

## **Biographical narrative study on student teachers' beliefs and the construction of their teaching identity**

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**Abstract.** Several investigations have delved into the relationship between the personal representations and epistemologies that teachers have with their performance and professional development, as well as the weak impact that initial training has on their sophistication or lasting transformation. In this scenario, the present study is a qualitative research whose objective is to know the beliefs about teaching and learning held by first-year student teachers. The data collection technique was based on autobiographical narratives and interviews with students of Basic Pedagogy, English and Kindergarten Education at a private university in Santiago de Chile. Subsequently, a biographical-narrative approach was used to analyze their pre-training trajectories, revealing the situated development of existing beliefs already in the first year of entry to the pedagogical training programs. The results show a direct influence of the school trajectory on the formation of beliefs and the configuration of their teaching identity. Based on this, it is proposed to strengthen the narration and analysis of these previous experiences as a strategy for knowledge and modification of beliefs in initial training.

**Key words:** Pedagogical beliefs, Teacher identity, Initial training, Autobiographical narration

### **1. Introduction**

One of the areas of research that has been most developed in recent decades is the beliefs and representations that teachers have about knowledge and teaching and learning processes (Gómez-Nocetti, 2017; Guerra, 2008; Hannula, 2012; Pajares, 1992; Pozo et al., 2006; Vargas et al., 2021). The relevance of these beliefs is that they are the main foundation of the decisions made during life (Dweck, 1999) and, consequently, they frame, signify and guide their teaching actions (Alarcón et al., 2014). Their impact is so great that it has been observed that these beliefs are maintained during initial training and are prolonged in pedagogical practice (Pajares, 1992; Tagle et al., 2014).

### **2. Theoretical Framework**

Beliefs are defined as "the personal ways in which a teacher understands students, the nature of learning, the classroom, the teacher's role in the classroom, the pedagogical objectives" (Borg, 2003, p. 100). Based on these beliefs, teachers design learning activities and evaluate students' actions and interactions, while students, based on their own pedagogical beliefs, evaluate and criticize the teacher's actions and the activities he/she proposes.

These implicit representations are developed in a specific dimension, are adapted to specific situations (Castorina et al., 2005) and are mediated by mental models that respond to specific situational contexts. In doing so, stable and rigid principles are

formulated that structure these theories (Roa, 2014). Therefore, beliefs about teaching and learning are difficult to modify, since they form complex networks that remain in long-term memory (Díaz & Solar, 2009), venturing that the older they are the less susceptible to change (Tagle et al., 2014).

Initial training has been shown to be ineffective in influencing these beliefs (Alarcón et al., 2014; Gómez-Nocetti, 2017; Russell, 2014; Tagle et al., 2014), practicing teachers act in their classrooms according to what they saw or experienced when they were students (Bruner, 1996; Lortie, 1975) rather than what they learned in higher education. For example, some research observes that student teachers mostly enter with a pedagogical vision linked to a simple and transmissive approach, which subsequently has an impact on the reproduction of a traditionalist teaching paradigm (Díaz & Solar, 2011; Malderez & Wedell, 2007; Martínez et al., 2017; Pajares, 1992).

### **3. Methodology**

This research is qualitative and has an exploratory and descriptive design (Hernández et al., 2014). Given the relevance of the experiential component in the origin of teachers' beliefs, the approach adopted is the biographical-narrative approach, which is understood as a "directed, analytical and systematic construction of the life history of a person or a collective" (Argüello, 2014, p. 294).

The participants are 60 first year students of Pedagogy in General Basic Education, Kindergarten Education and Pedagogy in English from a private university in Santiago de Chile.

### **4. Results**

The analysis of the autobiographical narratives shows us a conception of teaching as a place of refuge, of containment: "helping children, treating them well, making them laugh" (NP07) and of teaching as a liberating act (in gender identity issues, for example). Vocation is not enough: "pedagogical knowledge is among the priorities and that you care about your students, see what you are teaching them and that you care about what happens to them" (EnB02).

In the beliefs about learning, there are statements about how one learns as well as the roles and characteristics of the learner. For example: "Not all children are the same and not all learn in the same way or behave the same way, but that does not mean that they are less capable" (NP06).

Together with these conceptions, it is observed that the experiential component is the basis for motivation and expectations about the teaching profession, as well as the configuration of their self-concept and self-esteem: "A friend needed support in mathematics and I invited her to my house to study, I taught her and when I saw that she managed to do the exercise that cost her a lot, she was very excited, I liked this, the result" (EnB02); "I would like to work in rural establishments, economic vulnerability or Junji, because I want to be a contribution for children who do not have parents with many resources" (NP08). It can be affirmed that in this area beliefs are personalized, they land in a Self or concrete professional I (Bolívar, 2006; Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe, 1994).

### **5. Discussion**

As Schulte (2002) and Zeichner (2010) point out, teacher education should involve questioning one's perspectives, as well as cultural values and foundations through the exercise of critical thinking and the pursuit of social justice. The narrative from the pre-training experience configures the political subject and the subjectivity in it is revealed

as a catalyst of their pedagogical beliefs: "passion in teaching is political, precisely because it is personal" (Nias, 1996, p. 305). Individual expression becomes a social construction: elements of teacher identity such as self-concept and teacher self-esteem are not separable from the socio-historical conditions they inhabit (Cardona et al., 2021), so that emerging emotions are projected both to the past and to the future, energizing the construction of identity.

On the other hand, the constant presence of the emotional dimension in the narrative reconstruction of the experiences with their teachers in the school stage also confirms what has been raised by several authors (Valdés et al., 2016; Yair, 2008) on the relevance of affects in these significant learning experiences and the influence on their own motivations and expectations, central elements of the Self or professional I.

## 6. Conclusions

In the narratives and interviews, the affirmations and representations that first-year student teachers express about the teaching and learning process and the roles of the educator, the learner and themselves as teachers in training emerge. It can be affirmed that these beliefs shape a personal conceptual framework that has been consolidated through their own school experience. If the trainers do not know them and the students are not aware of them, there is no possibility of articulating them, reflecting on them or transforming them.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of the study is that, although it covers a significant sample of three degree programs, it is limited to students from a single university. A study that considers a diversity of institutions or pedagogical programs, or by age range, would be interesting.

Among the projections of this research is a longitudinal study on the development and transformation of the beliefs held by student teachers, covering the first years of insertion in the educational system, which would allow an effective evaluation of the real contribution or influence of initial training.

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