

**An Eisensteinian and Vygotskian Approach to the Use of Film as a Valid Teaching  
Tool For Children With Emotional and Behavioural Exceptionalities**

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**ABSTRACT****An Eisensteinian and Vygotskian Approach to the Use of Film as a Valid Teaching Tool For Children With Emotional and Behavioural Exceptionalities**

Laurie Warden

The particular focus of this paper is to properly elucidate the use of film as a valid and productive teaching tool when working with students who have behavioural and emotional exceptionalities. This perspective is grounded in the marriage of the Eisensteinian concepts of film form dialectics, conflict and *pathos construction* and social constructivist approaches to cognitive development, including peer regulation, social interaction, modeling, and scaffolding. Children with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities often do not possess these mental tools, nor do they know how to acquire them because of their inability to adjust socially, their lack of social skills and ability to externalize.

By amalgamating many of the theoretical approaches that film theorist and filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein and psychologist Lev Vygotsky established, we can see a wonderful opportunity for emotional and cognitive growth that, in essence, allows for the empowerment of the exceptional student in the context of their own development and adaptability. Since film has the power to invoke such an emotional response within the spectator, it also encourages them, or directs them, into externalizing those emotions and ideas, and accordingly to participate in the development of a distributed cognition, which can in turn lead (with teacher direction) to the internalization and development of individual mental tools essential to learning, and influential to behavior.

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## Introduction

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a revolutionary psychologist whose notions challenged Western thought and scholastic philosophies. Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) was a cinematic innovator whose epistemology of montage and film form revolutionized critical inquiry and production of the medium. So, where do Vygotskian and Eisensteinian theory meet? There is a juncture that exists between the two where the foundations of social constructivist educational psychology and cinematic constructivist theory overlap, creating a parallel in ideology and methodology that should offer an extraordinary new approach and reasoning to using film in the classroom. The two theories intertwine so wonderfully that it seems odd they have been ignored as counterparts in both educational and cinematic theory.

The particular focus of this paper is to properly elucidate the use of film as a valid and productive teaching tool when working with students who have behavioural and emotional exceptionalities. This perspective is grounded in the marriage of the Eisensteinian concepts of film form dialectics, conflict and *pathos construction* and social constructivist approaches to cognitive development.

Although there are literally thousands of published books and reports on the use of media in the classroom and its benefits to the student, I have yet to come across any literature that addresses the issue of using film to assist with special needs teaching in particular. Also, much

of the literature that takes a film studies approach explores the issue of using film in the classroom in a strictly pedagogical way, focusing on industrial and instructional films, and is quite dated. The literature that is most current in the area of instructional technology rarely concentrates on the use of film/video, focusing instead on the computer as a teaching tool.

Along the same vein, in the past five years, there has been much more emphasis on addressing special needs such as Attention Deficit and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in the classroom, yet the literature that pertains to film as an instructional tool has not “caught up” to this recent interest in specialized and individualized education. I have surveyed literature over an approximate 50 year span, and much of the texts are redundant and simplistic, dealing mainly with the benefits of using multimedia to teach social and political studies, and race or gender issues, or as a supplement to the standard curriculum. The topic of film in the classroom seems to have been almost ignored since the early 1990s in favor of *higher* technologies (i.e. the Internet, interactive software, authorware). The wealth of text concerning media/film in the classroom that does **not** include special needs students is proof in itself that it is time to find a new way of looking at film, as well as a new way of using it.

This thesis proposes to approach film in the classroom as more than just supplemental to the curriculum, but as a tool of exploration in all teaching subjects that can aid in cognitive development, and can be used as building blocks in the development of emotional and social intelligence. As stated earlier, because there seems to be little, if any, literature that deals

specifically with students with special needs, let alone with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities, the existing literature can only act as a foundation for a new kind of film study, and a new methodology of teaching, using film as a groundwork for a more integrated and effective communicative and cognitive developmental strategy.

Educational texts regarding the use of film in the classroom note that the comprehension of oral instruction depends largely on the linguistic and conceptual sophistication of the listener, and those skills may vary widely within any given classroom. Many ideas communicated in formal instruction naturally lend themselves to being stored and retrieved in visual form. There is evidence that learners remember essential features—whether visual or verbal—by constructing visual mental schemata. Since learners vary in their innate ability to do this, visual representations are helpful as aids to visualization. The basis of my methodology is the knowledge that the visual, empathetic, and responsive qualities of film encourage the emotional and cognitive development of the student. with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities.

Different genres and forms of film elicit distinct responses. Students with exceptionalities often have difficulty not only visualizing, but also responding to and interacting with a particular concept, value, or lesson. My methodology will consist of exploring the ways in which various film forms can help the student with special needs visualize, empathize, interact and relate, which, of course, are essential foundations for active learning.



This thesis endeavours to fashion a new model within which to approach film as a teaching tool. The symbolic representations present in film relate directly to the ways in which learners cognitively represent ideas, process information, and construct their own schemata (and in the case of this thesis, *exceptional learners* in particular). Learning will be investigated as an "active, constructive process whereby the learner strategically manages the available cognitive resources to create new knowledge by extracting information from the environment and integrating it with information stored in memory."<sup>1</sup> Within this constructivist approach, our knowledge is given meaning because of the structure we impose (i.e., construct) onto experiences using temporal (categorization, listing, comparison/contrast) or spatial (cause/effect, sequence) dimensions. Once objects are perceived through space and time they are understood through these mind's structures, and the individual has gained knowledge. It is this "construction" of knowledge through interactivity that will invariably help cognitive processes in the challenged learner, and vice versa.

This effuses into Vygotskian cognition theory which challenges traditional notions about teaching and learning. Founded in the belief that it is not possible to separate 'what we know' from 'how we know', it posits that knowledge and learning are fundamentally situated within the activity from which they are developed. In this context, 'how we know' film (or new ways of 'knowing' it) will affect 'what we know', and in turn influence the 'problems of knowing'

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Kozma, "Learning With Media" *Review of Educational Research* 61.2 (1991): 180.

present in exceptional learners. A basic theoretical understanding of Vygotskian theory is essential for being able to approach using it methodologically coupled to Eisensteinian film theory in a classroom setting.

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky developed a way to explain how children mature cognitively and acquire increasingly sophisticated mental abilities under the rubric of *tools of the mind*. Vygotsky believed that these mental tools could "change the very way we attend, remember and think,"<sup>2</sup> and therefore influence how and what we learn. Mental tools are culturally differing (such as language and mediators), and are essential to metacognition, which includes the skills of self-regulation, self-reflection, evaluation, and monitoring. A major consideration in Vygotskian theory is the crucial role of the teacher in "arming" students with these mental tools, and enabling them to use and build them independently and creatively: "The teacher's role is to provide the path to independence."<sup>3</sup>

The framework behind Vygotsky's theory is that children construct knowledge, and development cannot be separated from its social context, which should be considered as the immediate interactive environment, the structural levels (ideological institutions such as the family and school), and the general culture of the society at large (i.e. language and technology).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong. *Tools of the Mind* (Columbus: Merrill, 1996) 3.

<sup>3</sup>Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong. *Tools of the Mind* (Columbus: Merrill, 1996) 3

<sup>4</sup>Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong. *Tools of the Mind* (Columbus: Merrill, 1996) 9.

That is, unlike Piaget's theory that infers that cognitive construction occurs primarily with physical objects, Vygotsky believed that both physical manipulation and social interaction were necessary for the appropriation of culturally generated (in both content and form) knowledge.<sup>5</sup> To Vygotsky, there is nothing passive about learning: a child must make a mental effort to learn, and furthermore, learning is not just adding to existing mental schemata, but it is modifying and constructing upon current knowledge.

There must, as well, be the opportunity to experiment with different strategies and with the filmic medium to really gain an understanding of the practicality of the method. Because I have had the fortunate occasion, during the writing of this thesis, to be enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Ottawa, I have been able to put theory into practice, and directly observe the results of my own experimentation. Included in this paper are case studies observing the implications of using film as a teaching tool for students with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities. While I did ask myself, in the beginning, if it was ethical to use the students I had the opportunity to teach during my teacher training as subjects for this thesis, I came to the firm conclusion that this would be, in fact, the perfect opportunity. The case studies are in no way scientific and invariable. They are based on personal observations in an uncontrolled setting, with the primary focus not being on proving and supporting my hypothesis,

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<sup>5</sup>Vygotsky believed children appropriated the rich body of knowledge accumulated in their culture. Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong. *Tools of the Mind* (Columbus: Merrill, 1996) 8-10.

but on really finding the best way to reach, and teach, the students.

One of the fundamental strategies that is taught right away in Teacher's College is not to use just one strategy. There really is a push towards an eclectic instructional methodology, drawing from many different approaches to reach as many kinds of learners as possible. Many students do not learn effectively through listening, but require strong visuals and/or the opportunity to manipulate and interact. What is often the case with students with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities, is that their cognitive and metacognitive processes are often stalled or delayed because of the prominence of their behavioural and affective difficulties. It seems almost impossible to leap frog a student's socio-affective condition and jump right into distracted cognition. Introducing film as a teaching tool to help reach these exceptional children in particular would, at worst, be mere distraction, and at best, produce an observable change in classroom behaviour.

Also, it was very important that I had built a positive and trusting relationship with many of these students. Because of this, I was privy to an honesty of emotion and behavior that other teachers had perhaps not had the opportunity to see. Part of my approach consisted of trying to find out why some of the behaviors and emotional responses existed in the students in the first place, which is true of many teachers who deal with children that have behavioural and emotional exceptionalities.

It is my belief that knowing where your students are coming from is essential to being able to choose the direction of the instruction (i.e. which films are chosen to be shown, what genre, etc.) and to encourage desired response (i.e. knowing what questions to ask, how to lead the post-viewing discussions, etc.). Therefore, having stated earlier that the best approach to teaching is an eclectic one, regardless of the outcome of the case study observations, and regardless of the willingness of the teacher to use film as a teaching tool in this context, this thesis, at the very least, proposes new ways of using film in the classroom, and addresses a new approach to helping students with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities attain the success and knowledge they deserve.

In the first chapter, I will be discussing the parameters for the emotional and behavioural exceptionalities that will be addressed throughout the case studies included in this thesis. In the second chapter, I will begin to synthesize Eisenstein and Vygotsky's theories and relate them to using film as a teaching tool for exceptional children. In the third chapter, I will discuss curricular planning, and the ramifications and considerations that come with using film in a pedagogical setting. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I present three case studies which include my personal observations as a teacher with using film in the classroom.

## Chapter One

### Understanding the Parameters: Behavioural and Emotional Exceptionalities

If I hear “I’m so stupid” in a classroom setting, I immediately take advantage of a teachable moment to dispel the myth. Somewhere along the line, many kids have gotten the impression, through the media, friends, parents, themselves, that if they can’t do something, it’s because they’re dumb. Truth be known, there are no stupid kids. Obviously, in every classroom, there are students with varying intelligences and capabilities, with a spectrum of strengths and weaknesses, but not one of them would, or should, ever be labeled *stupid*. There is increasing awareness and very clear pressure on teachers to make the classroom a successful learning environment for all students. The Ontario curriculum provides excellent guidelines for ways of accommodating and modifying approach, delivery, task, and evaluation, so that every student gets a fair shot at learning. The blanket term of "exceptional" is used to describe a multitude of learning, physical, emotional, and developmental differences. Hardman, Drew and Egan state in *Human Exceptionality*:

Exceptional is a comprehensive term. It may be used to describe any individual whose physical, mental, or behavioural performance deviates substantially from the norm, either higher or lower. A person with exceptional characteristics is not necessarily an individual with a handicap. Differences can be in learning

disorders, behavioural disorders, speech and language disorders, sensory disorders, physical disorders, health disorders, or gifts and talents.<sup>6</sup>

In this sense, the term exceptionality is much less derogatory than the vocabulary historically used to identify students with learning, physical, emotional, and developmental delays or impairments (i.e. *retarded, handicapped, disabled*). The positive move towards a vocabulary that is not degrading, and that does not automatically label a child as *negatively* different means that the focus can be taken off the problem itself, especially those that arise in the social context, and can be placed on approaches that can help the exceptional child.

*What exactly are behavioural and emotional exceptionalities?*

While educational reform has brought about a new way of defining difference in learning styles and physical capabilities in the classroom context, removing much of the stigma that has been historically attached to it, behavioural and emotional exceptionalities are only beginning to be understood under the term exceptionality as valid identifications. In other words, regardless of legislation and documentation, colloquial reference to children with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities is generally within the lexicon of *bad* and *problem* kids. There seems to be a normalized reluctance on the part of educators, administrators, and even parents and

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<sup>6</sup>Michael L. Hardman et al. *Human Exceptionality* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999) 3.

students themselves, to accept that there are emotional and behavioural conditions beyond the control of the free-will of the child, and beyond the oft-blamed rebelliousness of youth to defy authority. Behavioural and emotional problems are just not seen, oftentimes, as valid hindrances to learning, worthy of the same kind of sensitivity and exigency as more easily controllable and measurable exceptionalities such as physical impairments, or cognitive delays. Instead of recognizing that they have a cogent exceptionality, even students with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities live under the conviction that they are just bad kids who don't deserve equal support.

Those who have been labeled as behaviourally or emotionally exceptional under the psychological and sociological rubrics of developmental<sup>7</sup> and cultural<sup>8</sup> labeling have great difficulty relating to the social context that surrounds them. Whether it be in dealing with teacher, peers, counselors, and even themselves, students with emotional and behavioural difficulties have a hard time overcoming those conditions to integrate themselves accordingly into their surroundings. As defined under the American Council for Exceptional Children,

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<sup>7</sup>Developmental labeling is “based on deviations from what is considered normal physical, social, or intellectual growth.” Michael L. Hardman et al. *Human Exceptionality* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999) 9. Psychologists, psychiatrists, neurologists, and pediatricians, for example, commonly take developmental approaches to labeling.

<sup>8</sup>Cultural labeling “defines what is normal according to the standards established by a given culture.” i.e. by examining values inherent within a culture. Michael L. Hardman et al. *Human Exceptionality* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999) 5. Teachers, counselors, sociologists and social workers, for example, commonly take a cultural approach to labeling.



*Emotional or behavior disorders (EBD) refers to a condition in which behavioural or emotional responses of an individual in a school are so different from his/her generally accepted, age-appropriate, ethnic, or cultural norms that they adversely affect educational performance in such areas as self care, social relationships, personal adjustment, academic progress, classroom behavior, or work adjustment. EBD is more than a transient, expected response to stressors in the child's or youth's environment and would persist even with individualized interventions. The eligibility decision must be based on multiple sources of data about the individual's behavioural and emotional functioning. EBD must be exhibited in at least two different settings, at least one of which must be school related... This category may include children or youth with schizophrenia, affective disorders, or with other sustained disturbances of conduct, attention, or adjustment.<sup>9</sup>*

This has obvious implications in an educational setting where cognitive development is dependent on social interaction, mental clarity, state of mind and being, and self-directed motivation to learn. These students often are impeded in the way they respond to social and academic tasks that are expected in an educational setting, and do not necessarily possess the social skills and tools to be successful in that environment. As Liden, Clingan, and Laurie state,

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<sup>9</sup>Michael L. Hardman et al. *Human Exceptionality* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999) 220.

a behavioural or emotional exceptionality "has an impact on the development of cognitive, memory, and language skills among others, and thereby on life performance in independent functioning, social interaction, and role achievement."<sup>10</sup>

That being said, not every child who exhibits manifestations of emotional disturbance or behaves inappropriately should be identified as having an emotional or behavioural exceptionality. Like adults, children and especially adolescents experience occasional mood swings, sometimes make bad decisions, behave inappropriately, act out, are defiant, are depressed, etc.. Looking at any random cross section of sixteen-year-olds on any given day might reveal that every one of those teens, on that given day, are manifesting characteristics of a behavioural or emotional disorder. The road from child to adult is often bumpy, and can oscillate between a joy ride and a nightmare.

The identifying factors distinguishing normal and appropriate emotional and behavioural patterns from exceptionalities is that the particular characteristics are manifested persistently in many different settings, regardless of intervention. It is not insignificant that one of these settings be delineated as educational since it is an environment that exerts, oftentimes, the most pressure to conform, to normalize, and to integrate from such a multitude of external, and internal forces. These forces are often conflicting and inconsistent.

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<sup>10</sup>Liden, Clingan and Laurie. "Temperament and Attention" in *Cognitive Development in Atypical Children* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985) 127.

As Martin Herbert states in *Conduct Disorders of Childhood and Adolescence*:

Behavior does not occur in a vacuum. It is a resultant of a complex transaction between the individual, with his inborn strengths and weaknesses, acting and reacting within an environment that sometimes encourages and sometimes discourages his behavior.<sup>11</sup>

School is often the breaking point for many students with these exceptionalities because they are unable to appropriately deal with all of these conflicting forces at once.

Because the acquisition of social and emotional intelligence is determined by a variety of subjective and experiential conditions, including parenting, family values, peer and siblings, social and cultural context, as well as biological characteristics inherent in the child, the identification of a behavioural or emotional exceptionality is often itself a subjective, or contextually determined practice.

The context in which behaviors occur dramatically influences our views of their appropriateness. For example, teachers and parents expect children to behave reasonably well in settings where they have interesting things to do or where

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<sup>11</sup>Martin Herbert. *Conduct Disorders of Childhood and Adolescence* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978) 5.

children are doing things they seem to enjoy. Often, it is in these settings that children with emotional or behavioural disorders misbehave. At times, they seem oblivious to the environments in which they find themselves. Some have the social skills to act appropriately, but choose not to use them. Sometimes it is the intensity or sheer frequency with which given behavior or cluster of behaviors occurs that leads us to suspect the presence of behavior or emotional disorders.<sup>12</sup>

This particular paper focuses on those students identified as having mild to moderate internalized or externalized<sup>13</sup> behavior disorders, social maladjustment, and emotional disturbances. There is no standardized set of criteria for determining the nature and severity of behavior disorders. However, if we consider the spectrum of mild to moderate behavioural and emotional disturbances under the statistically derived classification system identified by Quay, Von Isser and Love (1980), we can stipulate that for the purpose of this thesis, students being referred to as having an identified behavioural or emotional exceptionality fit within one of the distinct categories of behaviour disorders in children that follow:

1. *Conduct Disorders*, involving such characteristics as overt aggression, both

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<sup>12</sup>Michael L. Hardman et al. *Human Exceptionality* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999) 218.

<sup>13</sup>Internalized refers to behaviors directed at oneself, generally considered to be emotional disturbances. Externalized refers to behaviors that are directed outwards in terms of inappropriate observable behavior, symptomatic of social maladjustment. Michael L. Hardman et al. *Human Exceptionality* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999) 218-219.

verbal and physical; disruptiveness; negativism; irresponsibility; and defiance of authority—all of which are at a variance with the behavioural expectations of the school and other social institutions.

2. *Anxiety Withdrawal*, involving overanxiety, social withdrawal, seclusiveness, shyness, sensitivity, and other behaviors implying a retreat from the environment rather than a hostile response to it.<sup>14</sup>

These two categories would include clinically identified pervasive developmental disorders<sup>15</sup>, attention deficit and disruptive behavior disorders<sup>16</sup>, oppositional defiance<sup>17</sup>, and depression.

Now that the parameters for the types of behavioural and emotional exceptionalities

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<sup>14</sup>Michael L. Hardman et al. *Human Exceptionality* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999) 221.

<sup>15</sup>Typical of pervasive developmental disorders are poor communication skills, unusual gestures, postures and facial expressions; usually accompanied by nervous system abnormalities. Michael L. Hardman et al. *Human Exceptionality* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999) 222.

<sup>16</sup>Attention disorders are manifested in an inability to focus, to control one's actions, random and purposeless behaviors. Michael L. Hardman et al. *Human Exceptionality* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999) 222. They can run along the spectrum of attention deficit (ADD) which often appears to be laziness, but is in effect the inability to concentrate, focus, and stay on task, and attention hyperactivity (ADHD) where there is an inability to selectively focus. Instead, there is an overstimulation and a physical need to alleviate sensory overload.

<sup>17</sup>Oppositional defiance disorder is characterized by the deliberate, often spiteful, violent and vindictive refusal to comply with any form of authority. Michael L. Hardman et al. *Human Exceptionality* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999) 225.

have been delineated, it is important to justify why these particular exceptionalities were the chosen ones for this paper. After having worked first hand with children with behavioural and emotional difficulties, I have observed that although psychological, medical and social interventions are very helpful in giving the child coping and social skills in a general sense, there seems to be a kind of void in terms of directly dealing with some of the internal pressures, and emotional concerns within the classroom itself.

Social constructivist cognitive theory posits an approach that aims to deal with this problematic. It has been asserted that the Vygotskian social constructivist approach to teaching aims to give students the mental tools needed to construct knowledge in an interactive setting and sharing of cultural knowledge.

Gavriel Salomon states in *Distributed Cognitions*:

Cognition is distributed among individuals. Knowledge is socially constructed through collaborative efforts to achieve shared objectives in cultural surroundings, and information is processed between individuals and the tools and artifacts provided by culture.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Gavriel Salomon, Ed. *Distributed Cognition: Psychological and Educational Considerations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) I.

This runs parallel to Vygotsky's understanding of cognition that is shared through social interaction (externalizing) and then internalized to develop the ability to use higher mental processes<sup>19</sup> independently. Children with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities often do not possess these mental tools, nor do they know how to acquire them because of their inability to adjust socially, their lack of social skills and their inability to externalize.

Enter the use of films as a teaching tool for these children, under Salomon's definition, where we would consider film as a cultural artifact:

"By evoking feelings in the classroom, films set the stage for people to begin sharing what they care about. Each student becomes a critic, but as he shares his experiences with others he illuminates and often alters his own views. Answers in a film class must always reflect change and process because they emerge from encounters between people rather than from ideas alone."<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, because films can invoke such an emotional response within the spectator, in this case the behaviourally or emotionally exceptional child, it also encourages them, or directs

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<sup>19</sup>Higher mental processes are considered to be mediated perception, focused attention, deliberate memory, and logical thinking. Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong. *Tools of the Mind* (Columbus: Merrill, 1996) 20.

<sup>20</sup>Richard Lacey. *Seeing With Feeling: Film in the Classroom* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1972) 9.

them, into externalizing those emotions and ideas, and accordingly to participate in the development of a distributed cognition, which can in turn lead (with teacher direction) to the internalization and development of individual mental tools essential to learning, and influential to behavior.<sup>21</sup>

As Eisenstein asserts in Nonindifferent Nature: “The conventional *descriptive* form for film leads to the formal possibility of a kind of filmic reasoning. While the conventional film directs the *emotions*, this suggests an opportunity to encourage and direct the whole *thought process*, as well.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Mental tools help humans to master their own behavior...without mental tools, humans would be limited to reacting to the environment as animals do." Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong. *Tools of the Mind* (Columbus: Merrill, 1996) 19.

<sup>22</sup>Sergei Eisenstein in Jay Leyda, Ed. “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form”. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) 62.



## Chapter Two

### A Synthesis of Theories: Eisenstein and Vygotsky

To understand where the theories of Eisenstein and Vygotsky converge, let us read again the introduction to Eisenstein's "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form":

The projection of the dialectic system of things

into the brain

*into creating abstractly*

*into the process of thinking*

yields: dialectic methods of thinking;

dialectic materialism—

PHILOSOPHY.

And also:

The projection of the same system of things

*while creating concretely*

*while giving form*

yields:

ART.



form equitable views by stirring up contradiction within the spectator's mind, and to forge intellectual concepts from the dynamic clash of opposing passions,"<sup>24</sup> acquiring new knowledge is a manifestation of contradiction and conflict within the existing knowledge and emotional scheme of the individual with these exceptionalities. In the context of nature, Eisenstein asserts that art's nature is itself a conflict between natural existence and creative tendency.<sup>25</sup> Learning, or acquiring and creating new mental schemes within which perception and conceptualization occur for the emotionally or behaviourally exceptional children is a perpetual collision between the organicity of their existing mental scheme and the rational logic that they are attempting to learn.

In essence, just as art is dynamic because of the dialectic of its form, learning is parallel in its dynamism, more specifically for the emotionally or behaviourally exceptional child because of the dialectic of its methodology. My aim is not to prove or even demonstrate any quantifiable scientific conclusions, but to explore my intuition, based on my admittedly short teaching career to date, and based partially on the theories of Eisenstein and Vygotsky, that the analogy between artistic development (appreciation, response, and engagement) and cognitive development is significant. To my knowledge, this has not been specifically considered within the scope of the emotionally and behaviourally exceptional child within the breadth of a film studies lens.

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<sup>24</sup>Sergei Eisenstein in Jay Leyda, Ed. "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form". *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) 46

<sup>25</sup>Sergei Eisenstein in Jay Leyda, Ed. "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form". *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) 46

Teaching, or the process of delivering knowledge, must take into consideration this dynamism. Eisenstein asserts that, in the case of music, “the quantity of the interval determines the pressure of the tension... the spatial form of this dynamism is expression... the phases of its tension: rhythm.”<sup>26</sup>

In the case of the child who is to learn, cognitive tension is created in the conflict between new and existing knowledge structures, dynamic expression occurs in the expression of emotional or behavioural exceptionalities, and it is the teacher’s place to direct, or conduct, the rhythmic flow of knowledge. For example, a major factor influencing learning is *cognitive tempo*:

An individual’s cognitive tempo impacts on his or her interactions with the environment at both input and output levels. Given a certain level of alertness or arousal, the individual’s cognitive tempo mediates whether he or she reflectively or impulsively selects a stimulus to attend to. Similarly, the individual’s cognitive tempo influences how he or she monitors or verbally mediates information that has been attended to. Cognitive tempo, through its impact on monitoring, influences whether or not an individual evaluates his or her

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<sup>26</sup>Sergei Eisenstein in Jay Leyda, Ed. “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form”. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) 47.

behavioural response and attends to feedback.<sup>27</sup>

Traditional approaches to teaching run parallel to the historical definition of montage as “placing single shots one after the other like building blocks...the movements within these building block shots, and the consequent length of the component pieces, was considered as rhythm.”<sup>28</sup> Teachers were to lay out blocks of knowledge that were categorized into subjects, units, and themes, etc., and the rhythm of teaching, that is the consequent length of time spent on all the curricular components, was most often dependent upon when the holidays were and how much time and resources were available.

However, as Eisenstein argues with montage that it is not “the means of unrolling an idea with the help of single shots”<sup>29</sup>, effective teaching is not the unrolling of ideas and concepts with single blocks of information. This is most obviously an ineffective approach to teaching children with emotional and behavioural exceptionalities because we have already ascertained that these children do not possess the mental skills needed to make a castle of knowledge out of the blocks.

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<sup>27</sup>Liden, Clingan and Laurie. “Temperament and Attention” in *Cognitive Development in Atypical Children* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985) 124-125.

<sup>28</sup>Sergei Eisenstein in Jay Leyda, Ed. “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form”. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) 48.

<sup>29</sup>Sergei Eisenstein in Jay Leyda, Ed. “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form”. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) 49.

Eisenstein continues that “montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots—shots even opposite to one another: the “dramatic principle.”<sup>30</sup> If we then consider teaching as analogous to a kind of montage, effective teaching of children with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities begins with the ability to force a collision between existing knowledges and mental schemes and the new knowledges. Under Vygotskian theory, knowledge should not be considered as blocks, separate and distinct structures that are to be placed side by side or one on top of the other, just as Eisenstein suggests that single shots placed one after the other do not equal the true definition of montage. “Placed next to each other, two photographed immobile images result in the appearance of movement”<sup>31</sup> but mechanically, this is not correct. In the same sense, two blocks of information placed beside each other appear to demonstrate knowledge, but cognitively, this is not correct either.

Mechanically, in filmic terms, movement in montage arises from the process of superimposing on the retained impression of the object’s first position, a newly visible further position of the object (optically identified as stereoscopy).<sup>32</sup> Cognitively, real development arises from the process of integrating new knowledge into existing schemes of knowledge, that is not

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<sup>30</sup>Sergei Eisenstein in Jay Leyda, Ed. “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form”. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) 49.

<sup>31</sup>Sergei Eisenstein in Jay Leyda, Ed. “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form”. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) 49.

<sup>32</sup>Sergei Eisenstein in Jay Leyda, Ed. “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form”. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) 49.

erasing what was 'known' before, but superimposing new concepts and ideas and constructing a more dimensional form of knowledge. It is the incongruence between old and new cognitive schemes, the tension between the two, that becomes elemental to the rhythm of teaching approach. Because the cognitive tempo of the child with a behavioural or emotional exceptionality is irregular, so too should be the methodology of approach.

It is the particular form and rhythm of film that makes it such a valuable tool since it lends to the possibility for it to reflect cognitive tempo, which in turn is essential in encouraging and directing the child to focus, a trait which we have established to be deficient in the emotionally and behaviourally exceptional child.

"In selecting a stimulus to attend to, the (emotionally or behaviourally exceptional child) arrives at a primary or purposeful focus. In order to accomplish this, they must filter out ever present distractions. These distractions may be external (auditory, visual, etc.) or internal (visceral, anxiety, fantasy, etc.) to the individual. For individuals to attend purposefully and efficiently, the stimulus must be powerful enough to attract their attention."<sup>33</sup>

There is no doubt that the filmic medium has the power to engage a child as a primary

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<sup>33</sup>Liden, Clingan and Laurie. "Temperament and Attention" in *Cognitive Development in Atypical Children* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985) 125.

focus, as its temporal nature can direct attention to move smoothly from the whole to the detail and back, to relate details, to analyse, order, reorder.<sup>34</sup> In the context of the emotionally or behaviourally exceptional child, this is especially true because of the *emotional possession* that occurs during film viewing, and the emotionally vulnerable child's susceptibility to experiencing it. In a very early study of film's supposed deleterious effects entitled *Movies and Conduct* (1933), psychologist Herbert Blumer states that:

Emotional possession refers to the experiences wherein impulses which are ordinarily restrained are strongly stimulated. In this heightened emotional state, the individual suffers some loss of ordinary control over his feelings, his thoughts and his actions. Such a condition results usually from an intense preoccupation with a theme—in this case, a picture. The individual identifies himself so thoroughly with the plot or loses himself so much in the picture that he is carried away from the usual trend of conduct... The psychological characteristics of emotional possession are essentially a stirring up of feeling, a release of impulse, and a fixation of imagery. The individual is so preoccupied with the picture that the imagery becomes his own. The impulses, which correspond to the images, are called into play and encouraged, and the individual seems swept by intense

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<sup>34</sup>Raymond Durgnat. *Films and Feelings* (New York: Faber & Faber, 1967) 115.



feelings.<sup>35</sup>

Certain factors, such as personal experience, subject and the genre of a film notably effect emotional possession. In the latter case, melodrama or expressionist cinema may more easily lead to emotional possession. In *Films and Feelings*, Durgnat notes that: "The search for expressiveness in style by means of exaggerations and distortions of line and color; a deliberate abandonment of naturalism in favor of a simplified style which should carry far greater emotional impact. From this angle, a characteristic of Expressionism is that the feelings portrayed invade, swallow up the "otherness" of the outside world.." <sup>36</sup>

In terms of film syntax, Eisenstein proposed that montage should contain emotional combinations, with chains of psychological associations, delineated as association montage (to point up a situation emotionally).<sup>37</sup> To have this occur, there must be an emotional dynamization, where the succession of montage shots reconstructed begin to conjure certain holistic emotional associations. In the context of teaching children with emotional and behavioural exceptionalities, this is especially relevant because helping them find emotional associations and therefore building emotional bridges to self-reflection encourages the

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<sup>35</sup>Herbert Blumer, *Movies and Conduct* (New York: Arno Press 1933) 74 and 126.

<sup>36</sup>Raymond Durgnat, *Films and Feelings* (New York: Faber & Faber, 1967) 86

<sup>37</sup>Sergei Eisenstein in Jay Leyda, Ed. "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form". *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) 57.

establishment of an emotional dialogue<sup>38</sup> through the experience of pathos construction.

Eisenstein was interested in modeling ‘inner speech’ and creating in cinema an analogue for both the “thematic-logical” and the “image-sensual” aspects of thought. He believed that cinema “could recover the organic and syncretic qualities of primitive culture, simultaneously integrating impulses along a number of different tracks.”<sup>39</sup> Film art, according to Eisenstein, is a complex integration of different signifying systems. Within these systems, human personality and its attributes are conveyed in metaphorical terms, and film’s compositional devices themselves are rooted in the nature of the human mind and human behavior.<sup>40</sup> It is, in essence, the primal relationship between the structure (the visual and the compositional) of what is being represented and the cognitive and emotional structure of the human audience that makes film so emotionally powerful.

Eisenstein proposes that film is organically unified under a general order and, theoretically,

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<sup>38</sup>Emotional communication usually occurs in infancy, but can be paralyzed in a child with emotional difficulties. Emotional dialogue ranges from purely emotional exchanges to physical interactions to talking about one’s emotions. The development of emotional communication is essential for the development of a child’s emotional and social life, but can obviously be hindered under these exceptionalities. Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong. *Tools of the Mind* (Columbus: Merrill, 1996) 51.

<sup>39</sup>Sergei Eisenstein. *Nonindifferent Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) IX.

<sup>40</sup>Sergei Eisenstein. *Nonindifferent Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) XVII.

under a canon of law.

The organic unity of a work, as well as the sense of organic unity received from the work, arises when the law of the construction of this work corresponds to the laws of the structure of organic phenomena of nature... The perceiver feels organically tied, merged and united with a work, just as he feels himself one with and merged with the organic environment and nature surrounding him.<sup>41</sup>

It is this organic, physiological and psychological attachment to the film that allows for the emotional involvement needed to create pathos, and to bring the viewer into a state where he or she becomes beside oneself in ecstasy. This cathartic (or purging and cleansing) transition into a new quality of being enables one “to *experience the moments of culmination and becoming* of the norms of dialectic processes.”<sup>42</sup>

We have established that two primary concerns with children who have an emotional or behavioural exceptionality are their inability to focus attention, and emotionally interact and respond. These inevitably block knowledge and skill acquisition, as well as cognitive and social development. Eisenstein’s theories clearly establish the emotional relationship between film and

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<sup>41</sup>Sergei Eisenstein. *Nonindifferent Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 11-12.

<sup>42</sup>Sergei Eisenstein. *Nonindifferent Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 35.

spectator, constructed through dynamism, rhythm, composition, syntax, and organicity, which I hypothesize to be an essential tool in helping students develop those essential cognitive skills fundamental to learning.

In essence, students are drawn into a relationship with a film that allows them to focus their energy and emotion on connecting to a particular representation. This connection encourages the modeling, the release, the experience, the possession, and the interaction of emotions that they may not necessarily be able to duplicate in an immediate, or *real*, social context. So, although these skills that are being acquired come from interacting and constructing through a simulated or representational environment over a screen, films are essentially still a societal construct, and are reflective of and reflect on the societal context from which they come.

While there are some difficulties that will be discussed later inherent to film being a product of the apparatus, the virtual relationship between film and the emotionally or behaviourally exceptional child is extraordinary because it is *safe*. It allows for the honest expression and release of emotion along a very much guided path of impulses, in a virtual world. A student with exceptionalities does not feel safe. Whether it be in their manifestation of feelings, of opinion, of behavior, of interaction, a student with emotional and behavioural disturbances is perpetually guarded and fearful of the repercussions of their emotions and actions because they have been conditioned by teachers, parents, and society to be that way. Used

appropriately, meaning in a pedagogical context, guided by a professional teacher, and with follow up, film allows them to be organically tied him to an environment where he/she feel safe, irrespective of the fact that it is not “real”.

Vygotskian theory ascertains that “cognitive development results from a dialectical process whereby a child learns through problem-solving experiences shared with someone else.”<sup>43</sup> The “someone else” may indeed be a representation or symbolic, but the safety of the filmic medium allows the child to work alongside a particular character or representation and solve relevant emotional dilemmas or problems. The tools of the mind that are being developed, including self-regulation, monitoring, and impulse control, are very much real, carrying over to their interactions with the immediate environment, not to mention positively impacting their self-esteem. This all leads to a more productive, confident, vocal, questioning, honest, aware and responsive student.

In revisiting the initial idea of a dialectical projection of things into the brain of the emotionally and behaviourally exceptional student through the dynamic of film, we can reason that emotion and experience, through teacher assistance, can be given form and manifest itself in discussion, in interaction, in creative expression, yielding learning. The filmic experience becomes therapeutic, functioning as a form of art therapy and guiding and encouraging

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<sup>43</sup>Trish Nicholl. “Vygotsky and Social Cognition.” *Funderstanding*, <http://www.funderstanding.com/vygotsky.cfm>, 2001.

expression and empathy. For children who may have lost the color in their lives, or whose emotional landscapes may have lost their poetry, film offers a chance to see the rainbow and find the rhythm.

The mandate of art therapy is to facilitate the expression of feelings too difficult to talk about, to increase self esteem and confidence, to help develop healthy coping skills, to identify feelings and blocks to emotional expression and growth, as well as to provide an avenue for communication and to make verbal expression more accessible.<sup>44</sup> Although the main concept of art therapy involves having a client produce some form of artwork as a facilitation for expression, it is ascertainable that the Eisensteinian-socio-constructivist approach to using film as a teaching tool with emotionally and behaviourally exceptional children accomplishes similar goals. The phenomena of emotional possession and pathos help reach those primal emotions that may have been repressed or blocked, and are often at the root of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Empathetic qualities are developed through the child's organic bond to the filmic representation, encouraging through modeling the development of coping skills. Being able to safely feel encourages expression, both through more creative means and verbally, undoubtedly having a positive effect on the child's self-concept and esteem. Knowing him/herself is this child's first step at reformulating their emotional and behavioural identity, thus stimulating the development of social and relating skills, and hopefully positively affecting behavioural and

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<sup>44</sup>Petrea Hansen-Adamidis, *Art Therapy in Canada*, <http://home.ican.net/~phansen/pages/WHATat.html>, 2001.

emotional responses. Regardless of the measurable, observable outcomes that could possibly follow this type of filmic experience, there are certainly more paramount rewards. An anecdotal observation from Lacey in *Seeing with Feeling* elucidates:

Jean Paul Sartre said, "The greatest sin is to turn what is concrete into abstraction"; it is difficult to resist this temptation in film study. At a recent showing of short films, I saw *Orange*, a sensual three minutes of a mouth eating an orange. The audience cheered, but the program notes were more restrained: "A sensual lesson in the absurdity of objects," they said. Whether the orange is an absurd object, I don't know, but I object particularly to the word "lesson". It is as if the sensual experience were not valuable in and of itself but instead had to be translated into a message.<sup>45</sup>

There is always a point when film is used as a teaching tool. The qualities felt and expressed are meant to make more tangible a certain lesson, or concept. Although the outcome of the experience for the child with emotional and behavioural exceptionalities may not result in an epiphany and complete behavior modification, and there may not necessarily be substantiation of comprehension, it is preeminently more meaningful that the child has indeed been part of an

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<sup>45</sup>Richard Lacey. *Seeing with Feeling: Film in the Classroom* (Philadelphia: W.B Saunders, 1972) 23.

emotional experience, even if he or she does not know what do with it.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Thoughts on Curricular Planning**

There was a time when being a teacher meant marking papers, giving tests and homework, and handling discipline. These days, more and more, being a teacher also means being a friend, a mentor, a surrogate parent, and a counselor. Students do not come to class as blank slates, ready to be marked and molded into perfect citizens. Classrooms are increasingly culturally, religiously, socio-economically, and intellectually diverse. With a strong commitment to an inclusive classroom setting, it is up to the teacher to accommodate a wide spectrum of strengths, weaknesses, and abilities, much too frequently without the help of special education resources or teacher's aides. Inclusion means all students have the right to be included in a standard classroom setting, but it also often means additional headaches for the teacher who is trying to make it possible for every child to succeed. It is, moreover, impossible to know where each individual student is coming from, what his or her background or emotional baggage is. Everyone, of course, has good days and bad days, but it is part of the teacher's responsibility to be aware of those students who are coming from exceptional circumstances, such as abusive homes, extreme poverty, mental or physical illness, learning disabilities, or trauma.

Many of the Vygotskian approaches that educators can use when using film as a teaching tool for children with emotional and behavioural exceptionalities are there for promoting honesty

and fluidity, be they through verbal, written, or creative expressions. After having experimented with various strategies, the most successful always included Socratic/educational dialogue, which is when the mediator, or teacher, will point to a discussion and lead it in order to reach a certain goal or understanding, which may not necessarily be implicit or inflexible.<sup>46</sup> Cues need to be taken from crisis counseling strategies and child psychology in terms of delineating exactly what goals are being considered, and the ways in which those goals will be achieved and their success measured.

One way of demarcating the route a student needs to take to succeed is to first define that child's zone of proximal development. Vygotsky characterized the zone of proximal development as being paramount in influencing the success of a socio-constructivist approach. The zone of proximal development, or ZPD, is essentially the difference between the child's capacity to solve problems on his own, and his capacity to solve them with assistance.

An essential feature of (socio-constructivist) learning is that it awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are only able to operate when the child is interacting with people in the environment... The ZPD theory functions under the principles that there is a certain range of cognitive development that is possible at any given age, and that full cognitive development requires social interaction and

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<sup>46</sup>Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong. *Tools of the Mind* (Columbus: Merrill, 1996) 114.

mediation.<sup>47</sup>

It is the teacher's role as the mediator to be aware of the child's current stage of development, and to inferentially provide materials and tasks that go beyond the child's current capabilities. "The teacher's role is not that of simplifying the content, but of providing unfamiliar content and the setting for learners to step from their current level to a higher level of understanding."<sup>48</sup> For our purposes, the unfamiliar content is the emotive response to the dynamics of the film and the relationship that the child establishes through the representational experience (the "formal" content being emotive-sensory in nature in response to the dialectics of the film form); the setting consists not only of the classroom environment within which peer and mediator interaction would occur, but also the *film world* within which the child can symbolically interact on a primal, organic level; and the step that the learner takes from their current level to a higher one is embodied in Eisenstein's pathos theory, where the child would step from one quality of being into a completely different one. The *quality* of being, in this instance, provisionally refers to a new emotional state, awareness, honesty, and maturity.

Play is also a factor in acquisition of skills and knowledge. "In play, a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior. In play, it is as though he were a head taller than

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<sup>47</sup>Goldfarb, Mary Ellen. "The Educational Theory of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky", <http://www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/Vygotsky.html>, March 12<sup>th</sup> 2001.

<sup>48</sup>Goldfarb, Mary Ellen. "The Educational Theory of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky", <http://www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/Vygotsky.html>, March 12<sup>th</sup> 2001.

himself.”<sup>49</sup> There is undoubtedly a form of emotional interplay between the child and the film, but there must also be the opportunity provided by the teacher for a willing child to recreate or revisit some of the responses, problems, or questions that arose throughout the film experience. While the first step was to establish an emotional response and work through a particular problem through pathos, it is essential that the child continue to develop self and peer regulation skills, as well as appropriate emotional and behavioural response in a real and uncontrolled social and peer context. Role playing, dramatizations and re-enactments take advantage of the varying developmental stages of the involved students and allow for a shared problem-solving experience. These co-operative learning strategies promote positive social interaction.

An extension of the Zone of Proximal Development is an approach known as *scaffolding*. Scaffolding is in essence the technique whereby a teacher will set out a problem or a task that is just beyond the student’s current capabilities, and he/she will have to accomplish to task or solve the problem with the help of a peer or the teacher. Setting the goal just above what the student is individually capable of forces the student to construct new knowledge from social interaction. For our purposes, this can be accomplished by setting out a particular emotional or behavioural goal or problem and having the student respond to the problem after their film experience, and consequently encourage role playing from the film to solve the problem.

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<sup>49</sup>Goldfarb, Mary Ellen. “The Educational Theory of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky”, <http://www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/Vygotsky.html>, March 12<sup>th</sup> 2001.

Emotional and behavioural disturbances occur at every age and maturity level. While film could be used as a teaching tool for all ages, the experience and outcomes would be different for each based on past social interaction, life history, physiological and cognitive development. It is important to understand the difference between using film as a tool for the emotionally or behaviourally exceptional child, and as a cure for whatever ailment exists. There is no insistence here that films be the answer to all emotional and behavioural problems, or that the approaches discussed will be successful for all children. Films, although it has been discussed that they may indeed serve therapeutic purposes, are in no way meant to replace proper psychological evaluations and therapy by professionals. They should be used as a to supplement external support by providing an alternative approach to teaching.

Certain factors that would have to be considered before introducing films into this particular setting would be, for example, the current stage of speech development. Vygotsky theorized that there are three stages in the development of speech. The first stage is categorized as *social*, or external, speech, wherein a child uses speech to express simple thoughts and emotions to control the behavior of others (i.e. "I want...", crying, laughing, etc.) The second stage is *egocentric* speech, which is typically demonstrated between the ages of three to seven. Children in this stage often talk to themselves and think out loud to direct their own behaviour. The third stage of inner speech is the most mature, and is used to guide and direct thinking and behavior. (i.e. counting in one's head, using logical memory- repercussions demonstrative of

higher mental functions)<sup>50</sup> It is theorized by Vygotsky that thought processes begin to develop as a child begins to speak, and it is language, or signs, that directs behavior. The approaches taken to introducing and using film would differ greatly for each since the desired outcomes would also vary depending on the child's stage of speech development. A child who is functioning with social speech will not have the semiotic maturity to be able to express feelings and emotions not tied to more primal urges or drives. Accordingly, a child with emotional or behavioural disturbances may regress to this stage as a way of alienating themselves from the responsibility of regulating their own behavior. It is extremely unrealistic to expect this child to guide his or her speech to direct their behavior when the primary goal of language for them is to direct the behavior of others. The prospect of pathos construction for this level of speech development is minimal, since the internal speech responsible for rationalizing, regulating and moderating relationships is not yet present. This is not to disqualify using film entirely for this level, but the expected outcome should remain within their zones of proximal development for self-regulation.

Introducing films at the egocentric speech stage is ideal because it is during this period when the child is working on reconciling social speech and inner speech. There is a burgeoning motivation to guide and regulate one's own behavior, and it is also when the impression is that language must be spoken to do so. Under these circumstances, the egocentric stage is conducive to emotional and behavioural awareness, as well as to verbal expression and peer interaction.

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<sup>50</sup>Anderson. "Vygotsky Tutorial", <http://facultyweb.cortland.edu/andersmd/VYG/VYG.HTML>

Although this stage usually occurs between the ages of three and seven, it must be noted that many children above and beyond those ages who have emotional and behavioural exceptionalities have not developed the cognitive and social skills needed to move into the third stage of inner speech. By focusing on those particular cases, and by giving them the opportunities to allow them to reach the inner speech stage, the development of higher cognitive functioning is being strongly stimulated.

It is evident, then, that inherent in the varying stages of speech development are also varying stages of social and cognitive development. Ways of encouraging speech development and higher order metacognitive skills are to support thinking while talking, using different contexts to check for understanding, encouraging private speech and using peer regulation to promote self regulation.<sup>51</sup>

All this being said about the different stages of speech development, a teacher must take into consideration that just because a child has had an emotional breakthrough, or has internalized an awareness of an emotional or behavioural response, does not mean that he/she will necessarily be able to express it verbally. This point is essential in understanding and remaining sympathetic to the spectrum of learning styles. While assessing the success of using film as a teaching tool can be done verbally, through the role playing and cooperative learning

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<sup>51</sup>Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong. *Tools of the Mind* (Columbus: Merrill, 1996) 105-107.

strategies discussed, practices more applicable to art therapy should also be considered viable alternatives and amplifications. Just because a student *feels* does not mean they will necessarily be able to express it right away, or know how to. This is the time to teach them different ways to express themselves appropriately, by drawing, writing, painting, explaining their drawings, through music, etc., as well as to encourage verbal expression.

Another factor that must be considered is the selection of films, which goes hand in hand with issues of parental consent and involvement. Teachers must be aware that parental involvement and perspective are as varying as the nature of the exceptionalities themselves. Some parents refuse to accept the severity and nature of their children's exceptionality, while others encourage a full range of support and intervention options. A teacher can only accomplish so much if the parents are not willing or open to exploring film as a tool to help their children deal with their exceptionalities. Also, sometimes medicinal therapy is refused. Although we have described the ability of film to focus attention, some cases of ADD/ADHD would absolutely benefit from some form of medical intervention that is being declined by the child or parent.

Another important factor to consider when selecting films to use is bias. Film is unquestionably a product of the apparatus. It is impossible to separate culture from cultural product, therefore films are always infused with the biases of culture. While the purpose of using films to teach is to affect the emotional and behavioural responses of children with disturbances,



we should not ignore the possibility of reinforcing biases in the process. It is true that with any screening of a film in an education setting a teacher should take the opportunity to discuss possible present biases within the film itself, it is especially important in the instance of children with emotional and behavioural disturbances because of the fragility of their self-concepts and the purposes of trying to help them experience and have them model particular responses or behaviors.

Socio-constructivist teaching approaches underline the importance of choosing materials that are relevant to real social contexts. Therefore, in choosing which films to show a group of adolescents, for example, one should consider the immediate social and cultural influences that are relevant to them and if they are being reflected and explored. In the case study involving a showing of Alanis Obomsawin's *Kanesatake: 270 Years of Resistance* to a group of grade 6 students, it was far more appropriate to show this film rather than a historical drama such as *Last of the Mohicans* or *Grey Owl* or an industrial documentary to introduce the contemporary social conditions and relationships of the Native peoples. *Kanesatake* and the inherent racial tensions were very much a part of the immediate social context of these students, and directly influenced how they related to society. While some forms of emotional possession and pathos may have been constructed with other films, they would not have been immediately relevant, and therefore not true examples of the socio-constructivist approach. Another film, like *Neighbours*, which will be discussed in the case study, is just as relevant to an adolescent's immediate social context because adolescence is a stage where a sense of identity, or property, and the dynamics of

friendships and being a part of society are evolving.

## Chapter Four

### Case Studies and Observations

Let me reiterate that these case studies were not conducted as formal scientific experimentation, and incorporate subjective observations and empirical deductions from my experience as a teacher working with students with emotional and behavioural exceptionalities. The conditions under which these observations were made vary with each context, and the primary purpose of the case studies were not necessarily tied to their outcome, or to my interests as a researcher. My primary role was always as a teacher.

These observations are approached from a humanistic perspective on learning: “The process of exploring a film should concentrate on creating possibilities for discovering and sharing personal meanings rather than acquiring specific knowledge.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the observations were conducted under the guise of expressive objectives, not necessarily behavioural ones.

An expressive objective does not specify what behavior the student is to acquire but instead describes an educational encounter. An expressive objective identifies the situation in which students are to work, the problem they are to confront, and

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<sup>52</sup>Richard Lacey. *Seeing with Feeling: Film in the Classroom* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1972) 90.

the task they are to perform, but not what they are to learn... Expressive objectives invite students to explore and to focus on issues of particular interest to the learner, [understanding] the products of their learning are as diverse as the learner themselves. Expressive objectives are a way to organize our thinking about what processes of learning and growth we want to foster using film in the classroom.<sup>53</sup>

During the course of my teaching, there were many changes made to the approaches I had to take to disseminate the curriculum successfully. One of the most difficult parts of teaching is being able to adjust and adapt very quickly within an educational setting to be able to meet the needs of all students involved. There were instances where I had planned to show a particular film, or lead a discussion in a certain direction, and had to put that idea on hold or rethink it completely because it fit with neither the cognitive tempo, or emotional and intellectual involvement of the students.

The goal of this paper was to put practice into theory, emphasizing practicality and reality. Underpinning the observations were the formulation of expressive objectives, and the fostering of critical and emotional growth through the exploration of ideas, feelings, and social interaction..

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<sup>53</sup>Richard Lacey. *Seeing with Feeling: Film in the Classroom* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1972) 89-90.

## *Case Study #1--Social Studies and Kanasatake: Rethinking Fossilized*

### *Conceptions*

I had the opportunity to serve as a resource and special education teacher for six students in grade six, from January to June 2002. They were students of varying exceptionalities who were taken out of an inclusive classroom setting for art, science, social studies, and music. Ideally, these students would have been put in a special education program, but there was no space available at the school to accommodate any more students in that particular program. When I interviewed for the position, I was told that the teacher had enough difficulty dealing with the other 32 students in the class that these particular six students were getting lost in the shuffle.

I was able to get to know these students on a very personal level, and was able to get a clear understanding of the components of their exceptionalities. This being said, the observations brought forth in this case study occurred under conditions that, unfortunately, are not realistic. Because there were only six students involved, I was able to take all the time I needed in experimenting with different approaches, and really getting a strong feeling for the tailored instruction each student required. I was also able to gain a clear perspective of the personal and emotional issues that concerned these students every day, and was able to talk out many issues of varying severities concerning particular aspects of their behavior because I had forged a trusting and open relationship with them. In essence, it was the ideal situation within which to conduct my first set of observations because I was very much aware of the contexts the

students were coming from, I was able to observe the repercussions of the viewing of the films and monitor subsequent discussions over a long period of time, and was able to get what I believe to be honest feedback from the students with whom I had developed a relationship.

The students that took part in this observation and the exceptionalities that were present in their OSRs<sup>54</sup> were<sup>55</sup>:

-Gerry, 12; identified ADHD, unmedicated; mild identified ODD; strong anger management issues (violent) that were not responsive to intervention thus far; came from tumultuous family situation where father was physically abusive;

-Lana, 13; identified ADD, unmedicated; bi-polar disorder (manic depression), medicated;

-Tricia, 12; identified ADHD, unmedicated; mild ODD; very sensitive to emotional issues concerning paternal relations (did not know who her father was); strong anger management issues (non-violent); behavioural concerns

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<sup>54</sup>OSRs are the Ontario Student Records that are kept on file for every student throughout their elementary and secondary education. They include any psychological and cognitive testing and evaluations, disciplinary actions, report cards, legal documents (i.e. parental custody and restraining orders), etc.

<sup>55</sup>All names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the students.

dealing with promiscuity that had been identified by a psychologist as possibly stemming from sexual abuse;

-Brad, 12; identified ADD, unmedicated; identified antisocial behavior (nonviolent);

-Philip, 13; identified antisocial behavior (nonviolent);

-Samantha, 12; identified ADHD, unmedicated; diagnosed unmedicated obsessive-compulsive disorder; no identified emotional concerns, however throughout the course of being her teacher, she became almost obsessively attached to me, physically (with wanting constant hugs, sitting beside me, wanting to hold my hand when I was on yard duty) and emotionally in ways that were not necessarily appropriate for a 12 year old;

A particular concern that comes with being a teacher in the Cornwall area are the racial tensions that are sometimes underlying, but frequently quite overt. The city of Cornwall borders the American and Canadian (Ontario and Quebec) Mohawk Territories of TsiSnaihne (Snye), Kanatakon, Kawehnoke, Oka, St. Regis and Kanesatake, and due to the history of cultural tension and prejudice in the area, there was some concern on how to introduce and discuss the

Ontario curriculum's expectations for the Heritage and Citizenship<sup>56</sup> strand of Social Studies concerning Aboriginal issues and rights with these students, none of whom were Aboriginal. The particular expectations that needed to be covered, cited by the curriculum documents in terms of applying concepts and skills in various contexts, were:

- identify ways in which the environment molded Canadian Aboriginal cultures;
- demonstrate an understanding of the social, political, and economic issues facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada today;
- identify current concerns of Aboriginal peoples (e.g., self-government, land claims);
- describe the current relationship between the government of Canada and the Aboriginal peoples;
- identify the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to the political and social life of Canada (e.g., in music, art, politics, literature, science);

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<sup>56</sup>The curriculum document's overview of this strand demarcates: "The study of Heritage and Citizenship in Grade 6 focuses on the distinct cultures, both past and present, of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and on the early European explorers. Students describe the role of the environment in shaping Aboriginal cultures. They examine the interactions between Aboriginal peoples and European explorers at the time of their first contact, and they learn how the early explorers contributed to the development of Canada. They also study the origins of concerns related to Aboriginal peoples and determine their present social, political, and economic conditions." Government of Ontario. *Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6 and History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8*. (Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2003) 7.



My goals under this observation were to cover the curriculum expectations, as well as to deliver an anti-bias program which would scaffold the entire unit. Much hoopla has been made over great steps schools, school boards, and individual teachers have made to celebrate multiculturalism. While this is an excellent first step in inspiring a society of acceptance and diversity, Black History Months and *Foods of the World* lunch menu themes do little to get to the root of racism, prejudice, and stereotyping in people. As opposed to the multicultural approach<sup>57</sup> or the anti-racist approach<sup>58</sup> to delivering the curriculum, the anti-bias approach is the constant questioning of truths, of beliefs, and the origins of both.

Since bias is usually inherited through the value and belief systems of the parents, and therefore propagated from one generation to the next without much reconsideration, I thought it would be important to begin the unit by talking about each student's personal feelings and ideas concerning Aboriginal rights in Canada, and explore what knowledge they had been given about the subject. What I found most shocking was the general sense of ignorance, and uninformed stereotyping that pervaded the attitudes of every single one of these students. Unlike the Hollywood stereotyping of Native Americans, which can be found in the Disney-esque "savages"

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<sup>57</sup>According to an Anti-Bias Education in the Classroom course I took during my Bachelor of Education at the University of Ottawa, this is an approach which strives to celebrate aspects of cultures that are unfortunately not necessarily representative of the culture as a whole, or qualities that are based in stereotype, such as dress, cuisine, music.

<sup>58</sup>Also, according to the Anti-Bias Education in the Classroom course I took during my Bachelor of Education at the University of Ottawa, this is an approach which strives to stop the use of derogatory speech, hateful actions, and intolerance of other cultures.

and “princesses in peril” representations<sup>59</sup>, these particular students were being raised by parents who were bombarded during their teen years by the media frenzy surrounding the Oka Crisis and the considerable smuggling of alcohol and tobacco that was occurring in the area during the 1990s. The image that the collective media had contrived of the Aboriginal was of the anti-Canadian, violent, greedy Warrior. The Native struggle for independence that was at the foundation of the Oka crisis was communicated in such a warped way by the media that those who were only minimally to moderately aware of Native social issues easily got lost in a barrage of often offensive, generalized, and negative characterizations. The repercussion of this was a group of 11 and 12 year olds who pontificated about issues they had heard their parents speak of, using slang and derogatory terms that were definitely not taught to them in school, with misinformation and twisted facts.

My primary concern, then, was how was I, as a teacher, going to address the issue of land claims and social inequality in an objective and unbiased fashion to a group of students who had grown up under a blanket of ignorance and the belief that there was no *right* to equality?

I decided, after some thought, that since the scales were tipped heavily to one side of the bias, it would be impossible and futile to approach the unit in an objective way. Because these students had difficulty processing and reacting to conflicting emotions in an immediate social

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<sup>59</sup>Consider, for example, the Native representation in Disney’s *Peter Pan* (1953), where the Native characters are referred to as “savages” and are stereotyped caricatures.

context, it was also senseless to set out a completely new framework for the unit because they would have immediately put up a brick wall and stayed with what they already assumed as knowledge, well within their comfort zone.

My ultimate goal was to bring them into a zone of proximal development where new blocks of emotional and factual information could be integrated into their pre-existing knowledge scheme (which for the most part was false and biased) and be reconstructed into a somewhat more accurate, informed, and solid scheme. More precisely, I wanted to build upon existing experiences and knowledge by encouraging the *experience* of an emotive response to the film and fostering concrete and abstract thinking and creation based upon the new knowledge scheme. They were unable to respond to the issues we were discussing within the setting of a classroom discussion and in written form (through textbook questions) without letting impulsive and inappropriate speech erupt. In general, the ideal zone of proximal development was to bring them to a point where they could be able to interpret and address the issues at hand removed from the words and stereotypes that had been ingrained in their heads.

It was understood that the cognitive tempo of the students involved in the observation was generally not fluid since they had so much difficulty remaining mentally and emotionally focused. After several introductory discussions and activities, I decided to screen Alanis Obomsawin's film *Kanesatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), and draw on the biases that the children already had towards Aboriginals to encourage an emotional response that would clash

with the representations projected in the film. I hoped, as well, that the film could trigger new emotions such as empathy. *Kanesatake: 270 Years of Resistance* documents the crisis that occurred in Oka, Quebec in 1990 when the Mohawks blocked access to reserve land that was being appropriated for use as a golf course. Although I felt that the subject matter of the film was completely relevant to the unit topic of Native land claim issues, I also knew that some of the film would also be well beyond the students' cognitive abilities and they would surely not be able to understand everything surrounding such a complex situation. I had personally viewed *Kanesatake: 270 Years of Resistance* in my first year at university in a film studies course, and the only reason I was able to have a fairly solid understanding of it was because I was a teenager living very much near where the crisis occurred.

The point, as well, was not necessarily to impart only the facts surrounding the incident, but emotionally draw the students into the film and have them really understand that Natives are people with feelings and rights just as they are. This was a concept that was completely foreign to them. Once they understood these fundamental principles of *equality and humanism*, we could then concentrate on the specifics of land claims issues.

We have already stated that “for individuals to attend purposefully and efficiently, the stimulus (in this case the film) must be powerful enough to attract their attention”, and keep it irrespective of external or internal distractions. I observed through simple objective observation during the viewing of *Kanesatake* that the primary focus was the film. When trying to posit why

exactly *Kanesatake* was having this effect, I came to an interesting hypothesis on the thematic-logical and image-sensual (which embodies the *visual* and the *formal compositional*) relationship between the students and how pathos construction could be occurring:

**What if primitive emotional associations were being generated in the students' existing emotional schemes because the landscape of war and conflict presented on screen was so familiar not only to the students' immediate external environment, but more importantly to their own internal emotional landscape?**

Primary focus could be occurring because the natural impulses of the students were being focused through this organic tie and then being released through the *caesura* that occurred when the new emotional information was brought into dialectical opposition to the old emotional scheme. In other words, the chaos and turbulence on screen in *Kanesatake*, irrespective of subject matter, reflected the emotional turbulence felt by the students, and mirrored their cognitive tempo. This emotional resonance was naturally occurring (meaning not mediated by myself) and led to an emotional possession by the film, letting them release their impulses of anger, confusion, sadness, etc. The release felt safe because of this familiarity of landscape, and also let them react and interact with the filmic environment in a way that was dialectically opposed to the way they would have reacted on their own if it were in an immediate social context.

Since I have already posited that true learning means creating and giving form to expression and art based on emotion and experience, I needed to understand how the students would react and express themselves both concretely and abstractly after I had situated them within their zone of proximal development and scaffolding between new and old knowledge schemes had occurred through teacher mediation.

One of the ways I chose to let the students express themselves abstractly was through a collage. This was partly inspired by Eisensteinian theory, and I was curious to see if any of the concepts of the dialectics of montage and the juxtaposition of conflicting images/words/thoughts would manifest themselves in the students' work.

The students were assigned the task of clipping various words and images from newspapers and magazines, and making a collage that would express how viewing the film had made them feel. What I was really after was some demonstration of a deeper emotional understanding of human conflict and whether or not the juxtaposition of words and images could indicate a type of cathartic release. While I was slightly disappointed to see that most of the collages were haphazard and predictable compilations of words such as *native*, *indian*, *war*, *fighting*, and *money*, and the images were of guns, money and camouflage pants, one student's collage seemed to demonstrate exactly what I was hoping for. Lana had placed the word *me* in the top left hand corner of her page. In the bottom right corner, she had the word *you*. In the middle, she managed to piece together the phrase *i don't know* out of mismatched letters and

fonts. When I asked her to explain why and how she had chosen her words, she proceeded to explain that for her, *you* meant everyone, including Natives. She had placed it in the opposing corner to *me* because it was hard for her to belong to anything, and she felt very separate from most people. In the middle was *i don't know* because she couldn't figure out why people had to be on opposite ends all the time. She had chosen only a few images for her collage: a cartoon heart placed alongside a rifle, and a picture of a little girl who seemed to be looking at the heart and gun.

For a child who spent a lot of her time dwelling on the fact she was alone because of her recurrent bouts of depression, her questioning of why people needed to be so divided impressed me and reflected her own personal desire to belong to not only a group within society, but to belong to herself. She had such limited control over her emotions that where she placed the words on the piece of paper, and which images she chose, became a way of taking control and reflecting on her own emotional situation, although it also pointed more globally to the perpetual conflict between Natives and Non-Natives and how we are divided as a society. She was, for one of the first times, empowered in her emotional response.

Towards the end of the unit, and following the classroom discussions and assignments the students had to complete, they were assigned a "closing journal", where the intent was to reflect more concretely on the new concepts they were taught and their feelings on the unit in general. While I had mixed feelings regarding how well the unit had gone because it was still difficult for

the students in general to retain factual information such as dates and locations, I was quite pleased to read one of the student's journals. Gerry wrote:

Dear Journal,

Today we finished our Native study unit. I liked it a lot. I really liked it because I used to get really angry whenever people would talk about Natives and all the stuff they get from the government because my dad told me all kinds of bad things. But because we got to talk about it and I got to ask a lot of questions and Miss Warden wasn't mad when we said what we were thinking I think I learned a lot. I really liked the movie we watched too. I didn't understand a lot of what went on and not a lot of us did. But I know more about the whole situation now than I did before and I kind of feel like I was there with them, and I could feel that they were mad and I think I would have been mad too. So, even though I'm still confused about all the facts and stuff, I think I would like to learn more about what they were going through.

The wall that I had originally hit when first introducing the unit seemed to have fallen. Being 'open' to learning was a generally new concept for these students to feel. When Gerry



stated in his journal that he *felt like he was there*, I knew the film had managed to emotionally focus him, and bring him into an emotional state that conflicted with what he knew and what he was told he should feel. Teaching empathy to students who have an extremely difficult time feeling even *sympathy* is a daunting task. Because Gerry felt empowered, as though he had ‘transformed’ his existing beliefs on his own, he was much more willing to accept and adapt to the new emotional information that was beginning to redefine his schemata.

Samantha, on the other hand, seemed to have a more difficult time connecting to the film and focusing her attention on being emotionally receptive to a new internal schemata. While she appeared to have focused attention during the screening of the film, she refused to participate in the oral discussions, and her collage was fairly generic and did not point to any form of additional emotional comprehension. When I prompted her to compare how she felt about the Native land claims issue before watching the film and after watching it, she insisted that her opinion had not changed, and that nothing could provoke her to change how she felt. I ended up taking her aside, one on one after class, to talk to her about her feelings. She began our meeting with a negative attitude, contending the film was ‘stupid’ and only showed her violent behaviours that she had already assumed and was taught existed within the Native community anyway.

I understood from this discussion with her that I had failed to bring her into her zone of proximal development, and it would take much more scaffolding to bring her to a point where

she would be willing to accommodate new concepts and emotional knowledge into her existing scheme. I decided to begin with something abstract that could make more relevant the issues at hand. I knew from her student record that Samantha had attachment issues, and had become particularly attached to myself. Since Vygotsky advocated modeling, which is behavioural and emotional knowledge obtained by observing the behaviour and emotional responses of a mediator, I decided that I may have a rare opportunity to really reach Samantha on another level, and model what could be appropriate emotional development for her. We started to talk about my young daughter, whom she had met before on a few occasions. Samantha had enjoyed interacting with my daughter, and when I told her that my daughter happened to be half-Native, she was surprised. When I asked her how come it was surprising to her, she proceeded to explain that the behaviour she expected from Natives was nothing she had seen from my daughter. The realization that what she thought she knew was conflicting with new information was a positive sign that we were in a zone proximal to her learning. It had connected that my daughter was a real person, and my daughter was Native, therefore, she could deduce that Natives were just as much people, and just as deserving of equality as anyone else. It seemed like an odd route to take to get Samantha to this point, but it was an interesting demonstration that every student functions best within different zones of proximal development, and sometimes a detour or a bridge of a different kind must be taken to get there.

After Samantha and I discussed a little more the ways in which my own attitudes towards Natives had changed since I had the opportunity to be a minority within that culture and

appreciate customs that many non-Natives would never be part of, she seemed to understand that maybe her own beliefs came from her not being exposed to different cultures, and her lack of real knowledge about the Native culture in general. I asked her to write a short paragraph for homework that night and title it "Can feelings change?", hoping she would connect her new knowledge with her existing beliefs and adapt her emotional schemata. She came to me the next day and handed me a full page composition, the conclusion of which stated:

So, yes, I guess feelings can change when you have reason to change them. After talking with Miss Warden, I realized sometimes I don't know what I'm talking about. The movie we watched was okay, but I didn't need to feel bad for the people. Nobody was making me like them, and all I saw was that they were mad and people wanted their land. But I think after I got think more about it, I can see that my feelings changed because I like Miss Warden's daughter. And if I can like her, I can like other Natives as well. It doesn't mean I have to like everyone though, but it kind of made me see that people are different from each other, and that a person is just a person no matter what their culture is. And people have things that are important to them just like I have things that are important to me. And I wouldn't want someone to put the things that I think are important down just because they don't know me. So my feelings can change really fast, but I think a lot of the time it's better if they change a little at a time.

Philip, for his part, had an especially interesting experience after having watched the film. He was a member of the school band, and before the Christmas holidays, was invited to perform with the band at the elementary school on part of the Oka reserve. Because we were still in the middle of the unit, I thought it would be an interesting chance for him, and myself, to survey his attitude and reactions towards going. Before the performance, the students and I discussed what Philip thought the school might look like, and how the people might act towards him. After some consideration, he decided that the students in Oka were kids, just as he was, and that the school would probably look like a “regular school”. During the discussion, he noted that before seeing *Kanesatake*, he probably would have been scared to go, and would have been worried that he would encounter harsh or negative attitudes while there. He explained that the film was about a situation that was not presently going on—there would be no roadblocks, no guns, no protests while he was there. In fact, he was going to entertain, so he was expecting a positive reaction from himself and those who would be watching the band’s performance. The day after he returned, he nonchalantly commented that he had an enjoyable time, and was proud to be able to share a Christmas concert, and a positive experience, with a community that had historically not gotten along with his own. The understanding that there should be “no fear” on his part, and that he was able to communicate this to his peers, most definitely gave him satisfaction, and surely boosted his self-esteem, which was illustrated by the big, proud smile on his face as he was recounting his experience.

## *Case Study #2–Ferris Bueller and The Basics of Storytelling*

During my first year teaching, I was presented with the fairly difficult task of re-teaching the basic elements of a story<sup>60</sup> in a grade 9 applied English course which was in fact made up of four separate courses. All of the 26 students in the class had gone through the grade 8 English curriculum with moderate to severe difficulties (most barely passing), and were streamed in their first year of high school into either English for Beginners, modified applied English (*échelon local*), or were identified as requiring an adapted applied English program (in terms of ministry expectations). The exceptionalities that these students faced were on the cognitive development front, as well as on the emotional/behavioural one. So, not only were they learning at a slower pace and retaining less information, but they also had a very difficult time dealing with the social implications of being slower learners, and often acted out with inappropriate behaviours. The class could also almost be divided into those with attention deficit, and those with attention hyperactivity disorders. There were seven students identified ADD, and eight identified ADHD, very few of which were medicated. These students were considered by the guidance department as ‘at risk’ for dropping out of school, or failing everything and being held back again.

Needless to say, most of the students were not amused or interested in going through the same material they had looked at in depth the year before (either in grade 8, or in the grade 9

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<sup>60</sup>The basics elements to be studied were: plot, setting, atmosphere, characters, theme, conflict, crisis, dénouement, and resolution.

applied course which they had failed), whether they understood it or not. Therefore, motivation was the initial roadblock. It was by chance that one night while flipping through cable, I happen to come across a film I had seen during my own teenage years, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (John Hughes, 1986). The movie tells the chaotic day in the life of Ferris, who concocts an elaborate scheme to skip school and spend the day in Chicago with his girlfriend and best friend, all the while trying to avoid being caught by his parents, his sister, and the dean of students. Although it was the subject matter and possibility of a connection between the characters in the film and those in my class which first interested me in its classroom use, the film also has a very clear and simple breakdown of narrative elements.

It was not so much the character element of a story which gave the students in general the most trouble, it was the thematic, atmospheric, motivational, dynamic and climactic elements. The very abstract concepts of theme and motivation were lost on the students. In diagnostic assessments I had done early in the unit, many students were not able to come up with any sort of relevant theme relating to the short stories that were given to them other than to restate the crisis or the plot. My reasoning was that by drawing the students into a simple story by way of relatable, relevant characters, they would become motivated to appropriate and parallel the narrative elements to those of their own lives, and be able to properly connect and identify them in the context of the film.

It was not difficult to see that the film became the primary focus for the students

immediately. They were drawn by the rebellious spirit of Ferris Bueller, and could connect it to their own rebellious tendencies or impulses. The fact that it was a comedy that was at their level also helped in that aspect because it exaggerated the behaviours of both the teens and the adults in the film, making the conflicts and the character motivations much more obvious. During a formal written evaluation of plot, characters, setting, theme and conflict, the students generally had an excellent grasp on all the terms in relation to the movie. Their zone of proximal development, as a whole, was easily and naturally achieved when they were able to relate the filmic situations to those real situations that occurred in their lives. For example, after watching the film, they were given the task of writing about an episode in their life where they were forced to take responsibility for their actions. In *Ferris Bueller*, they borrow a car which is eventually driven out of a window and into the woods. Ferris's friend is forced to take responsibility for his actions and tell his father that it was his fault. The students, in general, were able to recount their own tales with ease, and understood that the concept of taking responsibility for one's actions is something that is an essential and relative youth issue. Therefore even the more abstract concept of 'theme' was grasped immediately, which I could tell when one of the weakest students in the class raised his hand to identify some of the themes as friendship, youth, and responsibility. When I asked him how he knew those were the themes of the movie, he replied that it was easy, because they were the themes of his life. That caused the classroom to erupt in laughter, but proved to be so true. It was the openness to learn due to the relatability of the themes that lead to the concepts of the basics of a story to be integrated into the students' cognitive schemes.

Although the students grasped the basics of a story in relation to *Ferris Bueller*, the true test was to see whether or not they were able to apply their knowledge to other texts as well. As a summative evaluation, I had them plan for and write a short story in groups which they would then storyboard and film. One of the negative interferences with this assignment was the inability to maintain constant communication and agreement between the students, so there was a lot of internal fighting within the groups. There is often difficulty in working with groups when so many of the students not only have learning exceptionalities, but emotional and behavioural ones as well. However, I did observe that some of the students who may not have completely understood the concepts of theme and character motivation were very positively influenced by their peers, and were able to reach their zone of proximal development through peer scaffolding. The task was to produce a 2-3 minute short film that could subjectively fit under the title Youth Issues. Some of the themes explored in the students' films were: Suicide, Teen Sex, Pregnancy, and Peer Pressure. Although the final concrete product of the film was interesting to watch, the social interaction during the planning stages of the project was also captivating.

It seemed that those students with the more serious emotional and behavioural exceptionalities took on leadership roles in the planning process. When I talked to one of the participants, Leia (identified ADHD and borderline Oppositional Defiance Disorder), she explained to me without being asked that she was very much enjoying the project because she



was able to express many of her emotions on the difficult issues through the characters that her groups was creating for their film. In this way, it was easier for her to decide on what subjects the group would tackle, what themes they would look at, how the characters would be motivated to act, and what the atmosphere would be because she was able to place herself in the characters' shoes and filter her own behaviours and responses through the characters. It occurred to me then that just as watching a film and becoming so emotionally possessed by it that the primary focus of the film guided the students' impulses and emotions in a therapeutic fashion, so did the process of creating a film.

### *Case Study #3—Modeling in Malcolm in the Middle, Max Keeble's Big Move, and Neighbours*

The Ontario Grade 8 Health and Physical Education curriculum document includes the expectations that after completing the year, students should be able to:

-analyse situations that are potentially dangerous to personal safety and determine how to seek assistance;

-apply living skills related to decision-making, problem-solving, and refusal skills.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Government of Ontario. *Health and Physical Education, Grades 1 to 8*. (Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2003) 23.

What became apparent very quickly was that disseminating the knowledge required to make wise choices about personal safety and behaviour, as well as teaching students (more particularly pubescent teens) how to use the common sense required to make the wise choices was very difficult. Children in their early teens usually do not want to hear about logic and common sensical ways of dealing with the day to day situations that pervade their pubescent lives. I needed to find a way to bring down the “I don’t want to hear it!” wall that was built up between the students in a grade 8 class and myself. I did part of my practice teaching in a grade 7 and 8 split class, in which there were twelve grade 8 students and eight grade 7 students. As if the task of teaching personal responsibility and how to make wise choices to these students would not be difficult enough, there were also four students within the class with moderate behavioural exceptionalities relating to oppositional defiance disorder (conduct disorder), three students with moderate to severe Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and one case of a moderate emotional exceptionality related to anxiety withdrawal and depression. Almost half of the class had been identified with behavioural or emotional exceptionalities, and the task of teaching self-regulation to students who had exceptionalities that were primarily characterized by their lack of an ability to self-regulate was daunting.

I chose to show episodes of Fox’s *Malcolm in the Middle*<sup>62</sup> (2001-Current) and the film

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<sup>62</sup>The episodes of *Malcolm in the Middle* that were used were: “Reese’s Party”: Hal and Lois (the parents) go out of town on a romantic getaway while their

*Max Keeble's Big Move* (dir. Tim Hill, 2001) because they provided ample opportunity to discuss not only adolescent behaviour and ways of dealing with relevant issues, but also to talk about how parents and adults react and interact to and with adolescents. *Max Keeble's Big Move* brings to the forefront issues of bullying, as the bullied Max plans to enact revenge on his tormentors when he learns his family is going to move away and he won't be there to face the repercussions. However, his family decides not to move at the last minute, and Max is left at the mercy of his tormentors. Situations that occur daily in real life are presented, especially in *Malcolm in the Middle*, through a comedic framework that still allows the issues relating to morals, values and cause and effect to be apparent. It was my goal through showing episodes of *Malcolm in the Middle* and *Max Keeble's Big Move* that we would be able to discuss the interrelation of their behavior, peer, parental and adult modeling, and the process of learning to take responsibility for their own actions as they enter young adulthood.

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son, Reese, has a party that spirals out of control when a group of drug dealers take over the family garage to operate their business.

"Clip Show": After a car has had \$700 worth of damage done to it, Hal assumes it was the boys who did it so he drags them to see a psychiatrist. As the psychiatrist asks them questions about their home and their parents, we are shown flashbacks of past episodes and shenanigans that the boys have pulled. We eventually learn that it wasn't the boys' fault at all, but Hal forgetting to set the brake on his car.

"Cliques": Malcolm and the rest of his enrichment class are put back into the general school population and must deal with various school cliques (i.e. the "jocks", skateboarders and "goths").

"Malcolm Holds His Tongue": Determined to put an end to his horrible habit of talking before he thinks, Malcolm starts "holding his tongue", which eventually lands him in the hospital with a bleeding ulcer.

Right away, the students in general became focused on the films and the television episodes because the themes of bullying, frustration, confrontation with authority and with peers were, like in the case of *Ferris Bueller*, themes that were recurrent in their daily lives. The comedic nature of the actions that took place in the film and the episodes also proved valuable because since they were so exaggerated for comedic effect, they were much more obvious for the students to pick up on.

I decided, as well, to show the NFB film *Neighbours* to the same group of grade 8 students also within the context of the Health and Physical Education program, but with a focus on self-esteem and self-concept. We were discussing as a class the role of the individual in society, and how you see yourself as a person affects the kinds of relationships you form with the people around you, especially your friendships. Since we had completed the unit on making wise decisions and modeling the month before, the students were still aware of and reflective about the concept of cause and effect, and how their actions affect others. The film *Neighbours* (1952), to me, was a perfect representation of this concept since the stop-motion animation short really made obvious the absurdity and pettiness behind many fights. I planned to use this Health unit as a segue into a Geography, History, and Social Studies integrated unit on war.

The discussions that I mediated after *Neighbours* were, I believe, crucial to understanding where many of these students, particularly those with ADHD were coming from in terms of their

difficulties in self-regulation. For example, the students agreed that fighting over a flower and a fence became ridiculous when the two neighbours were dead and neither was able to enjoy it. They understood and could discuss the fact that there should have come a time when each of the men in the film should have stopped himself, and been the “better person” for the sake of survival. In general, however, the students with ADHD, which I understood after our discussions, had a hard time applying this to their own lives. When I asked what could lead them to get so angry that they would fight to the death over something, they couldn’t think of anything. However there were three separate instances involving two of the students with ADHD where physical fights had to be stopped because they wanted a stapler that someone else had, or needed lined paper, or didn’t want to move their chairs. The ability for these students to self-regulate was not there, although their ability to reason was.

The connectedness of these films to the units was so obvious to the students that they had little difficulty integrating examples of what they had viewed into their verbal responses in classroom discussions. As an example, in *Malcolm Holds His Tongue*, Malcolm becomes frustrated with the people around him that he makes an unwise decision to stop talking because he eventually winds up with an ulcer. I used this episode as a precursor to a discussion on how to deal with anger and frustration. The participation in the round table discussion we had was excellent, and although many of the students did not believe they would accumulate so much stress that they would develop ulcers, they were able to see that holding in feelings was unhealthy, as was expressing them without any form of filter.

Also, since these particular students had an exceptionally difficult time with filtering their emotional expression, I decided to give them a role playing task, which would not only help them understand how important it was to self-regulate their behaviour, but also to instill in them the sense that the classroom and their immediate social surroundings were only a miniature version of the society around them, and how they acted and reacted with the people around them were skills they needed to carry out in a broader spectrum.

At the end of both units, the class broke up into several groups, and had to improvise scenes in front of the class of particular topics that were relevant to the films and episodes such as bullying and how to deal with anger towards authority figures and peers. The task was to first enact the scene as though they were modeling the characters in the shows: by exaggerating their responses, and not using a filter on their emotional and behavioural impulses. I decided to break up the groups so that the students with emotional and behavioural exceptionalities, especially those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, would be spread out. Because there is so much difficulty with self-regulation and primary focus in students with ADHD, it was very important for me to be able to give them an opportunity to reach their zones of proximal development through peer scaffolding.

We brainstormed as a class what kinds of themes we should base the skits on, and the students took their ideas from themes relating to the episodes of *Malcolm in the Middle* and *Max*

*Keeble's Big Move*. We decided that we would focus on bullying, anger management, peer pressure, and relationships with parents as our main themes. After the first enactment of the scene (and many laughs), the class would as a whole decide how the scene should be reenacted to demonstrate positive responses and appropriate behaviours. The peer-regulation aspect of this role play was essential to bringing many of the students into their zones of proximal development. While many of the students understood the concepts of self-regulation quickly, others did not. Those who did not, however, did demonstrate the natural response of peer modeling and assumed many of the suggestions in their role playing of those that did understand because they, for one, wanted to be a part of the group, and two, began to understand what was appropriate through the input of others without having to deal with negative reactions in a 'real' social setting. They were, therefore, comfortable to play out new roles and adapt their scheme of what was appropriate and inappropriate responses and behaviour.

The particular responses of the exceptional students was very enjoyable to watch. In particular, when it was time to first enact the scene and exaggerate their responses, most of the exceptional students modeled very closely the portrayals that they had seen in *Malcolm in the Middle* and *Max Keeble*. I hypothesize that this is because those representations very closely resembled their own natural, intrinsic reactions. Because they felt very comfortable in their roles and were able to "role play" their habitual behaviours in a positive setting, they seemed much more open to the peer scaffolding and suggestions when it came time to reenact the scenes. Instead of getting into trouble for acting out and receiving negative attention for their behaviours,

the students with ADHD in particular were being positively rewarded with peer attention for their role playing, and did not feel threatened by the suggestions of their peers. I finally understood this after reading a journal entry that one of the students with ADHD had written. These were personal journals that had no specified subjects to write about, yet this one particular student chose to write about his experience playing the “bad kid who didn’t get along with his parents and was easily peer pressured” and how it made him feel. He wrote:

I really liked how we got to role play in class yesterday. I usually watch *Malcolm in the Middle* on Sundays, and I really like the show because I feel like how Malcolm’s older brother Reese feels a lot of the time. He always gets into trouble and it makes me think of me. I don’t like getting into trouble, and I really hate that sometimes I don’t even know how to stop even though I am getting yelled at by everyone like the teacher or my friends. Sometimes I feel like nobody likes me because I get on their nerves, and sometimes I feel like I can make people laugh and so they should like me even though I can do bad things sometimes. I liked that I could pretend to be somebody else and I could play and no one got mad at me, and lots of people thought I was funny when I was acting. I liked that nobody yelled at me and I didn’t feel mad when they told me how I should act.

Self-regulation is not something that can be taught in one lesson, or even over the course



of a few days or a month. There are still many non-identified adults out there who have a hard time regulating their behaviour, and could probably benefit from a little role playing and peer scaffolding. I wish I would have had the opportunity to see if some of the exceptional children in this case could put some of the self-regulation skills into practice on a regular basis, but I had to be satisfied with a very temporary yet positive observational period. Even if some students only mildly benefited from the boost to their self-esteem, such as the student who wrote in his journal, the experience as a whole I think was beneficial and positive for everyone involved. At the very least, the students as a group were able to interact socially in a positive way for an entire afternoon. Hopefully, however, they were all able to put into practice and remain cognitively and emotionally open (even subconsciously) to the idea of peer scaffolding.

## Conclusion

In Chapter One, the exceptionalities that should be able to most benefit from the use of film as a teaching tool were demarcated so that the parameters for the observations in the case studies presented later on would be clear. In particular, the advantages of film as a teaching tool in the classroom for those students with attention deficit or hyperactivity disorders, as well as mild to moderate emotional and behavioural exceptionalities, were introduced in the second chapter, which introduced a synthesis of Vygotskian socio-constructivist theory and Eisensteinian cinematic constructivist theory. For example, film has the ability to become the primary focus for a student because it can emotionally possess them, and guides their attention and impulses along a particular path. For those students that have a difficult time focusing on one thing in particular, or on anything at all, it provides a guidance and safety through the form of virtual interaction with the filmic environment, and teacher mediation. I also addressed the idea that, just as art is dynamic because of the dialectic of its form, learning is parallel in its dynamism. In the third chapter dedicated to curricular considerations and planning, I introduced the notion that the dynamism of learning is especially true for the emotionally or behaviourally exceptional child because of the dialectic of its methodology. The intuitive correlation between artistic and cognitive development is analogous to a synthesis of Eisensteinian theory (the movement from one form of being and feeling into another through pathos construction) and Vygotskian socio-constructivist theory (the movement from one scheme of knowledge and way of thinking into another by bringing students into their zones of proximal development).

My subjective observations in Chapter Four provided some examples of my experience putting these theories into practice in the classroom. Here, I saw the potential for classroom film use by exceptional children, both in an integrated (regular class setting) and exclusive (where the exceptional children were pulled out of the regular classroom) setting. I was able to observe, for example, that some students with emotional and behavioural exceptionalities, such as those in the *Kanesatake: 250 Years of Resistance* case study, have a difficult time letting go of personal biases (such as prejudice against Native people) because they have never been given the opportunity to explore their own emotions towards those biases. It appeared as though they were too afraid to move from their existing schemes of prejudice into a more informed scheme because they were unable to positively interpret or examine their own feelings towards Native people. When they were given the opportunity to do so, however, through virtual directed interaction with the film, peer scaffolding, and classroom activities and discussions mediated by myself, most students seemed as though they were able to reach their zone of proximal development. The new blocks of emotional and factual information seemed to be integrated into their pre-existing knowledge schemes and were reconstructed into a somewhat more accurate, informed, and solid scheme. Once the experience of an emotive response to *Kanesatake* was fostered, concrete and abstract thinking and creation based upon this new knowledge scheme became evident in written, oral, and visual tasks. The other case studies showcased the success of peer modeling and peer regulation in an integrated setting through the re-enactment in an immediate setting of the emotional responses to the virtual setting of the films. Students with emotional and behavioural exceptionalities felt more comfortable expressing their responses to

the films or television clips through role playing activities because they were able to play out their habitual behaviours in a positive setting, and they seemed much more open to the peer scaffolding and suggestions when it came time to reenact the scenes.

It is also significant to note that using film as a tool in different strands and subjects is one way of integrating technology and art throughout the curriculum. The Ontario Ministry of Education states in the Arts Grades 1-8 curriculum document that: “Education in, and with, the arts is essential to students’ intellectual, social, physical, and emotional growth.”<sup>63</sup> In the technology curriculum, the document elucidates that technology is a “way of knowing”, and a process of “exploration and experimentation.”<sup>64</sup> Film, as a teaching tool, serves both purposes.

It is unfortunate that in many instances, film gets dismissed as “edutainment” in the classroom. Teachers use films as rewards for good behaviour or completed work. Films are shown on Fridays, or as an addendum to an assignment, or at the end of a novel to bring “life” to what was read. Not to discount these uses of film entirely, but it seems as though the “edutainment” label often overshadows film’s pedagogical use, and therefore the validity of its use as a teaching tool is overshadowed by its seemingly unconnected or irrelevant insertion into

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<sup>63</sup>Government of Ontario. *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8, The Arts*. (Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2003) 5.

<sup>64</sup>Government of Ontario. *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8, Science and Technology*. (Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2003) 4.

the classroom. Instead of using film as a reward *outside* of what is to be taught, it should be incorporated into the overall teaching approach to enrich the experience of learning, and to unquestionably add a whole new dimension. At the very least, film can help inspire and creatively spark those students who are visual learners. It can be used in any subject, and immediately allows for oral and visual communication to be facilitated.

Distinguished communications scholar David Berlo believed that the transformation of our culture from an Industrial Age to an Information Age required a similar transformation in education.<sup>65</sup>

Most of what we have called formal education has been intended to imprint on the human mind all of the information that we might need for a lifetime. For the first time in history it is no longer either possible or necessary to store all available information within the human brain, and education must adjust accordingly. Education needs to be geared toward the *handling* of data rather than the *accumulation* of data. Humankind needs to be taught how to *process* information.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>David Shaw. *A Plea for Media Literacy in our Schools*, [http://www.medialit.org/reading\\_room/article631.html](http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article631.html), 2002

<sup>66</sup>David Berlo in David Shaw. *A Plea for Media Literacy in our Schools* [http://www.medialit.org/reading\\_room/article631.html](http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article631.html), 2002

This is so relevant to the students with emotional and behavioural exceptionalities since they not only have difficulty handling and processing factual and strictly scholastic information, but also have the same difficulties handling and processing emotional information. To the child with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities, film as a teaching tool also encourages emotional and cognitive development, social interaction and expression. As well, it becomes a “way of knowing,” and more significantly, a new way of seeing and feeling so that students with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities can learn to accommodate to and adapt within their environment.

David Caverly asserts in “Technology in Learning Assistance Centers: Past, Present and Future”:

Learning is an adaptive function of the structures individuals understand about the world within the range of experiences they have had with the world. Evident of this viability is equilibrium where cognitive schemata are consistent with experience, though also dynamic like the balance of a cyclist or a tightrope walker. Given disequilibrium, where task demands challenge viability of knowledge, schemata change. New, inconsistent experiences cause disequilibration, or perturbation in the existing schemata, which in turn cause accommodation, which in turn cause equilibration after which we can say

students have learned new knowledge.<sup>67</sup>

A major issue for students with behavioural and emotional exceptionalities is their inherent inability to adapt and accommodate to new educational, emotional and social situations. The qualities that film brings to teaching, in particular the opportunity to let students adapt their emotional and behavioural responses to these new situations through virtual interaction during screening, as well as immediate peer interaction during post-screening discussions, helps not only give them a sense of equilibrium, but definitely encourages the development of their overall adaptability.

In a society which almost exclusively is driven by a *survival of the fittest* mentality, the ability to adapt to a changing environment and not get lost or defeated is essential to survival. Although this seems like a bold statement, it absolutely should be blanketed over the emotionally or behaviourally exceptional child. What happened for so many years is that these students who required extra emotional guidance were left to fend for themselves, which in turn only compounded the problem that they were facing. Vygotsky's socio-constructivist approach emphasizes the role that society also plays in nurturing and raising its youth. Film is an

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<sup>67</sup>D.C. Caverly "Technology in Learning Assistance Centers: Past, Present, and Future." Lecture during the *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Institute for Learning Assistance Professionals* (Tucson, AZ: University Learning Center, University of Arizona) 1995.

apparatus: it is society filtered, exaggerated, dissected, caricatured, and montaged into meaning. What an absolutely perfect tool to use to help bring technological revolution to the classroom. In a pedagogical, teacher supervised context, and within the collective framework of film viewing, emphasis is placed on the socio-constructivist approach, incorporating peer scaffolding and peer and self regulation, as well as teacher modeling.

Eisenstein must have been aware of the potential for the dynamics of the film form to clash with the existing emotional schemata in everyone, including those whose emotional state was already clashing with itself. It obviously perturbs and challenges, and leads to disequilibrium. Students are forced to adapt to their new knowledge scheme through pathos construction, incorporating the skills and mental and emotional tools that they have acquired through their interaction with film, and subsequent reorganization and acceptance of their new schemata through mediated work within their zone of proximal development. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of social interaction, and Eisenstein emphasized the significance of filmic interaction. Again, the opportunity for emotional interplay between the child and the film, mediated of course by the teacher, wills the child to recreate or revisit some of the responses, problems, and questions that he or she experiences throughout the film. The first step is to establish an emotional response and work through a particular problem along the lines of Eisenstein's concept of pathos construction. It is essential that the child continue to develop self and peer regulation skills, as well as appropriate emotional and behavioural response in a real



and unmediated social and peer context as well.

My intuition that the analogy between artistic development (appreciation, response, and engagement) and cognitive development is significant was supported by my observations in the classroom, and leads me to consider that, by amalgamating many of the theoretical approaches that both Eisenstein and Vygotsky established, there is a wonderful synthesis of intrinsic and extrinsic interaction. More importantly, for the emotionally or behaviourally exceptional child, this encourages the possibility of emotional and cognitive growth that, in essence, will allow for the empowerment of the exceptional student in the context of their own development and adaptability.

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