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Practicum of Early Childhood Teacher Students in Pandemic Times: A Narrative Perspective

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∞ The Covid-19 pandemic affected teacher education; universities had to adapt quickly through emergency pedagogy. One problem that emerged was the relationship between schools and teacher students. The situation was more critical in early childhood teacher education than in others. The conditions forced them to adjust to the absence of children in the student teachers' practicum. This article addresses the relational problem in a practicum in early childhood teacher education. Through a narrative inquiry with two early childhood education teacher students, we give an account of learning experiences in different educational spaces. During the analysis, two concepts emerged: 'the classroom taste' and 'presence' in teacher education. The research allows us to reflect on the essential focus of the practicum in early childhood teacher education from the perspective of these two concepts.

Keywords: Chile, teacher education, post-pandemic, body, virtual education

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Praksa bodočih učiteljev v zgodnjem otroštvu med pandemijo: pripovedna perspektiva

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☞ Pandemija covid-19 je vplivala na izobraževanje učiteljev; univerze so se morale hitro prilagoditi s pomočjo nujne pedagogike. Ena izmed težav, ki se je pojavila, je bil odnos med šolami in bodočimi učitelji. Položaj je bil v izobraževanju bodočih učiteljev učencev v zgodnjem otroštvu bolj kritičen kot na drugih področjih. Zaradi razmer so se morali bodoči učitelji med opravljanjem svoje prakse prilagoditi odsotnosti otrok. Članek obravnava problem odnosov v praksi pri izobraževanju bodočih učiteljev v zgodnjem otroštvu. Skozi pripovedno raziskavo z dvema študentoma poučevanja v zgodnjem otroštvu podajamo poročilo o učnih izkušnjah v različnih izobraževalnih prostorih. Med analizo sta se pojavila dva pojma: »okus razreda« in »prisotnost« v izobraževanju učiteljev. Raziskava nam omogoča, da z vidika teh konceptov razmislimo o bistvenem poudarku prakse v izobraževanju bodočih učiteljev v zgodnjem otroštvu.

Ključne besede: Čile, izobraževanje učiteljev, postpandemija, telo, virtualno izobraževanje

Introduction

In most countries, initial teacher education occurs in university classrooms and practice centres, with a permanent tension between both areas (Russell & Martin, 2017). In the case of Chile, early childhood teacher education is the responsibility of universities through a concurrent model, simultaneously developing the pedagogical and disciplinary education together with initial, intermediate, and practicum (professional practices or final practice) (Concha-Díaz et al., 2022). However, considering the emphasis on practical knowledge at a distance from academic, deductive, or consecutive curricula, there is a broad defence for the balance between practical and theoretical education (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Silva-Peña et al., 2019; Vaillant, 2021). The practicum is a space in the initial teacher education that merges such theoretical education as practical formation; moreover, it is essential for encountering children ranging from three months to five years in a diverse and changing environment. However, as is known, this space changed during the pandemic times (Fernández et al., 2022; Flores & Gago, 2020) as a consequence of changes in the schools (Dussel, 2020; Silva-Peña & Paz-Maldonado, 2021).

The teaching presence and ‘the classroom taste.’

A broad perspective on education gives a more complex background to understanding the rationality of practice and teaching knowledge. In this way, we found a reflective approach to practice and an epistemological turn towards practice (Schön, 1983) or experience (Dewey, 1938) to address dimensions of reality that, from more traditional logics, had remained invisible. From more phenomenological approaches (Van Manen, 2023), the concern is oriented towards understanding the experiences lived in the classrooms and the meaning of pedagogical sensitivity (Contreras, 2013; Van Manen, 2016, 2023).

If we pay attention to the sensory sphere, we can visualise education from another perspective. In a way, we can change the teaching and attend to the sense dimension lodged in the body. Having the educational relationship as a background links it with a broader concept of ‘presence’ in education, understood as knowing how to be physically and symbolically in that relationship of otherness. In the words of Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006), presence implies:

[...] a state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connection to the mental, emotional, and physical functioning of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments, and the ability to respond with an improved, thoughtful, and compassionate next step. (p. 265)

This study uses the term ‘taste’ to refer to creating pleasure in a specific practice. More precisely, we speak of ‘the classroom taste’ as a term based on research conversations with teacher students (see results). This term is similar to the taste (for science) Anderhag, Hamza, and Wickman (2015) used. Based on Bourdieu’s (1984) sociology of taste and Dewey’s (1913) notion of interest, the authors refer to taste as an interest socially constituted. Both perspectives coincide on understanding the education system as a significant space for acquiring habits or interests.

It is necessary to delve into, make visible, and reflect on these dimensions, even more so when education in a pandemic transfigures the sense of presence. Moreover, it is beneficial to continue considering the importance of understanding what sustains taste or the desire to teach from initial teacher education. Above all, when attention to the measurement of excellence anaesthetises attention to education as an aesthetic experience (Biesta, 2022), early burnout becomes an important educational issue (Clandinin et al., 2015; Kelchtermans, 2017). Next, sensory comprehension becomes more relevant, and the study of presence and ‘the classroom taste’ becomes necessary, especially after life in a pandemic. In the case of early childhood teachers, students had a challenging experience.

The practical education of early childhood teachers

An essential discussion in the literature on teacher education is the distance between the world of the university and the school (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Korthagen, 2016; Zeichner, 2010). This concern takes on a meaningful connection when it is necessary to advance towards experiential education (Contreras, 2016; Russell & Martin, 2017; Zeichner, 2010). Also, it is a discussion that focuses on this ‘jump’ from the university to the educational centres, something that has been called the ‘praxis shock’ (Veenman, 1984). Some are making theoretical efforts to understand this phenomenon through micropolitical literacy (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Silva-Peña et al., 2019), among other options.

In this way, the universities are more aware of this teacher education that derives from practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Loughran, 2006; Munby et al., 2001; Schön, 1984). A vision from this epistemology will enable us to conceptualise learning from experience. This means changing the inherited models from an application tradition and moving towards a model in which pedagogical practices are the axes of teacher training (Craig, 2016). In this scenario, the practicum has gained presence together with the search for devices

to mobilise reflective practices as a driver of professional development through the construction of practical or experiential knowledge (Hizmeri et al., 2021; Grossman et al., 2009; Tardif, 2004).

Teacher education in pandemic times

In March 2020, the arrival of a deadly coronavirus was officially announced. It quickly spread worldwide, generating a global health crisis (WHO, 2020). In Chile, as in other countries, different proposals were designed to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, which impacted all aspects of life, including work, education, and social life. One of the actions to prevent the spread of the virus was to close the schools (UNESCO, 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020).

The pandemic in Chile, as elsewhere, eliminated face-to-face contact in schools. Classes became virtual, and we had to react quickly to continue with formal education through emergency classes (Silva-Peña, 2020), which is a context that more clearly evidenced social and educational problems of social justice (Flores & Gago, 2020; Paz-Maldonado et al., 2022; Fernández et al., 2022). Moreover, the closure of educational establishments impacted future teachers' education, particularly the practicum.

The closure was not limited to nurseries, kindergartens, or schools. The end of face-to-face classes affected universities, forcing them to organise various paths to ensure educational continuity. In the case of initial teacher education, classes were held through virtual devices and mechanisms to provide an educational space remotely. Although with greater complexity, the same occurred with the practicum in academic centres, marking a break from the usual ways of teaching. For early childhood education students, the practicum involved an absence of direct contact with boys and girls. Instead, the practicum supported the early childhood educator student teachers who had contact with families. As a result of physical distancing and non-attendance presence, future early childhood educators found themselves challenged to rethink pedagogical practices, explore new paths of learning, reassess the role of families, and scrutinise their initial education and the sense of their vocation.

This article aims to analyse the meaningful experiences in the practicum in the education of early childhood teachers, using a narrative methodology to deepen the formative sense of these experiences that had the peculiarity of being given in the context of virtual education. However, research retains the relational dimension of practical training and knowledge constructed from experiences. So, even though this study examines an unusual or atypical educational setting that changed how the practice was taught and carried out, the

most important thing is to learn more about the essential parts of the educational task that become clearer when it is done virtually, showing how important they are for the growth of a sensitive and relational educational practice. In short, through the concepts of presence and classroom taste, we seek learning that allows us to contribute to the practical training process of early childhood educators.

Method

Narrative inquiry in pandemic times

Our research began in 2020, the same year as the pandemic. In the project's first phase, we carried out self-exploration regarding the teaching practice experiences we had experienced in our academic journeys. In the second phase, we began to work with the first participants, two early childhood education students from a university in northern Chile, whom we called 'Darocy' and 'Gaby', who were carrying out their professional practice process. All our research is based on narrative inquiry as an epistemic-methodological, ontological, and ethical proposal (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This perspective enables us to understand the experience from the stories shared by the participants. Thus, we co-construct the inquiry through the relational work between researchers and participants (Alfaro & Guíñez, 2018; Alcántara & Silva-Peña, 2022), shaping the exercise of living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Researchers Bessie and Ketty began working with Darocy and Gaby, respectively. Due to the restrictions caused by the pandemic, the meetings were held virtually. There were six meetings over the course of four months. In the first meeting, we asked Darocy and Gaby to build their lifelines and associate these pieces of the puzzle with certain milestones that they consider crucial concerning their training processes and the practices they have gone through. According to these threads and our research objective, we established the topics of conversation with them. This article focuses on the practice processes they experienced remotely, as it was the first record of this class format due to the pandemic. We sought to weave a story that would help us understand their feelings and pedagogical thinking to face the scenario of that time of pandemic and lockdown in classrooms and schools.

After each meeting, the researchers reviewed the recordings of the meetings to organise the information and create the stories that formed narrative stories (Clandinin, 2013). We applied narrative analysis to explore the themes the participants were raising; that is, we focused on the meanings they were

giving to their stories (Benson, 2018) and that, in many cases, they had common meanings and differed in others. Bessie and Ketty raised emerging themes and questions in weekly team meetings. We discussed the feelings and pedagogical thinking that emerged from each story, inviting us to think and reflect. The collective discussion enabled us to reflect on what was happening. As teacher educators, we set our sights on the difficulty of training in this emergency: in virtual, terrifying, and confined conditions.

Several months later, the researchers negotiated the narrative account (Clandinin, 2000, 2013) with the participants in person, thanks to the end of the so-called lockdown. The conversations and analysis with the research team, the recorded recordings, the stories written by Bessie and Ketty, and the negotiated text all played a role in its creation. Each researcher agreed on a day and place to negotiate the narrative account, which consisted of reading the text together. Thus, Darocy and Gaby reviewed the stories and expressed their approval or modification in some paragraphs to include the final text. Darocy and Gaby's stories allowed us to examine that process with nuance and pedagogical sensitivity.

Results

Practicum stories of two early childhood teacher students in pandemic times

Here, we share the result of our narrative analysis of work alongside two early childhood education students in their last year of initial teacher education. First, we reflect alongside Darocy's narrative account, whom Bessie accompanied. Then, we will continue with stories from Gaby, who worked with Ketty. Both told us about their experiences with teacher education and practices that clashed with virtuality during the pandemic.

Darocy's Story. The classroom taste.

The meetings between Bessie and Darocy began in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, amid strict lockdown. In addition, all educational spaces in the country remain closed. Despite living in the same city, the meetings must be held online. The virtual connection does not impede deep conversation, reflecting together on what is happening in teacher education. One of the first things Darocy tells Bessie is her desire to work in an activity room at a family health centre. That aspiration made Bessie remember her experience as an educator in contexts of poverty, so she can connect very well with Darocy's ideal of being

in places where every contribution to children's care is valuable. That conversation is also transferred to the research team. On several occasions, we discussed why we began our careers in pedagogy and the different world we are discovering when working with students in more challenging economic conditions. Darocy's surprise was aroused when she learned that the work of early teacher education was not limited only to kindergartens.

When I knew there were other options, I kept thinking. Since I entered the first year and knew that the educators were in the health centres, I was surprised... it had not crossed my mind. Later, I went to some sessions my nephew had in the familiar health centre; they taught him motor skills. That was beautiful work; they made my nephew sit on a mat, which was wonderful' (Narrative account)

Darocy says that seeing the setting of the activity room—all the work with her nephew, the motor skills games that the educator played, the movements, that one-on-one relationship, and the enthusiasm—sparked her motivation for studying early childhood education. There was something in how the educator built a relationship with her nephew that made Darocy feel called to that role. One of the sentences loaded with conviction that she says to Bessie is: 'I want my first job to be in the classroom. I want to feel that taste.'

That 'taste' was elusive during her formative years as an early childhood teacher, not only because of the pandemic we experienced but also because of the citizen mobilisation in October 2019 in Chile (Silva-Peña et al., 2022; Borzutzky & Perry, 2021). As a result, when she started the research conversations, she had a year without being able to get close to 'the classroom taste', as she describes it. She says the last year has been challenging because she had other expectations, such as getting closer to the children and beginning to enjoy the classroom.

I cannot believe I am finishing my studies. It has all been so fast, so hard. I had other expectations for this year... but things turned out that way, and you have to make the most of things and get positive. (Narrative account)

As with all early childhood teacher students, the practice carried out by Darocy was through computer screens. It was about getting the preservice teachers to support the educator. In the case of early childhood education, there was no direct contact with children; that is, they could not interact with them in that so-called 'learning space,' not even through a device's screens. Her collaboration as an educator in practice consisted mainly of developing strategies to support the task of the educator guide; they created many pedagogical resources, designed and planned learning experiences, and did some administrative

work. However, no matter how well executed the task was, it was devoid of the enjoyment Darocy refers to as ‘the classroom taste’.

Despite this context, Darocy speaks to us very appropriately about her work. Like her colleagues, she created infographics for the families, building a learning path through design, document preparation, and analysis. For this educator in training, it meant new ways of learning. She also gave her tools to engage in conversations with her supervisor to know how the job was done. Darocy handles new codes. Moreover, here, our first questions arise: How will the new codes these educators acquired during the pandemic affect them? How will this rather theoretical learning of the practical be configured when the new educators are in the classrooms in person?

Darocy allows us to reflect on what we experience as teacher educators. The ‘taste’ reverberates with us because, just as it does for her, it also makes sense to us; we also miss the taste we knew from the wards, even when that taste included sour as well as sweet. In our reflections as the research team, we see that ‘the classroom taste’ is no longer sustained only by the enjoyment that the educational relationship produces. Learning that taste implies a new configuration. To taste that space requires unique codes, ways of speaking and acting, and a specific sensitivity to the educational world one wants to inhabit, the world of boys and girls. We understand that an essential part of this configuration is learned and acquired during initial teacher education. The practicums are those times and spaces where what is seen in the fragmented theory holistically makes sense. For future educators, that is where those ingredients produce the distinct flavour of each classroom.

In conversations with Darocy, Bessie finds part of that sour flavour also felt in the classes on those days. The difficulties of the practice were seasoned with that foul taste that we all feel at some point during the pandemic. However, the conflicts seem the same despite being in a different environment.

Darocy perked up to ask the practice supervisor if you could assign tasks in her role as coordinator (the same one she assumed because no one else was encouraged). The supervisor enables her to organise the assignment, but simultaneously, she doubts, does not want to, and fears being imposed or described as authoritarian. Finally, her colleagues respond to her and send their part of the work. Their lack of implication is old. Darocy thinks that they are often individualistic in front of jobs and people. You wonder what it will be like when you find them, no longer as classmates, but at work. She chose this career by vocation, reaffirming her commitment to a task that, at times, you find thankless...She wants to treasure the sweetness of the classroom taste for long enough to swallow the other ones, the bitter moments. (Narrative account)

Darocy anticipates that the leadership she assumed in her career is necessary for the role of early childhood teacher. Somehow, that 'classroom taste' (not yet experienced by herself as it would have been in a face-to-face practice) is strong and is in her memory; we wonder if it may be part of what is understood as a vocation. The role that she assumes among her classmates seems to be that she does not stray from what the 'classroom taste' causes her because she not only looks at the present critically concerning the apathy with which other educators in training show themselves. Rather, it makes her wonder about the future of these childhood rooms, that is, her professional development and what she takes to the world of children.

When we finish the conversations, our participant, soon to finish her degree, wants to stay in the city where she lives and to work in a kindergarten; the health centre will come later. Now, the need and the desire are to be in a traditional centre, to 'feel that special taste of being there in the classroom', as she says. For her, that unique taste is being with boys and girls, receiving a baby, watching the first steps of a girl and observing how others go from the first babbling to one phrase with these natural language difficulties. Maybe, she thinks, watching someone learn to tie their shoelaces and clean the tempera stains on the wall before the supervisor arrives. The flavour she is talking about also refers to the ethics and aesthetics of teaching work as an early childhood educator. From what she indicates and describes, taste guides the care of childhood, the sensitivity of the pedagogical gaze in the world of boys and girls, and how that world is built for them to inhabit.

Gaby's story. Virtual 'Practice'? Learning presence from absence

It is 2020, and Ketty invites Gaby to participate in this research to share her practice experiences in a virtual context. Like many other students in Chile, Gaby saw face-to-face attendance cut short by the pandemic and the social upheaval experienced there since October 2019. Ketty and Gaby had these research conversations during the pandemic, which were also done through a virtual platform. Since Covid-19 caused the lockdown and virtualisation of education, a strangeness has manifested in Gaby regarding her previous experience. Her questions were felt in those conversations: Where was that sense of being in the classroom with others? What is this new virtual practice?

Gaby comments that this 'virtual practice has been strange', since they have experienced minimal approaches to the classroom, the kindergarten and working with children. During the first semester of 2020, the contact with children was reduced and spaced out in time; in the second semester,

it was much scarcer, if not almost non-existent. This situation causes sadness in her because 'I lost this year as a result of this pandemic.' Gaby points out that 'not having' or 'losing' this face-to-face experience in the classroom with the boys and girls is something she 'cannot overcome'. She indicates that she does not stop feeling that she is losing an essential part of her university experience, especially since she is in her fourth year of formation, with only one semester left to graduate. (Narrative account)

Absence has begun to characterise a way of learning that is so appropriate and natural to practice: being in relationship. Especially in early childhood education, the educational experience calls for bodies, voices, aromas, games, songs, holding hands, getting dirty, and many things to be done with others. In her story, nostalgia appears for those practice opportunities that she could experience before virtuality; that sensation lies in the possibility of being moved and feeling love for educating, for childhood, for those boys and girls with whom she worked in early childhood.

Gaby describes that the children she worked with in that previous practice were between one and two years old. She expressed that immediately she 'fell in love with them' because she experienced the feeling that 'you were in the right place and you were doing well', reaffirming that you had found the perfect career for you. (Narrative account)

The emotion that remembering herself in early childhood produces and that nostalgia for the experience that she lived in previous practices is brought to our team conversations. She invites us to reflect on what we also miss, which is the possibility of getting to know our students, even something that seems as simple as recognising their faces. We shudder in this dark face of the virtuality that the pandemic brought; many teachers never knew their students' faces. Cameras are turned off, anime photos replace the personal image, or just names' initials fill the screens. That virtuality that emerged abruptly and installed as the only possibility 'took away' from us what we took for granted in the classroom, which is the pedagogical encounter.

Along with Gaby's reflections and embodying the absence of the physical classroom space, the reality of the turned-off cameras challenges us as teachers of teachers. Beyond the fact that we were not prepared for this virtual reality (which, without a doubt, is an essential part of the problem), the questions that Gaby brings us, on the one hand, are how to learn to move through this form of practice that arises in teacher training during the pandemic experience, and, on the other, how we accompany these processes when we are also experiencing absence, perplexity.

Perhaps Gaby allows us to open the door to go beyond the loss we share as educators. That nostalgia becomes, at the same time, a feeling, a thought of what was lived in another time, when we did have those others, the physical classrooms, the patios and with that, for her, for example, the possibility to observe how one works in an educational space, even if that implied learning from what one does not want to become and do.

Practicums are super important. Apart from the regular attendance in the semester, in the major, we had an intensive week... all the classes and academic activities in the major were paralysed to be able to attend kindergartens. I still saw many things I did not like about what was happening in the garden, which helped me decide what I should not do as an educator. In my last practice in person, I had the 'good luck' to attend three weeks. Today, I appreciate it because it is a space where I learned a lot. (Narrative account)

The nostalgia for those experiences makes her remember, and the absence is filled with sensations, bodies and stories linked to the presence of a time that has passed. This invites us to think about what presence means (not face-to-face) in education, especially when discussing the practical education of future teachers. Therefore, presence becomes a necessity, a fundamental link, and a pillar of the sense of belonging in the educational field. When Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) refer to the presence in teaching, they refer to the 'alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step' (p. 265). So then, we take into account the presence concept in addition to Gaby's words:

With great conviction, Gaby stares at the camera and points out that, despite the lack of resources seen in the kindergartens where you have practised, something can always be done for children's education, like what she experienced in early childhood practice. 'Yes, you can, and that is why I was there. Sometimes, it is thought that nothing is taught in early childhood, but many elements associated with stimulation can be worked on with babies. If you could not do experiences with babies, you would only be in front of a childcare that cares for them until they are ready, [at the right age] to enter kindergarten.' For Gaby, working with babies is closely linked to attachment and affection. Perhaps for this reason, this area of early childhood education is the one she liked the most, which drew her to becoming a professional.

The emotional attachment and affection that Gaby identifies in her early childhood practice with babies arise from being present in those educational activities. Although these babies are not in her classroom currently, they continue present-day at Gaby's classes and invite her to think of herself as an educator for the time to come. The same happens when we look at ourselves as teachers of teachers and narrative inquirers; our past students continue in the present day every time we teach a new lesson.

Discussion

The practicum has always been a complex experience in teacher education. In the case of initial teacher education during the pandemic, the practicum became more difficult due to the need to deal with a virtual environment (Flores & Gago, 2020). As we have said, in the case of Chile, in the context of emergency education (Silva-Peña, 2020), students of pedagogy joined the teaching work by supporting virtual work (Fernández et al., 2022). In the education of early childhood teachers, the relationship was not even with the children. The students' work was to support the early childhood educators (i.e., generating audio-visual material, reviewing plans, and managing) but never being face-to-face with children. The basic idea was that little boys and girls were not in front of the screen. The relationship was between the educators and the families, and the early childhood teacher students supported the early childhood teachers.

For the educators in training, the expected, desired, and imagined practice would occur in an educational centre where they would simultaneously experience their trade in relationships with boys and girls and their families. The expectation of the educators, especially the desired professional practice, is to inhabit these spaces and experience encounters with childhood, accompanying how the boys and girls would build their learning from their senses, feelings, emotions, thoughts, and bodies. In that place, they would also interact with the educators and other colleagues who would accompany that final transition in learning their profession. Everything would make the practicum a profoundly educational experience. In this manner, diagnoses, planning, learning situations, and dialogues with communities, families, and boys and girls would be conducted.

From the conversations with Darocy and Gaby, concepts such as 'the taste of the classroom' and 'absence' appear. That 'taste' is from the perspective that Anderhag, Hamza, and Wickman (2015) refer to when discussing the importance of creating learning environments that arouse interest and taste. This taste is also extrapolated to issues that we associate with the meaning of teacher education. The virtual experience did not end, and the uncertainty regarding

this pandemic continued; the sensation of absence and the lack of flavour forced us to think again about a problem in initial teacher education, namely, the need for practicum to become an experience of meaning. How do we recover that 'taste of the classroom' for those who did not have it all this time? How does the bitter taste of the pandemic not take away our desire to continue savouring educational places? How do we rethink and focus on teacher education feeling the pedagogical flavour? How can we teach taste and presence?

The questions lead us to think about how to create that taste and understand it as a meaningful experience for the classroom in the practicum. We cannot let that 'taste' be a spontaneous generation of students. We must create a meaningful, hands-on educational experience that builds that love for the classroom. Perhaps one way to approach it in its radical nature has been to understand teaching as presence (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). A relational presence does not refer exclusively to having people in front of you but to the fabric woven from the relationship or connection with others. The presence in teaching (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006) is endowed mainly with meaning; that is, on the one hand, of the senses that are built around the teaching role, the educational work, and the pedagogical experience, and, on the other, of feeling and making one think that one is in a good physical and symbolic place, living the present time consciously connecting with what has preceded that being and with what we want to become.

The reflection about presence appears, starting with absence. The absence of contact between early teacher education students and children in the practicum reflects the importance of presence. The empty absence is not so, as it is populated with the knowledge carried as baggage in one's body. In this image of the future being drawn as a possibility of being, we also ask ourselves as a research team for future research: To what extent does doing a virtual practice contribute to teaching work characterised as a practice of presence? How do early childhood teachers who work with children in this context of distance sustain their work? What possibilities of learning or rethinking the educational relationship of presence have brought us the experience of virtuality in teacher education?

The pandemic interrupts that assumed ritual, which is the passage through the practicum. With that break, the imagined play environment characterised by the boys' and girls' murmuring, restlessness, and contagious energy vanishes. In the form of a desire for 'the classroom taste' or the need to sustain a presence in a context of absence, Darocy and Gaby reveal to us that what is at stake is the need to be in a relationship with children. For young educators, places matter and are an unavoidable condition in the educational process, inherent to the nature of the profession of educators. We need to reassess

the fundamental place that early childhood education occupies in the lives of children and their families since care, food, encounters, friendship, play, comfort, and learning occur in these spaces. At the same time, we must understand that teacher education is inextricably linked to those experiences from which essential pedagogical knowledge emerges to accompany childhood growth.

One idea that always arises in conversation is the tension between work that is rooted in the relational experience of childhood (the joy of being with girls and boys and accompanying their growth) and the uprooting that is pushed by the academic world, populated by abstract theories, distant and removed from the world of life and those who experience it. This distance is experienced in initial teacher education as two insurmountable worlds. This is where constructing a relational experience in teaching practice is necessary. Children did not experience care outside the home before school during the pandemic. They did not have the possibility of being cared for, and that bodily relational experience was not there. Claiming an experience, imagined or desired, also claims knowledge generated in that relationship. As teacher educators, we take what Kitchen (2020) points out regarding relational teacher education, which is the process of self-knowledge and knowledge of the different educational spaces. At the same time, as narrative inquirers, we consider the relational view that narrative inquiry proposes to us with a relational commitment, a relational investigation (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). This training and research proposal entails a relational ethic and an ethic of care (Caine et al., 2020). The ethic of care is related to the relational experience. Its axis is the ethic of care, which must be maintained in every relationship. However, in the case of these children, it is even more fragile because this is a learning space for someone to take care of us (someone outside the home). This experience is fundamental for thinking about teacher education in post-pandemic times. What are future early childhood educators learning about presence in teacher education? This is a question for the schools of education. Are schools cultivating the 'taste of the classroom'?

Conclusions

In the context of emergency education, in times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the teaching world changed deeply. The educational task was wholly through a relationship under the virtual modality. However, at least in Chile, in early childhood education, things went even further. Not only was that direct relationship between educators and children missing, but in early childhood education, the virtual connection was mediated through the relationship with

families. In the case of the preservice early childhood education teacher, they had no direct or even virtual relationship with the children.

The stories told from that absence question us about what presence in education implies. It is in the encounter, in the childcare relationship, where a large part of the educational profession is learned, and pedagogical sensitivity is cultivated (the look, listening, touch, and tone necessary to accompany childhood) and the taste for teaching. The studies on educational experiences during lockdown are not only a summary of history since they leave us with a practical meaning that always implies a more sensitive understanding of the present and that predisposes us to face the vicissitudes of the future. In that case, we must ask ourselves what we have learned from this pandemic that better prepares us to address the tensions of the present and the future. In this context, we explore the learnings for teacher education in the future.

In addition to being a synthesis of the past, these stories teach us what is necessary to take care of in the future. Although our study does not exhaust the learning possibilities, it allows us to identify important aspects of the educational process. Specifically, the valuation of presence and taste are unavoidable dimensions of learning the craft of teaching. We know that education is a practice; therefore, the stories show us that teacher training cannot lose sight of an experiential or aesthetic dimension where learning and pedagogical sensitivity are forged. The stories reveal the importance of what was missing, which we can recognise as necessary. Absence highlights the centrality of presence and the awareness of the value of being in the present and caring for childhood as an essential condition to learn sensitively, or from corporality and taste, the educational profession.

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