
Article

High-school cinema curricula: Evidence of new trends in education

Francis Desbarats

Université Toulouse II-Le Mirail; fr.desbarats@orange.fr

First published in *Images Documentaires* (Desbarats, 2000)

Translated from French by Madeline Whittle

Submission date: 30 March 2021; Acceptance date: 14 May 2021; Publication date: 23 November 2021

How to cite

Desbarats, F. (2021) 'High-school cinema curricula: Evidence of new trends in education'. *Film Education Journal*, 4 (2), 125–35. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/FEJ.04.2.03>.

Peer review

This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

Copyright

2021, Francis Desbarats. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/FEJ.04.2.03>.

Open access

Film Education Journal is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

Abstract

Drawn from the author's PhD, and originally published in *Images Documentaires* in 2000, this article presents an incisive portrait of the complex political and institutional history that led to the establishment of film education within the curriculum in French secondary schools. Mounting a detailed account of the nuances and successive developments within the field, this essay examines the chronology – starting within a post-war context – through which the successive influences of ciné-clubs, teachers, television, political movements and government interventions have shaped the form of curricular school-based film education in France today.

Keywords France; film education; secondary school; curriculum; baccalaureate; television

Cinema education in French secondary schools has existed since 1984, at a modest but meaningful scale. Its genesis, creation and evolution have been the product of diverse social forces, minoritarian and vibrant, acting in turn – and unsystematically, sometimes at cross-purposes – to achieve a double legitimation: the recognition of cinema as an art form, and its admission among the ranks of academic disciplines. These

forces faced an opposition that remained hostile, and who had the weight of scholarly tradition on their side, along with an established distrust towards an arrogant and seductive mode of entertainment.

This broad approach should not obscure the sometimes erratic flowering of events and decisions, nor the fact that, once decisions have been made, their consequences produce effects that might be unexpected even for those who supported them.

As it emerged under the leadership of Alain Savary, cinema education formed part of a history that can be traced back to the Liberation and the ciné-clubs that subsequently cropped up under the newly reinstated freedom of association [the right to free assembly and association within France, following the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights]. We will consider this history, examine the context and circumstances which presided over the minister's decision, and finally the implications of these developments within the general framework of the French education system.

The distant prehistory of cinema curricula

The ciné-clubs of the post-war period distinguished themselves from those of the 1930s through the importance they attached to secondary schools in particular. In the 1930s, ciné-clubs were primarily intended for and organised by undergraduates, with a political perspective: they often showed films made by surrealists or Soviet film-makers, which otherwise would have remained difficult to see because of vigilant censorship in commercial theatres. After the war, both situation and context were entirely transformed. The left had a demonstrable political dominance, even more evident and longer lasting in terms of culture, where, starting in 1947, the severing effects of the Cold War were less marked. Ciné-clubs appeared in the cities, and not only in the proximity of the 'campus'. Seven or eight ciné-club federations, experiencing remarkable growth, were powerful enough to obtain concessions from the film industry with the help of parliamentary arbitration.

What could explain this golden age of ciné-clubs that began after 1945? It seems that the ritual of debating films made it possible to prolong the aftermath of the experience of resistance: to be convinced, one need only look at the range of programming in 1945, which was very left-oriented. At the same time, these discussions had the function of exorcising the silences and passivities that had gripped France during the war. Via the hazy mirror of the world that cinema proffers, this popular spectacle – so lively and so modern, still rejected by official culture – French society looked at and 'talked to' itself, going beyond the wear and tear, the ageing, and the badly healed traumas of unimaginable defeat and sinister Pétainism.

Ciné-clubs thus authorised the reconstitution of a self-consciousness, which secondary schools could not accommodate, stuck as they were within a bourgeois academic education system (as they are generally in terms of content, and always in terms of form), offering young people only a model, and rarely one of intellectual experimentation. In post-war ciné-clubs, teachers occupied a prominent place, often serving as passionate and generous facilitators, sometimes as pontificators or obsessional ideologues, for which they could be forgiven. Some ciné-clubs were established in the high schools themselves – unimaginable in the 1930s – and aroused enthusiasm, because a different mode of transmission was at work in this context, undermining the stifling hierarchical mandate that structured relations between adults and young people in French society during these decades.

In this context, the question of cinema education was raised very early by teachers who were at once innovative pedagogues and ciné-club devotees. Thus, in Biarritz, a teacher named Jean Delannoy (no relation to the film-maker) introduced his eighth-grade students to compositional framing and camera angles using a piece of cardboard with a rectangle cut out of it. One of his former students, Pierre Gabatson, recounted the shock he experienced, and saw in this lesson the origins of his own interest, which, much later, would lead him to become a professor of cinema at university level. It is significant here that Jean Delannoy's byline appears both in the 1946 first issue of *Cahiers pédagogiques*, a journal of research on teaching, and in the first issue of *Cinéma 54*, a journal published by the FFCC (French Federation of Ciné-Clubs).

The National Education apparatus, however, remained hostile to the introduction of cinema. In January 1961, the incumbent minister addressed the matter in a speech in the legislative chamber. He proclaimed his goodwill by insisting on 'the very great value [of cinema] as a means of expression of human genius', but became frankly apologetic on the subject of material considerations (projectors, film prints, screening rooms, technical competency): he declared these matters insurmountable, and proposed instead to wait 'for the complete overhaul of school programmes and their adaptation to present realities, which will be a very long-term endeavour'.

The people whom we would now describe as cinephiles did not despair. They published accounts of their experiences, established affiliations with scholars of letters and languages, and organised regular conferences. Among them were Bernard Georgin (high-school principal who chaired a cinema studies department at the Paris Academy), Henri Agel (creator of an IDHEC [Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies] preparatory course at Lycée Voltaire) and Jean-Claude Guézennec (professor of classics at the Lycée Corneille in Rouen). It is worth noting that these figures generally placed a much greater emphasis on the study of films than on film-making. It was only Celestin Freinet who, from the 1930s onwards, endeavoured to create films for and with students, while in high school, only Jean-Claude Guézennec managed to realise his desire to balance film analysis and production. A few years later, he would lead one of the first cinema curricula.

Obstacles to cinema education are not to be found exclusively on the side of the authorities. Non-teacher cinephiles, such as Raymond Borde (in a shattering text in Issue 26 of *Cahiers pédagogiques*, in 1961), and sometimes former teachers, such as Andrée Tournés (in Issue 52 of *Le Français aujourd'hui*, in 1980, when she joined the Jean Vigo Federation), rejected the notion that cinema could be taught, citing their own love of the art. Borde solemnly warned educators: 'Please, Gentlemen, do not interfere with that which does not concern you. Cinema has until now been miraculously sheltered from education's learning imperatives. This is the beautiful state of affairs that you're on the verge of destroying.' Tournés, twenty years later, expressed concern in more moderate terms, but for similar reasons: 'Look how many children leave school with a taste for literature: if only the same were true for cinema ... We have always seen the ciné-club as a site of alternative practice. We want it to stay that way.' The reproach, which amounted to saying that secondary schools transform knowledge into indigestible and boring material, has stubbornly lingered over time, and no doubt carries painful associations for those who formulated it.

The situation changed with 1968. Many teachers, and sometimes even school leaders, sought to modify the institutional and pedagogical status quo. Cinema studies then arrived in earnest at the university level. Although the conditions were profoundly different, this development revived some of the hopes that had manifested themselves in 1944.

Indeed, in the 1970s, when it was first introduced at university level, some regarded cinema as a form of 'social intervention'. In light of the special connections that cinema establishes between people and ideas, they believed it might help to revolutionise the university, if not society itself. This is the utopian vision that we find in many publications from the time, observing the rise of 'syllabuses' dedicated to this new mode of instruction. Marcel Oms, who lectured in film studies at the University of Perpignan, while also keeping his post as a secondary school French teacher, testified to this when he looked back on those years in a text from 1987 (*CinémAction*, No. 45): 'Cinema, terrain of the imagination, arrived in universities at a time when we believed in the possibility of using the subversive force of dreams to alter the perception of the world. Cinema in education was, we thought, a means of calling into question the seriousness of traditional instruction.'

Activities tied to local initiatives were also undertaken in secondary schools. They were few in number, and variously appreciated by university deans and government ministers, who accused them at various points of leaning too far to the left. The most remarkable example, and the only one at this scale, was the Bordeaux Academy, spearheaded by René La Borderie (director of the Regional Centre for Educational Documentation) starting in 1965. It involved a large number of institutions, and its creators ensured that teachers would have an hour set aside each week for audiovisual instruction, organised and funded by the

administration. The orientation of the analyses was clearly semiological – Christian Metz served as a kind of sponsor for the enterprise – but film-making was not neglected. Another equally important example was the Academy of Montpellier, more classical in its cinephile traditions, which encompassed half a dozen establishments. It had its inauguration in 1972, with the initiatives of Marcel Oms and Pierre Guibert. Later, some of the first cinema curricula would develop as a result of competencies acquired: the Sarlat programme, around Jacques Colas at the Bordeaux Academy, and the Lunel programme in Montpellier.

An artistically oriented education

In February 1984, in a letter signed by Pierre Baqué and Claude Pair, the ministry announced the creation of a cinema curriculum at the start of the following school year for selected high-school applicants. The new programme was designed explicitly as a form of arts instruction, as the first lines of the letter established: 'The curriculum is not pre-professional. It is educational, artistic, autonomous.'

This orientation was not to be taken for granted; in other countries, policies around audiovisual media were very rarely artistic in nature. In the United States, for example, whose cinematographic power goes without saying, high-school curricula would never consider cinema from this angle. These curricula, called electives, comprise up to 50 per cent of academic programmes, bringing together disparate subject areas between which they introduce symptomatic coherences. Thus, 'visual arts' electives classify cinema, considered exclusively in the form of animated cartoons, alongside painting, drawing, design, photography and jewellery-making. Cinema, like the visual arts, requires a talent for fabrication, contained as it is within the commercial integration of the applied arts. What is absent is the idea of artistic commitment and personal involvement.

In France, the centrality accorded to cinema's artistic value is not necessarily a unanimous position, and it is regularly disputed in semiological or technical terms. But the logic that has persisted to this day continuously privileges this domain. It is the result of a national history that has regularly recognised, on the part of film-makers and cinephiles exhibiting cultural ambitions, a power of intervention on ethical and social questions. The support that film-makers showed to undocumented migrants in 1998 was in line with this tradition.

The letter announcing the curriculum's formation, succinct and very open, nevertheless laid out robust instructions. It insisted on the need for two approaches: 'the first is reflective, the second is practical'. It described these approaches as 'necessarily complementary', and expressed the hope that, within each team of teachers, there should be no division of labour, no sealed-off specialisations that would segregate one approach from the other. In addition, the letter requested that the teams be made up of both 'National Education personnel' and 'cinema and audiovisual professionals involved in the creative process', professionals recruited and paid for by the Ministry of Culture: the Ministry of Education intended to reinvest and amplify the lessons taken from the partnership, dating back to 1978, when cultural action services were created in the universities in connection with the DRACs [Regional Directorates of Cultural Affairs].

In September 1984, when cinema was effectively instated as a subject for general education in fourteen selected high schools, this new discipline occupied a limited space: only one class per school was planned, for a maximum of sixteen students. With a total of barely more than two hundred pupils in all of France, cinema-audiovisual (the name ultimately assigned to the programme) was therefore characterised by scarcity. For the pupils, it constituted an elective discipline, part of an optional curriculum, with no prospect of being tested for it in the exam, a curriculum that they could abandon at their convenience at the end of tenth grade, or the following year, at the end of eleventh grade.

The participating schools were selected by a monitoring commission at the Ministry of Education, where officials from the Ministry of Culture were also present, on the basis of an application that each high school had submitted according to certain specifications. In the first year, the commission accepted fourteen applications from the forty or so that were submitted. In the second year, budget constraints allowed the

commission to accept seven of the sixty high schools that had applied. This progression continued in the following years. From the start, then, the project corresponded to real expected outcomes.

The instatement of a cinema experiment sought to achieve balance between two extremes: the system of a single pilot high school, the results of which were easy to ignore if one wanted to bury the pedagogical choices that one had appeared to support at the start, and an intensive implementation, expanded from the outset, which rendered the possibility of eventual disengagement catastrophic and conspicuous. The chosen approach was an intermediary solution, and an instance of what is commonly known as 'small steps policy'.

The context of the 1981 elections

We must now consider what context favoured the novel character of this kind of instruction within the French education system.

All of the major candidates in the 1981 presidential election presented proposals concerning the cinema. As a candidate, Mitterrand outlined a policy that was more systematic than the others, seriously considering the question of culture and education, but announcing no specific programmes at secondary level. What is more, the newly elected president would go on to make a name for himself immediately upon taking office, thanks to a cleverly premeditated deployment of images.

During the broadcast of the 10 May ceremony, the lavishly immersive effects of television were spectacularly on display when the state's leading man entered the Panthéon to pay homage to the tutelary heroes of the left and of the 'real people' (Jaurès, Schloecher) by tracing a solitary path through the deserted crypt, demarcated with cameras and automated microphones. The new regime was not ignorant of the manipulative powers specific to the media, nor of the cultural prestige it carries. When not in power, socialist leadership endeavours to make innovative use of images, drawing upon the most diverse aspirations of the left to create new structures in this field. Relying on opportunism or consultation, rather than on the use of force (except in the case of television, traditionally the domain of the ruling class), would allow ideas to flow.

Within National Education, even before institutional decisions could be handed down, the election of François Mitterrand brought about indirect changes for cinema. We discover this when we consult the contemporaneous issues of the journal of the Association of French Teachers (AFEF), *Le français aujourd'hui*. These progressive teachers had been organised since 1966, because they were hostile to the directives of the discipline's general inspectors. One disagreement concerned the denial of space in the curriculum for contemporary literature, journalism, the media and cinema: an instructor teaching journalism would still be subject to sanctions. Finally, the inspectors had relaxed their policies during the final months of Giscard d'Estaing's seven-year term, and in 1980 they drafted instructions that were sufficiently open to allow for a certain number of professors to engage much more deeply with cinema. When the administrative turnover – Alain Savary was appointed in May 1981 – provided reassurance about the possible consequences of the innovations, the journal began publishing reports on tenth-grade syllabuses which extensively incorporated cinema: François de la Bretèque proposed a literature and film programme that would span an entire year (*Le français aujourd'hui*, No. 62, June 1983). Soon after, he would help develop one of the first cinema curricula, the aforementioned Lunel programme.

Another type of initiative made it possible to experiment with film-related activities in schools: specifically, PAEs (educational action projects), which overtook and enlarged upon the PACTEs instituted in 1979. These PAEs proposed financing for interdisciplinary projects organised around objectives – rather than programmes – that were defined by teachers in collaboration with external partners, frequently affiliated with the Ministry of Culture. The PAEs, which exist to this day, were organised around cultural, technical or artistic themes, among which cinema could play an important role. We can see, then, that in the case of teaching French, as in the PAEs, cinema was associated with a pedagogy of openness and innovation. Indeed, cinema was compelled to take on this role, since it did not officially exist within the institution.

Television's infatuation with the pedagogy of cinema

There was another important moment in the years 1981–3, the 'recent prehistory' of film curricula, indirect though its impact was: the change that took place around television in early 1982. Over several months, between May and December 1981, the socialists developed broadcasts which purported to represent a new style. They completely transformed the programming calendars of the three national channels (there were no private ones yet), even if it sometimes meant eliminating certain production units, which fought like pirates for leftist positions, but committed the error of having existed under the old regime.

Part of this effort was aimed at granting television an educational role in relation to cinema, no doubt so that the former would openly acknowledge the debt it owed the seventh art, repent for having squandered its credit, and renounce its own shamelessness as an upstart doped up on publicity. In this way, the public would at last understand the origins of what entertains them each night, and the proper hierarchy would be restored. A sampling of ciné-clubs would contribute to this righteous work, each to be followed by a curated discussion: all the functions of the ciné-club were represented, the backward-looking cinephilia centered on great American films in Eddie Mitchell's 'La Dernière Séance' (Mitchell was an artist: the show's discussion segment was an occasion for the sharing of anecdotes and filming tips), the cinephilia of openness to the world and to faraway film cultures in Jean Lacouture's 'Cinema Sans Visa' (Lacouture was a journalist: the discussion segment resembled a briefing), and the cinephilia of great style in 'Ciné-Club', splitting the difference between the two preceding examples, in terms of both form and content: the facilitators were critics and teachers, and the discussion segment restored the ritual of the discourse.

It was this last piece of the cinema puzzle that served the most important pedagogical role. The first episode was filmed at the Laon ciné-club, hosted by its president Raymond Lefèvre, a critic at *Revue de Cinéma* and teacher at the city's Paul Claudel High School. Oversight of the programme was entrusted to Jean Douchet, former head of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and a pioneer of analysing film on television: in 1967–8, he was already hosting discussions with high-school students on Wednesday afternoons for the nascent Channel 2, after screenings of great classic films (*Sunrise*, *Boudu Saved from Drowning*). In 1982, he also lectured at IDHEC. *Citizen Kane* was selected for the pilot episode: a flagship film in the history of cinema, and the work of a Rooseveltian committed to the New Deal ethos, taking a critical perspective on the fascination with power and the corruption that can be elicited by its exercise. The French cultural left, tasked with educating the people, wanted to demonstrate its noble intentions with such tokens of lucidity. The film was screened in its original version in prime time on TF 1 (which even Arte would no longer dare to allow today, especially for a film in black and white). The films that followed were *La Grande Illusion* by Renoir, and *L'Étrange Monsieur Victor* by Grémillon. Another programme ('Ciné-Parade') sought to invite film-makers to re-stage a great classic sequence. Only one example was actually carried out: the end of Lang's *M*, remade by Claude Chabrol. *M* is yet another film with a political bent, given its critical point of view with respect to German society.

The uncompromising will to educate that announced itself for a few months in the choice of programmes would elicit negative reactions, however, and many of these programmes were eliminated quickly: 'We are opposed to television that is besotted with pedagogy,' protested *Télérama* in its 10 February 1982 issue about the mentality governing the new programming calendars.

The thing to remember about film and television in early 1982 was the feverish desire to promote an old discourse about cinema that remained off-the-record: that of the cinephiles. Through the excesses of this moment, two major ideas manifested themselves: on the one hand, cinema is the expression of a form of knowledge about the world, a certain way of perceiving it, which makes it a precious artefact of cultural heritage. On the other hand, mediations must be found for cinema according to a different mentality than that which presides over the Césars (the self-satisfaction of professionals) or, conversely, at the university (the discourse of the learned).

A portion of these proposals and resources would go on to be invested in A3 cinema departments. When the ministry was later required to programme films for the baccalaureate, it would select for its

first year *Citizen Kane*, *M*, and, not *La Grande Illusion*, but another Renoir from the same era of left-wing solidarity, *La Règle du jeu*. When the ministry decided to produce a supplementary commentary track for each film in the programme, Douchet's project would be revived for these three films, as well as for Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* the following year. Finally, in one sign among many of the continuity between ciné-clubs and cinema instruction, the Paul Claudel High School in Laon would introduce a curriculum starting in 1985.

Alain Savary's artistic education initiative

It was the will, or more precisely the actions, of Minister of Education Alain Savary which brought about the creation of cinema curricula. The structure from which the curricula originated, however, was not initially intended for that purpose. In fact, when, at the end of 1981, the minister created an initiative related to teaching in the arts, it was limited to the visual arts and music, and he envisaged that it would suggest two directions:

- on the one hand, coordinating the structures of higher education: tensions still remain between old systems, music conservatories or fine arts academies on one side, and on the other, the new university curricula developed in the wake of 1968
- on the other hand, designing a denser policy with regard to middle and high schools, where the A3 visual arts and music curricula, which already existed, could find a complement.

From among a number of candidates approached to lead this initiative, and following multiple rounds of interviews, the ministry appointed Pierre Baqué, professor of visual arts at the University of Paris I, and previously a lecturer at Claude Bernard High School in Paris, where a training centre for secondary school art teachers had been in operation since the war. Baqué was chosen for his knowledge of issues relating to the visual arts and their pedagogy, both of which had been subjected to the turbulence of complex developments in the years since 1968.

By designating not an official from the inner sanctum, such as an inspector general, but rather a personality external to the administration, who would remain statutorily independent of it (Baqué would continue teaching courses at Paris I while undertaking his new responsibilities), the ministry was decisively committing itself to future work, because the person in charge could orient the discourses and decisions in a doubly independent way: because he was unaffected by internal hierarchical burdens on the one hand, and because he was ignorant of the administration's arcana on the other hand. 'I have been protected by my innocence: the knowledge of obstacles paralyzes,' he would say.

At first, a misunderstanding led Baqué to believe that the post was only concerned with higher education. He discovered that a vertical integration of the problems was presupposed, taking into account the middle- and high-school contexts alongside the different levels of the university. In contrast, the perspective was narrow: thought had been given to the plastic arts and music, but not to the theatre or the cinema. Savary immediately accepted the expansion proposal that Baqué formulated: it delved into the globalising logic which constituted the minister's deeper designs.

In its particulars, we see that the creation of cinema curricula was not in response to any objective formally stated at the start, and that, when it occurred, it was not spearheaded by a specialist.

Numerous obstacles to the development of cinema education arose within the ministry itself. Claude Pair, a ministry official charged with the 'Direction des lycées', and a signatory (with Baqué) of the foundational letter of March 1984, wanted only to conduct an experiment, and certainly had no interest in a baccalaureate. Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who replaced Savary as Minister of Education in 1984, was also hostile to the project. It has even been said that, at first, he received the earliest ideas about a cinema baccalaureate thus: 'The baccalaureate is a serious matter! Cinema and theatre shall not be added!'

As a result, no one seriously imagined that the subject would be tested in the exam, although some had given the matter some thought, periodically and more or less vaguely, over the previous decades. Henri Agel had seen it profiled at a conference in 1964 ('I think I can predict that in a fairly short time, there will be a cinema exam on the baccalaureate'), and Raymond Borde had brutally prophesied in 1961 that 'we will pick apart Méliès for an audience of dunces and we will put *Citizen Kane* in the baccalaureate programme'. For two years (1984/5 and 1985/6), lacking a baccalaureate exam, this instruction was open to students from all the traditional secondary school tracks (scientific, literary and economic), into which students are divided after the so-called undifferentiated tenth grade year.

Then, starting with the 1986/7 school year, for the new class of tenth grade students, a major change was implemented: a compulsory film examination – written and oral – was scheduled for the baccalaureate in their final year (with a nationwide 'programme' that included *Citizen Kane*, and which had the idiosyncrasy of trading more in know-how than in scholarly expertise). Incidentally, this led to the transformation of the curriculum into a department integrated within the framework of the literary track, modelled on the organisation of music and the visual arts. This department was then known as section A3 (or L3) cinema-audiovisual (the 'A' track, corresponding to all the literary departments, is now referred to as the 'L' track). It had the weakness of excluding students from the other tracks (scientific and economic), but at the same time, for several years, and in a more lasting way than the 'elective curricula', art studios were opening so that students from other tracks could still receive cinema instruction in high school.

What happened in the intervening years that can explain this change of course? As early as 1985, the monitoring commission for new teaching methods noted that, in the theatre curricula created a year before the cinema curricula, the students appeared to be less invested in the eleventh grade year than they had been in the tenth. A dull pressure, augmented by the attitudes of parents and secondary school administrations, was building in opposition to 'freebie' subjects as the prospect of the baccalaureate approached. The idea began to emerge within the monitoring commission that institutional weight must be granted to new disciplines, for fear that otherwise they would never be fully recognised, and would therefore quickly die out. In January 1986, the minister likewise came around to this position. He then accelerated the efforts to ensure that the legislative elections of May 1986, which the left predicted would go badly for its candidates, would not lead to a questioning of what was by then well established after three years of development.

In June 1990, high-school students sat the cinema exam for the first time. The composition subject – in three hours, they were asked to outline a short film project with a script, a letter of intent, and the detailed breakdown of one sequence – dealt with the theme of 'the telephone'. The mainstream press heralded the arrival of this 'cinema baccalaureate' as an astonishing event, and, thanks to journalistic enthusiasm, articles devoted to it were deemed front-page news.

Since then, the new instructional framework has broadly been maintained within the terms that were defined at the start of the 1986 school year. Above all, what has changed is the institutional framing: an inspector general was appointed (the post was occupied first by Gilbert Pélissier – then tasked with overseeing the visual arts – and today [in 2000] is held by Christine Juppé-Leblond), justified by the increase in the number of high schools with a cinema curriculum (as well as by the addition of elective courses): this number increased in 12 years (1984–96) from 14 to 104 – an increase, that is, from one high school for every two academies, on average, to a little more than one high school per region. Since 1996, the number has not changed significantly.

A laboratory discipline

We will not address either the concrete characteristics that cinema education has assumed in its 16 years of existence, nor the frequently perceptible enthusiasm of students, cultural partners and teachers, nor that of institutional managers. Nor will we insist on the various conflicts which can punctuate the life of the

departments, the harshness of which is not always mitigated by the institution. (Indeed, this sometimes results in placing people with different conceptions of cinema, or of the pedagogical relationship, directly in contact and face to face with students.) We will content ourselves with merely mentioning the modes of sociability that have developed out of L3 coursework, between teachers and students, between the world of education and the film and audiovisual professions; modes of sociability which are manifested, for example, in a new kind of film festival (sometimes literally spawned by cinema departments), such as those of Lunel, Sarlat, Aies, Auch, Clermont-Ferrand or Belfort.

We would like to hew close to the general structure that was established, and to show how, in the very conception of cinema departments, there are original elements that earn these departments a special place in the French education system, special even among the other arts curricula, and which endow the subject with the function of a laboratory discipline.

First, with regard to the status and the subjective situation of teachers, cinema constitutes a perennially elective discipline. In principle, nothing but their own interest leads them to choose it, and, having chosen it, nothing else compels them to continue practising it, since at any time, if they wish, they can resume teaching a full course load in their original discipline, without facing any administrative barrier. They are thus invested in this instruction in a very personal way.

What is more, these teachers come from all the disciplines taught in traditional high schools, which expands the range in their attitudes. Indeed, they have studied different university curricula, each of which is rooted in a specific disciplinary ideology. As a result, cinema education stood out from the start against the modes of instruction that dominated in high schools. It differentiated itself even from the other arts departments that were then already in operation, those of music and the visual arts, which were entrusted to a single teacher, specially trained in the intended artistic discipline, and from theatre departments, where teaching was assumed by language arts instructors.

Very early on, attentive observers noted the innovative aspects of this instruction. Thus, the editorial board of the journal *Hors-Cadre* decided in 1984 to prepare a special issue of their publication, 'when the creation of a cinema curriculum for a few secondary schools was announced'. The issue would appear in spring 1987. Two members of the editorial board, Michèle Lagny and Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuillemier, provided a summary in which we perceive their surprise at the flexibility of the project: 'The cinema-audiovisual curriculum is novel not only in terms of its subject matter but also in its conception: with assured perspectives, but without programmatic definition, it presupposes a set of specifications whose requirements have less to do with the content of education than with the conditions for its implementation. The relationship with a cultural partner external to National Education, the establishment of a multidisciplinary team, and the existence of a steering group to ensure regular evaluations, all make evident an intention to render the experience at once collective (within the establishment), open (towards other institutions), and likely to evolve in the course of its development.'

The authors are sensitive to the opposition between the latitude accorded with regard to content ('without programmatic definition') and the requirements that only apply to structural elements ('the conditions for its implementation'). Indeed, one of the fundamental axes selected for the new teaching model entailed a strong collective dimension, while anticipating several structures, whether horizontal or vertical:

- a multidisciplinary team of teachers
- a partnership between the teachers and a culture worker not affiliated with National Education, approved by the Ministry of Culture, for each cinema curriculum
- a 'steering group' structure to centralise information and analysis, where officials from the Ministry of Education would meet with teachers in the programme, as well as with officials from the Ministry of Culture.

To this must be added an internal vertical structure, specific to the Ministry of Culture.

These coordinations proved sufficiently sturdy to outlast the purely experimental phase, considered to have ended in 1991. They are still in place today, the renovations having not fundamentally changed the edifice. This stability may not be sustained in the future, but the fact that it could be observed consistently over 15 years is already remarkable. From 1984 to 2000, four legislatures followed the one that began in 1981 (with turnover taking place in 1986, 1988, 1993 and 1998), six ministers of Education succeeded Alain Savary, and there were five different ministers of culture going back to the first Lang ministry, without the initial impetus of the experiment ever being called into question.

Cinema, having become a subject of instruction, could be apprehended in different ways: as a body of works, as a set of technical practices, or as a site of collective learning. Generally speaking, in National Education, the orientation provided by official texts is essential for determining the function assigned to a teaching subject, and the forms of its implementation. It was not so for cinema. The first texts published were remarkable for their brevity and openness. If their influence has endured, it is perhaps because of the suppleness with which they articulate certain fundamental principles. This is an inversion of the situation as other disciplines experience it, where regulatory texts are perceived to be binding, because inspectors – issuing from universities and tied to their traditions – write the texts for teachers who are likewise alumni of the same universities. It is thus the common practice of inspectors to lend their texts a prescriptive dimension, suggesting that their directives will be understood and applied by recipients who share the same systems of reference.

The creation of cinema education was not dependent upon the university, however, nor upon a single corps of teachers, nor a group of inspectors, and the traditional prescriptive dimension was avoided.

On the basis of the initial impetus, cinema's function was thus modulated, taking into account both the results and their interpretation based on officials' early assumptions. Pierre Baqué testified to this in December 1985, describing this spirit of research that characterised the monitoring team when he was asked on the spot to provide a progress report for the experiment in progress: 'Progress report? Well, we have provisional progress reports currently; the steering group is working on it, along with people in the field who administer the curricula on site, who tell us: "Listen! this is what's happening." "Here, you're dreaming." "That's not possible, for this or that reason."'

By recruiting teachers from all disciplines for cinema instruction, the ministry sidestepped the traditional process of creating a specialised team of university-trained experts, but it risked provoking reluctance in the administration itself, among the unions, or in the sphere of public opinion. Thus, in 1996, *Le Monde de l'Education* still betrayed a hint of hesitation when it noted that 'fortunately, there exists neither a CAPES [Certificate of Aptitude for Secondary School Teachers] certification nor an aggregate degree for cinema'. In other artistic fields, as we have seen, the situation was different. Regardless, this avoidance of the traditional system was all the more firmly asserted insofar as contrary expectations had existed on the side of the universities since the first half of the 1970s and the creation of cinema syllabuses. University channels regarded film education as their rightful domain, and students graduating from these programmes failed to grasp that teaching positions in their specialty would not constitute natural opportunities for them.

Within the institution, however, there was a preference for using the new discipline to push innovation further, and trying to replicate the experiment with educators (teachers or speakers) who would actually work as a team, rather than following traditional routes of institutionalisation.

The departments thereby offered an opportunity to develop or scrutinise ideas for reinvestment. For their founders, the definition of cinema was open enough to prevent its instruction from congealing into a single formula. Thus, when asked in 1986 if cinema was a discipline, Pierre Baqué replied: 'For the steering group, cinema is an object of study, an intersection of disciplines, a meeting place of competencies.'

Some of the characteristics thus attributed to film education can be found today in the proposals that followed a consultation with all high-school students and their teachers, launched in 1998 by Minister of Education, Claude Allègre, and directed by Philippe Meirieu (asking 'What should be taught in high schools?'). The same principles are also to be found in middle schools, in the seventh grade 'diversified courses' from 1997, and in the eighth grade 'cross-work' of 2000.

For high schools, the synthesis of elements emerging out of the 1998 consultation, taking into account the interests expressed by students across all tracks, was derived from the principle that these interests can provide information about what is likely to motivate the students. Yet what they want is 'for arts education to be no longer relegated to elective courses, but instead taught to all students in all high-school classes'.

The institution is considering, more or less in the short term, the ambitious implementation of generalised art studios in all high schools, a result of the arts curricula experiment, and thus also of the cinema departments, which are implicitly referenced: the newsletter, sent in July 1999 to 600,000 high-school teachers to explain the modalities of the reforms in progress, takes up as a guiding idea the convergence of knowledge, know-how, technical skills, and artistry, interdisciplinarity and the intervention of external partners.

The text defined the framing modalities in these terms: 'the art studios are led by volunteer teachers from across all disciplines'. It established objectives in which cinema could participate: 'the exploration of a broader field of knowledge and know-how, integrating new creative technologies, allows students to perceive the interrelations between disciplines, to discover the connections that unite the different arts, and to refine a sensitive and social approach to the world'. Here, cinema is not presented as a model, but as an integrated element in a larger whole, emphasised in the remark about 'connections which unite the different arts', and manifested in the elaboration of the expected 'new technologies' into 'new creative technologies'. Cinema is perceived to be the oldest of the culture industries, alongside the young and triumphant computer science, and allegorises the link between creation and technicality.

Thus, it comprised one of the laboratories of the educational space where the goal was to motivate students with collective activities. It was one response among many to the crisis of efficiency that the education system experienced, dating back to the beginning of the 1970s, when social pressure forced it to welcome larger school groups, not much inclined to endure the disconnect between their studies and their lives, the breakdown of meaning, the siloing of disciplines. The last Giscardian ministers observed these new data points without having the ability to respond to them. The left believed itself to be up to the task, and worked towards the various outcomes with which we are already familiar. It is therefore easier to understand why the schematic developed by the steering group cited above did not aim to give a stable definition of film education. Rather, it belonged to a new ideological model that could be applied to any discipline whatsoever. This model derives from the principle that students learn from the generative articulation of a field, and the linking of knowledge and know-how.

We can therefore see that cinema found itself placed at just the right moment into a situation where it would materialise one of the avenues of development that was desired by the host institution. It served as support for the experimentation with this model, given its apparent consistency with this theory, and because it had arrived on the academic scene when this theory sought to test its own validity.

The fact that the cinema serves as a space for experimentation might just as well keep it on the margins of the institution, however, assigning it only the role of a pretext, or that of a transitory element, even if we cannot rule out the possibility that its technological future may still hold surprises in terms of its role in education.

Reference

Desbarats, F. (2000) 'Les sections cinéma en lycée, signes de tendances nouvelles dans le système éducatif'. *Images documentaires*, 39, 59–82. Accessed 7 August 2021. <https://www.imagesdocumentaires.fr/IMG/pdf/Idoc39.pdf>.