

**AN OBTL APPROACH TO SOFT SKILLS**

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**Abstract**

*As the success of learners in their lives is determined by their knowledge of soft skills, this paper explores how soft skills can be achieved through Outcome Based Teaching and Learning (OBTL). Traditional approaches to teaching and learning are based on direct instruction of standard methods and hence lack the scope to impart soft skills through problem-based-learning. On the other hand, OBTL involves the learners in various skill based activities and make them also display that they have achieved the intended skills. Further, as it is believed that soft skills are people skills or life skills and are acquired through active participation of the learners, Outcome Based Teaching and Learning is proposed as an appropriate choice to acquire soft skills.*

**Key Words:** Soft Skills, Movies, Outcome Based Teaching and Learning

Soft Skills play a vital role in the success of candidates in job interviews and they guarantee bright future in the workplace too. Hence, they are being given much importance in colleges and universities and various methods of developing soft skills are also followed. This paper explores how soft skills can be achieved through Outcome Based Teaching and Learning (OBTL) by using movie as a tool. Traditional approaches to teaching and learning are based on direct instruction of standard methods and hence lack the scope to impart soft skills through problem-based-learning. On the other hand, OBTL involves the learners in various skill based activities and make them also display that they have achieved the intended skills.

Soft skills complement hard skills and they are interpersonal in nature. They can be developed easily by systematic preparation and practice. Though it is difficult to answer the question “What are soft skills?”, there are top 60 soft skills preferred by any employer and some of them include: Math, Courtesy, Honesty, Reliability, Flexibility, Team skills, Good attitude, Writing skills, Personal energy, Personal integrity and Positive work ethic. (Sardhar). Most of the skills mentioned above can very well be developed through OBTL approach. To ascertain the scope of OBTL approach in the enhancement of soft skills, this paper uses the movie *Men of Honor*. By using a movie in the classroom a teacher can easily develop the soft skills with respect to OBTL approach.

*Men of Honor* (2000) is a drama film inspired by the true story of Master Chief Petty Officer Carl Brashear, who is also the first amputee and first African-American Master Diver

in the United States Navy. Brashear, played by Cuba Gooding Jr., was born to a poor farming family, and joined the Navy with insurmountable hope. In the diving school, he encountered Master Chief Billy Sunday (Robert De Niro), a 'gruff and tyrannical' diving instructor who held 'absolute sway over his charges.' "Sunday does little at first to encourage Brashear's ambitions, and the would-be diver discovers racism in the military is an ugly fact of life when his white comrades refuse to share barracks with him. But Brashear's courage and determination make an impression on Sunday, and the two men become allies as Brashear must fight prejudice, military bureaucracy, and even a crippling injury in order to realize his dreams" (Flixter). Racism was uncontrolled throughout the country when Carl Brashear determined to become the very first African-American scuba diver. Moreover, the imminent sufferings of Brashear could very well be predicted as a lot of his shipmates and even his trainer Master Chief Billy Sunday desired to witness him fail and quit the navy. It was the sheer will power, determination, and tolerance that made Brashear create history and gain the admiration of his fellow naval officers.

By using *Men of Honor* in the classroom, a teacher can fulfill Aim, Intended Learning Outcomes, Teaching and Learning Processes, and Assessment which are the prerequisites for an OBTL approach. Moreover, "OBTL, on the other hand, is based on such questions as: What do I intend my students to be able to do after my teaching that they couldn't do before, and to what standard? How do I supply learning activities that will help them achieve those outcomes? How do I assess them to see how well they have achieved them?" (Biggs & Tang 2007).

**Aim:**

The aim is to make the learners comprehend the theory behind soft skills and to experiment them in the classroom. Further, the aim is to bring out the relevance of movie in the development of soft skills and to assess the learning outcomes.

**Intended Learning Outcomes:**

The learners will realise the necessity of soft skills and will be able to use them in appropriate situations. They will also understand that soft skills complement hard skills and will show interest in learning them more. Further, they will experiment their learning in different situations and improve their performance depending upon the shortcomings.

**Teaching and Learning Processes:**

*Men of Honor* will be shown and the learners will be involved in various activities that can help them understand the components and relevance of soft skills. The activities include Group Discussion, Oral Presentation, and Role play. The active participation of learners will bring out the necessity of ambition, perseverance, hard work, motivation and determination. The hero of the Movie *Men of Honor*, Carl Brashear is an epitome of soft skills and one can imbibe his qualities at ease. As movie is the product of multimedia, it holds scope for better understanding due to the combined effects of audio, visual and other animation techniques.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Ambition plays a vital role in the success of a person and its absence makes him/her grope in darkness. Brashear is full of ambition and feels it as the pulse of his soul. "Through every scene we can see his passion, motivation and stubbornness to achieve his dream. We can see the struggle within him as he embarks to make his father proud" (Brown). It is his ambition that makes him tolerate all the cruelties and racist prejudices inflicted on him. Infact, his white comrades have refused to accommodate him in their barracks. He determines not to accept the role of cook or valet traditionally occupied by African Americans. Further, it is his ambition that makes the racist Master Chief Billy Sunday to change his perception of colour. In the beginning of the movie we find Billy Sunday revealing his racist feeling thus: "My name is Master Chief Billy Sunday. There was a preacher by the same name who cleaned up Chicago of all the whoring spics, drunken wops and mother fucking niggers that were making that place unfit for decent white folks to live. The only difference between me and that old preacher is that he worked for God, and I *am* God!" (Men of Honor). On his first encounter with Sunday, Brashear is made fun of for his ambition but he firmly replies thus "Sir, I am a Navy man. Where I come from, there are no oceans. Only dirt farms and ornery mules. And no self-respecting Navy man makes a living driving mules" (Men of Honor). Further, he displays his courage and determination when he is insulted further by Sunday: "You were right, Chief. You and I have nothing in common. I may be some dirt dumb nigger from Podunk, but at least I'm making something of myself. You, you're the same hateful, little man you started out as. Without diving, you're nothing but a lost, broke-down son of a bitch who used to be something" (Men of Honor). In the due course, Sunday is impressed by the insuperable will of Brashear and starts helping him to achieve his ambition.

Brashear's determination to overcome obstacles is par excellence. Right from the beginning of the movie, one can see Brashear's positive outlook on setbacks. "As the adult Carl begins his naval career, as a cook, the old adage of success being 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration holds true for the man. Carl has to work twice as hard as his white peers and ... competes with them as an equal. It's not all beer and skittles for Carl as he must overcome the prejudice of the white military bureaucracy against a black man climbing the ladder of success. As one expects, since this is a true story, Carl graduates in the face of adversity" (Clifford). His confidence reaches the pinnacle when he loses one of his legs during a salvage operation. Physical fitness is the foremost necessity of a naval diver and the loss of a leg is naturally a threat to the ambition of Brashear. As he is a man of determination, he considers the loss of his leg as a chance to prove the power of his ambition and remarks thus: "So I'm asking this: Cut off my leg and assemble a full medical review board 4 weeks from today. It is then that I will demonstrate that I am fit to return to full diving duty" (Men of Honor). He becomes the first African-American reinstated to full active duty as an amputee.

Hard work and determination transform all obstacles into stepping stones for success. Brashear's dedication towards his career has impressed and changed the perception of Chief Sunday who thinks initially, the entry of Brashear to the diving school as the challenge to the 'status quo' maintained in the Navy. "A product of his upbringing and the prevailing mores

of the day, Chief Sunday initially sees Carl's arrival as a threat to the status quo of his beloved Navy. Carl's determination, ability and dedication to the Navy slowly turn the chief and his attitude toward Brashear" (Clifford). Though Chief Sunday crafts hurdles in all the tasks set for Brashear, Brashear completes all the tasks in spite of the handicaps generated by Captain Sunday. "Likewise, during an underwater assembling task where each student had to assemble a flange underwater using a bag of tools, Brashear's bag is cut open. Brashear finishes the assembly and successfully completes the diving school, earning the quiet and suppressed admiration of Master Chief Sunday and his fellow divers" (Men of Honor). Captain Sunday is deeply moved by Brashear's invincible desire to become a Naval Diver and starts helping him to become the one.

Passion towards one's duty will induce abundant energy to complete even a herculean task. To be named a Master Diver, Brashear has to complete a task ie, make twelve steps with Mark 5 suit, in front of the racist juries. He has been forced to put on the modified Mark 5, equipped with helium for lower depths, weighs 290 pounds instead of the regulation Mark 5 suit which weighs 190 pounds. He accepts the challenge and prepares to make twelve steps to become one among the men of honor. He has none to support save Master Chief Sunday who has been demoted to Senior Chief by the commanding officer for supporting Brashear and for allowing him to pass. The encouraging words uttered by Sunday while Brashear making the steps are the hall mark of inspiration and motivation and it results in:

The United States Navy  
Proudly reinstates...  
Senior Chief and Diver  
Carl Brashear...  
to full, active duty (Drew).

As the movie is based on the life and tribulations of a universal hero, the qualities displayed in it are accessible and possible for all the people and none can term them fictitious or impractical. Infact, most of the production was made after being consulted with Carl Brashear and Brashear himself stands testimony to the relevance of the movie thus: "Carl Brashear was on hand throughout most of the production, re-living many of the events that helped shape a life and career marked by courage, perseverance and honor. Watching the filming was an emotional and unforgettable experience for the now- retired seaman, who sees his life - and the film based upon it - as having important, if basic messages. "It's not a sin to get knocked down," Brashear points out. "It's a sin to stay down. And if you dream big and work towards those dreams with all your might, you'll be successful."" (Men of Honour: Production Notes).

**Assessment:**

Learners will be assessed based on their performance in the activities assigned to them. The teacher can give a case study to a group of learners and involve them in solving the problems related the case. Further the teacher can make the learners react to different situations that demand their soft skills for the completion. Moreover, the teacher can grade

the learners by comparing them with one another and judge them based on the benchmark set by the teacher herself or himself.

## **Conclusion:**

Thus, the analysis brings out how soft skills can be attained through Outcome Based Teaching and Learning by using a movie as a tool. Further, as it is believed that soft skills are people skills or life skills and are acquired through active participation of the learners, Outcome Based Teaching and Learning is proposed as an appropriate choice to acquire soft skills.

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