



This paper is taken from

*Human Rights and Citizenship Education
Proceedings of the eleventh Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Academic Network*

London: CiCe 2009

edited by Peter Cunningham, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 978-0-9562789-6-8

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Calvaruso, F. P. (2009) Considering right of citizenship through a pedagogical use of photography. A laboratory experience about university education for primary and elementary teachers, in Ross, A. (ed) Human Rights and Citizenship Education. London: CiCe, pp 319 - 322

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Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Lifelong Learning Programme and the personnel of the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

Considering right of citizenship through a pedagogical use of photography. A laboratory experience about university education for primary and elementary teachers

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*'Everyone has the right to a nationality.
No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality
nor denied the right to change his nationality'
(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article XV)*

Abstract

The teaching of Pedagogy of the infancy and the preadolescence, played in 2007 at the Faculty of Education at the University Roma Tre for primary teachers, had as core the study of the concept of citizenship (it fixed on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), through the use of photography workshop. The participants, divided into sub-groups, have cooperated in the classroom and on the ground, interacted on-line and sustained verifications in presence. Training scheme: idea / conversation - photos - project / summary. The blended form provided an indication of and suggestions for the stages of study, re-engineering and co-construction of meaning to interpret. The photography, then, connected with education to establish images of everyday citizenship by offering the students as an opportunity for growth.

Pedagogic considerations

We live in a society defined as an 'image society' where appearing and showing seems to impose life style. Within this, the power of the mass-media is immense and often answers to a logic that considers little of what we could define as an 'ethics of view.' To diminish or to deny the dangers that arise, more or less camouflaged, along the channels of mass communication would be as dedicating oneself to a kind of moral blindness, as stopping on the threshold of social responsibility.

The problem of an overload of images is real; it is an incontestable matter of fact. To report such a situation is obviously not enough. We must act.

So what are the tools of pedagogy to cope with this overwhelming risk? The issue is serious and we can no longer afford the luxury of neglecting the resource of the multi-media reality. Universities and Schools are called on to give their contributions: there is need to give greater attention to the culture of communication and more specifically to that of the image, so as to be better equipped in order to manage the dynamics and content of the complicated processes of education more effectively.

Among the various tools of communication, photography appears to be the most widespread. In the society of the 'liquid-modern consumes', as Zygmunt Bauman maintains, everything is shapeless, fleeting and rapid, elusive, precarious, an endless succession of new beginnings. We live in an assembly at risk of strong homologation, in which tastes and sensibilities, visions and opinions, seem to level out, and which are driven decidedly by an excessive and at times perverse use of the image. Although common opinion identifies television as the 'bad teacher' that has given life to this state of things, the distorted use of photography can also account for a critical-visual degrade. We are constantly plunged into a sea of images: on advertising placards, in newspapers, on the web, on food packaging, etc. that contributes to desensitising of conscience and to shift semantic channels to the level of banality. It is, therefore, necessary to go further toward the recovery of a 'responsibility of view', to favour an ethics of the shot that knows how to give value to that gesture that catches and fixes subjects and objects. Therefore the use of photography for pedagogic purpose appears not only possible but also rather essential in order to educate students to more consciously and critically analyze, decode and interpret images and to consider the role and place of visual culture.

School deals with the education of tomorrow's citizens, striving, as Sandra Chistolini claims, to help understanding of the value of liberty and the common meaning of citizenship. Technology can become an excellent formative tool for education with regard to liberty and citizenship, helping, above all, young

people to understand how it is possible through the reading or taking of a photograph to put in evidence, ideas, values and situations. In this way pedagogy enters the territory of 'multiple citizenship' reminding students, consumers and professionals the inestimable value of liberty. It gives chance to move beyond the classroom, to critically search for significance, to face and analyze the surrounding, to bring it forward and interacting with it.

Most people don't realize the enormous quantity of images they produce. That apparently simple way to take a picture of reality, actually creating an 'iconic collective text', possesses, even though unintentionally, a strong surrealistic vocation. Protagonists and occasions of our shots are mostly alike: relatives and friends, pets and portraits, monuments and more exotic places, sunsets, parties of any kind, and many other things, which can be characterised as 'Snapshots of daily humanity'. Although little attention is paid to the matter, this territory is a resource that represents a theatre of associated life or the place where one feels more directly a citizen. Here, the assertion of liberty clarifies and measures itself in the action of the every day, with all those relations that contribute to form us in a civic sense. All the social interactions that are created and consumed in the cities, in an alternation of meetings and clashes, modulate our way to be citizens, they enact the context that gives quality of the entangled text that we all together write. Reading and also decoding even a single part of this enormous massive structure of signs is not easy. The approach of the subject to the text is always marked by a strong interpretative impact. The passage from the text to the action is possible only if we have knowledge of the nature of the ties existing among sign, meaning and signifier. The shape of the city shapes the city itself and its actors as well.

Critical questions are how can educational practice use images (and the taking of those images) for citizenship education, and in particular for the promotion of Human Rights? Can a photograph be an occasional and/or formative event in educational practice? One approach is to take photographic technique to pedagogy: to focus on a key concept, discuss it beforehand, to share interpretations and analysis, to choose a subject and give it a meaning; to shoot, to snatch, to stop an escaping image, perhaps forever. A pedagogic study applied to photography allows for a profitable match between the knowledge in an educational field (among which Human Rights have a decisive/conclusive role) and the practice of the translation into images, having for objectives what Luciano Corradini defines as 'weak lights that orientate the navigation' that is values. Therefore, the territory is an open laboratory full of situations allowing everybody to express themselves without getting lost in a too semantically disastrous Babel.

The themes of citizenship and liberty are therefore shaped in accordance with a project marked by a creativity that recomposes reality and invites others to new postpositions. An iconic memory to be intended as a metaphoric expression of concepts and values, places and ideas in such a way that they assume a form and constitute themselves as strictly meaning *eidōs*.

Laboratory experience

The course of 'Pedagogy of infancy and preadolescence' which took place at the Faculty of Scienze della Formazione of the University Rome Tre in 2007, was addressed to teachers of primary and elementary school. It has had as principal pedagogic focus on the study of the concept of citizenship (stated in the 15th article of the Declaration of the Human Rights), through the laboratory use of photography. Infant school teachers have been working in the laboratories of the Faculty on the 10th and 17th of March 2007 from 8.30 am until 6.30 pm; while primary school teachers have been working for the same hours on the 24th and 31st of the same month. Due to the high number of participants the head teacher had the collaboration of six experts: four of them were for the laboratory management team and present and two provided on-line support. Each section has been preceded by a meeting of the *équipe*, that modulated content and methodological matters for discussion.

The laboratory had focused attention on the intervening relationship between an idea (intended as thought) and reality (intended as action), aiming to introduce liberty, as an element of subjectivity, and citizenship as a meeting point.

More than 700 trainees, divided in alphabetical order in four subgroups, were present in the classroom during laboratorial phases, but most interaction was on-line on the web-forum. The training module was developed according to the scheme: 'idea / conversation / projecting photo / synthesis', and the

introductory lesson dealt with an exposure of indications and suggestions to give way to the phases of study, comprehension and construction of the meanings that came from various professional experiences.

The teaching has been carried out along an axle characterized by the concepts of willingness and sharing, as an educational background to develop studies, efforts and professional practices. The use of the photo-camera has been the privileged medium for the practice of reconstruction of the pedagogic communication flow. The photographic action, therefore, put out to the creative service of pedagogy to bring back the surrounding instantly, so that it can be introduced to the students as an occasion for discussion and comparison. Photography as a means of connecting the starting idea to the final product, in a process that puts the person in a position to direct content and thoughts through the camera, which transforms them thus offering new imagines of reality to be transferred, read, discussed, interpreted, written, spread, re-signified.

The specific objectives of the laboratory have been:

- a) to know how to use technology in order to translate the project in signifying image;
- b) to know how to interpret what the senses perceive;
- c) to know how to draw the intended meanings from a photo;
- d) to know how to communicate the meanings contained in an image.

In the morning section the trainees listened to the instructions of the teacher, and later they formed subgroups to work with the assignments, elaborating a common approach with the purpose of satisfying the assignment and of taking the photos that the activity required. In the afternoon section, they returned in the subgroups to examine and vote the best shot to be introduced to their colleagues in the assembly so that they could chose together the most beautiful and expressive photo of the day. After that, the trainees were first invited to examine the possibility to exploit with their own students at School some of the contents of the reports produced in the laboratory, secondly asked to work on the web forum to discuss the lab activity and on the themes that had been inserted: 'Citizenship in daily life' and 'Negation of liberty and drifting of citizenship'.

Themes emerged on-line

A) The 'pedagogy of the example' as civil evidence.

One theme to emerge was that to recognize each other as fellow citizens is to warrant respect for each person. It was recognised that there is still much to do for a similar verification to expand horizontally among people and penetrate vertically inside the individual conscience. Education is, as Luigi Giussani said, an 'introduction to the whole reality'; and it is for this, that with serenity and decision at the same time, we accept the strength that invites all of us to reflect on the person and on its intrinsic value. Citizenship is a concept that reaches its highest goals only if it is built on the foundations of solidarity and liberty for the development of the human being. It is not only a matter of method; it is necessary, in fact, to match with it a serious pedagogic commitment finalized to the realization of a common ground in which we can recognize each other as equally free citizens.

B) Civic responsibility.

It's by practicing it that School carries on its task, but it is more important to do it seriously for profound education. With an elevated rate of apathy, mistrust, hypocrisy and individualism the classrooms of our institutions, if we are not able to free ourselves from stupid prejudices, it will be useless to expect a deep and positive change. School is, without any doubt, full of valid professional people that believe in what they do; they sincerely feel the social value of which they are guardians and promoters. To rediscover some essential traits of that professional aspects, will help us also to give a shade of enamel to the delicate and important status of social actors that we cover, engaged as we are, in driving the students in their human, cultural and civic growth.

C) The task of the teacher

The negation of the full exercise of citizenship humiliates human dignity. Fighting in order to affirm its complete realization is the goal we must impose ourselves to set forth our existences over the dusty and sad ruins of lack of criticism, allowing us to observe on the horizon the new sceneries in which we can compare ourselves, steady in our will and calm in our sharing. In this context, School assumes a central

position. It helps students in the acquisition of knowledge and methods and must promote reasoning and social-relationship skills. School is an educating community.

D) Listening and recreation

Some of the trainees have centred their talks on the interaction between the negation of liberty (especially in the form of bullying) and the carelessness toward the emotional-affective status of the pupils. The leading conviction seems to be that an increase of the listening skills can be useful both for the comfort of the young people and for the preset educational-didactic finalities stated for their growth. Listening in an active way is like momentarily getting out of ourselves, and be projected toward the other person to really feel its presence; it is a trip towards someone we presume to know but of whom, most probably, we only have a vague idea which often does not correspond to its true nature. Listening is a broad activity, a silent and genuine answer. Moreover, listening to students, to their outpourings, their anxieties, their fears and their wishes in an active way, has a formative benefit, both for the pupils and for the teachers themselves, who can act promptly and with wariness when they need help. To feel well at school means to be at ease with oneself and with others; a condition that can act as a preventive measure with respect to bullying or other similar phenomena.

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