

# 9 Images to foster student teachers' reflective practice and professional development

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## 1. Introduction

This chapter deals with a small-scale study that focuses on the analysis of the student teachers' evidence gathered from the first task of the Barcelona study week of the proPIC project. The task, called 'One picture and One thousand words', consists of selecting an image that represents the student teachers' conception of Additional Language (AL) teaching and an explanatory text that accompanies it to clarify interpretation. The main objective of this task is to prompt student teachers to use the image-text relationship to express their beliefs about the complex process of AL teaching, and to make the metacognitive effort to verbalise this relationship.

There is already a number of studies that analyse the use of images in narrative inquiry research in teacher education to reveal student teachers' roles as professionals in the field of AL, their teaching methods, and professional identities (Birello & Pujolà, 2020; Chik, 2018; Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019; Melo-Pfeifer & Chik, 2020). Analysis of the images that student teachers select to show their perception of AL teaching can help them to understand how they develop their role as teachers in the first stages of their professional development (Bessette & Paris, 2019). In addition, having to describe these images can foster student teachers' reflective practice and metacognitive processes, which

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**How to cite:** Pujolà, J.-T., & González, V. (2022). Images to foster student teachers' reflective practice and professional development. In G. Schwab, M. Oesterle & A. Whelan (Eds), *Promoting professionalism, innovation and transnational collaboration: a new approach to foreign language teacher education* (pp. 223-232). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2022.57.1390>

stimulate teachers' awareness and allow their beliefs about teaching and learning to emerge (Costa Ribas & Manzan Perine, 2017).

The elicitation of metaphors of pre-service teachers to articulate their conceptions of teaching and learning is also a powerful reflective task in teacher education (Leavy, McSorley, & Boté, 2007; Saban, Kocbeker, & Saban, 2007). In addition, metaphors can be expressed in diverse representational systems or modes, such as the visual mode (Forceville, 2008), and thus, visual metaphors can also be exploited for reflective practice in teacher education. An image used as a visual metaphor can foster reflection but also expand different complex and opaque meanings which would certainly need clarification. When working with visual metaphors in teacher education, many authors combine visual and textual data which help to clarify the visual interpretation of metaphorical images (Besette & Paris, 2019; Costa Ribas & Manzan Perine, 2017; Hamilton, 2016). Thus, using both images and written texts to describe participants' conceptions of AL teaching provided the contextual frame for the current study.

## 2. Methodology

The objective of this exploratory study is to analyse the images as visual metaphors for reflective purposes that participants used in the first task during the study week of the first and second cohorts of student teachers attending the University of Barcelona in 2018 and 2019. Out of a total of 20 participants, 17 images were selected because they included a reflective written text, which is needed to disambiguate misinterpretations in the analysis.

The qualitative analysis was carried out in two phases, as below.

- **First phase.** A descriptive analysis of the image was carried out according to the following criteria: type of image, focus of agent (teacher or learner), content, and metaphoric conception. The criteria of analysis were established following an inductive approach to

try to achieve the research objective. This initial phase led us to establish categories that would facilitate the analysis of the images and group them accordingly. In this phase, both authors of the study labelled categories separately and then agreed on a consensus to achieve internal validity. Five categories were identified taking into account their metaphorical conception: openness, collaboration, process, construction, and challenge, and the images were classified accordingly.

- **Second phase.** A thematic analysis approach (see [Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)) was followed to identify relevant themes and keywords from the student teachers' written reflections. The information of the written text allows researchers to contrast it with the information portrayed by the image. In this way, researchers could validate or refute the interpretation of the visual metaphors.

### 3. Results and discussion

The data include 17 images, ten photos, and seven drawings which were all taken from the web. They portray both learners and teachers, with an emphasis on the learner since the teacher is portrayed only in four images. The use of the images as visual metaphors is the main strategy student teachers used to help them represent the abstract and complex conception of AL teaching. The images were classified considering the relation between the content of the image and the conception that they represent. Following an inductive approach of analysis, the images can be grouped into the following five categories: openness, collaboration, process, construction, and challenge.

#### 3.1. Openness

**Openness** is shown by six images that contain maps and world globes (for example, [Figure 1](#)) to imply that teaching AL broadens the learners' vision, opens the learners' minds, and develops their intercultural competence.

Figure 1. Image<sup>3</sup> similar to the one used by student teacher D



This conception of AL teaching coincides with what student D describes:

“I think as foreign language teachers we should encourage our students to follow their goals, to broaden their horizon, to be open-minded to other cultures and people who speak a different language than we do”.

### 3.2. Collaboration

**Collaboration** is the second relevant notion that includes three images which show the need to design collaborative tasks that enhance interaction as a key to improve students’ communicative skills including negotiation and mediation.

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3. Source: Photo by Alyssia Wilson, [https://unsplash.com/photos/800\\_aFy72KY](https://unsplash.com/photos/800_aFy72KY)

The three images in this category represent children from different ethnicities in a circle holding hands (see example in [Figure 2](#)).

Figure 2. Image<sup>4</sup> similar to the one used by student teacher G



In her text, student teacher G describes the literal representation of the image and emphasises the idea of teaching AL as a key factor to achieve a better world:

“I believe that teaching foreign languages and cultures can be a good starting point towards a more peaceful way of togetherness in the world. This is well visualised in the picture I chose because only by acting hand in hand can we change something about the way of living together in the world”.

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4. Source: Prawny from <https://pixabay.com/es/illustrations/niños-juventud-niños-pequeños-5133287/>

### 3.3. Process

The third category, **process**, also includes three images that portray paths or roads, either straight (see [Figure 3](#)) or circular.

Figure 3. Image<sup>5</sup> similar to the one used by student teacher K



These images show the perception of AL teaching as a **process**. This process is detailed in their written texts that describe two diverse aspects:

“I think a way in beautiful setting represents the situation in the classroom, where the class stands in front of the street and has to **walk together the path in the right direction**” (emphasis added, Teacher K).

“This picture should symbolise the will and encourage of teachers to **break out of their comfort zone** trying **something new** in their lessons and going a new path they didn’t go before” (emphasis added, Teacher T).

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5. Source: <https://pixabay.com/es/photos/la-carretera-%c3%a1rbol-paisaje-viaje-2593616/>

As we can see, the same type of image can reflect two different conceptions: In Text 1, the path leads to following a more prescriptive approach to teaching while in Text 2 it is a way to discover new avenues of teaching.

### 3.4. Construction

AL teaching seen as a **construction** is portrayed by four images that show the idea of rising, growth, or building, as shown in [Figure 4](#).

Figure 4. Sketch of the image selected by student teacher M



In this category, student teachers focus their attention on the teaching process related to Bruner's scaffolding of learning ([Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976](#)), as student teacher M comments:

“[s]econd language teaching is just like the teachers help students to build the bridge brick by brick. It also helps students to build connection between their mother tongue and the new language”.

The idea of teaching as construction in her text is reinforced in two main ideas: on the one hand, the succession of phases through the relationship with the use of construction materials and on the other hand, in the literal and metaphorical meaning of scaffolding.

### 3.5. Challenge

Despite having only one instance (see [Figure 5](#), a sumo wrestler facing a little sumo boy ready to fight) the last category is worth mentioning as the image reflects the teachers' **challenge** to empower the language learner with the necessary knowledge and skills to face new challenges in their learning process.

Figure 5. Image selected by student teacher F

Source: 呂布の痔: <https://bokete.jp/odai/3234998>

Student teacher F comments:

“For me, teaching is about equipping students for the world, not just the job or the university – and the challenge is to give them the courage to face every problem armed with their knowledge and curiosity, no matter how insurmountable it may seem. I root for the underdog, because I want every student to have the confidence to try, even fail, but then try again until they win. It’s easy to teach someone who wins every time, but it’s a vocation to turn those with the potential to win into those with the ability to win”.

## 4. Conclusion

This exploratory study carried out of a task using images underlies the importance of visual metaphors as a teacher training tool for reflective practice. Images, if used as visual metaphors, serve to trigger student teachers’ reflections to elicit their teacher identity construction at the pre-service stages of their professional development. The images selected by student teachers show that they are deeply ingrained in shared beliefs about AL teaching and learning. They illustrated AL teaching with key concepts such as openness, collaboration, process, construction, and challenge, which denote that the student teachers in this study have already comprehended and integrated them into their belief



system. In addition, the coincidence in the type of images selected reveals that the visual metaphors they used reflect similar conceptions despite coming from different countries and training programmes. Although this study does not allow generalisations to be drawn due to the small number of participants, it does allow us to affirm that this type of reflective task using visual metaphors can be relevant and meaningful in teacher education to examine student teachers' beliefs about AL teaching and learning in the development of their teaching competence as reflective practitioners.

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**Promoting professionalism, innovation and transnational collaboration: a new approach to foreign language teacher education**  
**Edited by Götz Schwab, Mareike Oesterle, and Alison Whelan**

**Publication date:** 2022/07/25

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Cover theme by © 2022 Editors  
Cover layout by © 2022 Raphaël Savina ([raphael@savina.net](mailto:raphael@savina.net))

ISBN13: 978-2-38372-004-1 (Ebook, PDF, colour)  
ISBN13: 978-2-38372-005-8 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)  
ISBN13: 978-2-38372-003-4 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)  
Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.  
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

**Legal deposit, France:** Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: juillet 2022.

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