
**INTERNATIONAL
COLLABORATION
IN FILM PRODUCTION
EDUCATION:
PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES
AT MASTER'S LEVEL**

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Abstract: This paper examines the pedagogical frameworks that inform the teaching of international film production collaboration at the master's level. Through an analysis of current educational practices, industry integration mechanisms, and the evolving landscape of European co-production models, this research illuminates how higher education institutions prepare emerging filmmakers for the complexities of transnational cinema production. The findings suggest that effective pedagogical approaches must synthesise theoretical knowledge with practical industry engagement, whilst fostering networks that transcend national boundaries. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on film education methodologies by proposing a more holistic approach to preparing students for the increasingly globalised nature of contemporary film production.

Keywords: film education, international collaboration, co-production, experiential learning, network development, curriculum design, pedagogical models, European cinema.

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Introduction

The contemporary European film landscape presents a complex terrain wherein emerging filmmakers must navigate multifaceted production environments that increasingly transcend national boundaries. The pedagogical approaches employed in master's level film production education thus face the considerable challenge of preparing students not merely for technical proficiency, but for the nuanced decision-making processes that inform international collaboration (Hjort, 2010, pp. 15-18). This paper interrogates how educational institutions might most effectively structure learning experiences that prepare emerging filmmakers for the realities of transnational production contexts.

The increasing prevalence of co-production models in European cinema necessitates a pedagogical framework that equips students with both practical knowledge and conceptual understanding of how stories might resonate across cultural contexts. As Elsaesser (2015, p. 73) observes, European cinema has evolved beyond national paradigms towards more complex networks of production, distribution, and reception. This evolution demands that film education similarly transcends traditional boundaries, fostering what might be termed "co-production literacy" amongst emerging filmmakers.

The shifting terrain of European film financing further complicates the educational landscape. The proliferation of international funding bodies, co-production treaties, and transnational support mechanisms such as Creative Europe MEDIA and Eurimages has created an intricate ecosystem that demands

sophisticated navigational skills from contemporary practitioners (Elsaesser, 2015, p. 73). As Trăilă (2023) demonstrates, the post-1989 turn toward unified European policies intensified co-production practices and recalibrated market priorities, directly shaping how film schools incorporate cross-border financing and legal frameworks into their curricula. Educational programmes must therefore develop not only creative capacities but also the strategic acumen required to mobilise resources across multiple territories. The pedagogical challenge lies in creating learning experiences that integrate these complex elements without overwhelming students or reducing filmmaking to a purely instrumental activity.

This paper draws upon empirical observation of educational practices across several prominent European film schools, as well as theoretical considerations from pedagogy, film studies, and professional practice. The methodological approach combines documentary analysis of curricular materials with insights gained from interviews with educators and observations of teaching practice. Through this multifaceted approach, the research seeks to identify principles that might inform more effective pedagogical strategies for preparing students to work across national boundaries.

Theoretical framework

The pedagogical approach to teaching international film production collaboration must be understood within broader theoretical contexts concerning knowledge acquisition and professional development. Kolb's (1984, pp. 38-42) experiential learning theory provides a particularly useful framework, suggesting that effective learning occurs through a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. When applied to film education, this model suggests that students must engage not only with theoretical understandings of international production models but also with practical experiences that test and refine these understandings.

The applicability of Kolb's model to film education becomes apparent when considering the multifaceted nature of cinematic co-production. Students must both comprehend the abstract principles governing international collaboration and apply these principles in concrete circumstances, adjusting their understanding through an iterative process of reflection and experimentation. This theoretical perspective helps explain why purely abstract instruction in international collaboration often fails to develop the adaptive capacities required for professional practice. Without the opportunity to experience the contingencies and complexities of actual collaboration, students typically develop overly schematic or idealised conceptions of transnational production.

Similarly relevant is Lave and Wenger's (1991, pp. 29-31) concept of "communities of practice", which emphasises learning as a process of participation in communal activity. This theoretical construct helps explain why exposure to industry networks and participation in international film festivals and co-production markets constitutes an essential component of film education. Through such participation, students gradually move from peripheral to more central participation in professional communities, developing tacit knowledge that complements their formal education.

The communal dimension of learning becomes particularly significant in international contexts, where the relevant communities of practice extend beyond national boundaries. Film students must develop the capacity to participate effectively in transnational professional communities, each with its own implicit norms, languages, and power structures. Wenger's (1998, pp. 72-85) elaboration of how participation shapes identity offers a useful framework for understanding how students develop professional identities that transcend national paradigms. Through engagement with international communities of practice, students begin to see themselves not merely as national filmmakers occasionally working internationally, but as participants in a genuinely transnational film culture.

This theoretical perspective also illuminates the limitations of educational approaches that remain overly focused on national contexts. When students are exposed primarily to domestic industries and practices, they develop professional identities that may impede rather than facilitate international collaboration. The challenge for educators is to create opportunities for meaningful participation in international communities of practice without overwhelming students with cultural and logistical complexities they are not yet equipped to navigate. Contemporary perspectives on transcultural learning further enrich this theoretical framework. Bennett's (1993, pp. 21-71) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity describes a progression from ethnocentric to ethnorelative stages, culminating in integration—the ability to move fluidly between cultural frameworks. This model helps explain the developmental trajectory that students must follow to become effective transnational collaborators. Initial exposure to international contexts often produces defensiveness or minimisation of difference, but thoughtfully structured educational experiences can facilitate progression towards acceptance, adaptation, and ultimately integration.

These theoretical perspectives converge to suggest that effective teaching of international collaboration requires an integrated approach that addresses both abstract knowledge and embodied practice, individual learning and communal participation, technical skills and intercultural sensitivities. The following sections explore how these theoretical insights might inform specific pedagogical approaches.

Methodological considerations in curriculum design

A comprehensive film production curriculum at the master's level must recognise the multifaceted nature of international collaboration. The initial pedagogical imperative involves developing students' analytical capacities for project assessment—specifically, the ability to discern whether a film concept possesses national or international potential. This process requires a sophisticated understanding of how narrative elements, thematic concerns, and production contexts interact to determine a project's scope and audience.

The analytical frameworks employed in this process must extend beyond simplistic notions of “universal” themes to encompass a nuanced understanding of how cultural specificity can paradoxically enhance rather than diminish international appeal. Students must learn to identify elements that provide distinctive cultural perspectives while simultaneously resonating with broader human experiences. This delicate balance between specificity and universality constitutes what might be termed the dialectic of transnational storytelling—a concept that educational programmes must articulate explicitly rather than treat as intuitive knowledge.

Developing this analytical capacity requires exposure to diverse cinematic traditions and critical frameworks that transcend Eurocentric or Anglophone paradigms. As Chan (2010, pp. 123-145) argues, even ostensibly international film education often remains wedded to Western aesthetic and narrative conventions, implicitly positioning “world cinema” as the exotic other of European and North American traditions. A truly international curriculum must destabilise these hierarchies, presenting multiple cinematic traditions as equally valid sources of aesthetic inspiration and narrative structure.

The curriculum must therefore incorporate analytical frameworks that allow students to examine story elements related to localisation, socio-political contexts, character backgrounds, and thematic concerns. Such analysis should not be taught as an abstract exercise but rather as a foundational skill that directly informs subsequent production and financing strategies. As Wayne (2002, pp. 40-42) argues, the political economy of film production cannot be separated from aesthetic and narrative considerations; rather, these elements exist in a dialectical relationship that must be understood holistically.

This holistic understanding becomes particularly crucial when considering the practical mechanisms of international collaboration. The curriculum must address formal structures of co-production agreements, diverse national funding systems, and legislative and fiscal frameworks governing international productions. However, such instruction risks becoming overly technocratic if not grounded in

a broader understanding of cultural exchange and the potential artistic benefits of transnational collaboration. The educational challenge lies in presenting these technical elements as enabling constraints that shape creative possibilities rather than as bureaucratic obstacles to artistic expression.

Pedagogical approaches must also cultivate students' capacity for what might be termed "strategic elasticity"—the ability to adapt projects to different funding contexts without compromising core artistic intentions. This capacity requires both technical knowledge of co-production structures and creative flexibility in conceptualising how projects might be realised through various international partnerships. Developing this capacity demands educational experiences that combine technical instruction with creative problem-solving, perhaps through simulations or case studies that require students to adapt hypothetical projects to different co-production scenarios.

The temporal dimension of curriculum design also warrants consideration. International collaborations typically unfold over extended timeframes, with complex iterations of development, financing, production, and distribution. Educational programmes are challenged to compress these processes into manageable learning experiences without oversimplifying their complexity. One approach involves creating longitudinal projects that span multiple terms or years, allowing students to experience the full trajectory of international collaboration, albeit in an accelerated form. Another approach utilises asynchronous collaborations with partner institutions, mirroring the extended timelines of professional practice while maintaining educational momentum.

These methodological considerations suggest that curriculum design for international collaboration must balance technical knowledge with creative flexibility, analytical rigour with practical application, temporal compression with authentic complexity. The following section explores how experiential learning might address these challenging requirements.

The role of experiential learning

The experiential component of film education represents perhaps its most crucial aspect, particularly when considering preparation for international collaboration. The academic environment provides essential foundational knowledge, but it must be complemented by structured opportunities for students to engage with industry practices and to develop professional networks. As Petrie and Stoneman (2014, pp. 87-89) note, film education has historically oscillated between vocational training and academic study; the most effective programmes achieve a synthesis of these approaches.

This synthesis becomes particularly important when preparing students for the complexities of international collaboration. Purely academic approaches may cultivate theoretical understanding but fail to develop the practical knowledge required for effective collaboration. Conversely, purely vocational approaches may develop technical skills but neglect the critical perspectives needed to navigate cultural differences and power imbalances. The experiential component of film education must therefore be designed to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge, allowing students to develop what Schön (1983, pp. 54-79) terms “reflective practice”—the capacity to think critically about their actions while engaged in professional activity.

The Erasmus programme offers one such mechanism for experiential learning, allowing students to immerse themselves in different cultural and production contexts. However, the pedagogical value of such experiences depends significantly on how they are structured and integrated into the broader curriculum. Simple exposure to different educational environments does not necessarily develop the specific capacities required for international collaboration. Exchange experiences must be carefully designed to facilitate reflection on cultural differences in production practices, aesthetic traditions, and pedagogical approaches. This might involve structured comparative analyses, collaborative projects with local students, or critical reflection on how different institutional contexts shape creative practices.

Similarly, industry initiatives such as Berlinale Talents, Talents Sarajevo, and CineLink Sarajevo Producer’s Lab provide crucial exposure to international practices and facilitate network development. These programmes typically combine instructional elements with opportunities for project development and networking, creating what might be termed ‘semi-structured’ learning experiences. The educational value of such programmes extends beyond formal instruction to encompass the tacit knowledge gained through observation of professional practice and participation in informal exchanges. Educational institutions might enhance the value of these experiences by providing preparatory guidance before participation and structured reflection afterwards, helping students to integrate insights gained from these experiences into their broader professional development.

Film festivals and co-production markets represent another vital domain for experiential learning. Through attendance at events such as AGORA at the Thessaloniki Film Festival, students can observe and participate in the actual processes of international collaboration. The pedagogical approach should therefore include guidance on how to strategically identify and utilise such opportunities, recognising that different events may offer varying benefits

depending on a project's specific cultural and production contexts. Moreover, educational institutions might develop partnerships with festivals and markets, creating structured opportunities for students to present projects or participate in industry events without the pressure of immediate commercial outcomes.

Beyond these established mechanisms, innovative approaches to experiential learning might include international collaborative projects between educational institutions, virtual collaboration platforms that connect students across national boundaries, or structured internships with production companies engaged in international co-productions. Such experiences must be designed to balance authentic complexity with educational scaffolding, providing sufficient support for students to learn from challenges without becoming overwhelmed by them.

The effectiveness of all these experiential approaches depends significantly on how they are integrated into the broader curriculum. Isolated experiences, however valuable, may fail to develop the sustained capacities required for international collaboration. The educational challenge lies in creating coherent pathways that progressively develop students' collaborative capacities through a sequence of increasingly complex experiences. This sequential approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978, pp. 84-91) concept of the "zone of proximal development", suggesting that effective learning occurs when students are challenged to extend their capabilities beyond current competence but within the range of what they can achieve with appropriate support.

Network development as pedagogical imperative

Perhaps the most significant challenge in preparing students for international collaboration lies in facilitating the development of professional networks. Unlike technical skills or theoretical knowledge, networks cannot be directly taught but must instead be cultivated through sustained engagement with industry contexts. The pedagogical approach must therefore create conditions conducive to network formation, whilst also developing students' capacity for effective relationship-building.

The centrality of networks in contemporary film production cannot be overstated. As Caldwell (2008, pp. 80-114) observes, the film industry increasingly operates through complex networks of independent practitioners and companies that coalesce around specific projects rather than through stable institutional structures. This networked model becomes even more pronounced in international contexts, where collaborations often emerge from connections established through festivals, markets, and other transnational meeting points. Students must therefore develop not only the technical and creative skills required

for filmmaking but also the social and strategic capacities needed to establish and maintain professional relationships across national boundaries.

This aspect of film education requires a delicate balance between structured guidance and autonomous exploration. Institutions might provide initial connections through alumni networks, industry partnerships, and guest lectures, but students must ultimately develop the interpersonal skills and professional identities that allow them to expand these networks independently. The pedagogical approach should therefore include attention to professional communication, cultural sensitivity, and the ethics of collaboration, treating these elements not as peripheral “soft skills” but as core professional competencies. Cultural differences in networking practices present particular challenges in international contexts. What constitutes appropriate professional behaviour varies significantly across cultural contexts, creating potential for misunderstanding or perceived impropriety. Educational approaches must therefore include explicit discussion of these cultural differences, perhaps through comparative case studies or guided reflection on intercultural encounters. Moreover, students must develop the capacity to recognise and adapt to different networking norms without abandoning their own ethical standards or authentic professional identities.

The development of a sustainable network also requires an understanding of reciprocity. Students must learn that effective collaboration depends not merely on extracting value from professional relationships but on contributing value in return. This principle should be embedded within the pedagogical approach, encouraging students to consider what unique perspectives or resources they might bring to collaborative relationships. This reciprocal mindset becomes particularly important in international contexts, where relationships may be shaped by historical power imbalances between nations or regions. Students from privileged contexts must learn to approach international collaboration not as an opportunity to exploit resources or labour but as a genuine exchange of creative and cultural perspectives.

Digital platforms present both opportunities and challenges for network development. Online professional networks, virtual festivals, and digital collaboration tools have expanded opportunities for international connection, particularly for students from regions with limited physical access to industry hubs. However, these virtual connections often lack the depth and serendipity of face-to-face encounters. Educational approaches must therefore integrate digital networking strategies with opportunities for in-person connection, helping students to leverage both modalities effectively. This integrated approach has become particularly important following the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the development of hybrid networking models combining virtual and physical elements.

Beyond individual connections, students must also develop understanding of how networks function at structural levels. This includes awareness of how certain hubs and nodes—particular festivals, markets, or institutions—serve as key connection points within international film networks. It also encompasses recognition of how formal and informal groupings—regional alliances, linguistic communities, or aesthetic movements—shape patterns of collaboration. This structural understanding allows students to approach network development strategically rather than opportunistically, identifying connection points most relevant to their specific projects and artistic visions.

Case study analysis in curriculum development

The incorporation of detailed case studies into the curriculum provides a valuable bridge between theoretical understanding and practical application. By examining successful international co-productions, students can identify patterns and strategies that might inform their own work. The pedagogical approach should encourage critical analysis of these case studies, considering not only the formal structures of collaboration but also the interpersonal dynamics and cultural negotiations that underpin successful partnerships.

Case studies offer particular value in illuminating the complex interplay between creative, financial, and logistical factors in international productions. A purely theoretical presentation of co-production models might suggest that these elements can be neatly separated, with creative decisions preceding and informing financial and logistical considerations. Analysis of actual cases typically reveals a more complex interrelationship, where creative possibilities are both constrained and expanded by financial and logistical factors. Bergfelder (2005, pp. 315-331) demonstrates this complexity through historical analysis of European co-productions, showing how production arrangements have shaped aesthetic and narrative choices in ways that both limit and enable creative expression.

For instance, a case study examining a Greek-Romanian co-production might explore how location elements created opportunities for partnership, how producers identified and approached potential collaborators, and how cultural differences were navigated throughout the production process. This analysis would then inform students' understanding of how to approach similar opportunities in their own work. The pedagogical value of such case studies depends significantly on their level of detail and analytical depth. Superficial presentations that focus solely on successful outcomes may create unrealistic expectations or fail to illuminate the genuine challenges involved in international collaboration.

The selection of case studies also warrants careful consideration. Educational programmes often gravitate towards high-profile examples such as major festival winners or commercially successful productions. While these cases certainly offer valuable insights, they may not represent the most accessible or relevant models for emerging filmmakers. Including diverse examples—smaller-scale collaborations, productions from underrepresented regions, or projects that encountered significant challenges—provides students with a more realistic and varied set of reference points. This diverse selection also helps to counteract the implicit hierarchy that often positions certain types of international production (typically those involving Western European countries or major festivals) as more prestigious or desirable than others.

Pedagogical approaches to case study analysis must also consider how students engage with these examples. Traditional teaching methods might present cases through lectures or readings, positioning students as passive recipients of information. More effective approaches involve active engagement through structured activities such as role-playing scenarios based on case studies, problem-solving exercises that require application of insights from cases, or comparative analyses that identify patterns across multiple examples. Such active engagement helps students to internalise the principles and strategies illustrated by the cases rather than merely memorising factual details.

The temporal dimension of case studies also warrants consideration. Film education often focuses on completed productions, examining the final film and the documented process of its creation. While this approach certainly offers valuable insights, it may fail to capture the extended and often uncertain process through which international collaborations typically develop. Where possible, educational programmes might complement traditional case studies with longitudinal examples that follow projects from initial conception through various stages of development, production, and distribution. Such extended case studies provide insights into how projects evolve over time and how collaborators navigate unexpected challenges or opportunities.

Digital technologies offer new possibilities for case study presentation, including interactive timelines, multimedia presentations, or virtual reality experiences that simulate decision points in production processes. These innovative approaches may engage students more effectively than traditional case presentations, particularly for learners accustomed to digital media. However, technological sophistication should not overshadow analytical depth; the most engaging case presentation has limited educational value if it fails to illuminate the complex dynamics of international collaboration.

Towards an integrated pedagogical model

Drawing together these considerations, an effective pedagogical model for teaching international film production collaboration might be conceptualised as a spiral curriculum (Bruner, 1960, pp. 52-54) that repeatedly revisits key concepts at increasing levels of complexity. The early stages would focus on developing analytical skills for project assessment, followed by theoretical understanding of co-production models and funding mechanisms. These foundations would then be enriched through structured experiential learning opportunities, with ongoing reflection to integrate practical experiences with theoretical knowledge.

This spiral approach recognises that developing capacities for international collaboration involves not merely accumulating knowledge but progressively refining understanding through iterative engagement with key concepts and practices. Students might initially encounter co-production models through theoretical presentations, then examine these models through case studies, apply them in simulated exercises, and ultimately implement them in actual collaborative projects. Each engagement deepens understanding while also revealing new complexities and challenges, creating what Dewey (1938, pp. 35-59) terms “continuity of experience”—the progressive building of knowledge through connected learning experiences.

The structure of the spiral curriculum must balance prescriptive guidance with opportunities for self-directed exploration. In early stages, students typically require more structured frameworks and explicit instruction to develop foundational understanding. As they progress, the pedagogical approach should increasingly emphasise autonomous decision-making and personal initiative, with instructors gradually shifting from directive to facilitative roles. This progressive transfer of responsibility prepares students for the professional reality of international collaboration, where practitioners must navigate complex situations with limited external guidance.

Throughout this process, attention to network development would remain a consistent thread, with increasing emphasis on student autonomy as they progress through the programme. The final stages would involve synthesising all elements through concrete production projects that require application of both technical knowledge and collaborative skills in authentic contexts. These culminating experiences provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their capacity for what might be termed “distributed creativity”—the ability to harness collective creative resources across national and cultural boundaries.

The assessment strategies employed within this pedagogical model must align with its integrated nature. Traditional assessment approaches often separate

theoretical knowledge from practical skills, evaluating each in isolation through distinct mechanisms such as written examinations and practical exercises. A more appropriate approach would employ integrated assessment methods that evaluate students' capacity to synthesise theoretical understanding with practical application. This might involve reflective portfolios documenting collaborative processes, critical analyses of students' own collaborative projects, or presentations that articulate the relationship between theoretical principles and practical decisions.

Digital technologies offer new possibilities for supporting this integrated pedagogical model. Virtual collaboration platforms can facilitate international projects between students from different institutions, while digital portfolios enable more comprehensive documentation and reflection on collaborative processes. Learning management systems might provide structured frameworks for progressive skill development, with embedded resources and assessment tools that guide students through increasingly complex collaborative challenges. However, these technological applications must be designed to support rather than replace the essential human interactions that characterise effective collaboration.

The implementation of this pedagogical model also requires appropriate institutional structures and resources. Effective teaching of international collaboration demands flexibility in scheduling, support for student mobility, and connections with industry partners and other educational institutions. These requirements may challenge traditional institutional models, which often operate within rigid scheduling frameworks, limited geographic scope, and established disciplinary boundaries. Successful implementation may therefore require institutional innovation, perhaps through the development of specialised centres for international collaboration, joint programmes between institutions, or flexible scheduling models that accommodate the unpredictable timelines of international projects.

Conclusion

The pedagogical approach to teaching international film production collaboration at the master's level must navigate complex terrain, balancing theoretical knowledge with practical experience and institutional guidance with student autonomy. The most effective approaches recognise that preparation for international collaboration extends beyond formal curriculum to encompass the development of professional identities and networks.

As the landscape of European film production continues to evolve, educational institutions must remain responsive to changing industry practices whilst maintaining a critical perspective that allows students to engage thoughtfully

with these practices. The ultimate goal should be to develop graduates who possess not only the technical and theoretical knowledge required for international collaboration but also the adaptive capacity to navigate an industry characterised by constant change.

This adaptability becomes particularly important given the ongoing transformations in production and distribution models. The rise of streaming platforms, the impact of global health crises on production practices, and the increasing importance of environmental sustainability all present new challenges and opportunities for international collaboration. Educational approaches must evolve continuously to address these changing contexts, perhaps through stronger integration of digital collaboration tools, greater attention to sustainable production methods, or explicit consideration of how global power dynamics shape streaming distribution.

Future research might productively explore how digital technologies are reshaping international collaboration in film production and how pedagogical approaches might respond to these developments. Additionally, comparative studies of film education programmes across different national contexts could provide valuable insights into diverse approaches to teaching international collaboration. Such research might consider not only formal educational programmes but also alternative learning pathways such as mentorship programmes, industry workshops, or self-directed learning through digital platforms.

The theoretical frameworks outlined in this paper provide a foundation for such future research, suggesting analytical approaches that integrate consideration of experiential learning, communities of practice, and spiral curriculum development. These frameworks might be further enriched through engagement with emerging theoretical perspectives such as decolonial approaches to film education, ecological models of creative practice, or network theories of cultural production

In conclusion, effective teaching of international film production collaboration requires a sophisticated pedagogical approach that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries and educational models. By integrating theoretical understanding with practical experience, technical knowledge with cultural sensitivity, and individual learning with community participation, educational programmes can prepare emerging filmmakers to navigate the complex landscape of transnational cinema production. This integrated approach represents not merely a practical necessity but an ethical imperative, fostering forms of collaboration that respect cultural differences while creating meaningful connections across national boundaries.

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