vicarious nature since we are watching but not necessarily doing, which means it lacks the element of experiential learning.

Adolescence is a difficult period in the development of personality. (Powell, L. M. At al. 2006) Nowadays, young people often find themselves in crises characterized, in particular, by disappointment in their professional and life choices, a mismatch between ideas and expectations about the profession and the reality of mastering it, job loss, lack of life plans, unrealized personal life, feeling dissatisfied with themselves, having no idea of the meaning of life, etc. (Hockley, L. 2001) The absence of internal means of the solution to these crises can lead to harmful alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide. For this reason, cinema therapy at these age groups acquires particular importance.

A young child's or adolescent's response to movies can help a therapist understand their personality, concerns, interests, or current problems. Their choice of movies helps us discover their working role model, ideal self-images, internal resources, potential goals, perceived obstacles, degrees of imagination and creativity, and their overall philosophy of life. Cinema Therapy allows children to express feelings easier, especially if they are actively and consciously engaged in behavior change.

This type of experiential learning is creative and requires a child or adolescent to actively participate in his/her creation by becoming self-aware. (Feldenkrais, M. 1985) A child now becomes his own teacher and is learning from him or herself as he watches the movie, again and again. Children learn to create specific images that allow an adequate reaction to difficult life situations and painful moments and reconstruct their thinking to build new thought constructions. Everything works here: words, thoughts, feelings, actions. (Wedding, D. and Boyd, M. 1998)



Cinema Therapy is a tool for assessment.

"The Movie Making Process"© is the concrete tool for behavior change.

(The Movie Making Process© was nominated by the State of Wisconsin to SAMHSA's Service to Science Academy in 2008 as one of the Midwest's most promising prevention programs).

"The Movie Making Process"© begins with the problem to be addressed, then focuses on the desired outcome. The movie becomes the hero's journey toward resolving the issue. A child needs to draw a positive image of themselves in their mind and try to bring it to life, get used to it, replay scenes from their own life and enter them already in a completely new role. This is how The Movie Making Process"© works. Our "hero" is the child, who needs to react differently and feel everything in a new way.

"The Movie Making Process"© uses the techniques of gorilla filming, which is the resourcefulness of what we have available at any given moment in time. This can be in a child's own home, backyard, neighborhood, park, or school playground. It's the creative process of choosing a theme and gathering, or creating, the props that make the movie "a movie." Children and adolescents love creating their own costumes, representing the "hero" they wish to become.

The movie is acted out non-verbally, like a silent movie, using gestures, facial expressions, and physical postures, which helps children learn and recognize the subtleties of human feelings and participate actively. The goal is to provide a comfortable and effective avenue of expression for them. (Heewon, Y., Younghkhill, L. 2005) The movie is often filmed through "reflection" when a child is "looking back" on something in his/her past. The child passes the "journey," which always ends with resolution and hope. Once the "journey" is completed, the hero is more aware, more skilled, and can now see the situation differently.

Narration and music are added after the movie is completed and edited. "The Movie Making Process" © is a very suitable form of work with the children and adolescent groups, as it fulfills the urgent task of youth development, self-discovery (awareness), and self-development (control). The influence of Cinema Therapy and "The Movie Making Process"© is based on the possibility of (and allows for), transferring socio-cultural experience and personal meanings to young people, creating conditions for internal dialogue.

Inviting family and friends to a "Premiere" of the completed movie is essential in creating new behavior. It offers positive attention for a job well done. This way, a child is actively participating, and that is the greatest power of experiential learning. (Feldenkrais, M. 1949)

Program Evaluation Design Courtesy of The State of Wisconsin:

Central CAPT: Service to Science Academy; Center for Applied Prevention Technology through SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Agency)
Mary Ellen Murphy, Evaluation Consultant

The Movie Making Process Testimonials

Nancy Riestenberg
Minnesota Department of Education

“...The student’s become stars of their own education. By seeing themselves “doing it right” over and over...the video’s power is harnessed to promote positive behavior.”

Don Olson
Teacher
Prairie View School, Bay City, Wisconsin

“...This is the first concrete application that appears to work with elementary students.”

Michelle Silverman
Executive Director
FREE ARTS MINNESOTA

“What you have created here is the best, well researched, and thought-out program anyone has ever brought to me.”

Lawrence J. Ruich
Doctoral Candidate
Special Education
Indiana University Bloomington

“As educators, we must acknowledge that our children have grown within the digital age. The alternative styles to an education are limitless and it is paramount to provide understanding through associative visual learning and active experience. The members of Taproot, Inc. are laying the foundation for these opportunities and many others within the field of education...The utilization of a visual medium as an education tool lends itself to innumerable explorations”.

Beth O’Keefe
School Social Worker
Thompson Heights School
St. Paul, Minnesota

“This was a wonderful opportunity and the benefits have carried over into the school year.”

AUTHOR: Dorothy Halla-Poe holds Master's Degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling, Clinical Psychology, and Human Development, as well as a Ph.D. in Human Development. She has specialized for more than two decades working with young adults suffering from traumatic head injuries. She and her colleague worked with children who displayed atypical behaviors due to neurological dysfunction. She has documented this work in *The Matrix Model*, an innovative researched approach to learning and mental health.

AUTHOR/FELDENKRAIS PRACTITIONER®/VIDEOGRAPHER: Linda Flanders has a degree in Criminal Justice and is a former police detective specializing in Child Sex Abuse. Flanders developed The Movie Making Process© as a means to work with atypical children. She is a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner® and independent videographer. In addition, she is a published author, teaches Crisis Intervention De-escalation skills and is certified as a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy paraprofessional.

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