

Cinematherapy as a Part of the Education and Therapy of People with Intellectual Disabilities, Mental Disorders and as a Tool for Personal Development

Smieszek, Mateusz

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Smieszek, M. (2019). Cinematherapy as a Part of the Education and Therapy of People with Intellectual Disabilities, Mental Disorders and as a Tool for Personal Development. *International Research Journal for Quality in Education*, 6(1), 30-34. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-73029-5>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC Licence (Attribution-NonCommercial). For more information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0>

Review Paper:

Cinematherapy as a Part of the Education and Therapy of People with Intellectual Disabilities, Mental Disorders and as a Tool for Personal Development

Mateusz Smieszek

Faculty of Education Sciences, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Torun, POLAND
502792@doktorant.umk.pl

Abstract

The review paper aims at presenting a look at ways, forms and usefulness of cinematherapy in the education and therapy of people with disabilities and people with mental disorders. I will analyze the usefulness of cinematherapy in different areas of education and therapy. The study also briefly comments on the most significant features that describe cinematherapy. Subsequently, it will go on to benefits of using cinematherapy as a tool for personal development.

Keywords: Cinematherapy, therapy, education, intellectual disability, mental disorders, personal development.

Introduction

Creativity should be an important element of the education process of people with disabilities and mental disorders. People with intellectual disability and people with mental or emotional disorders, along with other members of society, are fully capable of creative effort and involvement in artistic activities. Wojnar¹ emphasized that in such cases, art becomes a link between the outside and the inside world. However, this aspect is very often overshadowed. Culture Education is essential for the proper development of skills of children, young people and adults with different types and degrees of disability or mental disorders. Upbringing and therapy that ignore creativity become poor and insufficient.

The film is an important area of creativity. Film stories can function as works of art, entertainment, research tools, advertising posters, textbooks, means to control various technological processes. A film can be a significant element of therapy also due to the fact that it is not limited to aesthetic values. It may reflect economic, social, current and historical relations as well. Wedding and Boyd² write that one of the advantages of film is that it is closer to reality than any other traditional arts. Cinema, thanks to the combination of various art forms, shows life in its entire course and in all its fugacity.

In this study, I would like to discuss a possibility of using films in therapy and education. I will present which elements of cinematherapy can be particularly useful when working with people with intellectual disabilities, mental or emotional disorders and when developing specific character traits. My purpose is also to take a closer look at different ways in which this type of therapy can be used for posture-

building, personality development and self-improvement activities.

Cinematherapy – Review of literature

Cinematherapy is a fascinating, modern method of therapy or education that can be used both for individual and group patients or clients. An extensive body of literature exists on the usefulness of cinematherapy. The first definition of cinematherapy was presented by Berg-Cross, Jennings and Baruch³ in the article “Cinematherapy: Theory and Application” in 1990. The authors described cinematherapy as a therapeutic technique based on a selection of films by the therapist, which the client watches himself or with indication. This seminal work laid the foundations for the field of cinematherapy. Warmuz-Warmuzinska⁴ defines cinematherapy as an audiovisual form of bibliotherapy. An interesting term is the one suggested by Teague⁵, according to whom, cinematherapy is a medicine for a sore soul. The literature contains numerous synonyms of cinematherapy. Kozubek⁶ includes “cine therapy”, “movie therapy”, “reel therapy”, “video work”.

Cinematherapy has got a wide range of functions. Konopczynski⁷ writes that it can be successfully used in a variety of ways in revalidation or rehabilitation. The mentioned kind of therapy also provides some kind of psychological support. Therefore, it is used in therapeutic activities, not removing symptoms of a disorder, an illness, but providing mental support in a difficult life situation of a person. Berg-Cross, Jennings and Baruch³ think that cinematherapy is also worth applying cinematherapy to prevention, general personal development and aesthetic education. The aforementioned type of therapy can also be used for work with people with mental disorders (for example Wedding, Boyd and Niemiec⁸ write about it in their publication).

Darmer and Hutchings⁹ emphasize that the film is a very useful tool because it allows you to explore many different areas of everyday life such as gender, culture and social functioning. The aforementioned authors⁹ also stress that movies are helpful to externalize problems.

A film therapist working with people with an intellectual disability or people with mental disorders shall provide psychological support, break the isolation and increase the well-being of people undergoing such therapies. She or he must, of course, be emphatic, plastic and auto-critical. By

watching or making films, the therapist together with patients or clients reach a metaphorical understanding of the problems. A film therapist shall combine features of an educator, animator, or teacher. Calisch¹⁰ stress that s/he must be familiar with films. It is necessary to select the right films for the needs and possibilities of people with intellectual disability or mental disorders.

Because of its specific features, film therapy should be considered when designing assistance activities for people with intellectual disabilities. An important advantage of film therapy is the use of non-directivity in the work on changing patterns and taking on new roles in life. Mann¹¹ emphasizes that cinematherapy can be applied at different levels of sensitivity. The author mentions several types of movies which can be useful in movie therapy. Mann¹¹ writes about "popcorn cinema therapy" (used for emotional release), "evocative cinema therapy" (helping people learn about themselves) and "cathartic cinema therapy" (for opening up different levels of emotions and psyche). Newton¹² writes that it strengthens the feeling of security while concentrating on difficult experiences and reduces defensive mechanisms by enabling the patient or client to identify with characters and stories while maintaining distance. May¹³ underlines that the film also provides role models.

Cinematherapy also helps to raise the awareness of oneself and one's relationships with others. Kozubek⁶ writes: "from the perspective of a film therapist, the real experience of a film by a patient is usually due to the fact that he "noticed himself" on the screen, compared his life with that of film characters, incorporated ideas, facts and symbols and above all, situations which seemed to me to be his own or could at least be them"⁶.

Wolz¹⁴ and Peake¹⁵ stress that it also makes it possible to identify sources of problems and ways of solving them. It allows you to identify your own dreams and needs as well. The film releases blocked feelings in a safe way. Solomon¹⁶ underlines that it also provides an opportunity to work on difficult topics indirectly, without encountering resistance from those undergoing therapy.

Cinematherapy has got some specific features that distinguish it as a kind of therapy. It helps to realize that personal problems are universal: this kind of therapy helps to rebuild bonds, reduces the sense of loneliness when dealing with a given problem. Wolz¹⁴ highlights that it influences both emotions and intellect, breaks taboos. Scientific research confirms that film viewers empathize with content shown on the screen (Bandura¹⁷ writes that the so-called "mirror neurons" are responsible for this). Lessing¹⁸ emphasizes that cinematherapy can play an important role in the self-expression of students including those with disabilities. Researchers' theories provide explanations for a possibility of using cinematherapy in education and therapy.

Warmuz-Warmuzinska⁴ writes that film therapy can adopt two main forms. The first one is movie watching. It should be conducted according to a five-step scheme. In the beginning, the film is presented. Subsequently, a conversation takes place, during which the audience must, for example, quote one sentence, one scene they have remembered from the film and share their reflections on the film. Then the viewers have to remember the scenes which moved them the most and which are related to their situation, to their lives. Then they can choose one of the scenes from the film and create their own film and share their reflections on it.

Finally, they have to choose one of the characters from the film that could help in some way in their situation and think about why they have chosen this particular character. All these elements must, of course, be adapted to developmental and perceptual abilities of people with intellectual disabilities or mental/emotional disorders.

The second kind of cinematherapy is creation. Such therapy is based on the fact that people with disabilities do not watch films but make them. These can be films in which they perform themselves or simple animations. People with disabilities or mental disorders create works on their own under the supervision of a caretaker. The emphasis is on the independence of the participants, each task must be performed by them. Cinematherapy starts with the creation of a script, scenery, small elements; the selection of music to the making of a film. This is, of course, very labor-intensive, but it can give amazing results. The very end result, which can be admired, brings extraordinary satisfaction and joy to the filmmakers.

In both forms of film therapy, cinematherapy has mostly a therapeutic function. Watching or making a film by patients or clients creates positive emotions. It causes relaxation. Autonomous creation strengthens the feeling of causality and independence, which is also an important element of the therapy of people with disabilities and people with mental or emotional disorders.

Cinematherapy – Research Review

Cinematherapy can be successfully used when working with people with intellectual disability or people with mental and emotional disorders. This is evidenced by results of numerous scientific studies. Many authors write about the usefulness of cinematherapy in psychotherapy.¹⁹⁻²¹ A film during psychotherapy can activate processes of self-discovery or confrontation with difficulties. The present study gives examples of different forms of cinematherapy which have been used over the years. The researchers draw attention to the fact that cinematherapy could be used in different areas of personal development (education, psychology, sociology, couple therapy).

Dumtrache²² conducted a study on the effectiveness of cinematherapy in work with people with anxiety. The

researcher led research among a group of young people. She divided the respondents into two assemblies - one group carried out classes with the use of cinematherapy, the other group applied traditional methods of therapy. The main hypothesis of the study read as follows: "We assumed that young students' anxiety would decrease after their participation in a personal development program centered on movies"²². The tool for checking the changes was the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale. Activities based on film therapy were divided into three stages: the initial phase, the actual unfolding and the final phase.

The results of the research showed that the use of cinematherapy had a positive impact on the development of the subjects: "The participants explored their inner universe by identifying themselves with some characters or due to the central themes offered by the movies. Thus, their re-signified their personal universe; they restricted and transformed their own life scripts"²². Dumtrache²² also stresses that cinematherapy increases the attractiveness of the therapeutic process, which is also important for the success of the therapy.

Alexander and Waxmann²³ and Foster²⁴ stress that cinematherapy can also be used in school education. The use of films can help to transfer knowledge from different areas of education. Films are particularly useful as a means of conveying values. In an interesting research project Smithikrai²⁵ focused on testing the effectiveness of film-based learning in promoting positive attitudes. The research was carried out in a group of precisely 156 students. In this case, the cinematherapy consisted of watching a film (a total of 11 films were watched during a semester) and discussing the film. The data is comprehensive and empirical. Through the analyses conducted in the form of a pretest and a post-test, the researcher noticed a significant improvement in the respondents in the area of positive features of character and behavior. Positive orientation and personal growth initiative were considered. Smithikrai²⁵ writes: (...) the results of this study provide support that positive characteristics and behaviors can be enhanced through a systematic movie-based teaching course²⁵.

A similar study was conducted by Niemiec²⁶ whose aim was specifically to test the effectiveness of cinematherapy in improving well-being and shaping appropriate attitudes among the subjects. This is particularly interesting piece of data. The author presented a film about a person with an appropriate approach to life (optimism, openness to others). Subsequently, the author of this research project tried to see if the analysis of such a film work would influence attitudes of people undergoing this type of therapy.

The aim of the study was to notice possible changes in the subjects in three areas: "find ways to help your clients tap deeper into meaning, help clients to prioritize the development of positive, close relationships, work with clients to discover, explore and apply their character

strengths in order to engage fully in their life, work, relationships and goals"²⁶. In his conclusion, Niemiec²⁶ contains positive words about the effectiveness of this type of activities in the therapeutic work. This is a clear example of how cinematherapy could be used in psychology.

Kozubek⁶ conducted a study to test the effectiveness of cinematherapy during rehabilitation. The author carried out her research project in socio-therapy centers for young people. The main hypothesis of the work referred to the fact that pointing to values is more appropriate than pointing to duties in the case of maladjusted youth⁶. A key aspect of the research was the process of projection-identification by people undergoing cinematherapy. Films presented during the therapy classes were supposed to help those young people answer a few basic questions related to their lives: Who am I?, What would I like to do?. They were also designed to increase the level of the awareness of the respondents of parenthood and empathy.

The results of the research showed that the activities conducted in the form of film therapy had a positive impact on the young people. The author writes: "The films familiarized the students with contemporary issues in a very natural way, helping them better understand human relations and the difficult situation in which they found themselves"⁶.

Films also become an element of couple therapy, where they are used in shaping proper relations and bonds between partners. Kuriansky, Ortman, DelBuono and Vallarelli²⁷ analyzed possibility of using film metaphors to form relationships in counseling and coaching. This research focuses on the analysis of the usefulness of cinematherapy elements applied in individual and couple therapy. The authors of the research conducted it in cooperation with couple therapists who used film analyses in their activity. The study focused on issues such as a fear of engagement, sustaining a long-term relationship, control and power struggles.

The results of the research showed that by depicting life problems with the use of film materials, the subjects were able to look deeper into the structure of their problems and speak more openly about them. The authors conclusively established a link between the following two phenomena – cinematherapy and relationships.

Researchers undertaking studies on the effectiveness of cinematherapy emphasize limitations of such projects. They note that it is difficult to unambiguously verify the effectiveness of film therapy for the reason that other factors may also play a significant role in the course of the research. These factors can affect attitudes, beliefs and behavior. It is extremely problematic to accurately determine an impact of a film on individuals or groups of people. Cinematherapy as a research tool in the therapy of people with disabilities and mental disorders has not been standardized yet. That is why

the researchers have to take a reflective approach to the use of cinematherapy as a part of their therapeutic workshop.

Conclusion

Cinematherapy and its elements can be successfully used in the education or therapy of people with an intellectual disability or mental disorders. Aforementioned type of therapy represents a promising method that increases the attractiveness of educational or therapeutic process. Be that as it may, some limitations should be kept in mind. It must be stressed that film therapy is only an auxiliary method supporting traditional methods of therapy. Newton¹² underlines that cinematherapy is an extension or continuation of other, more traditional types of therapy (for instance bibliotherapy). Kozubek⁶ writes about this: "Cinematherapy is not so much a therapy in the strict sense of the word as an attractive addition to proper therapy, prevention, combining pleasant with useful ways of relaxation combined with self-fulfillment and development". The aim of therapy through film is to combine entertainment and awareness. The viewer is supposed to watch or create a film on their own while enjoying it. Under these conditions, the film can have a high therapeutic value.

It is worth taking advantage of one's own experience of participating in culture. Creativity should have educational functions because it makes the world a better place. Thanks to culture, we can get answers to our questions. Borowska-Beszta²⁸ writes that cinematherapy has cultural functions. Creativity in combination with education may become a space for discussion on the most important issues of the world. According to Wolz,²⁹ it can be an important element in overcoming difficulties and strengthening the acceptance of oneself. Packer³⁰ also writes that cinematherapy helps understanding the surrounding world and gaining joy in life. To sum up, cinematherapy should play a significant role in the process of development of all people (including people with intellectual disabilities or mental or emotional disorders).

References

1. Wojnar E., Cultural education and empathy training. In Suchodolski B., ed., Cultural education and human existence, Wrocław, PAN (1986)
2. Wedding D. and Boyd M., Movies & Mental Illness: Using Films to Understand Psychopathology, New York, McGraw Hill Education (1998)
3. Berg-Cross L., Jennings P. and Baruch R., Cinematherapy: Theory and Application, *Psychotherapy Private Practice*, **8(1)**, 135-157 (1990)
4. Warmuz-Warmuzinska E., Cinematherapy in education and therapy of school children and youth and adults, Warsaw, Difin (2013)
5. Teague R., Reel Spirit: A Guide to Movies That Inspire, Explore and Empower, Unity Village, MO, Unity House, 12 (2000)
6. Kozubek M., Cinematherapy, Gdansk, Wydawnictwo slowo/obraz teoria, 13, 229, 285, 97 (2016)
7. Konopczyński M., Methods of creative rehabilitation, Warsaw, PWN (2006)
8. Wedding D., Boyd M.A. and Niemiec R., Movies & Mental Illness: Using Films to Understand Psychopathology, 2nd revised and edited edition (2005)
9. Dermer S. and Hutchings J., Utilizing movies in family therapy: Applications for individuals, couples and families, *American Journal of Family Therapy*, **28**, 163–180 (2000)
10. Calisch A., From reel to real: Use of video as a therapeutic tool, *Afterimage*, **29**, 22-24 (2001)
11. Mann D., Movie therapy: Using movies for mental health, Retrieved July 27, 2018 from www.webmd.com/mental-health/features/movie-therapy-using-movies-for-mental-health (2004)
12. Newton A.K., Silver screens and silver linings: Using theatre to explore feelings and issues, *Gifted Child Today*, **18**, 43 (1995)
13. May R., Cry for myth, Poznan, Zysk i S-ka (1997)
14. Wolz B., E-Motion Picture Magic: A Movie Lover's Guide to Healing and Transformation, Centennial, Colorado, Glenbridge (2005)
15. Peake T.H., Cinema and Life Development: Healing Lives and Training Therapists, London, Praeger Publishers (2004)
16. Solomon G., The motion Picture Prescription, Watch This Movie and Call Me in the Morning, Santa Rosa, CA, Aslan Publishing (1995)
17. Bandura A., Social learning theory, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall (1977)
18. Lessig L., Free culture, Warsaw, WSiP (2005)
19. Kratochvil S., Foundations of Psychotherapy, Poznan, Zysk i S-ka (2003)
20. Barker P., Psychotherapeutic metaphors: A guide to theory and practice, New York, Brunner/Mazel (1996)
21. Hockley L., Cinematic Projections: The Analytical Psychology of C. G. Jung and Film Theory, Luton, The Netherlands, University of Luton Press (2001)
22. Dumtrache S.D., The effects of a cinema-therapy group on diminishing anxiety in young people, *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, **127**, 717-721 (2014)
23. Alexander M. and Waxman D., Cinema education: teaching family systems through the movies, *Families, System and Health*, **18**, 455 – 466 (2000)
24. Foster L.H., Cinematherapy in the Schools, *Chi Sigma Iota Exemplar*, **16(3)**, 8 (1989)

25. Smithikrai C., Effectiveness of Teaching with Movies to Promote Positive Characteristics and Behaviors, *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, **217**, 522 – 530 (2016)

26. Niemiec R.M., Positive psychology cinema education: A review of Happy, *International Journal of Wellbeing*, **1(3)**, 328-334 (2011)

27. Kuriansky J., Ortman J., Del Buono J. and Vallarelli A., Cinematherapy: Using Movie Metaphors to Explore Real Relationships in Counseling and Coaching, In Gregerson M.B., ed., *The Cinematic Mirros for Psychology and Life Coaching*, 89-122 (2009)

28. Borowska-Beszta B., *Echos of Expression*, Krakow, Impulse (2008)

29. Wolz B., *Cinema Alchemy: Using the Power of Films in Psychotherapy and Coaching*, In Gregerson M.B., ed., *The Cinematic Mirror for Psychology and Life Coaching*, New York, Springer (2010)

30. Packer S., *Movies and the Modern Psyche*, Santa Barbara, CA, Praeger (2007).

(Received 11th November 2018, accepted 15th December 2018)
