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EVIDENCE-BASED TEACHING IN FILM AND MEDIA EDUCATION

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Introduction

Ideas of teaching and learning have gone through various iterations, depending on the spirit of the time and the nature of the subject. Today, universities are moving towards student-centered or learning-centered teaching which puts the emphasis on the students' effort and agency rather than the mere absorption of information. Although these approaches highlight the learning that takes place in the minds of students, it is the teachers who have a key role in facilitating this learning, and this role requires knowledge of its own.

The student-centered approach to learning is promoted by the European Higher Education Area (n.d.) with the aim to support students' agency in the learning process and help them acquire skills like critical thinking, adaptability, problem-solving, and civic competencies in order to understand and meet the challenges of a complex world (European Association for the Applied Sciences in Higher Education, n.d.). These skills, in turn, contribute to the goals of enabling innovation in European media and audiovisual cultures as well as empowering both creators and audiences (European Commission, n.d.). Even more broadly, this relates to the European priority of resilience via collaboration, innovation, and participation (European Education Area, 2025). However, the levels of integration of student-centered learning remain unclear and are therefore an active concern in Europe's higher education (European Association for the Applied Sciences in Higher Education, n.d.).

Despite decades worth of studies on teaching and learning, research and theory often fail to reach practitioners because they are too abstract or general, irrelevant to practitioners, dense with jargon, or too time-consuming for practitioners to work through (Chi, 2021). There is, of course, value in teaching experience acquired over time, but experience does not transform into sufficient knowledge of how learning really works (Waugh et al., 2026). Therefore, a translation would benefit the implementation of research findings, the professional development of practitioners, and the efficacy of students' learning experiences (Chi, 2021).

With that in mind, this paper aims to empower educators to design informed and inspired lessons which best support students in their learning processes. To do this, the ICAP framework of learning modes and outcomes (Chi & Wylie,

2014) is introduced, paired with results of a survey conducted with film and media educators in the FilmEU network about their teaching. The paper ends with recommendations for educators and institutions in the fields of film, media, and audiovisual culture.

The ICAP framework

Teachers have often been thought of as transmitters of information, but in reality they can facilitate learning by encouraging internal psychological processes and creating supportive external circumstances. This is how teaching is viewed in the student-centered and learning-centered paradigms that view teaching as “facilitating the students' learning processes” (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008,) as opposed to a teacher-centered approach in which students more or less passively receive content from teachers.

Accordingly, this paper is about the role of the teacher as the facilitator of learning, which requires the educator to understand both how learning works and which teaching activities support it. While this connects to the vast and rich field of the psychology of learning, it is not necessary for every teacher to be an expert in it. Instead, this paper takes as its foundation the ICAP framework (Chi & Wylie, 2014) of the Interactive, Constructive, Active, and Passive modes of learners’ engagement and the resulting learning outcomes. This framework is student-centered because it focuses on what students can do to optimise their learning, as opposed to putting the entire onus on the teacher (Chi, 2021). Still, while the ICAP framework is about how learning works, it also provides teachers with flexible and domain-general guidelines and concrete examples of how to design their courses. It is supported by evidence across activities, domains, and education levels (Chi & Wylie, 2014). In addition, the ICAP framework is not posed as a mandatory monolith; in fact, it has been shown that even limited or imperfect implementation of the recommended activities improves students’ learning results (Chi et al., 2018). Ultimately, ICAP supports teachers’ autonomy, flexibility, and ownership of their teaching approaches and lesson design (Chi, 2021).

Nowadays, there is much talk of active learning that goes beyond ‘just sitting in a lecture’. However, there is not much clarity or consensus on what actually makes learning active and how to get students to engage in it. The ICAP framework both explains the processes of active learning and offers concrete suggestions on how to achieve it.

The framework suggests a hierarchical relationship between the interactive, constructive, active, and passive modes, with passive learning being the least

effective and interactive the most effective. In addition, each 'higher' level mode includes the previous ones, so the interactive mode, for instance, subsumes both constructive and active modes. Moreover, the framework connects the four learning modes to corresponding knowledge-change processes and the resulting changes in knowledge as well as related cognitive outcomes (Table 1).

Table 1

Modes of Engagement and the Corresponding Knowledge-Change Processes, Cognitive Outcomes, and Learning Outcomes

Mode of engagement	Knowledge-change process	Cognitive outcome	Learning outcome
Passive	Storing	Recall	Minimal understanding
Active	Integrating	Apply	Shallow understanding
Constructive	Inferring	Transfer	Deep understanding, potential for transfer
Interactive	Co-inferring	Co-create	Deepest understanding, potential to innovate novel ideas

Note. This is a simplified version of the table in Chi and Wylie (2014).

- Passive learning is paying attention and receiving information without doing anything with or to this information. Examples include reading a text, watching a video, and listening to a lecture. This activity results in the *storing* of information, and the memorised information remains isolated from pre-existing knowledge, but can be *recalled*.
- Active learning involves manipulating the instructional material in some way, like highlighting sentences or taking verbatim notes. The student's attention is focused on something specific, but they do not change it or create anything from it. This activates existing knowledge and *integrates* new information with it, so it can be *applied* in similar contexts.
- Constructive learning means generating something new that is not presented in the instructional material. This could be a new explanation, a comparison, a map, or a question. As a result of constructive engagement, the student can generate something new by *inferring* it from their existing knowledge. It is possible to ascertain whether the student has been active or constructive by not only observing their behaviour, but also comparing the provided material with what they themselves produced. This kind of learning allows for knowledge *transfer* in novel contexts.

- Interactive learning is about collaboration. This mode requires students to not only construct but also engage in dialogue in which each person builds on what the other has constructed. This *co-creation* has the most potential for innovation as students *co-infer* from their own knowledge as well as that of others which they would otherwise not have access to.

Overall, the ICAP framework is based on the assumptions that 1. student behaviours and student products provide an indication of their thinking processes, 2. student behaviours and products indicate knowledge-change processes, and 3. the connection between the overt behaviour and products and the internal knowledge-change processes is sufficient to draw conclusions about students' learning. In other words, it is not possible, at least in regular classroom settings, to see into students' minds, but what students do and produce can tell us enough about their learning processes. What is more, this is an accessible and operational approach for teachers as it allows them to 1. compare behaviours and products with instructional materials, 2. implement the concrete concepts when designing lessons, 3. assess in real time whether students are appropriately engaged, and 4. more easily guide the learning process (Chi et al., 2018).

As any framework, ICAP also has its limitations. Despite ICAP being applicable in various domains, "for domains or topics in which students cannot bootstrap themselves into deeper understanding due to a lack of relevant schemas, or for topics for which no deeper rationales exist, the predictions made by ICAP may not hold" (Chi & Wylie, 2014, p. 236). So, while subjects and fields have their specificities and can require giving information that students are unable to construct, the learning process can still benefit from interactive, constructive, or active activities when possible.

Methods

To explore teaching approaches in higher education on film, media, and audiovisual cultures, a qualitative survey was conducted in August-September 2026. The survey questions formed four broad parts: 1. The respondents' profiles, including country where they work, subjects they teach, whether the subjects are theoretical, practical, or both, their teaching methods, and how they have developed their teaching methods; 2. The respondents' specific teaching activities that they view as passive, active, constructive, or interactive; 3. The respondents' perceptions of the specificities of their subjects that support or hinder certain types of activities, their level of knowledge of learning psychology, and their interest in learning about it; 4. The respondents' recommendations to others and opportunities

for improving their own teaching in regards to implementing more constructive and interactive learning activities.

Respondents were recruited from the FilmEU Community based on their profiles that indicated their length of teaching experience, subjects, location, and contact information. Out of those contacted, 12 respondents from Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Ireland, and Portugal took the survey. 4 of them taught mostly practical courses, 3 taught mostly theoretical courses, and 5 taught both or mixed courses. While not representative, the generated data are diverse and offer a snapshot of various teaching approaches within the FilmEU consortium.

Current situation among film and media educators

Educators value learning activities in which students are mentally and practically engaged. Survey responses indicate that educators dedicate a significant amount of course time to discussions, group work, practice, and creation. Still, teacher-led activities like lectures in which the teacher presents information, contextualises the topic, and offers examples have their place in course design. When asked for recommendations of constructive and interactive activities, only one respondent explicitly mentioned learning theory. Many other responses focused on various forms of practice. This may imply that practice is viewed as active and theory as passive, even though learning theory can also involve all ICAP modes, depending on the designed tasks.

Educators use a wide variety of learning activities, but can conflate active, constructive, and interactive learning. For passive mode activities, respondents named reading, listening, and watching. Active mode responses mostly included taking notes. Several respondents said that they try to avoid passive and active mode activities. The constructive mode consisted of the longest list of options: explaining, commenting, comparing, analysing, creating, and presenting. Finally, the interactive mode was populated by discussion, pair or group work, and collaboration. Several of these activities were originally placed in other categories by the respondents, suggesting a possible conflation or misunderstanding of the different modes of learning.

External factors can limit the implementation of preferred learning activities. Despite valuing more engaging learning activities, educators can be constrained when, for example, there is not enough time for certain activities or individual feedback, when space limits more physical activities, or when some activities are not feasible due to a large number of students.

The ways educators teach are mainly influenced by personal experience and beliefs. Experience here widely includes teaching experience, non-academic professional experience, education, as well as interactions with colleagues and students. In addition, educators are guided by their beliefs about the purpose of teaching, the nature of knowledge, and wider societal developments.

Educators are interested in improving their knowledge of learning psychology. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating being unfamiliar with the psychology of learning and 5 indicating knowing a lot about it, most respondents ranked themselves between 1-3. To improve their knowledge of it, the most preferred methods were organised formal learning, like a course or a seminar, and independent learning with the help of literature and other materials. Knowledge exchange among colleagues was also mentioned.

Recommendations

Based on the ICAP framework, the indications from the survey, and the overarching European priorities, this paper offers recommendations to institutions, educators, and the FilmEU consortium to strengthen evidence-based student-centered education.

Recommendations to institutions

- Provide training, support, and resources to educators on learning psychology and evidence-based teaching.
- Foster structured peer learning among educators.
- Identify and reduce structural barriers to student-centered learning, like class sizes, room configurations, technical support, and educator workloads.

Recommendations to educators

- Map existing learning activities against the ICAP framework and identify opportunities to move selected activities toward constructive or interactive modes. Even some are more effective than none.
- In designing courses, focus on concrete student activities, products, and learning outcomes rather than the general format of the class (i.e., lecture, seminar, workshop).
- Distinguish genuine interaction from group participation. Discussions and pair or group work should count as interactive only when students build on one another’s contributions.

Recommendations to FilmEU

- Create a concise, user-friendly, openly available ICAP-based resource containing guidelines, examples, and adaptations for theoretical, practical, and mixed courses in film, media, and audiovisual cultures.
- Foster peer learning across national and institutional contexts by organising sessions at FilmEU events, online meet-ups, and online or in-person trainings.

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