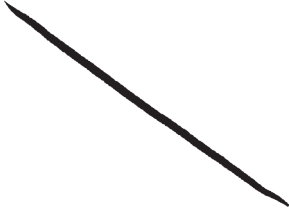


LOOKING THROUGH THE DIRECTOR'S EYE: ADOLESCENT FILM PRACTICE AS A FRAMEWORK FOR VISUAL EDUCATION, COLLABORATION AND GENUINE HUMAN CONNECTION

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Abstract: This article aims to examine the multifaceted pedagogical impact of film practice on adolescent development. The central premise is that learning to interpret cinematic language and translate emotion into visual form extends beyond technical proficiency, serving as a means of fostering self-expression and empathy. No cinematic image appears by itself, as film is inherently a collaborative medium. Each exercise in film practice comes from everyone fulfilling a specific role, actively listening, compromise and mutual respect, functioning as a useful platform for acquiring ethical values of collaborative artistic work. Teenagers learn to reinforce the ideas they believe in, while also relinquishing control, adapting, and searching for coherence within a team. Moreover, working with cinematic images develops what I would propose to call visual empathy, meaning the ability to observe details and decode deeper meanings behind images. Exercises in film practice tend to train the emotional perception of human expressions and the rhythm of a story. Not only does the participant learn to create images, but also to interpret them. Therefore, film becomes a visual educational tool, but also an ethical and emotional one. The paper supports the idea that film, as a pedagogical and artistic practice, can work quite effectively as a playground of human formation. Through this type of experiential education, teenagers improve their creativity, self-expression, and, more importantly, they become more connected to themselves and the world around them, building a foundation for becoming future adults who are able to listen, feel and relate in a genuine way.

Keywords: film pedagogy, adolescence, emotional intelligence, visual empathy, collaboration, editing, experiential education, self-expression, cinematic language, human formation.

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Introduction

I have found it relevant to begin this paper with a small digression into recounting a personal story from my own adolescence, an experience that has become a genuine cornerstone of my professional and creative development, and consequently of my approach to the pedagogical practice. At the age of seventeen, I participated in the *Let's Go Digital!* workshop for teenagers, organized within the Transylvania International Film Festival (TIFF) in Cluj-Napoca. Beyond learning a few basic notions about filming and editing, I found the feeling of discovering an entirely new way of expressing myself and exploring my identity. Due to the encouragement of the mentors and the collaborative atmosphere, I felt supported in expressing a personal vision for the first time. I was able to assert my individuality in a deep and authentic way, and, most importantly, I gained confidence in myself. Why mention this personal encounter? Because this article is based on my belief that

Let's Go Digital! was not a unique takeaway, however special that context might have been, but rather that the merit belongs to the very nature of what film workshops in general can offer at this age.

Upon a closer, more objective analysis, two important elements that greatly contributed to the experience can be identified: the summer camp atmosphere (being accommodated in Cluj-Napoca for ten days, away from my parents and school, sharing a room with three other girls) and the shared passion among participants (the fact that all of us had gone through a rigorous selection process because we deeply wanted to be there). Therefore, I can confidently affirm that a film workshop for teenagers cannot bring meaningful benefits to its participants unless they genuinely possess this passion, or at least the curiosity to discover it, hence, a minimal selection process is necessary. The “camp” setting was, in my case, a bonus rather than a necessity; this type of closeness and sense of community can also be achieved through the collaborative process of making filmed exercises. Filmmaking, by its very nature, dynamic and full of surprises, inevitably brings together people from different backgrounds and oftentimes (when the stakes are not too high, as in the case of large-scale commercial productions, for example) can recreate a sense of family.

Taking all of these aspects into account, I believe there is a real need for more contexts such as film workshops for teenagers who have an interest or curiosity about any vocation within the cinematic sphere — whether it be directing, editing, sound, production design, or others. They can later specialize in a particular branch if the opportunity arises, but without a framework that allows them to understand what these professions entail and to explore simulated versions of them, they would never be able to discover the full range of ways in which they can express their creativity and individuality through film.

Creative self-expression in adolescence

Adolescence represents a transitional stage having a major influence on individuals. Physical changes are quite obvious, loudly marking the transformation from a child to an adult. By contrast, psychological changes are subtler, yet strong nevertheless, and more often than not, teenagers themselves have trouble recognizing them. Author John Coleman has thoroughly investigated these changes (*The Psychology of the Teenage Brain*, 2023), linking their occurrence to the process of structural and functional brain development. Consequently, teenagers' social behavior is significantly influenced by these neurobiological developments.

First of all, the development of the prefrontal cortex is initiated during adolescence and this process goes on till the age of about twenty-five. The prefrontal

cortex is the part of the brain which controls executive functions, among the most important ones being decision-making, impulse control, organizing and planning. Its developmental immaturity explains the teenage susceptibility towards impulsive decisions and recklessness. Secondly, this developmental period is also characterized by increased neural connectivity, through a process called *synaptic pruning*. This mechanism consists in the elimination of unused neural connections, while at the same time strengthening the frequently utilized ones. Synaptic pruning optimizes the brain's efficiency, thus allowing it to process incoming information at a quicker pace. Additionally, the hormonal fluctuations specific to this age, including increased production of dopamine, strongly affect the mood, energy levels and emotional responses. According to Coleman's view, these neurological transformations directly influence adolescent social behavior. An increased motivation for pleasure and reward, for example, can lead adolescents to risky behavior as a means of immediate gratification. In addition to that, the amygdala, which is the part of the brain responsible for emotions, becomes more active than usual, while the prefrontal cortex is still developing. This can result in difficulties with emotional regulation, thus leading to intense and even at times, unpredictable outbursts.

Another key aspect of adolescence is the importance of belonging to peer groups. Teenagers place great value on social acceptance and may easily engage in certain decisions or behaviors out of conformity, seeking approval or admiration from their peers. Consequently, social success can be viewed as an important motivational factor in an adolescent's process of self-affirmation. An academic article titled *Social Success of the Teenager as a Psychology and Pedagogical Phenomenon* (Novak, 2019) defines social success as an integrative personal quality that combines systematic knowledge of social norms with a positive emotional and value-based attitude toward achieving success. Thus, the adolescent is oriented toward positive social interaction, learning and respecting the rules of society, while feeling fulfilled in social contexts. Another crucial component is the axiological one, reflecting the values that support socially meaningful behavior and constructive attitudes. In other words, these values help adolescents express their uniqueness in a positive and socially acceptable way.

Social success functions as a valuable resource. The experience of success acts as a catalyst for energy and confidence, fueling the development and affirmation of one's identity. Personal expression, in fact, is the means through which adolescents leave their mark on the world. This process involves both the epistemological dimension (the social knowledge necessary for self-affirmation) and the praxeological dimension (the practical application of one's ideas and achievements), thus resulting in a positive model of social integration. Basically,

teenagers learn how society functions and then utilize that knowledge to convey their unique ideas in a manner that still respects established norms while allowing them to remain authentic. Moreover, the aforementioned study emphasizes how productive social interaction includes the ability to adapt to the informational and digital era, which, in turn, facilitates personal expression in a living context. Therefore, the adolescent's need for self-affirmation is closely connected to the pursuit of social success. The question then arises: what tools of personal development can help teenagers express the specific and unique aspects of their personality while keeping pace with the values of a world in continuous change?

Subsequently, delving into creativity as a means of development, the analysis of the cited sources in the bibliography reveals that the different points of view not only agree on the fact, but also recognise creativity as a fundamental human personality aspect. Etymologically, the word traces its roots to the Latin word "*creare*", which means „to bring forth,” „to produce.” The modern science of creativity began when J.P. Guilford published his paper "Creativity" in the 1950s, which presented the concept of creativity as "a pattern of characteristic traits of the creative person", and creative people as able to bring forward "novel ideas". Soon, the definition of creativity morphed under the idea that beyond novelty, value is also imperative. "Creative work is a novel work that is accepted as tenable or useful or satisfying by a group in some point in time (Stein, 1953, p. 311).

According to Mel Rhodes (1961), creativity can be understood through four interconnected dimensions: person, process, environment, and product. Only when these elements overlap does creative output emerge. Creativity, as a phenomenon, is associated with various attributes such as productivity, usefulness, efficiency, value, ingenuity, novelty, and originality. Based on the theory of I. A. Taylor (1959), the manifestation of creativity can be found on five different levels: expressive, productive, inventive, innovative, and emergentive.

Through these levels, one is able to understand various means of creative expression (Runco, 2014, p. 45-46). Expressive creativity is open and voluntary, it is not bound by any utility, function, and it is the closest to raw emotional natural expression. Productive creativity is the use of acquired knowledge to do or create something new and useful, thus very much related to solving problems and practical thinking. Inventive creativity means the invention of new methods, processes, or tools, it roots in finding original solutions for existing problems, thereby going a step further than the previous level. Innovative creativity is centered on the improvement and the optimization of the existing systems and processes, while emergentive creativity, being the highest and the most complex one, brings forth entirely new concepts or ideas thus changing existing paradigms and, in most cases, sparking revolutions in different fields.

The particular relevance of this hierarchy pertains to adolescents who are experiencing various stages of exploring their identity and seeking unique forms of expression. The implications are gradual and developmental. Expressive creativity at first offers adolescents the opportunity to express their genuine self, helping them uncover their feelings and ideas. As they evolve from expressive to innovative creativity, they can also achieve the base skills of originality, which they can employ in their peer groups, consequently reinforcing the previously discussed need for social success. Finally, emergentive creativity gives them the potential to become agents of change within their communities, affirming their individuality in meaningful and influential ways. If one considers the fact that adolescents are naturally inclined to explore and innovate, then creativity becomes more than an important, it becomes necessary, as it has the potential to become a sort of psychological “release valve” for the expression of ideas and feelings that otherwise could have been repressed or dissipated in a superficial way.

Creativity, however, is not a fixed trait; it evolves over time. Just as adolescents undergo physical and psychological transformations, their creative abilities also develop and change. The article *Special Features of Creativity at the Teenage Period* (Shumakova, 2017) notes that if we categorize creativity into verbal and nonverbal types, verbal creativity tends to increase with age, reflecting enhanced verbal expression and idea elaboration. Meanwhile, nonverbal creativity, such as drawing, may plateau or decline.

Moreover, as teenagers mature, the quality of creativity becomes more important than the quantity. Older teenagers display a capacity of generating more complex, nuanced ideas, even varying by context, thereby showing a higher level of abstract thinking. This can be found, for instance, in the way their drawings evolve from simple objects to depicting more dynamic scenes, revealing a more conceptual and abstract train of thought. The creative expressions of the adolescents indubitably prove cognitive maturation as well as a growing aspiration to comprehend the world around them, as well as articulate and express their inner universe, their own personal uniqueness. Therefore, the evolution of individual creativity becomes crucial to the process of identity formation, thus providing the youth with a way to characterize and communicate their emotions.

Beyond unconscious creative development, psychologist Edward de Bono argues in his book *Serious Creativity* (1992) that creativity can and should be enhanced through deliberate effort and discipline. He introduces the concept of *lateral thinking*, a creative reasoning method that seeks to shift perspective in order to generate new ideas or solutions beyond conventional logic. De Bono emphasizes that creativity is not exclusive to the arts: motivation and freedom from inhibition help, but genuine creative potential is unlocked only through structured practice. According to him, the best indicator of how the mind generates new

ideas is humor, because their common ground is that they both rely on the sudden reconfiguration of perception. He differentiates between passive and active information systems: in passive ones, information remains inert until acted upon externally, while in active systems, such as the human brain, information organizes itself through a process he calls *auto-organization*. Incoming information forms activity sequences that become preferred pathways for future organization, essentially shaping perception. These pathways are asymmetric, meaning that they allow for lateral thinking, where both humor and creativity emerge.

De Bono's techniques for unlocking creativity are simple and effective, hence perfectly suitable for use with adolescents. Once learned, they can be applied across domains, including personal growth and education. To name a few relevant examples, one technique is called *The Creative Pause* and involves a deliberate pause during one's mental flow, to focus awareness on a single subject, without pressure for results, in turn creating valuable mental space that allows for new ideas to appear. Similarly, another technique named *Shifting Focus* involves consciously redirecting attention toward a new element or detail, encouraging alternative observation. Another example would be *Random Entry*, consisting of a deliberate disruption of the habitual patterns by introducing a random word or image in the thought process, therefore generating new associations. The PO Technique (PO standing for "provocation") uses surprising prompts with no logic, inserting them during work to expand perception and create unexpected links that might arise from the absurd nature of them. Lastly, techniques of sensitizing produce a heightened awareness on aspects of a problem that had been previously overlooked, for instance through writing stratals, short sets of five unrelated statements that are designed to spark new insights.

All of these techniques can and should be applied when working with teenagers. By means of this sort of exercises, teens are placed in the position of developing not only their inventiveness, but also their capability to be genuine and sincere in the expression of ideas. Therefore, this potential serves as a major argument for the necessity of educational context that facilitate the maturing of a stable and confident identity.

Building a supportive context

All the theories and techniques discussed previously are meant to cultivate and enhance creativity. However, they cannot reach their full potential unless implemented within a specific, nurturing environment that encourages exploration and collaboration. This is precisely where the need for a creative educational context arises. One such context can be a practical film workshop. Not only does this type of framework motivate the generation of new ideas, it also provides the

teenagers with a safe and rich space for exploration and self-affirmation, two vital elements in the process of forming an identity at this age.

The connection between one's creative activity and the growth of one's personality has been thoroughly examined by D. Anzieu (1993). While his theory applies to the human condition in general, its implications are especially evident in adolescence. Through creation, individuals gain the opportunity to express aspects of the self that they come to recognize precisely through this process. Creativity thus facilitates self-knowledge, particularly of the less articulated parts of the psyche, or what psychoanalysis call the unconscious. By externalizing these inner aspects, individuals confront them, bringing them to light and integrating them into a clearer and stronger sense of self.

Additionally, Anzieu described creation as an act of autonomy. By means of creative work, individuals are able to separate themselves from outside influences and strengthen their own principles and distinctive points of view. This creative independence represents a fundamental stage in the process of affirming the self, thus revealing the necessity of contexts where one can have authority and influence over their symbolic, inner world. Anzieu often portrayed the creative process as a form of struggle, precisely the struggle to give meaning and shape to one's inner experiences. When the creator gains the ability to impose order and meaning on internal chaos, the act of creation becomes a fundamental stage of personal development.

Such an individual growth, however, requires the youth to be equipped with what is generally referred to as competence-based education, a contemporary revision of traditional pedagogy. This innovative educational approach focuses not only on the accumulation of specific knowledge, but on developing essential skills for social integration and adaptation to the modern society. As author V. Chiş details in his book *Contemporary Pedagogy. Pedagogy for Competences* (2014), this educational model encourages, beyond technical proficiency, the cultivation of communication, collaboration, social responsibility, and surely, creativity. Once again, creativity emerges as a central pillar of personal development.

Competence-based education additionally acknowledges that learners have different learning styles, inclinations, and are essentially different by nature. The advantage of this approach is allowing the students to develop their individual abilities. An education system that focuses on creative skills makes the process itself more interesting and attractive, thereby increasing motivation and active participation. Therefore, by cultivating creativity, adolescents become more receptive to new ideas and perspective and better prepared to adapt to different social and professional settings. Moreover, they gain the ability to understand complex situations in order to offer innovative solutions. Teachers, in this sense,

serve as mediators between the adolescent and the world, guiding imagination and creativity in ways that are engaging, constructive. This form of education relies on initiative, independent thinking, originality, and constructive feedback, all of which reinforce students' confidence in their own abilities. To sum up, by implementing the strategies mentioned above and through the active role of teachers, an educational context conducive to creativity can be established; in turn, it becomes fundamental for adolescent self-affirmation. Such a context may very well take the form of a film workshop.

Clearly, creativity during adolescence is not merely a useful skill, but a genuine cornerstone in identity formation. Creativity expresses the individual's potential for self-affirmation and thus becomes essential to human development, particularly during a period as formative as adolescence. Young people need opportunities to build their individuality and explore their inner world. They feel a profound need to transform abstract ideas and emotions into tangible forms of expression. In this way, creativity acts as a channel through which adolescents process what they feel, communicating what they cannot articulate directly. As De Bono emphasized, creativity is not an innate gift but an ability that can be cultivated through deliberate techniques such as lateral thinking.

If we do nothing about creativity, then, clearly, creative ability can only depend on the 'natural' talent. But if we provide training, structures and systematic techniques, then we can raise the overall level of creative ability. Some people will still be much better than others, but anybody can gain a certain creative ability. There is no contradiction between talent and training. Any athletics coach or opera teacher can attest to this. The fact that some people are naturally creative does not mean that they would not become even more creative with some training and the help of certain techniques. Nor does it mean that other people cannot become creative. (de Bono, 1992, p. 59, **author's translation**)

The film workshop, therefore, becomes an ideal environment for putting this creativity into practice, due to allowing participants to train their minds through concrete exercises that encourage exploration, collaboration, and personal communication. Creativity here is not an endpoint, but rather a starting point for self-discovery.

As previously mentioned, adolescence is characterized by rapid psychological transformations that often leave young people destabilized, unconsciously seeking environments that provide both support and authenticity. Given that this stage is dominated by neurological processes that heighten

emotional experiences, the need for social belonging becomes particularly strong. What we might call social success can serve as an important motivational force, closely tied to one's confidence and self-worth.

When personal expression is acknowledged and appreciated by a group, it becomes a powerful means of strengthening identity. Creativity and social interaction are therefore interdependent dimensions: each is reinforcing the other, particularly in such a collaborative environment as that of a film workshop. Through cooperation and creative exercises, adolescents experience both self-expression and group cohesion, balancing inner and social development. The benefits, however, extend beyond creativity itself. They encompass emotional, ethical, and relational growth.

The director's eye as a curious and empathic gaze

One of the most distinctive traits of cinema, setting it apart from other arts, is its collaborative nature. While it is true that certain projects, usually documentaries, are made by a single individual with merely the use of a simple camera and microphone setup, it also stands that such cases are exceptions. In most situations, filmmaking is inherently collective: a teamwork endeavor. In a film workshop, this collaborative structure is mirrored on a smaller scale. Each participant is invited to take on a specific role within a creative team, contributing actively to a shared goal. Not only does this setup fairly divide tasks, but it cultivates key social and ethical skills necessary for adult life, such as clear communication, active listening, empathy, compromise and mutual respect.

Teamwork naturally brings differences in vision, which in turn necessitates managing conflicts and emotional regulation. By producing short films together, adolescents learn to justify their creative choices, to handle feedback without defensiveness, and to resolve disagreements constructively. These are not merely artistic skills but the foundations of professional ethics and interpersonal maturity. Collaboration makes them aware of the worth of each contribution, however insignificant it may be. By witnessing actors, cinematographers, editors, and sound designers working together toward a common goal, they come to appreciate the collective nature of creation. This, in turn, helps to construct solidarity, reduces unnecessary competition, and builds the mindset of "together we succeed."

Additionally, creative teamwork develops adaptability, which represents an essential skill in the modern world. Young participants learn that ideas evolve, plans shift, and group dynamics can be unpredictable. They must remain flexible, receptive to change, and aware of how each role affects the whole group. Participation in such a workshop thus becomes a formative human experience,

allowing teenagers to build their first ethical and relational dynamic. Beyond these interpersonal benefits, filmmaking also cultivates observation, empathy, and aesthetic sensitivity in a way few other arts can. Working with cinematic language teaches participants to perceive nuances. Therefore, they come to understand not only what a character does, but also what they feel. They perceive not only the physical aspect of a space, but what atmosphere it evokes.

Learning film language from a director's perspective means learning to see, to truly pay attention to framing, light, rhythm, and silence. This process nurtures what could be called visual empathy, meaning the ability to perceive emotions and human stories through the images seen on the screen. In today's fast-paced and hypervisual society, this type of sensitivity might seem like a luxury, but is actually a necessity. Being collectively and constantly bombarded by superficial and manipulative imagery makes the ability to observe deeply and critically a scarce skill, all the more vital. Through cinema's complex language, its interplay of image, sound, and rhythm, young people learn to observe and decode images, in order to then be able to express themselves through them. An education that is aesthetically oriented helps them discern subtle emotional tones, helping them interpret shifts in voice, gesture or atmosphere. Steadily, participants can become more aware of how emotions are shaped through visual storytelling. Developing this artistic eye through film workshops is therefore not a matter of elitist culture, but rather a formative necessity. In a world overwhelmed by speed and data, such experiences help adolescents slow down, observe and listen more deeply.

Looking through the director's eye cannot have a definitive meaning, but the one proposed by this paper constitutes in using cinematic language to translate emotion into images, as an exercise in self-expression and empathy. Ultimately, the greatest outcome of this artistic acuity runs beyond mere technical knowledge, building a deeper capacity for human connection, the ability to understand emotion, complexity, and meaning in others.

Skill apprehension through film practice

As previously argued, a film workshop would be amiss to remain a theoretical course on cinematography, instead of achieving the potential of a dynamic environment, with practical implications. Where direct action leads to learning, the core becomes an experiential education. Participants discuss film concepts with the goal of applying at least part of them directly, experimenting with each creative stage and the emotions it generates. The hierarchy should be a flexible one, unlike the professional context, due to the necessity of painting a broader picture of what crew work entails. Therefore, roles should be switched in rotation.

By taking on various positions such as screenwriter, director, cinematographer, sound designer, or editor, young participants explore a broad range of artistic and personal abilities, in order to later be able to find out whether they would find satisfaction in such fields of work, or at least in the proximity of them.

This process is formed by a sequence of carefully structured, age-appropriate activities that combine curiosity with diversity. Warm-up games, for example, strengthen attention, quick reaction, and mutual trust, representing essential elements in any creative team. Filming exercises such as fixed-frame shots or emotional portraits train observational patience and visual composition. Nonverbal storytelling activities encourage visual thinking, empathy, and collaborative expression.

In practical terms, the workshop might begin with introductory lessons on basic film concepts such as: shot, frame, editing, script and cinematic genres. Participants learn about the different professions within filmmaking and the steps of production. They are then introduced to the rudiments of character and story construction, applying imagination to craft short narratives.

Once divided into small groups, participants collaborate on short, one-to two-minute films with the use of their own smartphones. Each team writes a simple script, then shoots it, simulating a professional film crew context, with roles such as director, actor, cinematographer, designer and editor. The work remains collective, and the instructor offers guidance throughout. In the final stages, students practice editing techniques, learning how to give coherence and rhythm to their story. Additionally, they work with sound, recording, mixing and selecting suitable music. Each session may as well conclude with a short exercise or a creative task. For instance, after discussing animation, students might describe or even draw an original animated character; after learning about sound, they might be invited to take a brief outdoor sound walk, identifying and classifying ambient noises.

This kind of structure provides a comprehensive growth both personally and artistically. Step by step, adolescents learn to consciously observe, to understand how aesthetic choices affect emotion, and to explore multiple forms of self-expression through film.

Directing and cinematography exercises, such as framing, composition, or working with light, train awareness and intentionality. Gradually, participants understand that each visual image represents a prior artistic decision, that in turn carries emotional and narrative implications. Beyond developing artistic sensitivity, these exercises sharpen critical thinking and the ability to anticipate the reactions of a potential audience. After the process of shooting, solving editing tasks cultivates both aesthetic intuition and analytical judgment. When

students rearrange sequences or adjust a film's rhythm, they learn experientially how emotional intensity is built and controlled. They begin to grasp how time, space, and pacing, far from being solely technical parameters, become expressive dimensions of cinema. Another valuable activity involves filming in documentary style certain short portraits, depending on the assignment. By working with real people and authentic situations, adolescents practice active listening and empathy. They learn to observe emotions, frame responses, and understand behavior, therefore developing both communication and human sensitivity. Through such exercises, participants refine both their technical skills and also their understanding of human complexity and narrative responsibility.

For further illustration of these ideas, I am proposing a brief focus on one essential phase of filmmaking, editing. This process is often underestimated by nonprofessionals, perhaps because of its general accessibility. Due to social media reels, plenty of people have become inadvertent editors, with no experience but learning from doing. Yet editing represents much more than colliding different bits of video material, it represents one of the most intimate and reflective parts of creation.

Within a film workshop, editing can function as an efficient tool for achieving self-knowledge and more importantly, emotional regulation. Recent studies support this idea, such as the academic article titled *Film Editing as a Tool for Emotional Regulation* (Grün, Schintee & Smarandache, 2024) which demonstrates that the process of editing can actively reduce frustration, anxiety and feelings of depression while enhancing self-awareness and emotional acceptance. In the cited study, five applied editing workshops were conducted with participants aged 18–35. After each session, subjects reported a measurable decrease in negative emotional intensity and an increased ability to reflect on their feelings. Such results reinforce the notion that structuring and sequencing visual material is as much an emotional act as it is a technical one. As it requires focused observation of human micro-expressions and moods, editing naturally cultivates reflection and self-regulation. For adolescents, this process mirrors their own internal organization. Through cutting, selecting and rearranging images, they symbolically order their emotions. Editing thus becomes a form of dialogue with the self, a conscious and creative reshaping of the inner world.

By examining all these examples, one can understand the broad range of workshop activities, moving from framing an image to shaping emotional rhythm, from visual composition to documentary observation. The film workshop offers adolescents a wide spectrum of formative experiences. With the help of visual storytelling, they become more aware of the world around them and are able to think critically, to connect through empathy and being receptive.

To conclude, this model of a teenage workshop can provide the ideal framework for discovering personal sensitivities and learning through collaboration. Its success cannot be measured solely by the resulting audiovisual product, but rather by the inner transformation of participants, by the ways they grow, learn and find meaning. After considering such an experience in its details, one essential question inevitably arises: what might education look like if more subject were taught through artistic practice? And, by extension, what might the world look like if creativity were treated as the foundation of learning?

Field observations

These inquiries are not merely abstract, they are burning questions which I have for years I have been exploring in order to approach possible answers. All the practices and implications that have been described, I have tried to integrate in my own pedagogical practice, partly with university students, but also with teenagers. To illustrate the given arguments with proper observations from this field, the paper will briefly delve from a theoretical approach into a more personal terrain once again, by analyzing the process of a workshop I have taught for the July 2025 edition of Boovie, a festival for teenagers oriented towards literature, theatre and film. The festival is comprised of multiple and various activities taking place in Cluj-Napoca, some for children and preteens, and some for teenagers. The workshop in question was specifically called *Looking Through the Director's Eye*, having the primary goal of finding out exactly what the work of a director entails, taking a film from the starting point idea to the finished product, but also how does he or she collaborate with the crew in order to turn reality into a story told through images, acting, sound, spaces and choices, from pre-production to the final edit. The workshop was especially catered towards teenagers that shared a passion for film and a curiosity for finding out how does one construct a filmic vision.

In terms of the workshop structure, it consisted in two equal modules of two hours, and the participants were around fifty. Both the large number of participants and the fact that the two sessions were scheduled on the same day, one early in the morning and the other in the afternoon, did not allow for much time for practical activities, alas, I managed to interject a small homework exercise between the two. Firstly, I started the workshop by explaining the workload of a director, introducing him or her as the one who „sees” and „tells” the story. Then, I continued by explaining all the key steps that the preparation phase entail, from understanding the specificities of a film script, to choosing actors in casting auditions, choosing film locations and making a shotlist. Naturally, this evolved into a discussion on the topic of space and how it can better serve

the story, but also about how exactly the story is told. The participants found out what a film shot means, as I gradually trained their perception to identify types of framing, angles and compositions, even briefly delving into classical art territory to better understand types of compositions and visual perspective. They were shown how underneath the images, lies the core, meaning the story, defined simply and efficiently as the addition of ideas (what we understand rationally) plus emotion (what we are meant to feel). After learning these notions, they were explained what does atmosphere mean in a film, as the main tool for the director to translate emotion into images. The learning phase then shifted to interactive brainstorming, as they were shown filmgrabs with vastly different atmospheres and encouraged to identify the atmosphere mainly through lights, colours and compositions. Afterwards, as the first session neared its end, they were invited to participate in a small exercise as homework: with their own smartphone, during the break hours between sessions, they were asked to spontaneously capture a photograph that tells a story.

The following session, I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that plenty of them had done the exercise and were enthusiastic about showing me the results. We took the time to discuss each photograph, some of them being actually impressive in their manner of capturing a story, a visually suggestive space or an expressive character on the street. After this introduction, we moved on to discussing the production phase from the standpoint of the director's process. They were explained what exactly happens on a film set, what does a shooting day mean, how is a film crew hierarchy structured, and how does a director collaborate with the actors, what does it mean to act and more. Finishing the descriptive part, I additionally addressed the editing process and what it entails from deciding what to keep from the material, how to give it a shape, how to choose the rhythm and tone, and what can be the role of music and sound design.

Afterwards, the workshop evolved into a collaborative discussion, trying to use their creativity and specific ways of thinking in order to collectively interpret certain scenes from films, music videos, short-form animations. For instance regarding the music video, I chose a particularly cinematically narrative one, with the purpose of allowing them to explore how a story can be told only through images, without dialogue, prompting their ideas with questions such as: what is the transmitted emotion? How is it transmitted? What does the atmosphere suggest? Moreover, we discussed details such as the acting, the aesthetic of the camerawork, the set design and the costumes, all treated as contributing elements to the final result.

Throughout both sessions, but particularly during this last segment, I was able to observe an evolution in their perception. Participants were showing high

engagement, by answering questions and interjecting their own personal inputs. Additionally, they demonstrated an increased emotional awareness, being quite capable to identify emotional contexts with maturity and openness, so shortly after having been given the basic notions of film language. More specifically, by the time the workshop ended, they had demonstrated a more complex perspective on image reading, a deeper understanding of character motivations, and a more acute sense of picking up emotional cues. All of those results stand to prove not my personal pedagogical merits, by all means, but rather the potential of this type of workshop and hidden need that teenagers have to profoundly interpret art through their own sensibilities and perceptions. This workshop, as mentioned previously, was not the appropriate context for a more hands-on approach, but one can only imagine the possibilities lying beyond these two sessions, with such a thirst for creativity and willingness to learn.

Conclusions

Overviewing this paper structure, the initial portion delved into the psychological profile of the adolescent, with an emphasis on the neurological and emotional changes inherent in this stage. Another aspect that was analysed was the significance of social success as a means of asserting oneself. It showed how creativity, being a vital component of personality development, can play a fundamental role in the youth's growth, both by way of creative expression and social integration. The evolution of adolescent creativity was presented as a progressive developmental journey, driven by nurtured natural impulses, as well as by education and conscious practice, with the help of techniques such as lateral thinking. Building on this, the study went further to highlight the importance of a supportive educational context, that encourages creative exploration, such as a film workshop with a core practical side, which represents a suitable space to provoke genuine self-expression, awareness and growing the necessary skills for an authentic social adaptation.

The following section explored the positive effects of joining a film workshop, demonstrating the way that such experiences tend to enhance creativity, as well as contributing to the psychological, social and artistic development. The environment in this type of workshop facilitates the growth of skills such as collaboration, empathy, communication and ethical awareness. At the same time, it supports emotional intelligence and aesthetic sensitivity to bloom in participants. By engaging with practical activities, such as directing, operating a camera, editing, but also all the steps in between, adolescents broaden their creative horizons, deepen their understanding of the artistic process and,

ultimately, get to know themselves better. Recent research, for example on film editing as a tool for emotional regulation, points out that creative film practices can exert a positive influence upon one's mental health and emotional wellbeing, by easing anxiety, frustration, turning them into self-reflection and an empowering confidence, much needed at that age.

In that sense, a film workshop for teenagers emerges as a comprehensive educational framework, which could be seen as harmonizing artistic education with personal growth. They acquire technical skills, but also find ways of ethically collaborating through compromise and empathetically engaging with the world around them, through the potential subjects that they choose for their filmic exercises.

The analysis would have been incomplete without a proper case study, therefore I chose to examine a workshop for teenagers split into two sessions, by recounting the trajectory of the exploration and the exceedingly enthusiastic and productive response of the participants. This example only served to further support the idea in question, namely that film practice should be seen as a playground for adolescent self-discovery and self-expression.

Hence, one may conclude that a film workshop represents a vital place for creative, emotional and relational training. The worth of experiential education lies precisely in the fact that students learn by doing, by taking incremental creative risks, making mistakes and feeling the entire journey of the process. From a personal standpoint both as a practicing writer-director, but also from pedagogical practice in workshops and more formal structures, I believe that it is of utmost important that such activities be integrated into educational systems, either through curriculum or as additional scholar activities. Film education, by bringing together analysis, emotion, teamwork and artistic expression, can function as a genuine school for life, preparing them for the unpredictable life ahead. With a creative approach towards teaching film practice, it can improve teenagers' mental health, helping them find ways to express their ever-changing, blooming identities, and grow into fully-fledged adults, visually and emotionally connected to the world around them.

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