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# Cinemeducation: Teaching Family Assessment Skills Using Full-Length Movies

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## Cinemeducation: Teaching Family Assessment Skills Using Full Length Movies

### **Abstract**

A thorough family assessment provides a foundation for the nursing process when working with families. Therefore, nurses, along with other health care providers must develop expertise in conducting family assessments in order to provide the best possible care within the community. This article describes an innovative educational strategy using movies to teach family assessment skills and puts forth recommendations for future research to provide evidence to support this teaching modality.

Key words: family assessment, movies, nursing education

### Cinemeducation: Teaching Family Assessment Skills Using Full Length Movies

Historically, nursing education has focused on individual clients and nursing care provided within acute care settings. However, in today's healthcare environment many clients are discharged home with an ongoing need for nursing care. Because nurses collaborate with families when providing care in the hospital and at home, it is vital that nurses understand how to conduct a comprehensive family assessment. An in-depth family assessment assists nurses in developing a plan of care that takes into account attributes of the family and the environment in which they live. This information is useful when collaborating with other health care providers.

The traditional method for developing family assessment skills in undergraduate nursing education is to have students interface with a primary client and family over several home visits. However, facilitating this experience by nursing faculty has become increasingly difficult. Contributing factors include enactment of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), escalating violence within some communities, and decreased receptiveness of clients to have home visits by students. In addition, the nursing shortage has increased the number of students enrolled in nursing programs, which compounds faculty's ability to recruit an adequate number of appropriate families. Therefore, finding families within the community to teach family assessment has become a challenge. The purpose of this paper is to describe how movies were effectively integrated into an undergraduate community health nursing course to teach family assessment skills.

### **Movies and Nursing Education**

Learning is optimized when students develop metacognitive strategies (thinking about thinking) (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Educators need to be mindful that effective learning is associated with three types of memory: working, sensory, and long-term. Working memory is where the thinking gets done; sensory memory is experiencing the world through the human senses; and long-term memory is unlimited storage of information (Cisco Systems, 2008). Therefore, selecting effective learning activities should take into account these three aspects of memory.

A critical task of educators today is to help students learn through a variety of channels and involve students in problem solving that lead to effective learning (Weir, 2008). Researchers have found that a combination of books and videos can greatly influence learning (Cisco Systems, 2008; Kozma, 1994) and students have become accustomed to the use of video as a component of the learning environment (The New Media Consortium, 2008). Consequently, educators from a variety of disciplines are increasing the use of video, such as film clips and movies, as an education modality (Baharay, 2008; Hart, 2011; King, 2002; Simpson, 2008; Thomas & Mulvey, 2008; Villalba & Redmond, 2008; Weinstein, 2001; Zauderer & Ganzer, 2011).

Healthcare educators employ movies to teach a wide range of learners: medical students, mental health counselors, family doctors, psychiatrists, family therapists, and dentists (Alexander, Leahan, & Pavlov, 2005; Bell, 2009; Furst, 2007; Klemenc-Ketis, & Kersnik, 2011; Volandes, 2007; Wedding, Boyd, & Niemiec, 2005). In nursing education, movies have been used in teaching mental health, pediatrics, nursing management, and community health

(Carpenter, Stevenson, & Carson, 2008; DiBartolo & Seldomridge, 2009; Hart, 2011; Higgins & Lantz, 1997; Hyde & Fife, 2005; Griffith, 2011; Masters, 2005; Stringfield, 1999). The literature indicates nurse educators have successfully used movies to augment educational experiences.

Masters (2005) described viewing films as an alternative to clinical time in a mental health nursing course. Prior to viewing films, students were instructed to watch for certain behaviors, such as auditory hallucinations and violence. After the experience, students completed a 12-item instrument evaluating the assignment. The film experience was highly rated by students for learning and enjoyment. In a psychiatric nursing course, brief clips from popular films were used to bring the textbook description of psychiatric symptoms and interventions to life (Kerber, Clemens, & Medina, 2004). Students were encouraged to select a film that corresponded to the theory content from class. After completing a written, critical thinking assignment using films, students reported a better understanding of theory and found it to be a fun way to learn. Films have also been used in a nursing course to depict neurological and psychopathological disorders (Hyde & Fife, 2005). Students were assigned the task of executing a nursing assessment, developing priority diagnoses, nursing interventions, and client outcomes. The authors developed an assessment tool to evaluate the teaching strategy. Student evaluations indicated that this was a positive experience. DiBartolo and Seldomridge (2009), successfully taught end-of-life issues to 165 nursing students using movies. This experience was evaluated based on the quality of the paper written by the students. Grades ranged from A to D with the majority receiving a grade of C. Overall, the majority of the students were able to identify the stages of grief depicted by the characters in the movies used. According to the authors, most of the students expressed that the “films were helpful in gaining a deeper appreciation—from the

patient's point of view—of the complex emotions and issues that can emerge at the end of life” (p. 34).

Movies also have been used in a nursing management course to facilitate learning business concepts. After viewing the film *Wall Street*, students were asked to answer questions and be prepared to discuss them in class. When students were tested, they were able to recall the film, lecture notes, and textbook (Stringfield, 1999). This facilitated the students' ability to answer test questions correctly. Higgins and Lantz (1997) used films to teach developmental concepts in a pediatric nursing course. Students were asked to analyze how *The Lion King* depicts developmental passage from childhood to young adulthood. This creative writing exercise was viewed positively by the students as it increased awareness of growth and development. In a nursing family health systems course, films were successfully used in a reflective learning activity (Parker & Faulk, 2004). The objective was to use critical thinking and the nursing process to plan holistic care. The educational strategy included viewing movies, discussion, and assigning questions which enabled students to develop critical thinking skills.

Within nursing education, film clips and movies have been used over time as a successful teaching tool to facilitate discussion and stimulate critical thinking skills. However, there is no evidence that movies have been used to teach family assessment skills in nursing. Therefore, it was not unrealistic to consider using cinemeducation as a teaching modality.

### **Teaching Family Assessment**

In a community health nursing course, senior level undergraduate students were required to complete a family assessment assignment as a part of their clinical practicum. Historically, students in the clinical practicum were assigned to work with families receiving services from clinical agencies. Permission to make home visits was obtained from the clinical agency, family, and faculty. In order to thoroughly assess the family and complete the assignment, students would make three to four home visits during a six-week period. As a part of the family assessment, students completed a family assessment tool and wrote a scholarly paper about the family. The criteria for writing the paper required students to: (a) identify a primary client within the family, (b) use a family theory to describe the family, (c) prioritize the primary client and family needs, (d) generate nursing diagnoses, (e) develop nursing interventions guided by nursing theory, (f) propose a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions, and (g) discuss actual and/or potential outcomes.

The challenges in soliciting and obtaining suitable families for students necessitated faculty seeking an alternate approach. After several faculty discussions and exploration of the literature, the decision was made to use families from movies. The family assessment assignment was modified to reflect this teaching modality. Three components of the new assignment had to be addressed: selection of movies, modification of the family assessment tool, and revision of the grading criteria for the family paper.

The first step was to select movies that were identified through faculty discussions, literature reviews, and Internet searches. To meet the criteria for selection, each movie had to portray some type of family structure and include at least one health related issue. There was

consensus among faculty that no animated or science fiction movies could be used and each student would view a different movie. Faculty created a master list that included a synopsis of each movie and its Motion Picture Association of America film rating (This system rates a movie's thematic and content suitability for viewing audiences). By creating this list, students were provided with information in order to make a selection consistent with personal values or beliefs. Faculty distributed the movie list on the first day of class. Examples of movies chosen included *Stepmom*, *Million Dollar Baby*, and *A Beautiful Mind* (see Table 1).

Many of the selected movies not only focused on a health problem impacting the family, but also included health issues or problems that could ultimately influence the public's health. For example, the film *Philadelphia* is about a lawyer living with AIDS. The movie reflects not only his personal experiences but also how society views or reacts to someone who is living with a stigmatized disease. In *Lorenzo's Oil*, the parents are trying to cope with their son's genetic disorder, adrenoleukodystrophy (ADL) and struggle in getting their son appropriate medical care within a health care system that knows little about the disease and even less about treatment.

After the movie list was compiled, faculty modified the existing family assessment tool. This tool was used to collect demographic, developmental, physiological, psychological, sociocultural, and environmental data about the family. The family assessment tool was adapted to collect observational data and accommodate inferences that students would likely make about the family. These changes were necessary because students could no longer ask questions about family health patterns and probe health histories. For example, in the past students asked the family about their eating behaviors. However, by viewing a movie, students could only observe the family's eating habits and draw conclusions. If eating habits were not observed in the movie,



the students must come up with a proxy for that assessment data, such as observing the physical appearance of the client (e.g., weight, skin color, muscle mass) to approximate nutritional status.

Finally, faculty revised the grading criteria for the family assessment paper (see Table 2). The revisions provided clarity for students in writing the scholarly paper. The major headings in the new grading criteria included: *Presentation of the Family; Assessment of the Family and Prioritization of Needs; Identification of Nursing Diagnoses, Nursing Interventions, and Evaluation Plan; and Structure and Organization of Paper*. Under each heading, students were provided with detailed information about what content to include. The revised grading criteria mirrored the original criteria, developed when the family paper was based on students interacting with real-time families.

Students were encouraged to follow the grading criteria closely and use data contained in the *Family Health Assessment Guide* to support the narrative. In developing nursing interventions, students were instructed to view the movie and select a situation where they could intervene as a professional community health nurse. The students identified priority needs, selected appropriate nursing diagnoses, generated nursing interventions, developed an evaluation plan, and discussed expected outcomes. It was strongly recommended that students describe specific scenes from the film to support observations and inferences made. Faculty grading papers were required to view each movie to become familiar with the family being assessed; thereby enhancing their ability to provide appropriate guidance and feedback to students during development of the paper.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The students' family assessment papers based on movies were well-written, reflected appropriate application of family theory, and included thorough family assessment data. Faculty concluded that students were able to complete substantive papers comparable to work submitted by former students who assessed families in real-time situations from the community, especially in the application of theory, identification of needs, generating appropriate nursing diagnoses, and development of nursing interventions. Based on these findings, it is reasonable to conclude that movies can be used in nursing education to teach or strengthen family assessment skills.

A major challenge for nursing students conducting family assessments was to identify theoretical underpinnings that support the assessment of needs and the establishment of nursing diagnoses and interventions. The family assessment assignment helped students think critically and link theory with family assessment, nursing diagnoses, and interventions. Movies could also be used to strengthen family assessment skills as part of a continuing education program. However, would not require the learner to write a formal paper, but understanding family theory and its relationship to nursing actions, identifying needs of the primary client and family, and formulating appropriate family diagnoses and interventions would continue to be key components of the educational experience. Without family assessment skills, nurses are not able to effectively teach clients how to prevent or manage healthcare problems that affect them, their families, and ultimately the community.

Movies create a controlled environment where students can learn to assess a family and improve their observational skills. Students have the opportunity to view a movie several times to ensure accuracy of data collected. However, movies have limitations. One limitation in using

movies is students are sometimes forced to make inferences about what they observe and do not have the opportunity to ask questions or probe for additional information. Therefore, it is recommended that nursing educators and students meet periodically to discuss their perceptions about the movie. In a continuing education program, clips from selected movies can be used by the instructor to stimulate discussions. In selecting movies, nurse educators must be sensitive to diverse values and beliefs held by students. Also, educators need to be mindful that sometimes movies portray a simplistic view of family dynamics as opposed to the complex interactions that community health nurses typically encounter.

### **Recommended Research to Support Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies**

The following three research designs could be utilized to gather data to support the use of movies in teaching family assessment skills. The posttest only design (after-only design) where data are gathered after an intervention (the use of movies) could be used to determine the effectiveness of the educational strategy. A carefully designed instrument would be needed to elicit both increased knowledge of family assessment skills and participants' perception of family assessment skills in their future practice. In addition, focus groups could be conducted to elicit additional information related to the effectiveness of the teaching modality.

Another research design that will provide evidence is the pretest-posttest design (before-after design). Again the instrument used would have to address knowledge of family assessment skills and perceptions of how the knowledge gained could be used in practice. A comparison could be made of the participants' knowledge and perceptions before using a movie to conduct family assessment skills and then after viewing the movie.

A stronger research design would be quasi-experimental. One group of nurses or nursing students could be randomly selected to make home visits and then conduct a family assessment. A second group would view movies and conduct a family assessment. An instrument that can be used to compare family assessment skills between the groups would have to be developed. To prevent contamination, it would be beneficial if the two groups were at different sites or academic campuses. In all three research designs, psychometric properties must be established for all newly developed instruments that are used to measure family assessment knowledge and skills.

### **Conclusion**

It is important that nurse educators in the community and academia continue to keep abreast of best practices in teaching nurses about the importance of integrating an assessment of not only the primary client, but also the family into their daily practice. Using movies to teach family assessment skills to undergraduate nursing students has been found to be a sound educational strategy and can easily be adapted for use in continuing education programs. The community health faculty members who developed and use this innovative teaching strategy believe the benefits of using movies to teach family assessment skills outweigh the limitations identified. There is a paucity of nursing literature related to evidence-based teaching strategies. The authors concur there is a need to add evidence-based teaching strategies to nursing curricula.

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**Table 1. Sample of Selected Movies**

<b>Title of Movie</b>	<b>Health Issue</b>	<b>Film Rating</b>
<i>Forrest Gump</i>	Orthopedics	PG-13
<i>Juno</i>	Teenage pregnancy	PG-13
<i>Lorenzo's Oil</i>	Genetic disorder	PG-13
<i>Million Dollar Baby</i>	Trauma/Paralysis	PG-13
<i>My Sister's Keeper</i>	Cancer	PG-13
<i>Outbreak</i>	Infectious disease (airborne virus)	R
<i>Philadelphia</i>	Infectious disease (HIV/AIDS)	PG-13
<i>Rain Man</i>	Mental Health	R
<i>Steel Magnolias</i>	Diabetes	PG
<i>Stepmom</i>	Cancer	PG-13

**Table 2. Grading Criteria for Family Assessment Paper**

Points	Criteria
15 points	<p><b>Presentation of the Family</b></p> <p>A. Provide a brief overview of the film. Introduce all family members and identify general family structure and processes, including family interaction patterns. Identify one member of the family that you will focus upon as your primary client.</p> <p>B. Include a computer-generated ecomap in the appendix of the paper.</p> <p>C. Analyze ecomap being specific regarding the family's relationship to the environment</p>
35 points	<p><b>Assessment of Family and Prioritization of Needs</b></p> <p>A. Identify the family theoretical framework that you will use to assess the family as a whole. Provide a rationale for your choice of theory.</p> <p>B. Use your family theory to provide a structure for presenting your assessment data for the family and the primary client, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical and psychosocial condition</li> <li>• Environmental and sociocultural factors; values, beliefs, and rituals.</li> <li>• Nutritional status and medications (when applicable)</li> <li>• Use of health care resources and/or alternative medicine</li> <li>• Medical diagnoses (when applicable)</li> <li>• How client's condition affects the family and their reactions</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family perceptions of health</li> <li>• Strengths of the family</li> </ul> <p>C. Identify and prioritize needs of both the family and the individual client (a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 <u>each</u> for family and client)</p>
30 points	<p><b>Identification of Nursing Diagnoses, Interventions, and Evaluation Plan</b></p> <p>A. Identify one nursing theory as a framework for your nursing diagnoses and interventions. Provide a rationale for your choice of theory</p> <p>B. Based on the identified needs, generate appropriate nursing diagnoses (in complete NANDA format) for each. Be sure that the relationship between need and nursing diagnosis is clearly articulated in the narrative</p> <p>C. Identify one priority need for both the family and the primary client. Provide rationales for your choice. Develop nursing interventions to address both the family's and client's priority needs. Develop a plan for evaluating the effectiveness of your interventions</p>
20 points	<p><b>Structure and Organization of Paper</b></p> <p>A. Content is developed logically, expressed clearly, and good mechanics of writing are exemplified throughout the paper.</p> <p>B. Use A.P.A. Format, 6<sup>th</sup> edition.</p> <p>C. Sufficient references must be included to support ideas. Reference list must include current articles from four different professional journals, one family theory textbook, and one nursing theory textbook</p>