

# **Experience Sharing in Applying Cinematherapy as Part of the Affective Education among the Gifted Children, as Teacher Development and as Parent Education**

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## **Abstract**

Some gifted students were found to hide their talents intentionally or act as gifted underachievers in order to make friends with their nongifted peers. One teaching strategy of affective education is cinematherapy which aims to engage its viewers by using film strips. It was one of the many programmes offered by the Gifted Education Section of Education Bureau under a seed project with schools which promised to provide services to their gifted students. The activity, jointly organized by the government and the tertiary institute, later on turned out to be a large scale event which targeted at gifted students, their parents and teachers of the member schools of the project. The film “Finding Forrester” was chosen as it highlighted the gifted characteristics of underachievement and hidden talents and emphasized the importance of friendship. Three post-session panel discussions were held after the film-show for three different groups of audience. The event was well received with over 400 students, teachers, school social workers and parents. The guest speakers had a good exchange with their audience by sharing their own ideas. It is hoped that the successful event could act as a pilot so that member schools could replicate the activity for their gifted students.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Implementation of affective education as part of gifted education has long been a dream for curriculum developers, academics, frontline teachers and parents of the gifted and talented children. Various strategies addressing the affective domain have

been tried out but the activities that are integrated into students' daily lives such as literature reading, film show and art appreciation are found more effective. Through the joint effort of the government and the universities with the assistance of sponsoring bodies, a large scale event on using film strips to provide gifted students with social and emotional education was launched in May 2005. The activity, with its appropriate programme design, was not only able to benefit the students but also later on turned out to be a teacher professional development and a parent education event as the film strip itself was found to serve multi-purposes for different groups of target audience. What made the event successful was the post-session panel discussion in which the guest speakers according to their roles tried to share their experience with their own target audience. This combination of student learning, teacher development and parent education was organized for the first time in Hong Kong to achieve such purposes.

Similar to students with special education needs, gifted children have unique counseling needs related to peer relationships, emotional adjustment, social adjustment and stress management which includes individual differences, questions of labeling effect, human relational problems, perfectionism and conflicts arising from competition in various aspects (Moon, 2003, p. 389). Counselling gifted students is built on their social and emotional issues. One of the teaching strategies of social and

emotional education is cinematherapy which aims to engage the viewers of the film strip in the scene of the film and counsel them through the correct teaching from the gifted experts (Nugent, 2005, p. 24). However, it is not easy to apply such a therapy for gifted children. One of the difficulties was to find a film strip with its theme on some of the characteristics of the gifted and talented and which bears positive moral teaching for both gifted and nongifted students. Another difficulty may lie in the quality of the guest speakers of the panel discussion sessions. The success of the event also depends on the appropriateness of these speakers and the message they convey to their audience.

### **Background**

The Education and Manpower Bureau (now known as Education Bureau) invited both primary and secondary schools in the public sector to join a collaborative, research and development project (also known as Seed project internally) to provide various forms of programmes and curriculum for gifted students in their schools. The Gifted Education Section was responsible for launching the seed project and promised to provide support to schools which joined the project by offering resources and manpower in developing school-based gifted curriculum. The curriculum officers of the section would then work with the school teachers to plan and implement the school-based pull-out programmes for their students identified to be gifted or talented.

Under the agreement, besides providing on-site support, the Gifted Education Section also promised to run a series of students' activities, teacher training courses/seminars and parent education seminars for the students, teachers and parents of the member schools respectively.

Among the various students' activities, there was one activity called "Finding Forrester" which aimed to use a film strip with its theme focusing on some of the characteristics of being gifted to counsel the gifted students of the member schools of the project. A panel discussion was held after the film show. A guest speaker who used to be a gifted underachiever but now a young writer was invited to share his feelings and experience with the students. The film strip "Finding Forrester" was chosen as the gifted characteristics of underachievement and revealing hidden potential could be clearly identified in the film and be taken as the foci of the event.

These foci could be extracted from the story of the film strip as:

"Friendship could be its moral teaching but was found all over the story".

The details of the story can be found in the "Facets of Finding Forrester" (Appendix 1).

### **Rationale**

Some gifted students were reported to hide their talents intentionally or deliberately in order to maintain their friendship with their nongifted peers. Their

potential may never be discovered until some opportunities come along. Watching a film with suitable discussions may surface some gifted characteristics. Cinematherapy might be one of the many solutions to reveal some of the potentiality of gifted children as some gifted underachievers are talented in writing but weak in other disciplines.

### **Purpose of the event**

In order to help parents, teachers, social workers and community folks to understand the problems of affective education of gifted children, the Education and Manpower Bureau with the collaboration of the course *Nurturing the Gifted and Talents* of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University organized a film show which comprises the functions of parent education, teacher development and student learning seminar in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University called “Finding Forrester” to meet the needs of these stakeholders. The main purpose of the event was to investigate the characteristics of the students who were gifted in writing with other learning experiences through watching a film called “Finding Forrester”. Besides film-watching, a post-session discussion was held and speakers were invited to share on the topic so that students, teachers, social workers and parents could have a deeper understanding of the characteristics of gifted children and the underachievers and on how to provide affective education for this group of students.

## **PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION**

The decision later on turned out to be an event open to all students, teachers and social workers, and parents of the member schools under a Seed project. When the curriculum officers of the Education and Manpower Bureau approached the coordinator, Mrs Helen Yu, of the course, *Nurturing the Gifted and Talents* of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, for cooperation, she proposed to extend the audience to teachers and parents of the gifted children. The university then became the co-organiser with the Gifted Education Section of the former Education and Manpower Bureau when the venue was taken inside the campus of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

The organizing committee decided to broadcast the film in three venues at the same time with three different kinds of audience, namely, the gifted students, their teachers and parents. A panel discussion was held after the film-show. Guest speakers were invited for all three venues. Mrs. Yu, accompanied by a famous film director, was one of the panel speakers in the teacher-social worker session. In the parent session, a famous radio disc jockey and a secondary school principal were invited to share with the parents. A school principal and a young writer, who had a similar experience as Jamal Wallace, the main character of the film, "Finding Forrester", was

invited to talk to the gifted students in the third venue.

### **Reasons for choosing “Find Forrester”**

When selecting a certain film for teaching, a teacher should identify the social/emotional characteristic(s) to be targeted for discussion. The reason for choosing this film as the teaching material was because the film conveys some of the characteristics of the gifted children.

### **The story of the film**

Jamal Wallace: An intellectually gifted African American high school student who prefers to hide his intellect because of basketball with his peers in New York City

William Forrester: a famous writer-turned-recluse who befriends Jamal and helps him with his writing and self-discovery

This film deals with conformity and masking talent: there is contradiction between Jamal’s behaviour and what his score shows. He tends to hide his intellect in order to fit in with his play-pals. This film also deals with Empathy and Challenge to Authority. It discusses the teaching methods that are more effective for gifted children who are frequently challenging the teachers’ authority, and presents coping skills for teachers. The film also presents stereotyping. What is the root of stereotyping when Jamal is accused of cheating on his essay?

Discussion questions were set based on the needs of the different groups of audience. One example was quoted in the parent session as follows:

“What kind of affective education are we going to offer the students with writing talent and other learning areas?”

The Hong Kong Edcity was approached to provide support in publicity and labour in videotaping. All three discussion sessions were later uploaded to its website. The university was responsible for all the logistics for the venues and the Gifted Education Section for purchasing the DVD and clearance of the copyright. Distribution of pamphlets and school circulars was also part of the job of the government department (Appendix 1)

## **RESULTS**

For details on the three panel discussion sessions for parents, teacher and social workers, and students, please refer to the following website:

[http://www.hkedcity.net/article/parent\\_sp\\_talent/050811-001/](http://www.hkedcity.net/article/parent_sp_talent/050811-001/)

By referring to the evaluation completed by the two parties, the event was found to be a great success with a total audience over 400 including nearly 200 parents, 116 teachers and social workers, and more than 80 students from various schools. The event was well received by the speakers, audience and the volunteers. The film itself

aroused discussion in the three kinds of audience facilitated by the speakers. The discussion session of the teacher-social worker group continued way beyond the allocated time.. Most of the participants stayed until the end of the discussion. Even students were found fully attentive and engaged in their discussion session which was quite interactive. Volunteers from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University were helpful and busy with guiding the audience back and forth among the three venues. Comments from the teachers and parents were mostly positive. All the parties involved were satisfied with the process and outcome of the event.

## **EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP WORK**

This large scale event was organized for the first time in Hong Kong whereby a government department collaborated with a tertiary institute to use film to deliver affective education for gifted and talented students. At the same time, teachers, school social workers and parents benefited from the post-session panel discussions. The programme was a resounding success and received great support from the government, academics, teachers and parents. It then went on to achieve high recognition and publicity through their participation. This activity would be enacted next year by using the same approach but with a different film as the medium for cinematherapy.

This event could act as a role model for the member schools of the seed project. They could choose other film strips such as “A Beautiful Mind”. When selecting a certain film for teaching, a teacher should identify the social/emotional characteristic(s) to be targeted for discussion. Upon completion of the film watching, allow students to share their observation and feelings about the story. Debrief the students on appropriate affective domain of reconciling the real and the ideal such as perfectionism, extremity, over-sensitivity, overexcitability, being different, and multipotentiality.

## **REFERENCES**

- Moon, S. M. (2003) Counseling Families, in Colangelo, N. and Davis, G.A. (eds.) *Handbook of Gifted Education, third edition*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Nugent S. A. (2005) *Social & Emotional Teaching Strategies*. Waco, Texas: Prufrock Press, Inc.

## APPENDIX 1

# *FACETS of FINDING FORRESTER*

### *The Story*

Jamal Wallace is a talented 16-year-old basketball player in New York City whose secret passion is writing. William Forrester is a reclusive Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist\* who never gave the world a second novel. After an accidental meeting, Forrester becomes Jamal's unlikely mentor, providing guidance to help develop the young man's exceptional skills. Soon, Forrester's harsh view of the world begins to change as both men learn lessons from each other about life – and the importance of friendship.

### *Words from the Screenwriter*

The inspiration for the film FINDING FORRESTER came from an observation by screenwriter Mike Rich.

Rich: "I was doing an interview with someone who had done very interesting profiles on some of America's greatest authors, and I noticed a trend emerge. So many of America's greatest writers, J.D. Salinger or Thomas Pynchon, for example, were eccentric, reclusive types. I thought a story that showed how someone helped a great writer break through the barrier of isolation and re-enter the world would make a terrific story. It struck me that it would be even more interesting if the person who brings the writer out is someone young – a teenager, for example – who is also in some way gifted."

### *Words from the Critics*

"A brilliant film full of humanity, love and discovery." (Bill Zwecker, Fox-TV, Chicago). FINDING FORRESTER opened theatrically on December 19, 2000 in the United States.

## *The Cast*

Academy Award<sup>®</sup> – winner Sean Connery\* stars in this powerful and unforgettable drama from acclaimed director Gus Van Sant (Good Will Hunting, To Die For). With a strong cast including Academy Award<sup>®</sup> – winner F. Murray Abraham\*\* (Amadeus, Last Action Hero) and Anna Paquin\*\*\* (The Piano, X-Men), the film also features rap music superstar Busta Rhymes (Shaft) and an incredible performance from talented newcomer Rob Brown.

\*The [Pulitzer Prizes](#) for journalism, literature, music and [drama](#) were established by the 1904 will of Joseph Pulitzer, a 19th century journalist. Administered by the Columbia School of Journalism, the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction is awarded "for distinguished fiction by an American author, preferably dealing with American life." Each winner receives a gold medal as well as a cash award. Many Pulitzer Prize Winners go on to receive other literary awards such as the [Nobel Prize in Literature](#).