



DEALING WITH EMOTIONS DURING A FILM-MAKING PROCESS

Hellstedt, Lenka

Heiskanen, Anna

Aalto University

School of Arts, Design and Architecture

Department of Film, Television and Scenography

lenka.hellstedt@aalto.fi

anna.heiskanen@aalto.fi

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Dealing with Emotions during a Film-Making Process

Film students' film-making processes often lead to an emotional crisis or conflict. In our experience these conflicts usually take place in April during the first year of studies. The regularity and similarity of these annual crises lead us to think that problematic or difficult individuals did not cause them but there had to be a pattern of some kind.

As film-making is very much a collaborative art form, where no one individual is the owner of, or solely responsible for, the film as a piece of art, we decided to take the perspective of group processes as a psychological and/or sociological phenomenon. For the theoretical background we initially consulted two group process experts with slightly differing viewpoints. In these discussions we outlined some of the phenomena we were encountering, to include: students acting out or having difficulties controlling their emotions, students having difficulties distinguishing between the personal and the private, and students struggling with unaddressed traumas and prejudices passed from the previous generation. We then familiarized ourselves with several theories on group processes, which we briefly explain in the annex to our script.

As a result of our observations, interviews and source materials, we decided to write a film script presenting our conclusions. This was originally proposed by our supervisor Kari Nuutinen. In examining our observations of different student groups, we were able to characterize certain roles that present themselves in individual students. The script characters were written as archetypes of these different roles that individual students seemingly embody. In the script we also attempted to describe the set-up and nature of the processes of students' exercise films as we personally see it, and to convey the emotions a new teacher might feel when supervising these processes.

Spring of Arabia

Screenplay

Lenka Hellstedt and Anna Heiskanen

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Characters:

Teachers:

The Newcomer – recently started as teacher

The Lecturer – experienced teacher

The Old Fart – too experienced teacher

Students:

The Customer – production student, interested in his rights as a student

The Panicker – directing student, interested in her identity as an artist

The Follower – scriptwriting student, wants a guru

The DOP Student – cinematography student, busy

The Collapsing Student – locked in a cleaning closet

1. INT CLASSROOM – DAY

THE NEWCOMER smiles in anticipation. THE CUSTOMER, THE PANICKER and THE FOLLOWER lift their eyes from the scripts they've been reading.

THE CUSTOMER (1.1.)

This script is totally not what we agreed on.

THE PANICKER (2.1.)

I can't be on the main character's side.

THE CUSTOMER

I can't even tell who the main character is.

THE FOLLOWER (3.1.)

It's Chili. Like the teacher said.

THE PANICKER

What kind of name is Chili anyway? It's embarrassing. I can't be in this kind of a project.

THE NEWCOMER

Tut tut. This is the script we have chosen for production with the other teachers.

THE CUSTOMER

Why weren't we included in the decision-making?

THE PANICKER (3.2.)

Whose idea was this anyway?

THE FOLLOWER

Ours. We got the idea together as a group. The teachers said it was good.

THE CUSTOMER

Well this can't be the way films are made in real life, can it?

THE NEWCOMER

This triangle model is kind of a basic thing.

THE PANICKER (2.1.)

Triangle? What about the freedom of artistic self-expression?

THE CUSTOMER

Whose freedom? Yours? Do you want to make films alone?

THE PANICKER

Rather that than this shit.

THE FOLLOWER (3.1.)

Shouldn't somebody take control of this situation now?

The Follower looks at the Newcomer, crying.

THE NEWCOMER

Now, now. Lets' try to take it easy..

The Panicker looks very upset, jumps up and runs out.

2. INT COPY ROOM – DAY

THE LECTURER is scanning receipts for M2. The Newcomer stops by.

THE LECTURER

The last workshop of the first year. How is it going?

THE NEWCOMER

Well. How should I put it...

THE LECTURER

What do you mean?

THE NEWCOMER

Suddenly they became very strange. Saying bad things, crying, storming out of the room.

The Lecturer laughs. The Newcomer looks upset.

THE NEWCOMER

What have I done wrong?

THE LECTURER (2.1.)

Classic grand finale to the first year. Tuckman's stages of group development: forming, norming, storming, performing, adjourning. Moreno also has some good stuff on group roles. And when you scan attachments for M2, you can save your e-mail address here.

The Old Fart stops by.

THE OLD FART

Hello. Problems again? (talking about the photocopier)

THE NEWCOMER

The students are suddenly all in conflict.

THE OLD FART (4.1.)

They are always like that, life's too easy, it's all about me, myself and I. Don't forget about the process planning meeting today.

The Newcomer is thinking about something.

3. INT WARDROBE – DAY

The students are dressed as different characters. (5.1.) The Customer is a plumber, the Panicker is a doctor, and the Follower is a hippie.

THE CUSTOMER

Why are we doing this?

THE NEWCOMER

These characters could give us some healthy distance. If you were this character, how would you approach the project?

THE PANICKER

This is George Clooney from ER. The patient, meaning the script, is examined and treated accordingly. Actors, locations, shooting plan, props defined.

THE CUSTOMER

This is the plumber, who starts by setting the timeframe and cost for the project. Getting my tools.

He takes his laptop.

The Follower goes to the Newcomer and whispers. (3.1.)

THE FOLLOWER

Finally they are moving on.

The Newcomer adjusts the flowers in her hair.

THE NEWCOMER

Why don't you join them?

4. INT LUNCH CAFE – DAY

The Newcomer sits down with the Lecturer and the Old Fart.

THE NEWCOMER

Thanks for the reading tips. I came up with an idea for a role play that seems to work surprisingly well.

Smiling, she looks at the students farther away.

5. INT LUNCH CAFE – STUDENTS’ TABLE – DAY

The atmosphere is heated. (2.1.)

THE PANICKER

What is the budget for the set design?

THE CUSTOMER (3.2.)

How would I know, since you still haven’t told me what is seen in the shots.

THE PANICKER

But I haven’t even met the DOP yet.

THE CUSTOMER

How come?

THE PANICKER

Nobody told me who it is!

THE FOLLOWER

But it’s in the e-mail.

THE PANICKER AND THE CUSTOMER

What e-mail?

THE FOLLOWER

The one the teacher sent.

6. INT LUNCH CAFE – TEACHERS’ TABLE – DAY

The students come to the teachers’ table.

THE CUSTOMER (3.2.)

What is this e-mail we didn’t get?

THE FOLLOWER

They say they haven’t got any information about this workshop.

THE NEWCOMER

I sent it to everyone a few weeks ago.

THE PANICKER

Oh, such a long time ago? Then it’s got lost somewhere already.

THE CUSTOMER

To which address?

THE NEWCOMER

To your Aalto University addresses, of course.

THE CUSTOMER

But we don’t use them. I never get any of those.

THE NEWCOMER

Well, there you are then.

THE PANICKER

Is there a budget or not?

THE OLD FART

What's all this about budgets? Producers never give enough money anyway.

THE CUSTOMER

What is the whole point of this workshop?

THE PANICKER

Does this film school have any strategy or policy about what we are doing here at all?

THE FOLLOWER (3.4.)

Like they have at the University of Arts?

The Newcomer is left with her mouth open and doesn't know what to say.

THE OLD FART

Oh you want dictatorship, like at the old theatre academy?

The students leave looking angry. The Newcomer is upset.

THE OLD FART

If Mollberg, the last real film director, was alive today, he would let them have it with his horse whip..

7. INT CLASSROOM / CORRIDOR – NEXT MORNING

The Newcomer is staring at the clock in the empty classroom. (3.5.) She finally hears footsteps in the corridor. The DOP STUDENT arrives.

THE DOP STUDENT

I was supposed to come and shoot some project?

THE NEWCOMER

Unfortunately there's no one else here yet.

THE DOP STUDENT

I had one hour for this and I'm already one hour late. So I can't wait any longer.

The DOP student leaves.

After a while, there are footsteps again. The Newcomer rushes to the door. It's the Old Fart.

THE OLD FART

Don't forget the program planning meeting. Not that it helps anything, since we don't have the proper scheduling program. (3.4.)

THE NEWCOMER

I'm in the middle of a workshop.

The Newcomer pushes the door so that the Old Fart won't see that the classroom is empty.

8. INT CLASSROOM – DAY

The Newcomer is eating soup. She hears footsteps again. This time it sounds like several people. She runs to the door. She runs into the students and spills the soup on her clothes.

THE NEWCOMER

Shit!

THE PANICKER

Stop yelling at us.

THE NEWCOMER

Where were you all morning?

THE CUSTOMER

We were at the dentist's, the shoemaker's and giving a newspaper interview.

9. INT SHOWER DRESSING ROOM – DAY

The Newcomer comes in, trying to wipe the soup off her clothes. She is startled as she notices the Lecturer.

THE LECTURER

You had an accident?

THE NEWCOMER

No, just some pea soup. I ran into them since they were late

and I thought they weren't going to come at all anymore...

She tries not to cry.

THE LECTURER

Oh, poor you.

The Newcomer bursts into tears. The Lecturer goes and pats her on the shoulder in a friendly manner. The Newcomer starts to pull herself together.

THE LECTURER

It's never that serious.

Suddenly they hear a voice coming from the cleaning closet.

STUDENT X (off screen)

What do you mean, it's not serious? This is about my whole life.

THE NEWCOMER (whispering)

Who's that?

THE LECTURER (WHISPERING)

It's a student dealing with a deadline.

THE NEWCOMER

Oh. This kind of situation still happens to you too?

THE LECTURER

To be precise: these things don't actually happen to me or you. They happen to the students.

The Newcomer is slowly starting to look a bit brighter.

10. EXT PRINCIPAL'S VEGETABLE GARDEN – A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER (2.1.)

The Panicker is guiding the Follower on how to move the camera between vegetables. The Customer is holding a walkie-talkie and a reflector. They look very focused and it seems to be going smoothly.

The Newcomer is watching them from further away, looking happy, almost touched. She smiles and gives a thumbs up to the Customer.

The Customer looks gloomy, pointing at her wristwatch, and then to the sky.

A small, lonely cloud is approaching the sun.

-THE END-

CITATIONS

- 1.1. Turquet, oneness

- 2.1. Tuckman, the stages of group development
 - Forming
 - Norming
 - Storming
 - Performing
 - Adjourning

- 1.1. Bion, dependency, leader/teacher centering
- 1.2. Bion, scapegoat
- 3.3. Bion, aggression and resistance
- 3.4. Bion, waiting for the messiah
- 3.5. Bion, fight-flight (being late and absent)

- 4.1. Siltala, "Burden transference"

- 5.1. Moreno, group roles

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Basic Assumption Oneness (Turquet): The group seeks an undifferentiated state of wholeness – there is no sense of individuality, only oneness and homogeneity within the group. Members seek to join in a powerful union with an omnipotent force, which is unobtainably high, to surrender themselves to passive participation in order to feel existence, well-being, and wholeness. The group commits itself to a “movement,” a cause outside itself, as a way of survival.

Tuckman’s stages of group development:

Forming - stage 1

High dependence on the leader for guidance and direction. Little agreement on team aims other than those received from the leader. Individual roles and responsibilities are unclear. Leader must be prepared to answer lots of questions about the team’s purpose, objectives and external relationships. Processes are often ignored. Members test the tolerance of the system and the leader. The leader directs.

Storming - stage 2

Decisions don’t come easily within the group. Team members vie for position as they attempt to establish themselves in relation to other team members and the leader, who might receive challenges from team members. Clarity of purpose increases but plenty of uncertainties persist. Cliques and factions form and there may be power struggles. The team needs to be focused on its goals to avoid becoming distracted by relationships and emotional issues. Compromises may be required to enable progress. The leader coaches.

Norming - stage 3

Agreement and consensus largely forms among the team, who respond well to facilitation by the leader. Roles and responsibilities are clear and accepted. Big decisions are made by group agreement. Smaller decisions may be delegated to individuals or small teams within the

group. Commitment and unity are strong. The team may engage in fun and social activities. The team discusses and develops its processes and working style. There is general respect for the leader and some of the leadership is shared more by the team. The leader facilitates and enables.

Performing - stage 4

The team is more strategically aware; it is clear about why it is doing what it is doing. The team has a shared vision and is able to stand on its own feet with no interference or participation from the leader. There is a focus on over-achieving goals, and the team makes most of the decisions against the criteria agreed with the leader. The team has a high degree of autonomy. Disagreements occur but now they are resolved within the team positively, and necessary changes to processes and structure are made by the team. The team is able to work toward achieving the goal, and also to attend to relationship, style and process issues along the way. Team members look after each other. The team requires delegated tasks and projects from the leader. The team does not need to be instructed or assisted. Team members might ask for assistance from the leader with personal and interpersonal development. The leader delegates and oversees.

Bion's Group dynamics:

Basic Assumption Group: The latent aspect of group life that is comprised of unconscious wishes, fears, defenses, fantasies, impulses, and projections. It is that aspect of the group, which avoids the primary task by acting as if a certain group assumption was true. The purpose of the Basic Assumption Group is to survive as a group, where the group becomes focused on its relations to the leadership rather than to its task.

Basic Assumption Dependency: The group acts as if their task is to obtain security and protection from one individual – either the designated leader or a member who assumes the role. The group acts as if they must be saved by an omnipotent leader.

Basic Assumption Fight/Flight: The group acts as if its purpose is to preserve itself and that this can be done only by fighting (such as active aggression, scapegoating, and physical attack) or by fleeing the task (such as withdrawal, passivity, avoidance, and ruminating on past history). Action is essential whether for fight or flight. Leadership is bestowed on anyone who can mobilize the aggressive forces of the group or facilitates moving away from the task.

Basic Assumption Pairing: The group acts as if its survival is contingent upon reproduction; that is, in some magic way a Messiah will be born to save the group and help it survive. To this end, the group puts forth two people to pair with each other, with the hope that they will produce this unborn savior.

CONCLUSION

We presented our work to our work community in a monthly meeting. We gave out the scripts, did quick casting for the roles, and had a proper read-through like in any first film rehearsal. Even in the casting stage, people seemed to immediately get a grip of the characters because of their archetypical names. There was even some competition about certain roles, and disappointment expressed from those who did not get a part. During reading, there was laughter and spontaneous reactions of recognition and identification about the situations and characters.

After the read-through, we gave a Prezi presentation that preceded our study on group dynamics. In the presentation we mapped out the conflicting expectations and pressures faced in our field of work that we had defined as coming from five directions: university establishment, film business, individual teachers, individual students, and group dynamics.

After the presentation, it was obvious to us that the personnel's knowledge about group dynamics varied tremendously: some were making notes and seemed interested like they were hearing these things for the first time. Some were able to question details like Tuckman's developmental stages.

Afterwards, we were asked to present our study to the Nordcil (association of Nordic Film Schools) meeting in Gothenburg. We gave a similar presentation there in January 2015. The timetable was tight and there was not much time for discussion, but it seemed obvious that our Nordic colleagues were also able to relate to our experiences of the nature of our work.

One of our own professors subsequently suggested that we could get the students to actually shoot a film based on our script, preferably every year. This was naturally a joke, but it describes the immediate feeling of sharing that we got through our observations.

As teachers and pedagogues we found the scriptwriting process very liberating, as we understood that the crises in these groups did not stem from our inadequacy but were a normal part of group processes.

We decided to put into use the information we acquired in this study, and made an action plan for first year students, including introducing the students to material on group processes, thus giving them the tools to observe themselves in these processes. It remains to be seen if these means will make a difference to the film-making processes of the next generation of film students.

As we have focused on group dynamics in this study, we suggest as a future field of study the emotions arising from conflicting expectations of students and teachers, presented in the study *Mind the Gap* (Vaughan et al., 2008), in relation to group dynamics.

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