

The Powerful Impact of Using Movies to Teach Multiculturalism in Counseling Classes

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Using movies in the classroom has become increasingly more relevant, especially with students in today's college settings. The current population of students are more highly engaged with social media and other technological advances. When understanding multiculturalism and counseling, the United States is a country that is not immune to race relationship challenges. It appears the issues with race has become more transparent over the last several years. Thus, being able to train counselors how to support their clients with cultural issues are paramount. This can be a very challenging topic to speak about. Therefore, bringing movies into the classrooms to train future counselors about the impact racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia can have on their clients, gives the students the opportunity to create a safe space to engage in an appropriate and effective dialogue. From my opinion, movies allow people to be more open and relaxed when having to discuss complex topics.

Counseling Diverse Populations or Multiculturalism in Counseling is a major course requirement for those seeking to become counselors or work in the social services field (i.e. psychologists, social workers, etc.). This course is designed to teach counselors in training how to work with people from various ethnic and racial backgrounds. One of the goals of the class is to ensure that not only counselors have a full grasp of the challenges their client might encounter, but also be aware of their own biases, stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminations. Being self-aware as a counselor is extremely important so that counselors will not inflict their own biases onto their clients. Sometimes, this process can be intentional or unintentional. Thus, being able to take a course in Counseling Diverse Populations or Multiculturalism in Counseling will assist in that process. The goal of any counselor or therapist is to help the client feel better and not worst. However, the counselor must have an understanding of what his or her client is experiencing. Historically, counselors have subscribed to the one size fit all modality. Since everyone is different and experiences life differently, depending on their cultural background, it is important for the counselor in training to understand their clients' worldview and incorporate integrated approaches instead of a one size fits all approach.

There are several Hollywood movies that do a superb job demonstrating the lives of various cultural backgrounds and the challenges people encounter. Personally, I have used the following movies in my classes and have gotten great reviews from the students: (1) Crash, (2) Freedom Land, (3) Get Out, (4) Black Panther, (5) Osama, (6) Stoning of Soraya, (7) Daughters of Afghanistan and (8) How They See Us. Many professors grapple with rather they should show the movie during class time or have the students view the movie outside of class. I have found allowing students to watch the movies out of the classroom is most beneficial. The reason being is because it allowed us to have more class time to discuss the movie in-depth and hear everyone's opinions, thoughts, and concerns related to the movie assigned. It is important to place students in working groups, no more than 6 per group, and assign each group a list of critical debriefing questions. The questions developed need to be in alignment with topics in the textbook and have counseling implications. This is to ensure student learning outcomes are being met and that the students are getting the most from the movie. Indeed, students should be able to walk away with a better understanding of cultural diversity concepts and how to provide counseling to culturally diverse clients.

The power of movies in the classroom is far-reaching on several fronts.

1. Movies create a safe space where students are able to discuss a very sensitive subject matter.
2. Students can relate very well to popular movies. Often, they have already watched the movie, but now they are provided the opportunity to view the movie through the eyes of a counselor.
3. As the professor, you can point out clinical issues that students are not able to identify and research so they can gain a better understanding of these clinical mental health challenges.
4. This is a great opportunity to keep your students engaged and focused because you are having to assign a movie they can relate in many ways relevant to their own lives.
5. Students are given the opportunity to identify with what is taking place in the movie to real life events.
6. Students are able to have a honest and open conversation about topics that they might otherwise feel uncomfortable with talking about.
7. It is a great way to create case studies out of the many characters in the movies and have the students to develop a treatment plan.
8. Using movies assist students with understanding how they are able to utilize various clips in therapy to get their clients to open up about their personal issues.
9. Movies allow students to not only develop their counseling skills, but their critical thinking skills as well.
10. Movies are a significant way to connect with students and keep the class engaged and filled with excitement.

Please keep in mind when using movies to train future counselors or therapists that it is vital for them to understand just how the movie is reality. More times than not, students' thoughts are "oh well, it was just movie". It is exceptionally important to make ensure your movie curriculum is integrated with your textbook, goals, objectives and student learning outcomes. Furthermore, you want to create a short survey to ask your students how effective they thought the movie was and what ways did the movie provide them with a better understanding of working with diverse populations.

Movies in the classroom may not be for everybody. Nevertheless, an increasing number of counseling faculty are using movie clips to train counselors how to effectively and efficiently work with future clients. Being able to assist counseling students to transition from theory to application is very significant in the counseling field. One of the overall goals is to allow counselors in training to be able to apply what they have learned in their textbook to real life. In my opinion, what better way to do this than by using movies in the classrooms as a training aid?

Recommended Readings

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