Case Studies from Literature and Movies: A Best Practice for Learning

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Pedagogy today has a greater need to focus on relevance for students between course content and the real world of student life and work. Educators across disciplines have found a challenge to engage students in learning activities that carry value for them. The case study is a pedagogical tool that can connect student learning to real life examples. Narratives from books and movies present characters and situations that provide opportunity for student analysis within course concepts and student application to both personal and professional experience. Students enter example experiences that they might encounter and gain insight of potential response. This qualitative study examined graduate course work with case studies in Life-span Development, Multi-cultural Counseling, and Traumatology in which students reviewed books and movies with case examples aligned with course content. The instructor provided structured analysis format in which students were required to reflect on both personal and professional application relevant to the focus of the course. Student responses indicated perception of strong value for insight and application gained from the case studies and also high perception of use of these as tools in their own future work as educators or mental health professionals.

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Two needs with good pedagogy in graduate education today seem to be relevance to the real world of the student and student active engagement with the learning process. In yesteryear, the norm may have been lecture, note-taking, and examination. Yesteryear also had fewer students in pursuit of collegiate and especially graduate education. Machovec (2017) noted that while high school graduating classes are getting smaller, the percentage of those students going to college is getting larger. This trend aligns with the historical shift from agricultural to industrial to information-age worldviews. A growing concern is a trend toward overeducation and underemployment of young adults (Li & Simonson, 2015). Li, et al. (2015) indicated that 48 percent of workers were overeducated for their job positions.

A challenge for educators in all disciplines is to engage students in academic endeavor that has perceived value for the student. LeDuc and Kotzer (2009) conducted a study with current nursing students, recent graduates, and seasoned nurses on their professional values. They found that across all three groups, competence, collaboration, and peer-evaluation were considered as the most important professional values—all indicating relevance in real-world application.

The Case Study is often used as a tool of pedagogy across disciplines to connect student learning to real-life examples for constructs. Jaffe (2017) eloquently described the Case Study as a “Case and Frame” process (p. 285). The case is the central narrative of a work and the frame is the lens through which the learner examines and analyzes this narrative. Sankar and Raju (2011) conducted a study at two major universities with students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses where multiple case studies were used as core of class work. The findings indicated strong benefits with many desired outcomes of education, such as improvement in higher order and critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, and self-efficacy.

A plethora of resources exist in the narratives of literature and film for use in pedagogy across multiple disciplines. These narratives present both characters and situations to whom students can relate through their own experiences or through potential experiences they might encounter in their future work with scenarios or people. As students learn in the classroom from the narratives in both literature and film, they also gain awareness of use of these in future professional application. A value of these resources is that they are timeless, much as the basic needs of people are timeless. This supports the integration of narratives from both yesteryear and today as well as research completed in both past and current decades.

Background

Literature review provides support for the efficacy of integration of case studies with pedagogy across multiple disciplines. While these can be developed by faculty, many case studies can be drawn from existing literature or film. The focus of study with this article is on integration of such cases with three courses within graduate education—human growth and development, multicultural counseling, and traumatology. Some core background is included on these as well.

Case Studies as Tools of Pedagogy

A learning theory that is most applicable to use of case studies is that of Constructivism. Kumar (2011) noted several factors that must be present for a teaching experience to also be a learning experience. Kumar aligned the presence of these with use of Realistic Constructivism. Most pertinent with case studies were (a) engagement of the learner’s mind, (b) accounting for prior knowledge of the student, and (c) provision of learner-driven curriculum in which the learner is guided through a step sequence toward higher knowledge construction per the individual learner’s needs (p. 530).

Marsh, Butler, and Umanath (2012) discussed the process of integration of fictional material into classroom learning. They noted the value of resources such as novels, television shows, video games and plays. Marsh, et al. shared several reasons for the value of these tools—support for student visualization of course content, stimulation of discussion, and growth in perspective taking (p. 450). This use of fiction could provide lessons learned in both life application examples to follow as well as life application examples to avoid as students examine the choices and consequences experienced by the characters of the fictional narratives.

One use of case studies is provision of role models for best practice of a profession. Bos-Bonnie, van Bergen, Pas, Kijser, and van Diik (2017) used video-taped case studies for analysis of role models in training of medical general practitioners. Bos-Bonnie, et al. described a role model as “persons a learner can identify with, who are in a position that the learner wants to be in, and who master skills that the learner wants to master” (p. 3). While

this study used videos of selected professional role models, many such role models are also available through the narratives of literature and film.

Cases from Literature

The use of spoken narratives for the teaching of life lessons began as early as the use of parables in the teaching of Jesus Christ and the use of the *Iliad* for learning in multiple subjects. As the written word became more available to more people, narratives about the experiences of people continued to be a venue for learning. Marsh, et al. (2012) noted that a frequent goal of a story is for the reader to be transported into the story such that the reader feels a part of it. This can provide both supportive and non-supportive learning in that transportation could lessen the student's conscious connection to course constructs. This necessitates structured guidance of analysis from the instructor.

Gouthro and Holloway (2013) noted the value of using lessons from fiction with adult education. They indicated that reading of fiction tends to be a lifelong endeavor for many adults anyway and that fiction provides a modality for exploration of alternative perspectives and experiences than their own. Reading of fiction can also acquaint the reader with the nuances of social, cultural, or political issues in a way other than the daily news (p. 42). Use of fiction has long been used with guided analysis from instructors for all levels of education. Children in elementary schools engage in Accelerated Reading programs with structured examination of stories per their reading levels. High school and university language arts classes examine social themes in age-old novels.

Cases from Movies

Kumar (2011) noted that the use of multimedia such as film provides constructs that have useful similarity to life as experienced by the learner now or perhaps in the future. As such, these could stimulate useful insight and application for the learner. As Kumar indicated, "Not only does the learner have fun with the multimedia tools, but they also get a rich environment for knowledge construction"(p. 532).

Heston and Kottman (1997) found value in use of case studies from movies as metaphors with the practice of counseling. They found that this application helped clients to gain insight into their respective issues and also awareness of potential pathways for positive change with issue resolution. They defined a metaphor as "phrases, images, or story lines that symbolize, through analogy, another object, idea, person, situation, or relationship" (p. 2165). Through this application, the viewer as student or client could initially sense the similarity of experience as when looking at self in a mirror. The educator could then guide the student into consideration of relevance from the narrative beyond that initial perceived similarity.

Human Growth and Development

An examination of course work required for most college majors at the undergraduate through graduate level indicate inclusion of a course in human growth and development. Such a course typically includes examination of developmental factors at stages of life from conception through childhood, adolescence, various levels of adulthood, and death. The factors examined are most typically cognitive, physical, social, and emotional. Some course also integrate developmental parameters such as cultural and spiritual. Santrock (2018) describes the study of human growth and development as an examination of "the rhythm and meaning of people's lives and the weaving of a portrait of who each of us was, is, and will be" (p. 1). The stories portrayed in books and film offer rich elements of these portraits across humanity.

Key to the process of human growth and development is the mutual impact between the individual and the world around the individual. Danner (2015) noted several facets of this:

- (1) Variability in development is socially organized per social structure placement of individuals and their interactional processes. (p. 210)
- (2) Influence of the context on the person is usually greater than influence of the person on the context. (p. 212).
- (3) Individuals are producers of their own development and the social world in which they operate. (p. 212)

This mutual impact between learner and life context supports the potential for personal and professional growth as the learner gains insight from integration of stories from literature and film. There is also the potential for stimulation of the learner to then act on that insight in service to the people or issues around the learner.

Multicultural Competence

As the presence of cultural diversity increases across communities of the world, professionals across multiple disciplines are required to adequately adapt to and serve that cultural diversity. The U.S. Department of Education and leading education organizations such as the National Educators Association (NEA) have emphasized a need for educators to be culturally competent. Szucs, Shipley, McNeill, Houseman, and Vinal (2019) examined the role of cultural immersion experiences as way to promote growth of cultural competence for pre-service teachers. Szucs, et al. noted that “immersion activities required individuals to integrate into a culture, interact with people, and develop an understanding of the way that they live” (p. 70). This immersion could facilitate the transportation discussed by Marsh, et al. (2012) earlier. The study by Szucs, et al. provided an immersion experience with which students noted growth in awareness of both commonalities and differences within cultures that they could work with in their future teaching.

The profession of counseling has emphasized the need for multicultural competence for many years. Pedersen, Lonner, Draguns, Trimble, and Scharron-del Rio. (2016) described multiple issues that could arise with clients per cultural diversity and understanding or lack thereof between and individual and presence with different cultures in daily life such as with school, work, or even community of residence. Examples of these issues were privilege and oppression, acculturation, marginalization, and disempowered social class positions.

As noted by Szucs, et al. (2019), a priority of emphasis has been placed on integration of development of multicultural competence across disciplines in higher education programs. Each educator or counselor may not have benefit of immersion in all potential cultures of future students or clients. Neither will they have the opportunity to work with or experience personally issues such as marginalization or disempowered social class. This exposure and immersion can be facilitated more fully through integration of case studies from literature and film.

Traumatology

Friedman (2015) provided a current definition of trauma as “a catastrophic event (or series of events) in which individuals have been exposed to situations in which they were personally threatened or witnessed death, physical harm, or sexual violence” (p. 2). Friedman noted that trauma could include indirect exposure as well as direct exposure such as trauma experience of a family member or repeated exposure to the consequences of trauma such as experienced by professionals who help with the aftermath of accidents or violence.

There has been a growth in work among mental health professionals with persons experiencing trauma. While much attention has been given to the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) with military veterans, mental health professionals also work with traumatic experiences such as sexual abuse, domestic violence, natural disaster, or chronic poverty. Sanderson (2013) noted the frequency of reports of such experiences in the daily news to the extent that “a climate change in how systematic sexual violence against women, children and men is viewed and tolerated” (p. 11). Sanderson called for an increase in awareness of the impact of these trauma events on primary and secondary victims and survivors.

Disasters can provide both direct and indirect exposure to trauma. Jacobs, Gray, Erickson, Gonzalez, and Quevillon (2016) noted the capacity for disaster to occur unexpectedly such as with hurricanes, tornadoes, or acts of war. Jacobs, et al discussed the needs for mental health professionals to be prepared to help with impact of disasters from advance preparation such as coping strategy plans to support of recovery and healing even several years post disaster. A key facet of this help was the purposeful integration of strengths of those helped.

As with the developmental experience of multiple stages of human development and with the variety of cultures in the world, professionals from disciplines such as education or mental health could not personally experience or even live close to a vast multitude of traumatic experiences or events. Vicarious learning and insight could be gained and built upon through the integration of case studies from literature or film. Hillsburg (2017) provided many examples of narratives of abduction and prolonged captivity of young women in both literature and film as the notion of a damsel in distress.

Methodology

While the use of literature and movies provides endless opportunity for learning, the focus of this article is on examples from three graduate level courses. The first course was a masters’ level course in Multicultural Counseling with an in-depth analysis of the movie *Free State of Jones* for comparison of key course constructs. The second course was a master’s level course in Life-span Development in which students viewed a popular movie, *Grease*, about adolescence and compared that to course developmental constructs for that life stage. The third course was a doctoral level course in Traumatology with student comparison of course constructs to both a book and a movie of the students’ selection. The method of study was a qualitative analysis based on student response and insight about lessons learned from this pedagogical integration. Data was collected through verbal discussions and written student reflections.

Multicultural Counseling

Three students were asked to view and write an in-depth analysis of comparison and contrast of key course concepts for Multicultural Counseling with the movie *Free State of Jones*. This movie depicts the true account of a group of men from Jones County, Mississippi who chose to not fight with the Confederacy during the U.S. Civil War. The group included both black and white men, some of whom had served briefly in the Confederacy and deserted and some of whom were former slaves. They were led by Newton Knight, a local white man who had deserted from the Confederate Army.

Concepts of multicultural consideration that were analyzed were:

Privilege and oppression. Privilege occurs when one group has something that is denied to another group because of the respective groups of belonging versus what group members do or not (Perdersen, et al., 2016, p. 211). The group experiencing the denial also experiences oppression or a sense of “having not.”

Race and gender. While both racial discrimination and gender discrimination exist, there can be an intersection of dual discrimination for an individual from both facets.

Class and gender. Different social class statuses seem to carry different acceptable roles for gender as well. As with race and gender, there can be dual discrimination of one’s class status and gender role within that status.

Marginalization. Pedersen, et al. (2016) defined Marginalization as “a social process through which individuals or groups are relegated to the margins of a society based on some characteristics.” (p. 230).

Survival of traumatic stress. Traumatic stress arises from events that are “unusual or outside the range of normal human experience” (Pedersen, et al., 2016, p. 347). This includes both natural disasters and man-made disasters.

Poverty. While poverty may have different parameters of definition across segments of a society, persons in poverty typically have very low-paying jobs or have chronic unemployment.

Disempowerment of poverty class. Disempowerment arises from other than just monetary limitations for those in poverty. There also tends to be deficiency in basic supports and supplies for life such as lower quality of residences, schools, and fewer resources.

Distancing from the poor. Both intentional and unintentional separation happens between those who are not poor and those who are. This is presented as exclusion, devaluation, and discounting of the poor by those who are not considered poor.

Acculturation. Acculturation takes place as a member of one culture acquires and maintains facet of a culture in which the person now lives.

Life-span Development

Students in six sections of a graduate course in lifespan development were asked to review the movie *Grease* in class and then discuss instructor-posed questions of comparison and contrast between the movie and course constructs about the life-span stage of adolescence. 100 students participated in the activity across the six course sections. These constructs were:

Changes with puberty. Rapid physical changes primarily in sexual maturation, height, and weight occur in adolescence. Preoccupation with body image is strong, especially in the beginning years of adolescence.

Substance use and abuse. As adolescents gain greater mobility outside parental control, exposure and use of various substances such as drugs or alcohol increases.

Egocentrism. A heightened self-consciousness is prevalent during adolescence. One components of this are the Imaginary Audience in which adolescents have a sense of being the center of attention and interest in their universe. A second component is the Personal Fable in which the adolescent perceives a sense of uniqueness and invincibility (Santrock, 2018, p. 359).

Extracurricular activities. As children move into adolescents, their respective schools offer many activities beyond the academic work, such as sports and interest clubs.

Identity. A core process during adolescence is the establishment of an accurate idea of who and what self is within all facets of development, such as future work path, political and spiritual values, sexual identity, basic personality, social connections, and avocational interests.

Families. Relationships with family tend to be altered during adolescence and issues arise such as parental monitoring, autonomy and attachment, and parental or sibling conflict with the adolescent (Santrock, 2018, p. 377).

Peers. As family relationships alter in adolescence, relationship with peers grows stronger and peers become the key influence for adolescents.

Work. Adolescents explore, decide on and prepare for the work they will do upon completion of high school. Schools typically have academic tracks that either prepare a student for continuing collegiate education or prepare students for entry into a vocation shortly upon completion of high school.

Traumatology

Students in four sections in a doctoral course on counseling children and adolescents in trauma were required to review two books and two movies with which they could apply lessons from course constructs with the narrative experiences of characters in the books and movies. Across the four sections, 51 students completed these book and movie reviews.

Book. The focus of analysis for the book was reflection on connection to personal life experience, identification of new questions raised about facets of trauma experience, and insight on personal and professional changes to make after review of the book.

Movie. The focus of the movie review was to guide students into awareness of therapeutic benefit movies could have as tools for work with clients regarding the experience of trauma. Students first discussed their impression of key scenes of the movie that could have therapeutic value. With discussion of scenes, students shared how the scene could be used for enlightenment or education with the client issues of concern. Students also had to reflect on impact of the movie overall in their perceptions of facets of child or adolescent trauma and treatment of this. Finally students were asked to reflect on personal and professional insight gained from the movie that would guide them in the future.

Results

Student reflections indicated depth of insight and mastery of course concepts that could be better translated to personal life and work beyond what they go from routine course work such as lectures, text study, and exams. One reflection was that “This assignment seemed to be more active learning than passive learning—I got into the content like a participant rather than just having information spoon-fed to me that I later regurgitated on an exam.” None of the student reflections indicated dissatisfaction with this assignment modality.

Multicultural Counseling

All three students found examples in the movie that aligned with the required concepts to analyze. Representative responses are shared below.

Privilege and oppression. This was a movie that was about the bringing together of slaves and farmers. During the Civil War, Southern farmers supplies were routinely taken to feed the Confederate soldiers. The use of

the environment as a war tactic is a strategy that has been used for centuries around the world. Many war leaders have used this strategy as a war of ensuring victory, and the Civil War was no different. The use of the environment was just as important as the strategic efforts being made by both sides. The Union simply destroyed the southern landscape and lowered soldier morale.

Race and gender. Rachel as a young black women worked at a house where they treated her so bad before she moved to live with Newton. As a woman and black girl, she faced both of racism and sexism.

Class and gender. The pool white lady, whose house was burned by the evil guys, faced two counts of discrimination. One as a woman, she faced the sexism (gender). Secondly, she is poor, so she suffered from rich leaders.

Marginalization. As slaves and people of a different race, black people at the beginning of movie were marginalized. Nobody would care about their needs, and also they did not know what they should do to get of the situation until Newton came and told that they had to fight.

Survival of traumatic stress. Most people when they encounter a traumatic stress event, tend to shut down and not seek help. Those slaves in the movie had no option of getting help for their stress. They went through some of the most traumatic events a person could ever go through such as whippings, working in intense heat, having their families separated, and even watching loved ones by hung. There were no counselors or psychiatrists that could be consulted to help those slaves deal with the stress. They had to hold that stress in and had no way to vent their frustrations about their situations. In a way, that paradigm has not changed. We still hold in emotion in regard to stress or use stress as a crutch for not moving past the situation.

Poverty In this movie, black people suffer as class citizens, and they suffer from injustice, poverty and hunger, and have no right to education or to vote in the elections.

Disempowerment of poverty class. When thinking about how the Free State of Jones movie compares to modern times, I always look at the social class dynamic. In the movie, the slaves were treated less than humans and the landowners were considered of high authority. Usually I do not like to think about life in terms of race, I pay more attention to how people treat others.

People in the movie adapted to live as they are in poverty and they were costumed to be slave and give most of the money for taxes.

Distancing from the poor. Wealthy people and middle-class usually showed distancing away from the poor ones. However, Newton was close to others even slaves. That may explain why people trusted and loved him.

Acculturation. The continuance of the war left behind barren dry lands that had been stripped of its fertility. Nothing could be grown or salvaged from the southern battlegrounds. In comparison to modern times, this movie shows what can happen when people are pushed too far by their government. Unfair taxes affect everyone in negative ways. This movie shows black slaves and white farmers coming together at a time when it was almost unimaginable. Even today, people who may not have similar backgrounds will come together for the right cause.

Newton started acculturating black men when he realized that they and he had many things are similar and generally have the some problems. So they agreed to fight, then later, other white and people from different group came and joined to them. Newton also married Rachel and taught her reading and saying letters.

Life-span Development

Students noted that while the movie *Grease* was about a time in history before most of them were born, there were still commonalities with the focus course concepts. They discussed additional insight on differences between adolescence in the 1950's-1960's and current time of the second decade in the 21st century. Student reflections included.

Changes with puberty. Body image was seen as important in both periods with some perception that the components of popular body image has changed. As one student noted, "At that time, big boobs were in for females. Today it is more what you do to your body such as piercings, hair colors, or tattoos." Another student noted that "With both times, it was important to do what everyone else was doing." Several students noted that weight and eating disorders were not the concern then as now. One student mentioned that less healthy food choices, fast food, and less physical activity might affect that.

Substance use and abuse. The common reflection by students was that substance use was a popular activity for fitting in with peers in both periods of history, but that the substances of choice had changed. Students seemed to agree that alcohol and tobacco were the "drugs of choice" in the era of *Grease* but that today's choices tend toward marijuana, prescription drugs, and vaping instead of smoking.

Egocentrism. Students seemed to agree that the focus on self-importance and interests has not changed over the decades.

Extracurricular activities. Students reflected that today there is more diversity of what adolescents like to do outside of academic work and that "club-stuff and sports" are not considered as important as in earlier decades. Several students remarked about greater percentages of high school students working part time and also greater percentage of high school females becoming moms now that schools allow them to continue school while pregnant.

Identity. Students reflected that getting a sense of one's identity is still important today, but that there is less sense of common expectations on what that identity may be. Several students noted that many communities had local factories that high school graduates went to work in and that is not as common now. Others noted the greater limitation then on acceptable adult identities for females. One student said "Back then, females could be teachers or nurses, but they were expected to get married and have kids by their twenties. Today, females can do what males do and it seems to be okay."

Families and peers. Students noted that adolescents today still tend to pull away from family and pull toward peers, but that the family constellation has drastically changed with many more single-parent homes and many adolescents living in the homes of relatives instead of biological parents.

Work. Students tended to perceive better support for work choices for today's adolescent than in past decades as depicted in the movie. They mentioned to growth of Vocational-Technical programs in high schools instead of the same curriculum for all students. They also noted that dropping out of school was not as much of an issue today as students can go ahead and get a GED (General Education Diploma) and schools have classes such as Alternative School for discipline issues—where students stay in school instead of getting suspended.

Traumatology

While individual students shared differences in the insights and application that they gained from review of the cases in books or movies, all responses showed increase in awareness of facets of trauma experience that their future students or clients might have. Their responses showed insight on personal life application, professional application through new knowledge and insight for their work, and application of use of the book or movie as a tool in therapy with clients. Following are some example responses shared from students.

Movie review of Redeeming Love. “The movie review by this student is an example of a case of real-life type experience of chronic trauma from a childhood life and ongoing impact from this throughout the person’s life.” *Redeeming Love* (Rivers & Rivers, 2007) is a story about a little girl who is born out of wedlock but was much loved by her mother and rejected by her father and grandparents. After her mother died, she was sold into prostitution and renamed “Angel”. She faced constant abuse, assault and betrayal by everyone she met. Even after escaping and marrying, she struggled with trust and the ability to find value in herself.

I connected on several levels. First, I connected through past sexual assault and domestic violence experiences. I know how people can shame and blame for something out of your control. I also know that being young and experiencing the trauma is different than it is for an adult. could have made better choices, made choices at a different pace, or done hundreds of things different. I connected through my experience as a counselor. I may never had gone through prostitution or sex slavery, but I have had a few clients who have been through it. I can identify with a lack of support on different areas of my life and empathize with others going through building a support system or reaching out to a poor one.”

Movie Review on “How the Grinch Stole Christmas. “This movie review shares example of taking a narrative in a common popular movie for entertainment with non-people characters and delving beneath the surface of the story to the trauma experience actually present in the movie. “*How the Grinch Stole Christmas*” was written as a children’s book by Dr. Seuss and was adapted as a 1966 animated TV film, a 2000 live-action feature film, and a 2018 computer-animated film. The movie tells the story of the Grinch who lives in isolation from the rest of the Who community. He spends his days with his dog, Max, scheming how he is going to ruin Christmas for the cheery citizens of Whoville.”

Some specific scenes from the movie and therapeutic implication were:

- The scene when the Grinch comes into the world: He is dropped off in the middle of the night by a stork and neglected all night long in the snow. This scene is highly functional but could be used to explain the effects of child neglect on a person’s life.
- When Cindy Lou attempts to welcome the Grinch into their town: The school calls the police and she eventually must challenge the mayor on his interpretation of The Book of Who. Why were people so afraid of her altruistic gesture? How does this compare to the way modern society treats prisoners and others who have committed crimes against the community?
- The scene where the Whos wake up and realize all their gifts have been stolen: They decide to continue celebrations despite their material losses because they all still have each other. This can be used in therapy to talk about values. This could also be used to reflect what brings one happiness.

Book Review on “Why Me.” This book provides an example of using a true story case in which the author shares from her traumatic experience of childhood abuse by her natural mother. “Why Me (2010), written by

Sarah Burleton is the true story of Sarah and the horrible abuse she sustained at the hand of her natural mother. Sarah was conceived out of wedlock to a very young woman who had already decided to abort the pregnancy, however Sarah was born “in November 1978” in “Melrose Park, Illinois” (Burleton, 2010, p. iii). Sarah’s mother, Nancy, found out she was pregnant at a hospital, and instead of the nurse on duty calling Nancy’s mother she called Nancy’s grandmother who was completely against abortion. Throughout her life, Sarah was told by her mother that she should have been aborted, that she never wanted her, and Sarah never knew who her father was.

On and on the abuse went throughout her childhood. While beatings were unbearable at times (as well as the time Nancy gave Sarah a bottle of Excedrin and told her to go ahead and kill herself, no one would care), Nancy’s most commonly used weapon against Sarah was the mental and verbal abuse. Sarah shared a bit about her sense of resilience in the face of chronic abuse, running away from home to escape, and then going on to attain a degree with a fantastic grade point average. An area that peaked my interest had to do with an email that she sent to her mother. It has been noted with survivors of chronic childhood abuse that even though they knew what to expect from their abusers, there was always the hope that one day that abuser would love them and care for them. Sarah did not really talk much about her struggles as an adult, but I thought it was amazing that when her first child was born she contacted her mother for the first time since she ran away at the age of sixteen stating, “I felt it was important for my son’s sake to give Mom the benefit of the doubt, see if she had changed, and allow her back into my life to be a grandmother” (Burleton, 2010, p.102). I personally believe that forgiveness therapy merits a serious look with regard to trauma treatment.

Book review on A Child Called It. A number of students chose to review the book *A Child Called It*. *A Child Called It* tells the heartbreaking true story of the abuse Dave Pelzer suffered at the hands of his alcoholic mother, Catherine. Dave recounts his struggles to cope with the abuse, which he survived by relying on faith, determination, and the kindness of strangers. The story starts out like any “normal” family and then his mother becomes an alcoholic and abuses Dave in increasingly inventive and horrifying ways, such as locking him in the bathroom with a bucket of noxious chemicals. Father and brothers sit idly by and allow the abuse to happen. Often, his brothers take part in it. Finally, the police intervene, and Dave is taken away from his mother. He enters the foster care system, where he’s able to rebuild his life.

This student reflects that “Globally, children are among the most vulnerable and abused population. Like so many children who live in the shadows of abandonment, abuse, neglect, and domestic violence, the story of David Pelzer is as heartbreaking as it is indicative of the deep wounds of childhood that often go unheard and unaddressed. Awareness is curative, yet many people are unaware of their own unfinished business from childhood, or the deeper implications of why certain mental and emotional problems seem to plague the bloodline of an entire family; from generation to generation. David’s story, which is a New York Times bestseller, became the voice for many children and adults who had experienced abuse.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study confirmed the value of use of case studies from books and movies for student connection to course constructs. These narratives are most often a facet of routine student life activity as they read books or watch movies for leisure. This comfort component helps students to more readily accept engagement in the activity as an academic one. These narratives also cast directed examination of course constructs into real-life

scenarios with which students can develop personal and professional application for use outside the lines of academia.

Use of case studies as metaphors for student application are most efficacious when the instructor provides a structure for analysis such as a set of questions or points to examine. This helps students to move beyond the surface entertainment value to the depth of human experience beneath—such as with the childhood trauma of the Grinch in the popular Christmas movie *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*. Guided analysis also provides a commonality of foundation for comparison of insight across students enrolled in a course and section.

Student analysis with case studies from books and movies have the potential to strongly connect students to their own personal experiences and any accompanying memories or feelings associated with that connection. The potential exists for students to revisit either some joy associated with the experience or some distress from the experience. It is advisable and a best practice for instructors to let students know of this potential as they begin to engage in the assignment and also an option for students to choose a different book or different movie to review if distress is of a strength to be uncomfortable for the student to continue with this particular resource.

Students enroll in higher education courses for use in a chosen path of work and with interest for personal growth as well. This is especially true with graduate courses as students often enter these with some previous work experience to guide the choice of discipline. Students want to take course constructs and use these in real-world application. Case studies from books and movies offer a valuable modality for doing this.

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