

Unpacking Chilean Preservice Teachers' Beliefs on Practicum Experiences through Digital Stories

Claudio Diaz, Mabel Ortiz

Abstract—An EFL teacher education programme in Chile takes five years to train a future teacher of English. Preservice teachers are prepared to learn an advanced level of English and teach the language from 5th to 12th grade in the Chilean educational system. In the context of their first EFL Methodology course in year four, preservice teachers have to create a five-minute digital story that starts from a critical incident they have experienced as teachers-to-be during their observations or interventions in the schools. A critical incident can be defined as a happening, a specific incident or event either observed by them or involving them. The happening sparks their thinking and may make them subsequently think differently about the particular event. When they create their digital stories, preservice teachers put technology, teaching practice and theory together to narrate a story that is complemented by still images, moving images, text, sound effects and music. The story should be told as a personal narrative, which explains the critical incident. This presentation will focus on the creation process of 50 Chilean preservice teachers' digital stories highlighting the critical incidents they started their stories. It will also unpack preservice teachers' beliefs and reflections when approaching their teaching practices in schools. These beliefs will be coded and categorized through content analysis to evidence preservice teachers' most rooted conceptions about English teaching and learning in Chilean schools. The findings seem to indicate that preservice teachers' beliefs are strongly mediated by contextual and affective factors.

Keywords—Beliefs, Digital stories, Preservice teachers, Practicum.

I. INTRODUCTION

CHILEAN universities are the institutions that form future teachers of English offering programmes that last between four and five years of training. To enter one of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teacher Education programmes, candidates have to sit for a national exam that assesses Mathematics, Spanish Language, and History and Social Science knowledge and skills. Therefore, teacher candidates' initial English competence is what they have previously studied in primary and secondary education, where English teaching and learning are varied depending on the type of school, with candidates coming from public, semi-public or private institutions. First year university students who want to become teachers of English then have an entry level of English that can range from elementary to intermediate, before they do their professional practice in year

C. D. is with Universidad de Concepción, Edmundo Larenas 64A. Concepción, Chile (phone: 6412661333; fax: 56412204579; e-mail: claudioidiaz@udec.cl).

M. O. is with Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción, Alonso de Ribera 2850, Concepción, Chile (e-mail: mortiz@ucsc.cl).

five.

Once they are at university, teacher candidates study a strong language component that basically translates into courses in English Competence, Grammar, Phonetics, Literature and Culture. Simultaneously, teacher candidates have a line of pedagogical courses that go from General Curriculum to EFL Methods. Likewise, teacher candidates do three 24-hour practicum experiences in high schools, where they observe lessons and participate in small teaching interventions.

Teacher candidates' practicum experiences are an important event for them because they assume different responsibilities and tasks that make them test their teaching skills, as well as affective reactions when teaching and interacting with their students. Teacher candidates keep the link with the university in the form of weekly workshops that aim at making them debrief their teaching practice experience in the school settings. One of the tasks they have to accomplish is the creation of a digital story that illustrates one critical incident they have previously experienced in the context of their teaching practice experience. This study analyses 50 preservice teachers' digital stories and identifies, through the content analysis technique, what dimensions and categories emerge from the data.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Teachers' Beliefs

Beliefs are a complex construct that puts a series of variables into practice and refer to people's conceptions of a phenomenon or process [10]. Teachers' beliefs address the cognitive, metacognitive and affective dimensions and involve people's conceptions of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers' beliefs are personal, context-based and practice oriented. They are a synthesis of cultural knowledge and personal experiences [12].

Digging into teachers' beliefs constitutes an understanding of their pedagogical conceptions and classroom practices, and offers a possible explanation of what promotes or hinders educational change and innovation [2].

Beliefs are simplified versions of reality that are internally and personally organized, and allow people to make their own interpretations and decisions regarding different events; beliefs are culturally-based, because they are built in the context of communicative and social interaction [3]. They are implicit theories that help people make sense of their own personal reality.

B. Critical Incidents

Critical incidents are a learning tool about conflicting classroom situations that can affect people's relationships.

The critical incident tool triggers people's reflection skills and allows the production of qualitative data that have the potential of explaining why critical incidents occur [7]. Critical incidents are time and space specific, cannot be anticipated and can leave a strong impression on people. They are meaningful episodes that put teachers in an unstable situation affecting them in their cognitive, affective and social dimensions. Their key characteristic is the feeling of insecurity they provoke, which may give rise to aggressive behaviour [14].

The critical incident tool constitutes a rich source of data that visualizes key classroom management problems that may affect the school climate. This tool does not only aim at making people reflect, but it also fosters a change in teachers' professional identity. The idea is that teachers can view themselves as effective teachers capable of facing stressful situations, using deep psychological mechanisms and generating new professional identities.

Classrooms are a space where diversity is always present; hence, conflicting events are common situations in this context. A great deal of viewpoints, interests and knowledge mingle and clash each other. This is the reason why critical incidents are rooted in classrooms and why teachers should develop a repertoire of classroom management skills to deal with conflict. These skills should also be of a metacognitive nature, since reflection can provoke a real change in classroom practices.

C. Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling refers to the practice of using computer-based tools to tell stories. Digital stories involve the use of graphics, audio, video, text, and a variety of multimedia to focus on a specific topic and a particular point of view [1], [4].

Digital stories have a strong emotional component and are usually persuasive or reflective. They are a pedagogical tool that enables someone to narrate and communicate a theme and be aware of the audience's perspective [5], [9]. Digital stories let students express their voices and develop a sense of ownership and individuality, giving students an opportunity to experiment with telling a story that highlights specific characteristics or events, which are part of their personal and professional identity. Through stories people teach beliefs and values to others. The oral tradition of knowledge exchange is the basis for education, since humans started teaching one another [6], [8]. Some of the steps to follow to build a digital story are:

- Identify an event, person or a location that will be the subject of the story.
- Identify the audience and a purpose for the story.
- Use your own knowledge of storytelling and effective voice to create the story.
- Consider the structure of the narrative.
- Select the media that will add to the digital storytelling (music, sound effects, and text).

- Work on a script for the story.
- Receive feedback and make any necessary revisions before recording the story.
- Practise and record the digital story for sharing.
- Share the digital story and reflect on your learning [11], [13].

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Type of Study

This research study followed a case-study methodology in the context of qualitative research.

B. Research Question

What beliefs do EFL preservice teachers' digital stories unpack regarding their practicum experiences?

C. Participants

They are 50 preservice teachers who are in their fourth year of training at a Chilean university. They belong to a five year teacher education program and they are doing their teaching practices in local high schools. Of them, 35 are women and 25 are men, whose ages range between 22 years and 25 years. All are required to do 24 hours of teaching practice in a semester and teach English to high school students. After they finish these practicum experiences and their final professional practice, they will graduate as teachers of English and with a Bachelor's degree in Education.

IV. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURE

Two data collection techniques were used:

A. A Critical Incident Form

Participants had to identify a critical incident from their teaching practices based on the questions below:

- What is your teaching philosophy for selecting this critical incident?
- What was your understanding of this incident?

B. A Three to Five-Minute Digital Story

Based on the selected critical incident, participants had to create a digital story combining text, images, and sound effects. Most of the participants employed Windows Movie Maker to digitalize their stories. The digital story should evidence their critical reflection on a chosen critical incident from their teaching practice, ensuring all personal data had been removed.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

Each one of the digital stories was analyzed using the content analysis technique that helped to process the data like this: data transcription, coding, categorizing, saturation and triangulation by two researchers.

After analyzing the content of preservice teachers' digital stories, three macro dimensions emerge from the data.

A. Dimension 1: Teacher-Related Dimension

The teacher-centred dimension, seen in Table I, lists a series

of issues preservice teachers have selected as critical incidents from their own teaching practices. These practicum issues have emerged as a consequence of their awareness of a weakness in their own teaching skill in the classroom or as a weakness they have observed from their mentor teacher.

Preservice teachers' key critical incidents are classroom management issues such as a lack of effective classroom management techniques. The second highest frequency is when the mentor teacher does not accompany the preservice teacher in the classroom as a result of either being on medical leave or having left the job, which results in having a substitute teacher or having the preservice teacher herself/himself in charge of the lesson. This specific scenario generates a great deal of stress and worry on the part of preservice teachers. Lesson planning and students with special needs score as the third most frequent issues. Then there is a series of issues that are basically connected with how a teacher should act or react when facing different classroom scenarios or affective-involving situations (see Table I).

TABLE I
TEACHER-CENTRED DIMENSION

Practicum issues	Number of students
Lack of effective classroom management techniques	11
Absence of mentor teacher in the classroom	5
Lack of or poor lesson planning	2
Absence of techniques to deal with students with special needs	2
Drug-related issues in the school	1
Inappropriate techniques to build an environment for language learning	1
Ineffective teaching skills	1
Lack of communicative activities	1
Low expectations of students	1
Inappropriate techniques to respond to students' emotional outbursts	1
Inappropriate techniques to deal with socially vulnerable students	1
Poor test creation skills	1

Below there are some classroom situations that illustrate the four highest categories for the teacher-related dimension.

1. Lack of Effective Classroom Management Techniques

- a. The mentor teacher told the preservice teacher to take charge of the lesson. The students did not pay attention and misbehaved.
- b. A child has *popped* in his pants. The mentor teacher and the preservice teacher did not know what to do. The boy started crying, the mentor teacher talked to him outside the classroom while the preservice teacher kept on with the lesson, but the students did not pay attention to him.

2. Absence of Mentor Teacher in Class

- a. The mentor teacher did not show up in class. The school authorities asked the preservice teacher to do the lesson.
- b. The mentor teacher had to leave earlier and left the preservice teacher in charge of the lesson. The students misbehaved and the preservice teacher needed the assistance of extra personnel from the school.

- c. The mentor teacher quit the job and left the lesson plan for a substitute teacher to replace her. The substitute teacher changed the lesson plans and students did not like her lessons and misbehaved all the time.

3. Lack of or Poor Lesson Planning

- a. The mentor teacher did not have a lesson plan and used the same material for all the school levels.

4. Absence of Techniques to Deal with Students with Special Needs

- a. The preservice teacher realized that in her lesson there was a student with special needs that did not participate in the lesson. The mentor teacher told the preservice teacher that students with special needs would not learn English.
- b. A student hit one of his classmates and the mentor teacher did not do anything about that. The mentor teacher explained to the preservice teacher that this student suffered from Asperger's syndrome and the school did not have a specialist for that.

B. Dimension 2: Student-Related Dimension

The second dimension addresses student-centred issues that preservice teachers have chosen as critical incidents. As number one, students' misbehaviour in the classroom appears as critical for preservice teachers, followed by issues related to students' lack of motivation to learn a foreign language. The third issue is considered as crucial for preservice teachers - defiant students and multiple intelligence classrooms- are also of importance and concern (see Table II).

TABLE II
STUDENT-CENTRED DIMENSION

Practicum issues	Number of students
Students' misbehaviour	10
Students' lack of motivation	5
Unawareness of students' multiple intelligences	2
Students' personal emotions and their impact on learning	2
Students' lack of enough sleeping hours	1
Students' unawareness of world cultures	1
Students' language proficiency problems	1

The student-centred dimension depicts that a great deal of preservice teachers' most critical incidents are of affective nature. School students experience affect-related issues that may interfere with their language learning or adaptation to the school classroom or context.

Digital stories also unpack preservice teachers' self-perceived feelings when doing their practicum experiences. These feelings were connected to the participants' effective or ineffective classroom performance or to any success or failure their own students had had as a result of their own personal intervention. The situations below provide some examples that preservice teachers regarded as critical incidents.

1. Students' Misbehaviour

- a. A student was badly misbehaving. He was playing with his cell phone and constantly talking to classmates.

- b. While the preservice teacher was reviewing some contents, a couple of students stood up and started fighting in class.
- c. The first time that the preservice teacher arrived in the classroom, it was a complete chaos. Students were playing around, and listening to music. The preservice teacher was unable to do anything.

2. Students' Lack of Motivation

- a. A student told the preservice teacher that he did not like English because it was a useless subject. The preservice teacher realized that the language contents he was covering were not really related with the students' social background or topics of their own interest.
- b. Students were not interested in the English lessons. The preservice teacher used the class tool *Dojo* to improve classroom management.

3. Unawareness of Students' Multiple Intelligences

- a. The students were listening to music during the lesson. The mentor teacher suggested the preservice teacher involve students' in music-related activities.
- b. A student did not work in the class activities and misbehaved during the lesson. The preservice teacher discovered that this student liked drawing. So, she decided to do activities in which the students could draw and learn English at the same time.

C. Dimension 3: Personal-Related Dimension

In their everyday interaction, preservice teachers highlighted in their digital stories the feelings they had experienced when interacting with their mentor teacher, students or any other school personnel. These positive feelings were due to two main reasons: preservice teachers were very satisfied by their own performance or personal achievements when either teaching or by receiving feedback from their students or mentor teacher about their work (see Table III). However, preservice teachers' negative feelings outnumbered their positive ones while doing their teaching practices. From their own assessment, nervousness, shock and worry were three negative feelings that stand out (see Table IV).

TABLE III
POSITIVE FEELINGS

Feeling experienced	Number of students
Surprised	3
Grateful	2
Relaxed	2
Comfortable	1
Excited	1
Happy	1
Proud	1

The great number of negative feelings preservice teachers declared they had experienced while doing their teaching practice reveals that this activity has a strong affective load for them. The complexity of the foreign language classroom provokes an array of negative feelings on preservice teachers, which should be a point of concern for teacher education

programmes.

TABLE IV
NEGATIVE FEELINGS

Feeling experienced	Number of students
Nervous	8
Shocked	4
Worried	3
Anxious	2
Challenged	2
Disappointed	2
Uncertain	2
Unprepared	2
Upset	2
Afraid	1
Astounded	1
Bothered	1
Confused	1
Frustrated	1
Helpless	1
Overwhelmed	1
Powerless	1
Uncomfortable	1
Uneasy	1
Demotivated	1
Useless	1

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Preservice teachers' digital stories seem to unravel the fact that dealing with high school students' misbehaviour is a critical incident for these teacher candidates. They acknowledge not having the necessary skills to address misbehaviour issues in the classroom, which causes them a sense of frustration. A great deal of the participants' critical incidents is related to their lack of appropriate classroom management techniques to approach the complexity of the classroom.

Participants also claim that there is an array of student-related factors that challenge them. High school students' lack of interest and motivation to learn a foreign language is also pervasive in preservice teachers' critical incidents. Interestingly, participants show concern for not having sound strategies to approach students' emotional outbursts in class and those students who present any kind of special need.

The results of this study may constitute a call for Foreign Language Teacher Education Programmes in Chile to strengthen teacher candidates' knowledge and skills to approach affective and emotional related issues that emerge more and more frequently in classrooms. Contrary to what may have been expected, cognitive and metacognitive issues related to language learning do not appear as highlighted critical incidents among the participants of this study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

C.D thanks to FONDECYT 1150889, The cognitive, affective and social dimensions of the lesson planning process and its relationship with English preservice teachers' and beginning in-service teachers' pedagogical performances.

REFERENCES

- [1] Brown, J., J. Bryan, and T. Brown. 2005. Twenty-first century literacy and technology in K–8 classrooms. *Innovate* 1 (3).
- [2] Contreras, G. & Prieto, M. (2008). Las concepciones que orientan las prácticas evaluativas de los profesores: un problema a develar. *Estudios Pedagógicos*, v. 34, n. 2, 245-262.
- [3] Hashweh, M. (2005). Teacher pedagogical constructions: a reconfiguration of pedagogical content knowledge. *Teachers and Thinking: Theory and Practice*, v. 11, 273-292.
- [4] Kajder, S. (2004). Personal narrative and digital storytelling. *English Journal*, 93 (3), 64–68.
- [5] Lambert, J. (2010). *Digital storytelling cookbook*. Berkeley, CA: Digital Diner Press.
- [6] McGeoch, K. 2010. Digital stories. *International House Journal of Education and Development*, 28, 19–21.
- [7] Nail, O. (2010). Los incidentes críticos de aula. Un aporte a la gestión docente y la formación inicial. Proyecto DIUC 210.161.006-1.0. Concepción: Universidad de Concepción.
- [8] Ohler, J. (2008). *Digital storytelling in the classroom: New media pathways to literacy, learning, and creativity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- [9] Robin, B. (2008). Digital storytelling: A powerful technology tool for the 21st century classroom. *Theory into Practice*, 47 (3): 220–228.
- [10] Roehrig, A., Bohn, C., Turner, J. & Pressley, M. (2007). Mentoring beginning primary teachers for exemplary teaching practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 24, n. 3, 1-19.
- [11] Sadik, A. (2008). Digital storytelling: A meaningful technology-integrated approach for engaged student learning. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 56 (4), 487–506.
- [12] Shulman, L. (2005). Conocimiento y enseñanza: fundamentos de la nueva reforma. *Revista de Curriculum y Formación del Profesorado*, vol. 9, n. 2, 1-30.
- [13] Swenson, J., C. A. Young, E. McGrail, R. Rozema, and P. Whitin. (2006). Extending the conversation: New technologies, new literacies, and English education. *English Education*, 38 (4): 351–369.
- [14] Tripp, D. (1993). *Critical incidents in teaching: Developing professional judgement*. Nueva York: Routledge.