

## Short Communication

# Graduate Students “Meet” Cinematic Leaders

Tova Hendel\*

Department of Nursing, Ashkelon Academic College, Israel

## \*Corresponding author

Tova Hendel, Department of Nursing, Ashkelon Academic College, Ashkelon 78211, Israel, Email: tdhendel@smile.net.il

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**Abstract**

Learning human behaviour and response in a variety of situations is often difficult. A review of the literature reveals that nursing education is strongly based on traditional teaching methods and indicates the need to incorporate new ways of teaching - learning and evaluation methods. The use of aesthetic experiences in nursing education provides the students with vivid portrayals of peoples' thoughts, emotions, feelings and human interactions. This paper highlights a creative approach describing the process, outcomes and students' experiences by utilizing movies for the final project for a managerial/leadership course in the graduate nursing program. The use of popular movies was found to be an effective, affective and cognitive learning assessment tool, helping to facilitate leadership theories through the analysis process and create tangible experiences for the graduate students. Utilizing movies to teach and evaluate both undergraduate and graduate students is a creative way to engage students in the teaching-learning process.

**INTRODUCTION**

Paradigm shifts in health care organizations required changes in the perception of effective organizational management. Global trends are shaping the challenges that future leaders will need to face and cope with. For the majority of individuals in our world today, commanding and directing them is unlikely to gain their collaboration and commitment. New effective strategies are needed to influence people. In our rapidly changing health care environment, an organization's survival is dependent on leadership quality. Leadership in the modern context is a reflection of the way leaders exercise power and authority and carry out managerial functions. It is a matter of influencing people to achieve common goals by inspiring them, strengthen their commitment and develop their potential. Leadership deals with individuals and their continually changing dynamics and the challenge of leadership is to create change and facilitate people's growth. Managers today are expected to undertake a leadership role and demonstrate leadership qualities [1]. There is growing evidence as to the importance of nursing leadership in determining the quality and cost of patient services.

Learning human behavior and how to respond in a variety of situations is often difficult. Activities such as gaming, simulation and practical exercises are used in nursing education and conventional styles of delivering and evaluating materials are being used. A review of the literature revealed that nursing education is strongly based on traditional teaching methods and points to the need to incorporate new ways of teaching - learning and evaluation methods. The use of aesthetic experiences in

nursing education, with movies being one of these experiences, provides students with vivid portrayals of individual's thoughts, emotions, feelings, human interactions and everyday life situations, thus, enabling them to analyze their own behaviors and responses. Considerable experience in using cinema in nursing and healthcare education has been documented in the literature [2-10].

While knowledge can sometimes be learned through experience, the framework for how leadership works can and must be learned [11]. Leadership skills can be learned. Leaders and educators must role-model and develop leadership potential in their staff.

How do people learn leadership? What motivates adult learners? How do we as educators bridge the gap between the abstract and the concrete? How can we, as leaders and educators gain influence with others and assist them in becoming effective leaders; create and share a common ground in the spheres of vision, values, attitudes, relationships and communication; achieve organizational goals; make difficult decisions and develop an environment conducive to growth and inspiration.

We often associate leadership with great charismatic figures - military or political. We “used” associative thinking when we started to plan the final project for the managerial/leadership course in the master's program.

This paper highlights a creative approach describing the process and outcomes of using movies for the final project of a managerial/leadership course.

## METHOD

### Purpose

The purpose of the final project was to enhance the students' awareness and understanding of managerial/ leadership concepts, theories and behaviors by cinema viewing, reviewing and assessing their ability to integrate their body of knowledge learned through analyzing cinematic leadership characteristics.

### The course

Several topics were included in the managerial/leadership course such as: the concepts of leadership and management and the development of models evolving over time to describe the relationship between the two concepts; historical perspective of leadership theories; contemporary leadership and management theories and styles; culture and climate; leadership and power resources; empowerment management and organizational collaboration. During the course, 2-3 movies were shown with the aim to introduce the students to a number of themes in relation with each movie and as a basis for discussions. In order

to change the way students were usually evaluated at the end of the courses, ie examinations, we decided to develop a final project based on movies. The assignment used movies to connect students to specific components of leadership theories and behaviors and promote learning processes. The use of movies as an affective and cognitive learning tool was chosen both to impact information and create an experience for the students.

### The end project

A list of 40 movies was prepared focusing on popular history/ social leaders. The list was selected according to the author's familiarity with the movies and faculty members' personal recommendations. The faculty was given a brief explanation of the end project and were asked to suggest movies that would evoke emotional responses and enable viewers to gain insight into leadership from a border perspective. Some examples were Patton (1969), Norma Rae (1979), Gandhi (1982), Truman (1995), Joan of Arc (199), Erin Brocovich (200), The Devil Wears Prada (2006), Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007), Che (2008), Invictus (2009) (Figure 1). Students were exposed to both

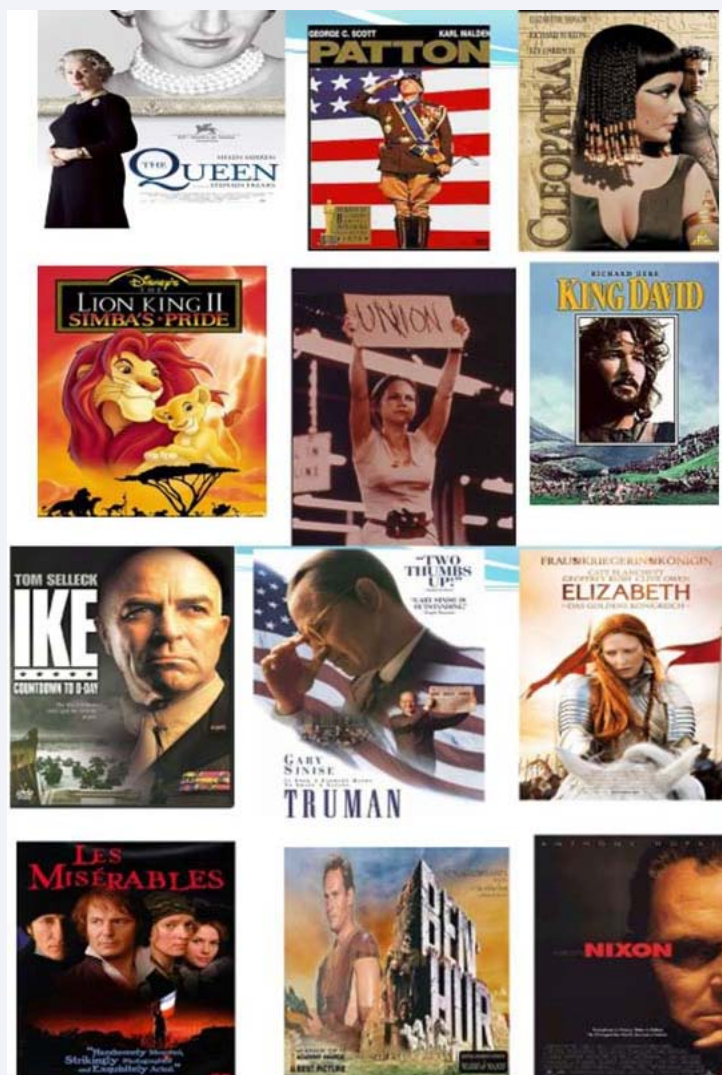


Figure 1 Examples of leadership films seen by students.

positive and negative role models. They were paired off and were required to watch a movie randomly assigned to them and to follow written guidelines for the final project. The guidelines included a brief overview of the movie, a description of the leader and his leadership characteristics and style, referring to selected aspects such as basic values reflected in the movie, use of power resources, interpersonal communication methods and collaboration with others. Students were asked to analyze the leader's characteristics in relation to the literature.

### The evaluation tool

The tool was developed to assess students' attitudes as to the process and outcomes of the project. Apart from demographic information, four questions were posed to the students asking about their previous experiences watching movies as a basis for writing assignments, their experience with the format of watching the films and the contribution to knowledge and understanding of the contents learned in the course and their recommendations for using this learning strategy in the future.

### RESULTS

The project was evaluated twice. Seventy graduate students (average age 38, 73% working full time, 53% in middle management positions) replied to the questionnaire at the end of the course. Approximately 91% had had no previous experience with films as a tool for writing assignments. The students were generally positive with regard to the format of the final work. About 93% of the students pointed out that the assignment was a helpful/very helpful learning experience for writing a final paper. About 80% of the students recommended/highly recommend the use of cinematic movies for future assignments. The participants were asked, "What do you consider to be the main benefits of the movies to your learning process?" and "What were the main disadvantages for using movies for the end project?" Students' feedbacks included statements such as "an enjoyable assignment", "different and interesting", "challenging and innovative", "it was exciting and beneficial to watch the film and analyze it from a management point of view combining literature and the material learned in the classroom". Most of the projects fulfilled the educator's academic expectations.

However, there were also a few exceptions: some students pointed out that the time invested in the project was a reason not to recommend this type of evaluation, for some it was difficult to find the movies, some found the movies boring.

### DISCUSSION

The article documents the process and experiences from an end project where movies were used as a means of effectively combining the theory learned in a managerial/leadership course in a graduate program. The project attempted to use, in addition to the traditional methods of evaluation, movies that present a range of different powerful leaders throughout history as well as in the present. Students' reactions indicated that they had a better understanding of the content learned after watching the movies and it was a fun way to learn. The positive attitudes and feedback of students towards the use of movies showed that the use of innovative strategies can help students to internalize theoretical contents and help them apply this knowledge and

skills in real life situations. Integrating liberal arts in professional nursing programs may provide a deeper level in understanding concepts, enhancing students' active learning and increasing awareness to complex issues learned. Technology may be a helpful tool when used for teaching-learning human behavior, communication skills, and leader followers' relationships - to complement traditional teaching methods and helping students to bridge the gap between the abstract and the concrete.

### CONCLUSION

Using multiple creating strategies to promote adult students' learning was found effective and motivating. Documenting the students' reactions helped us to determine if the decision to use films as a learning tool was correct. Educators have to develop creative and innovative teaching strategies to meet the students' learning needs. The use of popular movies was found as an effective, affective and cognitive learning tool, helping to facilitate leadership theories through the analysis process and create a tangible experience for the graduate students. Utilizing movies to teach and evaluate both undergraduate and graduate students has been used for many years to engage nursing students in the teaching-learning process. However, it was the first time that it was used by us with the goal to evaluate learners' knowledge and understanding gained in the graduate managerial leadership course.

Based on our results, movies' activities will continue to be integrated in the final assignments of the course. We felt that exposing the students to cinematic leaders was an additional and enjoyable way to develop leadership awareness and support the learning process.

"The more you know the more you see"

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