

'La quotidianità': issues on everyday life

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Bringing routine and new elements to life

Everyday life: wouldn't this be a boring subject? Today, this word can sound a bit old fashioned – in a context that focuses on speed and on what is new. Everyday life doesn't shine, and in education parents' expectations tend to focus on specific activities or projects with experts, as if only these moments would bring some kind of extraordinary learning achievement.

Both news and repetition are the two complementary aspects of everyday life. An unexpected moment becomes interesting thanks to the routine in which it takes shape. And the routine gets reorganised thanks to the unexpected moments that occur. If unexpected moments continuously come one after the other, news would become a habit and it would lose its meaning. When looked at more closely however, the difference between "everyday life" and "extraordinary moments" becomes less clear.

In the routine of childcare centres and kindergartens special things occur unexpectedly all the time. How can we capture these moments and give them back to the parents? Developmental theories and all the theoretical knowledge that supports pedagogy, become real in everyday life. How can we recognise them in daily routine and how can we make them more visible?

Building pedagogical documentation

First of all we have to carefully train our way of looking. We have to become more sensitive to small things – a gesture, a position, something that happens for the first time.

And here pedagogical documentation has a role: it transforms the content of what we observe in a concrete object. It is the mediator that allows us to communicate and share.

But to make sure that the message can be received, we need the right language. The relationship between content and shape is circular, rather than linear. Shape helps in defining the content, and a specific content can be expressed by certain shapes and not others.

More specifically, each language has its own grammar and rules. Taking pictures, making videos, graphics... they all need specific competences that are not really part of the job of practitioners / teachers (although documentation is now an essential part of this job in Italy). How can we link documentation to the specific competences that it needs?

A good starting point is being aware of the complexity that defines the role of practitioner/teacher and of the need to deal with this complexity with specific tools. Getting to

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vuole portare in giro ...**



... i servizi dell'infanzia della Cooperativa Sociale Labirinto

Abbiamo preso dalla pratica educativa dei servizi sei pensieri: cura, quotidianità, meraviglia, serietà, scoperta, semplicità. Saranno questi, attraverso i linguaggi della riflessione, della poesia, delle immagini, della grafica, ad accompagnarci in questa visita.

Semplicità



Cura



Quotidianità



Scoperta



Serietà



Meraviglia



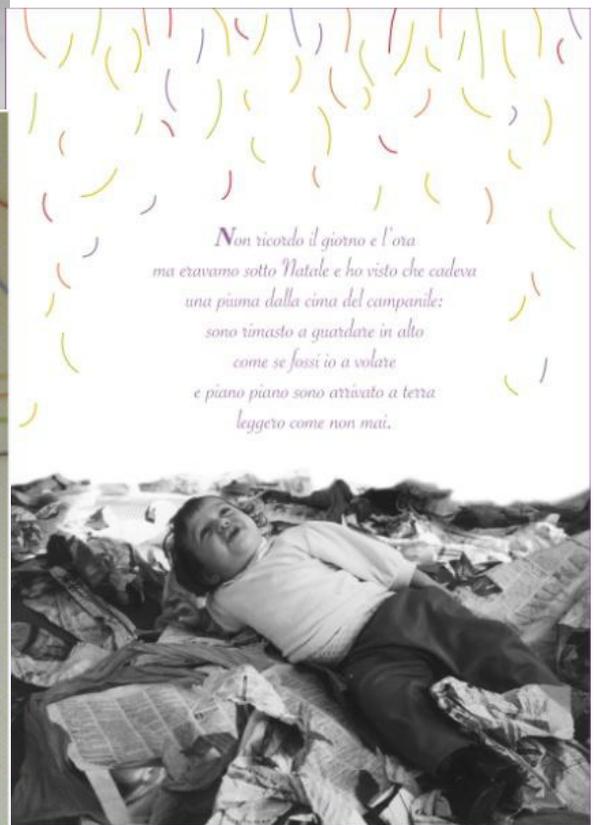


know the different languages that can be used becomes essential then, and it can be stimulated in many ways: from the choices of the pedagogical coordinators – for example through training courses about graphics or photography – to the increasing sensitivity of each practitioner/teacher towards what happens in everyday life.

Our “visual grammar” can be built gradually by developing attention and curiosity towards every kind of communication – books, reviews and websites. What do we like and what not? Why? Which elements make a photo frame readable? Why is a certain picture confusing? Which parts capture the eyes and which doesn't?

At the same time, observing the context in which documentation will take shape and the conditions that will define it (Who is it for? How often will it be prepared?) will give us useful indications to take into account. What kind of spaces is available? What are the characteristics of the spaces and which graphic languages can be used there? Large boards with pictures are very often used. They are definitely effective, but sometimes they are also used too often or too easily, while we can explore many other possibilities: projections, digital frames, videos, surfaces on the ceiling, paths on the floor.

A last aspect to take into account is the relationship between everyday documentation and the other documentation of the childcare centre / school. All the communicative aspects should indeed be in harmony with each other, with complementary meanings and a coherent way to expressing them.



*Non ricordo il giorno e l'ora
ma eravamo sotto Natale e ho visto che cadeva
una piuma dalla cima del campanile:
sono rimasto a guardare in alto
come se fossi io a volare
e piano piano sono arrivato a terra
leggero come non mai.*

The Labirinto experience

Trying to hold these parts together is a complex job, requiring a research attitude. Some years ago I took part in an interesting experience on this matter, which can serve as a good example here. Gina Lacomucci, the coordinator of the Organization (Cooperativa Sociale) Labirinto from Pesaro (Italy), asked the pedagogists of their childcare centres to create an object that could represent the services, showing everyday life, but also the idea of education that supports the interpretation and the choices that are made day by day.

At the beginning the work was done on two parallel levels: one related to the "content", by collecting theoretical materials and defining what needed to be expressed, and another related to the "shape", observing graphic materials and trying to identify the best elements to shape the content. But these two levels intertwined rather quickly in the process: once content is established, the choice of the pictures represents at the same time an aesthetic and a semantic matter.

Right after the choice, some visual aspects arose: the position of the picture in the page, the relationship of the picture with the text, colour or black and white ... linking research moments on both aspects. This path has been documented at the end with the help of Michele Ferri's graphic competences.

The result of this long work has been a "small book" in which six selected pictures, together with six theoretical texts and six poems represent the six main pedagogical principles of the services. These six principles colour the pages of the book in different ways.

The small book became, as Bruner would say, an externalised thought that has gained its own life: a mediator amongst teachers, services, teachers and parents, school and society.

By transforming a thought in something concrete and touchable, "externalisation" makes the transfor

mation of the thought itself more efficient and simpler, which can again take other shapes, in other places. A good example is the wall of the hallway in one of Labirinto's childcare centre, called "L'incontrario", in Pesaro. The wall, realised together with Michele Ferri, represents the six main principles through a wire, that becomes the main decoration as well and which allows to show the documentation in a flexible way.

In this way the images of the everyday life don't appear as isolated moments, but they are collocated into a thought, and the graphic parts used in the small book, instead of representing a limit to which one needs to adapt, gave a direction to formulate an idea linked to the previous



IL CANTIERE



Scientia descendit in mores
(Il pensiero si traduce nei suoi prodotti)





experience, but readapted to the new context.

Wires become "real wires" and they can create many possible combinations of lines. The supports used for the wires are also used to hang pictures or something done by the children, like small windows on what happens in the group. Last year, for example, teachers chose to document how children have used some small books made by the mothers during a workshop.

Teachers have become able in choosing and positioning the pictures. The only coloured picture they chose has been placed in the middle of the documentation. Besides, the metaphor of the wire has also been used in other ways in the childcare centre, for example in the small "wire ball" that identifies a specific group of children, and that can be attached and detached from one door to the other to show where the children are at that moment.

Of course, this kind of competence needs to be linked to a pedagogical one. That is why on the wall we can read the sentence: "Where are you?

Where are your friends?" in order to stimulate the children in finding themselves and the others in the pictures, a game that they love to do together with their parents.

A careful look can see different nuances in the same action repeated many times, and the pictures can witness these nuances. As Ferdinando Scianna used to advise, "Eye, mind, heart" should always be used: a good picture should not only be beautiful, but should also pass on information and contain emotion. I think these are the best words to end this reflection, wishing to everybody a good start or a stimulating continuation of the research on visual languages.

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