



FOCUS – I “SUONI”, LE CORPOREITÀ E L’ASCOLTO

Sensitization to the Other – The Phenomenological Vignette as a Resonating *Body of Sound*

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Sensibilizzazione all’altro – La vignetta fenomenologica come corpo sonoro risonante

Abstract

This article examines the aesthetic potential of the phenomenological vignette, a qualitative research tool grounded in phenomenology and used in professional development. Vignettes are concise, evocative narratives that capture co-experiential moments. As bodies of sound, they preserve fleeting instances through language and emphasize the pregnant and pathic dimensions of experience. Unlike traditional research methods that often overlook sensation, vignettes draw on it, capturing the co-experienced atmosphere they seek to convey. They focus on the pre-reflective, bodily articulations of participants. By describing tone of voice, posture, glances and movements, they give expression to experience beyond words. Writing vignettes requires sensitivity, receptivity and aesthetic refinement to make them resonate with readers. Like art, vignettes can challenge habitual ways of seeing and acting, open new perceptions and make experiences tangible. Positioned between sensuality and conceptuality, they embrace ambiguity, fostering awareness and a receptive attitude toward oneself, others and the world, thereby contributing to aesthetic education.

Keywords

Phenomenological vignette, perception, aesthetic experience, sensuality, resonance

Questo articolo esamina il potenziale estetico della vignetta fenomenologica, uno strumento di ricerca qualitativa basato sulla fenomenologia e utilizzato nel contesto dello sviluppo professionale. Le vignette sono narrazioni concise ed evocative che catturano i momenti co-esperienziali. Come “corpi sonori”, le vignette conservano esperienze fugaci attraverso il linguaggio e mettono in luce le dimensioni pregnanti e patiche dell’esperienza. A differenza dei metodi di ricerca tradizionali, che spesso minimizzano le sensazioni, le vignette attingono proprio alle sensazioni e all’atmosfera co-esperienziale che intendono catturare. Si concentrano sulle articolazioni corporee pre-riflessive dei partecipanti. Descrivendo il tono di voce, la postura, gli sguardi o i movimenti, le esperienze trovano una forma di espressione che va oltre le parole. Per far sì che le vignette trovino risonanza nei lettori, è necessaria sensibilità, ricettività e raffinatezza estetica. Come l’arte, anche le vignette sfidano le abitudini del vedere e dell’agire aprendo nuove percezioni e rendendo tangibili le esperienze. Posizionate tra sensualità e concettualità, esprimono l’ambiguità dell’esperienza e promuovono la consapevolezza e un atteggiamento ricettivo verso se stessi, gli altri e il mondo, contribuendo così all’educazione estetica.

Parole chiave

Vignetta fenomenologica, Percezione, Esperienza estetica, Sensualità, Risonanza

Introduction

The subject of sensation is neither a thinker who takes note of a quality,
nor an inert setting which is affected or changed by it,
it is a power which is born into, and simultaneously with,
a certain existential environment, or is synchronized with it.
(Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. 245)

René Descartes' dualism, which separates body and mind, has created a deep divide in Western thought that continues to shape it today. This separation has led to bodily perception and sensory experience being treated as secondary or even irrelevant compared to intellectual cognition. The German phenomenological educationalist Käte Meyer-Drawe (1999) describes this shift as a process in which “[w]e [...] have transformed ourselves into mere thinkers, things into the merely thought, and finally others into the unthinkable”¹ (p. 330). This transformation, rooted in Descartes' legacy, confines meaning to the brain alone, reducing our experience of the world to a purely cognitive construction. (Ibid.)

In contrast, a phenomenological perspective – initiated by the German philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl, founder of the phenomenological movement, and further developed by his successor, the French body phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty – underpins this article and emphasizes that, as embodied subjects of perception, we are always already involved in experiential processes with our reason (Mian, 2019). Experience takes place in and through our body, pre-reflectively and pre-personally. In the interplay between the sensual and the sensing subject – the synchronizing body (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005) – vague beckonings become sensations that emerge as distinct qualities from a pre-personal consciousness immersed in sensuality (ibid.). In this sense, there is no

[...] fundamental difference between the various modes of expression, and no privileged position can be accorded to any of them on the alleged ground that it expresses a truth in itself. [...] Expression is everywhere creative, and what is expressed is always inseparable from it. There is no analysis capable of making language crystal clear and arraying it before us as if it were an object. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. 455)

This phenomenological perspective challenges the separation of subjectivity and objectivity, between us and the world, and opens new perspectives on the role of sensuality, sensitivity and sensibility. The phenomenological vignette, a qualitative, narrative research instrument that is also used in the professional development of educators, builds on Husserl's descriptive phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body. It enables an aesthetic engagement with the world, bringing the sensual, pathic and affective dimensions of experience to the forefront. By capturing co-experiential moments in an aesthetic way, vignettes foster encounters with the self, the world and others while also creating opportunities for (aesthetic) experience through their composition, revision, finalization and interpretation – an approach known as vignette reading (*Vignetten-Lektüre*) (Agostini, 2016, 2019a).

This article first explores phenomenological vignettes in terms of the tension between sensuality and conceptuality. It then examines them both as a “sound body” of experience (Meyer-Drawe, 2012, p. 22) and a work of art (Mian, 2019; Meyer-Drawe, 2020). Finally, vignettes are situated in the context of educator development, underlining their transformative potential: By opening spaces for aesthetic experience, vignettes enrich the practice of perception fostering sensitivity to the world, others and the self while cultivating a receptive, creative, and productive engagement with diversity.

1 All quotations from non-English sources have been translated by the authors.

1. The Phenomenological Vignette: Between Sensuality and Conceptuality

In the means of linguistic expression the thing, as we say, is visualised, found as well as invented, made as well as discovered, both. Made and found. Language is not only [...] a certain mere tool, but a language is, [...] at the same time a world design [...]. It reveals and manifests a certain world view or conception of the world.' (Plessner, 2019, p. 64)

The phenomenological vignette was originally developed at the University of Innsbruck in Austria in 2012 as a qualitative research tool to trace the (learning) experiences of students. As a short narrative, it aims to capture moments of (school) experience like a photograph, recording them through language in a *pregnant* way and *engaging* way (Schratz, Schwarz, Westfall-Greiter, 2012; Agostini, Schratz, Eloff, 2024). In this context, *pregnant* does not only mean that the vignette is formulated or presented clearly, accurately and meaningfully, without unnecessary elaboration. Nor does it refer to a concise yet expressive and memorable way of writing that distills the essence of an experience. Metaphorically, it also speaks to the state of the vignette itself – 'full' or 'laden' with potential, carrying significance beyond what is explicitly stated. According to its original developers, Michael Schratz, Johanna, F. Schwarz and Tanja Westfall-Greiter, the word 'pregnant' refers to the quality of capturing the "memorable, peculiar, pleasing, disturbing, or curiosity-provoking aspects of a particular moment in such a way that the complexity, richness, and liveliness of the experience [authors: its 'pregnancy' with meaning] are preserved, at least in traces" (ibid., p. 35). In doing so, the vignette reflects not the researcher's detached, supposedly objective, but compassionate, *engaged* view.

To achieve this, vignette writers enter the research field with an attitude that is as open, receptive and unbiased as possible. They aim to "look in, listen in – not entirely without theory, but setting theory aside to confront the palpable force of the given" (Gehring, 2011, p. 31). Writers must be sensitive and ready to engage with what they experience, striving to capture the shared nature of the moment. While the lived experiences of others remain elusive, their bodily articulations do not. Writers are affected by these expressions, which resonate in their own bodies (Agostini et al., 2023). What gets recorded depends on what affects them as bodily beings, i.e., what draws their attention. In being affected, they are already responding to what is unfolding. Initial notes, or even early drafts of a so-called *raw vignette*, are written while the vignette writers remain fully immersed in the moment they are capturing. These early records of experience are significant, as the tone – often imperceptible to those immersed in the moment – imbues it with meaning that is accessible primarily to the involved gaze, yet remains hidden from the participants themselves. Subsequently, as soon as possible, the raw vignette, or initial draft, is further shaped through a multi-step enrichment process within a (research) group. The recorded co-experiential moment is then linguistically condensed and validated intersubjectively, leading to further refinement of the vignette (see ibid.). Until it fulfills its aim of making the shared experience as tangible as possible for readers, its intuitive clarity and the appropriateness of each word are continuously examined, first individually, then in pairs or in a group. In the example vignette, for instance, the following questions emerge: Was it a matter of listening, hearing, or listening up? What are the differences (in the perceived situation)? How was it said, and how was it received? What other bodily articulations, touches, movements or glances did the vignette writer notice? When writing and editing the vignette, the writer repeatedly returns to the lived moment, imitating and re-enacting facial expressions, gestures and other subtle details, searching to find the most fitting language to align what was shown with how it was shown. This is an act of translation, one that takes on the challenge of "bringing the experience to pronounce its own meaning" (Meyer-Drawe, 2012, p. 15). Frowning, stomping, searching glances, pauses, blushing, a spreading smile – mood and tone emerge in subtle nuances, sketching a situation as it was perceived by the writer, now taking form through their "art of language" (ibid.). The following vignette was recorded during a biology lesson at a Tyrolean secondary school:

In second year biology, students are giving presentations. After their turn, Martin and Alex return to their seats. Mrs. Schuster, the class teacher, had just occupied one of them while listening to their presentation on muskrats. Now she stands in front of the class, looking back and forth between Martin and Alex, and asks, frowning, why they had simply read from their script. Without waiting for an answer, she raises her voice and calls out to the class: "Be brave!" With energetic steps, she strides through

the room, positions herself in front of the blackboard and, after a scanning the classroom, calls out to the class: “The muskrat!” After a short, deliberate pause, during which she makes eye contact with each student from left to right, she continues energetically, mimicking a dramatic dive to the ground: “And then get down on all fours – or – whatever!” The students laugh as Alex leans back in his chair so that his legs are stretched out and only the back legs of the chair touch the floor. He fidgets with his upper arm, tugging at it between thumb and forefinger – a slight blush covers his face as he quietly mumbles “Yes”. At that moment, Fabian, seated in front of the two, turns around. He tips his own chair back so he can lean in closer and says, seriously, “Class 2c isn’t laughing at you.” Nods of agreement ripple through the class – Mrs. Schuster’s smiles. (Mian, 2019, p. 219)

How do readers respond to the moments captured and co-experienced by the vignette writer? What moves or unsettles them? How do they respond physically, perhaps with goosebumps, a scowl, or a smile? Do they notice these bodily articulations, which reveal something about their own co-experiential engagement? Have they been drawn into the situation, carried along by it, now searching for words to describe what the vignette has stirred in them? Discomfort? Pity? Relief? What becomes a claim for the reader in the act of reading the vignette, or what provokes their response to the claim made by the vignette? Successful vignettes have the potential to draw readers into the situation and involve them emotionally.

2. The Vignette as a *Body of Sound*: Between Resonance and Verbalization

[...] my body is not only an object among all other objects, a nexus of sensible qualities among others, but an object which is sensitive to all the rest, which reverberates to all sounds, vibrates to all colours, and provides words with their primordial significance through the way in which it receives them. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. 275)

The example vignette helps clarify what is meant by the term “pregnancy” – vignettes are “pregnant” (Meyer-Drawe, 2012, p. 14) in that they “carry traces of what has been lived through, experienced, perceived, sensed, heard, and co-felt in sensory fullness” (Schratz, Schwarz, Westfall-Greiter, 2012, p. 35). They seek to make a co-experienced atmosphere tangible and palpable, without closing down the surplus of meaning they generate. At the same time, new significance emerges in the act of reading. This happens when bodily articulations are recognized as pre-reflective forms of expression and given particular attention in the vignette. Much of what resonates in the description of the student Alex, for instance, remains unspoken: he fidgets with his upper arm, tugging at it between thumb and forefinger – a slight blush covers his face and he quietly murmurs, “Yes.” The atmosphere is conveyed, an image emerges through movement, colour and sound. These fleeting moments, often lost in a hectic school environment, resonate just below the threshold of conscious awareness – or fade away unnoticed.

In this respect, vignettes function as “sound body of experience” (Meyer-Drawe, 2012, p. 11). They give form to, “so to speak, still mute experience” (Husserl, 1977, p. 40) expressing it through words and sentences while simultaneously transcending their linguistic fixation by pointing beyond themselves. Drawing on the work of German philosopher and historian Georg Misch, the vignette’s writing style can be characterized as evocative: it gives voice to what cannot be fully expressed through clear, declarative sentences (Mian, 2019). A vignette always suggests more than it states; it resonates with meanings that remain implicit. It seeks to render the shared experience comprehensible “through an expressive mode that points beyond itself, much like a poem in an artfully literary manner, yet the evoked meaning should resonate like the fundamental tone of a melody” (ibid., p. 170). It is this resonance – the background, fundamental tone, the surplus of meaning, the significance of experiential moments – that becomes the focus of interpretation (*Deutung*) in what is known as vignette reading (*Vignetten-Lektüre*). Unlike other qualitative research methods, such as ethnographic studies, this approach does not adopt an observational stance. Rather, it involves a co-experiential attitude, which does not minimize sensations but draws directly from them and the shared atmosphere the vignette seeks to capture (Meyer-Drawe, 2020). Only through this engaged stance – the researchers’ involved body and the translation of shared experience into language – does the co-experiential experience become perceptible, resonating through contact with language. Crucially, this

resonance only emerges when it continues to reverberate in the readers, creating resonance in turn (for more information on the methodology of vignettes, please see Agostini, Schratz, Eloff, 2024).

In physics, “resonance” refers to the amplification of vibrations when an external force matches the natural frequency of a system. These vibrations – mechanical, acoustic or electromagnetic – intensify through resonance, increasing energy transfer. A classic example is the tuning fork: when struck, it vibrates and produces a pressure wave in the air, which we perceive as sound. On its own, the sound is faint as the tuning fork alone does not move much air. When held against a resonance box, however, the sound is amplified because the box absorbs and transmits the vibration – entering into resonance with it (Amaldi, 2012).

Similarly, the vignette acts as a resonating body: the vignette writer amplifies what happens within them without having initiated it, reinforcing the co-experiential experience by making it perceptible to others in a condensed and precise form. In the reader, this may open another space of resonance: Because of their bodily sensitivity, they are attuned to what is depicted, allowing the written co-experiential experience to affect them. In musical terms, this phenomenon is known as sound “by sympathy” (ibid., p. 2). Just as one tuning fork sets another in motion, the vignette – through its linguistic composition and compression – elicits subtle vibrations that would otherwise be lost to mere observation. Something happens to the reader that they did not initiate; it is, as the German phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels (2004) describes, a pathic event (*Widerfahrnis*). The vignette writing method, then, reflects an attitude of openness and receptivity. It resists the stance of detached observation and instead culminates in an embodied re-enactment of experience. This resonance is not passive reception but a creative response – an answer to what presents itself in the text. It is a response – a response to the co-experiential experience, condensed in writing and rendered resonant anew in reading. As German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1988) put it: “Things touch our strings, but we create the melody from them” (p. 311).

However, if the second tuning fork vibrates at a different frequency than the first, the transfer of energy from one to the other does not occur (or is significantly reduced) because the resonance condition is not met (Amaldi, 2012): the pressure waves of the first do not strike the second at the right moment. Similarly, in relation to the vignette, not every reader will be moved or touched by it. Each person resonates differently, depending on their own prior experiences and sensitivities, which shape their way of perceiving and experiencing. As a result, different aspects of a vignette come into focus depending on the reader and the context of reading. This makes it essential to consciously and transparently acknowledge the (theoretical) background that informs each interpretation (Schratz, Schwarz, Westfall-Greiter, 2012).

Like a poem, the vignette is not merely a vessel for information but a distinct mode of existence. Through sound, rhythm and condensation, it conveys a dimension of experience that, in reading, opens up new (aesthetic) possibilities of experiencing:

[A] poem, though it has a superficial meaning translatable into prose, leads, in the reader’s mind, a further existence which makes it a poem. Just as the spoken word is significant not only through the medium of individual words, but also through that of accent, intonation, gesture, and facial expression, and as these additional meanings no longer reveal the speaker’s thoughts but the source of his thoughts and his fundamental manner of being, so poetry, which is perhaps accidentally narrative and in that way informative, is essentially a variety of existence. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. 174)

This underscores why vignettes cannot be separated from their authors and, in Helmuth Plessner’s terms, constitute a “world projection”. The idea that events are merely subjectively constructed or co-constructed misses the point, as a phenomenological perspective subverts the mind-body divide by understanding the human being as an embodied subject of perception.² Waldenfels (2004) elaborates on this by his concept of responsiveness, understanding the human relation to the world not as intentional but as responsive: what is perceived, experienced, thought or done through the body is already a response to an encountered claim.³ Experience unfolds in and through the body, pre-reflectively and pre-personally. By the time something enters consciousness as an experience or perception, it has already taken place

² While the early Merleau-Ponty writes of the “subject of perception”, in his later work he reworks this as “flesh”.

³ Waldenfels refers in this context to the diastatic difference; for more details, see Waldenfels, 2004.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005): when I notice that I am blushing or smiling, it has already occurred within me.

These reflections highlight that the vignette is not merely a documentation of experience but a condensed, sensory articulation of co-experiential moment. Its resonance emerges through its linguistic composition. By capturing pre-reflective moments and embodied impressions in an aesthetic form, the vignette moves along the boundary between description and expression – between methodological precision and artistic creation.

3. The Vignette as a (Literary) Work of Art: Between *Aisthesis* and Aesthetics

It is sometimes the adherence of the perceived object to its context, and, as it were, its viscosity, sometimes the presence in it of a positive indeterminate which prevents the spatial, temporal and numerical wholes from becoming articulated into manageable, distinct and identifiable terms. And it is this pre-objective realm that we have to explore in ourselves if we wish to understand sense experience. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. 14)

Aesthetic perception plays a central role in both writing and reading vignettes, as shown in the previous discussion. In vignettes, the interplay between *aisthesis* – the Ancient Greek term for sensory impression, perception, sensation, feeling, and cognition (Menge, 2001) – and aesthetics – understood as the formation and representation of art-like figurations (Agostini, 2014) – takes on a distinctive form. Vignettes serve as an aesthetic medium for moments of co-experienced perception by condensing sensory impressions in a way that allows readers to engage with an exchange – with the vignette, with themselves, and potentially with others involved in the reading process (Agostini, 2019a, 2019b). This exchange unfolds through the analysis and interpretation of the vignette, a process known as vignette reading (*Vignetten-Lektüre*). Here, the shared experience is differentiated and interpreted by tracing the facets of the depicted moment.

For example, how does the previously cited vignette about Alex unfold?⁴ Unlike his classmates, Alex does not laugh in amusement after the teacher's presentation. Instead, he appears touched, moved, and affected in a different way. He seems to want to distance himself from whatever stirred him – whether it was his own presentation or the teacher's "performance." He leans back as far as possible in his chair, creating physical distance, while tugging at his upper arm, his face slightly flushed, and murmuring "yes". What does Alex experience? Is he embarrassed? Is he ashamed? The German doctor and anthropologist Hans Lipps argues that shame differs from embarrassment: "While [...] the latter merely refers to the awkward situation one finds oneself in and fears being perceived in, [...] in shame, one becomes conscious of oneself" (Lipps, 1941, pp. 38f). Is Alex overcome by shame, or merely embarrassed?

The entire vignette is thus subjected to a process of reading (*Lektüre*) and interpretation (*Deutung*), which can take place individually or collectively, discursively, in writing, scenically, graphically, and across various contexts – such as in professional learning communities or networks (Agostini, 2016; Agostini, Mian, 2020). In this process, one's initial response to the vignette is re-examined. The meaning, originally shaped into linguistic form, along with the surplus meaning evoked through evocative writing, is released anew. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, the intentional threads that bind us the world are loosened (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005). This reflection, known in phenomenology as phenomenological reduction, transforms functioning intentionality (in his later works defined as "responsivity", to give the "stranger" enough space) into explicit intentionality (or responsivity), while acknowledging that we can never fully grasp what we reflect upon (Waldenfels, 2012). It offers the opportunity to adopt a different perspective – on the experience itself, the people involved and the surrounding environment – and to step away from what is familiar and known. In this *reflective practice* (Mian, Zadra, 2025), the vignette takes on different meanings for the reader without eliminating space for further possible interpretations. The aim is not to extract definitive insights, but to open up a multiplicity of possible meanings shaped by experience and the chosen theoretical frames of reference. Rather than "pointing out" findings, there is a tendency to "point to" experience (Fin-

4 An example of a written vignette reading in the sense of an interpretation (*Deutung*) of this vignette can be found in Mian, 2019.

lay, 2009, p. 11) – or, in the Gadamerian sense of *deuten*, to point toward a direction, “an open space that can be filled in different ways” (Gadamer, 1967, p. 10).

Ultimately, the meaning offered by a vignette is multifaceted and may be received and completed differently, depending on the reader’s embodied perception. The mood conveyed and the linguistically fixed shared experience can affect readers in various ways – evoking resonances, causing irritation, or leaving them unmoved – depending on whether the experience is perceived as extraordinary or mundane, and how it is inscribed through their perception. Like a work of art, the vignette confronts the reader with themselves, as every sense of being affected is based on the revelation of something previously hidden (Gadamer, 1967). In the case of the vignette, this may involve uncovering habitual perceptual patterns that shape and constrain experience.

In the intuitive comprehension of a vignette as an exemplary description (Lippitz, 1987), differences in experience may arise, much like in postmodern art. The function of such art is to disrupt habitual ways of seeing and thinking: “The familiar is questioned, the known made strange, and irritations are intended to lead to a restructuring of perception and thought.” (Brandstätter, 2012, p. 4) In this sense, shared experiences captured in vignettes can unsettle readers if they contradict their perceptual habits of seeing or acting, thereby confronting them with themselves. This may also occur when the vignette leaves them unmoved and the depicted situation feels ‘normal’ and fails to attract further attention. However, through discursive engagement with others, the reader may encounter alternative modes of perception or become aware of different nuances, which can infuse the vignette or recorded shared experience with new meaning. This renewed perspective again confronts the reader with their own (prior) perception and potentially opens up new pathways. In this process, each interpreter becomes a source of information and experience, offering fresh perspectives on the captured moments and providing stimuli for reflection. Implicit theoretical knowledge and attributed meanings are brought into dialogue, allowing participants to engage in learning through inquiry, exploration and a responsive engagement with both their own and others’ questions. New meanings and views emerge – “learning emerges with and from others, transcending the common and obvious” (Agostini, Mian, Öztürk, Zadra, 2024, p. 233).

Aesthetic perception and experience thus emerge as a distinct mode of engaging with the world – of encountering the world and oneself, and of relating to and interacting with one’s surroundings. By treating sensory perception an end in itself within aesthetic experience, and allowing it to refer back to itself, we enter – following Cornelia Dietrich, Dominik Krinninger, and Volker Schubert (2012) in reference to the German pedagogist Klaus Mollenhauer – a particular “I-self relationship [...] that grants us pleasurable sensations of beauty, fascination, but also longing, melancholy, or sorrow” (ibid., p. 16).

The experiences of engaging with a vignette – both as reader and writer – can therefore be described as aesthetic. Sensory perception becomes an active, embodied process, and the bodily presence of both self and vignette is thematized. Working with the vignette involves articulating the meaning of experience, treating it as self-referential and an end in itself. This interplay of self- and world-reference – can be seen as a hallmark of aesthetic experience (Brandstätter, 2012, p. 2). Ursula Brandstätter, Austrian professor of music education, drawing on Hans Robert Jauß, describes this type of experience as “the experience of oneself in the experience of the other” (ibid., p. 3), which is distinguished by a distinct experience of time and space. In this way, the vignette becomes an aesthetic medium that not only condenses experience but also prompts reflection on one’s own perceptual habits, opening up new possibilities for encountering the world and oneself.

4. The Vignette Between Perception and Reflection: Fostering Teacher Sensitivity in Pedagogical Practice

Since the flowing quality of educational experience presents itself in oscillating clarity or intermittent obscurity, what must be sought is a description capable of conveying the intrinsic qualities of experience as it flows, without attempting to crystallize it into concepts that pursue an exactness incapable of grasping the givenness of reality. (Mortari, 2010, p. 150)

The phenomenological vignette is also used in educational contexts and in the professional development of educators to refine and deepen their perception (Agostini, 2020; for more information on the applica-

tion of vignettes, please see Agostini et al., 2023): How do I perceive (my) students? What experiences do they have in class? How are relationships – between teacher and student, or among students – shaped? What meanings do they assign to the events or topics being discussed? How do certain situations in the classroom affect me? Addressing these questions requires sensitivity to the nuances of interpersonal dynamics, attentiveness to students' bodily articulations and openness to multiple layers of meaning in pedagogical encounters.

Vignettes enable focused attention on specific moments of pedagogical action and, unlike the immediacy of the pedagogical situation itself, support more expansive reflection free from constraints or the pressure to act. As Meyer-Drawe (1984) emphasizes, pedagogical action seeks its footing in confirmation and success. It is not driven by a thematizing consciousness aiming to enlighten, but by a desire to find one's way, to come to an understanding, to achieve the goals one is striving for. Reflection, by contrast, involves halting action and thematizing the pre-reflective structures therein (ibid.), which is why the task of philosophical reflection lies in confronting consciousness "with its own unreflective life in things and awakened to its own history which it was forgetting" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. 36). The vignette can serve as a first glimpse of this forgotten history, a point of entry for reflection. Through reading, further perspectives on the experience may emerge (Mian, 2019).

Teachers, then, not only reflect on their cognitive interpretations of pedagogical situations; they also become more attuned to the emotional dimensions of classroom – dimensions that are often overlooked (Bruzzone, 2023). The aesthetic quality of the vignette conveys atmosphere and renders it bodily tangible through intuitive understanding. As Meyer-Drawe points out, drawing on the German philosopher Wolfgang Iser, there is an *emotional a priori* of understanding that is not excluded in vignette research in favour of [Author's note: supposed] insights" (Meyer-Drawe, 2020, p. 21). Writing and reading vignettes as researching practitioners cultivates a listening and observing attitude, which is essential for being "mindfully among things and with others in the world" (Mortari, 2017, p. 118). Such an attitude is characterized by sensitivity and receptivity to what is often missed or prematurely categorized in the routines of school life. For example, the vignette about Alex shows that his concern is not voiced directly but communicated through his body posture, a touch on the arm, a slight blush and a mumble. A teacher who notices and pays attention to such bodily articulations can more subtly perceive how students experience classroom situations – and this perception, in turn, can influence pedagogical action. Children do not primarily express their experiences through language, but through gestures, posture, facial expressions and movements. These are not mere side effects (Bertolini, 1988) but reveal how they experience a situation.

Further, the vignette draws attention to the fact that perception is always specific, and need not end with the initial attribution of meaning. Perception is never neutral; it is shaped by interpretive patterns that, consciously or unconsciously, frame and assign significance. Working with vignettes helps to question these patterns and explore alternative perspectives and interpretations. Perception is therefore ambiguous and unfolds as a dialogue and a process between perceiver and perceived. It becomes clear that perception is not a detached, individual act, but something that takes place between participants in a pedagogical moment. What a teacher perceives is not solely determined by their own individual perspective but arises in the space between them, the students, the subject matter, and the context. Vignettes and their readings, as forms of reflective practice (Mian, Zadra, 2025) make education, formation and teaching and learning visible, tangible and consciously experienced as responsive events. For instance, by reading a vignette and engaging with the teacher's experience within it, a teacher might recognize that their discomfort in a particular classroom situation is not solely due to the behaviour of the students, but also influenced by their own state, previous experiences or unspoken expectations – or vice versa. Such insights can support a more conscious approach to teaching and relationships, helping to make daily interactions less burdensome.

Working with vignettes contributes not only to cognitive reflection on pedagogical situations but also facilitates aesthetic experiences in teacher education. By engaging with the vignette as a space of experience, teachers encounter not only others but also themselves in a new way. In this sense, "it is only in this return of experience to itself, which is at the same time a change in our ability to experience, that the actual instructive power of experience lies". (Buck, 1989, p. 13) It fosters a listening and observing attitude, making teachers more receptive to their students' bodily articulations and the possible experiences these gestures convey. It heightens awareness of the ambiguity of perception and guards against premature judgements. In teacher education and professional development, this means that working with vignettes can be seen

as an essential element of professional growth. It creates a space where both aspiring and practicing teachers can cultivate openness and receptivity to experiences, supporting a reflective attitude that contributes to the development of a pedagogical ethos, characterized by mindfulness, attentiveness, “‘closeness’ or specific attentiveness, sensitivity, presence, caring, and an engaged involvement regarding the student” (Agostini, Bube, 2021, p. 65).

5. Conclusion

Sounds – ambient noises, tones of voice, subtle shifts in atmosphere – are often overlooked or reduced to background noise. In educational institutions especially, educators must develop the ability to notice and respond with care: to see attentively, to listen closely (Bruzzone, 2016), to engage with their whole body in perception, and above all, to remain open to what is fleeting or difficult to grasp, while also maintaining reflective distance and asking thoughtful questions. Because sounds and atmospheres tend to be ephemeral and intangible, they can escape deeper reflection – the kind that explores and differentiates subtle nuances and allows new possibilities of meaning to emerge. Phenomenological vignettes make it possible to capture these fleeting moments, and, through their aesthetic and resonant form, to uncover aspects of experience that might otherwise have remained unnoticed. They offer a way to bring the qualitative and pathic dimensions of experience into focus, revealing its complexity, multiplicity and ambiguity. Like a work of art (Gadamer, 1975), a vignette enables something new to emerge from subtle, often overlooked aspects of experience while also pointing beyond itself and inviting readers to explore meaning beneath the surface and from different perspectives.

Vignettes open up different spaces of resonance. First, there is the resonance of the body, which responds within the shared situation and the process of co-experiencing. Second, the vignette itself acts as a *body of sound*, translating perceptions into expressive language. Third, the reader’s body becomes a site of resonance. As others engage with the vignette, new resonances, possibilities and perspectives emerge. This depends on and requires a basic receptivity to others and to the world. Sensitivity to these different resonances can be developed through the multi-perspective use of vignettes as an *exercise in perception* (Agostini et al., 2023). By encouraging readers to question their own perspectives and explore alternative ways of seeing, phenomenological vignettes can contribute to the development of a receptive and sensitive attitude toward the world, oneself, and others. In doing so, they reveal the intra- and interpersonal dimensions of experience and help foster a sensitive, productive and creative attitude towards diversity.

Vignettes are not neutral, objective descriptions, but co-experiential, bodily perceived moments. This is not a limitation, but rather a strength, as they reveal what the Irish bass-baritone David Howes has aptly captured – a point we wish to underscore in conclusion:

The human sensorium, however, never exists in a natural state. Humans are social beings, and just as human nature itself is a product of culture, so is the human sensorium. [...] Tastes and sounds and touches are imbued with meaning and carefully hierarchized and regulated [...]. This system of sensory values is never entirely articulated through language, but it is practised and experienced (and sometimes challenged), by humans as culture bearers. The sensory order, in fact, is not just something one sees or hears about; it is something one lives. (Howes, 2004, p. 3)

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