



Photo-elicitation in lifelong learning of teachers of elementary education

La foto-elicitación en la formación permanente de maestros de educación primaria

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Abstract

In this article we present and analyze a plan of teacher training. This plan is promoted and supported in the photographs taken by two teachers in their classrooms. Subsequently, through two focus groups, one for each class, we reflect and debate on the content of the photographs. This study is based on three areas of theorizing: teacher reflection on own practice, the essence of experiential image and multimodal literacy of teacher and, finally, the value of the photo- elicitation as a means of storytelling. The question generator that plan was how to materialize represent delayed or experiential image of the teacher to encourage description and, therefore, understanding the experiences of your practice? The response we obtained using photo - elicitation is helping us to further investigate with rigor in human experiences unrelated to the hegemonic visual communication methodologies. Among its benefits within the teacher training, is to recreate the action out of what happened in it and, in parallel, offering the possibility of making visible and discuss conflicts and ethical dilemmas present in it. Thus, the photo- elicitation situations are warm to

analyze how and why a teacher has made a decision and no other, because when asked by a choice made is forced to explain his theories, beliefs, values, attitudes., and only when made explicit, when subjected to public scrutiny, is aware of them. We note that the change in teachers is only possible when it is aware of his theories, beliefs ... and what they entail in teaching.

Keywords: Teacher training, school-parent relationship, visual narrative inquiry, photo- elicitation, action-research.

Resumen

Este artículo versa sobre un plan de formación permanente del profesorado promovido y apoyado en las fotografías realizadas por dos maestras en sus aulas para, posteriormente, en dos grupos de discusión, uno para cada clase, reflexionar y debatir sobre el contenido de las mismas (foto-elicitación). Los fundamentos de dicho plan se asientan en tres ámbitos de teorización: la reflexión del profesorado sobre la propia práctica, la unión de la imagen experiencial con la toma de fotos por los docentes y, finalmente, el valor de la foto-elicitación como medio de narración. El interrogante generador de

esta propuesta de desarrollo profesional de maestros fue ¿cómo poder materializar o representar en diferido la imagen experiencial docente sobre las vivencias en su aula? Como respuesta, se analiza si la foto-elicitación recrea fuera de la acción lo que ocurrió en ella, y hace visibles los conflictos y dilemas éticos presentes en el aula. Se concluye que estas sesiones fotográficas son válidas para analizar la toma de decisiones de ambas maestras,

1. Introduction¹

The content of this article is about the analysis and evaluation of a plan for the permanent training of teachers in two classrooms of Primary Education of the public schools Jaime Vera and Concepción Arenal of Madrid (Spain). This work is part of the research project initiated in 2012 and aimed at investigating the nature of the relations between the families of both educational centers, promoted by biographical-cultural, text-visual and group narratives, initiated and supported by the teacher in the classroom and continued by parents in their family and social contexts. To this end, teachers' meetings with these families were created to generate stories with photographs about their respective countries, neighborhoods, families, and so on. These sessions of narration and discussion before a photograph have triggered interesting formative processes that have favored the personal and social development of parents and students, as well as the professional improvement of both teachers.

Located in this context of research, in this article we focus in particular on the last mentioned aspect, which began in the month of January of 2015, and concretized in the taking and projection of photographs by the teachers to know the influence of these situations in their professional development. In a special way, the value of these images is analyzed to represent their teaching experiences in the classroom and, later, to comment and discuss them with two members of the research team and with some students and parents when necessary. The subject

porque al preguntarles por ellas se les obliga a explicitar y, por lo tanto, a ser conscientes de sus teorías, creencias y valores. Se observa que el cambio en el profesorado solo es posible cuando este llega a ese nivel de conciencia y de lo que implica en su práctica docente.

Descriptor: Formación del profesorado, relación escuela-padres, indagación narrativa visual, foto-elicitación, investigación-acción.

of this text is, therefore, the professional development of teachers guided by the reflection that they make on concrete aspects of their practices in the classroom and center represented photographically. We consider that the novelty of the research lies in including photo-elicitation in teacher training. That is, putting photographic cameras in the hands of teachers and, in analyzing the captured images, to be able to explain the theories and beliefs that set the emerging ethical dilemmas in their teaching practice. We will observe if these photographs help the teachers to remember their thoughts and emotions lived in the action.

2. Background

The background of this work lies in three areas of study: teacher reflection on the practice itself, the value of the experiential image of teachers and, finally, photo-elicitation as a means of narration.

2.1. Teachers reflection on their own practice

There is an extensive theorizing about the value of professionals' reflection on their own practice to improve it (Gimeno, 1989; McKerman, 2008; Schön, 1992). Teachers can be helped to improve their work when they are aware of their beliefs theories, attitudes, values ... and for this they are "forced" to make them explicit. This happens because they are questioned and asked for what they do. Elliot (1992) systematized these processes of reflection on practice in Research-Action



loops. Each one is configured by a procedure that consists of the following three phases:

1. To plan the teaching or to specify in a document what are the end goals, the contents of culture, the materials, etc., that the teacher-tutor (in our case) will work and need for a period of time.
2. Develop the plan and record moments of it. One has to follow what is planned and capture information about what happened in that process. In view of the difficulty of reflecting on the action during the action, it is necessary to do it after having finished it. To avoid forgetting or missing the details of what is considered relevant, it is necessary to record it. What tools of the technological families are necessary to help teachers to record the action and reflect on it? We consider that they are those whose primary function is to produce information (tape recorders). We proposed that mainly two teachers did it with photography, capturing these moments, that is, we are in the group of tools still image. Obviously, to be able to narrate with cameras it was necessary that they had a basic knowledge of this visual language.
3. Analyze, question, discuss, and reflect on what happened there. After having executed the plan, we must reflect on the value of what happened in its development; we have done it through photo-eliciting situations. The result of this phase has led to new knowledge about the made decisions, the reasons or whys for them and, consequently, about the theories, beliefs, etc. that underlie them. This generated knowledge is enriching or gradually improving the work plan of the next Research-Action loop and, consequently, the training of the participating teachers.

For Lemon (2007), teachers' reflection on their own practice has been considered as a means to improve their work, as a moral prac-

tice, as a tool for emancipation and development of their professional autonomy. The different considerations that have been made of reflective practice by teachers in the last decades have been collected by Zeichner (2010), with some unanimity in the realized theories that the reflexive practice involves the typical processes of Action-Research for Improve the teaching work.

2.2. The value of the experiential image of teachers

The experiential image in the context of the permanent training of teachers is understood as the mental representation that teachers make of the events lived in their teaching practice in their fields of work. These mental images, the fruit of experience, to some extent support the theories and beliefs of teachers, and therefore, are valuable to relive the events they represent when thinking about them outside the classroom. In this sense, we consider that the photographic images are a suitable means to materialize and, therefore, to make visible the experiential images of the faculty and that, in turn, are conformed by their beliefs and theories on education.

Thus, in the areas of teacher training in the last three decades, the experiential image went from being a mental representation of physical elements to a way of presenting experiences about teaching lived in educational contexts. But this change of meaning has not been accompanied by procedures that help teachers to concretize experiences about their work in schools, possibly due to the difficulty of materializing this idea of experiential image. In this situation, the following question justifies this project: how to materialize or represent in a deferred way the experiential image of two teachers to promote the concretization, analysis and consequent understanding of the experiences of their practice in their classrooms and centers? The proposal we investigate to answer this question is to use the camera and the visual language it supports (Kellner, 2004).



2.3. Photo-elicitation as a means of narration

As we have indicated, photo-elicitation is a procedure that allows a person to remember and evoke a lived situation, an object, etc. through a photograph that has previously made by them (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007; Harper, 2002). Also, as we pointed out in the previous section, it can be a means of reflection and knowledge of one's own theories and beliefs when teachers are questioned for what they do, for the decisions they make, etc., in their teaching practice, through the images they take in the classroom with a camera. These processes go hand in hand with the narrative inquiry (Bruner, 2000, Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and the visual narrative inquiry (Bach, 2007; Lemon, 2007), which refer to the search in the own experience to relate and, therefore, to clarify and to know better one's own lived episodes. In this concept of narrative inquiry lies the idea that experience can be considered as a story that, as such, can be told. This inquiry is carried out during the photo-elicitation, when other teachers of the center, researchers who work as external observers, or some parents and students, question a teacher about some action taken or some event lived in his or her classroom that it was photographed and subjected to analysis and discussion.

Also, according to Lemon (2007), visual narrative in the institutional setting of a school can be an iconic tool for classroom screens and school corridors, to promote schools through posters in the main access to that center. Likewise, it is a means of relation between families and schools in the weekly newspaper. But above all, something that is easily forgotten is that it is a suitable tool for teachers' reflection on what happens in their classroom.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the value of photo-elicitation lies in group analysis and debate, because these situations bring moral content to the teacher training process, because with the contributions of the participants, a shared responsibility for constructing of knowl-

edge and the ethical value of the decisions taken that, in the future, guide the teaching tasks of the teachers involved in the context of their classroom and center (Bautista, 2014).

3. Objectives

The proposed objectives to know how the discussion supported in situations of photo-elicitation affected the professional development of the two participating teachers were:

- a. To analyze the relationship between the experiential images that these two teachers have about their professional practice in the classroom and the photographic images they make of the elements or moments of the same that they consider important.
- b. To know if the photo-elicitation sessions help both teachers to change their teaching work.

4. Research and Intervention method

Due to the experiential nature of the data needed to respond to the objectives of this research, its design is based on two case studies (Stake, 1989), corresponding to two teachers belonging to the Jaime Vera and Concepción Arenal public schools in Madrid. This methodological design will allow replicating categories and observing the life of these teachers in their school in two different contexts. The data that allow responding to the previous objectives are obtained through two discussion groups (Barbour, 2013), composed around two types of sessions that we call: photo-elicitation and audio-reflection.

Photo-elicitation sessions. They occur every two weeks. During that time, each teacher takes photographs of the events, tasks, behaviors, etc. that she considers most relevant and interesting in her classroom and other spaces in the center. After each period of 14 days and independently for each teacher, the said meeting of about 75 minu-



Audio-reflection sessions. The photo-elicitation sessions are being recorded in audio with a double investigative intent. One to analyze the teacher's manifestations and answer the question raised in the first objective, related to the epistemological nature of the photographic representation of the experiences contained in her mind. Secondly, in order to be able to codify and elaborate the information provided in the photo-elicitation session and to be able to address the second objective.

As anticipated in the abstract, the discussion group that makes this reflection is constituted by the teacher, the members of the investigation team who were present in the previous photo-elicitation session and some parents and students when the content of the photographs requires them to be involved. The parents gave their consent to use the photographs where their children appear whenever it is for educational and research purposes.

4.1. Analysis categories

In order to respond to the first objective of knowledge, the research group developed a "prior category" to be used in the data analysis that we call "correspondence between the mental image of each teacher and the content of the photograph". In order to provoke this concrete information, in the photo-elicitation sessions that compose and structure each of the two discussion groups, regularly and regardless of the content of the concern or motivation for which that image was taken, these two questions were formulated to each of the two teachers:

- What did you have in your mind when you took that picture?
- Afterwards, has the vision of that image helped you to remember what was in your mind as a result of what was then experienced in the classroom?

Also, in the analysis, "data-based" coding is being done (Gibbs, 2012), which leads us to construct the "emerging categories" of this study.

5. Results

In this section we present a representative selection of data collected between January 2015 and June 2016. With it we intend to illustrate the nature of the categories of knowledge that respond to the two proposed objectives.

5.1. Results linked to the previous category

As already mentioned, at different times, members of the discussion group belonging to the research team asked the question about the level of help each teacher received in each photo-elicitation session. Throughout these months, we have verified that the tendency of their answers has been affirmative. That is, the image has helped the two teachers to remember and recall two types or levels of information: conceptual and affective, as can be seen in this data:

"Member of Group 1 (M.G1) .: Following this repetitive question, which you will already know, and after these sessions of analysis of situations of your work in the classroom supported by photographs you did, how far are they helping?"

Teacher 1 (T1): Well look, to my surprise, at first I thought they would help me remember events, things about the tasks we did and did not work out as well as I intended, but I have discovered that, many times, and this already I have said it in other meetings, when the photograph was about some student's personal problem, or about the relationship with a parent or partner who had an emotional component, seeing the photograph not only helped remember but also rekindled that emotion of disgust or sadness I had felt at that time "(Fragment of the session of 05/13/2015).

Another day the teacher commented:

Teacher 1 (T1): I have thought that these photographs help me remember what I experi-



enced in a past situation because at the moment of doing it, in a matter of seconds, I want to pick up everything that had impressed me and drew my attention. For example, in the photo I commented in the previous session (see photo number 1), when one of the students began to scream to attract attention, such was the confusion of

those moments, where all the children and myself were blocked, that I did the photo collecting the expression of the two that covered their ears, as well as the face of disorientation of others, not knowing what to do. (Fragment of the session of the 25/02/2015).

Photograph 1



Faced with a similar question posed by the discussion group of school number 2, in one of the sessions teacher 2 commented:

“Teacher 2 (T2): Yes, I have realized that when I take a picture is for two reasons. One, because at that moment something happens that I do not understand what is happening or what I see in class. An example of what I say was when

the girl in the back photo who has two years of curricular delay (see photo 2) is sitting in a chair that’s small for her. With that photograph I wanted to capture that anomaly, that contrasts.”



Photography 2



Member of group 2 (M.G.2): And the other reason you have alluded to why you decide to take a picture when you are in school?

M2: Yes, the second reason, responds to the impressions and emotions that I notice in a moment. For example, when I was watching the recess and I saw that X and Y (students)

were kicking themselves (see photo 3), I felt that violence and I recorded it by framing their legs diagonally, inclined, crossed. “(Fragment of the session of 11/02/2016).



Photography 3



The independent manifestations provided by both teachers allow us to intuit the existence of a metaphorical and metonymic character link between their experiential images and the photographs they took on the reality of their classrooms. Somehow, although they did not have a great audiovisual literacy or photographic experience, they intuitively sought the materialization of their mental images about vivid affections and meanings, using rhetorical and stylistic figures, such as the antithesis, synecdoche and visual hyperbole.

5.2. Results related with emerging categories

Up to this point, in codifying the data related to the reasons why both teachers made each of the presented photographs, two grades of categories emerged on the common concerns that, as a basis, led this teacher to take these pictures:

5.2.1. -Concerns about some “difficulty in the development of the class”

In several of the sessions held in the first quarter of 2015, the teacher of the school 1 expressed con-

cern about the boredom shown, caused by many of the tasks that were done in the classroom. For example, before one of the photographs where she took the students with a medium shot, she said:

“Maestra 1 (M1.): Esta fotografía la hice por la cara de aburrimiento que tenían muchos de estos niños, y eso que les pongo a trabajar por parejas”

“Teacher 1 (T1.): This photograph I made for the boring faces that many of these children had, even if I made them work in pairs”

Member group 1 (M.G.1): What were they doing?

M1: Language exercises. I know that many times are routine and unattractive, but there is no choice but to work them. But that boredom is something that I often go around in my head. “(Fragment of the sitting of 01/28/2015)

This concern of the teacher was also evoked in the session of February 11 of that year, commenting on photograph number 4:



Photography 4



“T1: This photograph corresponds to the work they were all doing on the Day of Peace. They had to draw and write something about Peace, and then we had to put it on murals in the hallway.”

M.G.1: Why are they on the floor in the hallway, not in the classroom?

T1: Because being the day of Peace, I had to decorate the hall next to the colleague next door. Since I had to get up and down the stairs, I had to be out of class for a long time. I could not be in both places, and they were revolutionizing more and more, because they need the reference of an adult.

M.G.1: And how did you get them out into the hall?

T1: Since I could not be in the classroom all the time, it occurred to me that they were drawing in the hallway; I thought it would be better because I would have them controlled. Being there I could see them.

M.G.1: How do you value that experience?

T1: The truth is that I'm glad, they had a great time; It can be seen on their faces. It worked better than I thought. I think changing the workspace came in handy. “(Fragment of the session of 11/02/2015).

In the following session, we verified that the distribution of the tables of the classroom had changed. Before they were in three rows of two students and now the tables are making a U, as seen in photograph 5.

Photography 5



In this photo-elicitation session, the teacher expressed the reasons for this change in the organization of space:

T1: After the success of the drawing activity in the hall, I thought that changing the context of the tasks was good to motivate them to do well. And so, among the possibilities for change in the classroom, was to place the chairs and tables differently.

M.G.1: Why did you choose that U-shaped arrangement?

T1: Because it allows them to be able to see each other's faces when we talk about a topic. Also, of course, to be able to do individual activities when it is time.

M.G.1: For example, on Mathematics.

T1: Yes, of course. "(Fragment of the session of 02/25/2015).

5.2.2. -Motivations related to "personal problems of students"

There have been frequent photographs taken by both teachers motivated by the special behavior performed by some students. It was "special" because, unlike the previous case, that was a difficulty showed by a good part of the class, in this type of concern of the teacher it was only a boy or girl who manifested that behavior and, as it will be seen, this did not happen unnoticed for the group. In this section of data we will only describe three of these difficult situations. The first is related to the child we will call J. Regarding the photograph number 1 already shown and commented, the teacher explained:

"T1: This picture I made when J had one of his occasional *blocks*. He's a rich kid who shares everything and has good grades, but when you least expect it he has a rather odd way of drawing attention. For example, as seen in the photograph, he had started to hit the case against the table. I did not listen to him, to see if he would stop. But

he went further until it came down to screams. It was at that moment that I took the picture, to remember how several companions got up to attend to him and how others covered their ears to protect themselves from the shrieks."

M.G.1: And what did you do?

T1: I let about 10 seconds pass, trusting that the child would stop; but no, in addition to screaming he began to hit his head against the table. The scare I had made me quickly go to hold him and prevent self-injury.

M.G.1: How did you feel?

T1: You can imagine! A feeling of helplessness for not knowing what to do. It was a dilemma; On the one hand did not want to intervene to not reinforce that way of drawing attention. But, on the other, it came to such a situation that I had to do it. The dilemma was that, when to intervene?

M.G.1: Do you know why these episodes start?

T1: The truth is that I do not know. I have already spoken with the counselor. We think that he is a very sensitive child, and because of something we do not know if it is because someone has spoken to him loudly, or because he is ignored, then he becomes frightened, he blocks himself and starts that self-destructive way of drawing attention.

M.G.1: Have you told the family?

T1: Yes, the guidance counselor already spoke with the family following the first episodes at the beginning of the course. But the family says that he has never had such behavior in his home. Anyway, I agree with the counselor when she says that this anomaly is a behavior learned to attract attention and, because of the age he has, it is natural that it comes from his family environment, even if they deny it. (Fragment of the session of 11/02/2015).

The second case we expose corresponds to the child we call A. The teacher of the school 1 exposed it by showing us the photograph number 6 in a session.



Photograph 6

“M1: Today I also want to tell you a case that is worrying me, especially because of the relationship I am having with the parents. It’s A, and you can see in this picture (see number 6) what I’ve done and I want to tell you. He is a child who works well, but sometimes, when you scold him or you do not give him what he asks, he takes a rare attitude. Once he started to run between the tables, and another, he folded his arms and put his head on them as seen in the photo.”

M.G.1: What happened, how did you act in this case?

T1: He had not done his homework at home and left it without recess to do it at that time. At recess he did not do them, and put himself in the posture that the photograph (see number 6) shows. I told him several times to do them, but he continued in that attitude. As I stopped telling him to do them, he got up and went to one of the walls of the class, to draw more attention.

M.G.1: But that must be addressed, because the other children learn it.

T1: Yes, this week I talked to the parents and I was annoyed, especially for their contradiction that I didn’t take well.

M.G.1: What contradiction?

T1: In the month of December I was told not to be so hard on the child because I left him without recess when he did not do some work, knowing he could do it. But now, literally, the

father told me that in the education of his son, his wife plays the bad cop and he plays the good cop; and since I’m a woman I have to play bad cop. I thought the mother would not agree with this, but no, she told me that the child behaves like that because I do not give him fear, that I have to act in another way, as she does, putting order. I told him that fear and respect do not go together and that it would continue. She told me I should be harder. That’s why I do not understand, they used to tell me not to punish him and now, that I’m still acting the same, they tell me to be hard on him.

M.G.1: How do you feel?

T1: I took the annoyance home. I want to help them, but the parents do not understand what I do, and that each time they tell you something does not help me. “(Fragment of the session of 04/22/2015).

The third and last situation corresponds to the one lived and exposed by the teacher of the school 2:

“Teacher 2 (T2): The first photograph I sent you to WhatsApp is where K, A and N (students) are in a situation of reflection after a conflict of jealousy lived in the classroom after recess.

M.G.2: What do you mean by a conflict of jealousy?

T2: That K is going out with a partner, and “fools” also with A. Fact that annoys K, and is



reproached to A. N is a friend of class that supports A.

M.G.2: What triggered you to take that picture?

T2: Upon entering the classroom I saw that there was a strong discussion of voices and pushes from A and N to K.

M.G.2: How did you proceed?

M2: Immediately I interposed between them, and I took them to that area of the classroom, I told them to sit down to relax. I placed them in such a way that they would not look at each other, because I think that if they keep looking at each other, the discussion continues and progresses.

M.G.2: Is this how you always proceed in cases like this?

T2: Yes, because I think that in order to think and reflect on something, it is necessary to be emotionally calm, and this way of proceeding led the three students to relax. Only later, calmly, could we talk about what had happened.” (Fragment of the session of 04/20/2016).

Contemplating the answers of both teachers to the questions asked by the members of the discussion group we observe that they contain the beliefs, values and theories that they have about teaching since many of them begin with “I think ...”, or “I think ...”, etc.

6. Conclusions

On the relation between the mental images that collect the experiences lived by both teachers in determined moments of their teaching practice and the representation that they make of them by means of the photograph, to which the objective 1 referred, is possible to say that, whether Deliberately or intuitively, these two teachers have used different rhetorical figures of the image (metaphor and visual hyperbole, especially), to represent and communicate through a photograph what they had in their minds as a consequence of the meanings and emotions they were living in that classroom situation. For example,

taking the picture of a child sitting in a chair, away from the whole group, looking at the wall, evokes the meaning and feeling of loneliness. That is what the teacher of the school 1 lived and, among all the possible photographs, expressed it concretely with that image (photograph 1).

Taking into account the second objective, the change made in the practice of the teacher, considering the results obtained until the end of June 2016, it is pertinent to affirm that there is a change in the way they design and develop teaching situations. Thus, as explained in the results section, among other changes, the teachers modified the distribution of the tables of the students, as well as the approach of the tasks to be performed, seeking to be more relevant or close to their lives. Also, we can say that the common motivations that these teachers have shown to make those changes are of two types: to improve the school tasks in the classroom and to attend to the personal difficulties of its students. In this regard, regarding the reasons that led both teachers to take photos and based on the content and common concerns expressed by them, we can show that, mainly, are the personal and family situations and conflicts of the students, such as physical or emotional conflicts (situations of jealousy, marginalization, etc.).

By way of final reflections, we have to indicate that the basic function of photography in the processes of discussion or photo-elicitation was to slow down the processes of analysis of what was verbally manifested by the participants. Also, these pauses made it possible to describe and interpret the content in which they could contemplate and comment on their theories, beliefs and values.

We understand that these results help to improve the use of audiovisual languages in the professional development of teachers, as well as the discussion processes generated in the photo-elicitation sessions, because they are helping our two teachers, in our case, to know and promote more their relations with the rest of the members of the educational community.



Notes

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