

The cinema as a fostering tool for health area undergraduates

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Summary

Given that cinema may be a fostering tool for medical undergraduates, that the Journal of Medicine and Movies is in line with it and that health area comprises diverse practices (research, teaching and health care), this article extends such promoting influence to health area students and to their practices.

Keywords: Cinema, Health Area, Undergraduate, Journal, Movies.

El cine como herramienta estimuladora para estudiantes en el área de la Salud

Resumen

Dado que el cine puede ser una herramienta estimuladora para estudiantes de Medicina, que la iniciativa de la Revista de Medicina y Cine se halla en línea con ello y que el área de la Salud comprende prácticas diversas (investigación, docencia y asistencia), este artículo amplía tal influencia promotora a los estudiantes del área de la salud y a sus prácticas.

Palabras clave: cine, área de la salud, estudiantes, revista, filmes.

Los autores declaran que el artículo es original y que no ha sido publicado previamente.

Preliminary reflections and aim

While a relatively underused tool, cinema may acquire a notorious relevance during health careers when suitably employed.

On one hand, cinema may partly confirm the livelihood and the way of life the students choose when they decided for it through developing and/or reinforcing determined competences (knowledge, attitudes, habits, values and skills).

On the other hand, cinema may play a role in leading undergraduates towards their postgraduate options (research, teaching and/or health care).

Furthermore, cinema may strength their cultural background, and through it, their role as citizens into the society. In this regard, it becomes timely to keep in mind what Catalanian pathologist Josep de Letamendi i de Manjarrés quoted: "the one who only knows about Medicine does not even know anything about Medicine", and that this quotation may be also applied to health career students.



Given that cinema may be a fostering tool for medical undergraduates¹, that the Journal of Medicine and Movies, born in the Spanish University of Salamanca thirteen years ago, is in line with it and that health area comprises diverse practices (research, teaching and health care), this article extends such promoting influence to health area students and to their practices.

Health competences that cinema may foster

Health practice is not constrained to health care; as collective imagination supposes to be. It also encompasses health research and teaching together with their possible linkages.

Some competences are common to any health practice whatever its nature (for instance, suitability, ethics, aspiration, authenticity, humility, discipline, order, perseverance, responsibility, intellectual and personal honesty and decency, cognitive and communicational skills) while others are partially common.

Given the referred beneficial interactions between cinema and medicine, a number of related and inspiring movies on health research, teaching and care are mentioned far from including the whole series.

Health research

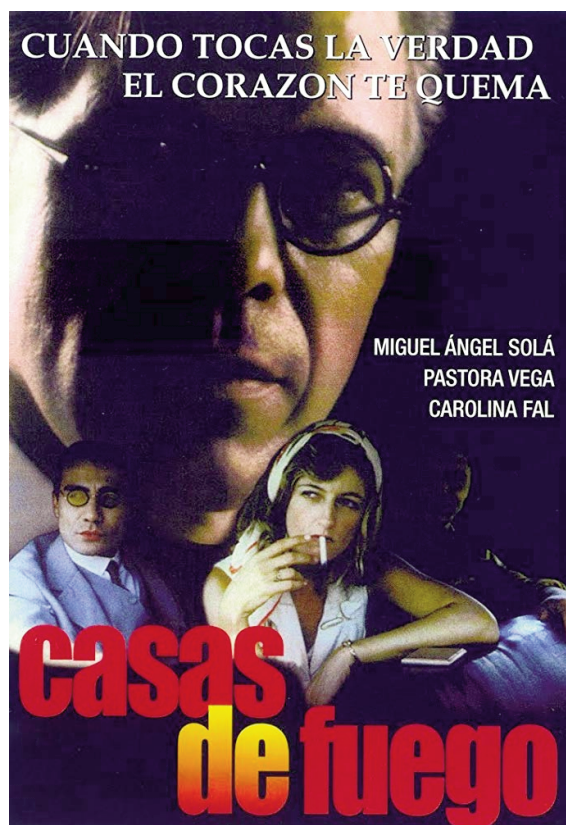
Its needed critic attitude, open mind, healthily curiosity, creative audacity and exploratory energy, may be addressed in this chronologic movie sample, most of them biopics: *Salamander* (1928) by Grigoriy Roshal on the life of Paul Kammerer, advocator of the Lamarckian theory of inheritance, who committed suicide after a still polemic episode who damaged his scientific credibility, *Arrowsmith* (1931) by John Ford, an approach to microbiology, ethics and research in the first decades of the 20th century, *The story of Louis Pasteur* (1935) by William Dieterle, *Yellow Jack* (1938) by George B. Seitz about Walter Reed, James Carroll, Jesse Lazear and Carlos Finlay and the yellow fever transmission by infected *Aedes* species mosquitoes, *Robert Koch, der Bekämpfer des Todes (The death defeater)* (1939) by Hans Steinhoff, *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* (1940) by William Dieterle, *Madame Curie* (1943) by Mervyn LeRoy, *Semmelweis - Retter der Mütter (The mothers' redeemer)* (1950) by Georg C. Klaren, *Freud* (1962) by John Huston, *Awakenings* (1990) by Penny Marshall about the neurologist Oliver Sacks who, in 1969, discovered the benefits of administrating L-Dopa to catatonic patients suffering encephalitis lethargic, *The Race for the Double Helix (aka Life Story)* (1987) by Mick Jackson telling the story of the



rivalries of the two teams of scientists attempting to discover the structure of DNA (Francis Harry Compton Crick and James Dewey Watson at Cambridge University versus Maurice Hugh Frederick Wilkins and Rosalind Elsie Franklin^a at King's College London), *And the band played on* (TV) (1993) by Roger Spottiswood dealing with the role of the US epidemiologist Donald Francis on the discovery of the AIDS virus, *Mesmer* (1994) by Roger Spottiswoode giving a picture of his controversial method based on the theory of the natural energetic transference (called by him animal magnetism) occurring between lively and lifeless objects, *Casas de Fuego* (1995) by Juan Bautista Stagnaro about the health worker Dr. Salvador Mazza and his social contributions on Chagas' disease, *Kindsey* (2004) by Bill Condon the entomologist who analyzed sexual human behavior, *The Constant Gardener* (2005) by Fernando Meirelles addressing the complex debate on drug research, and *Salto a la gloria* (Leap to Fame) (1959) by León Klimovsky about Santiago Ramón y Cajal².

Health teaching

The unavoidable pedagogical and didactic skills, required empathic teacher-student relationship and, sometimes, the undesirable consequences of being faithful to right principles may be appraised in this movie sample: *Doctor in the house* (1954) by Ralph Thomas follows – as a comedy - a group of students through medical school, becoming, from a teaching and learning standpoint, quite motivating for undergraduates, *Almafuerte* (1949) by Luis César Amadori reflects the Argentinean poet and teacher Pedro Bonifacio Palacios' life (1854-1917), best known for the pseudonym that entitles the movie, *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) by Richard Brooks, *To Sir, with love* (1967) by James Clavell and *Lean on me* (1989) by John G. Avildsen (loosely based on Joe Louis Clark's story) deal with challenging social and educative problems faced by teachers in urban high schools of USA and England, *Inherit the wind* (1960) by Stanley Kramer recreates the trial to John Scopes for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution in a Tennessee high school during 1925, where and when creationism prevailed, *Stand and Deliver* (1988) by Ramón Menéndez refers to the math teacher, Jaime Escalante, who took a group of math failures and turned them into math geniuses, using math problems they can relate to and giving sarcastic



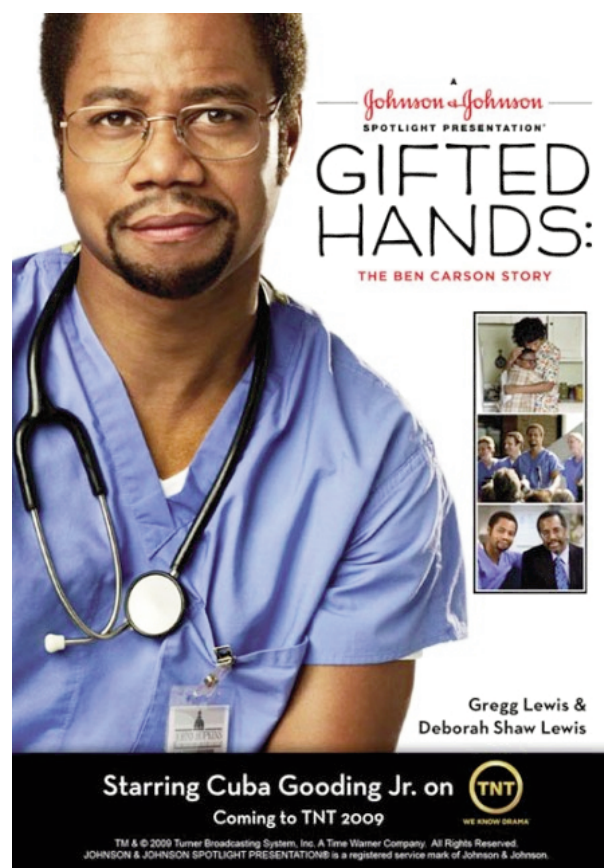
^a Franklin's X-Ray diffraction images of DNA led to her colleague and competitors to the discovery of the DNA double helix. While all of them received the Nobel Prize in 1962, her early death (37 years old) prevented it since the Nobel Committee alleged not to make posthumous nominations.

jabs to his learners, *Dead Poets Society* (1989) by Peter Weir recalls Samuel Pickering, teacher at the Montgomery Bell Academy (Nashville, Tennessee, USA). The story, relocated in the fictional Welton Academy, an elite conservative Vermont boarding school, is centered in a professor inspiring his students to look at poetry with a different perspective of authentic knowledge and feelings, *Finding Forrester* (2000) by Gus Van Sant teaches that *pedagogic eros* may appear not only in trained educators since this film does not take place in a classroom and the educator is only a writer. This movie focuses on Forrester, an eccentric old man, who beneficially transforms an Afro American young man, winner of a scholarship to a prestigious prep school, through the power of reading and writing, and *María Montessori, una vita per i bambini* (TV) (2007) by Gianluca Maria Tavarelli brings to mind the memory of this relevant woman applying her method and philosophy to children undergoing social risk².

Health care

The desirable biological, psychological and/or sociological behaviors resulting from some attitudes, habits and values, may be faced, debated and positively acquired in films such as: *The Citadel* (1938) by King Vidor reporting the cyclical story of a Scottish physician, who initially served Welsh miners suffering from tuberculosis, further moved to London for unethically treating rich hypochondriacs and finally returned to his original path, guided by his loving wife, *Not as an stranger* (1955) by Stanley Kramer contrasting humanization and dehumanization in medical practice and life, *A child is waiting* (1963) by John Cassavetes depicting a human drama in one of the first boarding state schools for developmentally challenged children where its demanding director disagrees with her new teacher on how best to get through to an autistic boy, *The Hospital* (1971) by Arthur Hiller showing that behind personal and institutional chaos may exist a broader societal problem, *The boys from Brazil* (1978) by Franklin J. Schaffner, portraying Josef Mengele who, while hiding in South America, manages to create clones of Hitler himself, reproducing for them Hitler's childhood environment and pursuing so the beginning of the Fourth Reich, *The Elephant Man* (1980) by David Lynch, providing the relevance of empathy and of a compassionate stare, *The Doctor* (1991) by Randa Haines opening the possibility for debating different protocols for breaking bad news: SPIKES, Buckman, ABCDE and BREAKS, physician-patient relationship and empathy, *Philadelphia* (1993) Jonathan Demme confronting AIDS and human discrimination, *Miss Ever's boys* (1998) by Joseph

Sargent, biopic exploring from Eunice Ever's viewpoint the social and ethical issues of the Tuskegee Experiment performed on untreated and uninformed Afro-Americans with syphilis, *Patch Adams* (1998) by Tom Shadyac biopic venturing where no physician had ventured before, by linking humor to pathos, *Erin Brockovich* (2000) by Steven Soderbergh biopic evidencing how, with situational leadership, a troubled mother may confront a legal case of environmental contamination, *Something the Lord Made* (TV) (2004) by Joseph Sargent biopic summarizing the interracial collaboration between the heart surgeon Alfred Blalock and his Afro-American assistant Vivien Thomas, formerly a carpenter, *Gifted Hands* (2009) by Thomas Carter biopic tackling the life of neurosurgeon Ben Carson between 1961 and 1987, year when he could successfully separate twins conjoined at the back of their heads, *Albert Schweitzer* (2009) by Gavin Millar biopic exposing the philosophy of Reverence for Life that he put on practice in his hospital (Lambaréné, Gabón, Africa), and *The Physician* (2013) by Philipp Stölzl, focused on an orphan from an English town who vowing to study Medicine, decides to travel to Persia and learns it from the famous Ibn Sina (Avicena) during the 11th century².





A cinematographic and health initiative worth knowing

In the abovementioned context, *Revista de Medicina y Cine / Journal of Medicine and Movies* (Universidad de Salamanca, Spain) is a pioneer and a well-known enterprise in Spanish-speaking countries (unfortunately less accessed in English-speaking ones). In its first number (2005) three guiding verbs were pointed out: “to inform, to divulge and to form”³. In essence, the journal pursues to link Medicine and Health Sciences, viewed as science, technology and art, with Cinema, an artistic and technical expression with complementary impact on other visual, scenic, musical and literary arts⁴. After thirteen years, the Journal has stimulated pre-professional orientations, humanized tackling psychological, sociological, anthropological and philosophical aspects (in particular, Bioethics), and treated features dealing with History of Medicine as well as with different health related disciplines. For better, it has presented emulating examples for the construction (research), transfer (teaching) and application of knowledge (medical care) covering the life stages from birth to death.

To sum up, the *Journal of Medicine and Movies* has humbly become for more than a decade a lighthouse for healthily curious minds in an innovative fashion.

Final remarks

As commented, health and cinema integrates a fruitful couple quite useful for informing, contributing to diverse medical and human competences, divulging, motivating, encouraging, inspiring emulations, disclosing scientific struggles and ethical controversies, promoting debates as well as exhibiting the best and the worse of human beings.

In this regard, each teacher must choose the corresponding movie in line with what kind of practice he/she pursues to foster, what aspects of the film are relevant to be debated and, when necessary, items worth addressing.

Finally, it is not redundant to underscore the two landmarks guiding this paper:

1. Since no human affairs can be unfamiliar to undergraduates, cinema is a useful tool for contributing to medical and humanistic information and the resultant influences arising there from
2. Beyond its present relevance as specialized bibliography, the role played by the *Journal of Medicine and Movies* in Spanish-speaking countries⁴ raises the need of similar journals either in Spanish or other languages.

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