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# **The transformative qualities and potential of cinematherapy: Using film art in the training of educators in intercultural education**

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## **Abstract**

This article highlights the transformative qualities and potential of cinematherapy, which make it an appropriate and innovative pedagogical tool. The relevant literature review shows that with regard to cinematherapy in education —both adult and minor— international research is limited. Relative research in Greece is non-existent. The aim of the paper is to present the method developed in the framework of an original experiential training programme for educators for the development of intercultural competence through films and cinematherapy, entitled "CINEducation". The programme is theoretically framed by critical pedagogy, the principles of intercultural and inclusive education, as well as adult education, in particular transformative learning and person-centred education. The programme is also linked to the principles of experiential learning, education through art and action research, placing the focus on individual and subjective experience, otherness and the transformative potential of education and cinematherapy. It aims to contribute to the fields of intercultural and film education, responding to the growing demand for training educators with new tools and in new tools. Film and cinematherapy are used as a means of personal and professional development through the gradual, intervening, non-directive discovery of knowledge and development of skills and attitudes that promote the principles of intercultural education.

*Keywords:* Film art, cinematherapy, educator training, intercultural education, personal and professional development

## **Introduction**

In Greece, in recent years, there has been significant interest in film education, primarily driven by certain private entities. However, the use of films in the educational process remains fragmented. Despite some recent initiatives from the state in the field of audiovisual and film education, cinema is essentially absent from the formal curriculum of Greek schools. It only exists as a subject in "special type" schools, and is rather an auxiliary medium, outside official teaching practice, with its usage depending on the initiative of educators.

Given these circumstances and considering that educators are simultaneously the "object" and "subject" of any desired educational and social change (Guskey, 2002; Villegas-Reimers, 2003), an original experiential training program for educators entitled "CINEducation" was designed and implemented as part of a PhD thesis on the contribution of film to educators' training for the development of intercultural competence (Roumpou, 2024). The theoretical foundation of the research and training

program is critical pedagogy, the principles of intercultural and inclusive education, adult education –specifically transformative learning and person-centered education, experiential learning, education through art and action research. All these aspects place individual and subjective experience, otherness, and the transformative qualities and potential of education and cinematherapy at the center.

The structure of the program is based on a gradual, intervening (Lobrot, 2015), non-directive (Freinet pedagogy, interpretive, person-centered, and critical pedagogy) discovery of knowledge and the development of skills and attitudes that promote the principles of intercultural education, using films as a means of personal and professional development within an action research framework (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 2001). Specifically, the program aims to contribute to the field of intercultural education by developing and "testing" an innovative method that utilizes film art and cinematherapy, responding to the increasing need and demand for educators' training with and in new tools.

In the context of the CINEducation program, cinema is approached both as a mass communication medium and as a cultural asset capable of shaping opinions and attitudes. The presence of cinema in education is considered without focusing exclusively on cinema as a teaching medium or on film education as an art form as it is believed that in educational practice the aesthetic experience cannot be isolated from the acquisition of knowledge in a specific cognitive subject. The cinematic film, in particular, is understood as a work of art and a cultural product, which, when appropriately utilized in education and employed as a projection medium/method/technique, with the main method of reception and processing being cinematherapy, can lead to the complete or partial "transformation" of the viewer through "projections" and "identifications" (Wolz, 2005).

The innovation of the presented approach lies in the systematic use of films and techniques of film education with cinematherapy as the primary method of reception and processing of the films, aimed at developing the intercultural competence of educators at all levels.

### **Intercultural Competence and Educators**

Intercultural education is characterized by key principles such as collaboration, empathy, respect for diversity, solidarity, and inclusivity. It aims to engage all students and citizens through various educational contexts —formal, informal, and non-formal. Despite variations in definitions found in the relevant literature (Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Gaillard, and Philippou, 2014; Bennett, 2007; Council of Europe, 2010; UNESCO, 2006), the common goal is to create and foster an environment that promotes the acceptance and appreciation of differences among individuals.

The "CINEducation" program adopts a critical intercultural approach rooted in critical pedagogy, focusing on familiarity, acceptance, and interaction with diversity. This approach encourages reflection on the relationship between the "self" and the "other," with the "other" serving as both a mirror and a window (Bishop, 1990). It aims to enhance students' critical thinking regarding social inequalities, discrimination, racism, and power dynamics (Magos, 2022). By emphasizing its emancipatory nature, critical pedagogy seeks to confront broader structural inequalities, while critical intercultural education challenges the tendency to reduce

individuals to normative identity categories as ethnocultural or any other identities (Magos, 2022).

In the "CINEducation" program, "otherness" encompasses a wide range of personal, physical, and demographic characteristics, as well as attitudes, values, and beliefs, extending beyond just ethnocultural differences (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002). This perspective recognizes that even in relatively homogeneous groups, each individual is unique and inherently "different", since it possesses a distinct personality (in the psychological sense of the term). Consequently, intercultural education addresses various approaches, methods, practices, and policies for managing all forms of otherness within educational settings, not limited to ethnocultural contexts (Magos, 2005).

Intercultural competence is defined as the social skills that enable individuals to recognize, accept, and creatively manage various aspects of otherness. This competence extends beyond ethnocultural differences to include other dimensions of identity, such as gender, class, education, profession, disability, and lifestyle (Magos, 2005). The aim is to foster an inclusive understanding and management of diverse identities within interpersonal interactions.

The Council of Europe's White Paper (2010) states that intercultural competence is not automatically acquired; it requires intentional educating, application, and lifelong maintenance. Educators play a vital role in fostering this competence, as they must first embody the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to intercultural communication (Spintourakis & Katsilis, 2013). This type of communication honors all forms of difference while encouraging mutual understanding, harmonious coexistence, and cultural exchange (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009). Therefore, the development of intercultural competence should occur across formal, non-formal, and informal educational contexts (Council of Europe, 2010).

Critical theory emphasizes that all teaching embodies social assumptions and cultural characteristics, whether consciously or unconsciously. Consequently, knowledge is not neutral; it is shaped by the perspectives and motivations of those who create it (Freire, 1977). As Carr and Kemmis (2002) note, educational practices are inherently social, and educational reform equates to social reform. In this context, educators are not merely variables for successful reform; they are also both objects and subjects of the change being sought (Guskey, 2002; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

The proposed approach emphasizes the personal and professional development of educators, viewing them as integrated individuals rather than separating their personal and professional identities. Grounded in epistemological theories, this method aligns with the philosophy of becoming a "fully functioning" person (Rogers, 1961). This entails being psychologically adjusted, evolving, and adapting behaviors to new circumstances, all while continuously moving toward self-actualization. The aim is to foster educators who are not only effective in their teaching roles but also personally fulfilled and capable of navigating diverse educational contexts.

### **Cinematherapy: A method of healing and education with transformative potential in educator's training**

Over the past century, films have emerged as a powerful medium for psychological exploration, particularly in psychotherapy, known as cinematherapy (Berg-Cross, Jennings, & Baruch, 1990). This approach, first highlighted in the early 1990s, aims to enhance self-awareness, mental health, and personal growth. Other terms like "reel therapy" (Solomon, 2001) and more recently "e-motion picture path to healing and transformation" (Wolz, 2005) have also been introduced. While primarily practiced in the U.S., cinematherapy has expanded its applications, including in education, where it is referred to as "cinemeducation" especially for teaching medical students (Alexander, Hall, & Pettice, 1994).

Cinematherapy is an exciting, modern therapeutic and educational approach that can be applied individually or in groups, as highlighted by Smieszek (2019). It is recognized for its potential in various areas of personal development, including education, psychology, sociology, and couple therapy. Alexander and Waxmann (2000) emphasize its role in school education, suggesting that films can facilitate knowledge acquisition and value transmission. Additionally, research by Khusumadewi and Juliantika (2018) indicates that cinematherapy can enhance empathy among vocational high school students.

Film theory, as discussed by Christian Metz (2007), examines the connection between transitional space and the imaginary in cinema. In this framework, films serve as mirrors for projection, excluding the viewer's body, which creates a void. This absence enables viewers to identify not with their physical selves but with a continually evolving self, fostering imagination and emotional exploration. It facilitates the (re)negotiation of identity, helping individuals recognize and communicate emotional conflicts while reconstructing their self-image and identity.

Wright and Sandlin (2009) highlight that films can transform our perspectives, perceptions, and assumptions. Sofos (2013) emphasizes that cinema, along with television and video, is a crucial modern medium that shapes our understanding of social reality and the world. The literature reveals that discussions about cinema's transformative potential often align with critical theory, focusing on social justice, hegemony and resistance. These analyses aim to develop critical consciousness regarding power structures that perpetuate inequalities. Additionally, they draw from postmodern theory, recognizing the fluid and constructed nature of discourses in films. Some analyses also explore the psychological aspects of cinema, suggesting that films reveal hidden elements of our "psyche" (soul).

Giroux (2011) argues that popular films wield significant power in teaching roles, values, and ideals, often surpassing the influence of schools, churches, and families. They shape meaning-making, subjective positions, identities, and experiences by intertwining entertainment with political themes. Arroio (2007) expands on this by noting that the experience of watching a film conveys not just content but also a range of emotions, behaviors, actions, and knowledge. This transmission offers individuals symbolic frameworks for perceiving and interpreting reality, highlighting the multifaceted impact of film as a form of art.

Jarvis (2012) highlights the transformative potential of cinema in adult education, emphasizing its ability to evoke empathy and identification while providing a means to distance oneself from personal experiences. This distancing fosters critical reflection on the constructed nature of reality, promoting personal

transformation. Dirkx (2006) supports this view, arguing that selective film use can enhance transformative learning, particularly within the emotional context of adult education. He points out that learning often engages unresolved conflicts, which can lead to “deeper self-understanding”. Dirkx stresses the importance of recognizing unconscious influences on our attitudes and behaviors, suggesting that increased awareness of these factors can trigger profound personal transformations, ultimately changing how we engage with our lives.

Viewing films creates a sensory experience that fosters identification with characters, influencing our mood and emotions (Wolz, 2005). This emotional connection can elicit strong, sometimes complex responses, as viewers synchronize with the characters’ experiences. Cinema’s use of metaphor, symbolism, and metonymy can bring to light unconscious fears and desires, triggering powerful reactions. Tisdell (2008) notes that participants often attempt to avoid confronting these emotions to escape “cognitive dissonance.” However, engaging with these challenging feelings later can lead to greater self-awareness and understanding (Jarvis, 2012; Wolz, 2005).

Jarvis (2012) argues that personal, socio-cultural and epistemological changes occur simultaneously as viewers reassess their relationships with “outsiders.” This process encourages the recognition of multiple truths and realities, prompting a re-evaluation of previously accepted cognitive frameworks. Such transformations can be initiated through exposure to impactful films, whether through single viewings or repeated experiences. Ultimately, this form of transformative learning supports social reform efforts.

Certain films can act as “critical educators” or “powerful teaching machines,” as Giroux (2002) describes. He views films as forms of public pedagogy, where pleasure plays a crucial role in their effectiveness by drawing attention to the social construction of reality. Giroux situates his analysis within critical theory while integrating postmodern perspectives, acknowledging that popular culture creates “multiple subject positions” and reflecting the complexity of oppression, which cannot be neatly categorized as conservative or progressive. He posits that cinema serves as a “new form of pedagogical text,” significantly shaping public memory, hope, and social action. This medium fosters public dialogue rather than promoting passive acceptance; pleasurable film experiences can simultaneously reinforce and challenge social norms. Films have the potential to normalize practices while also revealing their strangeness or injustice, highlighting their social constructs. Ultimately, Giroux argues that through engaging with films, students can develop critical skills, enabling them to reflect on how ideology and emotion intersect to shape specific worldviews that are significant for individuals and communities (Giroux, 2011).

Giroux’s perspective underscores the vital role of the viewer in transformative learning through cinema (2011). Viewers actively engage in meaning-making while watching films, positioning themselves as creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients. This perspective highlights the importance of sensitizing viewers to their active role in shaping meaning, acknowledging that meaning is not fixed but continuously negotiated. Bordwell and Thompson (2017) further clarify that a film’s meaning is constructed by the viewer through engagement with sensory materials and

textual cues. Factors such as personal projections onto characters, the conclusions drawn, and the viewer's openness significantly influence the film's impact, reinforcing the idea that engagement is essential for transformative learning experiences.

Specifically, Wolz (2005, 2010) emphasizes cinema's power to evoke empathy and identification, fostering a deeper understanding of ourselves and others. This process can enhance relationships and encourage the exploration of alternative life scenarios through the experiences of others. She notes that cinematherapy impacts both emotions and cognition, challenging societal taboos. Newton (1995) adds that cinematherapy creates a sense of safety during challenging times, reducing defensiveness and enabling viewers to connect with characters while maintaining some distance. May (1997) highlights that films serve as models for behavior and that cinematherapy contributes to greater self-awareness and improved interpersonal relationships.

Research shows that films allow viewers to engage with lives vastly different from their own, fostering empathy and understanding for those on society's margins (Wolz, 2005). By connecting with characters in unfamiliar situations, viewers can challenge their beliefs about themselves and consider alternative life scenarios. Films often work on an emotional level, raising awareness of how "normal" and personal identities are socially constructed. This awareness can trigger transformative processes that highlight social injustices (Jarvis, 2012).

Niemiec (2020) emphasizes that social change can be facilitated through cinematherapy, highlighting the importance of empowering therapists and educators to harness this approach for transformative purposes. Educators play a pivotal role in cultivating critical viewing skills, enabling individuals to engage more thoughtfully with films. By developing these skills, viewers can better understand the complexities of social issues and reflect on their implications, ultimately contributing to broader social change.

In the context of cinematherapy, cinema serves as a powerful medium that merges entertainment with scientific rigor, effectively capturing complex psychological processes. It engages individuals by connecting them to universal experiences, motivating personal reflection and growth. Cinematherapy leverages the cognitive and psychological mechanisms activated during film viewing, allowing individuals to participate on multiple levels: sensory (body), cognitive (mind/spirit), and emotional ("soul"). This multi-layered impact is significant; as Gardner (1999) identifies various types of intelligence —such as musical, linguistic, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal— cinema, as a collective art form that encompasses many other arts, addresses these diverse intelligences. Through its narrative, dialogue, imagery, color, symbolism, movement, and music, film contributes to the holistic development of individuals, enhancing their overall understanding and engagement with the world.

Models in the field of cinematherapy help codify how viewers engage with films, shaping the interpretation of meaning construction. Wolz's model (2005), which informs the "CINEducation" program, emphasizes the importance of active film watching and conscious awareness. This process allows participants to observe their cognitive and emotional responses, leading to reflection that can transform and enrich their perceptions, interpretations, and conclusions about self-awareness. The

overarching goal is personal development, with a primary focus on enhancing interpersonal relationships in both personal and professional contexts. By fostering this reflective engagement with film, cinematherapy aims to support individuals in navigating their emotional landscapes and improving their connections with others.

Wolz (2005) suggests that individual development within cinematherapy occurs through identification and projection, psychological strategies that help individuals manage anxiety related to unacceptable thoughts or emotions. By projecting these feelings onto film characters, viewers can assimilate their traits, leading to a partial or complete transformation of the self. Positive reactions to characters or scenes can foster self-awareness, while even negative reactions may reveal misunderstood or repressed aspects of one's psyche, aiding in reconnecting with their authentic self (Wolz, 2010).

Similarly, Sinetar (1993) argues that observing film heroes or characters allows individuals to distance themselves from personal issues, providing an alternative perspective on the world. This process contributes to the formation of new identities, as viewers engage with different narratives and experiences, ultimately promoting personal growth and self-discovery.

Different perspectives on the same scene or character within an educational group utilizing films and cinematherapy tools can significantly enhance how individuals relate to themselves and others. By engaging in discussions about varied interpretations, participants can gain insights into their own perceptions and emotions, which helps establish healthier boundaries (Sinetar, 1993; Wolz, 2005). This collective exploration fosters a deeper understanding of interpersonal dynamics and encourages personal growth, ultimately leading to improved relationships and self-awareness.

Smieszek (2019) highlights that practitioners of cinematherapy should embody the roles of educator, facilitator, and teacher. Calisch (2001) further emphasizes the importance of familiarity with the films used and the need for practitioners to engage in self-criticism. A key advantage of cinematherapy is its non-directive approach, which allows individuals to explore and change patterns in their lives and adopt new roles without feeling pressured. This flexibility fosters a supportive environment for personal growth and transformation.

The role of educators in using films to cultivate critical viewing skills is considered essential (Jarvis, 2012; Tisdell, 2008). Structured educational engagement with cinema offers advantages over unmediated experiences by providing an analytical framework and fostering a context for dialogue. Educators can design activities that incorporate cinematherapy, facilitating discussions around "difficult" issues and processes. This approach helps viewers navigate unpleasant emotions associated with "cognitive dissonance," clarifies and articulates new perspectives, and links emotional responses to a variety of theoretical frameworks (Jarvis, 2012; Tisdell, 2008). Ultimately, this structured engagement promotes deeper understanding and personal growth.

The innovative aspect of this approach lies in the systematic integration of films and film education techniques, with cinematherapy serving as the primary method for engaging with and processing films. This methodology aims to enhance the intercultural competence of educators across all levels. By combining these



elements, the approach not only facilitates deeper understanding of cinematic content but also fosters critical reflection and personal growth, equipping educators with the tools to navigate and address diverse cultural perspectives effectively.

### **The “CINEducation” Program: The Research**

The research aimed to design, implement, and evaluate an experiential training program for educators focused on developing intercultural competence through the use of film and cinematherapy. The objective was to raise awareness among educators at various levels regarding intercultural issues and diversity management, while also familiarizing them with cinematic media and film education.

Methodologically, the study adopted a qualitative research paradigm, utilizing interpretative and critical frameworks from action research for data collection and analysis. Qualitative content analysis was employed to analyze the gathered data.

Films were sourced from a domestic organization specializing in film education and included short films available online, chosen for their relevance to themes such as ethno-cultural identity, gender, health, lifestyle, socio-economic inequality, age, stereotypes, and educational issues. Selection criteria included a variety of genres and formats (feature and short films), narrative styles (comedy, drama, social commentary), and considerations of gender representation in direction, as well as compliance with intellectual property rights. This approach aimed to expose participants to a broad spectrum of film art, aligning with goals outlined by the British Film Institute (BFI).

The program emphasized that films should not be read merely as reflections of reality but as platforms for articulating diverse ideological discourses that critique or reproduce societal ideologies (Blasco, Moreto, Blasco, Levites, & Janaudis, 2015). The communicative intent of filmmakers was considered secondary; instead, the focus was on promoting reflection and constructive discussion among participants. The films' potential for multiple interpretations was highlighted, facilitating deeper engagement with both social realities and personal introspection.

Ultimately, the teaching and learning process aimed to use cinematherapy and related activities to encourage participants to critically examine their stereotypical and biased views, often perceived as social and cultural "truths." The goal was to facilitate a gradual transformation in their perceptions and behaviors towards diversity, recognizing cultural variety as a valuable asset rather than a threat.

#### *Cycle A of Action Research: Distance Learning Intervention*

Following the initial design of the program, the A cycle of "CINEducation" was implemented online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This cycle included 13 online meetings with a diverse group of 15 members, comprising both substitute and permanent educators from primary and secondary education, special educational and support staff, audiovisual specialists, and two “critical friends” who served as observers. During these meetings, various activities were tested, drawing from existing programs and models. These activities were adapted and enriched to align with the specific goals of this program. Different group dynamics were explored, including simultaneous, group, and individual film viewings. As a result of this process, 10 films were selected, along with associated activities and the overall methodology to be utilized in the face-to-face workshops of the B cycle of action

research. This collaborative and adaptive approach aimed to enhance the effectiveness of the training and ensure it met the participants' needs.

#### *Cycle B of Action Research: In-Person Intervention*

Using the snowball method, eight teachers were selected for the in-person intervention, ensuring a diverse range of characteristics, including gender, age, specialty, education and training, work experience, and representation from various types of educational institutions (e.g., preschool, primary, secondary, and vocational schools). Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with these participants.

The training intervention consisted of 50 hours and included twelve workshops focused on exploring intercultural education and promoting film education. Supported by one educator as a participating observer and two “critical friends,” the intervention employed various methods, including questionnaires, focus groups, observation, and experiential approaches. The activities developed could be used by educators before and after film viewings with their students, encompassing energizing exercises, prompts for reflection and opportunities for expressing opinions and feelings.

The primary aim of the intervention was to raise awareness about diversity and interculturality, utilizing techniques from film education and cinematherapy to develop intercultural competence. Participants were introduced to theoretical and practical tools designed to foster a positive atmosphere through the power of visual storytelling, enhancing communication, mutual understanding, and creativity through experiential learning.

Films served as the main medium in this experiential intervention, acting as catalysts for activities that familiarized participants with film language and audiovisual techniques in education. Cinematherapy was the primary method for processing films, enabling participants to explore their opinions, attitudes, and feelings, develop self-awareness, and identify elements of their personal identities while finding commonalities with others.

Throughout the training, participants examined concepts related to personal and group identities, self-determination, diversity, and interculturality through experiential activities and film therapy tools. Issues such as educator identity, stereotypes, and discrimination were addressed using adult education techniques, including group work, brainstorming, reframing, and reflective practices.

Theoretical concepts were clarified, and participants were practically engaged with research methods and techniques (e.g., action research, focus groups, evaluation). After completing the in-person training, they were encouraged to design and implement similar interventions in their educational contexts, promoting the principles of intercultural and film education in the C cycle of action research.

#### *Cycle C of Action Research: Application in the Classroom*

After completing the training, educators were encouraged to design and implement similar interventions in their classrooms to promote the principles of intercultural education. Non-participant observation was conducted to assess the effectiveness of these interventions. Additionally, educators were invited to engage in self-evaluation, reflecting on their experiences and the impact of the activities on their students. This process aimed to reinforce their learning and foster continuous improvement in their approach regarding intercultural competence.

#### *The “Follow-Up” Process: “One Year Later...”*

After a significant period following the completion of the training intervention, the participating educators were asked to reflect on their experiences.

They identified and evaluated any qualitative changes in their practices related to intercultural issues and diversity management. Educators were encouraged to report on shifts in their personal identities and how extensively they had incorporated films and the methods developed during the training into their educational work. This follow-up process aimed to assess the long-term impact of the training on their teaching practices and personal growth, fostering ongoing reflection and development in their approach to intercultural education.

### **CINEducation: The transformative impact of cinema and cinematherapy in educator's training**

Within the context of the program, participants engaged with films and cinematherapy methods that allowed them to actively view the content with conscious awareness. This engagement facilitated self-observation on cognitive and emotional levels, guiding them through reflection toward the transformation and enrichment of their perceptions, interpretations, and conclusions. As a result, participants were able to challenge and transform existing problematic assumptions and stereotypical views.

This process enhanced their self-awareness and fostered essential characteristics and skills, including empathy, authenticity, critical thinking, respect for others, and acceptance of diversity—all fundamental components of intercultural competence. Through these experiences, participants not only deepened their understanding of themselves but also improved their capacity to engage meaningfully with diverse perspectives in their educational practices.

The analysis of the findings from this research aligns with established theoretical frameworks and previous studies that underscore the transformative properties and potential of cinema and cinematherapy (Arroio, 2007; Barrett et al., 2014; Blasco et al., 2015; Dirkx, 2006; Giroux, 2001; Jarvis, 2012; Newton, 1995; Niemiec, 2020; Smieszek, 2019; Sofos, 2013; Worlz, 2005).

Regarding film education, several findings emerged: schools often lack the necessary infrastructure and facilities to effectively incorporate films into the educational process. Many educators faced challenges in implementing film-based lessons due to unfamiliarity with the medium, resulting in fears and time constraints, as well as issues related to access to films. Additionally, some educators adhered to traditional teaching methods, which led to a more directive approach. This tendency to impose their views on what constituted the "correct" interpretation of films raised important questions about authority and power dynamics in the classroom. Such practices could hinder the potential for open dialogue and critical engagement that film education aims to promote. This context underscores the need for training and support to help educators feel more confident and competent in utilizing film as a transformative educational tool.

The analysis of the research findings confirms that using films as a teaching method significantly enhances the teaching-learning process, aligning with the insights of Moskovich and Sharfb (2012). Moreover, it reinforces the value of cinema as a pedagogical medium in adult education, particularly for educators, echoing findings from McDermott, Hinchion, McGivern, and Meade (2019) regarding professional development workshops for current and future English language educators.

Additionally, the research highlights that film experiences can act as a "disorienting dilemma," serving as a catalyst for transformation, as noted by Giroux (2001) and Jarvis (2012). This aligns with the evolving theories of transformative learning articulated by Brookfield (2000) and Mezirow (2007), which suggest that

film can facilitate changes on personal, behavioral, and social levels (Dirkx, 2006; Jarvis, 2012; Wolz, 2005). Ultimately, the findings affirm the potential of film to promote deeper understanding and reflection, thereby clarifying and affirming the role of educators in fostering intercultural competence.

The approach and analysis of films through the methodology of cinematherapy revealed that many educators experienced a "*difficult*" and even "*painful*" process. However, this journey also involved significant "*exploration*" and "*soul-searching*". As noted by Fullan (2007), the changes and transformations sought within critical pedagogy require educators to challenge their previously held assumptions or "givens" which can be both challenging and time-consuming.

These findings resonate with existing literature that emphasizes the necessity of ongoing self-awareness and self-critique to combat biases in pedagogical practice. This process can be painful and exhausting, yet it is also creative and revitalizing, as highlighted by Neuner (2012). Furthermore, Brookfield (1987) emphasizes that re-examining and transforming one's ideas, beliefs, and values about the world can be a deeply painful process for educators, reflecting the complex nature of personal and professional growth in the educational context. Overall, while the journey through cinematherapy may present challenges, it ultimately fosters deeper understanding and transformation.

Participants in the program expressed surprise at the depth of insight gained from their reactions to film characters, as highlighted by Wolz (2010). They discovered that both positive and negative reactions could serve as rich sources for self-awareness. Initially, many participants struggled with identifying with "*antiheroes*", a challenge likely stemming from their unfamiliarity with introspection and self-reflection as well as societal norms that discourage sharing personal vulnerabilities.

This discomfort was compounded by a general belief that personal issues should remain private. However, participants found that the supportive environment of the group facilitated their willingness to open up. As one participant astonished at their readiness to discuss deeply personal thoughts noted "*I was surprised at how ready I was to open up and talk about very personal things, to share thoughts I wouldn't dare admit even to my loved ones!*" This shift underscores the importance of creating a safe space for dialogue and exploration, which can foster authentic connections and personal growth among educators.

The findings highlight that films, when approached through cinematherapy in an adult education context, create a safe space for processing difficult emotions and reflecting on personal perceptions. This environment allows participants to practice empathy and gain deeper insights into the values and experiences that shape their lives (Dill-Shackleford, Vinney, & Hopper-Losenicky, 2016). Cinematherapy is shown to be both empowering (Niemic, 2020) and transformative (Dirkx, 2006; Jarvis, 2012; Wolz, 2005), with the potential to "fully or partially transform the individual" (Wolz, 2010). It fosters self-awareness (Dirkx, 2006; Jarvis, 2012; Sinetar, 1993; Wolz, 2005), self-reflection, authenticity, and critical thinking (Kadeangadi & Mudigunda, 2019), as well as empathy (Smieszek, 2019; Wolz, 2005). Furthermore, it improves relationships with oneself and others (May, 1997; Niemic, 2020; Wolz, 2005) by allowing participants to address challenging issues indirectly, which helps ease any initial resistance they may feel (Newton, 1995; Solomon, 1995). This transformative process underscores the value of integrating film into educational practices to enhance personal and interpersonal growth.

The findings reveal that diverse perspectives within an educational group foster alternative views of the world, allowing participants to experience the realities of others and contribute to the formation of new identities (Sinetar, 1993; Worlz, 2005). This process enhances respect and acceptance of diversity (May, 1997; Niemiec, 2020; Worlz, 2005) and underscores the viewer's active role in meaning-making during film viewing. Participants engage through "projections" onto the film, "identifications" with characters, and their openness to the material, all of which shape their conclusions and assumptions (Bordwell & Thompson, 2017).

Cinema, as a communicative medium and an art form, combined with cinematherapy, effectively addresses emotions, promotes reflective attitudes, and connects learning with personal experiences (Kadeangadi & Mudigunda, 2019). This approach strengthens group bonds (Alexander et al., 1994; Borowska Beszta, 2008) and fosters trust, altruism, empathy (Dill-Shackleford et al., 2016; Jarvis, 2012; Khusumadewi & Juliantika, 2018), and intercultural communication (Borowska Beszta, 2008; Kadeangadi & Mudigunda, 2019), often "breaking" societal taboos (Worlz, 2005).

Moreover, cinematherapy in adult education allows for emotional detachment from personal situations, helping educators recognize the constructed nature of reality and facilitating transformative experiences (Jarvis, 2012). This dual process of personal and socio-cultural change emphasizes the interconnectedness of individual growth and broader epistemological shifts, as noted by Jarvis (2012).

The analysis of the findings reveals a significant transformation in how educators perceive cinema following their participation in the "CINEducation" program. Many participants now identify as "*active*" viewers, having discovered new ways to engage with films. Their experiences in the program have heightened their interest in cinema and sparked a desire to incorporate films as educational tools in their teaching, overcoming previous hesitations related to unfamiliarity and time constraints.

Moreover, the innovative methods developed within the "CINEducation" framework, particularly through cinematherapy, provided educators with a sense of security that helped alleviate their previous fears and uncertainties. This newfound confidence encourages them to explore alternative teaching and learning methods.

Importantly, the program facilitated the development of a proposal to adapt Wolz's cinematherapy model for use in classrooms, making it accessible even for preschool and early school-age students. This adaptation underscores the program's potential to help educators become more comfortable with cinematic mediums and their applications in educational contexts.

Additionally, a collaborative network has emerged among participants, evolving into a "community of practice." This ongoing interaction fosters mutual support in problem-solving, experience sharing, and collaboration on future film projects, extending the impact of the program beyond the initial educational setting. Overall, the "CINEducation" program not only enhances educators' engagement with cinema but also cultivates a supportive professional community dedicated to innovative teaching practices.

In conclusion, the approach to film reception, analysis, and processing as promoted in the "CINEducation" program facilitates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral change among educators. This transformation occurs not only at personal and professional levels but also extends to their social interactions, as supported by the theoretical frameworks of Jarvis (2012) and Wolz (2005).

## Conclusion

The article emphasizes that education is influenced by the ideologies and cultural backgrounds of educators. Simply changing institutional regulations, curricula, or textbooks is not enough to shift schools from ethnocentrism to an intercultural approach. Instead, educators play a crucial role in translating theoretical concepts into effective teaching practices. If they embrace diversity and foster an inclusive school culture, the entire educational system can move toward more inclusive practices, ultimately contributing to the development of a more inclusive society.

Specifically, the paper discusses the integration of cinema and cinematherapy in educators' training for intercultural education. While existing training often focuses on ethnocultural differences and language learning, this framework emphasizes self-analysis of identity among participants. It aims to foster introspection and reflection, encouraging attitudes and behaviors that extend beyond traditional intercultural approaches. This broader perspective also considers the dynamics between minority and dominant groups, promoting a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of intercultural education.

The research points the importance of creating a framework for film education that includes clear principles, engaging activities, and effective training for educators. It argues that film should not be seen as just a supplementary tool or a source of entertainment, but as an integral part of educational objectives. By incorporating film into the curriculum, educators can promote active learning and critical thinking, fostering a critical perspective on the world and aligning with the principles of intercultural education.

In conclusion, the research emphasizes that developing intercultural competence through film and cinematherapy is a powerful means of fostering intercultural understanding, respect, and acceptance. It posits that shifts in political perceptions can begin with enhanced human understanding. By highlighting the socially constructed nature of concepts like "normal" and personal identity, films can provoke transformative experiences that raise awareness of social injustices and broaden educators' epistemological views. This, therefore, has the ability to promote social change.

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