

VISUAL BIAS

Documenting, Representing & Communicating of Images in Educational History Research

CALL FOR PAPERS

Conference
May 20 to 22, 2026
BBF, Berlin

BBF Bibliothek für
Bildungsgeschichtliche
Forschung des DIPF
DIPF 

The performative power of images means that they are often understood not simply as representations of something else, but as documents embodying the very subjects they depict. This holds particular significance in the fields of education and pedagogy. The iconic nature of images cannot rely on a universal grammar; rather, each image must be interpreted anew, taking into account the prevailing conventions of representation and the specific contexts in which it was created. This becomes increasingly clear when large data corpora are analyzed using AI tools, which often produce biased or prejudiced findings. When images are employed in academic research—as sources, illustrations, presentations, or tools for knowledge generation in educational settings, for example through data visualizations—such biases must be carefully considered.

Within the framework of the series **Pedagogical Knowledge in Images**, this conference centers on the issue of visual bias within educational science and the history of education, as well as within the broader context of Digital Humanities.

Sections:

1) Documenting

Images occupy a central position in historical research—whether as photographic records of political events, as scientific documentation, or as elements of educational history collections housed in archives and museums. They serve as historical testimonies and frequently shape our understanding of an era more profoundly than written sources.

Simultaneously, images convey an impression of particular objectivity: whereas textual sources are acknowledged as subjective and interpretive, photographs or drawings often appear to constitute “direct evidence.” However, this assumption is misleading, as images are never value-neutral, their creation, selection, archiving, and presentation are invariably shaped by decisions, perspectives, and contextual frameworks.

Unlike texts, images exert a more immediate and emotional impact while remaining inherently ambiguous. Whereas texts are contextualized through argumentation, images frequently lack explicit and recognizable framing. Consequently, they are more susceptible to misinterpretation or emotional distortion.

This section welcomes contributions addressing educational history collections and pedagogical archives from the perspective of documentation and its inherent biases.

2) Representing

Images fulfill an epistemic function in the research process by visually representing objects, facts, events, or individuals within specific contexts. On a semiotic level, images represent primarily through visual similarity, functioning as iconic signs. However, they simultaneously operate as symbolic signs embedded within cultural and historical contexts.

Beyond their interpretation as sources, visual forms of representation can be strategically deployed to support and advance knowledge production. Visualizations enable the presentation of complex issues at a glance while illustrating and communicating research findings. In visualizations, bias may manifest at the data level itself, as they necessarily represent only a selective excerpt of reality. Furthermore, design choices, such as the scaling of diagrams, can present information in a biased manner or enable deliberate manipulation.

This section invites contributions on image interpretation and visualization design that engage reflexively or critically with the representational function of images in educational contexts.

3) Communicating

Within educational contexts, numerous images and image collections have been created to facilitate communication and serve as reminders of rules and prescriptions. While the didactic function primarily aims at simplification and accessibility, pictorial representations of rules and prohibitions focus predominantly on behavioral regulation. Their function lies in the symbolic reinforcement of norms. However, these representations frequently encounter problems of exaggeration or oversimplification, even to the point of distortion, thus paradoxically impeding—from a pedagogical perspective—the achievement of their intended objectives.

This section welcomes contributions addressing the didactic function of images in diverse ways, thereby illuminating their limitations, interpretive pitfalls, and potential excesses. This focus may be illustrated through both contemporary and historical visual examples.

The conference will take place on May 20 and 22, 2026, at the BBF premises (Warschauer Str. 34–35, 10243 Berlin). A panel discussion on May 20 will open the topic on the eve of the event and invite participants to an initial scholarly exchange.

Submissions for individual presentations (20 minutes talk + 10 minutes discussion) of at least 2,500 and a maximum of 3,000 characters (including spaces) are requested by **February 22, 2026, to be sent to: c.heinicke@dipf.de**.

Contributions may be submitted in German or English.

The decision on acceptance will be made by early March.

Registration for the conference will be possible starting March 2026.

We look forward to your submissions!

The Organizers

Linda Freyberg * Sieglinde Jornitz * Stefanie Kollmann * Katharina Vogel



https://pictura.bbf.dipf.de/viewer/2026_VisualBias/

