
Research article

Exploring possible approaches and proposals for the development of film education in Bulgaria

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Abstract

This article locates a consideration of the contemporary state of film education in Bulgaria within a wider discussion of the value of school-based arts education. Drawing upon the work of Arte Urbana Collectif – an artistic collective based in Sofia – and, in particular, upon two short case studies of the delivery of an innovative, state-approved programme of film education within a small primary school, and as part of a programme of teacher training, this article ultimately presents a series of proposals for the future of film education in Bulgaria.

Keywords film education for youth; European cinema; social impact through film; audience development

Considering the hyper-presence of images in the early twenty-first century, there is a growing conviction across Europe – as I have encountered in conversations with teachers and education professionals on an international basis – that our conceptions of literacy need to expand beyond traditional notions of reading and writing. Curricula across Europe are starting to introduce the study of moving images from an early age, with many believing that film (and the fostering of sensitivities to forms of visual expression) should be an integral part of literacy-focused work within mainstream curricula. Digital and technological

advances, such as smartphones, tablets, video games, web platforms, television and cinema, create a kaleidoscope of moving images, the influence and ubiquitousness of which within the lives of young people should not be underestimated. Even very young children, I argue, have a fundamental right to study these media in school, for they too are already an active part of our digital present. It is inevitable that young people will learn to use a phone or computer, but the nature of the moving image is much more complex than typing commands via a keyboard. I work with Arte Urbana Collectif, a Bulgarian artistic collective based in Sofia, which prioritises opening up access for young people to the arts, and to cinema in particular. We are increasingly aware that, educationally and culturally, civic institutions have a responsibility to create opportunities for children and young people to gain awareness and appreciation of culture and the arts, especially when this is not possible in home environments, for social or economic reasons. Our aim is for young people taking part in cultural and artistic processes not just to acquire basic academic knowledge and technical literacy, but equally to develop their aesthetic sense of the world of images: not simply looking at, but perceiving and expressing themselves through what they see. This can only happen, I argue, through developing a knowledge of art and, as a consequence, a sense of curiosity in regard to *otherness*, regarding new and unfamiliar forms.

Moving images today represent more than a century of global heritage and, as such, a powerful record of human creativity, culture and history. The cultural policies of countries in Europe such as France, Slovenia and Portugal are increasingly developing and integrating arts education programmes, in particular regarding film education. This article argues that the study of cinema in Bulgaria, either in school contexts or as an extra-curricular activity, requires the creation of a complex, inter-networked system, creating links between the moving image and specific pedagogical models, and between films and the methodology we choose to present, study and analyse them. Before discussing specific elements and examples of film teaching in Bulgarian schools, upon which my personal experience is based, this article first presents the broader approach to art education underlying Arte Urbana Collectif's work, in which I seek to position various components of film education within a larger discussion concerning the manner in which we teach artistic disciplines, and the ways in which we teach or *transmit* the arts in general, both inside and outside the school system. Following this, I present two short contemporary case studies of film education in Bulgaria: as part of an innovative programme of curricular classroom education and as part of a programme of teacher training, respectively. In conclusion, I look to the future in presenting a series of proposals that I argue may serve to cohere a national approach to film education across Bulgaria.

The transformational power of practice within arts education

The documentary *Mr Bachmann and His Class* (Maria Speth, 2021) positions us, as an audience, within a transformative school year. The film explores the transformation of classroom dynamics, of teacher–student and student–student relations as driven primarily by the central charismatic personality of Dieter Bachmann, a classroom teacher of 12–13 year olds at a school in Stadtallendorf in Germany, who impresses the importance of the arts on not only his students, but also the audience, through sharing both knowledge and also significant aspects of personal experience.

The most impactful moments of transformation are the scenes in which we immerse ourselves in the class's engagement with music, such as an impromptu music session between classes, a special rehearsal for a Christmas party, or Mr Bachmann accompanying a student on guitar during a meeting with her father. The engagement of the students during these music classes is matched by the engagement of their teacher, who, through the art of music, transmits a strong sense of inclusion of all in the educational process.

Mr Bachmann and His Class allows us to consider how aspects of artistic practice, even if minimal, change the traditional basis of teaching, through the manner in which they foreground the novelty and uniqueness of personal experience, and the transformation from experienced emotion into representation, and, subsequently, into self-expression. In the field of cinema, practice is not merely preparation for

working on a particular film, but is equally a condition for understanding and fully experiencing it. The participation of teachers and students in a workshop, even a short one, often changes the basis of the learning process. Within film education, forms of practice include participating in discussions about a film that both teachers and students experience for the first time, exploring practical exercises through film or photography, writing about film, or experimenting with other forms of audiovisual expression.

In our work with Arte Urbana Collectif, we have frequently observed that it is practice that primarily gives students confidence: the acquisition of new skills which students can subsequently apply in their further development. After two years working with Arte Urbana's Cinema in School programme (which included screenings, discussions and the making of a short film), primary schoolteacher Silvia Marushkina conducted an exit survey at the end of the 2018/19 school year to explore how students evaluated the impact of cinema on their own development. She writes:

Nineteen pupils of the age of 10–11 participated in the study. Respondents had to answer the question 'What did cinema give you?': 57% responded that, thanks to the cinema classes, they knew the film-making process and had initial practical skills on how to make a film; 47% said that cinema gave them knowledge; 47% of the children indicated that they felt joy, happiness in their encounters with cinema; 36% of the students confirmed that cinema has developed their teamwork skills; 31% felt that cinema has made them more empathetic; 26% of the students confirmed that cinema [provides an experience of] culture; for 15% of the respondents, cinema is fun. One child responded that he had learnt about European cinema, and one child said that cinema had taught him purpose. The total exceeds 100% because some children gave more than one answer. (Marushkina, 2020: 106, my translation)

Within artistic disciplines, tracking a student's individual developmental path is, I argue, of utmost importance, much more so than assigning a conventional grade. Arguably, the systems of competition present within many schools (including rankings and prizes) require reform, particularly regarding the teaching of art in schools, whether this is in class or during extra-curricular activities. Within our work with Arte Urbana Collectif, we consider collectivity and solidarity, rather than competition, to be at the heart of creative models in school. In our experience, a sense of solidarity within arts education is formed intuitively, following the nature of collective, creative activities, whether this is making a film, or a jointly presented exhibition. The complexity of the nature of this teaching, which involves not only concrete material, but also an engagement with emotions, self-expression and complex personal experience, must be considered through a very particular matrix, much more comprehensive and holistic than standard criterion matrices. Arts education also promotes the enhancement of social learning environments, starting within the classroom, and expanding outwards to the creation of a community around the artistic discipline, a further factor to be considered within teacher evaluations, with the participation of the students and all those who contribute to the delivery of the lessons.

In summary, as a powerful tool within school environments, Arte Urbana Collectif has found that working with the arts – at the level of teaching, creativity and exploration – contributes significantly to participants' development, inaugurating long-term processes of engagement that subsequently motivate learning well beyond school contexts. Having outlined the broader conceptions of arts education informing Arte Urbana Collectif's work, I now provide greater definition as to how the more particularised requirements of film education fit within this framework.

Pedagogies of film education

In Arte Urbana Collectif's experience of delivering film education in schools, it is only when film is taught in a meaningful and responsible way that participants have the opportunity to look closely at different kinds of images. We argue that it is the understanding that learners are able to develop in this way that will later lead to the acquisition of fundamental skills, namely, the abilities to attentively see, hear, discern,

appreciate and create in the field of film and visual art. By combining and developing these skills, students can reach a level of reflection that can further stimulate their relationships to the great diversity of images that they encounter in contemporary life on different mediums and screens, as well as to film specifically, and visual art in general, beyond the compulsory activities that they have ideally encountered at school. In order to develop their sensory systems, young viewers must subsequently expand their own cultural development, work on their perceptions, and encourage the creation of links between themselves and a broader community sharing the same values. Accessible school film programmes, such as those we have delivered ourselves in Bulgaria, should not set out to turn all participants into future directors or actors, much less technical professionals (outside the context of highly specialised programmes). Rather, most of the examples of school-based film education that we have encountered through our work with Arte Urbana Collectif are united by the prioritisation of appropriate pedagogical models that seek to cultivate encounters with cinema that simultaneously educate, transform and challenge learners.

The French film critic Luc Moullet's (2021: 9, my translation) famous remark, 'morality is a matter of travelling' – as latterly paraphrased by Jean-Luc Godard, that 'travelling is a matter of morality' – might also here be applied to film education. Within our work with Arte Urbana Collectif, we consider this conception of morality to extend to at least three spheres: aesthetic, pedagogical and financial.

First and foremost, we prioritise the moral imperative to build pedagogical approaches for learners to work with cinema from a very young age. In our experience, the study of film in schools creates real, democratic opportunities for students, not only to interpret images, but equally to build a toolkit through which to filter images for their meaning and quality. In this respect, encounters with film help young learners to develop their understanding of aesthetics, particularly when these encounters with the moving image take place through inclusive art pedagogies and analysis. While it seems important to clarify that the spheres of cinema and pedagogy are interrelated, the thesis that this article presents is that it is the art of cinema that should be placed at the heart of the model we have chosen to build within Arte Urbana Collectif. While the approaches within our model are manifold, we contend that none of them would be successful if we decided to teach art based entirely on pedagogical concepts. Even if we naturally find the psychologist and educational theorist David Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning (wherein, if applied specifically to the process of film education, students are led from initial experiences of film to knowledge acquisition and competency development) present within our particular methodology of teaching, it is nonetheless (I argue) the secondary concern of a well-developed film education programme that it interacts with pedagogical postulates. If we were to adapt the basic pillars of film education to pedagogical theories in order to promote (especially to teachers) film as a discipline overly subject to pedagogical theory, I argue that we would not achieve the impact and development we hope to foster for young learners.

In 2002, French cineaste, film-maker and pedagogical theorist Alain Bergala published *The Cinema Hypothesis*, a book whose significance for pedagogical approaches to the moving image has increased with each passing year. Attracting the attention of many of those involved in film education practices across Europe and globally, the book raises fundamental questions about the place of cinema within education, and the imperative to provide as many students as possible (through the involvement of state schools) with opportunities to encounter cinema. Bergala (2002: 48) notes that the images that cinematic works and artists present 'are not immediately digestible and recyclable into simple and ideologically correct ideas'. Instead, they are occasions for questions to be posed, rather than specific answers provided, thus creating a horizontal model of communication between teacher and student in which critical thinking is a two-way developmental process.

Within Arte Urbana Collectif, we believe that at the heart of any film education programme is an understanding of, and respect for, young viewers (from the age of 3), which requires in-depth knowledge of young audiences and continued tracking of their development, especially regarding their tastes in cinema. In our work, we subsequently seek to deploy this knowledge principally through the selection of films we choose to screen to students, the ways in which they are shown, and subsequent discussions are

held, the planning of practical exercises or other activities, and the creation of spaces for reflection on what has been experienced.

There are certain specific questions that we contend should be asked when building any film education programme, regardless of its framework. One particular element requiring consideration is the duration of film education programmes. Within many national programmes (such as France's *Cinéma, cent ans de jeunesse*), this duration is a minimum of one academic year, and, in some cases (such as the innovative programme of film education pioneered within the rural, Bulgarian primary school of Neofit Rilski, as discussed below), a cycle of two or three years. Where extra-curricular activities or additional projects are organised, the recommended duration again tends to be a minimum of 12 months. In *The Cinema Hypothesis*, Bergala (2002) describes the need for time, for without this crucial factor, we cannot create an adequate pedagogical approach in relation to the films with which we have chosen to work. In order to develop such an approach, regular meetings with students are indispensable, not only for the execution of a certain programme of learning (which usually includes a number of films, practical workshops and filmed exercises), but also to allow space for the development of students' taste and the accumulation of their cultural capital. It is this accumulation of culture, including those films that shape the tastes of the students with whom we work, that is one of the principal concerns foregrounded by those convinced of the benefits of film education, but this is often unsuccessful, because the time that schools are able to devote to arts education is increasingly limited (outside of specialised classes or schools). I have many times witnessed (within my own practice in Bulgaria) screenings during which children between the ages of 7 and 12, who live and study in Sofia, discover the experience of watching a film in a cinema for the first time. The complete blackout of the auditorium, the large screen engulfing the viewer, the collective experience of watching and sharing an emotion: all of this is still completely new to many young people in Bulgaria, and it sometimes proves to be quite a startling experience for them.

Integrating film education into schools ensures the coverage of a whole age group, especially in the European Union, wherein the enrolment rate (as recorded by the World Bank in 2011) was 97.6 per cent in primary school and 92.2 per cent in secondary school (UIS, n.d.). In *Arte Urbana Collectif*, we argue that film education should also cover the entire period of schooling, which, in countries within the European Union, usually starts between the ages of 3 and 5, and ends at the age of 18. We argue that each age group should have the opportunity to benefit from an introduction to cinema tailored to their particular level, ability and requirements, including a programme of films and workshops, in order to create a crucial sense of continuity between programmes for different age groups – something that is often lacking in film education programmes, in Europe and elsewhere.

The choice of films screened as part of a school cinema programme is a further question that requires attention. Within *Arte Urbana Collectif*, we believe that this choice above all pertains to the cinematic qualities of a given film, regardless of its intended audience and – in these instances – we therefore need to consider how to provide the appropriate introduction, accompaniment and tools to work with the film after the screening.

In the age of digital and dematerialised film viewing options, it is interesting to consider an example from almost forty years ago. As part of my doctoral research, I interviewed Julia Divizieva (conversation with author, 2021), a librarian and writer, who had previously worked in a school library in the centre of Sofia, and had completed a master's degree in film pedagogy at the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts (NATFA), Bulgaria, in the 1980s. She had been involved with cinema since her childhood, growing up in a small Bulgarian town. She recounted to me how she had watched the film *Hair* (Miloš Forman, 1979) over a hundred times in the local cinema, had become acquainted with Czech and French cinema and had attended Q&A events with directors. During her studies in film pedagogy, Divizieva formed a group of high-school students who wanted to engage with cinema, and, in this way, immediately began sharing all the knowledge she had received at NATFA. Due to the small age gap between Divizieva and the students (five or six years), the group very quickly bonded and cohered in the form of a weekly film club. They subsequently found that they had access in their school not only to a cinema screen, but also

to an 8 mm projector that had not been used for years. The cinema club (a group of about 15 young people, in their last years of high school) held classes once a fortnight, often for nearly four hours, for which Divizieva received no extra payment. Intuitively, Divizieva created a methodology that can be seen to follow the various components of film education later suggested by Alain Bergala (2002) in *The Cinema Hypothesis*, incorporating watching films, analysis, discussion, meetings with film-making professionals and aspects of practice outside of class time.

Participants in the cinema club began shared visits to the actual cinema, familiarising themselves not only with newly released Bulgarian films, but also with other significant releases from elsewhere in the world. They attended lectures at the Druzhba cinema, where they became acquainted with film-makers such as Buñuel, Fellini, Pasolini, Tarkovsky and Hitchcock, all screened within the regular programming of the cinema. Divizieva cites, in particular, Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Decameron* (1971), which she notes led the students to experience a certain degree of shock resulting from what they had seen. Screenings of black-and-white films also exercised significant influence on the students and, indeed, they discovered many films for the first time in this manner (for even those films shot in colour were screened only in black and white in Bulgaria during this period). After the screenings, students held long and intense discussions, often making connections with other arts they had experienced previously (such as theatre or painting) in their analysis of cinematic aesthetics. Concerning the choice of films to which her students were exposed, Divizieva intuitively arrived at her own personal approach, the development of which was cultivated by the lectures she attended as part of her studies in film pedagogy at NATFA, which provided the basis for film selection, film analysis and the systematisation of concepts, knowledge and perceptions. In doing so, she described frequently facing the concerns and prejudices of other teachers and school management regarding her choice of films, which were at times perceived as being provocative. Nearly forty years apart, the situation Divizieva describes resonates with the situation that Arte Urbana Collectif encounters in present-day Bulgaria, where film education practitioners, coordinators and initiators of cinema in Bulgarian school programmes seek to follow Divizieva in not underestimating their audience, avoiding didactic presentation of theory, and being unafraid to take risks in their choices of films and practical activities for students.

Beyond the school cinema hall, Divizieva further developed her non-formal film education project through organising various screenings at a popular video club at Liliana Dimitrova cultural centre, which regularly hosted her cinema club, providing the opportunity to watch a variety of films on VHS tapes, introducing recently released films, as well as themed programmes of cinema. Participants in this experimental film club had the opportunity to attend meetings with Bulgarian film-makers organised by Divizieva in the mid-1980s. Many of this group – today working as directors, journalists or in television – claim that these meetings were of particular importance in their personal development, especially in terms of discovering professions (such as directing, camera-operating or scriptwriting) that they had not previously known existed.

It seems important here to underline the degree of persistence and personal volition with which the film club takes place outside school institutions: in order to discover films, students must voluntarily visit the place where this meeting will take place, unlike a more contemporary context within Bulgaria, where films are largely invited into the classroom. Such considerations should be placed within the broader context of arts education, which, in institutional terms, is multilayered, and encompasses not only the classroom, but also the concert hall, the theatre, the museum or the cinema. The settings of these key venues are filled with opportunities for learning that, while not necessarily part of formal curricula, nonetheless remain important and contribute to a diversity of educational outcomes. This leads, however, to another problem that we encounter today in Bulgaria (likely also encountered by film practitioners elsewhere in the world), wherein, particularly in rural areas, smaller communities lack the cultural infrastructure to enable these sorts of intra-institutional connections within art education. How, for example, can one take students to the cinema if the nearest one is over 200 km away? How might we then deliver decentralised film screenings through providing the necessary technical conditions to ensure a full experience of cinema

(in regard to a big screen, quality of image and sound, and sufficient darkness to ensure immersion)? And, last but not least, how do teachers make choices about the films they use in their school-based film activities?

Within my own practice with Arte Urbana Collectif, I am increasingly convinced that, even if we had access to a substantial collection of available films, teachers would not use them without the necessary preparation materials to carefully accompany each film. One of the ten recommendations presented by Xavier Lardoux (CNC, 2014) in *For a European Film Education Policy* – a report summarising good film education practices across Europe that has exerted significant influence upon subsequent developments within film education across the continent – was to create a programme of 20 European films, drawn both from contemporary film culture and from cinematic heritage, to be distributed in cinemas and classrooms and school curricular contexts across Europe. Lardoux's recommendation has subsequently been implemented in certain European countries, including Bulgaria, through the digital platform CinEd (European Cinema Education for Youth, www.cined.eu), which aims to disseminate European cinema to a wide range of young people aged 6 to 19 across Europe.

Within a Bulgarian context, CinEd, which is supported by the MEDIA programme of the European Union, coordinated by Cinemateca Portuguesa in Portugal, supports the provision of free film screenings and discussions, the establishment of cinema clubs in different localities – in schools, libraries, community centres and youth centres – and aspects of training for teachers. The platform provides a free collection of 21 feature-length films and programmes of shorts, presenting fiction, documentary and experimental cinema from 15 countries. All films are accompanied by subtitles in all the languages of the partner countries (including Bulgarian), and are presented with detailed pedagogical materials for teachers and students. CinEd's methodology offers ideas for discussions that seek to strengthen young viewers' relationship with the films, in order to assist young people in developing their ability to express themselves and engage in dialogue.

Working with the CinEd collection and resources, as we have found through our work with Arte Urbana Collectif, allows children and young people to gain an understanding of European cinema, engaging with aspects of cinematic language, modes of expression and possible creative choices relating to both image and sound. Through film classes, learners are able to develop their critical thinking and, for example, to recognise and express their subjective points of view, while considering themes related to a concrete question of cinema. CinEd provides suggestions for pedagogical activities to accompany each of the films – for example, writing a letter to a film's director or to a main character, recreating dialogue from a film, filming a particular scene inspired by a film, or even making a short experimental film with easy-to-find materials, such as food colouring. In the process of practical film-making activities in particular, we have found, through our work with Arte Urbana Collectif, that young people are granted opportunities to learn to name and manage their emotions, and to reflect freely on what they have seen, done and shared together. In order to elaborate on the discussion of film education presented here, I now present two brief case studies of Bulgarian film education within a rural primary school, and as part of a programme of teacher training, respectively.

Integrating film education in the classroom in Dermantsi

Inspired by its work with the CinEd project, Neofit Rilski – a primary school in the village of Dermantsi in northern Bulgaria – has, through consistent and long-term explorations of film education practice, become a kind of pedagogical laboratory, providing the necessary space and time for experimenting with film education in its various forms. Most significantly, the school has recently implemented an innovative programme called Introducing Film Education in the Learning Environment, which offers three hours of film education per week for young learners.

My collaboration with the school started in 2017, when we created an impromptu, extra-curricular film academy at the beginning of the summer holidays. The small groups of pupils who attended our

first screenings in the cinema room of the community centre were shown films from the collections of the CinEd and IFcinema (Institut français, <https://ifcinema.institutfrancais.com/en/>) platforms, such as *The First Day of School* (Jacques Rozier, 1956), *A Little Light* (Alain Gomis, 2006), *Shelter* (Dragomir Sholev, 2010) and *The 400 Blows* (François Truffaut, 1959). Each screening was followed by a discussion between students, teachers and guests of the screenings.

These encounters with cinema continued during the following school years, during which other films from the CinEd collection were presented to the students and the pedagogical team, in particular *The Spirit of the Beehive* (Víctor Erice, 1973) and *Stone in the Pocket* (Joaquim Pinto, 1988). During 2019/20, in a partnership between the Dermantsi school and Arte Urbana Collectif, we implemented an intensive additional film education project: Cinema Workshops for the Development of Social-Emotional Skills. This project was again based on the films and resources provided by CinEd, alongside a methodology that we had developed ourselves through practical workshops. A total of 109 students, divided into five classes from first to fourth grade, participated in 41 workshops focusing on drama and animation film-making (alongside 5 workshops on photography), which we conducted with a team of two teachers and three mentors. During this period, students produced 28 short animations and drama films, and created their own exhibition of over one hundred photographs. Taking part in the initiative, and observing the children's progress, were 25 teachers and educators, alongside the school's principal and vice-principal. The primary teacher of the class which participated most actively in the project (and which has subsequently gone on to make a dynamic, ongoing engagement with film studies) remarked:

The cinema classes formed in the children a different and critical view of their surroundings. The activities enriched their knowledge of the world and different European cultures. They found themselves through the on-screen characters, rediscovering their own life obstacles and feelings. They learned to work more actively together. Undoubtedly, cinema provoked their curiosity! In time, they felt that learning is not something that begins and ends in the classroom, but is an ongoing process. The games, discussions and team activities led to them looking closely at the film, noticing the smallest details, and from there looking for the answers to the 'mystery'. Each of the students was motivated to express themselves without embarrassment. They felt cinema as art, as something that could enrich them. These activities gave them faith in their own abilities, facilitated the learning of the material. Weaker students became more confident and active in the classes. They worked with ease on texts where reading comprehension was required. Overall, the class increased its success. (Arte Urbana Collectif, 2021a: 21, my translation)

Unanimous positive comments received from the school's teaching team during reflective evaluation on the project and its components led organically to the study of cinema being introduced as part of the core school curriculum, which was subsequently approved by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, starting in the school year 2020/1, for four consecutive school years.

The programme of this film class was prepared in advance, although minor changes were necessarily made during the process of delivery, which, at the time of writing, is ongoing. The three film lessons per week are held on two days, divided into a two-hour session and a one-hour session, and delivered by Daniel Simeonov, the key exponent of film education in the school. During the first year of delivery, classes explored the topic of The Beginning of Cinema, a curated series of films forming part of the CinEd collection, which presents the first films of the history of cinema (from 1895 to 1908), thematically grouped in four parts and around the dual themes of Around the World/Imaginary Worlds. Around the World included the first films of the Lumière brothers – among them, *Place Cordelier in Lyon* (1895), *Augustbrücke* (1896), *Boat Leaves the Harbour* (1895), *Bathing in the Sea* (1896), *Children Shrimping* (1896) and *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1896) – and continued with films such as *Excursion in Italy: From Naples to Vesuvius* (Camille Legrand, 1904), *Gipsy Life* (1908, a Pathé production by an unknown director) and *Rescued by Rover* (Cecil Hepworth and Lewin Fitzhamon, 1905). Subsequently, Imaginary

Worlds continued with an exploration of the work of Gaston Velle (*Little Jules Verne*, 1907), Georges Méliès (*Gulliver's Travels in the Land of the Lilliputians and the Land of the Giants*, 1902), Ferdinand Zecca and Segundo de Chaumont (*The Fairy of Spring*, 1902–6), and Robert William Paul and Walter R. Booth (*The '?' Motorist*, 1906).

In classes, we asked ourselves how we could present these films to young viewers in a contemporary context, so that they might encounter with enthusiasm the discoveries of these seminal images, which continue to look at us from the screen, so that cinema becomes a window through which we can rediscover the world with a sensitive and intuitive gaze. Our accompanying presentation thus involved reminding students that the films in question were made by people with considerable curiosity and imagination, which drove them to experiment with a new tool, as cinema was at the time. Prior to the screenings of the films, students were also asked to share what they associated with each title.

In addition to screenings of all the films in this programme (most of which were then watched several times by the students, as rendered possible by the time afforded to the programme), learners participated in numerous discussions and practical workshops. From September to June, classes analysed each film in a separate session, exploring the camera perspective embodied in each shot, and how the first filmic frames of the Lumière brothers were composed (in terms of elements such as foreground and background, the movement of elements around the frame, the presence of 'characters' and duration), as well as exploring the links between cinema and literature in the imaginary worlds presented. Further activities included producing a flipbook, a thaumatrope and a zoetrope; discussions about film landscapes and itineraries; and participation in a curatorial workshop, exploring how to select and present film to an audience.

Further, the whole class was invited to film a 'Lumière minute' (an exercise that Arte Urbana Collectif uses not only in schools, but also during our trainings for teachers, librarians and cultural mediators, as discussed below). This exercise, through which the international film education programme *Cinéma, cent ans de jeunesse* was inaugurated in 1995 (now widely adopted by the programme's partners in Spain, Portugal, Argentina and beyond), serves to connect learners to the footage originally recorded by the Lumière brothers. Through this exercise, students are able to present the place in which they live, their point of view, and further choices expressing their particular perspective and reality. After these Lumière minutes have been filmed, watched and discussed in class, each short film is given a name, which is often metaphorical and related to the overall feeling that the viewer receives from watching it. By completing these short exercises, students learn intuitively that the camera is an instrument of transformation – of transposition of the ordinary into the extraordinary – which has the power to attract and direct the spectator's attention. The camera contains the secret of the transition between two realities: the reality that surrounds us, and the one we produce on screen. In our experience, it continues to surprise children in Dermantsi how their Lumière minutes are subsequently a source of interest for viewers outside their community. (All the Lumière minutes made by the students from the Dermantsi class are collected in a documentary, which can be seen at [Arte Urbana Collectif \[2021b\]](#). Examples of Lumière minutes from around the world can be seen at [Cinéma, cent ans de jeunesse \[n.d.\]](#).)

After this first year, in which the fourth-grade pupils from Dermantsi had gone through the intensive programme introducing them to the beginnings of cinema history, they subsequently had the opportunity to present their work in Sofia during the Meeting of Young European Cinema festival. Here, students showed confidence in presenting their exercises and the results of their work to an audience of teachers and other students, easily answering questions about the difference between the films of the Lumière brothers and Méliès, as well as about their approaches to filming and their point of view within the short films on which they were working. They shared their Lumière minutes, and offered aspects of context for each one, as well as their personal reflection on their experiences making them. For the children's teachers, such experiences illustrated the progress that students were able to make within just one year of dedicated film education provision. This work is ongoing, as is the development of the pedagogical framework upon which Arte Urbana Collectif continues to work with colleagues across the school.

Training teachers to impart film education themselves

Alongside our efforts to institute classroom-based film education in Bulgaria, Arte Urbana Collectif has also been exploring how such practices can be transferred and shared between film education practitioners in order to provide inspiration and encourage adaptation by other teachers. Creating a training programme able to connect and exchange experiences between teachers has thus also been a focus of our work over recent years. Pan-European programmes such as CinEd have allowed for the creation of training models that can subsequently be shared between representatives of different countries. In this way, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and institutions such as Arte Urbana Collectif that are active in national film education processes are able to develop their expertise and training capacities in response to their national context and regulations, and, above all, to the specific needs of teachers. In our experience, no matter how well-developed a school's film education materials are, publishing them online without corresponding training runs the risk of making them inapplicable to most teachers in Europe. This highlights the fundamental question of training formats, as pertains in particular to trans-European initiatives.

When we began working with CinEd almost 10 years ago, there was an urgent need to establish, in parallel with the resources we provided for teachers, specially created training opportunities, including screenings, specific exercises, working groups and space for analysis and reflection upon the demanding methodologies required for the transmission of cinema in the classroom. In Bulgaria, this was the first training of its kind to bring the principles of film education into the classroom in an interactive way, beyond the less participatory form of a lecture. The training framework we developed with Arte Urbana Collectif set itself the ambitious task not only of presenting specific films, teaching tools and pedagogical guidelines, but also of introducing participants to an intuitive pedagogy that involved the deep study of films and images in continuous dialogue with their students. In addition, the programme devoted time to developing an individual work plan for each participating teacher subsequently intending to initiate a film club or other related school-based activity.

The resulting training programme, based upon CinEd's methodology and collection of films, was subsequently approved by Bulgaria's Ministry of Education in 2018, and it carries two qualification credits for a total of 32 hours of work, split between in-person learning (16 hours) and individual study (16 hours). The two days of face-to-face training include various modules, which continue to evolve to take into account the learning gleaned from each annual delivery, the feedback we receive, and the needs of the teachers we meet. The first session we provide for teachers is dedicated to the concrete links between cinema and pedagogy, in which we address the key competencies from more generalised frameworks of education, which are nonetheless covered through the more specific prism of film education. We have found that starting from more general frameworks in this way, in which teachers are able to find concrete links from their own practice with film education, frequently proves empowering, helping teachers to develop confidence and to feel able to participate. We have also found that most teachers tend to have initial reservations about the more practice-focused elements in training modules, regarding the use of cameras or sound-recording equipment, but that they tend to manage to overcome these, mostly, in our experience, because of confidence gained through group work, pointing again to the values of collectivity and solidarity, which Arte Urbana Collectif place at the core of our approach to arts education.

The remaining seven sessions in our teacher training programme are dedicated to working on specific films from the CinEd collection (and here, if possible, screenings are organised in cinemas or appropriate spaces in libraries, schools or community centres), regarding the potential different uses of the pedagogical resources accompanying each film, while exploring the connections between different films. A principle aim of these sessions is to create visual and semantic connections between each film and wider bodies of cinema and other arts. We also explore a focus on possible pedagogical activities around each of the films. Designed to develop intuitive and sensitive approaches to each film, training focuses on pre-screening preparation, and post-screening activities (such as discussion, description and analysis), as well as on practical workshops and exercises for the classroom and beyond. These sessions

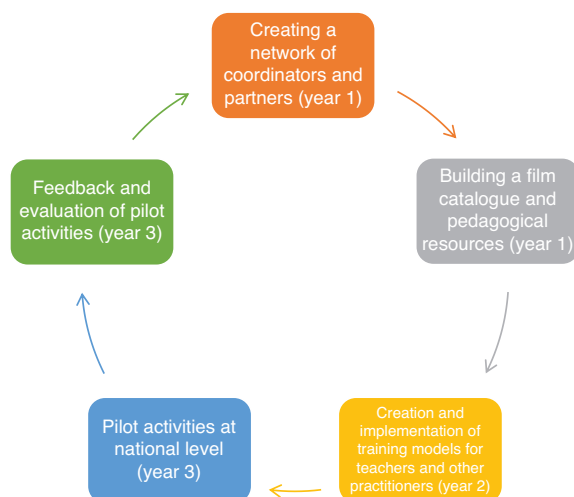
also present materials created specifically for students – such as our Young Spectator’s Sheet – that teachers can use as a follow-up to their collective work on each film. Each student can use the Young Spectator’s Sheet for personal reflection on the film, as it recalls key points and a short biography of the director, as well as relevant quotations pertaining to the film. This allows each viewer to revisit the film through words and images, and to find out more about the place where the characters live, as well as their historical context, potentially leading on to the discovery of other works (whether films, books, music, photographs or paintings). Further suggested activities include: writing a letter to the director or the film’s main character; creating a short, edited montage with footage and sound from the film; and creating a visual collage drawing from different sources (such as pictures, comics, photographs or advertisements). The worksheet of exercises for each film also exists in interactive, online versions on the programme’s website, which allow young learners to undertake aspects of this work directly themselves, using a secure personal profile. After completing their individual work around the film, students are free to share what they have done, or to keep the results to themselves. During the training, a more technically focused session is included to explain the functioning of this online platform for teachers (in terms of registration, how to download a secure player in order to screen the films and so on).

Each film screening held within our teacher training programme is followed by a general discussion with all participants, in which we explore issues and elements of film language, discuss teachers’ reception of the film, and put into practice parts of the pedagogical resources. Participants also work in small groups on a predetermined cinematic theme (such as the use of light or sound), and then present their analysis to the others. The programme also includes the screening and analysis of several thematic videos (on topics such as ‘At the table’, ‘Distance’ and ‘Looks’), created through a montage of relevant clips drawn from the films included in the collection. Our cinema screenings, as well as the presentation of these additional pedagogical tools, contribute to the preparation of the teachers, who, as we have found following participation in the training, feel encouraged to continue working with their students after they have experimented with the film material themselves, without any prior preparation being required.

In our experience, our training programme tends to be highly appreciated by all participating teachers, for, in addition to providing an environment for creative and cultural projects, it allows a space for sharing perspectives on screen images, creating an opportunity that teachers have told us they are not often given, let alone in a cinema or cultural environment. After this first in-person part of the training, participants are given 16 hours in which to independently prepare and conduct at least one screening of a film from the CinEd collection, and to prepare a description of their approach, the resources used, student reactions, aspects of practical work and their overall experience. Here, teachers also draw upon their own experiences, perspectives and teaching context, as such enriching the broader, collective undertaking of film education. If teachers wish to continue with cinema activities, trainers subsequently assist them in developing a year-long programme for a cinema club, cinema workshop or other form of delivery, in or out of the classroom.

Conclusion

Bulgaria currently lacks a national cultural policy pertaining to the field of film education, and arts education more generally. As such, our biggest challenge is to establish a concrete strategy that might unite efforts at a local or regional level, subsequently creating the prerequisite for a decentralised approach with which teachers and other film education practitioners across Bulgaria might be able to engage. In concluding this article, I present a series of ideas and suggestions for film education in Bulgaria (which I hope may be similarly useful for those working within similar contexts in small nations elsewhere in the world), which, rather than requiring the mobilisation of significant additional resources, proceeds instead from an assessment of resources that already exist in Bulgaria, in considering specific opportunities to connect existing expertise in order, step by step, to grow a national network of film educators. I first present a concrete, five-stage proposal for building a national strategy (Figure 1), followed by a series of broader recommendations for film and arts education in Bulgaria more generally.

Figure 1. Five stages of a proposed national film education programme

As a *first stage*, I propose the launch of a working group to create a national system of film education (considering films, resources and methodology). This working group should bring together in partnership units such as Bulgaria's Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, National Film Centre and National Cinematheque, as well as academics and representatives of the NGO sector. This group should, subsequently and gradually, build additional partnerships with libraries, community centres, cultural organisations and cinemas. It would be neither possible nor necessary to make this whole network of partnerships operational immediately. It is imperative, however, to implement pilot activities to check how the established partnerships work, and which elements might be improved.

As a *second stage*, I propose that a catalogue of accessible films should be built, accompanied by pedagogical resources, guidelines and digital tools (such as an accessible online platform). Again, building this collection of films may be done gradually, starting with three to five films, and building up over each subsequent year. The important condition here, however, is that each film is accompanied by appropriate accompanying materials, as well as a workable, easy-to-use online system allowing full accessibility in remote areas.

A *third stage* pertains to the development of training models for teachers, pedagogical and non-teaching staff, based on the selected films and created resources, to be conducted by a working group of experts and professionals from the field of cinema, who will then work with students on practical tasks. I propose that these working groups focus on building learning models, exchanging pedagogical experiences, and experimenting with concrete activities. Again, activity in this respect could start with a number of training sessions that are directly linked to the implementation of the pilot activities, and could expand outwards from there.

During the *fourth stage*, initial pilot activities on film education are prepared, and take place for one school year. During this year, training sessions for educators can continue, thus expanding the network of participating schools, as well as the distribution of the film collection and the attraction of new partners. Pilot activities here would include screenings, discussions, practical workshops and festival visits, organised with a specific timetable, in or out of school hours, according to each school's capacity and programme.

After carrying out these initial pilot activities, we arrive at the *fifth and final stage* for this cycle, namely feedback and evaluation on the process, taking into account certain specific factors. For this purpose, feedback forms would be created, including both quantitative parameters and open questions, pertaining, in particular, to achievements and difficulties during the pilot programmes. Teachers and students would be invited to express their personal impressions in the form of an interview, and observation by an external expert might also be carried out before/during/after the process, especially

with regard to students' handling of moving images. Analysis of the results of this evaluation process would subsequently inform the continuation of pilot activities (either in the same or extended form) in those schools already participating, while simultaneously reaching outwards to new institutions.

Having mapped out a five-stage proposal for a national programme of film education, I conclude this article by presenting a series of three summative thematic recommendations that I contend would significantly improve the presence of film education in schools across Bulgaria.

The first is to build a common methodology, vision and perspective to unite approaches to film education across Bulgaria. While it would undoubtedly prove difficult to put forward a common methodology in this respect, I argue that a conception of *cinema as art*, above all, is required to conceptualise mutually compatible and mutually relevant programmes of film education, as well as to evaluate their outcomes. Furthermore, I contend that such an overarching definition would help clarify notions of learning 'progress' in artistic disciplines. Progress in arts education, as we have frequently experienced in Arte Urbana Collectif, is not always linear, and students can also learn a lot from experiences of failure. Setting a common framework will also encourage dialogue, and the sharing of interests and goals between teachers, practitioners, academics and policymakers.

My second recommendation pertains to the importance of creating a national ecosystem through which to nurture the development of film education. National film education and artistic programmes, such as those in France or Slovenia, are usually characterised by a high degree of coordination between different institutional sectors (such as the Ministries of Education and Culture, NGOs, film structures and industry partners), and supported by a national strategic plan. In this way, sustainable projects may be created that are able to support students through trajectories of film education that continue through different educational stages. A strongly developed ecosystem, with an appropriate financial framework, would thus privilege the widespread dissemination of films for pedagogical purposes to children and young people of different ages, social and cultural groups. It is, I argue, a fundamental human right to be able to develop moving image 'literacy'.

My final recommendation concerns the imperative to expand access to cinema and culture. In addition to the presence of cinema in schools, access to screenings beyond those organised by the school institution, as well as to other forms of art and cultural events, is crucial for the intellectual development of students and their adequate involvement in cinema education. Here, a model of good practice is the Passport to Culture created in France in 2022, which offers tickets for performances, concerts, screenings and exhibitions (as well as access to podcasts, e-books, subscriptions to certain online platforms and so on) to strengthen and diversify young people's cultural practices. This Passport to Culture is the result of a partnership between government bodies, cultural organisations, schools and local authorities and, I argue, serves to afford culture its rightful place within the lives of young people, creating the chance to explore a diversity of opportunities and become independent in their own cultural choices. The Passport system is administered in the form of credits that any young person can receive through an app, whether they are a student or not. These credits (of a certain value) can be used for independent cultural practices, encouraging personal choice, as well as for collective meetings and activities chosen by a particular class or informal school group.

I contend that it is precisely the discovery of new cultural horizons that encourages young people to develop a desire for enrichment through the arts, and enjoyment of the encounter with creativity, while cultivating parallel values of tolerance, civic responsibility and an attitude of lifelong learning, all of which, I argue, remain crucial attributes outside the immediate and formal context of education. To achieve this broad range of skills and attitudes in children and young people, we increasingly need long-term commitment, and perhaps even a spirit of activism, in championing the transmission of the arts. In [Vighi and Nouss's \(2010: 7\)](#) imagined dialogue between Pasolini and Fassbinder, the latter shares a remark that I believe sums up the purpose of this work, and, more specifically, the vision of film education that this article has explored: 'Art? With the things you do, you try to sensitize your audience in a certain way to life and the world around them. That's a sensitizing process which you've put yourself through and now have to transfer to your audience – that's all it is.'

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Filmography

- The 400 Blows* (FR 1959, François Truffaut)
Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat (FR 1896, Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière)
Augustbrücke (FR 1896, Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière)
Bathing in the Sea (FR 1896, Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière)
Boat Leaves the Harbour (FR 1895, Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière)
Children Shrimping (FR 1896, Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière)
The Decameron (IT/FR/DE 1971, Pier Paolo Pasolini)
Excursion in Italy: From Naples to Vesuvius (FR 1904, Camille Legrand)
The Fairy of Spring (FR 1902–6, Ferdinand Zecca and Segundo de Chaumont)
The First Day of School (FR 1956, Jacques Rozier)
Gipsy Life (FR 1908, director unknown, Pathé)
Gulliver's Travels in the Land of the Lilliputians and the Land of the Giants (FR 1902, Georges Méliès)
Hair (US 1979, Miloš Forman)
Little Jules Verne (FR 1907, Gaston Velle)
A Little Light (FR/SN 2006, Alain Gomis)
The '?' Motorist (GB 1906, Robert William Paul and Walter R. Booth)
Mr Bachmann and His Class (DE 2021, Maria Speth)
Place Cordelier in Lyon (FR 1895, Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière)
Rescued by Rover (GB 1905, Cecil Hepworth and Lewin Fitzhamon)
Shelter (BG 2010, Dragomir Sholev)
The Spirit of the Beehive (ES 1973, Víctor Erice)
Stone in the Pocket (PT 1988, Joaquim Pinto)

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