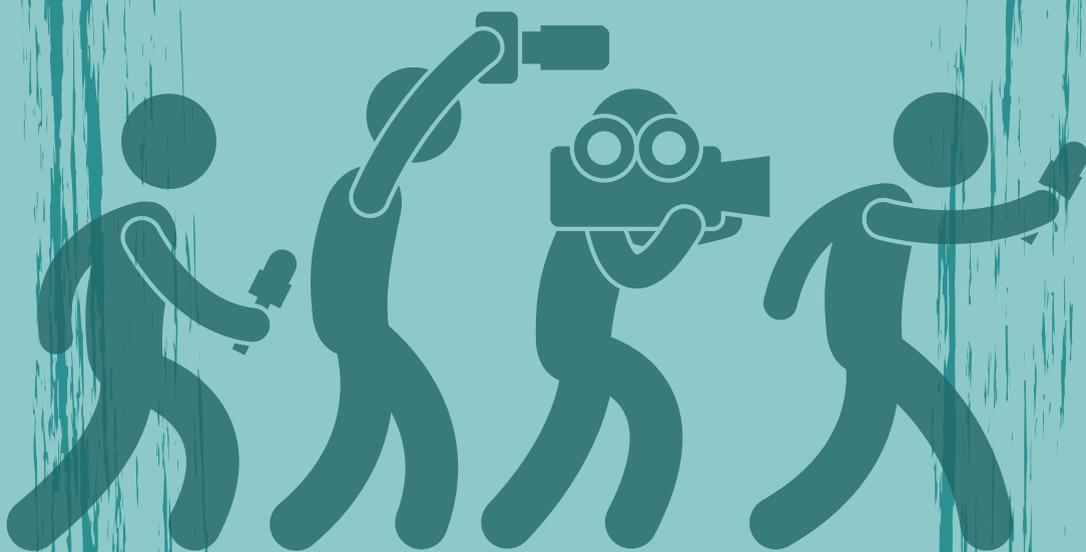


# Children Making Their Own Films



Film O'Clock International Festival #5

*“I have spent half of my professional life in teaching children. Why? Because they are the future, they are open to new experience, spontaneous, creative, imaginative and they deserve to live a full and happy life. I have spent the second half of my life in training teachers. Why? Because I love encouraging them to discover the childish part of their own selves, their creativity, their inspiration and contribute to the construction of a better world for the next generation.”*

Sissy Vafea  
Expert at Schedia - Centre for Artistic and  
Pedagogical Training

# Why Should Children Make Their Own Films?

Let's explore why it is meaningful to introduce children to the language of cinema or, more broadly, to audiovisual language.

Like other art forms, cinema is a way for individuals to express their emotions, share their perspectives on the world, and communicate with others. However, it is the most complex form of art because it incorporates all other art forms while engaging with both time and space.

In relation to time, cinema includes music—melody in scoring to evoke emotion and rhythm in editing. It also integrates visual arts, photography, painting, and even sculpture, as the sense of space is rendered in three dimensions on a two-dimensional screen. Additionally, its connection to literature is evident not only in fiction but also in documentary filmmaking, whether through recorded speech or voice-over narration. Moreover, technology plays a significant role in audiovisual art, making it even more intricate.

Although cinema is such a complex language, children are exposed to it from a very young age and learn to "read" it without anyone explicitly teaching them. However, this means they only understand it on a surface level. This is precisely why it is important for them to learn how to "write" in this language as well—because only then can they fully decode it, read between the lines, and develop a deeper understanding.

This skill is crucial in an era where fake news and various forms of ideological influence -through advertisements, TV series, movies, reality shows, and video games- pose risks to children's mental well-being and shape their future behavior as citizens.

By making their own films, children shift from being passive recipients of messages to active creators. They express their own perspectives, gain visibility in society today, and develop into engaged citizens of the future.

# What Else Do Children Learn by Making a Film? (I)

## 1. They Learn to Collaborate

Creating a film is a process that requires teamwork among many people, each with different roles. The screenwriter, director, cameraman, sound engineer, script supervisor, editor, and composer all have distinct responsibilities. In fictional films, actors, makeup artists, costume designers, set designers, prop managers, and special effects experts also play crucial roles. This variety allows children to explore different fields according to their interests and skills. They may choose one role that suits them best or try different ones throughout the process.

Making a film -all of us together- is a great opportunity to understand diversity—how it enriches our life and work—and to appreciate that equity does not mean uniformity but rather respect for each other's individual talents. No role in filmmaking is less important than another; no matter how talented the director is, if even one team member fails to do their job properly, the entire production can fall apart.



# What Else Do Children Learn by Making a Film? (II)

## 2.They Learn to Focus and Organize Their Thoughts

Filmmaking teaches children to concentrate, structure their ideas, and organize chaos. Effective communication is essential, as the creative vision of each participant—born from imagination and emotion—must be transformed into a structured action plan. This plan must be communicated clearly to all team members so that they know exactly what to do when their time comes to perform their role, whether as technical crew, actors, or artistic collaborators.

## 3.They Learn to Make and Defend Aesthetic Choices

Filmmaking requires conscious artistic decisions, which must be both defended and negotiated with collaborators. The choice of shots by the director, the lighting selected by the cinematographer, and the colors chosen by the set designer and costume designer for each scene are all matters of aesthetic judgment. Children develop an understanding of these choices and learn how to discuss and justify them within a team setting.



# Where Should We Focus When Working with Children? (I)

When working with children, we must both grant them the freedom of expression and provide them with opportunities and stimuli to develop their expressive tools and refine their aesthetic sense in the art of filmmaking.



## 1. Listening to Children and Ensuring Freedom of Expression

To safeguard creative freedom, the subject and script should originate from children themselves, reflecting their interests, perspectives, and emotions. Additionally, they should be given the autonomy to make their own artistic choices throughout the process. This means that educators shall listen to children carefully and apply democratic approach wherever a collective decision must be taken.

# Where Should We Focus When Working with Children? (II)

## 2. Developing Expressive Tools

To effectively express themselves, children need prior or parallel practice in the various arts that contribute to cinematic expression -photography, theatrical performance, and music. Photography helps them cultivate an understanding of framing and spatial relationships, while music enhances their sense of timing and rhythm, essential for both the internal flow of action within each shot and, most importantly, for editing. Cinematic art dictates its own rules for acting, which usually require low key performance. Nevertheless, it is still useful for children to have previous experience in theatrical expression.

## 3.Explaining the Power of Images and Editing

It is crucial to explain that cinema primarily relies on images and that editing creates meaning by juxtaposing them. As the renowned playwright, screenwriter, and director David Mamet famously said:

*Let the cut tell the story.*

Let's look at the example of the Russian director Lev Kuleshov. Here, it is clearly shown how the same image, when juxtaposed in montage with different images, conveys a different meaning. In the first sequence, we perceive that the man is hungry when looking at the plate of food; in the second, that he is mourning the dead woman; and in the third, that he desires the reclining woman.



# Where Should We Focus When Working with Children? (III)

## 4. Cultivating Aesthetic Appreciation

To refine their aesthetic sense, children should be exposed to great cinematic works by master filmmakers, starting with silent films by legends like for example Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. These films demonstrate the power of visual storytelling. Some directors continue to create films without spoken words even in the sound era—such as the great film maker Jacques Tati in the 1960s and 70s. In 2019 Veit Helmer made an outstanding film entitled “The bras”. It is a poetic film without dialogues, only sounds and music, proving that spoken dialogue is not always necessary.

But even in films with dialogue, the power of images -as well as the soundtrack and scoring-play a particularly important role in a film’s aesthetics.



# What to Keep in Mind When Making a Documentary

Reality is very complex, and that's why we cannot claim that a documentary presents it objectively and comprehensively. In a documentary, the creators use images from the external world to compose their own narrative about an issue they have chosen, thus presenting their own perspective on life and history.

The first step for children is to understand that in making a documentary, what they are ultimately doing is expressing their opinion on a subject, highlighting specific aspects of events. Even if they include conflicting or diverse views, they still cannot capture the entire spectrum of truth. The juxtaposition of opposing viewpoints simply expresses their belief that such differing perspectives exist on the subject. For this reason, when encouraging groups of children to make a documentary, it is essential that the topic is their own choice -that it relates to their experiences or interests.

A documentary is not synonymous with a news report. A documentary involves an initial stage of thorough research into the topic chosen by the children, followed by a second stage in which they decide how to approach it. If their presentation method includes interviews, they must ensure to build trust-based relationships with the people they speak to, so that their words are as authentic as possible.

The final "story" -that is, the children's perspective on the topic- emerges mainly from the editing. It's the juxtaposition of images that gives meaning, not necessarily each image on its own. Also, if there is voice-over, it's not interesting to simply describe what is seen in the image, but instead to either provide information not visible in the image, or to act in contrast to the image. All of this can be discovered by the children in practice, by experimenting and playing with their footage.

The musical score also reveals the creator's stance, as it influences the viewer's emotional response to what they see. Here too, it's good for children to experiment with different materials before making their final choice.

The final task will be creating the titles, and at this stage, it is important to raise the children's awareness on the ethical issue of respecting both the intellectual property of sources used and the importance of thanking those who helped in the making of their film.



# What to Keep in Mind When Making a Fiction Film

Fiction starts from the inner images of the creator(s), which must be composed in a way that allows viewers to connect with the work. When working with children, the goal is to steer them away from simply copying works they've seen on TV or in cinema. Instead, they should be encouraged to speak about their own experiences and emotions. Art is always both a spell and a remedy, and it's essential that children find a channel through their "story" to exorcise their own fears, express their anxieties, pain, anger or even joy.

This means that the facilitators must encourage the free expression of the children and should not try to express themselves or impose their own aesthetic views. However, what the facilitators can do, if they wish to lead the children toward a deeper confession, is to give them an initial stimulus that will spark their creative mood and imagination.

The creative process in fiction typically involves the following stages:

- Writing the script (individually or as a group)
- Theatrical improvisation to experience the meaning of each scene
- Choosing natural locations for each scene or building artificial sets if needed
- Breaking down scenes into shots and creating a storyboard
- Filming the scenes
- Editing
- Music scoring
- Creating titles

At all these stages, children should have the final say through democratic processes. The facilitator's role is to ensure everyone's free expression and mutual respect, so that the ultimate goal, that is cultivating a spirit of collaboration, is achieved.

# Voices of Educators

*"When we realized that Art and specifically cinema was extremely important for education, we decided to include cinema workshops in our school program. Our objective was to encourage children not only to view films but mainly to make their own films.*

*Through this process children express themselves on issues that concern them, they communicate with their classmates, they write scripts, they convert their oral or written narratives to audiovisual story-telling, they handle the camera, they include other forms of art into their cinematographic narration.*

*It is also important that they succeed all the above through team work. Thus, children show us the way toward a school of creativity, collectivity and free expression versus that of boredom, competition and individual success. They become creators, instead of being consumers of digital images and they become happy because they are doing something they like. Their joy makes teachers joyful too!"*

**Giannis Pappas**  
**High School teacher**

**Christos Stefanou**  
**High School teacher/filmmaker**

**"Every time I inspire children to make a film, I'm reminded why stories matter."**

**Vera Iona Papadopoulou**  
**Performance director, filmmaker & mentor**

# Voices of Children (I)

## **Giannis Economidis**

*"Happy Nightmare" is a wonderful memory from the years I spent at the Workshop, the anti-authoritarian school of my childhood. The fact that I manage to live in this violent and unjust world - and at the same time raise two children with love - is because my work is that of an actor and director.*

*Watching this film, I see myself learning to love art. In short, I remember what made me an artist.*



**Giannis Economidis** (age 7 years old) narrating his dream for the script of the collective film.

## Voices of Children (II)

### **Myrto Katzilieri**

*"Happy Nightmare" was the name of our little film, made from our dreams - the dreams of us nine-, ten-, eleven-year-olds... And it couldn't have had a more fitting title!*

*Some believe that childhood is a time of joy. But even in the most carefree times, children have their own problems, anxieties, worries, and insecurities. With their smiling innocence, they absorb the poisons of the adult world - a world that lashes out, shouts, commands, and imposes, firing its arrows into tender, budding hearts...*

*A child is a small human being who is often not taken seriously, not counted, often not even seen...*

*By chance, at the age of nine, I found myself participating in the creation of this beautiful film - a cultural endeavor by remarkable adults, adults who know how to see children. This experience was a kind of healing, both for the child I was and for the teacher I was destined to become.*

*Life led me to work with children of all ages, from infants to teenagers. And in all these years, I never met a child without wounds - big or small. I still haven't explained the incomprehensible mystery of God: with so much ugliness around them, where do children find the space and the strength for their smiles to bloom?*

*Tiny cyclamens in the cracks of a rock, as the poet would say.  
Where do they find their colours and blossom?  
Where their stem and movement?*



**Myrto Katzilieri (age 9 years old)**  
watching the film that she had made  
together with her friends.

**About:** Film O’Clock is a festival with a unique vision, celebrating global cinema by simultaneously connecting audiences from 11 countries. The festival fosters meaningful discussions and synchronized screenings, creating a meeting point for filmmakers, critics, and the general public, contributing to a vibrant intercultural dialogue. Film O’Clock International Festival #5 is a cultural project produced by Creatrix Fama and co-financed by the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN). The 5th edition is organized under the aegis of "Solidarity on Screen - Polish Presidency Film Review," supported by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute as part of the international cultural program of Poland’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2025.

**Partners:** National University of Theatre and Film "I.L.Caragiale" in Bucharest (UNATC), Union of Romanian Filmmakers (UCIN), DACIN SARA, National Film Archive, Eforie Cinematheque, Polish Institute in Bucharest, F-Sides Club Cineclub, Filmoteka Narodowa - Instytut Audiowizualny, Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych i Fabularnych, 35 mm online, Kino Iluzjon (Poland), Bulgarian National Film Archive, National Academy of Theatre and Film - NATFA (Bulgaria), Vilnius Academy of Arts (Lithuania), Lithuanian Film Center, CNC Moldova, Mediacor Chisinau, National Film Institute of Hungary, Tisza Mozi (Hungary), Dovjenko Centre, Zhovten Cinema (Ukraine), Schedia - Center for Artistic and Pedagogical Training (Greece), Romanian-Greek Association of Art and Culture (Greece), Otvoreni Univerzitet Subotica Doo (Serbia), Cinemaeuropa Subotica (Serbia), Delta Video (Serbia), Neelsie Cinema (South Africa), Jesuit Cinema Club (Egypt), Medfest Egypt, ART, thestoryspectrum.com.

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Wydarzenie kulturalne polskiej prezydencji w Radzie UE  
Cultural event of the Polish presidency of the Council of the EU  
Événement culturel de la présidence polonaise du Conseil de l'UE