PHOTO, MIND, BODY: UTILIZING IMAGES TO WORK WITH FAMILIES IN EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

PHOTO, MIND, BODY: L'UTILIZZO DELLE IMMAGINI PER LAVORARE CON LE FAMIGLIE NEI SERVIZI EDUCATIVI

Farnaz Farahi Sarabi
Università di Firenze
farnaz.farahisarabi@unifi.it

Abstract

Today, more than ever, it is necessary to rethink educational action in an active manner. Photography, like many other artistic forms, allows you to interact with beauty. What occurs is a form of empathy with the artwork that enables one to transcend logical thought and rationality and develop bodily emotional knowledge. We do not have a single interpretation through which to interpret the photographic message and it is precisely this multiplicity of points of view that makes photography a particularly effective pedagogical tool for some interventions. On the basis of the theoretical model of psycho-body phototherapy, an application of the method is offered within educational contexts with the aim of creating empowerment and forming alliances between families and teachers.

Oggi, più che in passato, si rende necessario ripensare l'azione educativa in forma attiva. La fotografia, come molte altre forme artistiche, permette di entrare in contatto con la bellezza. Quello che avviene è una sorta di empatizzazione con l'oggetto artistico che consente di superare il pensiero logico e la razionalità e generare a livello corporeo un sapere emotivo. Non possediamo una chiave di lettura unica attraverso la quale interpretare il messaggio fotografico ed è proprio questa molteplicità di punti di vista che rende lo strumento fotografico particolarmente adatto ad alcuni interventi pedagogici. A partire dal modello teorico della Fototerapia psicocorporea, si propone un'applicazione dell'utilizzo del metodo all'interno dei contesti educativi con l'obiettivo di generare empowerment e creare alleanze tra famiglie e insegnanti.

Keywords

Photography, Mind, Body, Educational services, Families.

Fotografia, Mente, Corpo, Servizi educativi, Famiglie.

1. Dialogue with beauty

Today, more than ever before, it is necessary to rethink educational action in an active, workshop, relational, and co-evolutionary manner, translating into training practises the Brunerian concept of learning, which views the group as a community of individuals learning from one another and assigning the role of orchestrator to the trainer. To do this, pedagogy has utilised many artistic genres for a number of years. One of these art forms is photography, which enables a genuine dialogue with beauty. Photography, like many other art forms, actually enables us to encounter beauty, an experience that transcends the ordinary: the experience of beauty. The pedagogical power of beauty was recognised by Schiller, Dewey, Proust, Bloch, Heidegger, Marcuse, Gadamer, and Adorno, along with aesthetics as 'salvation': thanks to art, experience is 'saved' and its meanings are revealed; thanks to aesthetic education, 'self-care' is made possible. The aesthetic reception of a work of art, a painting, or a landscape enables the formation of an inner dialogue that refines and reorients one's experiences. Therefore, the reception of an artistic expression is formative.

However, art appreciation has additional and specific functions. The first function is psychological-existential, in that art enables an individual to appropriate a text and apply it to his or her life. Then, there is a function that refers to technical proficiency, whereas, on the cognitive level, artistic enjoyment entails a knowledge expansion. Art has a social function that consists of its capacity to reflect society, criticise it, and sometimes overcome it, as well as a cultural and historical function, as it adopts different strategies throughout time. Lastly, it assumes a utopian function by announcing a new way of 'being' in experience (Cambi, 2016).

What occurs is a type of empathy with the artistic object that is able to overcome logical thought and rationality and generate on a bodily level an emotional understanding, elicited and stimulated by the work itself (Pesce, 2022). Regardless of the work of art, its fruition is enriched by a dialectical act that strikes a balance between form and interpretation, between the objectification of form and the subjectification of interpretation. Thus, through dialogue with beauty, one can develop *cura sui*, which entails opening oneself to the world in order to acquire more richness, awareness, and humanity.

2. Photography and photographic language

The message of photography is an interaction between the concrete image and the context in which the image is situated: 'what photography reproduces ad infinitum has only occurred once: it mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially [...] it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, dull and obtuse, the This (This photo and not the Photo), in short the Tyche, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real (Barthes, 2003, p. 6). It is the detail as a reproduction of this moment, this person, or this object that communicates multiple meanings to the viewer.

Photography immortalises the object that it captures in an image by relegating it to an afterlife. It is an existence that Barthes (2003) calls *spectrum,* which is observed by a *spectator.* A *spectator* observes an image of a reality that no longer exists. In addition to the spectrum, Barthes identifies the *punctum,* which is the image detail that, like an arrow, captures the viewer's attention.

According to the most widely accepted definition in the field of photography, to communicate means "to make common" or to share something with others in a virtuous exchange in which someone receives something without the communicator losing it (Taddei, 1984).

The verb 'communicate' implies participation, sharing, and reciprocity. Communication is fundamentally based on meaning. With this concept, we are not defining a reality-based fact, but rather a cultural product that, as such, is context-dependent. When discussing meaning, we must take into account its complexity and ambiguity. The absence of a definitive definition is due to the fact that its meaning is context-dependent.

In addition, photography's language is nonverbal. As a result, it retains aspects of the reality it seeks to evoke, and because it has analogical value, it serves a relational function, linking it to the dimensions of needs, desires, and emotions.

Photography can only communicate when the denotative and connotative aspects are combined. Otherwise, it is simply a photograph.

We tend to view the photographic image as a repetition and reconstruction of reality, but just as it re-presents a previously seen and known or unknown reality, photography by analogy suggests other ideas and images. We do not possess a single interpretive key for the photographic message. Observing a photograph is an excellent way to stimulate and satisfy curiosity, the desire to comprehend, and the search for meaning.

Following the thought of Barthes (2003), it can be said that photography is an analogue message that can be analysed at the level of symbolic connotations, for which there is no single, unambiguous key

with which it can be explained and interpreted. It is a language that differs from verbal communication because it expresses ideas by analogy. In this sense, the emotional condition aroused by the observation of an image allows one to communicate with the unconscious directly through its language (Jodorowsky 1991), without letting the verbal interfere through rationality.

Photography is a language of events as opposed to a code of discrete, conventional signs detached from the reality to which they refer. Both photography and its interpretation turn out to be predominately creative acts that are intimately connected to the individual who performs them. Photography, like metaphor, provides access to a symbolic, creative, and imaginative codification of human experience. Thus, there exists a creative dimension that allows concepts, emotions, sensations, and words to be associated with images and that determines the countless possible worldviews. To communicate with photographs, one must have a clear concept in mind that he or she wishes to share and socialise, while being aware that this concept will remain primarily our own and will suggest rather than determine what our interlocutors will find in it.

3. Photo, mind, body and educating images

There are numerous techniques and theoretical foundations on which the photography is based. One of the theoretical references is psycho-corporeal phototherapy, which examines the relation between *photo*, the *mind*, and the *body*. The term *photo* refers to the process of fixing an image onto paper. The word *mind,* on the other hand, refers to multiple concepts: mind, remembering, brain, as well as bodily and sensory awareness, a psychological condition that enables profound and comprehensive world experiences. In conclusion, the term *body* refers to a body that is not only physical, but also relational: a body experienced as self-image and personal space. In this sense, one can imagine the presence of a professional next to the subject who observes the picture *(*photo) and guides the viewer through the process of exploring the evoked meanings *(mind)* in order to invite a narrative, a memory, or a bodily sensation *(body)* (Musacchi, 2022). In phototherapy, the image is viewed as a symbol because it enables the cognitive, bodily, and relational components to be integrated within the emotional framework that the image evokes. In fact, there is a strong connection between the cerebral cortex and the soma: a photograph's ability to reactivate a memory also evokes the memory's corresponding state of activation (Cozolino, 2006).

This methodology makes it possible to work 'bodily,' a neologism that alludes to a mind that acts physically or a body that acts mentally and in which the concept of measurement is present (Manuzzi, 2008).

Beyond the therapeutic purpose of the Phototherapy method, there are unquestionably theoretical grounds for employing photography in pedagogical interventions.

Promoting a workshop space within image-using educational contexts is one of the pedagogical approaches that can be adopted.

The pedagogical value of photography as an activator and mediator of relationships has already been established in Italian and international literature (Martin, 1990; Schurch, 2007; Nuti, 2011).

Images and photography have a very high communicative and illustrative value because they can evoke and speak to each of our individual sensibilities and because they can convey connections and interweave with other images, other passages, and other languages (Malavasi & Zoccatelli, 2012). In this sense, the use of photographic language to facilitate communication processes within educational services is a particularly crucial area.

To the previously analysed aspects that define the language of photography, we add a new one: the group aspect. The use of photography within a group situation enables a type of mirroring in the other members, because the sharing of an action, even if only observed, as can occur when watching a film, activates a process of simulation in one's own motor system (Gallese & Guerra, 2015). The sharing of narratives affects the group as a whole, even in a group setting. Even within the training device,

mirror neurons are activated (Rizzolatti, 2006), both by viewing the photograph and by listening to and sharing with other group members who propose alternative interpretations. Mirror neurons allow us to relate what we see to what we feel, generating the process of embodied simulation that resonates with the environment and enables dialectical communication between body and mind, between I and you (Gallese & Guerra, 2015).

Communication through photography is facilitated by the power and originality of concentrating an idea and interpretation of a situation within a single frame. Given these conditions, the photographic device can be a highly effective tool for the majority of educational and training activities.

4. An example of the use of images for family education

As with every other tool and method, the use of the photographic medium must be carefully considered in light of the educational intervention's goals. Specifically because of the complexity and sensitivity of this cognitive moment, it is proposed here that the relationship with one's parents should be regarded as a fundamental field of application for the photographic device.

A reciprocal educational alliance between educational services and families is becoming increasingly necessary in the current environment, it is stated as a condition sine qua non for overcoming the respective problems and reducing the risk of creating genuine educational disloyalties (Contini, 2012).

Susanna Mantovani emphasises that "the exchange with the family, the support to the family to establish a trusting relationship, and therefore the basis for educational collaboration, have long been not only an essential tool of the pedagogy of services for children and daily educational work, but also an object, a purpose, and as such must be reconstructed and analysed" (2006, p. 71).

Reflection should be oriented toward considering the conditions, appearances, and contexts necessary to establish horizontal continuity between families and services that speaks of educational alliances or shared responsibilities (Pati, 2008; 2014).

In this regard, photographs can be used as a facilitation tool at various points in educational contexts. A first moment may occur during the initial interview with the parents in order to establish an exploratory dialogue that can be sparked by a few photographs brought by the parents. Thus, the narrative prompted by the images will describe the child's perceptions and history, as well as his or her relationship with the parents. Subsequently, the photographs can be used to organise meetings with parents throughout the year to encourage their active participation in the service and to produce a shared culture (Cecotti, 2015; 2016) or as genuine training moments oriented toward family education.

Photographic images produced in educational contexts serve important communicative functions: they inform, describe, excite, and assign values and meanings to the context's daily work.

Below is an illustration of how the photographic medium can be utilised for family and parental education purposes within educational services. It should be noted that this is merely an example drawn from the author's professional experience, which must be modified based on the particulars of the educational service and the requirements of the families.

One possibility would be to create opportunities for parents to interact in all educational settings, beginning with pre-schools.

It is believed that the group is a fundamental device in the work because it permits, through the processes of reciprocal resonance and the multiplication of meanings activated in the group field, to support the individual elaboration of the families and, at the same time, to create new shared meanings that can affect and modify the adopted educational practises.

In this way, photography is configured as a tool to represent the challenges families face in their parental roles and to propagate these meanings throughout the service.

Then, one can visualise training sessions in which trainer-suggested photographs are used to represent difficulties, moments of change, and resources related to one's parental role. A further method is to present parents with a collection of photographs and ask them to select the one that best illustrates their parenting. The narratives of the parents, mediated by the photograph, will enable the emergence of information that would be difficult to evoke via verbal communication alone or the compilation of forms and documents. Images can also be used to represent the parents' perceptions of the educational service in which their children are enrolled in order to highlight critical points and resources.

This first level of training, devoted to families, may be accompanied by interventions devoted to an intergroup level: training moments devoted to both families and service educators. The development of positive relationships between educational services and families is, in fact, a response to a mutual and shared need that affects and benefits both contexts responsible for the education of young children. Regarding this, it is essential to raise the educational group's awareness of the family's transformations over the years. During these formative moments, it would be possible to compare the various pedagogical actions and use photography as a tool to facilitate the development of a shared pedagogical culture.

The process to be exploited could be documentation.

Particularly, documentation can be a tool for communicating and valuing one's work. Documentation is, for all intents and purposes, an opportunity to show one's daily work and make it visible to the outside world (Faggion, 2017). In this sense, photographs respond perfectly to the objective of documentation because they allow one to show and remember: they are remembered more easily than moving images because they represent a precise time frame rather than a continuous flow. Each photograph is a privileged moment that has been transformed into an object that can be recalled and reviewed (Sontag, 1978). Moreover, learning to photograph in this context does not involve acquiring a technical skill, but rather accustoming the mind to seeing and observing the educational context (Cipollini, 2007). In this sense, the families could "document" and share images of their own educational actions within the family context, while the service could share with the families the documentation that occurred as a result of the photos. The exchange of reciprocal gazes could make it possible, on the one hand, to enhance so-called parental involvement (Bove, 2007) and, on the other hand, to move toward the development of an authentic educational community. Photography is not only a "rear-view mirror" of the past or a "mediator" that aids in the recovery of memories, but it can also be used to "aggressively move forward, inviting us to plan and imagine the future" (Musacchi, 2022).

5. Conclusions

Thus, the use of photography in educational contexts to include families is defined as a genuine process of change and empowerment based on the notion that all context-belonging individuals can be bearers of competencies, strengths, and coping skills (Gigli, 2007). Integrating families into educational services from a systemic perspective enables all actors in the educational context to engage in a continuous process of improvement characterised by confrontation and sharing, which will affect the quality of service provided to children.

Today's educational services are tasked with promoting a pedagogical culture of negotiation and dialogue between parents and teachers, which can serve as a significant indirect educational model for children (Bove, 2020). The use of photography as a methodology for family and parental education enables educators and parents to work collaboratively by going to the root of the

educational experience, promoting its future design, and working on the coordinates that guide its organisation and interpretation and that characterise it as a meaningful reality.

It is a matter of establishing pedagogical interventions based on a concept of the *embodied*, rooted, spatially and temporally situated mind (Santoianni & Sabatano, 2007).

The use of photography in this way enables a process of co-creation and the establishment of generative communication, a communication that allows for the generation of identities, exchanges, social relations, and shared acts among all the actors (Anichini et al., 2012) and that can contribute to the creation and maintenance of a shared educational culture in which all those involved in the education of the youngest children can feel like active protagonists (Moro, 2006; Bobbio, 2011).

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