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Exploring educational interactions in a pandemic situation through comics: an approach to the Spanish context

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to widespread changes in the ways teaching and learning take place under the pandemic. This has affected more significantly pre-service teachers, as they did not have the opportunity to experience their practicum period in a 'normal' context. Therefore, the aims of this paper are: (1) to explore how pre-service teachers experienced a period of uncertainty in teaching as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic; and (2) to explore how pre-service teachers imagined the teaching profession and the challenges they faced related to the pandemic. Results show that pre-service teachers believed that the educational relationship between teachers, the students and the subject is built through a personal relationship between teachers, students and the content to be taught. Results also demonstrate that the pandemic made it difficult for pre-service teachers to approach students and content, and create spaces of mutual trust between teacher and students.

Introduction

The initial teacher training stage is the period in which future educators begin to analyse, examine, observe and reflect on what they do and how they do it in the classroom; it is the vehicle that allows them to form their teaching identity in a critical and reflective way (Atkinson, 2004; Graham & Phelps, 2003). This phase also allows pre-service teachers to develop their professional judgment that will join them in curriculum development and pedagogical encounters with students (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2017). However, in the wake of the health crisis caused by Covid-19, the teaching profession has changed radically in a few months. Spain, like many other countries, had to change and adapt to different ways of teaching. First, in a virtual way and, later, in person but with some recommendations in place (e.g. keeping distance, wearing masks, washing hands often).

Research regarding the pandemic is emerging in Spain, particularly in relation to the changes in teaching environments (e.g. González-Calvo, 2020; Díez Gutiérrez & Gajardo Espinoza, 2020). However, this paper is one of the few investigating how the pandemic has shaped the teaching practice of future educators from a visual perspective. The aims of this paper are: (1) to explore how pre-service teachers experienced a period of uncertainty in teaching as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic; and (2) to explore how pre-service teachers imagined the teaching profession and the challenges they faced related to the pandemic. The specific research question that guided this study is: how do pre-service teachers perceive the conditions of the teaching profession during a

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pandemic? We answer this question by exploring the educational and relational phenomena of pedagogical tact, pedagogical relationship, and pedagogical triangle.

Tact, pedagogical relationship and the pedagogical triangle

Teaching is often understood as a process that separates the knowledge of the students from their lived experience (Atkinson, 2018; Van Manen, 2008), making the education turn exclusively about learning without taking as a reference the process that the students go through (Biesta, 2020).

However, Clandinin and Connelly (1998), inspired by the work of Dewey, warned us about the need to focus the teaching on the experience of students in the classroom, and claimed that experience has value insofar as it implies a transaction between the individual and what constitutes the environment. From this perspective, learning stands as the process by which students acquire a complex system of predispositions that prepare them for future actions as they interact with their environment (Atkinson, 2018). This perspective is particularly relevant during a pandemic, as more unique and unpredictable approaches are needed.

Clandinin and Connelly (1998) elaborated the notion of 'lived curriculum' to refer to the web of experiences that are interwoven in schools. In so doing, learning is always the result of this interaction between the prescribed curriculum, the didactic approach supported by each teacher and how students are involved (Martín-Alonso, 2019)

The willingness to be open and interested in knowing and understanding the situation of the students, how they live and shape their history, requires pedagogical tact (Friesen & Osguthorpe, 2018). Having pedagogical tact implies understanding the experiences of each student and what is appropriate in each specific situation for the (re)creation of their lived curriculum (Yi-Huang, 2018). For Van Manen (2010), pedagogical tact is the ability to know how to interpret thoughts, feelings and inner desires through indirect signs such as gestures, behaviour, expression, body language, among others. Teaching knowledge that functions as dispositions for action and the educational relationship involves touch (González-Calvo, 2020; Varea & González-Calvo, 2021). This is based on a very different epistemological order compared to other teaching competences, as they appeal to a sense of ethical sensitivity that is difficult to prescribe. Hence, despite the normative nature of education, this necessarily takes the form of a relationship in which what is pedagogically sustainable depends on pedagogical judgement, which is always settled in praxis.

In this sense, there is much to learn from what students say about the good teachers they have had. Van Manen (2008) states that, among the generalisations about these teachers, students highlight traits such as a sense of fairness, patience, attention, communication skills, the willingness to maintain discipline, a sense of humour, interest in students and, ultimately, wanting to understand the life of each one of them. Therefore, the teacher's perspective, characterised only in terms of isolated competences (Korthagen, 2004), is not enough, as teaching must take into account the teacher's personal aspects, such as enthusiasm, flexibility, affection towards students, humour, honesty and sensitivity, among others (Day, 2005, 2006; Korthagen, 2004, 2009, 2010). This is even more important in the school during a pandemic situation (González-Calvo, 2020; Chiara et al., 2020; Odriozola, Planchuelo, Irurtia, & de Luis, 2020).

Even though one of the recommendations during the Covid-19 pandemic was to keep distance between each other, education is, fundamentally, a relational activity, since it inevitably develops and makes sense through the interaction between people (e.g. Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007; Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017). This is why schools have traditionally required the physical presence of both, teachers and students, who have constant interactions. For this reason, it is not enough to consider teaching as a merely rational profession, but also as a work imbued with affective and emotional elements (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2017; Hargreaves, 2000). From this perspective, knowing the students in initial teacher education and giving space to their concerns is an important task in the line of achieving more effective learning (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011; Seale, 2010).

The social interactions that take place in school, due to the relational nature of education, help to build a series of cultural meanings that not only develop the social competence of the students, but also of the teacher. For these interactions to be positive, among the social skills to be developed in schools, empathy stands out (Bozkurt & Ozden, 2010; Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017). Empathy is defined as the ability to put oneself in the place of the other person, know what they think, what they feel and act accordingly to achieve a positive relationship between both parties (Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017). In other words, it is about 'an affective response more in line with the situation of the other than with that of oneself' (Hoffman, 1992, p. 60). Empathy is particularly relevant in the teaching/learning process, as it allows improving the relationship established by the teacher and the student while improving the general climate of the class and school success (Bozkurt & Ozden, 2010).

In an uncertain and overwhelming situation such as a pandemic, it is more important than ever to direct attention not only to the learning process, but also to the educational relationship and the ways in which pre-service teachers develop their professional experience. Doing so implies thinking of the teacher-student encounter as the axis of the process of subjectivation within what has been called the *pedagogy of presence* (Bárcena, 2012). Acting within the framework of the pedagogy of presence leads to placing at the centre of the teaching–learning process, and not the student or the content being taught. Teaching is constituted through three main interactions (Houssaye, 2015): teacher and knowledge, teacher and students, and students and knowledge. These three interactions can be represented in the form of a triangle, that is what has been called the 'pedagogical triangle' (Houssaye, 1988, 2015). The three vertices of the triangle are determined by the learning process, the teaching process and the training process. The relationship of the learning process shows the direct relationship between the learner and knowledge, being favoured by the teacher as the organiser of the external learning processes (Houssaye, 1988; Houssaye, 2015). The relationship of the teaching process refers to the connection between the teacher and knowledge, the teacher being responsible for structuring the knowledge for assimilation by the student. Finally, the relationship of the training process is the one established between the apprentice and the teacher, both being in constant interaction (Houssaye, 1988).

Methodology

Our study is inspired by Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) narrative perspective of educational experience. According to this approach, people tell stories that lead to narrated lives, both individually and socially. Following Connelly and Clandinin (1988), the curriculum corresponds to the ways and means by which teachers and students compose and make sense of their experiences in the classroom (Clandinin et al., 2006; Hubert, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). Of course, teachers and students occupy different places with different meanings.

Inspired by the narrative vision of the educational experience, we used visual media (i.e. comics) as a method that allows to address the complexities of the relationships between teaching and learning, the relationships between the participating agents in the educational process and the pandemic situation in which teaching took place during 2020 and 2021. The use of comics allowed for pre-service teachers to develop visual narratives that help to contextualise the teaching stories they have been through, and to deepen the complexity of their professional decisions and beliefs. In so doing, comics can be considered an artistic tool to tell stories related to education in times of a pandemic.[1] This is also the case for other media and procedures such as photo-language (Akeret, 2000; Baptiste & y Belisle, 1991).

In this sense, visual narratives collaboratively access participants' life experiences and engage in a process of storytelling and reprinting that reveals multidimensional meanings, and presents an authentic and compelling interpretation of the data.

'Research-based comic' is gaining popularity in arts-based educational discourses (Lawrence, Lin, & Irwin, 2017; LeBlanc & Irwin, 2018), and it is described as the broad set of practices that use the comic to collect, analyse and/or disseminate academic research (Kutner, Sousanis, & Weaver-

Hightower, 2017). It is a flexible and multimodal form of research that allows to explore and analyse the stories of the participants, and an appropriate tool to represent the results of the research (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2018). That is, the narratives are constructed from data through a reflective, participatory and aesthetic process (Kutner et al., 2017; Leavy, 2009). The comics produced by the participants explore the potential of narrative inquiry, while addressing the narrative nature of the educational experiences of future teachers.

There is little research to show that the comic is an appropriate form of representation in relation to professional learning narratives (Kraver, 2013; Lawrence et al., 2017). Comics are constructed through instantaneous exchanges between text and image, called narrative drawing (Groensteen, 2013), in which the unique professional experiences of teachers who combine their present experiences with their future aspirations are revealed. It is a flexible and multimodal form of research that allows to explore and analyse the stories of the participants, and it is also an appropriate tool to represent the results of the research (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2018). The process of telling stories through comics is a creative game (Madrid-Manrique, 2014), offering researchers a way to solve problems such as confidentiality and anonymity while challenging the researcher to reconsider both reality and fiction regularly (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2018). As a form of relational research, like the one presented here, comics allow to represent and (re)construct difficult experiences such as vulnerability, fears and uncertainties, expressing how participants live in relation to others and placing them in a network of embodied relationships (Madrid-Manrique, 2014).

Participants for this study were a group of 25 pre-service Primary Education teachers from Spain (19 women and 6 men) who were undertaking the last year of their teaching degree programme (fourth year). The students were asked to create a real story that was part of the current pandemic context and related to their personal and professional identity as future teachers. They were asked to combine text and images to make a comic. The teacher suggested some questions for them to reflect on, such as: How has my idea of the teaching profession changed since the emergence of the pandemic?; What fears and expectations do I have now?; How do I imagine the future after Covid-19?; What was the pre-Covid school like and what will the post-Covid school be like?; How is the way we approach other people changing because of the pandemic? Students were given the option to draw the drawings by hand or using a computer application. Finally, each comic was explained by the student to the teacher in an interview of approximately 10 min each. Interview data on experiences, expectations and fears were also considered to enrich the analysis. The drawings and excerpts of their descriptions included in this paper are the ones most representative of the topics being discussed.

Visual narratives in comic form were analysed by all researchers. Ethical approval was obtained through the first author's university and the names of the participants were substituted with pseudonyms to guarantee anonymity in the presentation of the results. Three main themes were constructed from the data, which are presented below, organised according to the criteria established by the pedagogical triangle: (1) the relationships between teachers and students; (2) the relationship between students and the subject to learn and (3) the relationship between the teacher and the subject to be taught. Within each category, the different topics constructed from the data analysis are presented.

Results

The relationship between teacher and student: training

a. *The relationship between teacher and student in the new school*

Despite the difficulty of creating a space in which mutual knowledge and accompaniment are possible, teachers expressed an interest in enabling relationships with others. In so doing, teachers try to

make room for the everyday and the uniqueness of each student. However, the new pandemic situation forced the pre-service teachers to imagine the profession as something linked to technology, making contact and physical proximity difficult. Some of the vignettes of the participants demonstrate how the body and face do not have the same importance during an online interaction, and how this leads to the disappearance of interpersonal contact (Han, 2017) (Figure 1):

This new way of understanding the teaching profession makes it difficult to establish an educational relationship as an experience of direct encounter between teacher and students (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2017). In this sense, Bárcena (2012) considers that the educational relationship must be based in terms of presence. The teacher must be present in a face-to-face relationship, always according to the object that matters in the teacher-student relationship. However, the vignettes of the participants reflect this difficulty in being present in a context that favours more distant encounters. In this sense, the uncertainty of the pandemic implies that the participants rethink what the profession was like in the recent past, what it is like today and how they think it will be in the near future. Being aware of teachers way of being in the classroom and responding to the needs presented by the students are some of their concerns. Several participants preferred to be available and empathetic with the different situations that students have to face. Being available implies here involving the whole person, being sensitive to the student's history and their uniqueness. This is something that has to be done 'with tact' (Friesen & Osguthorpe, 2018), that is, respecting the rules and the limits in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, and interpreting with sensitivity the social and psychological importance of the child's inner life (Asensio Aguilera, 2010; Van Manen, 2010).

Equally important are the relationships that schoolchildren establish with each other. The pandemic situation has led to non-existent contact and proximity with peers. This is a theme that appears recurrently in the comics of the participants that shows how one of the most important parts of the educational process – the encounter with the other – is compromised, and the school loses its human interaction capacity. Education is therefore at the risk of being dehumanised without being able to be close to others, given that education is a human manifestation (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2017). Education is constantly remaking itself in praxis (Freire, 1996), something that the participants reflect as a limiting factor during the pandemic (Figure 2):

The school during the pandemic implies, for the participants, a socially constructed risk in which both teachers and students are defined as 'people with greater risk than others' (Varea & González-
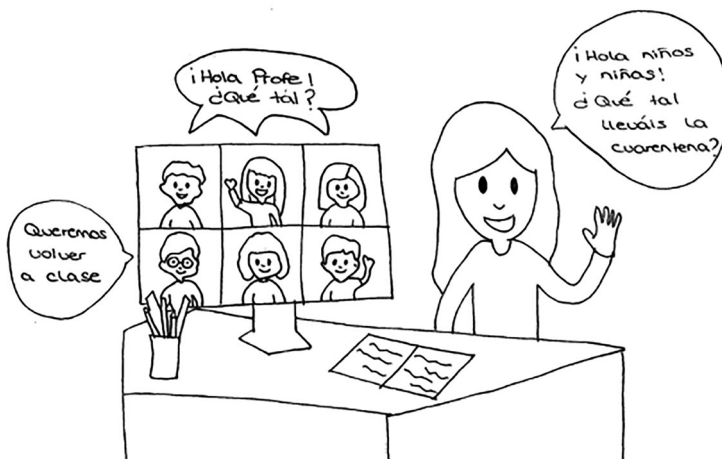

Figure 1. The new way of teaching and learning. [Teacher: 'Hi kids, how are you doing?', Children: Hello, teacher., Children: We want to go back to class!].
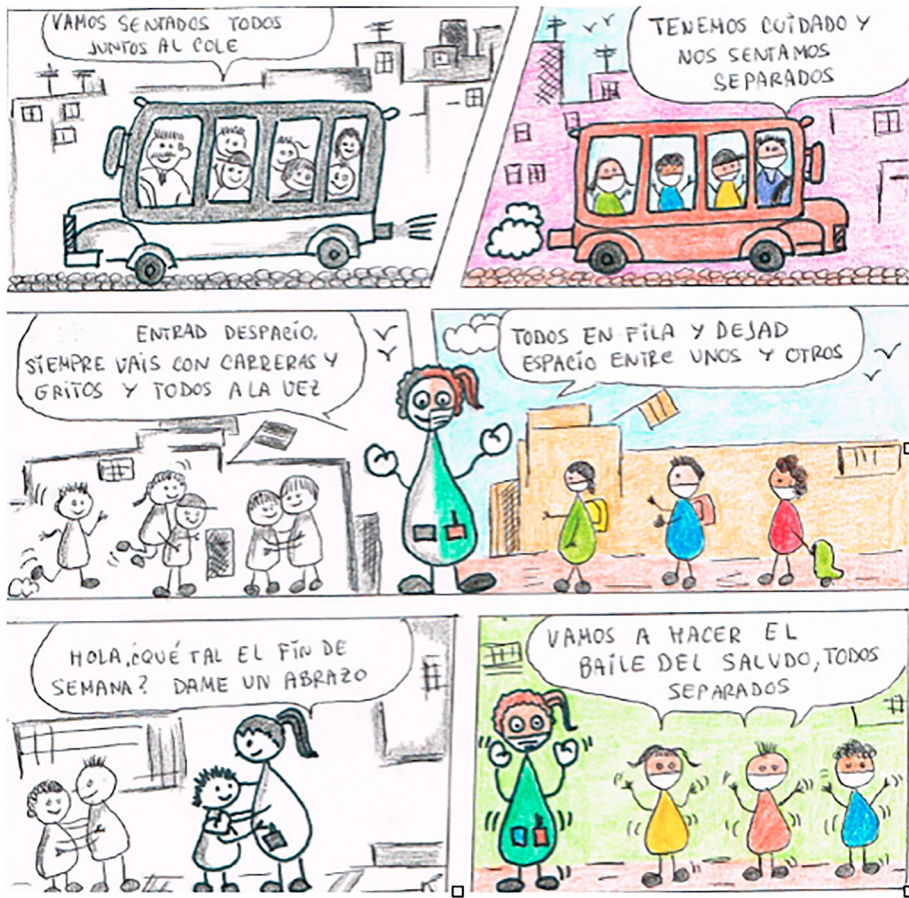
Figure 2. Distances in the 'new school'. [Black and white figures: depicting the school before the pandemic. 'Let's go to school together', 'Enter the school slowly, without rushing', 'How was your weekend? Give me a hug!', Figures in colour: Representing the school and its 'new normal'. 'We are careful, we sit separately', 'We enter in a line, leaving safety space between each other', 'We are going to do a dance, keep a safe distance from each other'].

Calvo, 2021) due to the high proximity social interaction between them. Participants understand that proximity and physical contact between children and adults is now considered a potential threat to health. During the pandemic, in which any behaviour seems risky, the differentiation of spaces, the regulation of distancing from the other and the null physical proximity are intensified in the name of the safety of children and teachers. In this way, the participants consider schools within this prevention narrative, in which educational practices have undergone obvious changes due to socio-educational policies of restriction.

b. *The difficulty of establishing threat-free environments*

The participants expressed in their vignettes an attempt to establish authentic relationships with the students, so that the classroom becomes a safe place in the physical and emotional sense (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2017). In this vein, the school should be a threat-free space (Merieu, 2004) in which students can present their ideas, learn and feel safe. In the vignettes there are scenes where the teachers are represented by showing confidence rather than fear, seeking that personal and social functioning that leads everyone to feel good about themselves and with others. In

so doing, schools cannot only be a safe space in the physical arena, but also in the emotional sense, giving room for students to express their feelings and emotions (Figure 3):

Some of the vignettes represented the teacher not so much as a technician, but as someone capable of considering personal aspects such as enthusiasm, affection and sensitivity, which is in line with what previous research has demonstrated (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2017; Evelein, Korthagen, & Brekelmans, 2008; Hen & Sharavi-Nov, 2014; Korthagen, 2004). The teaching profession usually involves a high emotional component (Fried, Mansfield, & Dobozy, 2015). Thus, it is important for the teachers to identify how their emotions and/or those of the students
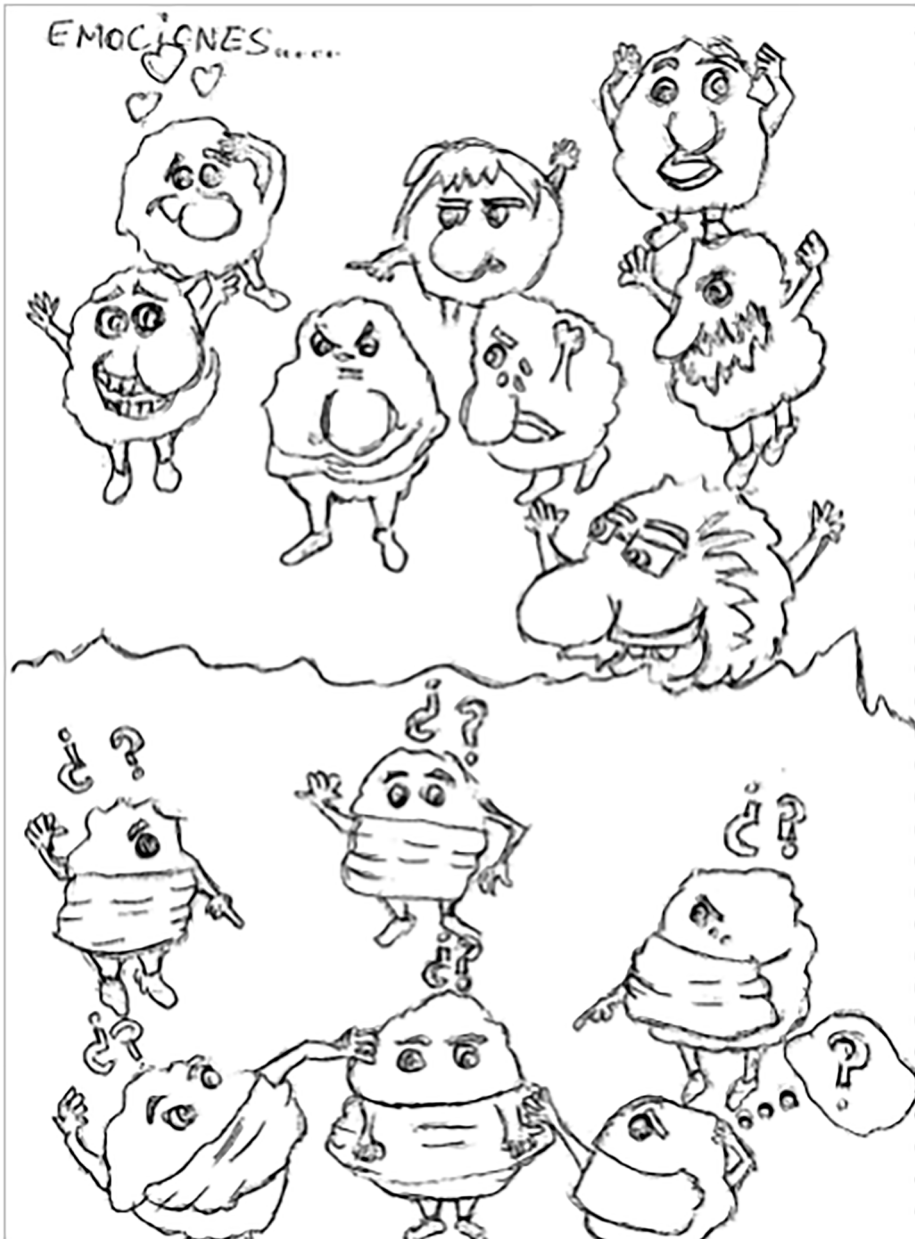

Figure 3. Difficulty in accommodating emotions. [Emotions].

inform the ways in which their feelings increase or limit the possibilities in their teaching (Varea & González-Calvo, 2020; González-Calvo, 2020) and how these emotions allow them to think and act differently, because they play a key role in building their pedagogical practice (Fried et al., 2015). As Shapiro (2010) affirms, through the expression of emotional identity, teachers can develop greater reflexivity, stronger solidarity and greater sensitivity towards their students. Despite this, in the new pandemic school, the participants find serious limitations to fully accommodate the emotional aspects. The facial mask is represented in the vignettes as one of the most important limitation (Figure 4):

The comics show how for these pre-service teachers the body dimension is important when building educational relationships. Like relationships, gestures are both physical and symbolic. Each gesture is born from a feeling and from an intention towards the other person. The educational relationship is originated, therefore, in a physical encounter that is constituted from significant physical gestures (Martínez-Álvarez & González-Calvo, 2016). Nevertheless, the participants expressed the interpersonal encounters in terms of distance and mistrust, being the students themselves the ones who sometimes stand as 'safeguards' of hygiene measures, usually within a climate of mutual mistrust and distancing (Figure 5):

c. *Difficulty approaching the other: fears and hidden curriculum*

The hidden curriculum, that is, the tacit transmission of knowledge, ideas, norms and attitudes from the teacher to the students in an unconscious way (Abroampa, 2020; Massialas, 2001), has more relevance during the pandemic. Several comics represented the teacher (unconsciously) transmitting fears and insecurities to the students in an effort to safeguard safety and hygiene measures. In so doing, the teachers teach beyond the purely curricular content and objectives. They also teach, for example, the importance of not approaching the other, not touching, the fear of the other as 'suspected' of contagion, and the importance of following the rules (Figure 6).

Fears and the hidden curriculum are the results of an impersonal, abstract, structural action, in which no one seems responsible for having hidden the hidden curriculum (Abroampa, 2020; Nami, Marsooli, & Ashouri, 2014). Nonetheless, the new subjectivities that the teachers are developing appear explicitly in the comics, and the pandemic has led to a pedagogical situation in which there is not too much hidden in the curriculum.

Figure 4. The mask as a hindering factor to make room for emotions. [Teacher: 'How are you? With the masks on, I can't see your faces'].
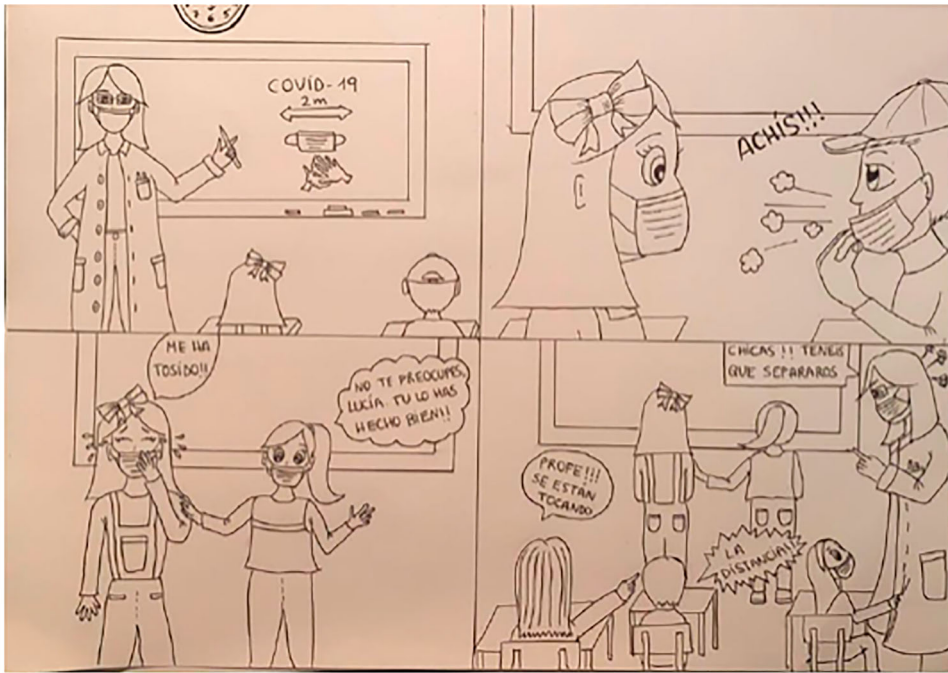
Figure 5. Pupils as 'health police' and the climate of mistrust. [The teacher is explaining the security measures to be adopted in the new normal school. A pupil cries because a classmate has sneezed near her. The last cartoon depicts the teacher asking the pupils to keep a safe distance, while some students complain about those who do not comply].

Figure 6. The teacher as a transmitter of fears and insecurities. [Teacher, shouting: 'Please, respect the security measures'. Students: 'Teacher, give me hand sanitising gel'. 'Me too'].
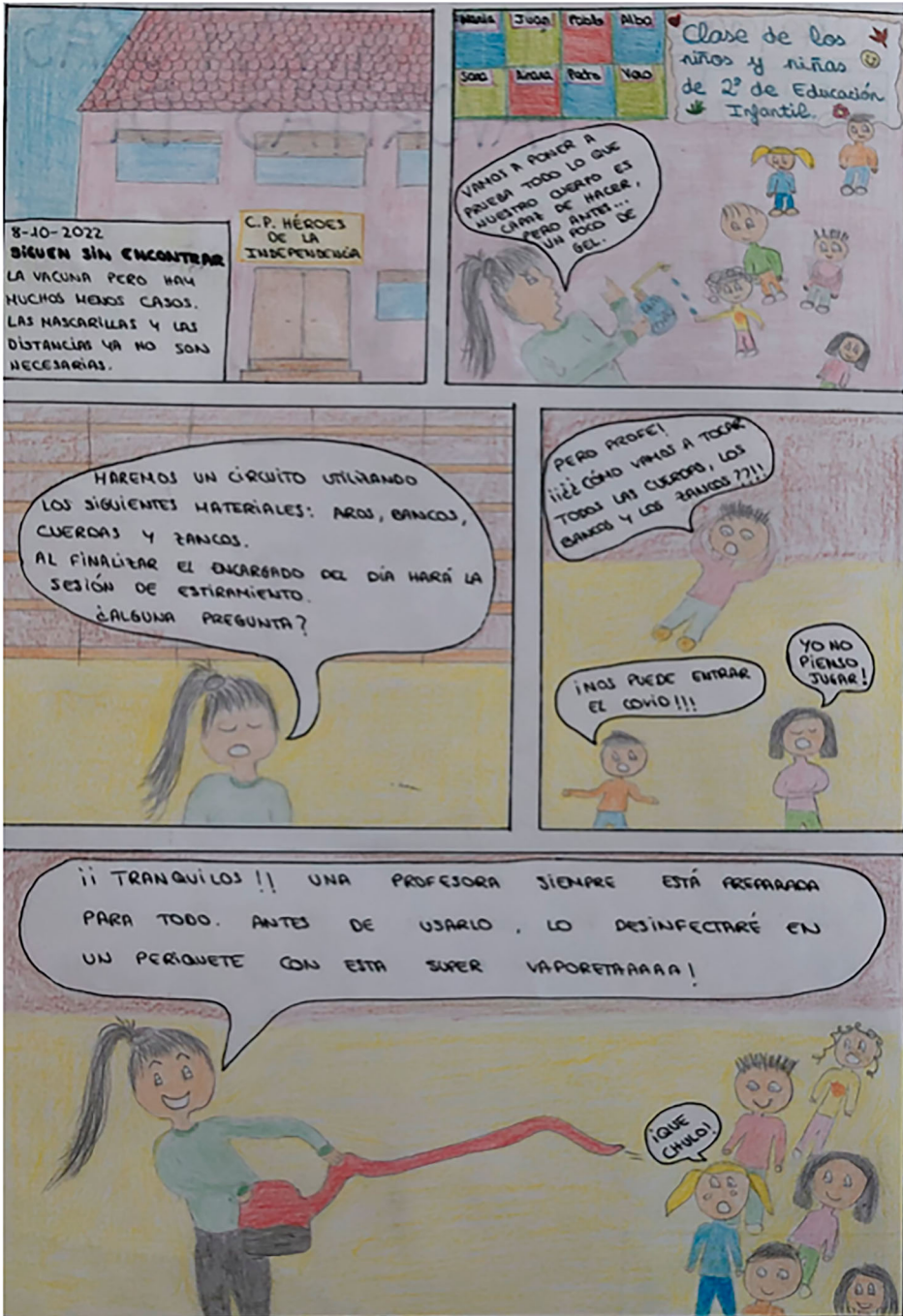
Figure 7. Fears about the task. [Teacher: 'Today we will do a skills circuit using materials such as hoops, benches, stilts … '. Students: 'But teacher, we can't touch the materials! We might get the virus! I'm not going to do it!'. Teacher: 'Don't worry, I'll take care of disinfecting everything with that super gadget'].

The relationship between the student and knowledge: learning

   a. *The involvement of the students in the new school 'without movement'*

Children represented in the comics do not seem to enjoy the school during the pandemic. They are portrayed as not getting involved with the content, not making sense of the content and not having fun. There are also fears and mistrust towards the tasks (Figure 7):

    The difficulty in establishing a close environment, in which interpersonal relationships are relevant, as well as fears of contagion and the suspicion of the 'other as a possible contagion', lead to behaviours in which teachers and students are distant from each other. The phenomenon known as *learnification* (Stearns & Guadalupe, 2020), that is, the tendency of pedagogy to shift attention from teaching to learning, where the teacher–student and student–student relationship and the physical and symbolic presence of the bodies in relation, is favoured in the new educational situation. There are several vignettes that reflect this physical and symbolic distancing between the different educational agents and a school lacking body and movement. Thus, the following vignette reflects what the school was like before the Covid-19 and how the participants perceive the school during the pandemic: the student is represented dishevelled, sweaty, dirty and injured before the pandemic, while the lack of play and movement during the pandemic are represented in a groomed, clean and completely sanitised student.

    The division of spaces and the relevant distancing leads the participants to understand the school as a place with bored students, a space in which the lack of proximity with the other makes leisure time meaningless and where the only possibility is to be sitting on the floor without playing and without moving (Figure 8):

    This sedentary situation and lack of movement are not exclusive to school recess times. For the participants, the lack of movement also negatively affects motivation within the classroom, representing students as demanding other types of activities, ones that allow movement and the presence of the body as important elements in the teaching/learning process.

    Vignettes also represented the need that students feel to carry out practices that allow movement and the relevance of addressing content that involves movement and exercise (Figure 9):

    Educational practices during the pandemic, in which the body and movement become practically non-existent, make students more distant from active interaction with the world around them and limit their bodily and sensory experiences. However, the analysis of the drawings shows the importance that the body has for the pre-service teachers in understanding school and education.

The relationship between the teacher and knowledge: teaching

   a. *The physical and emotional impact for the teacher in the new pandemic school*

In some vignettes, the participants represented the teacher subjected to excessive wear and tear as a result of the demands of the 'new normal' and the loss of the human factor that characterises the teaching profession. This situation seems to affect the motivation for the teaching tasks, envisioning a future scenario towards which they may not feel any desire to teach. The following vignettes show two tired and exhausted teachers after a school day in which the new pandemic situation has exhausted their energies (Figure 10):

    The teaching profession represented during the pandemic as more physically and emotionally demanding, appears repeatedly in the vignettes. The new way of being a teacher requires now being continually active and aware of everything that happens at school. Thus, it is recurrent to see how participants expressed in their vignettes having little energy at the end of the day, and how tired they are when they go back home. From this point of view, pre-service

Figure 8. The 'new school': the impossibility to relate to and have fun with others. ['How boring it is not to play together'].

teachers are already more likely to burn out with the profession due to pressures, school climate and disenchantment (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016; Visotskaya, Cherkashina, Katcin, & Lisina, 2015). In Primary Education, which is based largely on development and body contact (in Spain), the lack of socialisation becomes more evident. Pre-service teachers understand that this form of teaching

Figure 9. The need for movement as a motivating element. [Student: 'How boring it is to sit in a chair', Student: 'Teacher, can we exercise?']
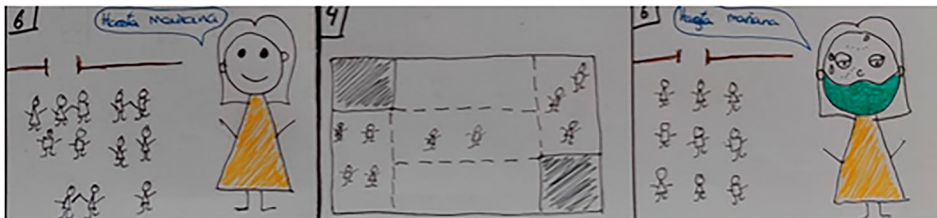

Figure 10. The 'new teaching': a stressful and exhausting situation for teachers. [Teacher saying 'see you tomorrow' in the pre-pandemic school, and saying the same in the new normal school].

is far from their educational ideals, and that it is exhausting, decontextualised and generates a feeling of disenchantment (Figure 11).

In the new pandemic school, pre-service teachers consider the teaching profession more demanding, a job that involves physical and mental effort that, on many occasions, leads to exhaustion. Looking for the conditions that affect the health of educators is necessary to try to respond to the pressures to which they are subjected to. In this sense, physical and mental demands may be one of the reasons why, in the current context of a pandemic, teachers can burn out shortly just after starting their profession.

Groupings and spaces as limiting the pedagogical practice

The school in times of pandemic implies a new relationship with and understanding of school spaces, and well-differentiated pedagogical practices. The safety and risk conditions that originate from the educational relationship led the participants to consider two types of risk: objective and subjective (McCoy, Esslinger, & Baghurst, 2017), which are represented in their comics. While the
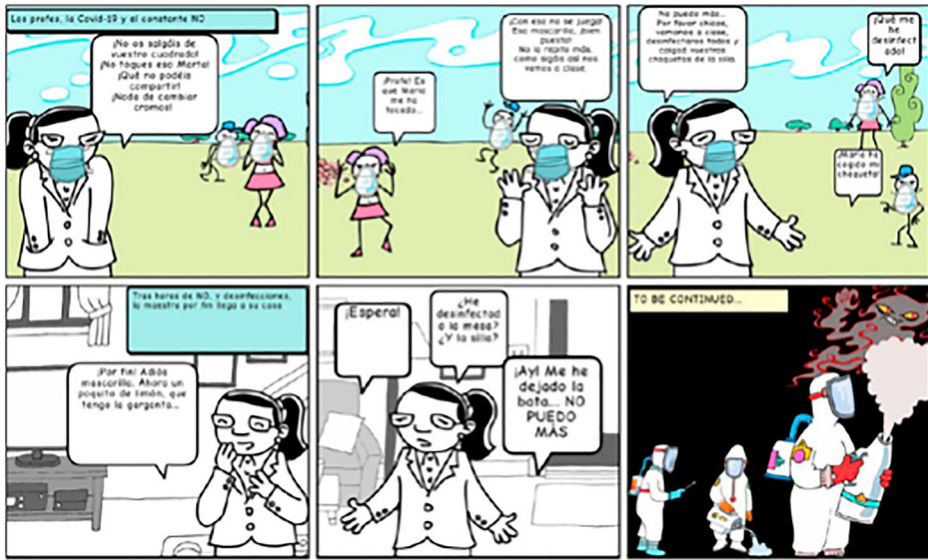
Figure 11. The lack of relationship with students leads to disenchantment with the profession. [The teacher, at the beginning of the school day, continuously reminding students of safety measures: 'Keep a safe distance', 'don't touch anything', 'you can't share your equipment', 'remember to wash your hands thoroughly with the hydroalcoholic gel'. The teacher, after the school day: 'Finally some relaxation. Oh wait a minute, did I disinfect the table and chair, where did I leave my dressing gown? I can't take it anymore!'].

objective risk is real, the subjective risk only refers to the perception of how the way of teaching is changing (for the worse) since the health crisis is present in schools. This is identified in the spaces designed by educational policies to ensure the distance between students and the organisation so that students can only interact in small groups during the pandemic.

To be able to transform the practice places so that an *atmosphere* (Van Manen, 2008, p. 73) can be created in which students feel protected, confident and ready to learn, requires teacher reflection on the intended learning outcomes (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2017; Varea, 2018). However, the vignettes of the participants mainly represent the strict conditions imposed by the educational administration, and in spaces that do not offer the best opportunities to carry out teachers' work (Figure 12):

Beyond the scarce pedagogical possibilities offered by the reduced spaces and the distances between the students, the setbacks of the teachers to offer teaching in the current conditions appear recurrently in the cartoons. Thus, compliance with safety conditions implies constant ventilation of the classrooms, a situation that in cold weather and in winter complicates pedagogical practice. In this sense, cold is one of the aspects reflected by several of the participants, perhaps because it is perceived as an element that affects the class, increasing the physical discomfort of students. It also increases risk for some diseases, and negatively influences student attention (Haverinen-Shaughnessy & Shaughnessy, 2015; Haverinen-Shaughnessy, Shaughnessy, Cole, Toyinbo, & Moschandreas, 2015) (Figure 13):

In this way, pre-service teachers encountered serious difficulties to be able to respond to their teaching obligations in the new pandemic school context. Although what educators do with the school curriculum is a central part of their work (Gerrard & Farrell, 2014), during the pandemic were more immediate and central aspects in the teaching. In this sense, there are elements that emphasise the difficulty to carry out an appropriate teaching/learning process and an impediment to articulate a new way of learning and improving, as a result of the difficulties to organise an appropriate learning environment.
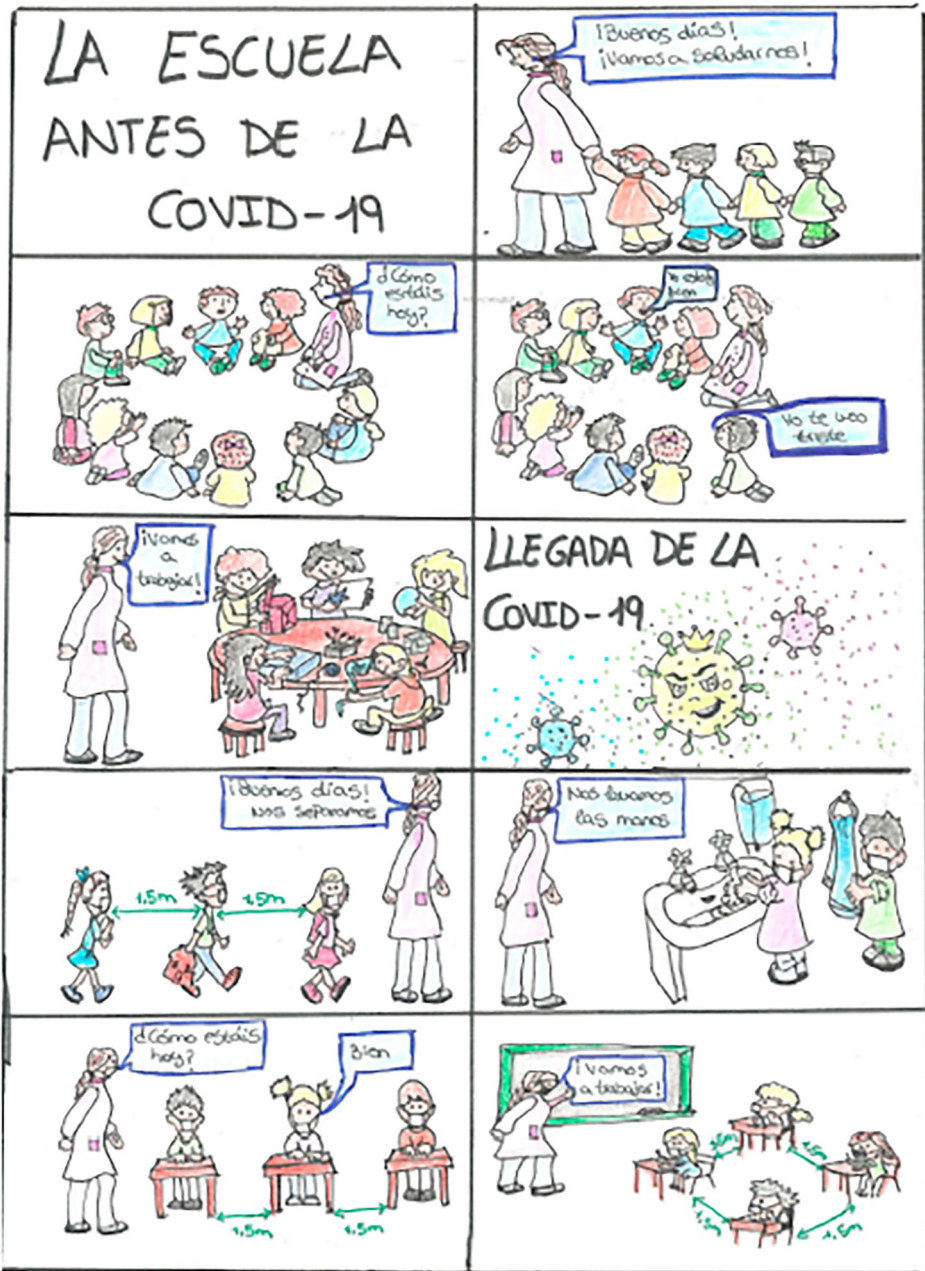
Figure 12. The new relationship and understanding of school spaces: distance and security. [The comic depicts the groupings and greetings in the school before the pandemic, and in the school at the time of Covid-19].

Conclusions

Teaching practice, from the perspective of the pedagogical relationship, goes beyond the mere transmission of content from the teacher to the student (González-Calvo et al., 2020). This is not a simple technical issue, but is based on decision-making in specific and complex situations. For the pedagogical action to make sense, it is important to listen to others and their stories. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, we found tensions between the two curricular worlds (Pinar &
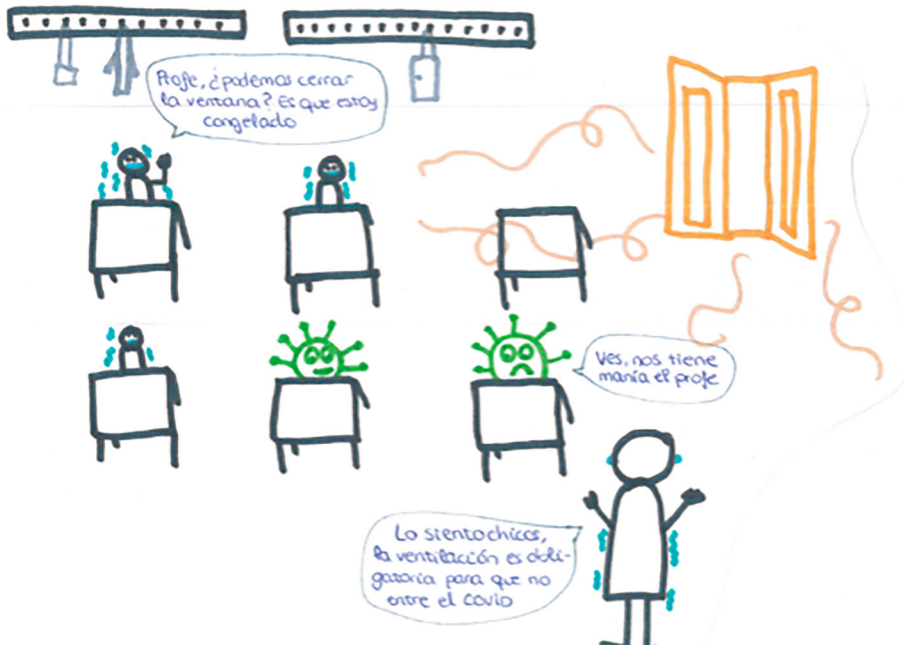
Figure 13. Cold in the classroom: discomfort and demotivation at school. [Student: 'Teacher, we are cold, can we close the windows?', Teacher: 'Sorry, but ventilation is mandatory to keep out the Covid-19'].

Irwin, 2004): on the one hand, there are purely academic issues, such as the learning that teachers have to facilitate to students through the objectives and content which is similar to all students; on the other hand, there is the lived curriculum which includes the experiences of the students that are unique, unpredictable and expresses different needs (Chiara et al., 2020; Fegert, Vitiello, Plener, & Clemens, 2020; Ghosh, Dubye, Chatterjee, & Dubey, 2020).

In this exceptional situation that has profoundly modified the way of understanding and approaching the teaching profession, it is important to explore and understand the implicit experiences and beliefs that pre-service teachers bring to the profession. This allows pre-service teachers to recognise those beliefs and experiences, challenge them, and to reflect critically to promote a change that can impact their teaching practice (Beltman, Glass, Dinham, Chalk, & Nguyen, 2015; Chong, Low, & Goh, 2011; Jenkins, 2014). Today, teaching is more than ever before the result of the accumulation of knowledge, beliefs, experiences, sensations and feelings collected throughout personal and professional lives. Through graphic representations and metaphors in comic form, the pre-service teachers of this study conveyed ideas and conceptions about what it means to teach and what teaching implies. In this sense, the use of visual images in the form of comics allowed us to be aware of how pre-service teachers' experiences, expectations and fears during the pandemic mark their way of understanding the teaching profession. Furthermore, the representations and attributions of meaning towards teaching, the school and the function of the school were disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. In doing so, we could witness how the school itself was transformed through the pre-service teachers' representations in their comics.

These visual stories represented as comics may help pre-service teachers to understand and situate the history, evolution, current situation and future perspectives of education. Several of the participants conceived the new way of facing the profession as a path full of obstacles and problems, which have diverted their attention from the learning necessary to be a teacher, towards the acquisition of the learning necessary to be a teacher during a pandemic. Without formal and face-to-face spaces for dialogue, for learning and for educational exchange, pre-service teachers perceive

that the profession becomes tense, asymmetric, dehumanised and tinged with individualism and a strict control of security measures that affects desire, identity and teacher development. Pre-service teachers showed tiredness regarding the profession that awaits them in the near future. This is a profession that moves away from pedagogical and didactic approaches, and where technological instruments and personal protection in terms of health seem to be the most important aspect, and where the possibility of reaching all students is difficult. The main danger may be that the new axes of meaning imposed on us by the pandemic will crystallise into a new professional culture.

Nevertheless, interpersonal relationships at school are the only aspect that can give true meaning to education according to the participants of this study. Without that proximity, pre-service teachers understand schools as empty spaces, lacking that vital breath, without the possibility of talking, interacting and learning together; spaces for boredom and inaction. In this sense, the political and educational climate that seems to be settling does not help to understand the future of the teaching profession as a place where we can gather and learn together face-to-face. On the contrary, pre-service teachers perceive a stage where the teaching profession loses value and the few educational measures fill the classrooms with fear, individualism and control. Thus, it is essential to invest in an education and a school that support, finance and allow the development of a culture of rapprochement, collaboration and away from fear of the other. By doing so, we can favour the strengthening of the pedagogical relationship between teachers and students, and the establishment of a climate free of threats that allows pre-service teachers to face the difficulties of their profession with certain guarantee of success.

Similarly, we can ask ourselves in the light of this study what the Covid-19 pandemic has meant at pedagogical level, and how it has infiltrated the professional teaching culture.

In turn, this reflection may lead us to consider two further issues. First, the need to offer initial training to future teachers that addresses not only academic aspects, but also social and emotional aspects. Second, to open the door to diverse expressive formats that allow us to think and build another school and another education from other dimensions: the body, daily life, affections and feelings.

Note

1. In this sense, the work with artistic media (including all kinds of narratives) in emergency contexts or therapeutically reconstructing traumatic experiences is well known (Cyrulkin, 2001).

Disclosure statement

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