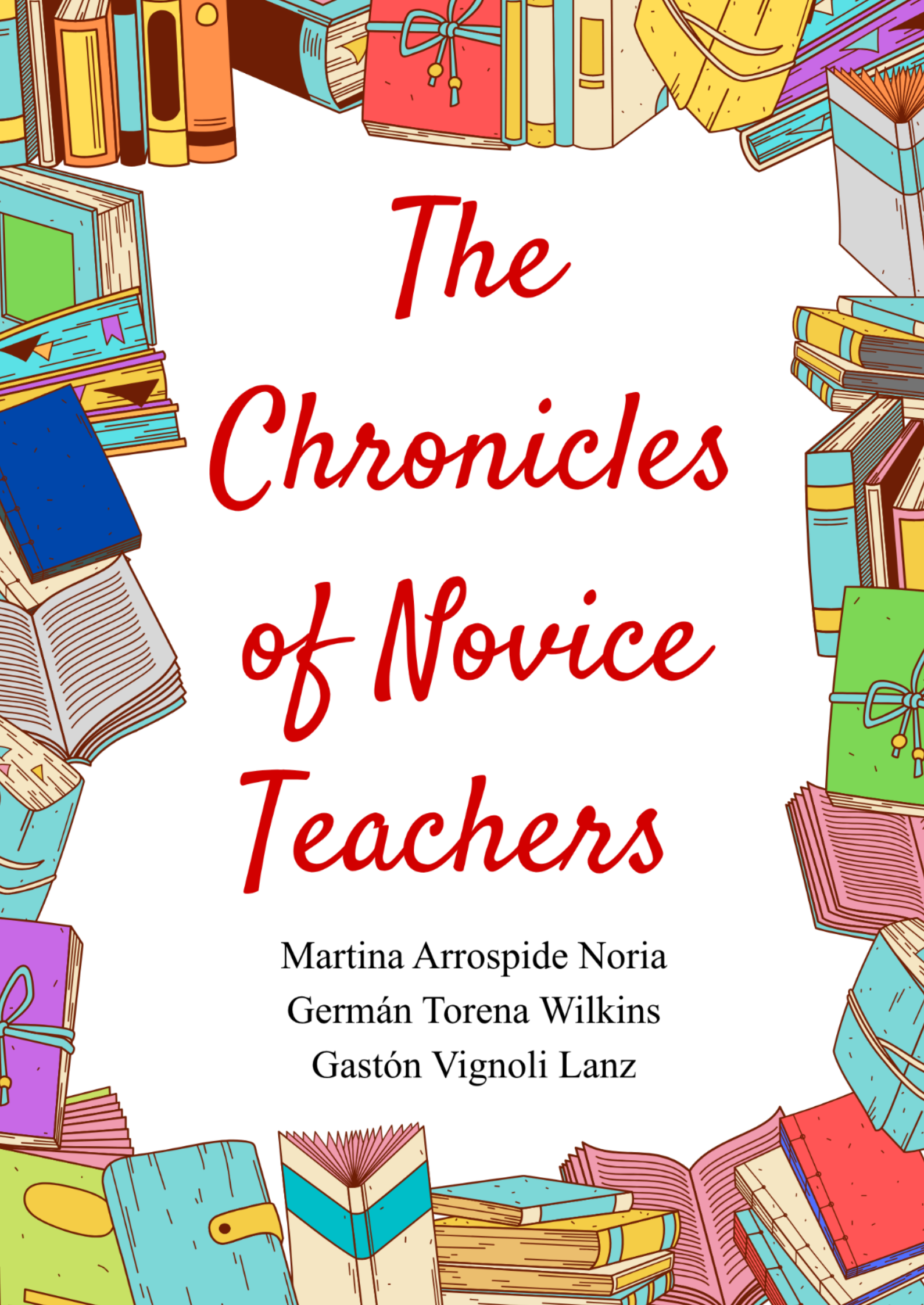




The Chronicles of Novice Teachers

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PROLOGUE

Reflecting on our own teaching practice should be a milestone in our careers if we consider ourselves professionals. This process has to start from the very moment we are in a class and in contact with students.

This booklet aims at inviting the reader to travel through a series of experiences lived by Gastón, Germán and Martina, a group of Uruguayan novice teachers of English who started a journey with their own groups of students, a challenge they embraced with joy and commitment.

Each chapter consists of a brief theoretical framework followed by a series of personal accounts that clearly illustrate the different challenges faced by these teachers. Moreover, each chronicle depicts how much each of them felt and cared about their teaching practice, questioning and reflecting on the ups and downs of this journey they started four years before when they decided to become language teachers. The different entries also show how these prospective teachers grew along the process; a process that certainly enriched them.

We hope this booklet motivates other teachers to establish a genuine dialogue between theory and practice because, as Dewey (1933) stated, “we do not learn from experience (...) we learn from reflecting on experience”.

Adriana Pérez

Chapter 1

Opening the Classroom

Door: First impressions

About first impressions:

The psychology dictionary defines first impressions as the term applied to the initial impression we have of another person when we meet them for the first time. It contains positive and negative impressions and a sense of physical and psychological features. Along these lines, Rule & Ambady (2008) define first impressions as “the initial perception and formation of thoughts about another” (cited in Mayhew 2010). Simply put, first impressions are the ideas we form of another upon first coming into contact with them.

While discussing how first impressions are formed, Zingg (2020) claims that first impressions of other people are formed in a matter of seconds. Research suggests that students’ first interactions with teachers, principals, and fellow students all have an impact on how they perform in school throughout the year, and shapes the mindsets they will carry through their educational careers. (Ansari et al, 2020)

The beginning of the school year is as important for educators as it is for learners. At this stage students form their first impression of the teacher and his or her competence in the subject. This is a major stepping stone for first year teachers. As expressed by Brooks (1985) “first year teachers have been students on the first day, but they have never been the teacher on the first day. In student teaching they have learned how to keep it going, but they have never learned how to get it going”. That is to say, teachers know all about being learners, but not nearly as much about being teachers, and that is the one of the biggest worries for first-year teachers.

In an attempt to explain the anxieties that student teachers face during the first days of class, Adey (1997) catalogues such feelings as understandable. He proposes that such anxieties may be explained by the fact that student teachers “(...) are venturing into an unknown institution: they know little or nothing about the culture and ethos of the school, its values, expectations and aspirations” (Adey, 1997, p 125). What is more, Adey points out, student teachers will have to become acquainted with the people, practice, and procedures within the school before they can develop as teachers. This makes for a double challenge, adjusting to the institutional dynamics as well as to developing a sense of professional fulfillment.

This chapter compiles personal accounts from the first day of school and our very first impressions of the groups we were assigned to, the way it felt being in charge of a class, and what may have made us nervous.

Sample 1: From Martina's Journal

Hello diary, yesterday was my first lesson ever with my own group. I felt my emotions together at the same time, I just can't even put it into words!! I'll start from the beginning, I arrived at school at 7 pm. I remember that I had planned to arrive at that time because I was scared of having any type of technical difficulties with the presentation . I know that I did my practice there last year but I felt like I needed more time in order to find myself in the place. As I predicted I started having problems with the TV, that didn't help with my nerves. I asked a teacher who was walking in the hallways (he was very welcomed) and he offered his help. Finally at 7.15 the TV was already working, by that time the form teacher, Adriana, welcomed me to the teachers' team, then the principal, Paola also welcomed me!

By 7.30 my nerves were killing me. I was excited and anxious at the same time, so in order to relax I started to revise my feelings and also to understand why they were there, what they had to tell me. While doing this exercise, something that I have never felt ever before while being in front of the class appeared, loneliness. Wow that was hard, if I'm going to be really honest I felt unprotected, curious about how I'm going to solve and process this feeling. It was 7.35 and none of my students had arrived. I'm worried. By 7.40 only two students arrived in the classroom, and a few minutes later another student joined the class. I started with the presentation and also with the games that I had prepared. The lesson went well and the students seemed to enjoy it.

At the very end of the lesson I felt more relaxed, and happy. Still a feeling of intrigue occupied my head and loads of questions came to my mind, will my lessons always be like this? only with three students? Well, at least this will be more personalized... but how am I going to hold the floor with only three students ? periods of class are too long for only three students !! Will my lessons be monotonous? Will my students get bored ? Am I gonna get bored!!! Agghhh too many things in my head and no answers for my questions !!

With mixed feelings I thought, this is not even a challenge... I don't wanna feel disappointed because it is my first lesson so far, but I can't avoid feeling anxious about how this year will turn out.

I'll write to you soon, love Martina.

Sample 2: From Germán's Journal

Hello diary!

After several frustrations with the “Elecciones de horas” process, I finally managed to start working with my own group. April 21st was a great day to begin this new journey with my first graders.

Fortunately, the class seems to be quite active and genuinely interested in the subject. Most of them are eager to participate and very receptive — or at least, that's the impression I've got so far.

I feel both excited and a bit nervous, as every new beginning comes with its own challenges. Still, I'm hopeful that this experience will allow me to grow as a teacher and to learn as much from my students as they do from me. I'll tell you later whether my first impressions were right or not.

Germán.

Sample 3: From Gastón's Journal

Today was the first day of the school year for me as a teacher, though not for students as they had a teacher for the month of March already. It was a single-period class where I invited students to play some icebreaker activities aimed at lowering anxiety but also at allowing me to start getting to know them.

The lesson was fun and students were hooked, each student spoke at least once, and nobody was unwilling to cooperate nor unresponsive which was quite a pleasant surprise. While teaching the lesson I felt comfortable and in control, although my anxiety showed out a couple of times. I would rush worrying about time, move my hands awkwardly, overpronounce to the point that I stuttered, all of which made me feel a bit clumsy at times.

However, looking back on the lesson, I am satisfied because I am starting to get a grip of the fact that there will always be room for improvement, and I need not be hard on myself every time something goes wrong or not as planned. Instead I should build on those weaknesses, look at them as opportunities for learning because that is what they are, learning opportunities.

Gastón.

Reflections and Recommendations for Future Practice:

Reflecting on our experiences during the first day of school as student teachers with sole responsibility for a class, it becomes evident that all three of us experienced mixed feelings such as anxiety and high expectations. Looking back on this we realize that such feelings were the result not only of high expectations of students, but even higher expectations of ourselves. Ultimately, teachers' biggest critics are themselves.

Tips for teachers to handle their first day of class:

Addey (1997) argues that a teacher's familiarization process with an institution begins on day one, and proposes four fundamental pillars to ensure a good start and alleviate feelings of anxiety, as well as manage expectations realistically.

1. To meet key personnel including the mentor and other teachers in their subject department.
2. To undertake some classroom observation (to see both teachers and pupils in action).
3. To get an introduction to the geography of the school – to start to be able to find their way around.
4. To use all of the above to start developing a 'feel' for the school.

Following these steps could improve a novice teacher's experience when first walking into the school building by fostering the development of a holistic perspective on the many branches that constitute teaching as a profession.

Chapter 2

The Learning Path: Managing Motivation

About motivation:

According to online magazine "Psychology Today" (May 11, 2012), *motivation* is the desire to act in service of a goal. It is one of the main elements in achieving our objectives. It is possible to say that motivation is the driving force behind human behavior. The site posits that the absence of motivation can lead to mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety. Consequently, providing our students with a dose of motivation every class becomes an imperative to ensure both learning and a sense of accomplishment.

Central to motivation are "effort beliefs". Pelletier et al (1999, cited in Legault et al, 2006) say that students' motivation is the "desire and capacity to invest the energy or effort demanded by a given behavior". Students may be aware of what is required to fulfill academic requirements. They may also positively appraise their ability to do so. Nonetheless, they may still be academically unmotivated. This may be due to the fact that they do not believe they can initiate or maintain the effort that is required by academic tasks.

Therefore, teachers play a key role in assisting students to manage motivation through the school year. So, promoting motivation through our teaching practices becomes fundamental. Dörnyei (2001) maintains that in EFL classrooms, teacher behavior, instructional methods, and overall classroom climate play a significant role in upholding students' motivation.

This chapter compiles personal accounts that deal with the matter of motivation. These accounts offer a look into how we perceived student motivation during varying teaching practices, and how we handled it.

Sample 1: From Martina's Journal

Hello diary! New day, new comments! In today's class I used flashcards, I came up with a very fun activity that the students really enjoyed playing. It was a very visual activity for them and that helped anchor them with previous knowledge. We continue with the improvement of the pronunciation of the new vocabulary. My students were quite open and made a great effort to try, I appreciate that very much. I must emphasize that today they were quite open to the lesson, as everyone has their days, but today was a rewarding class.

Ohhh I almost forgot! Today we started working with the book!! I must say that I feel quite confident about certain activities! I already want to experience the difference of giving a class 100 percent planned by me between a class planned based on a book. Let's see what happens!! Wish me luck!!

I'll write to you soon, love Marti.

Sample 2: From Germán's Journal

Hello diary! I come back to share new experiences in the classroom. Social and personal background of course influence the students' behaviour, commitment and concentration in class and its respective activities. My students belong to a generation in which the use of cell phones is massive, and with these two years of non face-to-face lessons, their focus and concentration have been seriously affected. My students find it very difficult to concentrate on the classroom activities, even when they are diverse. However, I will continue trying to catch their attention and interest. Let 's go on!

Germán

Sample 3: From Gastón's Journal

Today I handed out midterm results and I was pretty much bombarded with a set of mixed reactions. There were happy students because they passed the test (even if barely), there were also disappointed students who expected better marks, and then there were totally disengaged students who would not even look up after seeing their marks.

This was the scenery I had to look at while carrying out the test correction. Students were barely taking part in the correction.

After the lesson finished I felt their emotions weighing down on me to the point where I felt guilty for their failing the test. It took me almost fifteen minutes of discussion with a classmate for me to feel more at ease with the situation. Martina, the classmate in question, provided me with great advice and I was able to realize or re-realize that all students passing the test is not something that I can control. At the end of the day students must do their best as well, otherwise it would not be feasible for learning to take place at all.

Gastón.

Reflections and Recommendations for Future Practice:

These accounts provide some evidence of how motivation varies across different groups of students and across various teaching practices. Motivation is not necessarily a switch that you can turn on and off. Rather, it should be thought of as a continuum. Students tend to move along the ends of this continuum, so they may be more inclined towards the motivation end or the demotivation end. In fact, it is not entirely impossible that they will navigate different levels of motivation throughout a single lesson. While it is true that oftentimes students show clear signs of being demotivated, teachers should never view this as

a fixed or immutable state. It is our job to help learners find ways to get closer to the motivation end of the continuum.

Tips for teachers to foster student motivation:

1. Set SMART goals.

Specific (present learning goals in chunks that are lesson-specific)

Measurable (favor activities that are easy to measure in terms of progress)

Achievable (implement tasks and projects that are realistic and meet student capacities)

Relevant (choose topics that you can contextualize to foster student engagement)

Time-Bound (always time tasks or provide deadlines to help learners manage resources and requirements within specific time margins)

2. Foster positive teacher-student relationships: Place value on human connections to take your lessons to the next level. Rita Pierson (2013) had the right idea when she said “kids don’t learn from people they don’t like”. This does not mean we should befriend our students, but on the consideration that we teach people, some thought must be given to acknowledging the value of relationships in our practices.
3. Create opportunities for success: Consider teaching from the UDL (Universal Design for Learning) approach. Providing ample opportunities for students to succeed is essential. This might be done by offering multiple access points to your classroom contents. Also, incorporating a variety of learning activities like games, roleplays, hands-on projects, and discussions. Lastly, procure to implement level-appropriate tasks, with minor consistent challenges when needed.
4. Build a Positive Classroom Atmosphere: Ensuring a supportive learning environment can make the difference in student performance and motivation. Start by agreeing on some baseline rules that everyone should follow. Allowing students to think of rules gives them an opportunity to collectively build a stronger class community. Additionally, encouraging student participation, modestly praising their success, and destigmatizing mistakes are paramount to build a safe learning space.

Chapter 3

A Taste of Chaos: Managing Behavior

About behavior:

In the words of German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1810), “behavior is the mirror in which everyone shows their image”. Thus, behavior is defined as something observable. Behaviorist theorist Skinner (1953) sustains that behavior can be encouraged or discouraged by systematic use of rewards and punishments. Within this view, teachers can influence student behavior by providing some form of praise when desirable actions take place. When non-desired actions transpire, applying some form of punishment to suppress such conduct would be the next appropriate step in behavioral theory. In a classroom setting, rewards could include praises, free time, exemption from homework. As for punishments, these may entail extra homework, missing recess, and in tougher cases a visit to the principal’s office.

Discussing the role of behavioral theory in educational settings, Woolfolk & Usher (2024) insist on the importance of discovering the cause behind a specific behavior, and then develop an appropriate plan to address the misbehavior. The authors provide a real-life account to illustrate a possible course of action for misbehavior correction. “I once worked with a middle school principal who was concerned about a boy who had lost his father a few years earlier. (...) The student disrupted math class at least twice a week and ended up in the principal’s office.” (Woolfolk & Usher, p. 316). The authors explain that it was in the principal’s office that the boy felt seen and enjoyed uninterrupted attention. Although the misbehavior led to being dismissed from math class (negative reinforcement), it gave the student one-on-one time with the principal (positive reinforcement). Closing the chapter, Woolfolk & Usher share an action plan developed to meet the student’s needs. This included giving him some extra tutoring time and awarding him time with the principal only once he completed all his assignments without disruption.

Rutter (1985 as cited in Gaoni et al, 1998) argues that behavioral disorders, as the one above, tend to be a reflection of the environment in which the child had been brought up.

This chapter offers some accounts of student behavior in class. Explanations are provided on how disruptions unfolded, and the course of action we took to address each situation.

Sample 1: From Martina's Journal

Hello diary, I'm back! Did I mention I wanted a challenge? Well, here I have it! Wow! This is really interesting! I must say that today I felt frustrated, it's our fifth class and I already feel like I'm losing control! But why ? All I have done is follow all the steps, balance my attitudes as best as possible! How can this happen to me?

Agggghhhh, today I reached my limit!! I feel so sad, I don't know if I can handle this the whole year. Bad behavior in the classroom is more and more constant and it is almost never possible to come to an agreement with students. They feel that they are the ones who should have control of the class and that everything I do for them is just my responsibility and duty, I think it's a very selfish position on their part!

Today we closed the introductory module project and that was one of the most difficult things I've ever faced in a class. Nearing the end of the class, with my spirits on the floor and the students having wasted and destroyed most of the materials I had given them. I mean don't get me wrong, I did bring these materials for them to work with, but they totally destroyed the materials in front of my face ! Just because it seems to be funny ?! No way ! I'm not gonna allow that in my class !! EVER!! I just talked to them and all they did was laugh in my face. I felt like running out of the room, going to cry in a corner and giving up.

I still find it hard to believe that young adults continue to behave like teenagers and just because they see me young they think I don't deserve respect! I am frustrated, angry and tired. And here is where I'm going to confess something, I wanted to shout at them so badly. It's quite complicated to explain this because I'm not like this ! never! and having this feeling is so bad, hopefully all these years of studying took me to a place in which I made a good decision, I stayed there in front of the class just quiet for a few seconds.

This moment took me to my first year of psychology at CERP. I was there again sitting in the back of the classroom and our psychology teacher was there. We are talking about how to be a wise teacher and how not to react to bad behavior. long story short, just be quiet, don't say a word and that's what I did, I turned around and kept silent. I have to say that it worked for every one, except for that one student that left the class without my permission.

Anyway, I have to say that besides I was about to collapse, in a way I managed to find a wise (or almost wise?) solution. Yeah... let's see what happens after Easter week.

I'll write to you soon, love Marti.

Sample 2: From Germán's Journal

Hello diary! It's me again. In the last entry, I talked about the difficulty that some of my students have to concentrate. Lack of concentration usually leads to misbehavior. What a challenging aspect of teaching!

Most of my students behave in a very correct way but there are always exceptions. The problem is when they misbehave, but in a very crucial moment for you. What do you do? How do you act? On Thursday, the Didactics teacher visited my class. It was the second visit of the midterm. I started to deliver the class I had consciously planned when a couple of students started to misbehave. They began to talk without permission and to interrupt the lesson constantly. I drew their attention once, twice and on the third occasion, I said: "it is the last time".

As both went on with their attitudes, I decided to ask them to leave the classroom. It was a situation that I obviously didn't enjoy but I considered necessary to maintain the lesson's atmosphere. In addition, other students were continuously complaining and saying they wanted to go home. I was so upset! Fortunately, the Didactics teacher supported my decisions, so I felt relieved in a certain way.

In the following period, I had a serious and severe talk with my students, pointing out that I would not tolerate this kind of attitude again. The clue now is to continue constructing a link with my students and to be balanced, having authority without authoritarianism. Another interesting challenge!

Germán

Sample 3: From Gastón's Journal

This first week of class after the winter break turned out to be quite a challenge, and exhausting one. Despite having revised concepts and given time for sts to settle and come back to their in-class profile, it still took them some time to adjust once again.

I struggled trying to get them to keep quiet and focus. Once I managed to correct some sts behavior another disruption broke out somewhere else in the classroom. And so as this went on repeatedly I had no option but to catch the attention of a few ones and continue the class with them. About this I did not feel proud but I needed to do something and most students were not precisely willing to.

Gastón.

Reflections and Recommendations for Future Practice:

Some of the most recurring behavioral issues that we faced in the classroom include, late arrivals, inappropriate use of cellphones, and off-topic chatter. These distractions strongly influence both students' and instructors' motivation in and out of class. After a tough lesson, teachers tend to carry the exhaustion in our mental baggage outside the classroom, so it may affect our mood while teaching other classes.

That said, we do understand that even the most purposeful misbehaviors have underlying causes. These can be contingent on individual student situations as well as issues regarding course structure and lesson development dynamics. Among the most habitual contingent situations that can affect our students' development in the class, one may find that health or family problems, academic difficulties, and self-esteem issues are at the top of the list. Additionally, it is crucial to highlight that newer generations bring to class a plethora of values that do not match ours. The coexistence of these differences may give rise to some tension at first. Even so, such dissimilarities should also be seen as opportunities to rethink the way we teach and connect with our students.

Tips for teachers to manage student behavior:

Behaviorist strategist Michele Holiday (2019) developed an action plan with useful strategies to handle disruptive behavior in class, as follows:

1. Redirect behavior: Give students a call to action, focusing on what they should be doing, as opposed to what they should not be doing. Examples include "Focus, get back on task". This takes the spotlight away from the disruptive behavior in question and places importance on the work at hand.
2. Check your environment: Take a reflective look at the type of classroom environment you have. Develop consistent routines where most students are working and engaged. Order promotes order, so misbehavior engagement is lowered.
3. Feed the need: If the undesired behavior continues to happen after repeated redirection, and despite a positive classroom atmosphere, it is time to find out the why. Pinpoint behavior patterns, and what students hope to gain from it. Act accordingly, offer differentiated tasks, allow some breaks, change seats.

Chapter 4

Learning the Ropes:

Supervisory

Observations

About supervision in teacher training:

Supervision of student-teachers in practice is a pivotal instance in the development of teachers, and as stated by Akpan (2000) it should not be taken for granted. He then adds that supervision “requires mutual understanding, co-operation and a close working relationship between the supervisor and student-teachers in order to achieve the objectives of teaching practice” (Akpan, 2000, p.128)

Understanding the essential role of a teacher trainer, Hattie and Timperley (2007) define the supervisor’s feedback as a “consequence” of performance. Feedback is conceptualized by the authors as information that is provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding different aspects of one’s performance or understanding.

Then, Villeneuve (1994, cited in Colognesi et al. 2022) says that supervision in teaching training is a continual process of exchange where both student-teacher and teacher trainer exchange information that helps the trainee develop functional skills. Expanding his ideas, he cites Wexler (2020) to argue that teaching feedback “is necessary for learning to teach” because “it allows teachers to reflect on their teaching practice, assess their growth, and set goals accordingly.”

Formative peer observation is considered by many to be a powerful tool for providing feedback to individual teachers, disseminating disciplinary good practice and fostering a local evaluative enhancement culture (Yiend et al., 2014).

This chapter features accounts focused around experiences related to teacher-trainer supervisions during the development of our practicum. These showcase a deeper look into how our self-awareness was impacted on by the presence of a teacher-trainer watching our lessons, how we felt, and what we learned from it.

Sample 1: From Martina's Journal

Hello diary! I'm here once again. Today my Didactics teacher came to visit me for the first time in my class. I must say that I didn't feel so nervous, I felt safe and despite the fact that it was quite difficult for me to carry out the activities, everything went very well! During the development of the class we worked with a writing activity so I showed a model to students which was very helpful and at the same time very useful. I think they showed very good results and understood the lesson pretty well. I have to say that this is a big jump for my students because now they are writing a three paragraph text and two,three weeks ago they were writing only one paragraph!

My students behaved respectfully and I must thank them because they collaborated to make this class work well. I really liked the environment of the class and how much they have improved in terms of behavior. During the course of the lesson almost everything went very well and at the end I had my feedback which was very encouraging! Still I need to improve my time management. Let's see what happens in the next class !!

I'll write to you soon, love Marti.

Sample 2: From Germán's Journal

Hi diary! It's Germán with more experiences to tell about my practice. After a couple of visits, the Didactics teacher was there again for the midterm test. This type of instance usually provokes a logical adrenaline but I have to say that our trainer provides us with calm and security to achieve our goals. And how crucial it is to build people's confidence! Fortunately, the class was as I had planned before and students were engaged and interested in the topic. Most of them participated, raised their hands and took their turns respectfully in oral activities. We worked with types of houses and their parts. My students were able to

describe their houses and succeeded in building a mockup of their homes and explaining it orally in front of the class. It was a very nice experience!

Germán.

Sample 3: From Gastón's Journal

From the comfort of my home I now sit to reflect on the lesson delivered today, which was observed and evaluated by my teacher trainer.

By now having the presence of my teacher trainer in class is no longer something that gets me tense nor extremely nervous as it used to a year ago. I have become used to the dynamics of delivering a lesson while being observed. As to that, I must say that it is quite a positive experience because I can always count on my teacher trainer to provide feedback that will benefit my professional development.

This lesson was, in my eyes, quite successful. Students' effort in an English classroom is something I have learned to highly appreciate because of how demanding it is to receive input in a foreign language. All students were able to follow the thread of the lesson despite their level of English. All activities implemented were completed and discussion breaks saw a variety of students intervening.

The most positive aspects for me were time management and student engagement. On the one hand, the didactic sequence felt clear and well paced. Then, everything I planned could be worked on, and students had an active role from start to finish.

Nonetheless, one thing I would like to improve on is having ready-made instructions for low-performing students. My solution to this was to give them instructions in Spanish as a last resource, but I believe that with concise instructions and not too wordy they can understand, and that would allow me to slowly start incrementing the amount of vocabulary I expose them to in instructions.

All in all, I am proud and pleased with the lesson, and I believe that the presence of my teacher trainer gets the best out of me and pushes me to look out for several aspects that need to be attended, not just the stages and activities.

Gastón.

Reflections and Recommendations for Future Practice:

Supervision in teaching constitutes an essential pillar in the formation of soon-to-be teachers. Yet, acknowledging its importance does not make it less of a nerve-racking experience. On any normal day, giving a class as a novice teacher is an emotionally-packed experience on its own. The presence of a supervising figure intensifies those emotions. So in addition to worries about students' perceptions, and our own self-perceptions, we must also leave room to worry about teacher-trainer perceptions.

Nerves aside, the role of our teacher-trainer during the practicum was crucial in achieving gradual success. First and foremost, feedback on performance encourages us to learn from mistakes and work towards correcting them. Secondly, it nurtures a positive relationship with our profession, allowing us to cultivate a critical understanding of teaching in relation to the value of continuous learning and improvement.

Tips for teachers to manage supervisions: In a guide aimed to assist pre-service teachers in coping with their practicum, Thomas Rademacher (2020) offers some practical guidelines.

1. Try hard - Focus your efforts strategically instead of worrying about every single detail. Trying to do too much gets you close to nowhere.
2. Connect with students - Devote time to building relationships and knowing who you teach as much as what you teach,
3. Take initiative - Do not be afraid to try new things, let your imagination fly. Seek the support of your supervisor to explore new strategies.
4. Ask for help - Never take help for granted, always demand it. Teacher-trainers are prepared to help you sort out your doubts, so do not doubt requesting their assistance.
5. Vent, and fail - Take time to breathe. Allow yourself to make mistakes, acknowledge your frustrations. Then find ways to leverage them towards improvement.
6. Strike a positive study/life balance. Do not sacrifice your personal time, but if you must, do it strategically. Finding a balance between academic life and personal life is vital. Think of teaching as going to the gym, if you go every week day with no rest days, your muscles will likely tear. The same applies for teaching.

Closing the Classroom

Door: Final Thoughts

Having kept a diary of our teaching practice was a well-welcomed challenge. When first assigned this undertaking, and never having kept a diary before, we all concurred that doing so would require arduous consistency. Consequently, we hesitated about our ability to succeed at being constant enough to record our experiences on paper. The first few entries were uncomplicated and we all found ourselves capable of wording our feelings and expectations about our groups and first meeting them. Words simply flowed and it was easy to describe the scenario, the challenges we expected to encounter, as well as the milestones we hoped to accomplish.

Along the way, during the first recorded entries we realized and later discussed the similarities between keeping a diary and planning a lesson. In both cases, we express our intentions to strive and achieve certain goals. On that note, setting writing goals was central in our attempts at being consistent with the diary. In turn, recording entries in the diary became a goal in itself. Reviewing reflections from our diaries, we noticed that there was a recurring element across most entries. Accounts tended to be written either in relation to succeeding or failing to achieve a given goal.

Lastly, due to lack of practice, reflecting on our lessons proved to be a rather grueling task. In spite of that, post-lesson reflections were a life-changing tool that facilitated lesson adjustments. Devoting time to analyze our practices through introspection, considering the things that went well, and the ones that needed improvement, enabled us to grow into the teacher role. Closing the classroom door is far from being the end of teaching. If anything, it is an opportunity to rethink our practices, so that the next door we open will be a new chance to deliver greater lessons and become better teachers.

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INDEX

Prologue	3
Chapter 1. Opening the Classroom Door: First Impressions	4
Chapter 2. The Learning Path: Managing Motivation	9
Chapter 3. A Taste of Chaos: Managing Behavior	14
Chapter 4. Learning the Ropes: Supervisory Observations	19
Closing the Classroom Door: Final thoughts	24
Acknowledgements	25
References	26
About the authors	27