



The viewing room: A lens for developing ethical comportment



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ABSTRACT

Healthcare is dynamic and complex, and against this background, nursing students must negotiate the transition from lay person to healthcare professional. Diverse life experiences and learning styles can further complicate this journey of transformation. The contemporary role of the nurse includes caring for and making clinical decisions about patients based on ethical principles. Learning about and integrating ethical comportment as part of the transformative journey requires nurse educators to create and implement learning experiences that challenge nursing students to think deeply and broadly about the experiences they encounter, to question their previous assumptions and prejudices, to consider the world of healthcare through a new lens, and to reflect on and learn from the process. The judicious use of film has the potential to assist students to recognize and develop ethical comportment as they prepare for real-world clinical practice experiences. In this paper, we present three film exemplars and related teaching strategies designed to facilitate transformative learning and development of ethical comportment.

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Introduction

“Movies change people and people change lives.” (www.movieschangepeople.com/about-heritage.php). The notion that films have the potential to change people resonates with nurse educators who must inspire and support students in their transitions from lay person to professional and the role of the contemporary nurse. Transformation is essential, as the dynamic and complex nature of healthcare requires nurses who are ethical, adaptable, and responsive to change. This transformative experience is one that requires cultivation by educators and reflection by students on their changing experiences, attitudes, values and beliefs (Fulford, 2008; Mullen and Streiner, 2004; O'Halloran and Blackwood, 2010; Scott et al., 2011). The use of films as educational resources can assist students to embrace their own life

experiences and consider abstract conceptualizations and others' authentic stories as they prepare for the real world experience of practice. The purpose of this paper is to describe ways to incorporate film as a learning strategy through the use of three exemplars for promoting transformative learning and development of ethical comportment.

Background

Developing ethical comportment

Ethical comportment is a fundamental value that nurses hold alongside skilled know how and deep knowledge (Benner et al., 2010). Ethical comportment goes beyond legality but figures prominently in making quality clinical judgments about patient care (Benner et al., 2009). Benner et al. (2009) define it as the way in which nurses embody the ability to relate to others respectfully and responsively. Such embodiment requires nurse educators to play a critical role in designing learning experiences that invite student transformation and acquisition of ethical comportment. To develop ethical comportment, nursing students must become aware of their own vulnerabilities in challenging patient care situations as they reflect on and reconcile their feelings (Benner et al., 2009). Having

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opportunities to abstractly work through authentic stories, such as those presented in films, provides a repertoire of experiences that students can interact with and integrate into their practice.

Film as a learning strategy

The arts have long been known to be effective teachers for developing empathy, compassion, and appreciation of others' perspectives (Darbyshire, 2006; MacDonnell and MacDonald, 2011). Films as popular media have tremendous appeal for a wide variety of learners and have potential to elicit the viewer's thoughts and feelings while living out another's plight or situation (Arroio, 2010). A recent integrative review concluded that four learning approaches were evident in the use of film for health professional education: (1) film as a holistic learning experience can enhance *student-centered learning* in ways that textbooks cannot; (2) film provides "case studies" as a realistic yet safe *experiential learning strategy*; (3) film prompts *reflection* which can be used for personal insight as well as group learning; and (4) considering the stories presented in films offers the potential for higher-level thinking and *problem-solving* that a paper and pencil case study might not (Oh et al., 2012).

Releasing the transformative power of films

With these approaches in mind, the responsibility falls to the educator to use films judiciously and intentionally (Oh et al., 2012). Films, be they biographic or fiction, are a form of storytelling. The emotional 'pull' that an intriguing and multilayered story has to engage students and build on their previous life experiences can facilitate learning about self and others (MacDonnell and MacDonald, 2011). An emotive musical score, camera angles that capture emotions in faces or sweeping panoramas, the *mis en scène* (how elements within the frame are organized), plot devices, the collapsing or exaggeration of the passing of time, and the use of computer-generated imagery are all ploys to enthrall and immerse the viewer in a new reality, assisting them to feel and think in new ways (Bordwell and Thompson, 2003; MacDonnell and MacDonald, 2011).

As Gottschall (2012) stated, when we become immersed in a story, we "allow ourselves to be invaded by the teller. The story maker penetrates our skulls and seizes control of our cognitive and emotional machinery" (p. 16). Film is not innocuous or trivial: it can inspire and direct, prompting new thoughts and actions, which can be transformative and stimulate people to action to right injustices (MacDonnell and MacDonald, 2011). There are numerous influential non-documentary films that have had a significant impact—raising awareness, connecting audiences with humanity, and motivating change. They are often multi-layered, with complex meanings and learning that may be applied in varying ways. Some examples include helping to deepen insight into psychotherapy (e.g., *Girl, Interrupted*); reducing stigma about a misunderstood or hidden problem (e.g., *The King's Speech*); reaching people emotionally when other strategies have failed (e.g., *The Snake Pit*); and inspiring people to make social change (e.g., *Erin Brockovich*).

However, the power of film to achieve transformation is only a *potential* power and requires guidance from effective facilitators so that new insights are gained and perspectives enabled (McAllister et al., 2015; Oh et al., 2012). As such, nursing educators must make discerning selections of films related to course outcomes; direct students' attention to issues of importance; and model curiosity, hesitancy, and openness towards the plot so that judgments are not prematurely made. In this way, the knowledge and attitudes developed through discerning engagement are not merely theoretical but rather grounded in human experience. When the issues

are more personal, they are more likely to be remembered and integrated into future nursing practice.

Making effective use of film as a teaching strategy

Although students can construct new meaning from previous learning when exposed to film (MacDonnell and MacDonald, 2011; Peters, 2000), educators' input is critical to guide new understanding (Oh et al., 2012). For example, facilitated discussion can provide a valuable means for constructing new learning (MacDonnell and MacDonald, 2011). Therefore, the authors of this paper offer practical guidance in Table 1 for possible learning outcomes when using film to develop ethical comportment. We also offer the following general recommendations for educators who plan to use film as a stimulus for transformational learning:

1. Ensure the availability of the selected film, either through library access or Internet subscription service, for example. It may be useful to advise the librarian to purchase the rights that allow the film to be played to large audiences, though in most cases the use of films for educational purposes is permitted.
2. Suggest that students first view the film just for pleasure.
3. Provide reflective thinking questions once the film has been viewed and ask students to re-view the film so they are prepared to participate in group discussion.
4. Hold a group discussion where selected excerpts are analyzed and reflected upon for the relevance of their content, processes, assumptions, and assertions made about the subject being studied.
5. Design extension or assessment activities that require students to transfer the learning from this experience to other contexts; to imagine how, if they were a film-maker, they might engage, inform, and inspire an audience to action about a particular issue; or invite students to make a short film (this could be as simple as an animated power-point) to communicate a topical and meaningful issue.
6. Facilitate students' application of understanding to their own practice.

Drawing on these insights, this paper presents three exemplars for the use of immersive and transformative learning via film to show how interest and curiosity for the subject matter can be aroused and used as the impetus for transformative learning.

Three film exemplars for transformative learning

There is convincing evidence that films can assist viewers to vicariously engage in an experience in ways that motivate, energize, and inspire new learning and action. In the next sections, three authors from diverse settings explain in their own voices how they have used films that have the capacity to facilitate transformative learning and development of ethical comportment. It is hoped that the reader will identify unique learning opportunities from the descriptions. The three film exemplars include *Good Will Hunting*, *Wit*, and *My Sister's Keeper*.

Good Will Hunting

I (first author) have used the award-winning film *Good Will Hunting* (Van Sant, 1997) to deepen students' understanding about mental disorders and recovery. The film is a poignant story about a young man who was severely abused as a child and has been in trouble with the law ever since. The film depicts how he agrees to undergo counseling to avoid going to jail.

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