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What images tell us and about us: Understanding how my students and I interact with images

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Orientadora:
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To Emilia and Julio (In Memoriam): You have always been and will always be my beginning.

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ABSTRACT

Images are easily available from various online sources. For this reason, they have been mainly used in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms as visual aids to enhance language learning rather than as objects in themselves with the potential for students to see their "own inner meanings" (KARASTATHI, 2016). In view of this, EFL teachers can and should reflect on the reasons why we like certain images and how meanings are constructed during our interactions with them. Barthes (1980) asserts that the Punctum is cTherefore, in this study, I seek to understand my own motivations behind my choices of photographs in the classroom and what details "prick" me. I also seek to understand what meanings a group of Brazilian adolescent EFL learners construct when given the opportunity to choose images available from online sources, as well as how the Punctum emerges in discourse through their own texts. In my attempt to understand my own practice and my students' interactions with images in the classroom, I draw on Exploratory Practice (EP), a "form of practitioner research in language education which aims to integrate research, learning and teaching." (HANKS, 2015:2). It is by integrating research into a collaborative class activity that I aim to gain a deeper understanding of how we choose images and what meanings we construct when interacting with them.

Key words: autoethnography, classroom pedagogy, EFL, Exploratory Practice, identity, photography, visual literacy

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RESUMO

Amplamente disponíveis em várias fontes on-line, imagens têm sido mais comumente utilizadas em sala de aula no ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira com a finalidade de enriquecer o aprendizado do idioma do que como um fim em si mesmo, levando-se em conta o seu potencial de possibilitar aos alunos ver seus "significados intrínsecos" (KARASTATHI, 2006). Por esta razão, professores de inglês como língua estrangeira podem e devem ser convidados a refletir sobre as razões pelas quais damos preferência a determinados tipos de imagens e como construímos significados durante as nossas interações com elas. Barthes afirma que o Punctum é um detalhe, "um objeto parcial" em uma imagem que atrai o nosso olhar e nos sensibiliza (1980:47). Portanto, neste estudo eu procuro entender as minhas próprias motivações por trás das minhas escolhas de determinadas imagens na sala de aula e quais detalhes em uma imagem me sensibilizam. Eu também procuro entender os significados construídos por um grupo de adolescentes alunos de inglês como língua estrangeira diante de imagens escolhidas por eles a partir de fontes on-line, assim como de que forma o Punctum emerge no discurso através dos textos produzidos por eles. Na minha tentativa de entender a minha própria prática e as interações dos meus alunos com imagens em sala de aula, eu recorro à Prática Exploratória (PE), "uma 'forma' de pesquisa por praticantes no ensino de línguas que objetiva integrar pesquisa, aprendizado e ensino" (HANKS, 2015:2). Através da integração de uma pesquisa a uma atividade colaborativa em sala de aula, eu procuro obter um entendimento mais profundo de como fazemos as nossas escolhas e quais significados construímos através das nossas interações com imagens.

Palavras-chave: autoetnografia, ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira, identidade, fotografia, letramento visual, pedagogia de sala de aula, Prática exploratória.

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“I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph.
It exists only for me.”

Roland Barthes

1.
Introduction

> If I could tell the story in words, I wouldn't need to lug a camera.
>
> *Lewis Hine*

What can images tell us, and ultimately, what can images tell about us? I had never asked myself this question before despite the growing use of images in EFL (English as a foreign language) materials and in many other situations in my daily life. I have been using images with my EFL students for over two decades. Over a span of over twenty-five years, images have gone from EFL course book illustrations and magazine cutouts used as flashcards to online image resources readily available on the interactive whiteboard screen in my classroom. However, despite their growing presence in my teaching context, until recently I had never considered delving into the reasons why I am drawn to certain images, more specifically photographs that depict aspects of the American culture.

Conversely, images have always attracted me both in my personal life and in my teaching practice, but until recently, the use of images in my classroom was rather limited: I used images as resources for conversation starters and as illustrations of grammar points and lexical items. Paradoxically, I had always perceived them as powerful tools that help me make sense of the world and of my lessons as well. As time went by, I began to wonder why I am attracted to American images and where my connection with them stems from. I also began to wonder what images my students would choose and whether they would be somehow related to the ones I choose. In short, I began to look at images as powerful pedagogical tools.

Therefore, this present study is a narrative of my endeavor to understand why some images appeal to me and to understand how a group of adolescent EFL learners interacts with images when they are given a

chance to become image curators, and what meanings are constructed during those interactions in an EFL class.

Before all else, this introduction comprises a brief account of the rationale behind my choice of photographs over other types of images, an overview of autoethnography as the theoretical framework used in my writing, as well as the theoretical frameworks that lay the foundation for my understanding of images. Second, it introduces the aims and objectives of this research as well as its relevance for my practice, my community of practice and other EFL-related areas. Finally, it describes the organization of this paper.

1.1. What images?

The images referred to in this research are photographs. Two main reasons have led me to choose photographs to be analyzed: (1) I tend to choose photographs over drawings or paintings for my classes because photographs give me a "sense of immediacy and reality" (WYSOCKI, 2004:9) and therefore a sense of connection with the image in front of me; (2) thanks to the recent developments in information technology and the cellphone industry, it is now easier to produce, share and consume photographs: "Like every mass art form, photography is not practiced by most people as an art. A social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power" (SONTAG, 1977:5). Free image hosting websites and many other online platforms make it easier to retrieve photographs from the cyberspace into my classroom and consequently render language learning more real and concrete for my students, and ultimately, for me, as I am the one who curates the photographs. Further considerations about photography and the implications of using photographs in my research will be given in Chapters 1 and 2.

1.2.
I as an author: An autoethnographic approach to narrating my research

First and foremost, in writing this study and revisiting places of memories depicted in old family photographs which are so dear to me, a distinction must be made between feelings, emotions, and affect, constructs which play a central role in my attempt to understand myself and my students: Emotions are changes in one's "body state in response to a positive or negative situation" while feelings are "the perception of these changes". "Affect" is a broader term that encompasses "aspects of emotions, mood, feelings and attitude which condition behavior" (ARNOLD; BROWN, 1999:1).

As it is often the case of autobiographies and memoirs, this monograph is a narrative of how a certain research project came to be. Thus, it was my experiences and the emotions and feelings attached to them that paved the way to my research. Therefore, as much as I would have expected myself to write this monograph in an objective way, I could not play down my own narrative --- and neither could I play down my students' agency in their narratives. When one avoids the first person, "the agency of the writer is occluded: She is absorbed into her method, and she serves, rhetorically, as nothing more than the channel for the truth. Her place could be occupied by anyone willing to be disciplined by the proper method" (GRIFFITHS, 2009:150).

Inevitably, research is never a neutral territory and the researcher cannot but see things from his or her position, no matter how much he or she may attempt to stand back and remove his or her feelings and emotions. In this regard, one of my chosen research paradigms, autoethnography, addresses subjectivity as it brings into play the researcher's personal experience and agency. (PELIAS, 2000, 2007 as cited in ELLIS; ADAMS; BOCHNER, 2011).

It was a journey that only I could take, for one can only speak for oneself and of oneself. Within this context, "autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience to understand cultural experience" (ELLIS;

ADAMS; BROCHNER, 2011). It combines elements of autobiography and ethnography.

For this reason, it contains elements of autobiographies in that it is the written narrative of selected past events which may be referred to as *epiphanies*, that is, transformative experiences that force the researcher to analyze his or her trajectory using theoretical and methodological tools.

Hence, the researcher's personal narrative is the driving force behind his or her research, as it may help unlock the researcher's puzzle. In this context, autoethnography is both a process and a product: Writing is a process of discovery and it allows one to incorporate new insights as they arise, thus enriching the research by rearticulating the topics and by reframing the claims.

Autoethnography also contains elements of ethnography in that the researcher studies a culture, its values, practices, and beliefs by becoming a "participant observer" (ELLIS; ADAMS; BOCHNER, p. 3, 2011) to help insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) to gain a better understanding of the culture.

In this respect, autoethnographers facilitate the understanding of a culture by making his or her personal experience meaningful to others. Ethnographic narratives may focus on the researcher's self and may be told in the first person to emphasize the researcher's *eyewitness account* and to evoke feelings and emotions that make the research more engaging to wider audiences (ELLIS; ADAMS; BOCHNER, 2011).

1.3.
Aims and objectives

According to McAdams, "identity is an internalized and evolving life story (…) Stories live to be told to others. Life stories, therefore, are continuously made and remade in social relationships and in the overall social context provided by culture" (2001:117-8). McAdams explains that as individuals move into and through adolescence, they begin to articulate, expand and refine the characters to construct their life stories. Thus, they integrate in a

single narrative many different “imagoes,” that is, “different personifications of ‘me,” (2001:106) or many different selves.

Therefore, paradoxically, one single individual may articulate the self-as-English-language-learner and the-self-as-young-girl-who-wanted-to-study-French as he or she begins to change roles in “families, the workplace, and society” (2001:107). The “one-in-many-selves paradox,” (KNOWLES; SIBICKY, 1990:676 as cited in McADAMS, 2001:106) helps individuals bring into their stories concepts such as the past, the present and the future through idealized selves, that is, “who I would like to be.”

The classroom, thus, can be regarded as a space for the realization and idealization of students’ selves. For this reason, time is not linear, and through their interactions with their peers and the materials, the students are articulating “who they have been,” “who they are,” and “who they would like to be.” Therefore, teachers should be aware that in the here-and-now of apparently simple classroom tasks, individuals are articulating and re-articulating their life stories.

In short, a lesson is an interaction between teacher, learners and materials (ALLWRIGHT, 1981). As a teacher, I am part of my community of practice in which our life stories emerge through our interactions, which are often mediated by the pedagogical tools that we use in the classroom. This is to say that the classroom is a rich environment where meanings and identities in the form of life stories are shared, created, and re-created during our encounters.

Bearing this in mind, the aim of this research is twofold: First, I aim to gain an understanding of my self as an image curator and why I have developed a preference for American images, mainly photographs, which are frequently used as pedagogical tools, and what details attract me, or “prick” me. Second, I aim to understand my students’ selves as image curators, what draws their attention in an image, and what meanings they create though images. To answer my puzzle questions, some theoretical frameworks are especially relevant, as they lay the foundation for the way in which my research is conducted. They also support the methodology and help me understand and discuss the findings.

1.4.
Theoretical frameworks: Connecting my understanding with other understandings

To understand how I engage with the American culture, I draw on constructs of identity and culture. Given the relevance of my personal connection with the American culture, Bhabha's theory about culture and identity (1996) plays an important role in my narrative. It is this relationship that I have been seeking to understand since I first asked myself my puzzle questions.

To help me understand what photography entails, I draw on theories about photography which focus on the intricate relationships we have built with photography over its two centuries of existence and the dynamic dialogic relationship viewers establish with the object being photographed (SONTAG, 1977). It is especially noteworthy that in 1977, Sontag was already witnessing the profound changes photography was operating on society and the moral and aesthetic implications of photography in the way individuals began to look at worldly events and their own lives.

What exactly draws my attention in the photographs I choose and what makes my students choose one image among many others? Barthes' understanding of the effects photographs have on viewers provides me with invaluable insight and guides me through the analysis of the data in this research. This is to say that Barthes' theoretical framework is central to my research and to my understanding of why some details of photographs *prick* us while others do not.

To understand how one experiences visual communication (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006), among which are photographs, I draw on studies about visual literacy to approach photographs as objects in themselves with the potential for students to see their "own inner meanings" (KARASTATHI, 2016).

One last, but nonetheless important theoretical framework is the Appraisal system proposed by Martin and White[1] (2005) from the perspective of the systemic-functional grammar (HALLIDAY, 2004), which allows for an analysis of evaluative language and the understanding of how evaluative language reflects my students' stances towards the photographs they selected. It should be noted, however, that the Appraisal system herein is used for a philosophical perspective rather than for an exhaustive evaluation of my students' texts and it applies to the text surface.

1.5.
Relevance of my research for myself and others

This research is self-motivated and was primarily driven by my strong desire to understand what happens in my life and in my classroom, so hopefully my findings will truly help me understand how my affective experiences constitute who I am and how my life events, experiences, and interactions shaped my views of the world through images both as a learner and as a teacher.

Therefore, I hope that my narrative of my self as a child will help my community of practice, as well as other communities of practice, see learners in a different light by understanding how teachers may impact their learners' perceptions of a given activity and that "novices (learners) become acquainted with

activities not only from their own and others' attempts to define what transpires in an activity, but also from how those participating in the activity respond to them (OCHS, 2002:107).

For the teacher in me, this research acts as a lasting reminder that my students' agency and choices may be shaped by and through the feelings and emotions embedded in their experiences, and that images can potentially help these emotions emerge in the classroom.

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[1]For further reading on the Appraisal System, refer to MARTIN, James R., WHITE, Peter R.R. *The language of evaluation: appraisal in English*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005.

As Emilia Ferrero (1985) puts it, behind the hand that holds the pencil, the eyes that see, the ears that hear, there is a child who thinks[2], but I hope that this research acts as a reminder that, above all, there is a child who feels.

Finally, I hope that my own experience with images and the interactions that my group of learners had with the images they chose themselves will bring insight on what takes place in our minds and how our experiences, emotions and feelings awaken meanings in us.

Parallel to this, I hope that my students' perceptions will help teachers, learners, and educators in various contexts to become aware of the dynamic, dialogic relationship one establishes with the object being photographed (SONTAG, 1977) and how important it is to address and understand what photographs do to us and what we do to them.

1.6. Structure

This study will be divided into 7 more chapters. Chapter 2 narrates how images entered my life and their impact on my sense of self and identity. It is important to note that my narrative in Chapter 2 is intertwined with selected photographs from my family album. Each photograph is accompanied by a commentary which offers a glimpse of my personal view on Barthes' theory of the Punctum (1980). Chapter 3 outlines the literature review on photography and examines the theoretical approaches that set the ground for a definition of images and a clear distinction between the different types of images: photographs, drawings and paintings. It concludes with the ways in which viewers see photographs and how their understandings of images can be analyzed through the Appraisal system proposed by Martin and White (2005). It also discusses Barthes' theory of the Punctum (1980) and its implications for the reading of photographs. Finally, it presents an analysis of a photograph in the light of the Barthes' theory of the Punctum. The theoretical background is followed by a critical

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[2] FERREIRO, Emilia.; TEBEROSKI, Ana. *A psicogênese da língua escrita*. Trad. Diana Myrian Lichtentein et al. Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas, 1986, p. 14.

overview of the two online image hosting platforms used in this research, Google Images© and ELTpics. This section discusses the implications of the use of these platforms with adolescent students in the classroom. Chapter 4 focuses on Exploratory Practice (EP) and sets the context in which the research took place. It starts by describing and discussing the tenets of qualitative research and the seven principles of Exploratory Practice intertwined with my reflections on my practice and my research. It also introduces my research puzzles and describes the rationale for the first PEPA used for this research. It furthers the discussion on puzzles by introducing the notion of puzzlement zone (NÓBREGA KUSHNIR; MACHADO, 2003), in which a new puzzle emerged during my research and another PEPA was designed and implemented with the same group of students. Chapter 5 describes my teaching context, that is, my school, my students and their level of English as well as the procedures for the two PEPAs. Chapter 6 describes how the data were generated, selected, and categorized and it closes with the two images selected for this study. Chapter 7 provides the analysis of the texts produced by two students for the two selected photographs grounded on the theory of the Punctum, proposed by Barthes (1980), and the Appraisal system, proposed by Martin and White (2005). It concludes with my reflections on Exploratory Practice (EP) and its implications and relevance for my research and the analysis of my findings. Finally, Chapter 8 attempts to provide a reflection on my experience as a practitioner researcher and the understandings that I gained during this process.

2.
Me: Images in my Life

We keep this love in a photograph
We made these memories
for ourselves
Where our eyes are never closing
Hearts are never broken
And time's forever frozen still

Ed Sheeran (Photograph)

Why images? When I started teaching English back in the mid-eighties, the only materials available to English teachers were course books, tapes, and imported magazines and newspapers. Images had always appealed to me in such a way that made learning easier for me. Drawings and charts had helped me make sense of math and physics. I recall sketching ideas in my chemistry class and sketching biology concepts in my notebook. I was fond of drawing and I still am. Photographs, maps, charts, and illustrations make me see things more clearly, so reading images, as well as producing them, is a way for me to turn abstractions into concrete evidence of worldly things. Since the world presents itself to me through visuals, I have developed a close relationship with the visual language. Colors, textures, and composition give me genuine pleasure, which is a powerful element that motivates me to use them in my daily life as well as in my classroom.

Because images are a crucial part of my toolkit to understand the world, I assume they are useful for my students as well. I teach through images. Before the internet, I bought American magazines and newspapers to use as sources of both text and images. I would cut out the magazine pictures and transform them into flashcards and illustrations for worksheets. Now that they are easily available, I curate images for my classes in the same way I did over twenty-five years ago. Curating images allows me to experience a flow and this task has my undivided attention. “Because flow feels so good, it is intrinsically rewarding. It is a state in which people become utterly absorbed in what they are doing, paying undivided attention

to the task, their awareness merged with their actions" (COLEMAN, 1999:91 cited in ARNOLD, J. & BROWN, D., 1999:15).

Keeping that in mind, to speak of the role of images in my classroom is to speak of how I developed a strong feeling of affection for the American culture. In short, to talk about why I choose certain images over others for my classes is to reminisce about how the English language entered my life and how I first perceived it as being a part of me, that is, my identity.

"Identity itself takes the form of a story, complete with setting, scenes, character, plot, and theme" (McADAMS, 1985, 1993, 1996 as cited in McADAMS, 2001:101). Thus, I need to explore my life story and the key events and people whose influence on me did much to shape my identity as an English language learner and teacher. As I reminisce about my relationship with my paternal grandmother and my late father, I gain a deep understanding of how I was socialized into the American culture (OCHS, 2002) and its impact on the role of images in my classroom.

My grandmother was my first English teacher and it was through the English words that she taught me and the photographs that she showed me that I first encountered my English-speaking self. It was my grandmother who taught me the first English words when I was about seven years old and it was my grandmother's motivation that instilled in me a strong fascination for the English language and culture.

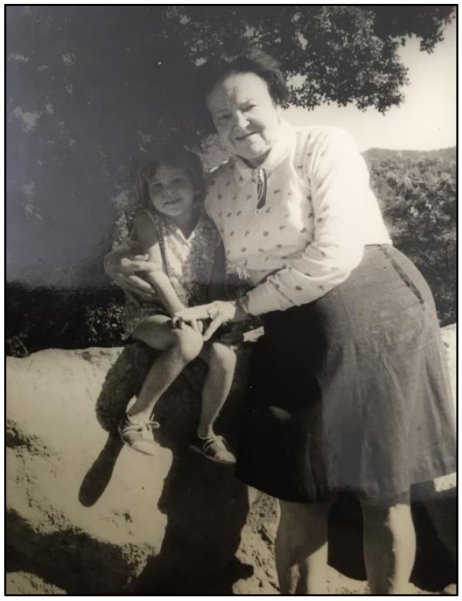
Her younger son, my father's only brother, had emigrated to the United States, where he was building a life with his American wife and their three children. Having just returned from a one-year stay with my uncle's family in the USA, my grandmother told me first-hand stories about my cousins. It was through my grandmother's stories that I began to understand that a part of my family was living in another part of the world and that it was somehow incomplete. What intrigued me back then was the fact that one of my cousins and I were the same age and still I did not know her. Soon my grandmother's motivation became my own when I discovered that writing in English could help me connect with my Michelle, my American cousin, who lived about seven thousand kilometers away from me.

My grandmother Emilia with her two sons: Arnaldo (left) and Julio, my father (right). Rio de Janeiro, 1937.

Her smile: It is her smile that arrests my gaze. She is so put together and so are the boys. There is an element of magic in old family photos: While in recent photos, we know when and where they were taken; we know what the weather was like; we remember what people were doing and they may still be wearing the same clothes that they were wearing when they were posing. Not old photographs, though, for they are lost in time. They are mythical in that they are immemorial. "The image is re-presentation, which is to say ultimately resurrection, and as we know the intelligible is reputed antipathetic to lived experience" (BARTHES, 1977:32)

In general, Brazilian children's first contact with English takes place in an EFL classroom, where communication occurs in a rather artificial way; children are expected to interact with their peers in through pair and group work in the context of the EFL classroom, which may not make much sense for some of them. As much as teachers strive to make class content relevant for learners, hardly ever do young learners in Brazil have the chance to interact and connect with someone outside their classroom in English. The fact that I had an American cousin made me feel somehow special and different from other children: I had a real motivation to communicate in English.

In that sense, English felt very real to me because my grandmother did not teach me English in a classroom. Rather, she taught me at an old wooden writing desk in the living room in her two-story house in her very own grandmotherly way. She never told me stories from an English course book character, neither did she show me pictures from an illustrated children's English dictionary. On the contrary, the things that she talked about and the pictures that she showed me were all very real even though my cousin was still just a vague image of a girl who dwelled in my grandmother's stories and on the photographs accompanied by words I could hardly understand. Despite that, I longed to connect with her so much that I embraced a world outside my own little universe, which until then had been confined to my own immediate experience.



My grandmother Emilia and me.
Friburgo, circa 1972.

"I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think" (BARTHES, 1980:21). Barthes asserts that the 'Studium" is of the order of 'liking,' not of 'loving.' It is never 'my delight' or 'my pain.' It is the Punctum that makes me love it or hate it. What I love about this photo is my grandmother's oddly large hands around me as if protecting me. "I love you," they say.

From that point on, I began to experience an extraordinary sense of fulfillment as I started to write my first words in English with the help of my grandmother. The more I learned, the closer I got to answering the questions I had been pressed on:

Who is she?
Will she like me?
What does she like?

I did not want to write letters only because I had been told to; I wanted to write my way to meaning. What had started as my grandmother's wish was beginning to overtake me; something that I probably could not explain at that time, but it made perfect sense that I had to learn English because learning English would help me answer questions about my cousin. Yet, I was exploring relatively new terrain, but instead of feelings of dread or anxiety, I can only recall a collection of flashing moments filled with a sense of discovery and enjoyment. It may have been no more than three or four letters that I received from my cousin, but it was an experience that marked me deeply; it was an experience which would by far turn out to be the biggest influence on my formative years.

My Uncle Arnaldo and Aunt Grace with Michelle, circa 1971

I am immediately drawn to my Uncle's beaming smile and to my Aunt's gentle gaze fixed on them. They all look so much like us, and yet, it is hard to imagine that they are speaking a different language. "Every photograph is a certificate of presence" (BARTHES, 1980:87). This one may not have been among the photos my grandmother showed me; however, the ones she brought me attested to the existence of my cousin. They were a lingering reminder of her existence. To me, at the time, these photos were not a testimony of "what-had-been," (1980:87), but a statement of "there-she-is," the truth (1980:115), hence my longing to meet my cousin.

Yet, my grandmother's lessons and photographs do not tell the whole story. I would not be writing these words if it had not been for my father. As I reminisce about my relationship with him, I gain a deeper understanding of how I was socialized into the American culture and how this experience eventually impacted my life (OCHS, 2002). As the granddaughter of a woman whose younger son had left her to build a life with his American wife and children in the United States, I was being socialized into my cousin's culture. Likewise, as the daughter of a man whose younger brother was thriving in his medical practice in the United States, I was unsuspectingly being socialized into the "American dream[3]." In my father's words, the United States had become a haven for me to pursue a solid career and economic growth. Without a doubt, those moments spent with my grandmother marked the beginning of a bond between the American culture and my young self which was strengthened as I developed a deep connection with my father, who became my most influential mentor and my greatest inspiration.

My grandmother and my three cousins in the USA.

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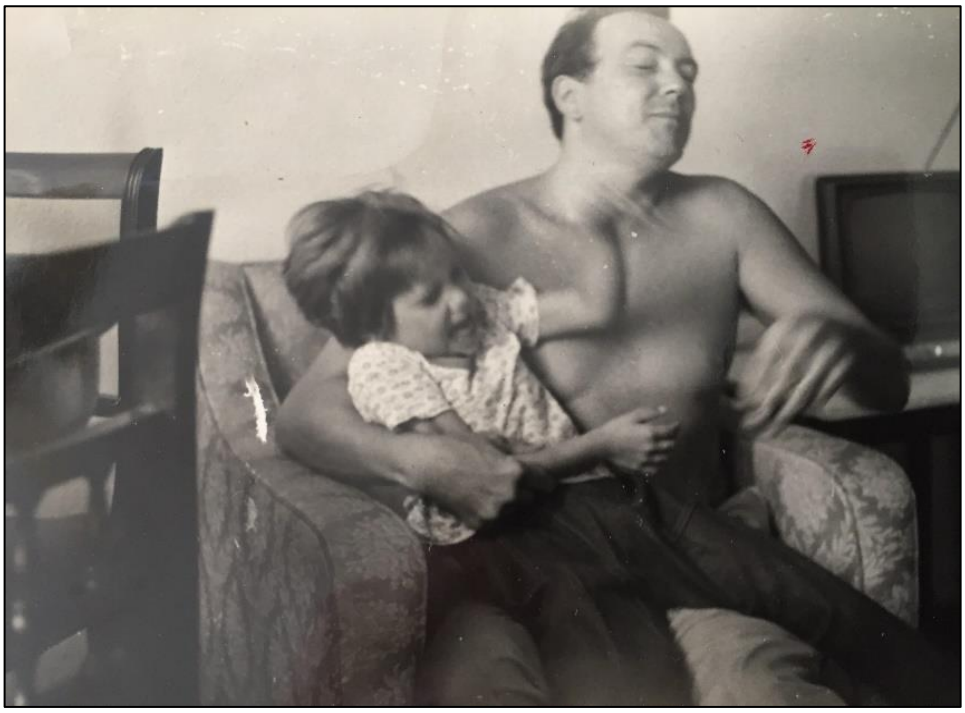
3 A happy way of living that is thought of by many Americans as something that can be achieved by anyone in the U.S. especially by working hard and becoming successful. With good jobs, a nice house, two children, and plenty of money, they believed they were living *the American dream*. *Merriam-Webster Online*, "American Dream," https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/the%20American%20dream



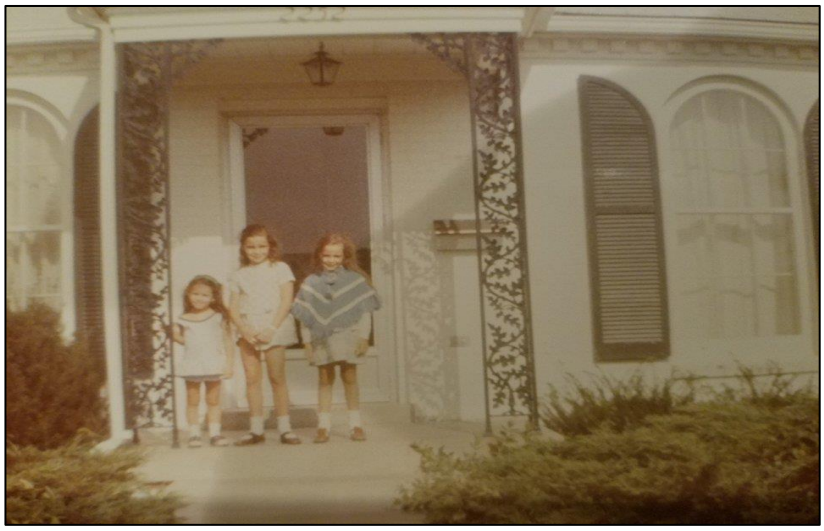
Eu e papai (Me and dad), Porto Alegre, circa 1972

I wrote a caption on the back of this photograph. There it is in my own handwriting: “eu e papai.”. It is Reference which is the founding order of Photography. It is neither art nor communication. No painting, however real, can attest that something has been there (Barthes, 1980). It is this overwhelming truth of photographs that haunts me. This moment will never be replaced because it “exists in this place which extends beyond infinity and the subject” (1980:77). In the split second captured in this photo, my father, who is now dead, never dies. A flash of a moment whose existence keeps coming back in my gaze. The Punctum is precisely what I cannot see: my blurred hand; my father’s blurred hand has turned his fingers into “playdough” fingers, an analogy that only a child’s eyes can think of: I am playfully batting at his neck and his face is turned. He is smiling and is almost about to laugh. I have always been especially fond of this photograph and now I know why.

How do we become especially fond of something? A seven-year-old child may have all the necessary conditions to learn to read and write in English, but truth is, will she grow fond of reading and writing in English as time goes by? Will she inevitably become curious about her mysterious cousin, about whom she knows very little? Or, will she grow tired of writing her letters and stop asking her grandmother questions? The question I should ask myself is how I went from writing a couple of sentences to my cousin to embracing the American culture as my own.

Gradually I started beginning to claim a place in a foreign language in an unknown foreign place located far away from everything that I knew. I started wishing to be someone else. It was this tension between *being* and *wishing to be* that I occupied. My marginal self wished to become the *Other,* so I created stories to connect with a world that only existed in a place called Otherness, and it was through these narratives that I could impersonate my future self.

The narratives that I created lingered in the back of my mind and I obligingly relished the idea of becoming someone else, the *Other*. It was the "timeless eternal" America, an America whose story is told in the present simple, a site with "a static system of synchronic essentialism, the site of dreams, images, myths, obsessions and requirements" (BHABHA, 1994:71). It was my pursuit of this idealized America --- seen through the eyes of my father, that created in me this distinct feeling of identity with the American culture.



My American cousins in front of their home. From left to right: Michelle, Linda, and Susan, who is wearing the poncho that my grandmother had knitted for them, circa 1972.

My cousin Michelle in front of her house in Springfield, Illinois, circa 1972

"In order to perceive the Punctum, no analysis would be of any use to me (but perhaps memory sometimes would…" (BARTHES, 1980:42)

Me and the house. 1984

"My father wanted me to have an education and to get a better life. I just wanted to be in this house. "…we say "to develop a photograph;" but what the chemical action develops is undevelopable, an essence (of a wound), what cannot be transformed but only repeated under the instances of insistence of the insistent gaze" (BARTHES, 1980:49). Surprisingly, the Punctum is not me or the house in the background. Rather, it is my presence, my being there; it is the resurrection of my self. It is this photograph that all the photographs that I bring into my classroom "re-present" (1977).

As North-American literature Professor John J. Allen used to tell his students, "you *don't* know what you think until you write it down." Reminiscing and writing about my past enabled me to understand that my relationship with my father and my grandmother was a crucial ingredient in the development not only of my own self, but also of my desired self. It also helped acknowledge my selves as the product, so to speak, of my father's idealized construct of the American way of life. Before committing myself to writing this section, all I had were bits of memories, some of which were dim and vague, while others were vivid and lingering: I clearly remember my grandmother guiding my hand as I am writing my first words in English, my

father sitting in an easy chair right behind us in the den, the floor tile cracking, the warm summer morning contrasting with a photograph of a young girl whose existence had only been made possible by a photograph. My memories of those lazy Sunday mornings spent at my grandmother's house have been reduced to these images, but they are filled with unequivocally deep emotions.

Eventually, living and studying in the U.S. became a life goal, a joint enterprise I undertook with my father. It became a promise I made to my father so that I could fulfill his unfulfilled dream. However, an enterprise that had begun so full of promise ended in disappointment and frustration. Contrary to my own expectations, adjusting to another culture proved to be difficult and I began to experience nostalgic moments more and more often, and contrary to my father's expectations, the *American dream* was short lived and did not last longer than a year.

However, on the upside, living and studying in the U.S. only strengthened a deeply held belief that the Other was indeed better. Coming to that realization was key for the construction of my identity. If my experience had failed to meet my expectations, I would have probably re-signified the "American Dream." Today my narrative would be grounded on different beliefs; I would have selected different snippets for the reconstruction of my story.

As a young adult, I was still finding out who I really was, but I certainly knew I was no longer what I had been. Therefore, to describe the role of images in my classroom is to describe the many past and present selves that have been a part of me and are still a part of me. To describe my self is to think about the identities and positions that I am socially and discursively ascribed and the ones which I need to struggle for because identity is never a finished enterprise. It is a place of conflict and struggle for power with no simplistic "binary oppositions" (BHABHA, 1994), and from my perspective, it was my self-as-loving-daughter and my-self-as-loving-granddaughter that paved the way to my self-as-admirer-of-the-American-culture.

In truth, my affection for my grandmother --- and ultimately, my father, is the key element that defines who I am today. However, it is mainly my

affection for my father that is behind my choices of images in my classroom. Only now, as I write these lines, do I realize how profoundly it has always impacted both me and my teaching practice.

Having said that, the images I bring into my life, and consequently, into my classroom, speak of my own narrative, and in the same way as it happens with traditions, the photographs I choose narrate a story which must be repeated all the time it is forgotten all the time. (BHABHA, 1994). Likewise, the images I share with my students are a place of remembrance; they tell me a story I have heard and told myself many times. They do not say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*.

Every photograph is a certificate of presence" (BARTHES, 1981:85). It is my presence within the boundaries of what I have been that I seek when I look at the American photographs. Essentially, I choose images that bring an element of timelessness in which I can endlessly inhabit: A place in which I can hope to fulfill the promise I once made to my loving father.

3.
Theoretical background: What is in an image?

How does meaning get into the image? Where does it end? And if it ends, what is there beyond!

Roland Barthes (1977:32)

Chapter 2 opened a window into my past as a learner through the emotions and feelings that emerged during my interactions with photographs. In what follows is a review of the literature on photography to explain how we construct meanings during our interactions with photographs and how affect and cognition impact the way we read photographs. I conclude with Barthes' theory of the Punctum (1980), which offers insights into what makes us love a photograph and how the mere presence of a detail changes our reading (BARTHES, 1980:42).

What is in an image? The noun image originates from Old French *image*, which is derived from the Latin nominative case word *imago*, meaning "copy, imitation, likeness, and "phantom, ghost, apparition" ("Image," defl, Online Etymology Dictionary). The word *image* is also linked to the past participle "imitari" of the Latin word *imitatus,* which means "to copy, portray" ("Imitate," defl, Online Etymology Dictionary), (BARTHES, 1977:32). Therefore, in this context, Images comprise photographs, drawings, paintings, charts, among other visual messages (BARTHES, 1977).

However, before setting aside this question, one further distinction should be made between photographs, drawings and paintings: Images in general communicate two messages: a denoted message and a connotative meaning. The former is the "analogon" itself, or in other words, what it represents, or its analogical content, which may comprise a scene, an object, or a landscape. Conversely, the latter can be broken down into a signifier and a signified: The signifier is communicated by the colors and arrangement of the objects, or in other words, the artist's intervention, or style. The signified is "the way in which the society, to a certain extent, communicates what it thinks of it," that is, the signified addresses a specific culture and its ideologies (BARTHES, 1977:17). For this reason, images

may acquire different connoted meanings in different cultures. Therefore, some forms of art, for example, may be perceived as impenetrable by viewers who do not share certain cultural or ideological positions. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) add that the more images become stylized, the more abstract and coded they become.

James Rosenquist. Marilyn Monroe, I. 1962
MoMA's online collection
www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/james-rosenquist-marilyn-monroe-i-1962

To make sense of Rosenquist's highly stylized, fragmented and inverted portrait of American icon and sex symbol Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962), one needs to be familiar with the critique of celebrity culture.

Differently from images in general, the photograph, in principle, leaves no room for connoted meaning. Thus, photographs are not coded in that all its elements are there to be seen, whereas in drawings and paintings, the artist's choices of what should be seen are conveyed through his or her choice of color and objects (BARTHES, 1977). Conversely, one's feeling of "analogical plenitude" is so great when in front of a photograph that it becomes impossible to describe it and, in my own view, despite its "analogical plenitude," a photograph may give away different meanings. Even Barthes admits that photographs may be manipulated or embellished to convey connotative meanings in that the composition of a photograph

results from the photographer's choice of lighting, framing, and his or her knowledge of technology.

However, regardless of the photographer's interventions, every photograph brings a sense of immediacy and irrefutable evidence that something happened (WYSOCKI, 2004; SONTAG, 1977). On the other hand, drawings and paintings "present objects more abstractly than in photographs, and so to present only in what an object is relevant" (WYSOCKI, 2004:10) with the purpose of fitting the author's assumptions.

Still, according to Wysocki (2004), in the same way as paintings and drawings, photographs cannot be considered "caught moments of reality" because they too are the result of the photographer's choices and interpretation of the world, or fragments of reality in the same way as paintings and drawings are, as Sontag (1981) puts it.

Sontag adds that, precisely because of that, photographs are political and ideological objects. It is within the photographer's frame and angle that we look at the world therein represented, and because they are fragments, the context in which they are inserted is relevant. The emotional weight of a photograph depends on the context in the same way the same photograph displayed on the front page of a newspaper may be read in a different way if displayed in an art gallery or in a school hallway.

That said, hardly ever do we "encounter a literal image in a pure state" (BARTHES, 1977:42). Texts often accompany photographs which are captured from mass media, such as the press, advertisements, and websites. Captions, for example, help the viewer not only to "focus" his or her "gaze" but also his or her "understanding," thus intervening in his or her interpretation of the photograph (BARTHES, 1977). However, even if a photo speaks through its captions, even if words speak louder than a picture (photograph), "no caption can permanently restrict or secure a picture's meaning" (SONTAG, 1977:84). Even if a caption is merely an interpretation; by no means can it shun an image's plurality of meanings, including its moral values and therefore its coded message.

3.1.
Photographs and visual literacy: How do we read images?

Sontag claims that photography has changed our "ethics of seeing" (1977:1) and that we have established "a consumer's relation to events, both to events which are part of our experience and to those which are not. Consequently, photography has changed the way we interact with the world, as "more and more events enter our experience" (1977:121). It can be argued that photographs furnish "knowledge dissociated from and independent of experience" (SONTAG, 1977:121), but how do we appropriate this type of knowledge, and how do emotions enter photographs?

For Barthes (1980), to look at a photograph is to look through the eyes that looked at someone or something. It is through the photographer's eyes that the "pathos," that is, an array of feelings and emotions, is embodied and displayed. Viewers do not want to explore photographs at their face value. Rather, they expect photographs to shock them, fascinate them or even terrify them. "Most subjects photographed, just by virtue of being photographed, are touched with "pathos" (SONTAG, 1977:11) and regardless of the photographer's intention, what feelings and emotions will arise exist within the viewer.

Whatever feelings one expects photographs to furnish, Barthes distinguishes different domains of photographs, one being the public domain and the other, the private domain, and their different effects on the viewer: "I experience the Photograph and the world in which it participates according to two regions: on one side the Images, on the other my photographs; on one side, unconcern, shifting, noise, the inessential (..), on the other the burning, the wounded (1980:98). This is not to say that private photos cannot move into the public domain. "Each photograph is read as the private appearance of its referent: the age of Photography corresponds precisely to the explosion of the private into the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publicly" (1980:98).

However, what one sees in a in a photograph depends on what one expects to see and to learn from it. Young children, for example, cannot attend to factual information in advertising and may only perceive the color, texture, and other peripheral clues, and consequently read images through their emotions. (BARRY, 1998 as cited in AVGERINOU, 2011:8).

In view of this, Avgerinou (2011) argues that reading images not only belongs in the affective domain, as described by Barthes (1977, 1980) and Sontag (1977), but also in the cognitive function domain and it involves "critical viewing and thinking, imaging, visualizing, inferring as well as (AVGERINOU, 2001b as cited in AVGERINOU, 2011:8). Non-verbal skills precede verbal communication, that is, the use of spoken and written language. Therefore, visual communication skills are not "secondary, derivative, impure or peripheral" (MORIARTY, 1994 as cited in AVGERINOU, 2011:8). However, "it should be noted that the cognitive side of learning is not in opposition to the affective side" (ARNOLD; BROWN, 1999:1).

Such set of skills is referred to as Visual Literacy (VL), which was first used by John Debes in 1969 (KARASTATHI, 2016). Thus, one must learn to read visuals, including photographs, which challenges Barthes' view of photographs as not being coded (1977). Although there may be universal symbols, pictures and visuals are nonetheless "cultural products shared by individuals" (MORIARTY; ROHE, 1992 as cited in AVGERINOU, 2011:12). Modern technology has made photographs accessible to individuals from different contexts and backgrounds and are therefore understood in different ways, since the context in which they are circulated and manipulated may impact their reception. (SEARCH, 2006 as cited in AVGERINOU, 2011: 12).

Such considerations are especially relevant for my research for the following reasons: (1) In the previous chapter I revisited "my photographs," the ones I would rather be alone to look at because they are "the burning, the wounded;" (2) in this research, my students read private images which were made public and therefore were consumed publicly. In this context, they may have interacted with the images in a different way; (3) meanings are constructed not only through one's emotions, but also through one's

cognitive skills; (4) Barthes (1977) argues that photographs have continuous meanings, that is, it is not necessary to establish a "relay," or in other words, "a code between the object and its image" (BARTHES, 1977:17). However, photographs may be coded depending on the context in which they are consumed, as the context in which they are circulated and consumed might add different meanings to them (AVGERINOU, 2011).

Having presented different assumptions about how images are read, it is now necessary to introduce Barthes' construct of the Punctum (1980), the theoretical framework used for reaching an understanding of what elements in a photograph draw my students' attention.

3.2.
The Punctum

This section discusses Barthes' theory of the Punctum (1980) and how certain details, however small they may be, permeate the reading of a photograph. It should be noted however that Barthes decided to start his inquiry into photographs from the perspective of emotions; he intended to take himself as "a mediator for all Photography" (1980:8). "What does my body know of photographic "knowledge?" (1980:9). To Barthes, emotions and feelings, or in other words, affect, are in the foreground of his theory, which will be soon demonstrated in the analysis of a photograph of my father.

In Barthes' own words, the Punctum is "a detail which attracts me" and changes the way I read a photograph regardless of the photographer's intention. (BARTHES, 1981:42). It is just a detail, and yet, it 'pricks me', "arrests my gaze," expands and fills the whole picture. "I am a primitive, a child ---- or a maniac, I dismiss all knowledge, all culture, I refuse to inherit anything from another eye than my own" (BARTHES, 1981:51).

The Punctum is perhaps the most "indefinable" element of a photograph because as a 'Spectator," or viewer, Barthes is only interested in photography not as a question, but as a "wound" (1980), hence the term "prick," defined by Barthes himself as "sting, speck, cut, little hole --- and also a cast of the dice, for the Punctum is this element which rises form the

scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me" (1980:26). The word Punctum, derived from Latin and which means "punctuation," breaks (or punctuates), differs from Barthes' notion of the "Studium," (1980:26), which is no more than the viewer's initial commitment to a photograph, an initial interest in some types of photographs. The Punctum is therefore a rupture, and in Barthes' words, it is "that accident which also bruises me, is poignant to me" (1980:27). Consequently, it is not possible to speak of Punctum without speaking of the viewer's feelings and emotions. The Punctum is pain, or to some, delight, but to see the Punctum is to inevitably feel its prick.

Despite its infinite potential meanings, the Punctum is not coded; it is very often a detail I cannot even name (BARTHES, 1980:51) but in my own view, it is through the Punctum that I can establish a dialogic relationship with the photograph because it speaks of what runs deep in me. The Punctum is therefore the expression of my subjectivity in someone else's work, as it arouses sympathy, anger, and an array of feelings and emotions, or in broader terms, is the affective side of a photograph: I can relate to it as though if I were a part of it. Because the Punctum is void of morality or good taste, my "thinking eyes" are overwhelmed by the "entirety of my reading (…) by the mark of something the photograph is no longer "anything whatever" (BARTHES, 1981:49). It is this detail that arrests not only my gaze, but my thoughts as it whispers something about me to me.

Because the Punctum is about affect, it resonates with my own life story and my assumptions about how my students interact with images. To see the Punctum is to gain an understanding of what my students' eyes see; therefore, to see the Punctum is to understand how they see the world and themselves through images.

What will come next is an analysis of a photograph and how the Punctum reflects my subjectivity and my emotions and feelings, and consequently brings a fresh perspective into the image and its significance through the meanings I assign it in the light of Barthes' theory.

The photograph below is one among a set of family photographs probably shot on the same day. It has been chosen based on my feelings towards it and it has fascinated since I first laid eyes on it. To me, this photograph depicts a happy moment in my father's life. It thus depicts a rare

perfect moment in my father's childhood marked by his parents' broken marriage.

3.3.
An analysis of the Punctum: (Always) a subjective perspective

Uncle Arnaldo (right) and my father Julio (standing).

Rio de Janeiro, 1937

What do I see? (…) Such is the Photograph: it cannot say what it lets us see" (BARTHES, 1980:100). Only I can tell.

This photograph, which belongs to the same set as the photo of my grandmother and her sons, was probably taken by a commissioned photographer. It depicts my father and my uncle, aged four and two at the time. My father is standing while my uncle is sitting. My father's gaze is locked with his brother's in what would be a demonstration of brotherly love.

Two details *prick* me: The first one being the fact that my father is smiling and seemingly saying something as he is gazing at his younger brother. It looks as if he is leaning towards his younger brother to ask him something. Perhaps the photographer himself told my father to stand still, smile and say something; perhaps he was patient enough to wait until he could capture the boys' candid look. To me, however, it does not look staged at all, except for the saddle stool, which is carefully positioned to level the boys' height. It is my father's smile, though, that makes me want to cuddle him. It is this small detail that makes me wonder what my father was like when he was a child and what children were like back in the day. My father was a gentle, sweet man.

Likewise, this photograph shows me a sweet, gentle little boy and that is why I chose this photograph among so many others in my family album. I recognize my father in this photograph It is him re-presented (BARTHES, 1977:32) by his gentle smile that re-connects someone who had been to my father. This tension creates in me a strong sense of familiarity.

The second Punctum, "Time," however, turns this photograph into a catastrophe (BARTHES, 1980:96) because it silently shows me death in the future and how paradoxical my father's existence becomes right before my eyes. My father occupies different places in time: He is only four years old and is alive, but he is dead, and yet, he is going to die. In historical photographs such as this one, "there is always a defeat of 'Time" in them" (1980:96). According to Barthes, every photograph is this catastrophe whether the subject is already dead or not. The Punctum therefore is not exactly death, but my realization of the inexorable truth of death and finitude contained in this photograph.

One more consideration must be made: Even though I have subjected myself to the inexorable certainty of death, I still wish I inhabited in this garden. Barthes explains that photographs of landscapes "must be *habitable*, not visitable" (1981:38). I would add that all photographs must be habitable. This is not to say that they should look beautiful, comfortable or pleasant. What I mean by 'habitable' is that it would seem plausible to inhabit it, or in other words, to belong in a photograph of a landscape, and

in my own view, in any photograph. It is a question I ask myself: “Where in that scene would I be and what would I be doing if I were there?”

Thus, this photograph is a place of desire. I too long to be in this photograph and experience what would have been a summer afternoon spent posing for family photographs not in just any garden, but in that garden. As Barthes puts it, this longing is “a fantasmatic, deriving from a kind of second sight which seems to bear me forward to a utopian time, or to carry me back to somewhere in myself” (BARTHES, 1980:40). This is no longer a family photo in a photo album: It is a window into myself.

3.4.
The Appraisal System: Understanding my students’ understandings of images

In the previous chapters and sections I have highlighted the importance of affect for our interactions with images. By the same token, I have sought to understand what meanings I construct when interacting with images in my life. Nonetheless, for this investigation, it is necessary to understand my students’ understanding of images, that is, how my students convey their assessment of images through verbal text. If the “Punctum” is what makes one love or hate something in a photograph, how does one translate these feelings and emotions into words?

The Appraisal system (MARTIN; WHITE, 2005) is concerned with how speakers approve or disapprove, love or hate, and what stances they take during their interactions with others or with objects. The authors propose a framework for understanding how texts are constructed and how linguistic mechanisms are used to convey values and feelings shared by a community of speakers.

For this research, the Appraisal system will be used as a philosophical approach to the understanding of my students’ texts and what lexical choices they make to express their stances towards images rather than a rigorous method for analyzing language. I should point out that the focus of the analysis is on the text surface and is concerned with my students’ lexico-grammatical choices to share their emotions, normative assessments and

tastes, which set the ground for deeper understandings of their understandings of images.

Now that I have reminisced over my memories and that I have revisited old photographs and discussed the theoretical background for my research, in the next section I provide an overview of two image hosting platforms which I use in my classes and which I have chosen to use in my research.

3.5.
Two online resources: Google Images© and ELTpics

As put forward in the previous section, this section provides an overview of both sources used in my research, the reasons that led me to choose them and the implications of using them in the classroom.

3.5.1.
Google Images©

Google Images©, a search service owned by Google©, was introduced in 2001. When it was launched, 250 million images were indexed, according to Siegler (2010). Deceuster (2013) claims, however, it is impossible to know how many images are indexed today, as images indexed by Google© are constantly being moved and re-indexed. In addition, many images are duplicates, that is, different websites may feature the same photo.

Users can search images by typing in keywords on the Google Images© tab. The search results are displayed in thumbnails, that is, in smaller copies of the original images to reduce download time and to show as many images as possible on a "single continuous scrolling page" (DECEUSTER, 2013). Clicking on the images takes the user to the website where the image originally belongs.

3.5.2
ELTpics

ELTpics (www.flickr.com/photos/eltpics/) is **"**essentially, a collection of thousands of copyright-free photographs taken by people who work in the field of teaching – primarily, English language teaching (ELT). These photos

are, in turn, available for non-commercial use" on Flickr © (www.flickr.com), a free image hosting platform which can be easily accessed on desktop computers, tablets, and smartphones.

The ELTpics collection on Flickr © contains photographs shared and curated by ELT volunteers, who are themselves members of the community. The images are divided into themes, which are referred to as 'sets,' and they offer a fresh perspective of everyday topics and ordinary life through the eyes of ordinary people from different parts of the world.

Each set is divided into sub-topics ranging from *clothes and fashion* to *dreams and ambitions*. It is a collection of curated photos taken by real people, or amateur photographers, as it were, whose intention is largely to capture real life moments. Submitted photos may be selected or rejected. If selected, they are categorized and uploaded onto the Flickr © platform, one of the platforms Creative Commons (CC)[4] works with.

What follows is an overview of the two image hosting platforms chosen for the PEPA in my research and how they can be distinguished from each other:

3.6. Implications of using Google Images© and ELTpics

With both Google Images© and ELTpics in mind and their distinguished features, I needed to know what images my students would select if they could make their choices based on a given topic. Would their images resemble the ones I might choose for the same topic? Since I use both Google Images© and ELTpics in my classes, I felt it would be fair to give my students the same choices.

Given the amount of content available online, it is important to address some important issues involving the use of image search engines and image hosting platforms in the classroom. Hence, this section highlights

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[4] Creative Commons is a non-profitable American organization which supports digital sharing of scientific and creative works by issuing copyright-free licenses free of charge to the public. For further information refer to: https://creativecommons.org/about/

some important features of both platforms, and as part of the discussion on the nature of images, it draws a comparison between the images featured on Google Image© and on ELTpics.

3.6.1.
Types of images featured on Google Images© and ELTpics

The enormous variety of images indexed on Google Images© leads to questions such as the types of photographs and what websites and platforms they come from. Images may come from free downloadable clipart websites, newspaper image collections, libraries and image banks, just to name a few. Images may be licensed for specific uses and may be bought by publishers and advertisers as an alternative to hiring costly professional photographers. Below is the screenshot of the images that appear for the words "people:

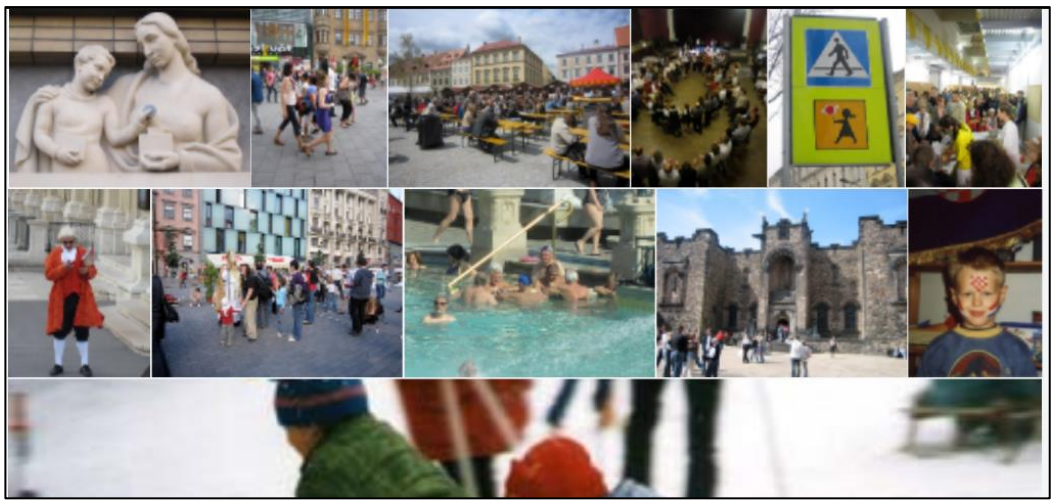
https://www.google.com.br/search?q=people&rlz=1C1CHWL_pt-BRBR687BR687&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjdpfeHio_XAhWQnJAKHQNRBhAQ_AUICigB&biw=1280&bih=614

It is evident that these photos do not reflect the extraordinary diversity of photos and other images available on Google Images©; nevertheless, this small sample presents a pattern: Most of them are close-ups and what strikes me is that the objects, that is the referents (BARTHES, 1980), are fixing their gaze on the viewer as if trying to quickly establish a relationship with him or her. None of the photos in this sample invite the viewer to explore

them. Rather, they beg the viewer to immediately connect with them. (KRESS; VAN LEUWEEN, 2006).

These photographs are what Barthes (1980) might refer to as 'unary' photographs (1980:40). There is no "duality, no indirection, no disturbance (…) in these images, no punctum: a certain shock --- the literal can traumatize --- but no disturbance; the photograph can "shout," not wound (…) no detail (in some corner) ever interrupts my reading" (1980:41).

While Google Images© offers a variety of images especially produced for commercial purposes, ELTpics photographs may invite viewers to reflection and may come in many "shapes and sizes," as the saying goes, thus providing viewers with richer visual experiences.



Photos from ELTpics, shared under a Creative Commons 3.0 license taken by @sandymillin and @abfromz

3.6.2. Copyright issues

First and foremost, Google Images© ought not to be confused with Creative Commons© (www.creativecommons.org) or the public domain[5]: While Creative Commons© (CC) is an affiliate network that provides a platform where users can share and use copyright-free works, the public

[5] For further information on the public domain, refer to the Stanford University Libraries at https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/public-domain/welcome/

domain comprises anything available to the public and that is not protected by intellectual property laws either because the license has expired or because it has been waived, among other reasons[7]. Although Creative Commons© (CC) images and public domain images are indexed on Google Images©, users must keep in mind that many images are 'someone else's intellectual property" (EDUCATION RESOURCES, n. d.), and therefore must be properly credited, or not used for commercial purposes at all.

Likewise, CC images must be copied, distributed, or modified with caution; authors can choose from six different types of license conditions, ranging from permission to modify an author's work to only permitting others to share the original copies of an author's work. Whichever license one chooses, images must always be properly credited (CREATIVE COMMONS, n. d.).

As for images in the public domain, anyone can use a public domain work without obtaining permission, but no one can ever own it." (STANFORD LIBRARIES, n.d.). In short, individual images may be used free from copyright, but collections of public domain images may be protectable, as collections are assumed to have been creatively organized by someone.

3.6.3. Age-appropriate content

Contrasted with ELTpics, whose curators filter out potentially mature content, Google Images© has some implications which can pose some challenges for teachers, especially when it is used during class. Keywords may lead users to content that is inappropriate for students' age unless filters have been used to block certain types of content. However, even if search filters have been activated --- that is, even if certain keywords have been blocked, students may still stumble upon unsuitable images and websites. I had to consider this possibility and I assumed that by brainstorming some topics and keywords with the students, we would avoid their access to certain types of images. We also had a discussion on responsible curation of images.

Having pondered about both platforms, I chose to use them alongside each other so that my students would step in my shoes and use the same sources I normally use.

In what follows, I introduce Exploratory Practice, my chosen research paradigm and its seven principles. It also explains the PEPA (potentially exploitable pedagogical activity) during which my students curated images from ELTpics and Google Images ©.

4.
Us: Exploratory practice in our classroom

> "Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention,the restless,impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry beings pursue with the world and with others."
>
> *Paulo Freire (1970:33)*

This chapter explains how Exploratory Practice resonates with qualitative research and it explores the principles of Exploratory Practice and how they resonate with my own practice. Therefore, the seven principles of Exploratory Practice are intertwined with my reflections on my practice. It is followed by some reflections on the puzzlement zone and how new puzzles were dealt with and how they scaffolded my understanding of my other puzzles. Finally, it explores the steps taken to implement the PEPA in our classroom.

4.1.
What is Qualitative research?

First, it is important to draw attention to some underpinning principles of qualitative research per se, which focuses on a small number of individuals as it seeks to study and understand "human actors in natural settings, in the context of their ordinary everyday world "from the perspective of those involved" (RICHARDS, 2003:10). Because qualitative research focuses on a specific setting, it does not aim to generalize; therefore, its findings are not 'generalizable.' Yet, they may still be relevant to other people if the researcher attempts to "make the particular real" (RICHARDS, 2003:265), that is, if the research as a whole proves to be a sufficiently rich account of a given context and its participants.

Epistemologically, qualitative research conducted by teachers is not only about giving a rich account of a given reality: It recognizes that the classroom is a highly complex environment and it aims to 'represent its complexity.' In Richards' own words:

> In this continually shifting world, knowing and feeling co-exist in creative tension. It is part of the evolutionary imperative that we should seek knowledge, but some things, says Eisner (2002:381), 'you can understand only through your ability to feel."
>
> (RICHARDS, 2003:297,298)

It is clear then that qualitative research relies upon the practitioner researcher's commitment not only to the conceptual dimensions of his or her research but also to the social dimensions of which he or she is a participant. It is in this paradox that practitioner researchers operate, and it is by understanding the tension between knowing and the ability to feel that they should orientate themselves. It is in this 'complex territory' that I, as a practicing teacher, seek to gain an understanding of both of myself and my students, and it could not be different given my life story and my relationship with the English language and the American culture as well as the context of my research: my classroom.

If the classroom is regarded as a rather unpredictable environment acted upon by its participants in their interactions with one another, it is valid to argue that the tenets of qualitative research resonate with my inquiry into my own practice and my beliefs about the nature of my research, which aims to understand individuals' perceptions.

4.2.
What is Exploratory Practice?

Ultimately, the key feature of Exploratory Practice (EP) is the belief that "learners as well as teachers are necessarily involved in the moment-by-moment micro-management of classroom events". EP entails "local understandings --- understandings that take fully into account the human and other particularities of the immediate situation" (ALLWRIGHT, 2003:5). Classroom life is "volatile and constantly puzzling" and teachers and learners are constantly puzzled about something that is part of everyday life in the classroom. Therefore, according to this view, doing research should be a continuous process and it should aim to help teachers and learners reach an understanding by using "normal pedagogic practices as

investigative tools" in such a way that research is integrated into teaching and learning (ALLWRIGHT, 2000). As a principled framework, EP relies on seven core principles (ALLWRIGHT & HANKS, 2009, p. 149-154 as cited in HANKS, 2015:3) proposed by several teachers from around the world as well as the reflections from the EP group in Rio de Janeiro (HANKS, 2015:3). Below are the seven principles with some key considerations for my research:

Principle 1: 'Quality of life' for language teachers and learners is the most appropriate central concern for practitioner research in our field.

The most important principle behind EP is *quality of life*. Because EP is about understanding my classroom and its participants, as a practitioner researcher, I aspire to contribute significantly to the well-being of my community of practice of which my students and I are part, as, ultimately, "what helps the teacher should also help language learners and/or other teachers, and vice versa, in a continuous loop of learning and development" (HANKS, 2015:5). Motivations for conducting research are multiple and range along a continuum. However, my main motivation for carrying out research with this group of students has an affective side. Sharing stories is part of my practice.

Many teachers may refrain from sharing something that perplexes them or something that is worth telling --- be it their puzzles, stories or experiences, with students for fear of exposing themselves or for fear of not giving students the floor to share their own stories; however, it is teachers --- especially language teachers in my context, who are constantly asking students to speak or write about how they feel about rather personal matters (GERALD, 2003). In addition, lessons can be planned to strike the right balance to meet learners' needs in terms of speaking opportunities --- for students and the teacher, and reflection. It is just as important for students to listen to their teachers, and consequently view the teacher as a whole human being and the classroom environment as a community where teachers are participants as well.

That said, I decided to share my puzzle with my students hoping that it would bring us all a sense of acceptance and that it would foster our ability to be mindful of others' feelings and stories, including my own. In retrospect --- and I realize this as I reflect and write about it, this research was also an effort to foster empathy in my classroom as well as an opportunity to discover our voice by sharing our stories. This research, motivated by a puzzle of mine, certainly aimed at improving the quality of life by engaging all the participants in a collective enterprise to understand the role of images in our classroom.

Principle 2: Working primarily to understand the 'quality of life', as it is experienced by language learners and teachers, is more important than, and logically prior to, seeking in any way to improve it.

This principle contributes greatly to the practitioner researcher's quality of life as it brings forth the notion of research as a tool that helps learners and teachers make sense of their learning and teaching experiences. It is this understanding that provides "a good foundation for helping teachers and learners make their time together both pleasant and productive" (ALLWRIGHT, 2003:114).

Within this context, EP is a descriptive approach rather than a prescriptive one in the sense that it involves understanding rather than attempts to impose rules or modify behaviors, as it were, or as a pathway to change or improvement. It is important to note that puzzles that arise out of classroom life are not to be viewed as problems that need to be solved. The same can be said for change: EP is not concerned with change; once the teacher and (or) the students have identified a puzzle, they should try to work for understanding. If – and only if, change --- or improvement is desirable, then it should become an outcome. Within such a *volatile* and *constantly puzzling* environment, EP allows for a true capture of the nature of teaching and learning --- and naturally, the relationship between teachers and learners.

These are compelling reasons in themselves for me to become a practitioner researcher, since I feel the need to describe and understand

how my students and I relate to images in the classroom rather than change our relationship with images. EP is about reflection: I am aware of my actions as a teacher, that is, I know what I *do*, but it is high time I *wondered* about what I do, as Freire puts it (FREIRE, 1973 as cited in HANKS, 2015).

Principle 3: Everybody needs to be involved in the work for understanding & Principle 4: The work needs to serve to bring people together.

In many contexts, in academic hierarchies, teachers may be regarded as being different from students, who in turn, may not qualify as researchers. EP points out that such division should not exist and stresses the idea of *collegiality*, that is, everyone – teachers, students, and colleagues, should get involved in research and "work for each other's development as well as their own" (ALLWRIGHT, 2003:129). It is the participants – or *practitioner researchers,* themselves who should be encouraged to seek an understanding of what goes on in the classroom, that is, what puzzles them about their lessons. In view of this, EP views the learners as "key developing practitioners" (HANKS, 2017: 49).

Once the teacher and (or) the learners have identified something that puzzles them, they may reflect about it and together engage in the research. Challenging though it may sound, involving everyone in a quest for understanding gives participants a chance to help each other, thus giving them a sense of shared ownership. In this research, I dealt with my own puzzle, but once I shared it with my students, it became ours, thus leading us to a sense of shared ownership, inclining us to collaborate with one another. So, it is reasonable to say that, to me, EP is much about wondering and reflecting upon my experiences in the classroom and sharing it with my students.

Principle 5: The work needs to be conducted in a spirit of mutual development.

In my own view, EP has produced a profound change not only in the way I view research, but more importantly, the way I view my own practice,

my students, and my many selves. I am allowing my classroom to be as it is --- this type of acceptance addresses an issue that many teachers are faced with. As for my students, this research gave them an opportunity to reflect on their own choices of images and to gain an understanding of the use of images in the classroom.

As a rule, teachers may feel the need to change student behavior; teachers may feel urged to control their students' attitudes in the same way they may wish to control their grammar and vocabulary outputs; we inevitably treat the language classroom as an environment whose purpose is to develop learners' language skills only under the assumption that we are in control of what students learn. "Language teaching and learning can "therefore be reduced to a relatively unproblematic, asocial, matter of cause and effect relationships" (ALLWRIGHT, 2003: 114).

Principle 6: Working for understanding is necessarily a continuous enterprise.

Principle 7: Integrating the work for understanding fully into existing curricular practices is a way of minimizing the burden and maximizing sustainability.

Classroom life is a "dynamic social situation" (ALLWRIGHT, 2003:130) and Gaarder's reflection (Sophie's World, 1991) makes a powerful metaphor for how practitioner researchers should view classroom life:

> To children, the world and everything in it is new, something that gives rise to astonishment. It is not like that for adults. Most adults accept the world as a matter of course. This is precisely where philosophers are a notable exception. A philosopher never gets quite used to the world. To him or her, the world continues to seem a bit unreasonable - bewildering, even enigmatic. Philosophers and small children thus have an important faculty in common. The only thing we require to be good philosophers is the faculty of wonder… (p. 18)

Therefore, it makes sense for teachers to never stop asking questions and to begin to think about classroom life puzzles as an ongoing, lifelong pursuit. It also makes sense for students to take part in the research by means of "Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities," or PEPAs (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009:157), which aim both at reflection and

linguistic development. This principle of EP brings sustainability to research and it makes it possible for teachers and learners to be committed to continuous inquiry. Below is Allwright's point of view on the importance of sustainability.

> Exploratory practice' has been developed precisely to offer a sustainable way of integrating an investigative element into the normal working lives of teachers and learners, to help them develop their understandings of what happens in classrooms. It has deliberately prioritized 'sustainability' over 'quality' (without abandoning 'quality'), simply because *without* sustainability there is going to be nothing of value happening in the long term.
>
> (ALLWRIGHT, 1996)

EP has within it many beneficial elements for practitioner researchers: It takes teachers and learners into the realm of long-term inquiry, as it unburdens them from long hours spent on planning or analyzing data. Because all participants must be brought on board, collaboration and support are key, thus giving teachers freedom to give learners opportunities to analyze the data or to assist in the planning. In short, EP helps teachers and learners view research as something doable.

EP also fosters teachers and learners' creativity in that they may use whatever materials and resources are available to them. I used tablets and A4 sheets of paper in my PEPA, but in contexts where resources are scarce, a class discussion will do.

The objective of the PEPAs" (ALLWRIGHT, 2000) is twofold: They aim at:

(1) helping learners develop linguistically;

(2) contributing to a better understanding of life in the classroom and mutual development.

EP goes a step further because it relies on existing practices with the transformative power of leading to linguistic development and understanding supplemented by the framework of EP research, which includes data generation and analysis methods. For this reason, teachers do not have to limit their work to a single PEPA; they may plan other PEPAs if they need to investigate further. Hanks argues that it may take some time for practitioner researchers to 'discover the elegant simplicity' of PEPAs; it is necessary to 'reframe pedagogy' so that a PEPA is designed in such a

way that it is consistent with the EP approach (2015:6). However, the upside outweighs the downside. Just as in most research methods, practitioner researchers may pilot a PEPA before its implementation and thus redesign it if necessary.

4.3.
Navigating the puzzlement zone: When new puzzles emerge

A similar argument can be made for puzzles, which can be reconsidered as the researcher begins implementing the PEPA. It should always be noted that EP research is regarded as a continuous process, so it allows for puzzles to be rethought, refined or readjusted. On the upside, a puzzle may be complemented by an emerging puzzle, since reflection may yield new puzzles about the same issue in a spiral movement (NÓBREGA KUSCHNIR; MACHADO, 2003). This is to say that --- as I can attest by my own experience, it is possible to deal with the puzzlement process in a sustainable way.

Since I was expected to take part in the classroom activity, I had to make sure the PEPA (Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activity) would include me as a participant in an activity that also considered my students' context as well as their linguistic needs. The PEPA tasks should be included within this spectrum; therefore, students and the teacher should have the opportunity to both create and investigate the events involving the use of images, which are often used in our classes. My research would need to be "fully integrated into the teaching and the learning themselves" and would need to aim to contribute to my students' linguistic development through the use of target language within the communicative approach to language teaching and learning (ALLWRIGHT, 2003:5, 6). The EP framework comprises the following steps:

STEP 1: Identifying a puzzle: Why things happen the way they do and

STEP 2: Reflecting upon it. Initially, my puzzle was:

Why do I choose images that depict the American culture?

The images that I choose for my classes have always intrigued me, so, my puzzle could be broken down into two questions:

1. Why do I choose images that depict the American culture in my classes?

2. What meanings do I construct when interacting with these images.

At some point, I also wondered if my students would choose similar images. However, I wanted to know what choices my students would make if they were given the opportunity to bring their own images to the classroom. If I really intended to understand my students, it would be best to allow them to be the curators themselves rather than tell me what they think about the images that I bring. On thinking about my students as curators, an adjacent puzzle emerged:

What images would my students choose?

With that in mind, I designed a PEPA that would give my students the space to bring their own images and talk about them. Having done the activity and having looked at the data, that is, the images chosen by my students and their notes, I still felt that my puzzle was missing a piece. I did not know exactly what piece --- or if it was just a piece or perhaps if my research question reflected my puzzle. This awkward feeling translated into my reluctance to analyze my students' notes. I had mixed feelings about my research and I could not help experiencing some frustration. I had the data, and yet, I was unsure about what to do it with it. As much as I was willing to understand my students' relationship with those images, I still felt the data to be somehow disconnected from my puzzle. I had assumed that once I had the data, I would have the answers to my question; what I did not realize was that there was another puzzle within my puzzle. My initial puzzle yielded yet another puzzle --- or perhaps more than one puzzle. I suddenly found myself in a *puzzlement zone*, "a spiral movement (…) where a former puzzle revealed new puzzles about the same issue" (NÓBREGA KUSCHNIR; MACHADO, 2003:163).

The authors' view of the puzzlement zone is noteworthy for the analysis of my own puzzle. The puzzlement zone may be thought of as a set of building blocks that move us progressively towards a growing understanding of life in the classroom, so Exploratory Practice may be approached as being parallel to Vygotsky's concept of ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development). The puzzlement zone, in which new zones emerge as a result of the practitioner's further reflections, functions as a mediator between the practitioner and his or her understandings, that is, "EP is an integration of several reflective processes, mainly self-self (myself and I), self-other(s) (my students and I, other teachers, coordinators, etc.) and other(s)-other(s) (students and students, students and other teachers, other teachers and coordinators, etc.)" (NÓBREGA KUSCHNIR; MACHADO 2003: 166). This question sets out what I hope to learn about my students and how they perceive images as a teaching tool.

Would my students use their images in a class? If so, what would they use those images for?

After asking myself this question, I realized I would have to collect new data through a PEPA especially designed to allow my students to revisit the images they had chosen. By doing that, they would be able to put themselves in my shoes and go through the process of defining an image in terms of potential linguistic content. Somehow, they had thought about what those images had to say, but now they would have to consider their most prominent features to assess them as learning/teaching aids. I thought it would be interesting to share Barthes' concept of Punctum (1980). I hoped that sharing my thoughts with my students would help them not only to understand the role of images in our classes, but I also hoped that we would all reach an understanding of Barthes' assumptions about photography.

Last, life in the classroom can and should be a two-way road in which teachers and students build up their relationship on mutual understanding. I cannot but refer to American psychologist Carl Rogers, who highlights the importance of a deep understanding in all relationships, put simply, empathy: "To be with another in this way means that for the time being you

lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself to enter another's world without prejudice" (ROGERS, 1975:4). I believe that in a world full of noise as ours, listening to our students empathically --- and giving them opportunities to listen to us empathically, helps all members of a community of practice see that all elements in a classroom are intertwined with one another and dependent on one another in the way living organisms are. Thus, to be empathetic means to fully experience someone else's feelings and emotions because we are aware that we too experience feelings and emotions. To achieve this is to add the human dimension of learning and teaching, which takes us to step 3:

STEP 3: Planning a PEPA (a potentially exploitable pedagogic activity) to allow the group to work towards understanding the puzzle and to gather data:

One of our main concerns as language teachers is whether our students are learning the content or not. The widely spread belief that knowing information helps students to succeed highly impacts the way teachers, students, and parents view curriculum design, homework, and classroom activities. Very little importance may be given to reflection about learning and teaching in many contexts and teachers' choices of activities take in consideration the syllabus rather than deep understandings about classroom life. In language schools, where teacher-student interactions are limited to two or perhaps three weekly meetings, much more focus is given to language teaching and exams.

At first glance, EP may seem to run counter to these mainstream concepts. In truth, EP goes one step further: It engages learners through communicative activities that combine language learning and "understandings of language learning and/or teaching in a sustainable ecology of research and teacher and learners' life in the classroom. The same principle is valid for the tools, which should be the ones already used in the daily activities in the classroom. For this research, technological tools were available, so I designed a PEPA that would enable my students to choose images from online sources. The tablets and wireless connection enabled my students to quickly access the digital content and select images

for the activity. Luckily, thanks to the materials available, their choices were based on a wide range of images available online; therefore, they had to face similar issues to the ones I am faced with daily, such as having a multitude of choices of images and having to choose one single image in a limited amount of time.

Accordingly, it can be argued that neither the PEPA nor the tools deviated from what we already do or use in our classes. A PEPA should resonate with Hanks' notion of 'elegant simplicity' (2015:6).

STEP 4: Carrying out the PEPA and observing the students and trying to understand how they perceived the activity itself and how they coped with the challenges and possible shortcomings that may undermine the spontaneity of the students' responses to the tasks.

Putting the PEPA into action requires all the participants to take part in the joint effort and if the teacher alone has planned it, he or she must find ways to engage the students --- or whoever participants are involved, in the activities at hand. Easier said than done, many incidents may affect the PEPA and force the teacher to make *in-flight* decisions. Several factors, ranging from unexpected absences to lack of student engagement, might hinder the ability of the practitioners to carry out activities as planned. There may be times when these issues require the participants to call it off. Even if all according to plan, the dynamic nature of human interactions may achieve unpredictable outcomes which the participants must be able to deal with. In principle, unpredictability can and should be treated naturally and as part of normal classroom life. Most of us fear the unexpected. As said before, many teachers and students seek control whether it be control of their learning and teaching or control over the conversations taking place in a class. Often, I am the one who makes most choices for the sake of practicality. However, it is possible to bridge the gap between research and pedagogy to bring people together and work for understanding. (HANKS, 2015:4). Having said that, the PEPA "creates the space for practitioners to explore their puzzles while concurrently practicing the target language" (HANKS, 2015:4).

However simple EP may seem, some issues crossed my mind while I was planning the PEPA. I constantly asked myself how I would deal with

any unexpected events. However, I later realized that it was my need of control that was causing anxiety and fear. It took me a while to let go of this need, and it was not until I implemented the PEPA that I discovered that it was indeed a very liberating experience to let the PEPA take its course. Yet, I felt a sense of possibility which allowed me to perceive that my students owned the activities which I had assigned them. I felt that I did not have the right to intervene even when some students expressed frustration during the decision-making process.

It is important to note, nevertheless, that it is not possible to prescribe the materials or tools used in a PEPA. What works in a certain context does not necessarily work in a different one, but trying to assess the materials and tasks from the students' perspectives is a valid enterprise. Having said that, however, the tablets did not make decision-making harder for the students, as it is something most people must cope with nowadays. My students are no exception. We are all faced with an overload of options which may push us into decisions that may not reflect our tastes, values, or preferences.

I tried to put myself in my students' shoes by considering some possible scenarios: How much importance would my students ascribe to their choices? Would they find themselves having to make heart-wrenching decisions or would they simply *pick good enough* options just because they had been told to do so? I also wondered whether their decision-making processes would show in their writing and whether they would simply let their partner choose an image rather than negotiate their choices.

These were questions I asked myself during the planning and the implementation stages of my research and I decided that I would not want to have control over these issues because they are part of classroom life. If I had committed myself to designing and implementing a PEPA meant to give my students an opportunity to own those images, then I would have to embrace uncertainty as well as unpredictability, for every research has its own limitations in terms of framework.

5.
Us: Images in our classroom

> "…the notion of the Other (Bakhtin, 1986) brings the realization that our understandings are dependent not only upon our selves, but on our interactions with others."
>
> *Judith Hanks*

In this section, I explore our classroom and describe the people who interact in it. I also provide a description of the online sources of images and a thorough account of the PEPA and the data generation procedures in my research.

5.1.
My teaching context

I have been teaching at a private language school based in the south area of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for 11 years now. Most of my students are middle-class and upper-class children and teenagers aged 9-19 who attend a large local Catholic school located next door to our institute. However, the neighborhood is also served by private and state-run schools, a German international school, and schools associated with different religious denominations, namely Jewish and Adventist. Formerly occupied mainly by neoclassic 19th century palace houses, clinics, hospitals, schools, and office buildings, the neighborhood is gradually being converted into a residential area with new apartment blocks being built and attracting middle-class and upper-class families. This is to say that our students are assumed to have access to high-quality education and a wealth of technological devices in their everyday lives.

As for our language institute, we have access to an IWB (interactive white board) in all classrooms and images from various online sources are readily available in our classes. I often use visual resources to explain grammar points, vocabulary, and to trigger discussions. When students ask questions about vocabulary, I search Google Images© and select one of them to copy and paste onto our vocabulary page on the IWB. I also choose images beforehand when I am preparing my classes. Most of the images I

select are used as discussion and writing prompts and depict everyday scenes and situations.

With the booming ed-tech industry and its implications for learning, we have been experimenting with tablets, which are also available on request. They can be integrated with our syllabus and materials, or they may be used independently for any pedagogical purposes at the teacher's discretion. In general, the tablets are used to foster collaboration, since students usually work in pairs and in small groups. We are provided with high speed internet connection, so online resources and apps are at our fingertips. However, despite the strong presence of technology in our classes, print course books are still adopted as core materials.

Students are placed in single level classes based on their age, therefore, they may share similar needs and tastes if we take into consideration their age group profiles. On average, our students begin studying with us at the age of 8 and graduate at the age of 17 and it may be the case that some students have been studying together with the same classmates for quite some time, so it is not uncommon for them to form close friendships.

For my research, I chose a group of 14 intermediate students aged 14-15 years old whose level of English enables most of them to fully express themselves in English. According to the CEFR (Common European Framework Reference), their levels range from B1 to B2, that is, they can express themselves in familiar situations and on a range of topics, including describing what they see and expressing their perceptions on images.

This section has given an account of my students' context, but now it is equally important to give some background information about who we are and how we position ourselves in the classroom as learners and teacher.

Teaching well is extremely difficult; however, bonding with students poses an even greater challenge. When one has devoted so many years to teaching, one is better able to attempt to understand learners' behavior and words and to build relationships based on affect. Affect is the biggest factor behind teacher-student relationships. Showing students who we are, sharing our experiences with them, and showing genuine interest in them creates a space where they can express themselves as well. Drawing on

Arnold & Brown, "*being* is just as important as *doing*; a good language teacher *knows* and *does* but most essentially *is*" (ARNOLD & BROWN, 1999:4). In my own view, any attempts to nurture a space for being not only leads to learning, but also to personal growth.

It is in this environment that my students and I *are* and *do*, but nurturing a space for being is not an easy task: It is a political endeavor in the sense that the teacher needs to challenge traditional ways of *doing* in order to create a space for *being* in a language class, which conflicts with the core beliefs about language learning. Put simply, we need to go beyond language learning and the course syllabus to engage our students and create a community of practice.

As for my students, they are a typical class of teenagers. They are noisy and intense, as any teenagers would be expected to be. A few of them clearly enjoy learning English while others do not. Yet, all of them are cooperative and friendly towards each other and are willing to participate in the activities, but being a monolingual class, I need to help them make sense of speaking English with their peers. For that reason, we hold discussions on language, language learning, discourse, and learning strategies.

5.2.
What meanings do my students construct when interacting with images?

To understand what meanings my students create when exposed to images, I needed to design a PEPA which entailed my students' individual perceptions of images and at the same time encouraged them to work collaboratively. To meet this challenge, we needed high speed internet access to content, since they were expected to choose their own images within a wide range of options. My students also needed to work collaboratively, so the tablets would be the best resource for them to work together and autonomously.

Having chosen to use the tablets, I needed to decide whether my students would be free to choose images from Google Images© or whether they would limit their searches to ELTpics. Without a shadow of doubt, both

Google Images© and ELTpics would equally reflect my everyday choices, which also involve choosing from a large assortment of color and black and white photographs, cartoons, paintings, drawings, and clip-art images from ads, news stories, free image hosting sites, all sorts of websites, and blogs, just to name a few. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that ELTpics feature photos taken by people from different countries around the world --- including the United States; however, the photos are intended to portray, render, or depict something or someone rather than sell, convince, persuade, replace text, or communicate knowledge only.

5.3.
Implementing the PEPA (Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activity)

Fourteen students participated in the activity, 8 of whom were male aged 14-15 and 6 were female aged 15. I repeated the activity twice so that they could choose one image with a partner and then another image with a different partner. Giving the students the opportunity to work on two different pictures would allow them to share their views with someone else and would obviously yield more data.

The activity was carried out as any activity in my lessons would have been and it followed a basic lesson framework comprising a lead-in, a pre-viewing task, and a post-viewing task, which in turn consisted of a writing task and a discussion in pairs. Hence, the same activity was conducted twice, that is, in the first activity students were free to search for images from any sources they found suitable and they could choose to visit the ELTpics website; in the second activity, they were instructed to access ELTpics for images.

STEPS:

Google Images© and ELTpics

1. **Lead-in Activity (Aims to engage students with the topic)**

After the students were paired up, I showed them the word IMAGE on the IWB. I asked them to share five ideas related to it with their partners. I

then collected the ideas and jotted them down on the board. Students contributed with different words and ideas.

2. **Pre-viewing task (Aims to narrow down the scope of the topic by proposing some questions to be answered during the activity):**

After contributing with ideas, the students were shown a very short list of possible topics that images could represent: school, family, and English. They were free to choose more topics, which were added to the list as more ideas came up. I reminded them that the topics on the board were suggestions and that they were free to think of other topics.

After that, I told them that they were going to search for images on Google Images© under a topic of their choice and that they would do it in pairs, that is, they were going to choose an image together. They were also told to choose an image that related to their lives or things they liked. Before they were given the tablets, they were suggested the following:

Suggested source:
https://www.flickr.com/photos/eltpics/

2) Copy the link to the image onto the notepad on your device
3) Take a screenshot of the image: Press the Home and Lock buttons on the tablet at the same time to capture a screenshot.
4) Can you think of a title for the image?

Each pair of students was handed out a tablet and they searched for the images under my supervision. I made sure they were neither straying off the task nor exposing themselves to explicit content. On the other hand, I avoided saying anything that might interfere with their choices. I also avoided giving any opinions so that I would not interfere with their choices. Fortunately, the activity ran smoothly with the students working together and speaking mostly in English. Most students selected random images from Google Images©; only one pair of students followed my suggestion and went straight to ELTpics. I did not tell them what kind of images they were

supposed to search for. They were free to choose drawings, photos, paintings, and any other types of images.

3. Post-viewing (Encouraging students to reflect on their choice and elaborating a text)

Step 1:

After the students had chosen their images, they were told they were going to work individually and think about the following:

1. Why I chose this image;
2. What the author communicates through this image;
3. What stories and experiences are included in this image.

I gave them a few moments to think about their answers and I made it clear that they could include anything they thought was relevant. I also asked them not to worry about their English and that I would help them with words they did not know or if worst came to worst, they could use Portuguese. Only after this, did I hand out blank sheets of paper for them to write on. I did not set a time limit for the students to write their texts; I did not want them to rush through the task for it required deep reflection on their part. The fast finishers were assigned some revision exercises in their course books and everyone was asked to work quietly.

Step 2:

After everyone had finished writing, I asked them to share ideas with their partners and discuss what meanings the images evoked.

ELTpics

After the students had handed back their papers, I paired them up with different partners and I told them that they were going to repeat the activity, but this time they were going to use ELTpics images. All the steps were repeated and I finally asked them what the point of this activity was and the students discussed the possible meanings images can have for each individual based on one's knowledge of the world and ideologies. After a five-minute discussion, the students handed back their papers. As soon as

the class finished, I sent myself the images that were saved in the tablets and collected the A4 sheets of paper with the students' texts.

However, another puzzle emerged as I looked into the images my students had chosen, which led me to plan a second PEPA. A few weeks later, I brought the images back to my students to attempt to answer yet another puzzle:

Would they use the images in a class? If so, what would they use their images for?

In the next section, I describe the PEPA that I implemented with the same class six weeks later and what happened when they revisited their own images.

5.4. Navigating the puzzlement zone: When a new puzzle emerges

With the idea of the "Punctum" in mind, I began to wonder what details 'pricked' my students and how those details impacted their choices. I also wondered whether they would use the images for a class. I wondered what decisions they would make regarding the images they had at hand. Obviously, I knew they had no language teaching experience and that perhaps they would have some difficulty making decisions. On the other hand, they had been taking English classes for about 8 years had been exposed to images used for teaching.

A simpler framework was required for this PEPA**.** Eleven students were present in the class. All of them had participated in the first PEPA. Because they were going to write their texts individually, it did not matter whether they sat next to their first PEPA partner. They just needed to access the images they had chosen for the first PEPA.

Step 1:

We started with a discussion on puzzles and the puzzlement zone (NÓBREGA KUSHNIR; MACHADO, 2003). After that, we moved on to

Barthes' theories and assumptions about the nature of photography, among which is the theory of the "Punctum." Together, we recapitulated our first PEPA and I explained that we would revisit the images they had chosen and that they would write down what detail of the image *pricked* them. I also pointed out that it was an individual task and that it was important for them to take some time to read their images.

Step 2:

I handed out A4 sheets of paper with the selected images and their names. After they had put down their ideas on paper next to the images, we discussed the way that I use images in our classes and what I use images for. We brainstormed some of the uses of images, such as: (1) illustrating lexical items; (2) illustrating grammar points; (3) as prompts for discussions on specific topics, e.g. family problems, communication, and student life, among other topics. After that, I asked them the following questions:

Would you (not) use your image in an English class? Why?
If so, what would you use this image for?

I asked them to write their answers individually, which they did.

Step 3:

After they had written down their answers, I collected the papers and some students shared briefly their impressions on their images.

Comments:

Overall, they were willing to share their ideas and impressions and they felt at ease putting them down on paper. At first, I was afraid that they would resist to talking about the images once more, but fortunately, the activity ran smoothly and our discussion prior to the text production helped them understand the reasons why I had decided to implement a new PEPA.

6.
Selecting images: the two images chosen for this research

> "It doesn't matter what stories the authors will tell about these images. They belong to your students now."
>
> *Maria Isabel Cunha (December 2016)*

Fifteen images were selected by my students, since each pair of students was given a chance to choose two images. As expected, there were a high number of photographs: 14 out of the 15 images were photographs. Only 1 drawing was chosen. I had expected most of the images to be photographs, since the students accessed ELTpics; however, the presence of only one drawing among so many photographs suggests that my students may (1) have mimicked me as I tend to use more photographs than other types of images, such as drawings, comic strips, or paintings; (2) they understand that photographs are better able to convey their chosen topics.

Having considered the Punctum, I discarded the drawing and decided to select 2 photographs out of 14 based on two criteria:

a) Only images that were accompanied by texts that at first sight seemed to be more elaborated in terms of content including their ideas about the Punctum whether explicitly stated or not;
b) Only images from ELTpics for the following reasons:

   c.1) ELTpic images tend to be less contextualized and therefore offer fewer clues about the purpose of the photographs such as their intended use for ads, news media, or for any other commercial or personal purpose.

   c.2) The purpose of my research is to gain an understanding of my students and the images generated during the PEPA did intrigue me. Since the images chosen by my students were very different from the ones I myself would have chosen, I decided to select two photographs that provoked disturbance (BARTHES, 1980) and therefore challenged my own views;

c) One of the students participated in both PEPAS, while the second one participated in only one PEPA. The reason why I chose the images is stated in c.2; however, I thought it would be interesting to wished to learn whether my students' attitudes might (or might not) change when revisiting their photographs. I believe that the first photograph and its respective texts may give us valuable insight on how our students' stances and attitudes may change over time.

The purpose of my research is not to compare students' views, but to (1) understand their views and consequently gain a deeper understand of how they interact with images; (2) discover how the Punctum emerges in their texts. For this reason, only one of the two texts produced by the pairs of students may have been considered for the analysis.

In principle, it was my feeling of strangeness towards the images chosen by my students that motivated my choices. The images in my life had all been too familiar from a very young age however unfamiliar they may have seen when re-visited in this research. As Barthes puts it, a photograph does not tell one what to see but I hoped that my students' eyes would be my guide in unknown territories. Perhaps I would be able to look through their eyes, see what they see, and to understand them.

PHOTOGRAPH 1: A really bad image (Paulo)

Photo taken from http://flickr.com/eltpicsby @dfogarty, used under a CC Attribution Non-Commercial license, http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/

PHOTOGRAPH 2: Behind the song (Alice)

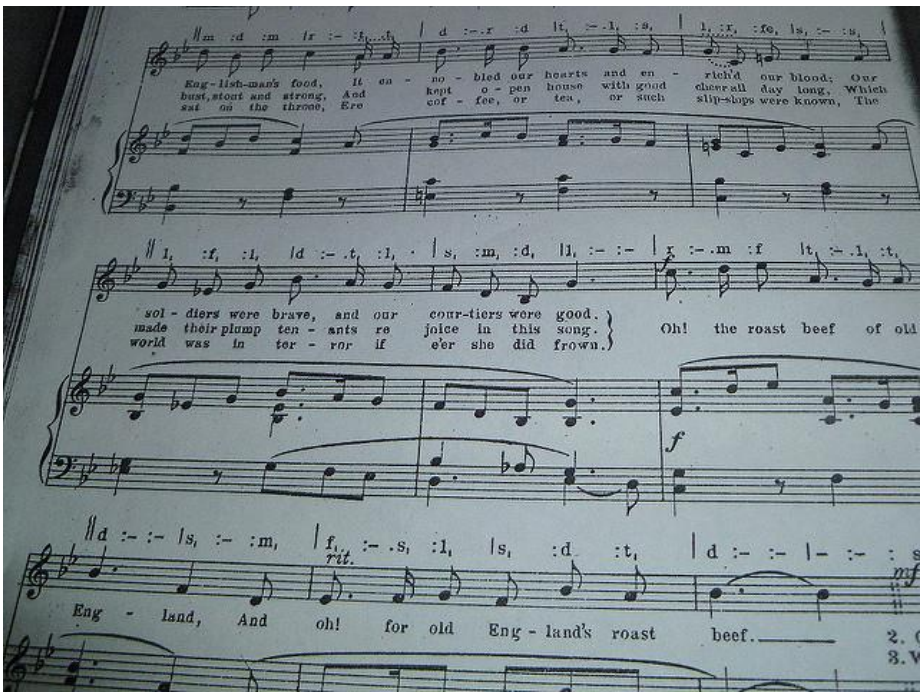


Photo taken from http://flickr.com/eltpicsby @sueannan, used under a CC Attribution Non-Commercial license, http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/"

7.
Them: What images tell my students and about my students

> People are just as wonderful as sunsets if you let them be. When I look at a sunset, I don't find myself saying, "Soften the orange a bit on the right-hand corner." I don't try to control a sunset. I watch with awe as it unfolds.
>
> *Carl R. Rogers*

In what follows is the analysis of two students' texts based on the photographs that they chose during the PEPA (Potentially exploitable pedagogical activity). The objective of this analysis is twofold: It aims to (1) identify what meanings my students construct when interacting with their photographs and how these meanings emerge in their texts; (2) recognize the Punctum (BARTHES, 1980) and capture the moment in which it emerges in my students' texts.

Because subjectivity is key in Barthes' construct of the Punctum, the analysis of the students' texts is foregrounded on the Appraisal System, a framework for dealing with "the subjective presence of speakers/writers in texts" (MARTIN AND WHITE, 2005:1). Therefore, a few considerations about the Appraisal system must be made prior to the analysis.

7.1.
The Appraisal System

The Appraisal system is concerned with interpersonal meaning, in other words, the "subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances both towards the material they present and those with whom they communicate" (MARTIN AND WHITE, 2005:1). Writers and speakers thus construe for themselves "authorial identities and personae "through linguistic resources, namely grammatical and lexical choices including adverbs, modality, and metaphors.

It is important to note that interpersonal meanings are not discrete elements in a text. Rather, according to Halliday, they are "distributed like a prosody throughout a continuous stretch of speech" (HALLIDAY, 1979: 66-7 as cited in MARTIN AND WHITE, 2005:19). Interpersonal meanings may

be inscribed in a text, that is, explicitly stated, or evoked, in other words, indirectly expressed through metaphors. They may also be positive or negative stances, that is, they may express whether "writers/speakers positively or negatively evaluate entities, happenings and states-of-affairs with which their texts are concerned" (MARTIN AND WHITE, 2005:2). Interpersonal meanings express a community's shared values, feelings, and knowledge of the world and are categorized into the following aspects:

1.Affect

Affect is related to positive or negative feelings; it is concerned with how we feel, and therefore it is expressed through adjectives such as sad, happy, and excited, when inscribed in a text. Affect may be evoked in a text by means of metaphors.

2.Judgment

Judgment is concerned with "attitudes towards behavior, which we admire or criticize, praise or condemn" (2005:42). Judgment comprises two aspects:

2.a. Judgments of social esteem

They concern how speakers/writers evaluate whether one's behavior is normal or deviant in a given social group, such as family, circle of friends, and in social networks. Behavior that does not conform with that of a group is subject to gossip, humor, and stories which can be critical of one's behavior.

2.b. Judgments of sanction

They concern how speakers/writers evaluate one's ethical and truthful behavior, as well as the decrees, rules, and regulations of institutions such as the Church and the State. Noncompliant behavior in this sphere results in penalties and punishment.

3. Appreciation

Appreciation refers to the way in which speakers/writers evaluate phenomena from an aesthetic perspective "according to ways in which they are valued or not in a given field" (2005:43).

Nonetheless, first, we may note that the lexical items may vary their attitudinal meanings according to the context in which they are used. Another aspect of the Appraisal system regards lexical choices speakers and writers make to express their attitudes and stances: For Martin and White (2005:6), "choice gives rise to a particular discursive persona." However, Lewis (2002) reminds us that it is not possible to assess the range of choices available to a speaker/writer. For this reason, it is not possible to determine the motivations behind the lexical and grammatical choices of a speaker/writer. However, it is important to regard a speaker's/writer's use of lexis and grammar as a matter of choice.

Thus, Lewis' insight on speakers' choices of grammar and lexis (2002) and Martin and White's construct of choice of language as a resource (2005) have important implications for this study however limited my students' semantic choices may be. Therefore, for this study, the use of lexical and grammatical structures and their embedded meanings by my students shall be regarded as the result of their choices.

Having listed the sub-categories of the Appraisal system, what follows is the analysis of two photographs and their respective texts produced by two students. This analysis aims (1) to gain a deeper understanding of my students' choices by understanding what meanings they construct; (2) to identify the Punctum, that is, what detail(s) of the photographs may have attracted them in a way that changed their reading of the image; (3) how this shift emerges in their texts.

The first image, entitled *A Really Bad Image*, was selected by Paulo, who participated in both PEPAS. Therefore, Paulo produced two texts. The first one was written for PEPA 1 and the second one was written for PEPA 2. Below is Paulo's first text:

7.2.
PHOTOGRAPH 1: A really bad image

"What I can name cannot prick me. The incapacity to name it is a good sign of disturbance"
(BARTHES, 1980:51).

PEPA 1:

- "I think that's **the ugliest** picture I have **ever seen**.
- It reminds me of **2007 Britney Spears**.
- The author of this image **must be a virgin that still lives with his mom**.
- It's **so bad** I **don't even want to look** at it.
- I'm **emberresed** (sic) !!"

Paulo

I think that's the ugliest picture I've ever seen.

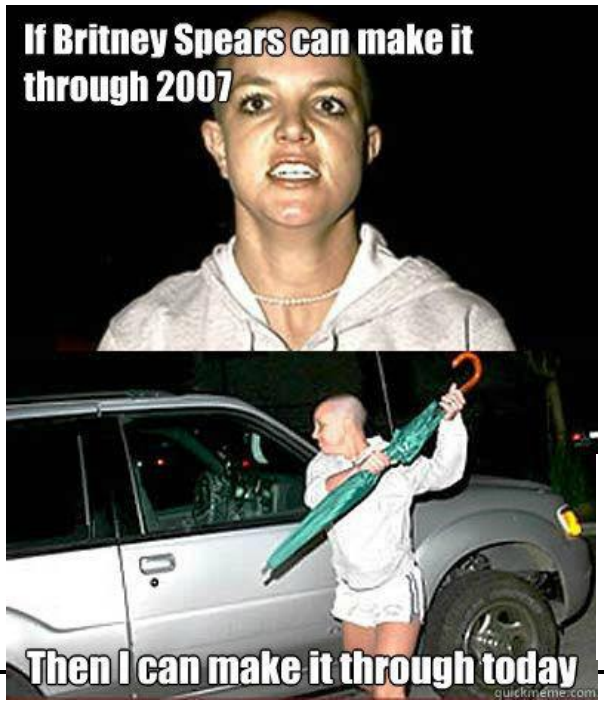
It is in bullet points that Paulo expresses his first views on the image he has chosen. It is not only an ugly picture: it is the ugliest picture that Paulo has ever seen. It is not only bad: it is so bad that he does not even want to look at it. The author of the image does not live with his mother: he still lives with his mother. The phrase formed by the superlative 'the ugliest' and the adverbs 'ever,' 'so,' and 'still' functioning as intensifiers construe the idea of maximum intensity of the negative values that Paulo attributes to his visual experience, which, in my own view, is also marked by parallelism, that is, the repeated use of intensifiers renders Paulo's text a strong, steady rhythm. Martin and White (2005:20) assert that the use of intensifiers (intensification), "makes a bigger splash which reverberates through the surrounding discourse."

It reminds me of 2007 Britney Spears.

To Paulo, “2007 Britney Spears” is the ugliest picture he has ever seen. On the night of February 20, 2007, shortly after checking into a rehab center, then 25-year-old American singer Britney Spears attacked a paparazzo’s car with an umbrella only days after shaving her head. Below is an explanation of the shocking nature of the photographs of the incident involving Britney Spears:

> Images of a wide-eyed Spears bald as the day she was born, gritting her teeth, are memorable not only because they are visually jarring when compared to her polished pop-star looks, but due to the nature of the act itself.
>
> *Stephanie Marcus for the Huffpost*

The shocking photographs of Spears’ meltdown soon turned into an “inspirational meme” which marked the pop culture scene at the time and in the following years. This incident intrigued her fans in that Spears displayed a sudden irrational behavior even though she had been displaying strange behavior and spiraling down for quite some time in her personal life and in her career:



Credit to: Huffpost Brazil

(http://www.huffpostbrasil.com/entry/britney-spears-shaved-her-head-ten-yearsago_us_58a5cff6e4b07602ad525d50)5fdde280000c63a999562.jpeg

Eventually, Spears apologized to her fans: “I apologize to the pap for a stunt that was done four months ago regarding an umbrella,” she wrote on her website (People Magazine, July 7, 2007).

People at the time did not quite understand Britney’s sudden rage. Having become a meme, however, Britney’s images flooded the web and most people who have been online for a while have seen it whether they wanted to or not, whether they knew the story behind it or not. From this point of view, however, even if one has never heard the story behind Spears’ meltdown and its causes, her image clearly evokes feelings of shame, embarrassment, and bewilderment. It seems evident that to find a reasonable explanation for the photograph he has chosen, Paulo refers back to a familiar image which renders a striking metaphor, which in turn encapsulates the following stances: Affect, judgment, and appreciation: Thus, the analysis of the ‘Britney Spears metaphor’ must be broken down into the following evoked stances:

1. **Affect:**

Spears’ breakdown was embarrassing both to herself and to those who watched her. Taking into account this context, embarrassment might be equivalent to the Portuguese expression “ter vergonha alheia,” an idiom which is widely used by teenagers. Its English equivalent is “feel secondhand embarrassment,” which is “the personal embarrassment one feels on account of and for another” (“Secondhand embarrassment,” defl, Urban dictionary online). Paulo’s attitude does not seem to be circumscribed to the object alone, but to himself as well. In conclusion, Paulo’s embarrassment is evoked, that is, implicitly expressed through this metaphor.

2. Judgment:

2.1. Judgment of Social esteem:

Perhaps there is some room for humor as the scene of a bald pop singer attacking a paparazzo with an umbrella at a gas station may resemble familiar comedy movie scenes, and in the eyes of a teenager, it may be appropriate to laugh at it or make jokes about it.

2.2. Judgment of sanction

Contradictory though it may sound, Paulo may be implying that attacking a journalist, or anyone, with an umbrella is an offence punishable by law and morally wrong.

3. Appreciation:

As the photographs and the media coverage of the incident attest, a "wide-eyed
Spears bald as the day she was born, gritting her teeth" was definitely an unsightly image.

Having said that, it seems reasonable to affirm that Paulo may have referred to Spears' 2007 photograph to negatively evaluate the photograph he selected as being as 'ugly as Britney Spears.'

The author of this image must be a virgin that still lives with his mom

Paulo also wonders about who the author of the image, that is, who the photographer, is. "It must be a virgin who still lives with his mom," Paulo says. He does not, however, affirm that he 'is,' but that 'he 'must' be a virgin. Probably Paulo is not sure about anything. Paulo knows it is definitely a man who still lives with 'his' mom. This metaphor might refer to Hitchcock's movie Psycho (1961), in which Norman Bates, an enigmatic (and supposedly) virgin man, still lives with his mom in a secluded motel. Might the author be a psycho, an insane older man?

More likely, Paulo's text seems to be shouting rather than negotiating his viewpoints with his reader. The use of intensifiers and the exclamation marks that close his narrative of his photograph attests to Paulo's strongly negative attitude towards the image, as said before. Paulo might be in fact allowing his reader to consider other alternatives to his proposition.

However, in this context, “must” should be perceived as (1) Paulo’s subjectivity which might translate into: “This is what I think;” (2) and as a token of certainty, meaning “Take my word for it,” or “Trust me.”

As we delve more deeply into Paulo’s choices of lexis and grammar, we may note Paulo’s use of modality, either through the use of modals or through the use of lexical modality. In the same way that he “thinks” it is the ugliest picture he has ever seen, he chooses to assume that the author of this photograph ‘must’ be a virgin who still lives with his mother. Why does Paulo choose ‘think’ and ‘must?’

A word about modality before we conclude this analysis: Modality is about the speaker’s or writer’s judgment or stance towards an event and is “grounded in the moment of speaking, at the point Now” (LEWIS, 2002:102), for the speaker’s judgment may change over time, as it is intrinsically subjective and context-sensitive.

Considering Paulo’s stretch of discourse and the prosodic nature of interpersonal meaning, “I think” makes it clear that it is Paulo’s subjectivity and authorial persona, or identity, that is being construed. Paulo probably means: “This is me saying this to you.” By the same token, besides expressing Paulo’s subjectivity, the pure modal “must” in “…must be a virgin that still lives with his mother” might indicate that it is one proposition among many potential others, thus giving the reader space to refute his proposition by opening up “dialogic spaces for any such alternative” (MARTIN AND WHITE, 2005:110).

Parallel to that, for Martin and White (2005), the use of the modal “must” to refer to the author of the image may be interpreted as Paulo’s uncertainty and tentativeness regarding his knowledge of a fact. On the other hand, ‘must’ may communicate his authority over his own judgment of the fact, which seems more probable if we assume that Paulo has created a coherent e cohesive text in which “semantic relationships are construed above and beyond those construed by the grammatical structure --- but still using lexicogrammatical resources” (HALLIDAY,1993:107).

The Punctum emerges…

It's so bad I don't even want to look at it.

At first glance one might wonder why Paulo has chosen an image that he hates. Paulo's subjectivity is clearly expressed by the verb "want" in "I don't even want to look at it," in which Paulo exercises his agency in not looking at the image. However, it seems clear that it is precisely his negative appreciation, that is, its ugliness, and consequently, his aversion to this photograph, that is the Punctum. Even though he has not been asked to indicate it at this point, he has been struck by it, and that is why he must not remain indifferent to his photograph. However, where exactly is the Punctum in this image?

Can Paulo see the Punctum? Barthes (1980:45) contends that "however 'lightning-like' it may be, the Punctum has, more or less potentially, a power of expansion" (1980:45). We may say that, in principle, Paulo cannot see the Punctum, nor can he refrain from taking negative and critical stances towards the object in the image. This is so because the Punctum has expanded and taken over the entire object. The entire photograph pricks him; it is what he refers to as 'that,' 'it,' and 'this image.'

It is in this split second that the Punctum emerges and here it is. This is where Paulo's text shifts dramatically: If we look attentively at the image that Paulo has chosen, we may discover the head of an animal with short ears; we may even think it has the shape of a head, but this image is not about what we can see: The question is, what is Paulo looking at, or rather, what does Paulo not want to look at? Might it be Britney Spears' face that Paulo does not want to see?

Barthes (1980:34) wonders about "what makes a face into the product of a society and its history." He contends that photography is "outside of meaning," and therefore it cannot signify, or "aim at generality." It is only when it assumes a 'mask' that it signifies. It is when its meaning is absolutely pure that it achieves an essence, a "different meaning from the literal one (1980:38). To use Barthes' words, the essence of everything that Paulo despises is "laid bare" to Paulo, and all of it is contained in the head-like shape of the image. To Paulo, to look at the Punctum is to see what he hates the most.

I'm emberressed (sic)!!

One last but nonetheless important point that must be made is that Paulo could have chosen to say that the photograph embarrasses him or that it is embarrassing, but he has chosen to say that he is embarrassed (by it). Paulo's blunt statement reveals a great deal about him as a spectator of the event which we might name "looking at an image." Martin and White (2005:50) assert that choosing one lexical item over others involves "grading the depth of feeling." Paulo's choice of the verb 'be' + the participial adjective "embarrassed" reveals that not only is the image embarrassing but that he is deeply affected by it; the image suffuses the entirety of his being.

It is reasonable to assume that Paulo's conclusion resonates with what may be referred to as the evaluation (LABOV, 1997), whose function is to evaluate the personal narrative and is typical of the personal narrative genre. Here, Paulo assesses his feelings, and having made his points about the photograph and having described it using modals and metaphors, he now dislocates his gaze from the image onto himself and concludes with a rather short and poignant confessional statement about the way he feels about it.

In Barthes' words, a photograph is violent in that it "fills the sight by force because in it nothing can be refused or transformed" (1980:91). Paulo's uneasiness is clearly distributed throughout his text in the same way in which the Punctum has expanded all over his photograph. This may be due to the force of the photograph, which lies in the fact that "it is never distinguished from its referent," that is, from the object it represents (BARTHES: 1980:5), hence the undeniably strong presence of what Paulo despises the most.

What follows is Paulo's second reading of Photograph 1, A really bad image. When revisiting the image, Paulo has the chance to elaborate on it further and thus gives us the chance to delve more deeply into his subjectivity. Note that Paulo draws a flower in his text, which gives us further reflections on the use of different types of images to construct meaning and our subjectivity.

PHOTOGRAPH 1: A really bad image

PEPA 2:

"I ***like*** the colour, and I also like  *but* ***I don't*** like this picture! Why is that so? Socrates is ***still trying*** *to figure it out*. ***No,*** I ***wouldn't*** use this picture because I ***wouldn't know*** what or what to use for. And I ***don't even*** know what that is. (…) In conclusion, this picture is ***not*** good to start any topic ***at all***. A good topic could be ***vocabulary of guessing***. Grammar: ***I think that, it could be, in my opinion, it might be***."

Paulo

When revisiting the image in the second PEPA, Paulo is asked to indicate the Punctum, which he does by assigning it to the colors. Perhaps he diligently indicates the Punctum as he has been asked to do; however, his reading of the image markedly shifts when he realizes that he does not like the picture because he **still** does not understand it. His lack of understanding surfaces in "Why is that so?" "Perhaps it is the shape, the Punctum for Paulo in his first encounter with this photograph, that Paulo does not understand. Has the Punctum changed? However, "while remaining a detail, it (still) fills the whole picture" (BARTHES, 1980:45).

In his first encounter with this image, Paulo provided his reader with a hint, or in other words, a clear reference to what he hated about it, even though he could not name it. He still cannot.

What permeates his text is a "splash" of negative adverbs (***no*** and **not**) and intensifiers (**still**, **even**), which at first might indicate a strong aversion to this image, but in truth, it indicates that it is Paulo's lack of understanding of the image that stirs him to loathe it: he "doesn't like "it; he wouldn't use it; he "wouldn't know" what to use it for; he doesn't even know what to use it for; it's not good to start any topic at all.

These are the words that Paulo chooses to convey his negative affect towards the image as well as his subjectivity and agency. He is desolated, hopeless. His image is a desolate place, which in Latin means “an uninhabited place.”

For a deeper understanding of Paulo’s desolation, it is necessary to refer to Barthes’ construct of the truth in a photograph. For Barthes, a photograph “accomplishes the unheard-of identification of ‘reality’ (that-has-been) and truth (there-she-is); it becomes at once evidential and exclamative; it bears the effigy to that crazy point where affect (love, compassion, grief, enthusiasm, desire) is a guarantee of being” (1980:113).

What we seek in a photograph is this dichotomy. Paulo is certain that the referent, that is, the object in this photograph exists, as photography “offers an immediate presence to the world” (1980:84), but he cannot exclaim: “there it is!” How is it possible that he cannot understand something that is right before his eyes? We have already discussed what Paulo does not like in this photograph. Now we shall turn the focus of our attention to what he likes about it.

Paulo asserts that he likes the color. He also likes ‘flowers’ as he engraves them onto his text by drawing a flower. Drawings are abstractions (WYSOCKI, 2004) as they represent an idea rather than the object itself. Yet, they present only what is relevant, and to Paulo, the ‘engraved’ single flower represents an idealized image, precisely what he would expect from his photograph, and precisely what he cannot find in it. This photograph does not meet his expectations of what an image of a garden or a plant should look like.

The Punctum is there, but Paulo still cannot see or understand even though he may have already seen it, and yet, he refused to see it. This is where he feels trapped. For him, the Punctum may still be the face-like shape/Britney Spears’ face of the object, or it may now be something else, but he cannot see it, and neither can Socrates, whom commonsense judges to be endowed with extraordinary reasoning skills, and therefore, should be able to explain what this image is.

Curiously, Paulo seeks Socrates’ endorsement, which translates into a dialogic relationship with his reader, as he relies on shared world

knowledge and as an apology for not being able to say what this image is. Is he perhaps apologizing to me as his teacher or as his reader? “I am sorry,” he seems to be saying. This insight tells me, both as a teacher and researcher, that no subjectivity exists independently of affect. Obvious though it may sound, it helps me understand the interpersonal function of texts, a “process by which positions of potential alignment between writer and reader are constructed” (MARTIN AND WHITE, 2005:211). It is through shared world knowledge that Paulo tries to justify his failure in completing his task and gain the reader’s empathy, or perhaps his teacher’s. Since he does not feel he has the authority over his teacher, he seeks someone who does.

Paulo’s text is therefore a desolate place or a place of desolation; it is an uninhabited place which bears no truth for him. He concludes that there is nothing left to do except admit that he has been defeated by the photograph, as it has turned itself into a sphynx, a riddle that Paulo has failed to answer. As a solution for this conundrum, Paulo provides a list of useful phrases to help him deal with it, but in fact, what Paulo does is allow himself to ask questions again through this list of phrases so that he can come to terms with the fact that he does not know and accept that there may not be a correct answer.

In view of this, differently from his first text, Paulo seems to be using modality not to claim his subjectivity or his authority over his own judgment of the fact. In his text, Paulo uses modality to offer the reader --- and himself as well, “a number of potential dialogistic alternatives (MARTIN AND WHITE, 2005:106). Not only does he allow himself to ask questions, but he also wants to engage his reader and invite him or her to join him in this enterprise.

Having said all that, this question remains without an answer: What pricks Paulo now? For Barthes, ‘unary’ photographs “transform reality without doubling it (…) no duality, no disturbance, no indirection” (1980:41). There is no Punctum, no disturbance, no wound. This photograph, nonetheless, is anything but ‘unary’ for Paulo. He has seen it twice and whether the Punctum hides in its contour or whether it completely blurs his vision, this photograph certainly bruises him.

Having gained a deeper understanding of how Paulo's affect, judgment, and appreciation have been woven into his text, we can see it is his lack of understanding, or what he cannot see, that pricks him. Once again, as it happened in his first encounter, the Punctum has expanded and "filled" the entire photograph, and for this reason, Paulo still cannot understand it. It is impossible, however, to affirm to what extent it wounds him, for only Paulo can speak for himself.

What follows is the analysis of the photograph selected by Alice, who participated in the first PEPA, and for this reason, only one text was produced.

7.3.
PHOTOGRAPH 2: Behind the Song

> "I am delighted (or depressed) to know that the thing of the past, by its immediate radiations (its luminances), has really touched the surface which in its turn my gaze will touch"
>
> (BARTHES, 1980:81)

PEPA 1:

"I chose this image because I think it's a better way to **represent** music; it shows where **it comes from**: **ink and paper**.

I think that the author wanted to **show** that, how music is '**made**,' the sound **in a sheet of paper** --- **crazy, isn't it**? He also wanted to show all the complexity **behind** it.

This image can show the work of a musician or **the first time a child got in touch with the song**. It **shows** the '**notas** (?)' and the lyrics that **form** this song."

Alice

While Paulo's texts are filled with affect and judgment, as he expresses his doubts and desolation, Alice's text is filled with affect and appreciation: Her image speaks of discovery and wonder; it does not conceal anything. On the contrary, it shows, it can show, and it wants to show her something. However, this is not to say that Alice is not puzzled by what she sees. "Crazy, isn't it?" --- she wonders.

Therefore, differently from Paulo's photograph, Alice's photograph is a place of discovery. While Paulo's photograph fails to meet his expectations despite his painstaking efforts to understand it, Alice works on the scaffolding of her own thoughts so that she can finally gain a thorough understanding of her photograph.

At first, Alice's photograph is "a better way to represent music," but she wants to see beyond the object-referent dichotomy. This is to say that Alice is aware that it is the photograph, and not the photographed object itself, which attempts to represent what music is. It is immediately clear that Alice is aware of the intent of her photograph: it represents something as she skims through it and writes: "…it (This photograph) is a better way to represent music."

As Alice's text unfolds, Alice's focus of attention shifts to the musical notes and where they come from: "ink and paper." However, Alice is not simply describing an object. She is aesthetically engaged with it through her choice of words to describe the photograph and music: Alice chose this image not because it is a good way to represent music; she chose it because it is a better way to represent it. To Alice, this image represents "all its complexity," meaning that music is complex; "ink and paper," meaning that despite its complexity, music can be rather simple.

We have seen that Alice's text expresses appreciation throughout her description of what music is. However, Alice's question is central to her understanding of her photograph and the object it represents as it points to her understandings of what this photograph is or does:

- I think **it**'s a better way to represent music;
- "**it shows** where it comes from: ink and paper."

- “I think that **the author wanted to show** that, how music is ‘made,’ the sound in a sheet of paper --- crazy, isn’t it?
- **He also wanted to show** all the complexity behind it.
- **This image** can show the work of a musician or the first time a child got in touch with the song. It shows the ‘notas (?)’ and the lyrics that form this song.”

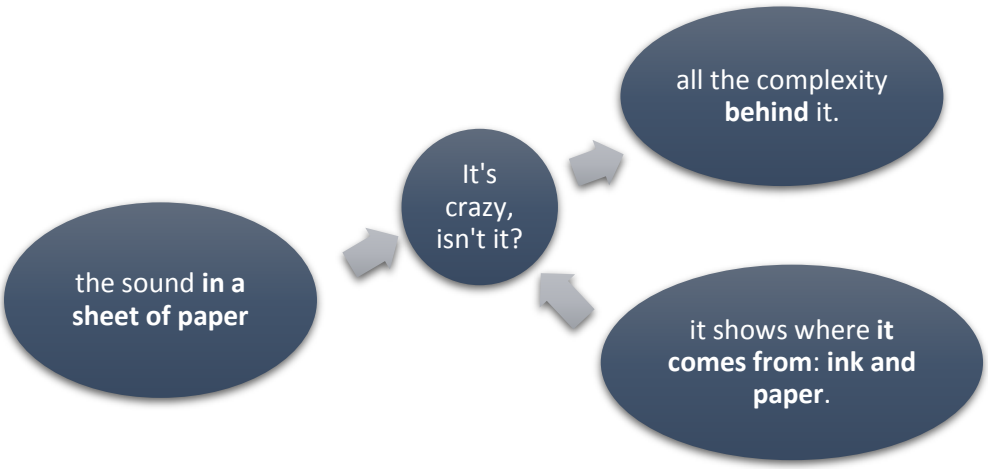
On equal terms, her question points to her understandings of what music is based on what she sees in the photograph:

- what music is made of**: ink and paper**;
- where music comes from: **the sound in a sheet of paper**;
- is its complex nature**: all the complexity behind it;**
- the fact that it is created: **the work of a musician.**

“Crazy, isn’t it?” --- Alice asks herself as she gazes in awe at the notes lying flat on the sheet of paper. Apparently, this may seem to be the only instance of affect in Alice’s text in that she lets the reader know that the object in this photograph makes her wonder and affects her in some way. “I am in awe,” she might as well say. However, a more detailed analysis will indicate how subjectivity, agency, affect, judgment, and appreciation are interwoven in her text. It may also be noted that another fundamental question has not been answered yet: What pricks Alice and how does the Punctum emerge in her text? In view of this, what follows is an attempt to answer these three questions.

First and foremost, we can observe that Alice’s subjectivity is present throughout her text, and so is her agency. Alice “chose the image,” Alice “thinks and Alice wonders. It can be argued that “in order to move from its reality to its photograph it is in no way necessary to divide up this reality into units and constitute these units as signs, substantially different from the object they try to communicate” (BARTHES, 1977:17). It could be argued, however, that Alice re-signifies what Barthes refers to as the uncoded, “continuous message” of photographs by assigning layers of meanings to what she sees. In this respect, Alice takes ownership of her photograph when she gives it meaning that goes beyond what is visible.

However, does Alice feel? We have seen that she does feel awe when she realizes that music "is the sound in a sheet of paper." What she does is an epistemological enquiry about what music is. Curiously, Paulo does the same when confronted with his photograph. "What is it?" they both ask themselves --- and the reader obviously must engage in their quest. It is evident that Alice's realization about where music comes from: "ink and paper" and that "music is sound in a sheet of paper" has sparked a question, which in turn has sparked affect across her description of music because she is no less surprised when she realizes how complex music is. Interestingly, Alice's sense of wonder and discovery is "distributed" throughout her text, as the diagram below illustrates:



Alice's gaze then turns away to the work of a musician, but through the conjunction 'or,' she gives the reader another alternative to look at: "This image can show the work of a musician **or** the first time a child got in touch with the song. By doing this, Alice acknowledges the different possible interpretations of her photograph, thus allowing the reader to choose one or the other, or perhaps both.

Alice's photograph now unfolds into two different images: She speaks of possibility and ability through the modal 'can,' thus rendering her image a pathway to a range of meanings, all of which are connected by affect, for the work of a musician is not a lesser metaphor for affect: Our shared knowledge of the world, and perhaps, our experiences as music learners

probably lead us to perceive it as a powerful metaphor of one's love, passion, resignation, and patient, hard work to create sound out of ink and paper for a child, whose first contact with the song may bring about profound changes in him or her. From the genesis of music to the child seeing it for the first time, Alice constructs a narrative of subjectivity expressed mainly through affect and appreciation.

We may also note that the path she chooses is built up as she moves forward deeper into her own self. It means that her departure point is a more general description of the image and gradually she positions herself as a guide leading the reader to see music through her eyes, which contrasts with Paulo's obstinate refusal to look at his photograph. Alice, on the other hand, accepts hers wholeheartedly.

To look at Alice's photograph through her eyes, I referred to the first chapter in which I reminisced about my memories and my first contact with the English language and the photographs of my cousin. Therefore, it is reasonable to affirm that the metaphor of the child's first contact with the song encapsulates Alice's sense of wonder expressed in "crazy, isn't it?" Towards the end of her text, Alice moves more deeply towards her emotions and feelings through her choice of words: 'child,' first time,' 'song,' all of which are loaded with symbolic meanings related to affect: How does a child feel when he or she gets in touch with a song or music for the first time? Is this perhaps the Punctum for Alice?

I have sought the answer in my former self as I reminisced about my own childhood and how I felt when I wrote my first English words. An array of feelings come to mind, and it is possible that the same happened to Alice as she wrote those words. In her attempts to construct meaning out of a still image, Alice cannot but choose the path of affect and resort to her own experiences to fulfill her need for meaning, as we all do in all aspects of our lives. Nothing that we do, say or hear is void of emotions or feelings, in other words, affect.

"A photograph's Punctum is that accident that pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me" (BARTHES, 1980:27). It is not possible to ascertain the emotional load attributed to the metaphor of the child who gets in touch with music for the first time, and to what extent it pricks her;

however, it is arguable that she has turned her gaze away from the image to seek her own life references to construct and stamp her own meanings onto the image, but where exactly does the Punctum emerge in her text?

The Punctum may be that place of remembrance represented by the child's first contact with a song; that moment when the child discovers that music is sound in a sheet of paper and exclaims: "There it is!" "Crazy, isn't it?" Maybe to Alice, this photograph gave her "an involuntary and complete memory" (BARTHES, 1980:70), just an accident, an unexpected event, a surprise. And she can see that now through the child's eyes that the lyrics are curiously attached to the musical notes; the child realizes that the lyrics make the music easier to read. Is Alice the child?

"Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not what we see" (BARTHES, 1980:6). However, to Alice, her photograph is not completely invisible, and she knows it is trying to tell her a story through the object it represents. Nonetheless, while Paulo realizes that his photograph will not give away its story, hence his frustration towards not only the object represented, but also towards the photograph that represents it, Alice discovers the various elements in her photograph and 'divides' them up into units to (re)signify them.

To signify them means to transform them into meaningful elements of a narrative, and to re-signify them means to de-construct the photograph's "continuous" meaning and create different meanings which help her create her own narrative. Once together, the musical notes and the lyrics acquire meaning for the child she once may have been, or perhaps, to the child she still is as she finds herself in front of her photograph.

One last point that needs to be made is that for both Paulo and Alice, it is their photographs that render the crude materials with which they construct their stories. From this perspective, every photograph is a personal, unique narrative and it would be useless to try to compare Paulo and Alice because even though images may "trigger" or "evoke" feelings and memories, it is their experiences that define whether their stories will be sad, happy, or anything in between.

For Barthes, the Punctum is invested with emotions that hurt when we least expect it, while the Studium translates into our sympathetic interest in a photograph. Alice chose her image because she may have a keen interest in music, but she may not have foreseen the child, perhaps the child herself, to emerge out of the musical notes and the song lyrics in her photograph. “By the mark of something, the photograph is no longer anything whatever” (BARTHES, 1980:49). Nonetheless, for the child to emerge, she must have summoned her at some point. What we need to look for is the precise point in which she looked at her photograph through the eyes of a child, as if seeing music for the first time.

For Barthes, the Punctum is best revealed when we are no longer looking at the photograph. It is an absolute state of subjectivity and the realization that the Punctum is what we “add to the photograph and nonetheless is already there” (BARTHES, 1980:55). There it was, and she saw it: “The sound in a sheet of paper---- crazy, isn’t it?” which expresses the way she feels: She is bewildered by what she sees and by what she will see next. ‘Serendipity’ is the word that best describes what Alice experiences when she looks at her photograph. It means to find something valuable by chance. In this case, what would have been an ordinary photograph of musical notes on a sheet of paper gradually acquires new contours and becomes an image of the genesis of music --- and the, ultimately, the child who discovers it through Alice’s eyes.

Whether a photograph be about love or repulse, whether it be about understanding or lack of it, inevitably, it carries us back to somewhere in ourselves (BARTHES, 1980) because it is our eyes that look at it and it is ourselves that we seek in it.

7.4. Insights on Exploratory Practice and us

As discussed in the introduction, learners have storied selves that cannot be dissociated from their selves in the classroom, so they are encouraged to share their stories and experiences during ordinary

pedagogic activities. Naturally, these interactions help us all --- myself included, connect with one another.

McAdams (2001) reminds us of the importance of helping children share their stories as a way for them to engage in “co-constructing their past experience in conversation with adults” (2001:105). Exploratory Practice can give us an opportunity to scaffold our students in the same way by giving them a chance to organize past events and their many-selves into one narrative and thus appropriate it as their own. In this context, a PEPA can contribute significantly to our students view of themselves as agents of their narratives.

What my students brought into their photographs in a simple routine classroom task involving images gives us a clearer idea of the impact of affect and subjectivity, as well as judgment and appreciation, on the way they experience learning. Understanding it was only possible because we all fostered principles such as collaborating, sharing, learning together, and connecting with others in their lives, and not only in the classroom. What my students shared with me and their peers was a part of their selves, and in this regard, it is fundamental for teachers and students to ground their work on solid ethics and solidarity.

However, I did not like the images my students chose. They were not me. This made me wonder whether they appreciated the images I brought them, and this provoked some disturbance (BARTHES, 1981), which was productive for my research, as I was now being faced with a necessary puzzle:

Why do these images cause some disturbance?

It may be assumed that new puzzles emerge during the implementation of the PEPA or perhaps prior to it or immediately after it. Nonetheless, new puzzles may emerge during the analysis and they should be addressed. It must be made clear, however, that they ‘should,’ be and not ‘must’ be addressed. It may be the case that they should be saved for another research project.

However, it is important to set priorities and assess whether new puzzles will positively or negatively affect the practitioner's quality of life, one of the most essential principles of Exploratory Practice. Simply thinking about the reasons why I did not like the photographs my students chose helped me understand my own motivations behind my choices of images. As I explored my students' texts and realized their motivations and life stories, I could understand the meaning of those images for them.

Another important aspect of Exploratory Practice refers to quality of life in the classroom. I might add that it expands into our lives out there because to understand how my students behave --- and the reasons why they behave in certain ways in the classroom, helps me build empathy for others, as I understand them as unique, complex individuals.

While I do not feel compelled to change things for control's sake anymore, I am now aware that my students are not --- and have never been, *controllable*. Rather, the classroom is a collective enterprise whose outcomes may be rather surprising and unexpected. There may be times when I need to understand. Anyone who has been teaching for as long as I have, may have long left their puzzles aside for the sake of their teaching. They have lost their faculty of wonder and curiosity as they may have gotten used to classroom life. This is to say that they may have stopped paying attention to the right-here-right-now experience of being in a classroom. One should never lose one's capacity to be amazed by ordinary life events.

8.
Reflections: The missing puzzle pieces (dis)connecting us

Go and open the door.
Maybe a dog's rummaging
Maybe you'll see a face,
or an eye,
or the picture
of a picture.

Miroslav Holub

I have opened the door to Exploratory Practice and it has been an incredible journey. When I set out to do research under the principles of Exploratory Practice, I knew that I would have to let go some of the teaching habits that I had formed during many years of practice. I knew that I would have to let go of my need for control. Because I had always strived to listen to my students and although I had always tried to give them opportunities to listen and to be listened to by their peers and me, I had assumed that I knew my students well enough. After having delved deeply into their texts and having read what they wrote, I am aware that my students are too trying to gain an understanding of who they are. I am aware that I am still claiming and reclaiming my identities when I am teaching. Still, there are many questions that have been left unanswered. However, research has helped me gain far more understandings than I could have fathomed. The first one being an understanding of some key words and concepts from the theory.

My grandmother was a skilled pianist and seamstress. She knitted and did crochet, but above all, she was a fantastic storyteller. I will always remember her for the wondrous stories she told us as she made tiny knit stitches with her practiced hands. I did not know at the time that she was stitching her stories together with mine. Writing my story through the lenses of autoethnography helped me understand why I became a teacher of English as a foreign language. Autoethnography also helped me understand the meaning of the word 'epiphany' as I discovered the importance of my grandmother and my father not only in my life, but also in my teaching practice.

I also used the word ‘serendipity’ to describe Alice’s moment of discovery, but I too had a chance to experience it when writing a narrative of my own photographs. This is a word that does not exist in the Portuguese language, and by the same token, I might just as well use ‘saudade,’ a word that does not exist in the English language, to accurately describe my experience revisiting the images in my life, for only they can tell me who I was when I was seven years old. In fact, it was my self-as-a-seven-year-old whom I had been seeking all the time. In Barthes’ own words, those photographs carried me “back to somewhere in myself” (BARTHES, 1981:40).

To achieve that, I had to move beyond the random American imagery as the locus of meaning to walk a labyrinth in search of understanding. Interestingly, unlike a maze, a labyrinth has no dead ends and it is not designed to make one get lost. On the contrary, a labyrinth is designed to help one discover oneself. Barthes (1980:73) too walked a labyrinth and he knew that at the center he would not find truth, but the one and only picture of his mother that “constituted the *thread* that drew him toward Photography:” The Winter Garden Photograph.

Unlike Barthes, though, I did not find one photograph, but a thread of images interwoven with stories that I unraveled as I penetrated the labyrinth, and it suddenly dawned on me that every American image that I searched for was “the picture of a picture” of me. For this reason, I found myself wondering about the reasons why I did not like the photographs my students had chosen. They did not resemble anything familiar. The images my students had chosen, in principle, seemed to disconnect us. However, when I started reading their texts, I understood all their richness, and even though the photographs they wrote about had not been dug out of a dusty family photo album, as it had been my case, they too elaborated on their own feelings and emotions. They also drew on their life stories to build a narrative for those photographs. In a sense, they led me to the center of their labyrinths.

It was thus surprising to see so much meaning emerging from the images and through my students’ texts. However, it took me a while to perceive these meanings. As Barthes (1980) puts it, we want meaning, but

we tend to mistrust pure meaning. When the meaning of a photograph is too impressive, or explicit, it is consumed aesthetically. When it is not, it is consumed politically. What my students had in their hands were photographs whose meanings were not overtly explicit, and yet, they were pure meaning. Despite the colors, contours, and details, the photographs did not always give my students what they wanted, so they searched for meaning within themselves in order to understand their selves both from a diachronic and from a synchronic perspective.

Interestingly, our stories were so uniquely diverse that I was afraid I would not be able to put the data together to answer my puzzle questions. All I could (not) see were the missing puzzle pieces. Nonetheless, what I had failed to see was the fact that because our stories were so inherently unique, they fit perfectly together because they were narratives of our life stories. In view of this, this research opens up for a key understanding about how people put their life stories together when interacting with images.

Having said that, understanding is ultimately about acceptance and it is an understanding of the EFL classroom as a space which encompasses all human experience beyond the limitations of the present time that I hope to bring to light in this study. The EFL classroom is a space where one's past memories and emotions --- as well as one's idealized future selves, can emerge out of simple activities involving the use of images. This is what Hanks refers to as 'elegant simplicity' (2005:6). Keeping Hanks' concept in mind, images are useful for teachers and learners to explore affect in the classroom and to scaffold students to narrate their own stories. There is no need to plan complex PEPAS to make language learning meaningful to students and teachers.

In short, we all learned together that images are products that are produced, circulated, and consumed. Ultimately, they are semiotic resources with a meaning potential (VAN LEEUWEN, 2004) and that whatever meanings we construct are based on affect. I learned that a simple classroom task involving images can yield rich discussions on several topics, including affect, life stories, and images as semiotic resources in themselves.

To conclude, understanding affect is crucial to our well-being in the classroom and seeing our learners as whole beings is possible when we see ourselves in a different light. For this reason, practitioner researchers should be invested in working for understanding not only their students, but themselves as well, and include their own puzzles in their research, since we are all storied selves and "our stories are set in a particular time and place and involve characters that act on their desires and beliefs over time" (McADAMS, 2001:105). Understanding why I became a teacher and why I use American images helped me "locate and define my self within my ongoing life story" (McADAMS, 2001:107).

Yet, there is still a lot that can be done to integrate the use of images with work for understanding in Exploratory Practice. In truth, I still have a long way to go along towards a deeper understanding of the Appraisal system (MARTIN AND WHITE, 2005) and its implications for written texts about images, namely stortytelling, an area of knowledge into which I would like to delve more deeply. In the light of the latest technological advances involved in the production, circulation, and consumption of online images by EFL learners, the need for research in visual literacy and multimodality has become more urgent and relevant for practitioner researchers and educators to understand how we interact with images in EFL contexts. It is also crucial to view them, not only as language learning tools, but as tools with the potential to tap into our feelings and emotions, and thus enrich our experience of teaching and learning.

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