Scientific Perspectives on The Importance of Film Language Literacy

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Abstract: Objectives: The article examines specialized research in the fields of film studies and child psychology in order to demonstrate the value of cinema as a tool for education and emotional management. The study highlights the importance of visual literacy in developing critical thinking, interpretive skills, and the ability to understand cultural and social messages conveyed through film. **Prior Work:** Studies by authors such as Christian Metz, David Bordwell, and Laura Mulvey highlight the role of cinematic discourse in shaping young generations and in the dynamics of social communication. Their contributions demonstrate how narrative structure, editing techniques, and visual symbolism participate in the construction of meaning and profoundly influence contemporary viewers' perception beyond the mere reception of the story. **Approach:** Starting from the historical analysis of cinema's evolution as a language, the article investigates how such knowledge can support the self-awareness of young people and children, who are today confronted with an overwhelming flow of digital images. The research relies on a qualitative methodology — theoretical syntheses and the analysis of representative sequences — in order to show how film can be "read" and critically interpreted by students as potential viewers. **Results:** The findings show that individuals familiar with the grammar of film are able to interpret visual messages more profoundly, recognize manipulative techniques or implicit ideologies, and develop a critical spirit that protects them from the passive consumption of images. **Implications:** The integration of film education into school and university curricula becomes essential, together with the training of teachers. Any encounter with audiovisual material should not be a blind one, but a prepared experience in which conscious understanding tempers raw emotions and transforms visual exposure into a process of knowledge serving inner growth rather than blind submission. **Value:** The research provides a theoretical and practical framework for media education, aimed at supporting the development of modern educational policies and the initiation of

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film and animation workshops for children. This represents a natural step toward transforming visual literacy into a tool for personal development, fostering creativity, and strengthening the child's uniqueness as an emerging author.

Keywords: cinematic language; digital media; creativity; visual literacy; film grammar; animation; optical illusions

1. Introduction

Hypothesis: In a world where media structures and cinema settle into children's lives like an unceasing light on a screen, their impact on creative development becomes impossible to ignore. They may function, at times, as a generous spotlight, stimulating imagination and opening doors to new forms of thinking, but also as a heavy curtain, capable of overshadowing cognitive and emotional potential. If everyday video media — built on small, comforting ideas — can flatten perception, art cinema, through the depth of its visual construction and the "great thoughts" it carries, emerges as a necessary form of education, able to reveal media structures as mechanisms of meaning rather than simple backgrounds of perception. Within this "play" between illumination and obscurity, the future of children's creativity and the subtlety of their emotional intelligence are constantly at stake — either elevated or quietly suppressed.

According to the study "Children's Use of the Internet" (2022), conducted by Save the Children and Ora de Net, results show that out of a sample of 2,740 children in Romania, 49% used the internet for the first time between the ages of 5 and 8, 40% between 9 and 12, 6% between 1 and 4, and only 4% — surprisingly — as late as 13–17 years old. In other words, by 2022 it was already rare for an adolescent aged 13–17 to access the online environment for the very first time. The study also highlights the risks of unprepared internet use: 67% of respondents stated they had no unpleasant experiences, yet 37% admitted they had been insulted or received offensive messages. Among the many online activities reported by children, 62% involved watching films online.

For younger generations, the so-called "digital natives," this reality is even more pronounced: screens are no longer just a tool but a deeply integrated layer within processes of learning, socialization, and exploration. They are immersed in a continuous flow of information and a language of communication that shapes not only their access to knowledge but also the construction of identity itself. To deny the central role of the digital today is to deny reality itself, for it has undoubtedly

become the fundamental conductor of how the human condition is perceived. In this context, the studies and efforts of the Council of Europe, carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research of the Republic of Moldova, reflect a genuine concern for supporting children in navigating the online space in a healthy and well-equipped manner (Richardson, Milovidov & Schmalzried, 2020).

However, essential activities such as the study of cinema and the analysis of entertainment media, which could play a major role in shaping self-perception and cultivating emotional intelligence, are not included in these programs. Among all art forms, cinema is the one that "feels" the screen most profoundly—for it was cinema itself that created the screen and transformed it into its medium of expression. This intrinsic relationship with the screen allows film to weave a unique cinematic language, a complex visual and sonic grammar that transcends words and discovers hidden angles of access to meaning. By its very nature, film lays itself bare—with no possibility of concealing the author's level of self-awareness. What is reflected on the screen is not merely the story being told, but the extent to which the author understands and masters what is being expressed—whether as the result of an authentic experience or the execution of a learned and repeatedly delivered pattern.

The research conducted in the master's thesis *"Découpage – A Creative Tool in the Art of the Film Director"* (Surațel, UNATC, 2019) demonstrates that the personality and form of a film are profoundly influenced by the author's emotion. In order to be understood and transposed into the filmmaking process by an artistic and technical team, this emotion undergoes a process of rationalization, taking shape within the concrete structure of the film's découpage — while never ignoring, and always being guided by, the specificity of the emotion itself. Thus, the conviction expressed in the hypothesis of this research is preserved: that emotional intelligence plays a decisive role in the way a video or cinematographic work is conceived, and inevitably plays a crucial role in how a visual work is digested, absorbed, incorporated, and assimilated by the spectator's psyche.

2. The Objective of the Research and the Essential Competencies of the 21st Century, Arising from the Cultural Impact of Cinema

Even though the world is in a state of continuous change, transformations and evolutionary processes have always emerged from a deep understanding of fundamental concepts, not from their neglect — even if, in the course of development, there have been defining and irreversible shifts.

The education of the younger generation depends essentially on our ability to remain connected to the present and its needs, so that human value does not degenerate or collapse. Within this framework, emotional language — the subtle expression of emotional intelligence — becomes a central element of personal development, formed from early childhood in close relation to access (often unequal) to sources of education and culture. As Daniel Goleman (2001) notes, human beings operate through two kinds of intelligence, rational and emotional, bound in constant interdependence, and the balance between them determines one's capacity for action, coherence, responsibility, and reconciliation with oneself. Despite the advances of civilization, this balance remains an active challenge even in 2025.

Starting from Simona Ionela Androne's study *Pedagogical Constants of the Evolution and Valorization of the Emotional Intelligence Paradigm (A Comparative Approach)* (2019), through the lenses of philosophy, psychology, and social pedagogy, one finds that emotion—and its central role in shaping collective perceptions of human success or failure—is far from being a modern invention. Emotional intelligence emerges not as an isolated or fashionable concept, but as a layered inheritance, sedimented over centuries: from ancient philosophy, refined through modern ethics, and reinforced by contemporary sociology. The same underlying tension between rationality and emotionality reappears throughout these traditions, revealing that the core values of emotional intelligence—self-control, empathy, respect, harmony—are in fact civilizational values. Pedagogy, therefore, should cultivate them not as passing trends, but as the very foundation of human development.

In this context, the present research proposes cinema—and particularly art film—as an educational tool capable of stimulating children's structural imagination, developing their ability to articulate and describe their own visions, and training them to sustain the logical or even abstract thread of a narrative until achieving genuine visual coherence. The study of art cinema, adapted to the comprehension level of young children while still preserving its specific features, can offer a unique educational pathway.

A concrete solution in this regard lies in the technical reproduction of the earliest cinematic manifestations (1832–1896), with reference to Georges Sadoul (*Histoire générale du cinéma*, 1961) and Kristin Thompson, David Bordwell, and Jeff Smith (*Film History: An Introduction*, Fifth Edition). This would take the form of optical devices composed of sequences of images that children could design and draw themselves, and then assemble into various installations such as the thaumatrope,

Faraday's wheel, the phenakistiscope, or the zoetrope—turning the process into both a creative exercise, engaging motor skills and structural thinking, and a living lesson about the origins and fundamental mechanisms of cinema.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to establish a logical connection between the cultivation of emotional intelligence at an early age and the formation of the skills required to operate with it, on the one hand, and the study of cinema adapted to primary school levels, on the other—understood as both a tool for exercising the self in relation to modern reality and a means of consolidating emotional intelligence in its formative stages.

3. Methodological Strategies for the Interpretation of Cinema in an Educational Context

According to the study conducted by Iulia-Adriana Cîrlescu (*The Influence of Screens on Children's Health*, *Revista EDICT*, 2025), children aged 2–5 spend on average 2–3 hours a day in front of screens, those aged 6–11 reach 4–6 hours, while adolescents between 12–18 even 7–9 hours daily—far exceeding the recommended optimum of 1–2 hours. Although technology can stimulate learning and creativity, excessive exposure is associated with sedentarism, obesity, sleep and vision disorders, decreased attention span, language delay, digital dependence, and emotional problems. This reality makes it necessary to limit exposure time and carefully select content under parental supervision.

In *Psychology of Ages* (2017), Silvia Briceag outlines the intellectual development of young schoolchildren, emphasizing the central role of sensory perception, memory, reading and writing skills, the coherence and clarity of concepts, and their understanding and communication, as well as imagination, attention, and willpower. All these dimensions experience significant growth between the ages of 7 and 11, requiring increased pedagogical attention during this formative stage.

The child's desire for achievement, accompanied by an emotional complex shaped by anger and empathy, can overwhelm their capacity for liberating emotional expression and limit awareness of what is happening. Thus, the first school experiences generate additional affective responses which, at this age, may turn either into mechanisms of voluntary control or into the ability to simulate and conceal emotions. The need for social integration further amplifies these mechanisms of emotional self-regulation.

In such contexts, anxiety can overwhelm the child and disrupt the proper functioning of the nervous system, leading to the development of sleep disorders, tics, or phobias. Therefore, the need for activities that support the discovery and understanding of one's own emotions—enabling healthy self-expression and the release of emotional constraints caused by the cognitive limitations of this stage of life—becomes all the more evident.

Consequently, the exploration of pedagogical possibilities derived from the study of cinema—adapted to early ages and grounded in research on children's cognitive and emotional characteristics—may foster a process of self-knowledge. This process is indispensable for building the emotional foundation of a young individual characterized by high self-esteem, confidence in their own strengths, a balanced concern with appearance and physical differences, autonomy, independence, and the capacity to cope effectively both on their own and within a group, while embracing the positive acceptance of differences in peers' levels of competence.

In her scientific study *Increasing the Efficiency of Interpersonal Communication in Young Schoolchildren* (2022), Maria Roșca emphasizes the concept of self-knowledge, formed as early as childhood, which serves as the basis for a broad developmental trajectory. Through it, the child acquires self-management tools free of inhibitions, rather than using them to mask fears or negative emotions associated with moments of failure.

The exercises of building and physically assembling optical devices – the zoetrope that comes to life through rotation, the phenakistoscope that reveals movement in circular fragments, the thaumatrope that merges two worlds on the same piece of cardboard – become for the child not just a game, but a ritual of initiation into the unseen alphabet of cinema. Each wheel, each axle, and each image drawn by his hand are not simple pieces, but letters from a conscious writing of the first narrative.

In this process, the construction of the images themselves becomes just as important as the machine that sets them in motion. The child discovers that a story is not born by chance, but from the careful ordering of sequences, from respecting a narrative thread that must be coherent both in the internal logic of the assumed genre and in the emotional rhythm it seeks to transmit.

A cycle of 24 images, placed in a real machine and watched as it unfolds in a continuous loop before the eyes, becomes a small epiphany: the moment in which one understands that movement is nothing but a well-orchestrated illusion. And this epiphany is stronger than any static illustration in a textbook or any digital

simulation. Just as a chemical experiment, seen live, awakens in the pupil the fascination of matter, so too the disassembly of cinema to its core – the optical illusion of moving images – can ignite a deep understanding of the power of film.

Thus, the pedagogical act does not stop at a lesson in technique, but becomes an initiatory journey toward recognizing cinema as a language of emotion and an instrument of self-knowledge, preparing the adult who will know how to read themselves through the stories of others.

4. Research Results

As a film director active in today's industry, I can confirm the substantial difference in dialogue, depth, and nuance between two types of viewers: the one who watches and studies art films, and the one who consumes exclusively entertainment video materials, without prior awareness or discernment regarding the information received. This is not meant as a negative critique or a discrediting of video entertainment, but rather as a necessary emphasis on an evident reality: an informed, educated, and cultivated viewer, shaped through a mature and varied selection of cultural sources, will display an argumentative capacity far superior to someone who limits their opinions to the simple label "I liked it / I didn't like it." Even though this informed spectator can also appreciate or even create mediocre manifestations, with morally or ethically questionable intentions – the essential difference lies in the awareness of choice and in the ability to support it rationally, thus transforming the experience into a lesson of self-education.

Following the implementation of the *Cinema and Animation Course for Children* (2024–2025), organized within the private schools Educare and Inspiro Room in Chișinău, it was observed that the mere attempt by children to construct a sequence of actions for a character – whether invented or inspired from reality – becomes a complex challenge. Almost every time, this process reveals visible confusion regarding the concepts of emotional intelligence, even when these are explained in ways appropriate to each age, between 7 and 11 years old. The predominant emotion is a mix of restlessness and uncertainty: the child does not know where to begin telling a situation, how to build a simple narrative skeleton, and how to attribute to it a clear emotion that follows a coherent path from beginning to end.

It must be emphasized that if, at this early stage, the child is not taught to formulate, in the words available at this age, a balanced opinion – both rational and emotional – the chances of acquiring this ability later in life decrease considerably. The absence

of this basic skill leaves a gap in the structure of the adult's emotional intelligence, a gap that inevitably reflects itself in the way cultural and media content is consumed. In the case of cinema, this void translates into a superficial reception of the work, lacking the critical filter necessary to distinguish between value and mere visual seduction, between authentic emotion and affective manipulation.

In *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 1982), Christian Metz underlines that the imaginary and fiction, as a simulacrum generated by the moving images of film, produce in the psychological perception of the viewer states that can be experienced as non-imaginary and non-fictional. This particularity shapes an asymmetrical power dynamic: the film – a non-human structure – exerts a living influence on the spectator, while the spectator, during the act of viewing, has no possibility to influence the audiovisual product. This observation can be sustained without recourse to experimental verification, being valid in any context where one might attempt to alter the video material during projection. In the stages of editing and post-production, however, the power dynamics of the relationship are reversed: the artist – the author – becomes the decision-making agent, shaping the personality of the emerging audiovisual material. Even when strictly following the reasoning of cinematographic language, the author, consciously or not, aims for an emotional impact that ensures the audience's receptivity, not necessarily for commercial or advertising purposes.

Let us take as an example *12 Angry Men* (directed by Sidney Lumet, 1957), a film which, on the surface, relies exclusively on logical arguments, legal reasoning, and the analysis of evidence in a murder trial. The narrative structure is conceived as an exercise in clarity and rational persuasion. However, as each juror exposes his convictions and prejudices, verbal tension becomes a catalyst for strong emotional reactions. For some viewers, the confrontations in the jury room awaken a sense of belonging to the idea of justice, a moral support and reassurance that truth can triumph; for others, the scenes provoke frustration, indignation, or even the feeling of witnessing injustice and intolerance. Even a viewer with a mature self-awareness feels these emotions – they may not overwhelm him, but they still touch his inner core. In contrast, a viewer unprepared emotionally may allow himself to be completely overtaken by the intensity of the experience, and in that state, reasoning loses its power to sustain a coherent dialogue. From this perspective, *12 Angry Men* becomes an eloquent example of an architecture of emotions articulated through rational discourse, turning into a fragile bridge between mind and soul, where each

viewer projects his own story and his own truth – or, in other cases, out of emotional or rational incapacity, rejects the film altogether.

Drawing on Laura Mulvey's observations (*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, 1975), we can reconfirm that any reasoning present in cinema, even when it relies on a logical construction, inevitably aims at an emotional reaction. In this sense, Mulvey's analysis of the mechanism of visual pleasure and the process of identification highlights the fact that the act of looking is impregnated with an affective dimension that escapes rational control. Resorting to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, the spectator's gaze turns into a narcissistic process of idealized recognition, where the image on the screen reflects and amplifies their projections of the self.

This interdependence between reason and emotion carries within it the risk of error, determined by the subjectivity of interpretation and the diversity of human discernment, impossible to quantify uniformly. The examples are numerous, from social propaganda films that instrumentalize collective affect, to productions with an ideological gender agenda, where the representation of women—analyzed by Mulvey through the Freudian lens of scopophilia and unconscious desire—shapes social perceptions and behaviors.

Through film we draw inspiration on how to dress, how to behave in accordance with our desires and preferences; we update our standards, revise our values and the set of ethical and moral rules we possess, or those we have lost and regained in updated form through experience. In other words, film plays the role of a mirror in which we see ourselves from the outside, and the emotion transmitted or created within us, as an effect of viewing, can motivate us to know ourselves better or, at other times, to continue to hide — a powerful proof of the emotional impact that the moving image has upon our psyche.

Thus, if the adult can be so strongly influenced, even when equipped with solid critical and cultural tools, we may ask what chances a spectator lacking early training has in recognizing and managing this influence. In the absence of the habit, from childhood, of constructing a dialogue between reason and emotion, the gaze remains vulnerable, and emotional intelligence — fragile. From here arises the difference between a conscious consumer, who can understand, choose, and rationally sustain a media experience, and one who is carried away by the wave of emotion, without a critical anchor. Cinema, with all its beauty and power, thus becomes not only a mirror of the self, but also a test of our inner maturity.

5. Film as an Educational Medium: Pedagogical Approaches to Teacher Training

The research supports the integration of film education into school and university curricula, not as a decorative addition, but as an essential component in developing students' critical, creative, and emotional competences. Through its complex language, film can become an interdisciplinary laboratory where logical thinking, artistic sensitivity, and ethical discernment are exercised simultaneously. For this potential to be fully realized, it is fundamental to train teachers in the field, so that they do not limit themselves to a merely technical use of film, but approach it as a cultural body of work to be analyzed, interpreted, and integrated into the learning experience.

For this educational approach to be viable, it is not enough for teachers to simply possess technical skills or a predefined set of methods. They must also grasp the subtle dimension of film — that in which the language of the moving image becomes a vector of emotional and cognitive influence. Film is not merely an illustrative tool, but a cultural organism capable of shaping perceptions, values, and behaviors. This is why analyzing the ways in which film acts upon the viewer's psyche, the mechanisms of identification, and processes of personal projection becomes indispensable in teacher training. Such awareness paves the way for exploring key concepts such as the imaginary, fiction, and the affective impact of cinema — without which its integration in education risks remaining superficial.

Therefore, if film has the power to shape perceptions, values, and behaviors, and if its emotional impact is impossible to avoid, then its integration into the educational process requires an awareness of the affective responsibility the educator carries. But this is not about bringing film into the classroom as a visual ornament — it is about using it with the lucidity of a surgeon of emotions, with the craft of an architect of perceptions. Here, the teacher becomes the main actor, not merely a backstage commentator. Children will model not only their thinking, but also their emotional responses on the way they see the adult before them engaging with a story, with an injustice, with a spoken truth. In this pedagogy of the image, the students' emotional intelligence grows out of that of the teacher; one cannot demand empathy, self-awareness, or discernment if one does not embody them as a second skin. Thus, film education is a double work: on screen, stories that open worlds; in the classroom, a living model that shows how to inhabit them. And when the light of the projector

goes out, another light remains — the one in the eyes of those who have learned to see themselves in new volumes and angles.

6. Value

The study of cinema language within school and university education is no longer a cultural luxury, but rather a discreet urgency, hidden beneath the glow of screens that breathe into our eyes and into our memory, day and night. We live in a reality pressed against glass, where the relentless flow of digital images seeps into the eye and, uninvited, into memory. Why insist on artistic expression, on cinematic language, as the central axis of this research? Because, at its core, a work of art is a radiography of the soul, where the fibers of emotion intertwine with the mechanisms of body and mind in a subtle collaboration that no machinery can fully replicate.

A primary understanding of what constitutes a work of art lies in the expression of the human soul in equilibrium — or cooperation — with its systems of physical execution, rationality, and logistics. The second part may easily be mistaken for elements in the description of a pre-programmed robotic device, yet this research is concerned with safeguarding uniquely human capacities from atrophy, capacities threatened when neglected in favor of automated reflexes. In this sense, what must be cultivated is not merely the technical ability to operate a device, but narrative thinking — the ability to structure a succession of images so that they generate coherence both logically and affectively. Rational coherence and emotional coherence thus emerge as two complementary pillars of cinematic expression, and their absence reduces the visual product to a mere sequence of soulless frames — a construct executed with technical precision, yet sterile in human terms.

7. Conclusion

Thus, a solid argument takes shape in support of the introduction of emotional education into the formal system—not merely as a soft skill, but as a cultural and philosophical legacy of humanity, one that emerges, alongside other major forms of artistic expression, from art cinema. In this sense, the integration of film education into school and university curricula becomes not only a cultural act but also a strategic one, capable of supporting the development of individual identity and the uniqueness of each student as a potential author. The workshops in film and animation designed for children, proposed within this research, are not intended to be mere spaces of technical learning, but laboratories of critical thinking and

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personal expression, founded on a complex yet accessible artistic language that can stimulate the formation of a generation capable of consciously navigating between emotion and reason.

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