

CRITICAL PEDAGOGIES OF OTHERNESS: RETHINKING ETHICS AND INCLUSIVENESS IN FILM EDUCATION

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Abstract

In contemporary film education, ethics and inclusiveness are central to creative practice, yet curricula still tend to privilege aesthetic mastery and professional competence over sustained reflection on representation, difference, and responsibility. This article elaborates on a theoretical framework for critical pedagogies of otherness that integrates ethical, affective, and epistemic dimensions of film learning. Drawing on Freire's critical pedagogy, Hooks's engaged teaching, Noddings's ethics of care, Levinas's philosophy of responsibility, Bhabha's third space, decolonial critiques by Mignolo and Walsh, and feminist accounts of empathy as a situated and politically ambivalent relation, it argues that teaching film today entails learning how to see, feel, and represent responsibly. Empathy is understood here not as immediate access to another's experience but as a critical and mediated disposition shaped by power, affect, and reflexive accountability. Otherness operates not only within screen narratives but also within pedagogical relations—teacher/student, image/subject, culture/gaze—where power is negotiated. Ethics is reframed as an embodied and situated practice inherent to image-making. The article concludes with curricular strategies for embedding reflexivity in production, assessment, and institutional practice, positioning film schools as laboratories of care, critical imagination, and socially responsible authorship.

Keywords: *Film education; Ethics; Critical empathy; Critical thinking; Otherness; Inclusiveness; Pedagogy; Decolonial theory*

Introduction

Film education today stands at a crossroads where aesthetic formation, ethical responsibility, and institutional transformation converge. Once primarily concerned with the acquisition of technical skills and artistic mastery, film pedagogy increasingly recognises its social and moral dimensions. The act of teaching cinema now entails teaching how to see and represent responsibly, and how to understand the image as both a creative gesture and a political event. This reorientation has been accelerated by what Damásio (2024) identifies as a paradigmatic shift in European film education, where schools are being reshaped by digital technologies, networked collaboration, and the demand for critical media literacy. His analysis, grounded in the FilmEU framework, argues that contemporary film programs must balance professional training with reflective practice, fostering students who are not only creators but also ethical interpreters of audiovisual culture.

The transformation Damásio describes echoes broader global debates about the future of film schools. Mourão et al. (2016) observe that the twenty-first-century film and media school faces “challenges, clashes, and changes” that extend far beyond curriculum reform. Economic pressures, technological acceleration, and the commodification of education can narrow pedagogical horizons by equating training with market readiness. Against this tendency, they call for schools that remain critical spaces where art, ethics, and civic responsibility can coexist. Film education, in this view, must respond to contemporary media ecosystems by reaffirming its humanistic core: the cultivation of reflective, socially conscious creators.

Critical pedagogy provides a theoretical foundation for this reorientation. Freire’s (2020) emphasis on *conscientização*—the awakening of critical consciousness through praxis—invites teachers and students to co-create meaning in the face of structural inequalities. For film educators, this means

moving beyond the illusion of neutrality as framing, editing, sound design, casting, and modes of address all participate in shaping collective perception. Giroux (2020) extends this view by linking cultural production to democratic responsibility. Within film schools, such an approach transforms learning from professional training alone into civic formation, preparing students to recognise how creative choices may reproduce, complicate, or contest existing hierarchies.

The ethical dimension of this transformation is further illuminated by Noddings’s (2013) relational ethic of care, which reframes moral education around attentiveness and responsiveness. Applied to film, care implies recognising that every image enacts a relationship between those who see, those who are seen, and those who later interpret the work. Levinas (1998) radicalises this understanding by proposing that ethics precedes knowledge: the encounter with the Other demands responsibility before comprehension. In cinematic terms, this does not mean that every image can be judged through a single moral code, but that images always organise relations of visibility, proximity, distance, and voice. Teaching film ethically therefore means teaching students to inhabit those relations consciously.

Empathy occupies a central but delicate place within this argument. It cannot be treated as a transparent capacity to feel what another feels, nor as an automatic guarantee of inclusion. Boler’s (1999) pedagogy of discomfort warns that affective identification can become self-confirming when it allows viewers or learners to feel morally reassured without interrogating their own positions. Pedwell (2014) similarly shows that empathy is politically ambivalent: it can open relations of solidarity, but it can also reproduce unequal assumptions about who is expected to understand, translate, or be understood. Plantinga’s (2009) work on film emotion helps situate this problem within cinema, where audiovisual form can guide affective response without necessarily producing ethical understanding. For this reason, the term “critical

empathy” is used here to describe a mediated, reflexive, and accountable relation between feeling and judgment.

In Latin America, educators have long recognised the potential of cinema as a transformative pedagogical tool. López et al. (2025) argue that *el cine del aula a las pantallas* embodies a movement from instruction to dialogue: a way of engaging learners in critical interpretation, social reflection, and collective creation. Their work exemplifies how film education can bridge formal and informal learning spaces, cultivating civic awareness through creative practice. When read alongside Freire, Hooks, Boler, and Pedwell, this approach clarifies that empathy in film pedagogy is not a sentimental endpoint. It is a disciplined practice of listening, contextualising, and remaining accountable to the limits of one's own perception.

A further contribution comes from feminist, postcolonial, and decolonial theories of representation. Bhabha's (2012) concept of hybridity describes cultural production as a negotiation within a “third space” where meanings are constantly translated and redefined. Minh-ha (2014) proposes “speaking nearby” as an ethical mode of engagement that resists appropriation while maintaining relation. Mignolo and Walsh (2018) insist on the need to delink pedagogy from the epistemic hierarchies inherited from colonial modernity. Together, these perspectives invite film educators to approach otherness as a methodological problem rather than as a representational theme alone. The question is not only how difference appears on screen, but how educational institutions organise the right to look, speak, assess, and authorise.

Film schools often struggle to embody these principles institutionally. Ahmed (2020) cautions that diversity and inclusion can become bureaucratic performances that obscure deeper inequalities. Banks (2015) and Apple, Au, and Gandin (2009) likewise emphasise that multicultural and critical education must confront systemic inequities to remain transformative. For film education, this means aligning pedagogical ethics

with institutional practice: rethinking not only what is taught but how authorship, evaluation, access, and visibility are distributed within the school itself. The following sections develop this framework in detail, examining how ethics operates within film education, how critical pedagogy reframes the encounter with otherness, and how feminist and decolonial approaches can foster inclusive and reflexive curricula suited to the challenges of twenty-first-century film schools.

Ethics and Responsibility in Film Education

Ethics in film education cannot be confined to professional codes, consent forms, or technical standards, although these remain necessary. It concerns how students learn to perceive, interpret, and relate to the world through images. Cinematic choices do not mechanically determine moral meaning, and their ethical implications may be interpreted differently across theoretical traditions. Nevertheless, choices of framing, editing, narration, sound, and point of view participate in constructing the relations between filmmakers, subjects, collaborators, and audiences. Teaching film, therefore, involves teaching students to recognise the possible consequences of those relations rather than assuming that form is ethically neutral.

Noddings's (2013) ethic of care provides a foundational framework for understanding this responsibility. For her, moral education begins with attentiveness and responsiveness: the capacity to recognise and respond to the needs of others. When translated into film pedagogy, care becomes a methodological principle. Students must learn to approach subjects, collaborators, and audiences not as objects of representation but as participants in shared meaning-making. This approach transforms the film set and classroom alike into relational spaces grounded in empathy, mutual respect, and accountability.

Levinas (1998) deepens this understanding by describing ethics as a call to responsibility that precedes cognition. The

encounter with the face of the Other disrupts self-centred perception and demands response. In the visual field, this notion assumes particular weight: the face on screen calls for recognition, not appropriation. To teach students to frame ethically is to teach them that composition, gaze, and voice are not merely expressive devices; they organise relations of exposure and response. Such an education fosters reflexivity and epistemic restraint, countering the instrumental logic that too often dominates visual culture.

As Mourão, Semerdjiev, Mello, and Taylor (2016) argue, one of the central challenges of twenty-first-century film schools is this precise rebalancing of ethics and technique. Their comparative research across international programs reveals that the institutional emphasis on employability and digital proficiency can displace critical reflection. The result is a gap between creative competence and ethical literacy. Ethics, in this sense, should not appear as a peripheral concern added at the end of production training. It should function as a structural principle guiding pedagogy, collaboration, assessment, and production.

This position resonates with Freire's (2020) insistence that education be grounded in praxis: the unity of reflection and action. In film education, praxis emerges when students critically examine the implications of their aesthetic decisions. To edit is to interpret; to interpret is to take a stance toward time, causality, attention, and value. A critical pedagogy of film therefore asks students to connect technique with consequence. Giroux (2020) reinforces this idea by connecting ethics to civic imagination: creative practice becomes pedagogically meaningful when it contributes to democratic discourse rather than passive consumption.

The relational dimension of ethics also transforms the pedagogical encounter itself. Hooks (1994, 2003) conceives teaching as an act of love and liberation, a practice that integrates intellect, emotion, and social responsibility. Within film

education, engaged pedagogy implies that the classroom must function as a community of care where dialogue and vulnerability can replace fear, hierarchy, and competitive isolation. When students share authorship, critique each other's work collaboratively, and reflect on their intentions, they enact ethics as a lived practice. Teaching to transgress, in Hooks's sense, means enabling students to connect aesthetic inquiry with emotional intelligence and social responsibility.

Documentary and experimental forms provide concrete terrains where such ethical awareness can be cultivated. Nichols (2017) describes documentary as a discourse that claims truth but is always mediated by perspective. Renov (2004) insists that self-reflexivity—making visible the conditions of mediation—is essential to ethical filmmaking. Winston (2000) underscores that ethical choices in documentary are contextual rather than absolute, negotiated within the relationships between filmmaker, subject, and audience. Russell (1999) extends this argument through experimental ethnography, suggesting that formal innovation itself can serve as ethical inquiry. By encouraging students to experiment with reflexive, participatory, or collaborative methods, educators help them internalise ethics as a creative resource rather than an external constraint.

López et al. (2025) bring these questions into the Latin American educational context, where cinema operates not only as an art form but as a social pedagogy. Their notion of *del aula a las pantallas* emphasises the continuity between classroom and community, between learning and representation. In their framework, film education fosters ethical awareness through collective creation. Students learn to see themselves as participants in a wider cultural dialogue, and authorship becomes less a claim of individual control and more a practice of shared responsibility.

This shift matters because the ethical question in film is not simply 'what do I show?' but 'with whom do I create', 'under

what conditions', and 'with what forms of accountability?' Such a question displaces the auteur model toward a dialogical understanding of production in which knowledge and agency are distributed. It also challenges evaluation systems that privilege technical polish over ethical reflection. As Banks (2015) and Apple and Au, and Gandin (2009) observe in the broader context of critical education, assessment must reflect the values it claims to promote. In film schools, this means recognising ethical reasoning, collaboration, and reflexivity as forms of achievement alongside aesthetic invention.

Mourão et al. (2016) caution that such transformations require institutional courage. The structure of many film programs—rooted in industrial models and hierarchical teaching—can inhibit the development of ethical autonomy. Educators must therefore act as facilitators of reflection rather than guardians of correctness, creating conditions where students can confront ambiguity without fear of failure. Ahmed's (2020) analysis of institutional diversity underscores this point: genuine inclusion entails friction and discomfort, not the smooth performance of equality. A responsible pedagogy accepts conflict as a necessary element of ethical growth.

In practice, cultivating ethical awareness in film education means embedding reflection in every stage of learning. Brookfield (2013) proposes that students develop critical thinking by identifying and questioning their habitual assumptions. In film, this might involve analysing dominant visual codes, documenting decisions made during production, or reflecting on one's emotional investment in an image. These exercises complement practical work, ensuring that creation and critique inform one another.

The characterisation of film as an art of encounter should therefore be understood conceptually rather than merely metaphorically. Cinema places bodies, voices, spaces, memories, and spectators into mediated relation. It does not guarantee ethical recognition while creating formal situations in which

relations of attention and responsibility are staged. To teach film ethically is to teach students how to remain open to difference within these situations, to recognise that every image establishes a relation, and to ask what forms of response that relation demands.

Critical Pedagogy and the Question of Otherness

Critical pedagogy begins from the recognition that education is never neutral. As Freire (2020) argues, every act of teaching participates in a wider process of cultural production, shaping not only knowledge but also the consciousness and agency of learners. Within film education, this principle takes on particular visibility because images are not passive reflections of reality. They actively construct social imagination. To teach filmmaking, therefore, is to teach how to engage with power: how to represent, interpret, and respond to the Other ethically and responsibly.

Freire's (2020) *conscientização* emphasises that learning occurs through dialogue, where teachers and students co-investigate reality and challenge dominant narratives. For film education, this translates into a pedagogy that values collaboration and reflection as much as technical skill. Each cinematic exercise becomes an ethical dialogue between perspectives: how does one frame difference without fixing it, and how can the camera become a tool for listening rather than control? In this dialogical space, students begin to see otherness not as a limit to understanding but as a condition of creativity.

Levinas (1998) grounds this relational vision in an ethics of responsibility. The encounter with the Other interrupts self-centred thought, generating an ethical demand prior to comprehension. Film, as a medium of faces, gestures, voices, and presences, embodies this tension. Every act of looking implies an orientation toward the Other, a positioning that

reveals the filmmaker's stance. Teaching students to attend to this encounter means reorienting film education from mastery toward positional reflexivity: an awareness that one's own perspective is located, partial, and implicated in relations of power.

This formulation avoids treating humility as a vague moral virtue. What is at stake is a pedagogical discipline: the capacity to recognise the limits of knowledge, to listen before interpreting, and to revise one's assumptions in response to others. The goal is not to teach how to represent the Other perfectly, as if such completion were possible, but how to represent relationally, with attention to mediation, consent, distance, and accountability. In this sense, otherness is not an object to be mastered but a relation that reorganises the conditions of learning.

Hooks (1994, 2003) expands this into pedagogical practice. Her engaged pedagogy seeks to dismantle the hierarchies that separate emotion from intellect and teacher from student. In film education, this translates into collaborative authorship, critical screenings, and learning environments that honour lived experience. The camera becomes an instrument of relation only when students learn to question the power of looking itself. For Hooks, teaching cultivates communities of hope in which critical reflection and emotional awareness co-exist. The filmmaker, like the educator, learns to see through relation rather than distance.

Giroux (2020) complements this view by emphasising that critical pedagogy must also be civic. He warns that the neo-liberal turn in education and culture risks reducing creative practice to market value. In response, he calls for an education that links cultural production to democratic responsibility. Film schools can function as laboratories for civic imagination, helping students understand how media shape public life and moral perception. This echoes Mourão et al.'s (2016) diagnosis of the tension between industrial models of

film education and the need for reflective, socially grounded pedagogy.

The question of otherness also resonates deeply with post-colonial and decolonial thought. Bhabha (2012) introduces the concept of hybridity to describe how meaning emerges through translation and negotiation within the third space: a realm of cultural in-betweenness. In film pedagogy, this perspective challenges universalist assumptions of the canon, encouraging students to view filmmaking as a process of cross-cultural dialogue rather than unilateral representation. Hybridity becomes a pedagogical principle when learners understand that cultural difference is not simply content to be depicted but a condition that reshapes form, authorship, and interpretation.

Mignolo and Walsh (2018) extend this insight through their theory of decoloniality, which calls for a radical delinking from the epistemic hierarchies of modernity/coloniality. They propose an education rooted in pluriversality: the coexistence of multiple ways of knowing and seeing. For film educators, this means questioning what counts as cinematic knowledge. Which films are taught, whose aesthetics are privileged, and which voices remain excluded? A decolonial pedagogy acknowledges that every image carries geopolitical weight and invites students to situate their creative choices within histories of representation, power, and exclusion.

Spivak's (2023) famous question—Can the subaltern speak?—adds a critical dimension to this reflection. Inclusion alone does not guarantee justice. Representing marginalised voices without altering the frameworks of interpretation risks reinforcing the very hierarchies it seeks to dismantle. Within film education, projects about underrepresented groups must also question the aesthetic and institutional structures that determine visibility. Who is allowed to tell stories, and under what conditions? Minh-ha (2014) offers a way forward with her concept of speaking nearby: an ethical stance that

maintains proximity without appropriation. Teaching students to “speak nearby” encourages them to work through ambiguity and relational distance, approaching others with accountability rather than certainty.

López et al. (2025) demonstrate how this ethos can be enacted pedagogically. In *El cine: del aula a las pantallas*, they advocate for an approach that integrates film production with collective reflection, treating cinema as both method and metaphor for dialogue. Their model aligns with Freire's (2020) idea of praxis by grounding creativity in ethical and communal engagement. By combining audiovisual storytelling with social participation, film education can help students develop critical empathy, which is the ability to connect affect and analysis while remaining attentive to the unequal conditions under which stories circulate.

Damásio (2024) similarly underscores that European film schools must evolve from teaching about film to teaching through film. His notion of reflexive competence parallels critical pedagogy's emphasis on awareness and relation. Film educators must prepare students not only to navigate technological change but also to engage ethically with the cultural ecosystems that shape their work. Here, the manuscript's analytical contribution lies in bringing together critical pedagogy, ethics of care, decolonial critique, and film-specific reflection in order to define otherness as a curricular and institutional problem, not merely as a representational topic.

Ahmed (2020) reminds us that institutions often resist such transformation. Inclusion can easily become a slogan that masks structural inertia. Critical pedagogy demands friction: the willingness to confront discomfort and contradiction. In film education, this means cultivating spaces where conflict is not avoided but explored as a learning process. Brookfield's (2013) emphasis on critical reflection complements this view. Students must question not only cinematic texts but also their interpretive frameworks: why certain images evoke

familiarity or discomfort, why some aesthetics feel natural, and how cultural background shapes perception.

Critical pedagogy and the ethics of otherness thus converge in their commitment to relational learning. To teach film critically is to teach students to dwell within complexity: to listen, to unlearn, and to co-create. Otherness is not a theme to be mastered but a mode of engagement that defines both artistic and ethical formation. As Freire (2020) insists, liberation begins when learners recognise themselves as participants in the transformation of reality. Film education, when informed by this ethos, becomes a practice of freedom and an art of seeing otherwise.

Decolonial and Feminist Reframings of Representation

Representation in film is never innocent. It is shaped by systems of power that determine who is seen, how they are seen, and who controls the means of visibility. For this reason, feminist and decolonial frameworks are indispensable for rethinking film education. They offer ways to interrogate the hierarchies embedded in cinematic language and institutional practice, challenging the aesthetic and epistemic norms inherited from colonial modernity. Teaching film becomes a project of ethical reconstruction: an effort to reimagine representation as relational, plural, and politically aware.

Hooks (1994) insists that education is political because it shapes the boundaries of what can be imagined. Her engaged pedagogy begins from the recognition that students bring to the classroom embodied experiences marked by gender, race, class, sexuality, and desire. Teaching must affirm these lived realities while nurturing critical awareness. In film education, this means dismantling the assumption of universality that often underlies traditional visual grammar. The camera has historically been an instrument of domination as much as discovery. To teach students to transgress

through film is to help them reclaim authorship over their own representations and transform the gaze from an instrument of surveillance into one of care and critique.

Mignolo and Walsh (2018) frame this transformation within the logic of decoloniality. Coloniality persists not only in political or economic structures but also in ways of knowing and seeing. The visual field carries colonial residues when linear perspective, narrative closure, and universal aesthetics are treated as neutral standards of knowledge and order. A decolonial pedagogy of film challenges these legacies by introducing pluriversality: the coexistence of multiple epistemic and aesthetic traditions. In practice, this involves integrating Indigenous, diasporic, community-based, and non-Western visual methodologies into curricula, while valuing oral narratives, collective authorship, and non-linear temporalities as legitimate cinematic forms.

Minh-ha's (2014) concept of speaking nearby resonates strongly within this framework. Ethical representation involves proximity without appropriation, relation without possession. To speak nearby is to resist the colonial impulse to speak for others while remaining accountable to them. Pedagogically, this means guiding students toward a relational approach to representation that privileges listening, contextual understanding, and reflexivity. When learners situate their creative processes within broader cultural dialogues, film becomes a form of conversation rather than declaration. Minh-ha's philosophy thus complements Freire's (2020) dialogical model: both understand learning as a practice of mutual transformation.

Bhabha's (2012) notion of hybridity extends this idea by showing that cultural meaning is negotiated in the third space, a site of translation where difference generates innovation. In film education, hybridity can become both a principle of creativity and an ethic of coexistence. Students working across languages, cultures, or genres experience hybridity as

a condition of practice. Every filmic gesture is a negotiation between multiple identities and histories. This formulation does not simply repeat the introductory claim that otherness matters; it clarifies how otherness works formally, through translation, mediation, and the transformation of cinematic language itself.

Encouraging this awareness allows educators to cultivate what Giroux (2020) calls critical citizenship, preparing students to navigate an interconnected yet unequal world. Hybridity is not mere fusion. It is conscious mediation: an acknowledgment of the political and emotional labour involved in creating across difference. Film pedagogy grounded in hybridity asks students to examine how narrative structure, sound, genre, casting, and visual style may carry competing cultural memories. This work trains students to treat plurality as a compositional and ethical problem rather than as decorative diversity.

López et al. (2025) show how such approaches can materialise in educational practice. Their collective model, rooted in Latin American traditions of popular education, transforms film from a product into a process of participation. Students learn through co-creation, exploring how cinematic representation can serve as both mirror and catalyst of social transformation. This aligns with Freire's (2020) idea of praxis as reflective action: filmmaking becomes an inquiry into lived experience, and pedagogy turns into an ethics of encounter. The value of this model lies in its insistence that inclusiveness is practiced through process, not merely declared through content.

Damásio (2024) situates similar concerns within European film education, arguing that schools must evolve from teaching about cinema to teaching through cinema. His analysis of FilmEU highlights how transnational collaboration and technological innovation demand renewed commitments to critical thinking and ethical literacy. Feminist and decolonial pedagogies embody this reflexivity by foregrounding care,

otherness, and the politics of visibility. They enable students to understand that visual creativity is inseparable from ethical engagement, and that innovation without responsibility risks reproducing the hierarchies it claims to transcend.

Mourão, Semerdjiev, Mello, and Taylor (2016) likewise emphasise that film schools must confront contradictions within the contemporary media landscape. An overemphasis on technological proficiency can obscure questions of representation and power. As global industries standardise aesthetic norms, the educational challenge lies in preserving cultural plurality and critical independence. Feminist and decolonial frameworks offer tools to resist such homogenisation by grounding creativity in relational and contextual understanding. The twenty-first-century film school should not merely adapt to change; it should shape change through values of inclusiveness, ethics, and creative autonomy.

Ahmed (2020) provides a necessary institutional perspective on these ambitions. Inclusion is not achieved by adding diverse content alone; it requires transforming the structures that define who belongs and who decides. In film education, this means rethinking the admissions policies, hiring practices, mentoring cultures, funding systems, and curricular hierarchies that perpetuate exclusion. Feminist and decolonial approaches reveal that ethics are not only a matter of representation on screen but also of power behind the camera and within the classroom. By embedding diversity and care into the material organisation of schools, educators can begin to align institutional practice with pedagogical principles.

Hooks's (2003) vision of teaching community complements this structural critique. She conceives education as a collective act of liberation sustained by solidarity rather than authority. In film programs inspired by her thought, collaboration replaces competition, and learning becomes an ongoing negotiation between autonomy and interdependence. This approach fosters what Noddings (2013) describes as

relational trust, a foundation for ethical creativity. When students experience trust and recognition within their learning environment, they are more likely to extend these values into their artistic practice.

Together, feminist and decolonial frameworks redefine what it means to educate through film. They reject the separation between aesthetics and ethics, between individual talent and collective responsibility. Representation is not the endpoint of learning but one of its central media: a process through which students learn to see, feel, and act differently. Film schools that embrace this ethos become laboratories of plurality, capable of cultivating filmmakers attentive to the politics of vision as well as to its poetics.

Towards Inclusive and Reflexive Curricula

For film education to fulfil its ethical and critical potential, its structures and curricula must embody the values they teach. Inclusiveness and reflexivity are not supplementary goals but foundational conditions for learning that transform rather than reproduce. To design a curriculum capable of this transformation requires an understanding of pedagogy as both relational and political: a continuous process of negotiation between knowledge, creativity, and power.

Freire's (2020) conception of praxis offers a point of departure. Education must unite reflection and action in the pursuit of liberation. Applied to film, this principle calls for a curriculum that connects technical mastery with social awareness and ethical inquiry. Rather than separating practice from theory, students should engage with both simultaneously, questioning how their creative decisions relate to broader structures of visibility and representation. Assignments that pair production exercises with critical reflection journals, or that require students to contextualise their projects within social issues, exemplify how praxis can become a pedagogical method.

Hooks (1994, 2003) reinforces this approach through engaged pedagogy, which positions emotional literacy and community care as integral components of intellectual development. In film schools, this translates into collaborative workshops, shared authorship models, and feedback sessions that emphasise respect and empathy over competition. Educators play a central role in fostering communities where vulnerability is treated as a resource rather than a weakness. These environments encourage students to take creative risks, explore identity, and address ethical dilemmas through experimentation.

Yet empathy in such a curricula must remain critical. Boler (1999) warns that pedagogies of feeling can become complacent if they invite students to identify with suffering while leaving their own assumptions untouched. Pedwell (2014) adds that empathy can be unevenly distributed across social and geopolitical hierarchies. A reflexive curriculum should therefore teach students to ask how affect is produced, for whom, and with what consequences. In film practice, this might involve analysing how sound, close-ups, editing rhythm, or the narrative alignment solicits viewer feeling, while also asking whether such a feeling opens up ethical relations or closes it down through simplification.

The curricular vision proposed by López et al. (2025) brings this ethos into the Latin American context. In *El cine: del aula a las pantallas*, they demonstrate that the integration of film into education should not end in professionalisation but extend toward community participation. Their model encourages students to collaborate with local organisations, schools, and social movements, treating film as a tool for civic engagement and collective memory. This approach bridges formal and informal learning spaces, allowing cinema to function as a language of participation.

From a European perspective, Damásio (2024) argues that the future of film education depends on developing reflexive

competence: the capacity to link aesthetic decision-making with ethical and contextual awareness. His FilmEU framework proposes a transnational model in which students work collaboratively across borders and disciplines, combining creative production with cultural literacy. Rather than repeating the general claim that film schools must be reflective, this model shows how reflexivity can be operationalised through joint projects, mentorship, intercultural dialogue, and attention to the technological infrastructures that shape creative work.

Mourão et al. (2016) provide a complementary institutional lens, noting that the challenge for twenty-first-century film schools lies not only in updating curricula but in redefining their purposes. As media ecosystems become increasingly globalised and automated, schools risk prioritising employability over reflection. Inclusive and reflexive curricula should therefore train students to navigate digital media critically: to question algorithms, data politics, platform economies, and standardised aesthetic norms while maintaining their commitment to human-centred creativity. Inclusiveness refers not only to the diversity of identities but also to diversity regarding epistemologies, methods, and criteria of value.

Institutional structures play a decisive role in enabling or obstructing this vision. Ahmed (2020) warns that diversity initiatives often falter when they remain bureaucratic rather than transformative. For inclusiveness to become a living practice, it must reshape institutional power relations. This means rethinking who teaches, who is represented in syllabi, and whose work defines the standards of cinematic value and achievement. Banks (2015) and Apple, Au, and Gandin (2009) similarly argue that critical and multicultural education requires systemic commitment: equity cannot be achieved through isolated projects but through sustained structural change.

In film schools, such change might involve revising admissions policies to ensure socioeconomic diversity, supporting

community partnerships, recognising collaborative authorship in the assessment criteria, and creating mechanisms through which students can question institutional norms without penalty. Inclusiveness thus extends from the classroom to governance, aligning pedagogy with institutional ethics. Practical implementation also depends on continuous reflection. Brookfield (2013) proposes that educators model critical thinking by making their own assumptions explicit and inviting students to challenge them. This transparency demystifies authority and situates learning as a shared process.

Reflexive curricula can incorporate meta-pedagogical components: workshops where teachers and students jointly evaluate learning objectives, discuss representational ethics, or co-design assessment rubrics. These practices foster what Noddings (2013) calls relational trust, reinforcing the ethical bond between educator and learner. When reflection becomes habitual, inclusiveness ceases to be a target and becomes a texture of daily interaction.

The aesthetic dimension of reflexivity must not be overlooked. As Russell (1999), Renov (2004), and Nichols (2017) have shown, experimental and documentary cinema offer fertile grounds for practicing ethical reflexivity. Encouraging students to produce self-reflexive works—to expose their position in relation to their subjects, to question the authority of the image, or to reveal the labour of mediation—translates theoretical ethics into form. Such exercises embody Freire's (2020) notion of critical consciousness by transforming technique into inquiry.

Inclusive and reflexive film education cannot be separated from the broader social ecologies in which it operates. López et al. (2025) demonstrate the importance of connecting classroom and community. Damásio (2024) and Mourão et al. (2016) emphasise the need to integrate reflection into curricular, institutional, and technological design. Together,

these perspectives outline a pedagogy that unites care, critique, and creativity. Inclusiveness and reflexivity are not states to be achieved once and for all. They are practices to be sustained through dialogue, vulnerability, and institutional imagination.

Teaching to See, Feel, and Represent Otherwise

Rethinking film education through ethics, otherness, feminist theory, and decolonial critique reveals that teaching cinema is not simply a technical or aesthetic endeavour. It is a moral and political practice that shapes the sensibilities through which people see and relate to the world. Images created within the classroom may later circulate through public life, mediating how societies imagine identity, difference, violence, memory, and belonging. The task of educators is therefore not only to train competent filmmakers but to cultivate responsible witnesses: creators capable of perceiving the ethical weight of their choices.

The framework developed here brings together several traditions that are often discussed separately. Critical pedagogy clarifies the relation between education and power; ethics of care foregrounds attentiveness and responsibility; feminist and decolonial approaches expose the hierarchies embedded in representation; film theory shows how affect and mediation operate through form. Their convergence defines critical pedagogies of otherness as a practical orientation for film education. Such pedagogies ask students to connect technique with consequence, feeling with analysis, and creative freedom with accountability.

Critical empathy is central to this orientation, but only when understood as a mediated practice rather than a sentimental ideal. Film can solicit emotion with great intensity, yet affect alone does not ensure ethical understanding. The pedagogical challenge is to teach students how emotions are

organised by form, how identification can both open and foreclose recognition, and how empathy may reproduce power when it is detached from reflexive analysis. A responsible film curriculum should therefore cultivate affective literacy: the capacity to examine how images make people feel and what those feelings authorise, obscure, or make possible.

This approach also alters the meaning of representation. To represent is not simply to show the Other, nor to include difference as content. It is to construct relations of visibility, voice, proximity, and interpretation. Decolonial and feminist pedagogies insist that these relations must be questioned in every stage of filmmaking: research, collaboration, consent, production, editing, exhibition, and assessment. The question is not whether students can produce ethically pure images, but whether they can learn to recognise and negotiate the responsibilities that images create.

Film schools have a decisive role in making such learning possible. Their curricula, assessment systems, admission policies, and production cultures communicate implicit ideas about value, authority, and authorship. When schools reward only technical polish, individual authorship, and industrial readiness, they narrow the field of what cinema can become. When they recognise collaboration, reflexivity, community engagement, and ethical reasoning as integral to artistic formation, they expand the possibilities of cinematic education. The classroom becomes a microcosm of the society it seeks to transform: a living workshop where empathy, disagreement, dialogue, and imagination intersect.

The future of film education lies in this capacity to hold freedom and responsibility together. Students need space to experiment, fail, and invent; they also need the tools to understand how invention takes place within histories of representation and unequal relations of power. Teaching film ethically does not mean imposing moral certainty on creative practice. It means equipping students to inhabit uncertainty

responsibly, to remain attentive to the people and worlds their images engage, and to treat filmmaking as a form of relation rather than possession.

To teach film ethically is, finally, to teach perception itself: to form eyes capable of seeing complexity and practices capable of responding to it. Representation is never final. It is a continual negotiation between self and world, image and subject, institution and community. Film education, seen through this lens, invites students not only to depict the world but to participate in remaking the conditions under which it can be seen, felt, and represented otherwise.

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