

Using VIDEO to Address the Social and

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In the recent film, *October Sky*, four teenage boys develop their talents and their task commitment when they pursue rocketry as a science fair project that eventually results in a national prize. The year is 1957, and the impetus for their project is Sputnik. One of the boys is a "brain" who is socially isolated from the other students in his school. Another is a talented student who has not been motivated to achieve in math because he did not see the usefulness of this content area. Another of the teens is physically abused by his alcoholic stepfather. The recent viewing of this film by several gifted students caused an hour of heated debate about school and the absence of opportunity to pursue projects based on interests, as well as several other social and emotional issues related to feeling different.

The use of videotherapy as a strategy to address social and emotional needs

of gifted children is extremely useful for teachers, parents, and counselors. While the use of videos in education and therapy is fairly recent, films have been used for social/emotional needs for many years. In this article, we review the use of film in therapy, discuss videotherapy as a technique that is similar to bibliotherapy, describe the use of videotherapy in addressing developmental as well as counseling needs, and suggest sources and activities.

Use of Films in Addressing the Social/Emotional Needs of Gifted Children

Films are often used in counseling and social/emotional development of gifted students. Collins, McCabe, Jupp, and Sutton (1983) used video images of

bodies to portray people's attitudes towards their bodies as part of a weight reduction program. Snyder (1999) explored the process of social learning and instigation using movies with juvenile delinquents. Fine and McIntyre (1986) described their use of interactive video to help train family therapists address various problems encountered by families. Chatwood (1974) used video material in therapy situations to help patients, teachers, and students and to train therapists in addressing a range of counseling needs and issues.

Newton (1995) suggested the use of movies with gifted children as part of a developmental gifted program and counseling, indicating that films can be just as challenging as books and can provide a different medium for addressing issues and needs. Schlichter and Burdette (1994) discussed Halsted's (1988) definition of the concepts 'development'

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and 'clinical' in the context of bibliotherapy. The former refers to the process of helping healthy people in their normal growth and development...[and] attempts to anticipate and meet needs before they become problems, helping people to move through life's predictable stages with information about what to expect and examples of how other people have dealt with the same developmental changes. In contrast, ... [the latter refers to] psychotherapeutic methodologies used by skilled practitioners with populations in a specific treatment program for emotional or behavior problems. (p. 280)

Gifted children are noted as relating "to be environment in a unique way. They perceive things in different ways and pur-

sue issues generally of concern to much older people such as 'the origin of the universe,' where they came from' (Raethel, 1982; cited by Taylor, 1996, p. 393). Some realize they are not the same as other children very early and may display many dysynchronies in their development (Milne, 1992; Silverman, 1993a). These issues may result in situations in which smart students encounter stress and require some form of counseling.

Books and bibliotherapy are suggested as one approach to counseling (Hébert, 1991; Schlichter & Burke, 1994; Silverman, 1993a). However, while many gifted and talented children are excellent readers, not all read well (Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1995). Some are learning disabled, and some are underachieving gifted students, ESL students, and students who may lack opportunities for advanced reading. Television and access to films are now common,

with video stores, lending libraries, and cable stations readily accessible to and used by many families (Snyder, 1991). Watching videos is as common as reading and often occurs more frequently in families than in-depth discussions.

The principles of social learning theory have been applied through film in counseling sessions to explore modeled scenarios, patterns of behavior, and possible outcomes (Snyder, 1991). Snyder noted that "motion pictures may exert a prosocial effect on adolescents. Positive social learning about adolescent phenomena that are as diverse as peer groups, family systems, and identification may occur as a result of viewing films" (p. 128). "Prosocial behavior such as altruism, control of aggressive impulses, delay of gratification, reparation for bad behavior, resistance to temptation, and sympathy have been shown to

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increase after exposure of youth to certain television programs" (Liebert & Sprafkin, 1988; cited by Snyder, 1991, p. 129). However, Snyder warned that "studies demonstrating positive effects are sparse" (p. 128). Care must be taken to ensure a comprehensive understanding of counseling strategies, the content of the films to be used, and how they will be used with each individual. Snyder suggested the use of role-play and other strategies as part of the counseling or therapy process. Videotherapy, or what Newton called "cinematherapy" (p. 15), appears to be a valuable addition to strategies that can be used by teachers and counselors for developmental and clinical purposes.

Bibliotherapy

Taylor (1996) defined bibliotherapy as a "technique using discussion of books [that] can be carried out in small groups. It uses the advanced cognitive abilities of able learners to actively foster social/emotional development, addressing

affective needs and problems" (p. 398), in a safe environment, and it enables individuals to "mentally explore various approaches to dealing with conflict(s) without the negative consequences of an unwise decision" (Fraser & McCannon, 1981; cited by Newton, 1995, p.15). Gifted children can vicariously identify conflict in books with personalities and situations. Difficult personal experiences, such as disabilities or the death of a relative or a pet, can also be discussed through thoughtful selection of suitable books coupled with sensitive discussion of the issues as they emerge.

Through discussion with peers, parents, teachers, and counselors, gifted and divergent children gain insight into themselves and the world in which they live, and discover they are not alone (Fraser, 1996; Lovecky, 1996; Reis, 1998; Taylor, 1996). Hébert (1991) has suggested six issues that confront gifted boys that can be addressed through bibliotherapy. These six issues may form a basis for the classification of films into the following categories: (a) image management; (b) self inflicted pressure (for

performance); (c) being labeled differently (i.e., absent-minded, nerd); (d) maturing; (e) being alone within a culture [involved in certain valued activities (e.g., public speaking, debating not considered central to a school's culture, such as basketball)]; and (f) gender role conflict.

Splicing the Pieces

The rationale and strategies for the use of books in bibliotherapy can be applied to film in videotherapy. Halsted's (1994) definition of bibliotherapy seems relevant to videotherapy as "a counseling technique for helping people deal with their problems through [watching films] about characters who have similar problems" (p. 209).

The four stages of bibliotherapy discussed by Joen (1992) can also be applied to videotherapy:

(a) *identification*, where [viewers] see similarities between themselves and characters in the story; (b) *catharsis*, where [viewers] allow emotions and internal conflicts to rise to the surface and consciousness; (c) *insight*, where [viewers] make the connection between the characters and themselves; and (d) *universalization*, where [viewers] understand that their problems are not unique, and that they are capable of exploring different and effective methods for coping with them. (Joen, 1992; cited by Newton, 1995, p. 15)

Newton (1995) suggested that videos should be selected with care so that content is relevant to issues and needs and is likely to produce useful discussion either in individuals, in small groups, or for the whole class. It is important to note that several of the



Table 1
Films That May be Useful in Videotherapy

Behavioral Problems:	
<i>The Breakfast Club*</i>	<i>Lean on Me</i>
<i>Stand and Deliver</i>	<i>The Principal</i>
Disability:	
<i>Children of a Lesser God</i>	<i>The Man Without a Face</i>
<i>Dance With Me</i>	<i>Mask</i>
<i>Bridge to Silence</i>	<i>Forrest Gump</i>
<i>Ice Castles</i>	<i>My Left Foot</i>
<i>Annie's Coming Out</i>	<i>The Elephant Man</i>
African American:	
<i>Conrack*</i>	<i>Amistad</i>
<i>Roots</i>	
Social/Emotional Issues:	
<i>Dead Poets Society</i>	<i>Little Man Tate*</i>
<i>The Outsiders</i>	<i>Parenthood*</i>
<i>Real Genius*</i>	<i>Stand by Me</i>
<i>This Boy's Life</i>	<i>Rookie of the Year</i>
<i>With Honor</i>	<i>Star Trek</i>
<i>Babylon 5</i>	<i>Voyager</i>
<i>Star Wars</i>	<i>The Night Train to Katmandu</i>
Gifted Females:	
<i>Desert Bloom</i>	<i>Say Anything</i>
<i>An Angel at My Table</i>	<i>My Brilliant Career</i>
<i>Matilda</i>	<i>The Secret of Roan Inish</i>
<i>The Night Train to Katmandu</i>	<i>Contact</i>
<i>Ever After</i>	<i>Mulan</i>
Performing Arts:	
<i>Fame</i>	<i>Madame Sousatzka</i>
Process of Talent Development:	
<i>Searching for Bobby Fischer*</i>	<i>Contact</i>
<i>Shine</i>	<i>October Sky</i>

* Suggested by Newton (1995).

films have language and content that might be considered objectionable by some parents and students, so care should be taken to select unobjectionable segments that would highlight

social and emotional issues. Newton further indicated that videotherapy may be used in addition to bibliotherapy since students will watch films anyway, and a number of available films deal with most

themes, and issues, especially for gifted students. He further suggested that "movies appeal to visual learners, many of whom are members of minority groups or are underachievers" (p. 16), and they are accessible and relatively inexpensive to borrow. He suggested that teachers preview films and develop suitable questions and activities that may enhance the discussion or therapy process. Careful follow up is also important.

In addition to films suggested by Newton (1995), newer films are suggested for use in Table 1. Other suggested titles can be found in *Books in Print* (1998); Green's (1989) *Guide to Video Cassettes for Children*; Sleeman, Queenan, and Butlers' (1984) *200 Selected Film Classics for Children of All Ages: Where to Obtain Them and How to Use Them*; Peary's (1986) *Guide for the Film Fanatic*; and Nach's (1985) *The Motion Picture Guide*.

Additional sources include local monthly (e.g., "The Cable Guide," published by TVSM) or weekly television guides that usually provide synopses of films to be shown. Publications such as *Kid Vids: The Best Videos for Your Children* (Farley, 1998); *Videohounds Golden Movie Retriever-1998: The Complete Guide to Movies on Videocassette, Laserdisc, and CD* (Connors and Craddock 1998); *Facets Non-Violent, Non-Sexist Children's Video Guide* (Boyle, 1996); and catalogues produced by distributors such as A&E Home Video (South Burlington, VT), Columbia House (Terre Haute, IN), Ingram Entertainment (Demion, IA), PBS Home Video (Charlotte, NC), and Video Finders Collectors (Glendale, CA) are also helpful. Many more sources can be located by using Internet web sites (e.g., Find a Movie [<http://www.findamovie.com>]; and Hollywood Studios [<http://www.geocities.com/hollywood/studio/6391>]).

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**Sound, Camera,
and Action!**

Videotherapy may be used developmentally in counseling by teachers or clinicians who have completed appropriate coursework in counseling (see Schmitz & Galbraith, 1988; Silverman, 1993b). They should also have experimented with the videotherapy process, developed relevant strategies, and examined a range of video material to become aware of what is available and its appropriateness for different purposes. Once theme(s) or issue(s) have been identified, video resources can be identified and obtained. Careful previewing with specific objectives needs to occur so that content is clearly understood, appropriate segments identified, and questions and activities designed. Whether an entire film is shown and then discussed or whether clips are shown depends on the predetermined objectives, the maturity of the content, and the nature of the resources. For example, the films, *Shine*, *My Left Foot*, and *An Angel at My Table* are all controversial and mature and contain sections that are quite advanced and may be inappropriate for young students if the films were shown in their totality.

When exploring the process of achievement, entire films such as *Contact* or *Searching for Bobby Fischer* may be shown, and viewers may be asked to record key elements and reactions in personal journals (Hall, 1990, p. 2). To discuss and interpret these and other points, clips may then be replayed. Follow-up activities may include painting, creating three-dimensional constructs, writing and producing plays and video documentaries, writing articles or poetry, pursuing further research, locating additional film and other materials, surfing the Internet, and contacting user groups and likely mentors (with appropriate cautions) (Strot, 1997; Westberg, 1997).

Little Man Tate (1991)



Where issues are explored as a developmental activity for the whole group, as part of a program of awareness of the special needs of some children, as a therapeutic activity for a gifted child, or as part of a gifted enrichment program (Renzulli, 1994; Renzulli & Reis, 1997), the teacher may show and discuss specific clips from films such as *Little Man Tate*, *Dead Poets' Society*, *The Man Without A Face*, *Shine*, *Ice Castles*, *Mask*, *My Left Foot*, *Forrest Gump*, *Matilda*, *An Angel at My Table*, *My Brilliant Career*, and *The Color Purple*. Specific themes of interest or concern to students may be identified from curricular documents, by discussing with students their journal entries (Hall, 1990), or by asking students to complete an "Interest-A-Lyzer"

(Renzulli, 1994; Renzulli & Reis, 1997) or other instruments designed to explore students' social and emotional functioning, such as "The Children's Self Report and Projective Inventory" (Gust, 1996).

Summary

Technology moves quickly and can be applied in countless ways. The use of film as part of therapy for various groups of people can be traced to the early part of this century. Videotherapy, like bibliotherapy, may be used developmentally and clinically with individuals, groups, and entire classes. It can be particularly helpful for gifted students who may feel different, lonely, or isolated. Teachers, parents, and counselors who wish to use this approach need to understand the

principles and practices of counseling and its application to technology. Various resources have been cited in this article to facilitate this process. Time also needs to be spent exploring resources to understand how they may be used for particular purposes and the follow-up activities to be used. Planning is essential.

It is clear that an urgent need exists for better practices focusing on the developmental counseling, and applications of videotherapy in home, school, and counseling practices may address that need for gifted and talented students. The suggested films in this article provide an opportunity to address the social and emotional needs of gifted and talented students. ©©T

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