The contributions of Boris Kossoy's iconography and Erwin Panofsky's iconology to the History of Education survey[1]

Contribuições da iconografia de Boris Kossoy e da iconologia de
Erwin Panofsky para a pesquisa em História da Educação

Contribuciones de la iconografía de Boris Kossoy y la iconología de
Erwin Panofsky a la investigación en Historia de la Educación

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Abstract

The analysis of photography as a document falls within the field of Social History and the History of Mentalities. The article situates the importance of the iconographical sources in the context of the research in the History of Education. Iconography does not rival nor deny other sources, however articulate itself with them, providing unpublished information, which is not always found in classical documents. The text brings along the methodological discussion about the use of photography in the historiographic research. It also moves to alignment two analysis of photograph perspectives: Boris Kossoy's iconography and Erwin Panofsky's iconology, in dialogue with the conceptions of Ana Maria Mauad, Solange Ferraz de Lima, Vânia Carneiro de Carvalho and Ulpiano Toledo Bezerra de Meneses. Together, iconography and iconology open new spectra of approach, analysis, and interpretation of history, contributing to the deciphering of imagetic content. The two techniques aim to contributing with the image content decoding. Photographs are not allegorical resources. They carry symbolisms, representations, and meanings that cannot be disregarded by the historiography of education. It is not about the images quantitative enrolled in the survey that bestow the research attributes, but the interpretative endeavor of the researcher in the quest for historical phenomenon casual link which can be found in the photographic artifact.

Keywords: Photography; Iconography; Iconology.

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Resumo

A análise da fotografia como documento insere-se no campo da História Social e da História das Mentalidades. O artigo situa a importância das fontes iconográficas no contexto da pesquisa em história da educação. A iconografia não rivaliza nem nega outras fontes, mas articula-se com elas, fornecendo informações inéditas, nem sempre encontradas nos documentos clássicos. O texto traz uma discussão metodológica sobre a utilização de fotografias na pesquisa historiográfica. Propõe e foca no alinhamento de duas perspectivas de análise fotográfica: a iconografia de Boris Kossoy e a iconologia de Erwin Panofsky, em diálogo com as análises de Ana Maria Mauad, Solange Ferraz de Lima, Vânia Carneiro de Carvalho e Ulpiano Toledo Bezerra de Meneses. Em conjunto, a iconografia e a iconologia abrem novos espectros de abordagem, análise e interpretação da história. As duas técnicas contribuem para a decifração do conteúdo imagético. As fotografias não são recursos alegóricos. Carregam simbologias, representações e significados que não podem ser desprezados pela historiografia da educação. Não é o quantitativo de imagens arroladas no estudo que confere qualidade à pesquisa, mas o esforço interpretativo do pesquisador na busca das relações causais dos fenômenos históricos que podem ser encontradas no artefato fotográfico.

Palavras-chave: Fotografia; Iconografia; Iconologia.

Resumen

La análisis de la fotografía como documento se inserta en el campo de la Historia Social y de la Historia de las Mentalidades. El artículo sitúa la importancia de las fuentes iconográficas en el contexto de la investigación en historia de la educación. La iconografía no rivaliza ni niega otras fuentes, sino que se articula con ellas, aportando una información inédita, no siempre encontrada en los documentos clásicos. El texto trae una discusión metodológica sobre el uso de fotografías en la investigación historiográfica. Propone la alineación de dos perspectivas de análisis fotográfica: la iconografía de Boris Kossoy y la iconología de Erwin Panofsky, en diálogo con las concepciones de Ana Maria Mauad, Solange Ferraz de Lima, Vânia Carneiro de Carvalho y Ulpiano Toledo Bezerra de Meneses. Juntas, la iconografía y la iconología abren nuevos espectros de enfoque, análisis e interpretación de la historia y contribuyen a la decodificación del contenido imagético. Las dos técnicas contribuyen a descifrar el contenido de la imagen. Las fotografías no son recursos alegóricos. Llevan simbologías, representaciones y significados que no pueden ser ignorados por la historiografía de la educación. No es la cantidad de imágenes incluidas en el estudio lo que da calidad a la investigación, sino el esfuerzo interpretativo del investigador en la búsqueda de las relaciones causales de los fenómenos históricos que se pueden encontrar en el artefacto fotográfico.

Palabras Clave: Fotografía; Iconografía; Iconología.

Initial Notes

> Perception becomes experience when it connects with sensory memories of the past [...]. In this situation of 'crisis in perception,' the issue is no longer educating the dull ear to hear music, but restoring hearing. It is no longer a matter of training the eye to see beauty, but of restoring 'perceptibility' (BUCK-MORSS, 2012, p. 169).

Susan Buck-Morss's[2] quote seemed appropriate to us to begin our approach to iconography and its importance for research in the History of Education. By bringing imagery into the framework of sources to be analyzed by the researcher, iconography can make an invaluable contribution to the study, as it opens up new perspectives of analysis and new spectrums of interpretation of historical phenomena.

The photography should not be considered an illustrative component, an allegory to be integrated into the work. It does not mean the mere freezing of a scene captured in time and space by a photographer's click. The photographic image is imbued with its own historical plots. In the opinion of Oliveira and Nunes (2010, p. 309), "the image, as a social product, derives from the collective mentality. Its understanding fosters knowledge about many issues that were relevant in different social contexts."

Following this reasoning, photographs carry symbology, representations, and meanings intertwined in the plot that the historian seeks to unravel. For this reason, "the scene is what we know as the freezing of a moment that can represent an event; it also designates the space of the event" (CARVALHO; LIMA, 2012, p. 61).

> All images, in any case, have their reason for being, express and communicate meaning, are charged with symbolic values, fulfill religious, political, or ideological functions, and lend themselves to pedagogical and even magical uses. This means that they fully participate in the functioning and reproduction of present and past societies (SCHIMITT, 2007, p. 11).

The analysis of image artifacts is not a leisurely adventure. Meneses (2003a) warns that the study of images requires a broad approach, encompassing all stages of their existence: from their creation and dissemination to their consumption and social impact. However, this does not imply that the research should result in an exhaustive compendium. Furthermore, each element of the process can present significant variations, making it impossible to formulate a single analytical model in advance. In any case, it is unfeasible to insist on examining the image in isolation, without considering its trajectory, social insertion, and the multiple layers of meanings and significance that accompany it over time, since "images are historical records that, like other sources, cannot be analyzed outside their historical context" (OLIVEIRA; NUNES, 2010, p. 312).

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[2] Professor Emeritus of Political Philosophy and Social Theory at Cornell University (United States). Her interdisciplinary work encompasses art history, visual studies, history, philosophy, cultural studies, architecture, and literature. Her books include The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project (1989), Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West, and Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History (2002).

According to Mauad and Lopes (2014), images are intrinsically linked to historical processes, shaped by the different forms and possibilities they offer. Mediated by visual perception, its existence gives rise to representations in multiple media that influence the construction of knowledge. Visual regimes delimit the scope of perception and determine the parameters of historical production, as "the term image can be applied in the material or mental realm. Thought constitutes what we can call a mental image, which is a condition for the constitution of the material image" (OLIVEIRA; NUNES, 2010, p. 308).

The images do not only document historical events but also actively participate in the construction of History, becoming both an object and a means of its elaboration: "Visual regimes are capable of managing the meanings of History, that is, there would not be a history behind the images, but a history of images and with images" (MAUAD; LOPES, 2014, p. 283-284).

According to Mauad (2025), if further investigation is not conducted on a photographic artifact, this body of information will remain in the realm of speculation. This observation prompts us to reflect on the fact that photographic images, in and of themselves, do not constitute evidence, and for them to be recognized as historical documents, it is essential that they be analyzed within the context of a historical experience that manifests itself in different temporalities.

> Without advancing research, this set of data would remain in the realm of mere conjecture. This leads us to reflect about the fact that photographs are not self-evident, and to become historical documents, we must examine them as part of a historical experience that takes place at different times: the context of their production within the social circuits of visual culture; their storage in photographic archives as a guarantee of their permanence as a visual document of an era; and their inscription in other situations and contexts (MAUAD, 2025, p. 25).

The iconographic documents that integrate the catalog of sources selected for a study should not be overlooked in qualitative studies about the History of Education, especially those that present traces that can contribute to the reconstruction of past historical phenomena and, consequently, to the historiography of education.

Without downplaying the importance of other documents, iconography provides valuable images to broaden the understanding of a topic under investigation, as "we know that everyday life leaps out at us as 'images' or impressions that can be investigated" (MARTINS, 1998, p. 92).

> Photographic sources offer a promising avenue for research and discovery as we attempt to systematize their information and establish appropriate research and analysis methodologies to decipher their contents and, consequently, the reality that originated them (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 34).

In order to aid in understanding the fabric of the History of Education, the collection of photographs that make up the list of iconographic documents selected by the historian must be relevant to the topic under investigation. The selected imagery must be well-connected to the research, closely related to its object, problem, and objective. The time frame and spatial boundaries in which these artifacts were produced must also be relevant to the research.

Photographic Documents: Conceptual and Technical Aspects

Iconography can contribute to a landscape of data and visual information that allows for a better understanding of the past in its multiple social dimensions (KOSSOY, 2012). For this reason, it should not be ignored by researchers seeking a more qualitative approach and analysis for their research problem and a more accurate understanding of what actually occurred in the past, because:

> While archives are fundamental to the work of historians, they are far from sufficient to provide everything historians need for their work. In fact, the question of whether or not to research archival sources has much more to do with the object or the historical problems being examined than anything else (BARROS, 2012, p. 131).

The iconographic sources, like any other, cannot be chosen randomly. They must be carefully selected, contextualized, and connected to the object, the research problem, and the defined objective of the study. What transforms an image into a document is the historian's interest, curiosity, and investigative acuity. From this premise derives the importance of preserving image sources, because:

> Considering that sources are the point of origin, the basis, and the support for the historiographical production that allows us to gain knowledge of the history of Brazilian education, it is crucial to develop an intentional and collective concern for the generation, maintenance, organization, availability, and preservation of the multiple forms of sources on the history of Brazilian education (SAVIANI, 2006, p. 33).

For Berger (2000, p. 12), "an image can surpass in duration what it represented." In this sense, Kossoy (2012) reiterates that the content of the photograph presents two distinct moments to be considered and analyzed: the first, related to the fragmentation and paralysis of historical time, and the second, characterized by the dynamism and movement of what was supposedly inert. In other words, the photograph carries with it the idea of a new reality, beyond the interruption of life in time. It is neither past, present, nor future. The photograph is, at the same time, all three simultaneously:

> Every photograph represents in its content an *interruption* of time and, therefore, of life. The selected fragment of reality, from the moment it was recorded, will remain forever *interrupted* and *isolated* in the two-dimensionality of the sensitive surface. A frame of a real subject, without other frames to give it meaning: a single frame, without a before or after. Without a before or after; this is one of the most fascinating aspects of the continuous, fragmented moment of life that merges with the birth of the discontinuous document. From the moment the process is complete, the photograph will carry within itself that frozen fragment of the past scene, iconographically materialized (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 46, author's emphasis).

Photographs, artistic paintings, and other types of images have always held a certain fetish for humanity. Whether it's the silent voice emanating from the portrayed image, the mysterious and enigmatic expression of the printed effigy, or even the tireless attempt to decipher what was happening at the exact moment the image was produced.

> The representative power of the "image" is fascinating, generating multiple discourses and analyses, even though it proves resistant to the theories and methodologies developed for communication. Verbal action. "Images" constitute a significant space in the historian's work as sources, as a process and methodology for document recording and archiving, or even as a form of historiographical "writing" (MARTINS, 1998, p. 88).

Images and photographs describe, voluntarily or involuntarily, the thoughts and ordinary activities of society. In research on the history of education, they serve as a catalyst for new analyses, interpretations, and conclusions about the phenomenon under investigation. Depending on the object of study and the research problem, other documents may not be able to satisfactorily support the researcher's analyses:

> We believe that the use of iconography and "images" reinforces the description and interpretation of ideas, the analysis of everyday and biographical life, similar to the circles that expand around a stone thrown into water in the research process. The image illustrates the difficulties experienced in empirical research, that is, the difficulties related to grasping the facets of everyday life by maintaining a 'distance in time' (MARTINS, 1998, p. 89).

Iconography contributes to the apprehension and understanding of a context that was not always the setting for the historian's life. Reading and analyzing a photograph in detail allows the researcher to unravel many enigmas of everyday school life. Often, daily life in a school has ended up being omitted from documentary sources and, in the worst-case scenario, disregarded as a highly significant element in understanding the processes and relations established within the school space:

> Audiovisual sources are condemned to serve as a 'pretext' for the events, circumstances, and social actions of 'everyday life,' exerting an active influence on the researcher. They are assumed in historical-educational research, not only as sources of information, but fundamentally as sources of structuring 'everyday life' (MARTINS, 1998, p. 96).

Compared to other documents, photography[3] is a recent resource, as the first time an image was fixed to a medium dates back to the early 19th century, in 1826, in France. Initially, it was used to record the image of individuals or families on a light-sensitive surface.

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[3] Based on the reflections of Le Goff (1990), Müller (2006, p. 1) clarifies that "photography [...] is understood as a social artifact and document/monument that perpetuates the history of individuals and society, the collective

For Benjamin (2012), the portrait (face image) was the most privileged subject during the emergence of photography. During this period, the contemplation of the countenances of loved ones, deceased or distant, conferred the aura, the cult value of photography. It was with the work of Eugène Atget (1857-1927), when he photographed the deserted streets of Paris in the 19th century, that the exhibition value of photography superseded its cult value. Atget's work introduced new elements to the interpretation of a photographic image, especially the search for some trace that attempted to explain the context of a given scene: "with Atget, photographs began to become testimonies of the historical process. This gave them a hidden political meaning" (BENJAMIN, 2012, p. 17).

The shift in the central thematic axis of photography began to shift from the face toward other scenarios, beyond mere contemplation. From self-portraits, new images were recorded, in new contexts, constituting important objects of investigation. Thus, the analysis of a photograph began to require a new perspective, a more refined and careful perception of its constituent elements to find the clues one hopes to discover in the image. The investigative observation of a photograph thus began to require "a certain type of reception, no longer suited to uncommitted contemplation" (BENJAMIN, 2012, p. 18).

Based on the work of Jean Keim (1971), Kossoy (2012) states that "if it is possible to recover past life, the first reality, and if we have, through photography, new proof of its existence, there is in the image a new reality, past, limited, transposed" (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 46, author's emphasis)4. Photography is more than a static, historically innocuous image. It is not devoid of symbolic content or meaning that it wished to imprint, even if unintentionally. It is imbued with signs, with indications of a reality that can and should be investigated historically, since "every photograph is a residue of the past. An artifact that contains within itself a specific fragment of reality" (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 47).

However, Meneses (2023b) emphasizes that, in approaching the visual universe, historians have often limited their analysis to the image, conceiving it essentially as an informative resource. It would be pertinent, therefore, to begin the investigation by questioning the cognitive reach of the image, in order to understand how it has been explored over time. Even more fundamental would be to examine its role at the very heart of social life, considering the traditions and cultural constructions that characterize Western thought.

The way we perceive and access past experiences is profoundly influenced by the historicity of our visualization practices. Mauad (2021) argues that the historical dimension of practices of making the visible world perceptible exerts an inescapable influence on the way we access past experiences. These experiences not only register on the surface of the image as fragments of lived scenes, but also permeate it as an artifact resulting from and enjoyed in the context of social relations, individual trajectories, value systems, and principles that shape the social fabric.

The photography is the result of a process that articulates human action in time and space, supported by technology, in which "three elements are essential to the creation of a photograph: the subject, the photographer, and the technology," notes Kossoy (2012, p. 29, author's emphasis). At the same time, "photography complements and derives from the process, detaching itself from it and developing its own, autonomous reality" (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 40).

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memory, and makes it possible to unveil the multiple faces of the past. This dismantles the idea of photography as testimony, evidence, irrefutable proof of truth".

4 Boris Kossoy (2012) extracted this excerpt from p. 64 of the work *La photographie el l'homme*, written by Jean Keim, published in 1971 by Editora Casterman (Belgium).

According to Kossoy (2012), the complete cycle for producing a photograph comprises: (1) the constituent elements (subject, photographer, and technology), which bring together the fragment of the outside world that one wishes to capture (subject); (2) the artist (photographer); and (3) the equipment, techniques, and photosensitive materials used (technology). The location coordinates (space and time) include the spatial framework (the location where the image was taken) and the time framework (the time or date the photograph was taken).

The combination of these constituent elements with the location coordinates results in the photograph, which is a fixed visual record of a fragment of the outside world. It contains iconic elements and various pieces of information that make up the recorded content, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Summary of the photographic cycle[5]

Source: Image created from Kossoy (2012)

Every photograph unfolds within a unique historical moment, yet is part of a broader context, with political, social, economic, cultural, and aesthetic nuances, among others. The photographic record reveals only a captured fragment of reality, yet it can be imbued with evidence of a macro reality. The interruption of time and the isolation of just a fragment of a larger scene characterize the first reality of photography, its inertia and stagnation. From this point on, a new moment begins: the second reality, the reality of the document. It is this (new) reality that interests historiographical research, as photography becomes, par excellence, "alive." For Kossoy (2012, p. 46), "another process begins: that of the life of the document. This not only preserves the image of the past; it becomes part of the world."

Photography *versus* Reality

The technical advances in photography from the mid-19th century onward reduced costs and democratized portraiture, which became a human "necessity." Portraiture opened up the possibility for people to perpetuate their image. However, the desire to immortalize one's own

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[5] Caption: Constituent elements: subject; photography; technology. Situation Coordinates: Space and Time. Final Product: Photograph.

image as a character who never existed, imitating noble and aristocratic airs, elegant attire, and an austere posture before the camera, was recurrent. These aesthetic principles, although stereotypical, were seen as indicators of privileged social standing and suitability, even if they never were. The important thing was to be immortalized with the best possible appearance (KOSSOY, 2012). In the words of Carvalho and Lima (2012, p. 60), we find:

> Photographic portraiture met the demand of rising social groups seeking ways to construct their identity based on the display of behaviors (poses), props (books, decorative and architectural elements), and environments (sets depicting landscapes and residential interiors).

Kossoy (2012, p. 48) emphasizes that "every photograph was produced with a specific purpose," regardless of whether the recording originated from the photographer's own desire or whether he or she was commissioned to do so. The author reinforces that "these records were produced with a documentary purpose" (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 48), regardless of the nature of the request. If it is a document, the photograph becomes, in itself, an artifact of information and knowledge of the past.

Like other sources, photography is not a portrait of reality. It is a fragment of reality, the freezing of a dynamic social reality, always in motion. As such, it is unable to represent an event or social reality within a broader temporal and spatial perspective. That is, photography is the representation of an aspect of reality, the capture of which lasted only a small fraction of a second. However, Kossoy (2012, p. 119) emphasizes: "this content is the end result of a selection of possibilities for seeing, choosing, and fixing a certain aspect of primary reality."

The alleged idea that photography accurately reproduces history can be found in the text "Photographs as Strong History?"[6], published in 2015 by Elizabeth Edwards. Analyzing the article, Mauad (2025) observes that the interconnection between positivist historiography, historicism, and the aesthetics of photographic realism consolidated a robust structure in the construction of historical narratives mediated by photographic images. Following this reasoning, photographic realism encompasses the perspective of the past projecting itself entirely into the present, fostering the illusion that, through photographs, it would be possible to faithfully access historical events as they occurred.

In his studies, Kossoy (2012) highlights the issue of photographic manipulation as an aspect to be considered during the historiographical analysis of the document. The manipulation the author refers to does not relate to the tampering with the recorded image, partially reproducing or altering what was originally captured, but to a possible rearrangement of the setting and scene, a preparation that may have been provided to capture what was intended to be elucidated, distancing itself from the true natural appearance of its reference:

> It cannot be overemphasized that this content is the end result of a selection of possibilities for seeing, choosing, and capturing a certain aspect of the *primary reality* [...]. This selection constitutes a first manipulation/interpretation of reality, whether conscious or unconscious, premeditated or naive, and whether it serves one political ideology or another (denouncing social tensions or, on the contrary, "bearing witness to the normality" of the same situation simply by choosing a different, more convenient angle for falsifying the facts) (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 119, author's emphasis).

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[6] EDWARDS, Elizabeth. Photographs as Strong History? In: CARAFFA, Costanza; SERENA Tiziana (Orgs.). Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation, 322-328. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015.

The likelihood that the photographer interfered or prepared the scene, either on their own initiative or by decision of the applicant, and service, cannot be dismissed. Photography can present an image that does not correspond to reality. By altering the natural realism of the objects and the environment in focus, this manipulation impacts the appearance of the subjects and distorts reality; it induces the reader to an interpretation consistent with the image, yet compromised by reality (KOSSOY, 2012).

> Authenticity and veracity, which could underpin the production of meaning, are categories obliterated by images that, partially detached from their original contextual cores, move through the social imagination, and can, at any moment, be remobilized to recycle old meanings and forms into new images (CARVALHO; LIMA, 2012, p. 57).

Thus, a qualitative iconographic interpretation, which approximates the reality of the time in which a scene was captured while, at the same time, distancing itself from the resources of manipulating reality, requires the historian to pay close, cautious, and vigilant attention to detail. These biases distort the reality of the time and offer the reader a surreal image that was perhaps intended by its protagonists. Distancing these intricacies or avoiding these traps dilutes the possibility of misreading. It leads to a more competent interpretation, with greater adherence to reality, for *not all that glitters is gold; not everything seen is what it seems; not everything that appears is what it truly is.*

We do not intend to assert here that photography is a (re)invention of reality, nor that it uses its own clothing to distort the appearance of reality. By raising the possibility that a photograph can be manipulated in its production process, we in no way contradict our conviction that it is a source that can provide the traces we seek, for "photography will always be an interpretation" (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 126).

For Mauad (2025), photography cannot be understood as a mere portal to a past time. Produced in different contexts, with purposes and functions linked to their own historicity, photographs offer a vast horizon of possibilities for investigating the past, enabling interpretations that challenge conventional narratives. The complexity of examining photographs leads to the reflection that these images do not have a fixed nature, but acquire meaning over time. They do not represent indisputable evidence in themselves, but rather become historical clues in light of the interpretative perspectives we grant them.

Iconographic Analysis and Iconological Interpretation

In establishing the previous discussion, the aim was to raise awareness that photography, like any other source, is not the absolute truth. Verifying the accuracy of the historical context depicted in the photograph is an arduous task, requiring critical effort from the researcher and, certainly, the search for other documents. According to Kossoy (2012), "the trace of life crystallized in the photographic image becomes meaningful the moment one becomes aware of and understands the links in the chain of facts *absent* from the image" (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 130, author's emphasis).

Given these considerations, we believe that, when engaging in investigative work with imagery resources or artifacts focused on the history of education, the researcher must be convinced that the analysis of the image should not be carried out in a contemplative, melancholic, or nostalgic manner. It is necessary to identify, contextually and through the aid of other resources, such as oral history and written documents, who the people portrayed were,

how they lived, and how they were inserted into the historical context to be examined, before issuing an interpretative opinion: "it is up to the interpreter to understand the photographic image as discontinuous information from the past life, into which one intends to delve" (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 127).

When handling a photograph, especially older ones, researchers may encounter some handwritten (or otherwise) information inserted into the document. Generally, these notes are intended to inform the period in which the photograph was taken, the event captured, or even the names of the people portrayed.

Dating a photograph may seem like a secondary activity in the study of iconographic sources. However, identifying the period in which it was taken is important information to avoid the futile effort of analyzing images that are unrelated to the object of study. In most cases, some references[7] are contained in the photograph under consideration: "information concerning the location coordinates (SPACE, the place where the photograph was taken, and TIME, the date, the period in which the photograph was taken) is implicitly or explicitly evidenced in the document" (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 95, author's emphasis). On the other hand, this analysis implies an inter and multidisciplinary approach, which may require, depending on the decoding needs, the collaboration of professionals from other we know the subject of knowledge, as detailed by Kossoy (2012):

> The verification of all the details of the images, the examination continually fed by information made available through periodicals of the time, official minutes issued by the government, reports from the municipal administration and state secretariats, architectural plans, city chronicles, among other sources (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 89).

Another relevant piece of information in iconographic analysis, especially of photography, concerns authorship and protagonism. Knowing who took, was the subject of, or witnessed the photograph are rough edges that must be smoothed out in the process of reading, analyzing, and interpreting the recorded image. Access to these individuals is significantly valuable in the study of photography, as it provides key elements that may have been overlooked when capturing the image, as Kossoy (2012, p. 85) points out: "The constituent elements of a photographic artifact cease to be purely descriptive when details of its particular history are known."

Photography contributes to the analysis and interpretation of life, historical phenomena, and the history of education. It conveys important aspects of past social life, allowing historians to better understand the organization and functioning of society, establish connections with other sources, and find residual information that can support the researcher's arguments, confirming or refuting their initial hypotheses.

> Images with recognized documentary value are important for specific studies in the fields of architecture, anthropology, ethnology, archaeology, social history, and other fields of knowledge, as they represent a means of understanding past events and, therefore, a possibility of recovering the visual memory of humanity and its sociocultural environment (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 59).

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[7] According to Kossoy (2012), some clues to dating a photograph can be found by observing the back of the image. It usually contains information that allows us to determine the time or date the photograph was taken. It is quite common for people who keep photographs in their care to make this handwritten note on the photograph before storing it in a safe place. Although more uncommon, many photographs carry a title or caption that refers the reader to the period and scene photographed.

Henri-Irénée Marrou, in his work *De la connaissance historique* (1954), explains: "Indeed, the more a document has in common with a homogeneous series of similar and already known documents, the easier and more reliable its interpretation will be" (MARROU, 1954, p. 106).

By decomposing visible and sensorially perceptible reality, photography produces a wealth of information about a past event that awaits competent interpretation. For this reason, "when questioning a source, out of a desire for a given answer, the researcher can distort the facts, even unconsciously" (OLIVEIRA; NUNES, 2010, p. 310).

From a positivist perspective, the visual content of a photograph is not questioned, as it is indisputable proof of the existence of a given event (KOSSOY, 2012). Disagreeing with this perspective, the author does not agree that photography is a literal and faithful representation of reality and offers the following warning:

> It is in this transposition of appearances between fact and photograph that manipulations of all kinds are articulated. There are no "decals," "adhesions," or "transparencies" between a subject and its respective record; these are concepts shaped by the myths of "truth" and "objectivity" that have surrounded photography since the 19th century and that were eventually adopted by the authors of pioneering theoretical essays during the second half of the 20th century. The photographic record is not impartial, and its truth is only relative, iconographic in the *stricto sensu* (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 115-116).

The relation between photographic evidence and the potential reliability of the visual document to reality can be established by two categories of photographic sources: (1) photographs taken voluntarily by the photographer, without intention or immediate application; and (2) photographs commissioned by third parties. In either situation, the relationship of visual-real fidelity can be attested by comparison with other photographs of the same subject and from the same period (KOSSOY, 2012).

Regarding the decision to take a photograph, whether it was a deliberate and unintentional action by the photographer or a commission from a third party, it is not easy to raise and sustain suspicions about the reliability of photographs from the past, especially when the subjects depict inert scenes, such as human expressions in family albums, buildings, quiet streets, or static nature, for example. However, a closer look cannot prevent us from searching, in the naive or innocent appearance of photographs from the past or present, for their deeper meanings (KOSSOY, 2012).

Kossoy (2012, p. 46) suggests that "every photograph has a story behind it." It is up to the researcher to uncover which story was filtered (or not) in the photograph. Iconographic analysis suggests examining other documents related to the object under investigation. It represents a cautious approach before announcing an interpretative conclusion. It is the interweaving of the traces left in each source analyzed that will lead the historian, throughout their analysis, to reach at an interpretation of the iconographic artifact.

Iconographic analysis does not necessarily reflect an aesthetic approach (which cannot be disregarded), but an essentially investigative approach. Returning to this issue, it is worth highlighting that the photographed image represents a *spectrum* of possibilities to be duly explored by the historian's thoughtful gaze. This gaze does not always correspond exactly what the human eye sees in the depicted image, since: "the deepest meaning of life is not material. The deepest meaning of the image is not necessarily

explicit. The meaning is immaterial; it has never been or will ever be a visible subject capable of being photographically portrayed" (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 130).

Oliveira and Nunes (2010, p. 312) add: "The image is considered a record of the multiple possible meanings of the historical context it reflects and is a product of. Thus, we understand that the same image can generate multiple approaches and meanings." Reading, and especially interpreting, a photograph brings together elements (people, objects, scenery) that often conflict during the document's analysis, as "each iconographic element is multivalent and, therefore, can give rise to a range of meanings" (GINZBURG, 1989, p. 44).

Some note made on the artifact or the photograph's caption itself can guide the reader to a cursory understanding of the image's meaning. Such notes can lead the historian to a hasty conclusion. The key is to understand the fine line that separates the literal meaning of the image's content from its symbolic meaning, which abstracts and synthesizes elements that are not always visible: "the great difficulty in documentary analysis of the photographic image lies in separating denotation from connotation, not to mention that the photograph's caption itself indirectly guides us toward a connotative analysis" (BOCCATO; FUJITA, 2006, p. 98).

In order to overcome the dichotomy between materiality and expression in a photograph—the distinction between what is visible and what can be grasped—Kossoy (2012) proposes aligning two perspectives for analyzing the document: iconography and iconology. Combining these two strategies allows researchers to assimilate the message conveyed by the visual artifact. While iconography is concerned with identifying the visible elements of an image, iconology is responsible for recovering information encoded in the photograph, as "seeing, describing, and observing are not enough" (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 107).

In his work "Meaning in the Visual Arts," Erwin Panofsky[8] made a significant contribution to historians' establishment of criteria for analyzing and interpreting images beyond the merely visual[9]. By establishing iconology as a method that stems from synthesis rather than analysis[10], the historian contributed to the construction of deeper interpretations of image elements, which is the field of action of iconography, which is responsible for describing and classifying images.[11]

Based on the postulates of Panofsky (2011, p. 54), who defines iconology as "an iconography that becomes interpretative and, thus, becomes an integral part of the study of art," the iconological interpretation of a photograph presupposes moving through three levels of image apprehension, as shown in Figure 2.

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[8] Iconology, the study of icons and symbols in visual representations, was established by the German Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) in his 1939 work Studies in Iconology. A celebrated historian, he diligently studied medieval and Renaissance art. He was one of the greatest exponents of the iconological method, which seeks to analyze and interpret a work from three distinct levels: the first, represented by the theme and technique employed in the work (pre-iconographic); the second, which encompasses the abstraction of the image; and the last, which involves describing the image taking into account answers to the following questions: where, how, and why the image was produced.

[9] Cf. PANOFSKY, *Erwin. Significado nas artes visuais. Tradução de Maria Clara Forbes Kneese e Jacob. Guinsburg. 3. ed. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2011. 440 p. (Coleção Debates)*.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid

Figure 2 – Levels of interpretation of a photographic image[12]

Source: Image created from Panofsky (2011)

The pre-iconographic level describes the actions and objects represented in the photograph. It is situated at the researcher's level of experience. It corresponds to the identification of familiar elements of the image, known in the reader's practical world. The presence of an unfamiliar object suggests bibliographic research.

The iconographic level classifies the images identified in the previous level and can signal the secondary theme represented by the photograph. It lies between looking and perceiving, understanding.

The iconographic level represents the final reading of the image, its interpretation, understanding, and explanation. It synthesizes the two previous levels and requires the researcher to confront and compare what they believe to be the internal meaning of the image under analysis with what they imagine to be the intrinsic meaning of other similar photographs.

The photographic document is composed of two distinct and intertwined dimensions: the first and second realities. The first realities relate to the interpretative aspect of the photograph. The second reality refers to the technical nature of image production (KOSSOY, 2012).

These two realities (or moments) of the photograph are important aspects taken into account during the process of reading the image, although the first reality overrides the second during the reading of the document. In other words, the historical analysis of a photograph distances itself from the aesthetic aspects of the image, while approaching its more realistic characteristics, generally implicit and underlying the document.

In the analysis of a photograph, beyond the iconographic truth, both realities (first and second) are taken into consideration, especially the first dimension, as already established. Analyzing and attempting to decipher the first reality of a photograph is what is most important in the process of reading an iconographic document.

Exploring the field of photograph analysis implies not abandoning the postulates of iconography, but incorporating the assumptions established by iconology. In the iconological analysis of a photograph, the aesthetic and compositional elements of the photograph are considered, but they are not predominant in the analysis of the document, as seen in Figure 3.

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[12] Caption: Pre-Iconographic Level. Iconographic Level. Iconological Level

Figure 3 – Iconographic analysis and iconological interpretation[13]
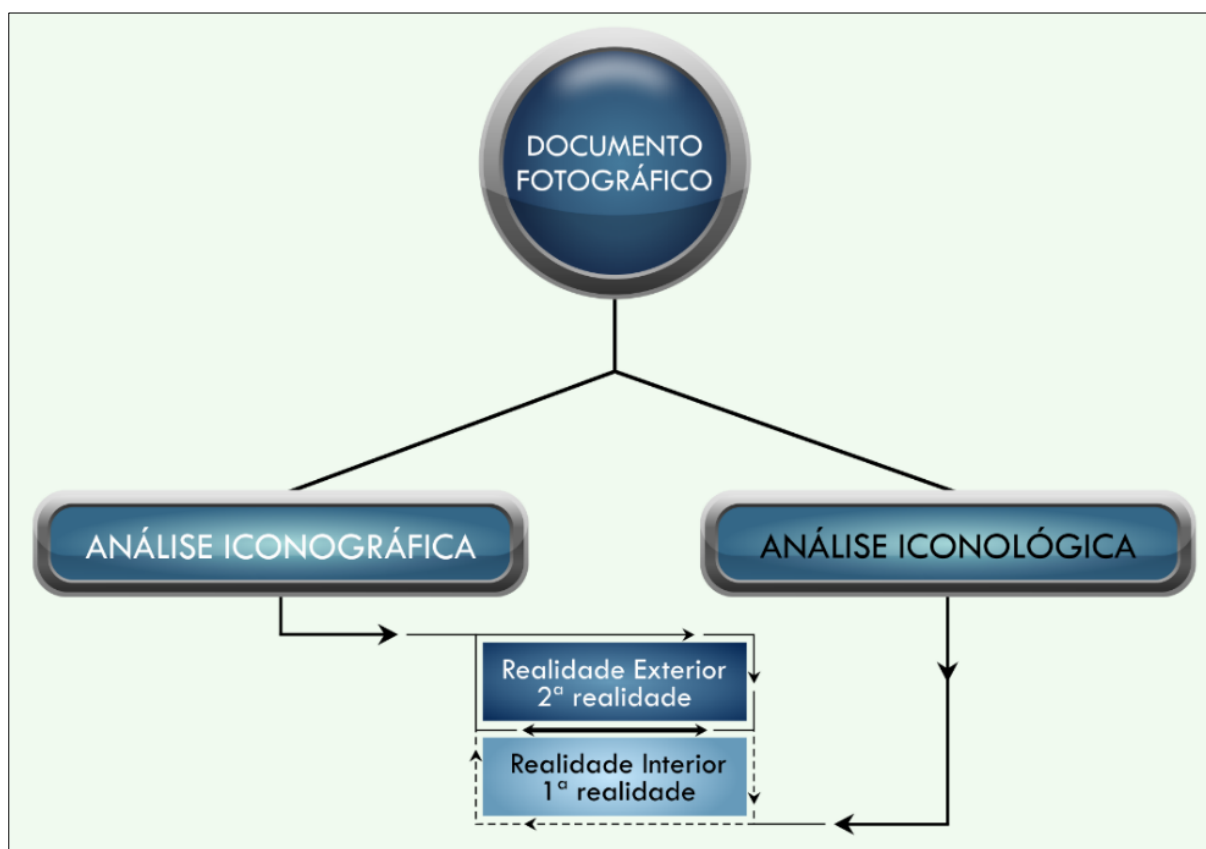
Source: Kossoy(2012, p.108)

It is not the quantity of photographs or images gathered by the researcher that will transform his investigative work into a great contribution to the history of education, because "the listing of countless facts will contribute little to history, if their causal connections are not sought, if there is no effort at interpretation" (KOSSOY, 2012, p. 150). It is the researcher's intuitive ability, critical competence, and interpretative acuity that will contribute to the construction of new knowledge, because:

> The collection and examination of documents never replace the historian's creative activity, which is to attempt to reconstruct past life by interpreting the thoughts, feelings, and actions of man, the central character of the history one seeks to understand (KOSSOY, 2012, p.150).

A superficial and naive analysis can transform a photograph into an emblem. Thus, what precautionary methodological procedures should the historian consider when analyzing an image? In order to elucidate this question, Meneses (2003a, p. 138) states that certain conditions can lead to the mistaken process of iconizing a photograph: "to begin with, its snapshot character […], this evidence of a (seemingly) merely automatic recording of the 'real.' It is that 'eye of History,' so often talked about in the 19th century, automatic, neutral, competent, immune to the manipulations of the will." In this sense, Lima and Carvalho (2018, p. 44) declare

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[13] Caption: Photographic Document. Iconographic Analysis. Iconological Analysis. External Reality 2nd Reality. Internal Reality 1st Reality

that "we can never forget that the senses are not inherent to images. Meanings are produced by those who consume them."

Research about the relation between photography and history shows that public images play an essential political role, enabling the dissemination of messages that give visibility to both strategies and power struggles. Public photography is produced by institutions specializing in image production, whose work directly influences the formation of collective opinion (MAUAD, 2013).

According to Mauad (2013), public photography constitutes a fundamental instrument for the construction and preservation of public memory, recording, preserving, and projecting an interpretation of events in historical time. This interpretation is constructed through a hybrid narrative, both visual and verbal, characterized by its intertextuality and pluritemporality. In this way, public photography visually materializes a shared space in contemporary societies, aligning itself with the perspectives and worldviews that give it meaning.

In the field of social sciences, art history, initially, and anthropology later, discovered the cognitive value of visual records and, above all, of Photography. The consolidation of the field of Visual Anthropology occurred when it was recognized that visual sources not only possess informative value but also a distinct discursive nature. From this understanding, its objectives began to include, in addition to the production, circulation, and consumption of images, the dynamic interaction between the observer and the observed. Thus, studies about visual representations of culture began to incorporate the analysis of the multiple mechanisms of meaning construction, which are socially constituted, dialogical, and subject to transformation, rather than inherent or previously determined by the visual source itself (MENESES, 2003b).

In interpreting the image, the historian must move away from the monotonous and naive appearance of what was portrayed and approach the elements, signs, and traces that contribute to a more qualitative, in-depth, and dialectical analysis of what the image appears to portray, because "it is from the distinctive features of the image, and not from its supposed objectivity, that we find, still in a latent form, its potential for iconization. For this very reason, it is always necessary to begin analysis with the image" (LIMA; CARVALHO, 2018, p. 44).

In Figure 4, we provide an example of photographic analysis from an iconographic and iconological perspective. It is a public photograph, an iconic photo[14] that plays an important political role and has the ability to influence social opinion. Despite our efforts, and especially because it was produced in the second quarter of the 20th century, we were unable to identify the photographer, the person (or agency) who commissioned the photograph, nor were we able to locate the original. However, we believe it was requested by the state government.

Using various media (physical and digital), this photograph circulated extensively throughout the city of Arcos, Minas Gerais. The image is found in books on the history of Arcos, doctoral dissertations, local periodicals, and in the school's entrance hall. Whenever the *Grupo Escolar Yolanda Jovino Vaz* (formerly the *Grupo Escolar de Arcos*) is mentioned, this is the image that comes to mind for the city's residents, given its intense publicity throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. In this sense, Carvalho and Lima (2012, p. 56) state that there is "a covariant relation between the mode of knowledge through types and stereotypes and the intensification and massive dissemination of images through their reproducibility."

Based on Panofsky (2011), the iconographic (external reality) and iconological (internal reality) analysis of Figure 4 allowed for some inferences that may not be made explicit in the photograph.

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[14] Cf. Mauad (2008, p. 1), these are "photographs that gain public expressions, associated with the world of politics and the notion of historical event."

Figure 4 – First professionals of the *Grupo Escolar de Arcos*

Source: Archives of the *Grupo Escolar Yolanda Jovino Vaz*, Arcos, Minas Gerais (1937)

The setting in the photograph, the central courtyard of the *Grupo Escolar de Arcos*, was duly organized and prepared for the moment in which the image would be captured an elegant coffee table covered in a hand-embroidered covering was placed there, lending a formal atmosphere to the moment. In the background, at either end of the photographed field, two potted plants decorated the space. These pots were likely not located in the location where the photograph was taken, as this was where the students' recreation was held. These plants likely decorated more prestigious spaces within the school, such as the principal's office or the entrance hall of the *Grupo Escolar de Arcos*.

Seated in the center of the photograph were the most prominent figures in the hierarchy of the *Grupo Escolar de Arcos*. Standing, other important figures from the institution's staff, albeit with less political prestige, became peripheral figures in the image. In the foreground, seated to the left of the coffee table, is the school inspector, Manoel Pinto de Carvalho, and to the right of the table, also seated, is the principal of the *Grupo Escolar de Arcos*, Corina Ribeiro de Carvalho.

The photograph shows only the teachers who worked at the *Grupo Escolar de Arcos* when it first opened in 1937, accompanied by the school inspector and the principal, the central figures in the image. Other staff, such as cleaning assistants, cooks, or school bookkeepers, are not included in the photograph. Likewise, students are not among the subjects photographed. The image attempts to convey the idea of organization, discipline, morality, and respect—values that the Republican government insisted on emphasizing in its publicity for school groups. In general, school group photos did not depict the daily routine of the schools and their potential conflicts. They rarely showed the school in action, its routine, or its pedagogical work.

The women are easily identified by their attire. Women's clothing featured bows at the collar and, sometimes, a small tie that distinguished it from the men's. Dresses, always below the knee, prevented female legs from being exposed to male gaze; thin, opaque stockings covered women's legs, preventing skin tone from being identified. Women wore elegant shoes, selected exclusively for that occasion. Long sleeves prevented female arms from being exposed, warding off disrespectful glances. At the time, long hair was common among women, but the most prominent women in society, such as teachers, sported modern, shorter haircuts, in keeping with the French *Belle Époque* lifestyle. The people photographed represented and symbolized the customs and culture desired for the ideal society, from the perspective of the ruling class.

Although all those photographed presented an austere and serious expression, perhaps that was not the intention of this group of people. No expression of emotion was shown, not even a hint of it. In photographs, smiles should be avoided, especially female ones (although men also avoided any expression or intention of smiling). Smiling should always be avoided, as it signaled undesirable social behavior, especially for women. When photographed, the model adopted a somewhat spontaneous and often mechanical posture. People prepared themselves appropriately for the photograph: posture, gaze, leg and hand positions… a veritable ritual. The photograph should faithfully express what was intended to be conveyed and communicated to the eyes and imagination of those viewing the image: the idea of seriousness, respect, organization, harmony, and pride in being captured. The recorded image should capture a classic, elegant, and well-behaved posture. In the photograph analyzed, everyone presented virtually the same expression, always enigmatic, reminiscent of a sphinx.

Final Notes

In the History of Education, figurative testimonies play an essential role in qualitative studies, especially those that seek useful traces for reconstructing past events and consolidating the historiography of education. By opening new perspectives for analyzing historical phenomena, the use of iconographic sources in research about the History of Education constitutes a relevant resource at the historian's disposal. Photographs are produced within a historical context, in constant flux. Due to their technical constraints, they are limited to capturing only a visible aspect of reality, capturing a fragment of reality, a micro-perspective stolen from the macro context of the phenomenon portrayed.

By integrating the set of sources analyzed by the researcher, iconography and iconography The technology of photography represents a valuable resource for historical studies, as it expands the interpretative possibilities and analytical approaches to the phenomenon under investigation. Far from being merely an illustrative element, photography goes beyond a momentary capture of the historical *continuum*. Each image contains its own narratives, imbued with symbolism and meanings that the historian seeks to analyze, decipher, and understand.

In most cases, the photographic image is not a naive document, produced without intention, within a conceptual void. Photographs are always imbued with evidence of a reality, with specific historical plots that must be investigated scientifically, with a critical and qualitative approach.

Photography is not a faithful portrait of reality, the indisputable truth, as positivist researchers often claim. It does not necessarily represent reality. As a product of human labor, it can be imbued with intentionality. Implicitly or explicitly, they carry symbolism, representations, and meanings of great relevance to the research and can decisively contribute

to the researcher's unraveling and revealing of the reality under investigation. For this reason, photographs should not be disregarded in a qualitative study that aims to analyze a historical phenomenon with theoretical depth.

The selection of photographs used in the study cannot be a random choice by the researcher, as the images cannot be configured as an allegorical resource for the text. Likewise, they should not be selected based on visual, aesthetic, nostalgic, or emotional criteria. The photographs chosen must be contextualized in time and space and maintain a close relation with the research, its object, problem, and objectives. It is not the volume of photographs used in a study that will ensure the study's contribution to the history and historiography of education, but the qualitative aspect of the analysis of the imagery used.

Like other documentary sources, visual artifacts must be rigorously selected, aligned with the research subject and the study's objectives. What gives a photograph its documentary character is not its superficial appearance, but the historian's investigative acuity, their capacity for interpretation and critical analysis.

A photograph is produced at the intersection of two distinct yet simultaneous moments: the spatial division of reality within historical time and the movement, the dynamics—the before, during, and after—that scene was captured by the photographic lens. The photograph insinuates, voluntarily or involuntarily, the actions, thoughts, and ways of being and doing of historical subjects. It reflects, in one way or another, the daily lives of humankind and society. It is on this link that the historian must focus their analytical and interpretative efforts regarding the image under examination. The historical significance of a photograph does not lie in its materiality. It resides, fundamentally, in the image's immateriality. Its constitutive aspects are considered in the analysis and interpretation, but the hidden, implicit, and underlying characteristics of the source predominate.

By allowing the decomposition of visible and sensorially perceptible reality, photography produces a collection of data potentially amenable to analysis, awaiting an explanation of past reality that may or may not be supported by other sources.

The researcher's critical and accurate eye allows for the identification of points of convergence and/or divergence in the photograph with other documents analyzed (written, oral, or material). It is in the separation or opposition of evidence collected from different sources that the link unites them and enables a possible explanation of the phenomenon is found.

In the iconological analysis of a photograph, the researcher must emotionally distance themselves from the photographic artifact. He cannot be seduced by its external or superficial characteristics. Aspects of a visual, aesthetic, or ethical nature are not relevant in qualitative photographic analysis. To distance themselves from this potential bias, the historian must adopt a neutral stance and distance themselves from any stance that leads them to a contemplative examination of the photograph. Otherwise, his analysis may result in a weak, distorted, inconclusive, and, at worst, misleading opinion.

Iconographic and iconological studies help explain how visual representations reflect and shape pedagogical practices and social values. By enabling an in-depth analysis of visual artifacts as historical and epistemological sources, iconography and iconology provide essential contributions to the historiography of education. By categorizing, analyzing, and interpreting photographs related to education, iconography can reveal educational conceptions from different periods and sociocultural contexts. In turn, iconology deepens the analysis, seeking to (re)interpret the symbolic meanings of these representations, linking them to philosophical, political, and ideological aspects that influenced the construction of the popular imagination and social ideals and their implications for the production of educational thought.

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