JOURNAL OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change,
2025, 10(4), 3219-3227
ISSN: 2589-1316

Digital Microteaching as Cultural Practice: Reworking Storytelling Competence, Pedagogical Authority, and Moral Learning in Vietnam

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Citation: Huyen, N. T., Huyen, N. T. & Yen, T. T. K. (2025). Digital Microteaching as Cultural Practice: Reworking Storytelling Competence, Pedagogical Authority, and Moral Learning in Vietnam, *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(4), 3219-3227. https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i4.3503

Published: December 20, 2025

ABSTRACT

Digital microteaching has become a cultural arena where student teachers meet their own image, negotiate their bodies, and rehearse the moral expectations of the profession. This study examines how storytelling practice, once grounded in voice and presence, is reshaped when captured, replayed, and scrutinized through screens. Drawing on a mixed set of videos, reflective journals, group observations, and interviews, the analysis traces three distinct trajectories of becoming: rapid openings shaped by self-recognition, slow adjustments formed through embodied micro-motions, and protective stillness anchored in mor al anxiety. These movements reveal digital microteaching not as a technique but as a moral–embodied field where teacherly presence is continually reassembled. The findings recast storytelling competence as a form of ethical attunement cultivated through the subtle frictions between image, body, and vocation.

Keywords: Digital Microteaching; Embodied Pedagogy; Moral Attunement; Teacherly Presence; Cultural Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Digital microteaching has entered Vietnamese teacher education as a quiet but decisive shift in how early-childhood pedagogy is perceived. When a student teacher records a storytelling lesson and watches herself pause, adjust her tone, or hesitate before a gesture, a familiar activity is rearranged through a different sensibility. What once belonged to instinct—voice, rhythm, eye contact, the fragile work of emotional connection—becomes something that can be seen, paused, and re-negotiated on screen.

This shift turns microteaching from a technical exercise into a cultural practice, a space where authority, moral expectation, and professional identity surface and slowly reconfigure themselves. Repetition through video produces a second narrative of teaching—parallel to the classroom—where reviewing, cutting, and reflecting form another layer of learning to become a teacher.

In early-childhood education in Vietnam, storytelling has long carried an ethical weight: the teacher's voice is expected to cultivate empathy and orient children toward collective sensibilities. Digital capture alters this terrain. What once dissolved into face-to-face contact now becomes sharply visible: the slight tremor before a line, the softness of an eye movement, the way distance is created or bridged. Microteaching draws these subtleties into a field of scrutiny and refinement, aligning with wider debates about how play, narrative, and teacher presence shape socio-emotional life in early education (Ashiabi, 2007; Bodrova & Leong, 2010; Wood, 2010, 2013).

Our preliminary inquiry shows that students often struggle when moving from theoretical preparation to embodied performance—whether in preparing materials, sensing children's needs, or sustaining the tempo of an

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activity. Microteaching does not erase these tensions; it renders them traceable, creating a loop where students confront the difference between what they believed they performed and what the camera reveals. This act of self-observation forms a distinctive aesthetic of learning—one shaped by continuous negotiation between intention and recorded presence.

Despite this emerging reality, existing research tends to stabilise teachers as role-holders or focus on competencies required for effective instruction. Few studies have approached microteaching as a cultural field where digital mediation reshapes moral reasoning, pedagogical authority, and the emotional labour embedded in teaching. Insights from play and creativity-oriented traditions (Rogers, 2011; Vecchi, 2010; Edwards et al., 1998) hint at the richness of embodied pedagogical work, yet they seldom touch the moral frictions triggered when teaching becomes an object of repeated viewing. Even broader discussions on care ethics (Noddings, 2013), educational accountability (Biesta, 2010), and multimodal sensibility (Rowsell, 2013) have not fully addressed how digital capture reorganises the teacher–self relationship.

This gap becomes consequential in Vietnam, where early-childhood teachers are expected not only to perform correctly but to inhabit the role of moral caretakers—figures who secure emotional safety for children through tone, manner, and attuned presence. Digital microteaching invites student teachers to revisit their emerging professional selves: whom they address, with what voice, and through which stance toward the child. Such introspection resonates strongly with Vietnamese cultural value formations that bind teaching to moral cultivation (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2019), while also intersecting with global conversations on place-conscious education (Gruenewald, 2003a, 2003b; Yemini et al., 2025) and the evolving relation between self-technology and pedagogy (Foucault, 1988).

This article treats digital microteaching as a cultural lens rather than a training device. Through that lens, storytelling is not merely rehearsed; it is staged, re-embodied, and interpreted within a digital ecology shaped by policy frameworks (MOET, 2018, 2021; UNESCO, 2024), creative pedagogical vocabularies (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Garcia-Lazo, 2022), and the textured emotional work of early-childhood teaching. Drawing from these strands, the study asks:

What becomes of pedagogical authority and moral learning when storytelling—an act grounded in live presence—is transformed into a sequence of recorded, replayed, and edited practices?

From this question, microteaching emerges not as a technical scaffold but as a new terrain of early-childhood education in Vietnam, where student teachers learn to tell stories not only through words but through attending to the subtle shifts of voice, body, and professional virtue as they appear, disappear, and re-appear across frames.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foundational scholarship in early-childhood education often treats play as the ground on which social and emotional life takes shape. In Ashiabi's (2007) account, play creates a sphere where children test relationships, negotiate intentions, and learn to regulate feeling. Bodrova and Leong (2010) advance this view through the idea of a developmental frame in which children rehearse cultural scripts through roles, rules, and interaction. Studies of peer cooperation and problem-solving—from Ramani's (2012) experimental work to Wood's longitudinal inquiries into preschool curricula (2010, 2013)—show how child-directed situations nurture collaboration and a sense of communal belonging. Even comparative developmental research across humans and non-humans, such as Warneken et al. (2005), underscores the deep evolutionary roots of cooperative impulses that surface in early play.

Yet these insights emerge almost entirely from settings where the teacher's presence—tone, movement, gaze—anchors the encounter. Once teaching enters digital space, the texture of that presence shifts. Rowsell's (2013) examination of multimodality suggests that image, sound, and gesture become structural elements of pedagogy rather than supplementary ones. This resonates with the a/r/tographic sensibility articulated by Irwin and Springgay (2008), in which the teacher inhabits the intertwined positions of artist, storyteller, and researcher, crafting learning as an iterative creative act. Garcia-Lazo (2022), writing from a similar orientation, shows how artistic processes open new corridors for reflexivity that blur the boundary between instruction and self-making. In this light, digital microteaching is not a minor technical step but a site where teachers witness themselves, interpret their own performance, and reshape practice through cycles of enactment and review.

A cultural reading deepens the stakes. Feld's (1982) work with the Kaluli demonstrates that voice always carries an emotional architecture drawn from collective life. Noddings (2013) treats care as a mode of presence more than a method, a stance in which the teacher opens herself to the learner's vulnerability. Vietnamese cultural scholarship echoes this spirit: Ngô Đức Thịnh (2019) describes a value constellation where restraint, warmth, and relational harmony form the moral background of educating young children. Kể chuyện—storytelling—in this tradition is an ethical practice, shaping a climate of trust as much as conveying narrative content. Nguyễn Huy Hoàng (2010),

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in his study of ritual and traditional forms, speaks to the enduring power of performative acts to shape communal feeling—an insight that helps illuminate why the teacher's voice carries such weight in early-childhood settings.

Policy discourses amplify these expectations. UNESCO's (2024) framework positions cultural and arts education as central to cultivating creativity and meaningful participation. Vietnamese curriculum documents (MOET, 2018, 2021) adopt similar stances, calling for teachers who can design learning environments infused with sensitivity rather than follow pre-scripted sequences. Research on culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies (Smith et al., 2022) points to the teacher's capacity to read children's expressions, recognize latent cultural meanings, and transform them into learning experiences. Together, these strands frame storytelling as a practice of ethical attunement and cultural mediation.

The digital turn complicates this terrain. Biesta's (2010) concerns about the rise of measurement regimes gain renewed relevance when microteaching transforms pauses, intonation, and micro-movements into visible elements susceptible to scrutiny. Studies of teacher agency during reform (Dinh & Sannino, 2024; Ross, 2024) reveal how early-career teachers often juggle technical expectations, personal commitments, and unstated cultural norms embedded in schooling. Foucault's (1988) reflections on technologies of the self help explain how video becomes a device through which teachers monitor and reshape their professional being. Grieshaber and McArdle's (2010) critique of "problems while playing" shows how tensions in practice are often tied to institutional demands rather than the children themselves, a point that becomes sharper when teaching is mediated by recording tools.

Contextually grounded approaches—including the Reggio Emilia perspective (Edwards et al., 1998; Vecchi, 2010) and place-conscious frameworks (Gruenewald, 2003a, 2003b)—remind us that learning spaces operate as semiotic environments. From this angle, storytelling extends beyond spoken word to include space, light, materials, and the teacher's embodied stance. The digital layer shifts these dynamics: the frame of the camera, the quality of sound, and the deliberate act of editing generate a "second classroom," one where student teachers are simultaneously performers, directors, and commentators of their own work. Yemini, Engel and Ben Simon's (2025) systematic review on place-based education underscores how context becomes a curriculum in itself—an argument that takes on new meaning when the "place" of storytelling becomes a digitally constructed environment.

Across these bodies of literature, a shared blind spot emerges: little is known about what happens when storytelling—an act tied closely to live presence—is transposed into a recorded, replayed, and self-edited format. Research has not fully addressed how digital microteaching reorganizes pedagogical authority, moral learning, and embodied practice for early-childhood student teachers. Nor has it examined how cultural expectations around voice, demeanor, and relational softness are negotiated when the teacher confronts her own image on screen.

This gap is not abstract. It moves alongside pressing concerns in Vietnamese teacher education, where students must meet competency standards while embodying cultural sensibilities that resist simple codification. Storytelling, in this sense, becomes a window into the broader question of how digital technologies recalibrate the teacher's moral and embodied presence—an issue that remains understudied despite its rising significance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study grows from weaving together three strands of thought often treated as separate: the ethics of presence, the structure of multimodal expression, and the teacher's capacity to act within digitally mediated pedagogical spaces. When these strands are read through the lens of Vietnamese microteaching, they form a conceptual mesh that helps explain how storytelling—rooted in culture, emotion, and communal rhythm—is transformed as it moves through screens, lenses, and acts of editing.

Agency: The Staged Capacity to Act in a Digital Environment

Digital microteaching places early-childhood student teachers in a particular condition: they perform a story while simultaneously confronting their own performance as captured on video. This split self exposes a layered form of agency, a kind of "staged capacity to act" that echoes the dynamics described by Dinh and Sannino (2024) in contexts of educational change. Agency no longer unfolds only through direct engagement with children; it is shaped by how the student anticipates future viewers—lecturers, peers, and the self who will later re-watch the recording. What appears to be a simple gesture or pause becomes a choice that can be revisited, corrected, or reworked. In this sense, agency becomes reflexive and recursive: one acts in the story, but one also acts on the story through cycles of review and reconstruction.

This dual structure differentiates microteaching from classic accounts of teacher agency in early-childhood storytelling. Rather than emerging solely from the interplay with children, recorded agency develops through tension between embodied performance and the camera's unblinking gaze. Ross (2024) has shown how teachers'

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interpretation of curriculum reveals layers of "curricular potential." Microteaching amplifies such layers: the camera becomes a silent co-author that both expands and restricts what the student teacher feels able to do.

Structure: Multimodal Expression as The Architecture of Digital Storytelling

Once storytelling enters digital space, narration and presentation are inseparable. Rhythm, voice, silence, hand movement, posture—these elements fold into what Rowsell (2013) calls a multimodal structure. The environment of teaching, long described in the Reggio Emilia tradition as a "third teacher" (Edwards et al., 1998; Vecchi, 2010), shifts form: the third teacher is no longer the physical classroom with its light and arrangement, but the frame of the shot, the distance between body and camera, the warmth or coldness of audio.

This multimodal structure carries a double effect. On one side, it allows creative shaping: students may choose warm lighting, soft background sound, or framing that evokes folktale atmospheres. On the other side, it exposes them to a subtle discipline, aligning with Grieshaber and McArdle's (2010) observation that problems in play often arise from institutional expectations rather than from children. Digital storytelling becomes susceptible to over-formatting, where the narrative is read as a visual product and the teacher becomes absorbed in controlling micro-details. Structure thus releases and restrains, creating the tension that defines much of the microteaching process.

Motivation: The Ethical and Emotional Drive Behind Storytelling

If agency concerns capacity and structure concerns conditions, motivation asks why a teacher chooses to tell a story in a particular way. In Vietnam, the motivation for storytelling reaches beyond technical competence. Care—as Noddings (2013) articulates—is a posture of openness in which the teacher offers attention, patience, and emotional presence. This resonates with Vietnamese cultural values described by Ngô Đức Thịnh (2019), where gentleness, restraint, and attunement form the core of early-childhood pedagogy. Storytelling becomes a moral act of creating an atmosphere in which children feel held.

In microteaching, this ethical motivation does not disappear; it changes its mode of expression. Teachers must learn to make softness visible: the gentle drop in tone, the looseness of eye contact, the small descent of the shoulders. These are no longer sensed by children in the moment; they are observed by viewers who analyse the recording. Motivation thus operates on two layers: the act of telling for an imagined child and the act of revealing one's moral qualities to an evaluative gaze. It becomes a form of ethical display—an insight also anticipated in studies of performative moral labour such as Feld's (1982) work on voice as cultural emotion, and Nguyễn Huy Hoàng's (2010) analysis of traditional performative forms.

Relationality: Teacher–Child Resonance Under Digital Distancing

Traditional storytelling relies on a live emotional loop—children's laughter, their widening eyes, the micro-adjustments that guide the unfolding of the tale. Digital microteaching breaks this loop. The child is absent; the teacher imagines a listener without presence. Biesta's (2010) formulation of the educational tension between authority, care, and learner freedom becomes salient here: teachers must hold these tensions alone, without real-time feedback.

The absence of children does not cancel relationality; it transforms it. What emerges is a reflective relation between the teacher and her own image. Small shifts—an unintended sharpness in tone, a protective distance in posture, or a moment of moral signalling through gaze—become perceptible. Relationality becomes introspective, shaping a mode of caregiving mediated by self-observation. The process echoes Foucault's (1988) insight into technologies of the self, where individuals work upon themselves through acts of viewing and revision.

Place-Consciousness: Cultural Grounding as Cognitive Background

Place-conscious educational approaches (Gruenewald, 2003a, 2003b; Yemini et al., 2025) foreground the role of space—material and symbolic—in learning. Storytelling in Vietnamese early-childhood education is steeped in cultural cadence: measured speech, soft transitions, a collective rhythm that reflects community values. When storytelling is recorded, these values do not vanish; they are reframed. A dim dormitory room, a sparsely lit corner of a classroom, or a makeshift background becomes part of the narrative space. Place becomes more than physical environment; it becomes cultural material carried into each frame.

UNESCO's (2024) emphasis on culture and arts education, as well as policy orientations in MOET (2018, 2021), align with this perspective, positioning teachers as designers of contexts rather than mere executors of curricula. The cultural, relational, and aesthetic demands of storytelling thus merge with the visual-material demands of the digital stage. Smith, Avraamidou and Adams (2022) remind us that culturally sustaining pedagogy depends on the teacher's ability to read and mobilize cultural cues. In microteaching, this reading extends to how teachers curate the space around them, intentionally or not.

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Methodology

The study unfolded over eight months, coinciding with the final phase of practicum for early-childhood student teachers. When more than sixty students completed their first round of digital storytelling recordings, a natural divergence appeared in the raw footage. Some shifted markedly after their first self-viewing, some changed slowly but steadily, and a small group remained almost untouched by the camera's presence. This spontaneous variation guided the sampling strategy. Instead of selecting participants randomly, the study followed the arc of change itself. Eighteen students were invited into a longitudinal track: six who transformed quickly, six who moved with moderate pace, and six whose performances held their original rhythm. The criterion lay in the amplitude of movement, because the amplitude hinted at the mechanism through which microteaching exerted its influence.

Alongside this long-track sample, the entire class participated in a baseline survey capturing their prior experiences with trial teaching, their confidence with digital tools, and their personal orientations toward storytelling. Sixty-two questionnaires were returned, combining Likert-type items with short open-ended prompts. The survey was not designed for measurement in the statistical sense; it served instead as a contour map—tracing initial confidence, childcare experience, and comfort with recording, all of which shaped how students entered the digital microteaching environment.

To deepen the longitudinal accounts, twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted, four from each trajectory group. Selection was not based on academic strength but on how clearly a participant embodied the tempo of their group: the quick movers revealed how agency surfaces when technology becomes supportive; the gradual movers offered a view into slow self-adjustment; the still group illuminated the weight of hesitation and the unease of watching oneself perform. Each interview lasted about forty-five minutes and focused on the felt experience of rewatching their own body, on moments of reluctance, and on forms of change they struggled to articulate in writing. Interviews made it possible to reach the quiet inner corridors of thought—places that written reflections rarely uncover.

Parallel to surveys and interviews, light participant observation took place across twelve group-discussion sessions held after each cycle of recording. The observations followed how students read one another: who tended to speak first, who hesitated, who noticed the details in others' performances more readily than those in their own. These micro-interactions opened a window into the culture of the learning community—the ways students offered comfort, gave gentle pressure, or inadvertently heightened tension. This mattered because storytelling in early childhood education is not merely an individual act; it circulates in a shared space of becoming.

The full dataset consisted of three streams: video, text, and speech. In total, fifty-four videos, fifty-four written reflections, sixty-two surveys, twelve interviews, and twelve group-discussion observations were brought into a common qualitative environment. Analytical software was used to maintain structure, preserve temporal links, and enable rechecking of codes. Videos were read through a performative lens—hand positions, eye openings, irregular pauses. Written reflections and interviews were reviewed iteratively to trace words and fragments that signaled worry, release, or self-doubt. The survey served as a grounding surface, helping to locate the connection between early emotion and later movement. Group observations provided the final layer: how each story was collectively interpreted and re-shaped.

The academic value of weaving these four methods—survey, observation, interview, and layered video analysis—lies in how the combination preserves the full architecture of storytelling in digital space. Storytelling becomes visible not as narration alone but as a three-way negotiation between body, image, and self-reading. Only a design held up by all four pillars—baseline dispositions, embodied movement, self-interpretation, and collective interaction—has the strength to reveal the quiet yet decisive mechanism through which pedagogical competence begins to shift.

Throughout the process, the researcher maintained a position of deliberate self-limitation. The camera exposes vulnerable corners students may not yet be ready to face, demanding that field notes be written with the restraint of someone entrusted with another person's image. Interpretations hold only when they protect the dignity of participants and remain anchored in what the data genuinely show. This stance ensured that analysis stayed faithful to the students' lived transformations rather than imposing meaning upon them.

FINDINGS

The baseline survey with sixty-two students sketched a clear starting line for the cohort. Only about one third felt confident telling a story in front of a camera; nearly half admitted discomfort with rewatching themselves; more than seventy percent believed their storytelling "lacked shape." These numbers did not determine the findings, yet they set the emotional tempo of the first recording cycle. Low confidence anticipated the tension captured in the earliest videos.

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Across fifty-four recordings, the performative analysis identified twenty-seven recurring bodily markers: tightened hands, averted eyes, compressed voice, broken breaths, and prolonged pauses. Their frequency dropped across cycles for the high-change and medium-change groups. In the first group, eye-avoidance decreased by nearly half from the first to the last round; in the second group, shoulder tension softened more slowly but consistently. The group that remained nearly still showed only minor, unstable shifts—a small release appearing in the second round and disappearing in the third. These micro-variations were always cross-checked with reflections and interview material to avoid overstating movement.

The fifty-four written reflections revealed three distinct emotional vocabularies. Students in the high-change group used the language of discovery: "I heard my own voice," "this part feels softer." The gradual group used the language of effort: "steadying my breath," "trying to keep calm," "not yet in control." The near-still group wrote from hesitation: "I'm afraid," "not used to this," "I can't look at myself." When these vocabularies were coded thematically, three emotional bands emerged, each mirroring the bodily trajectories seen in the videos. Brought together across the five sources of data, they formed three clear lines of movement; Table 1 places them side by side to show the shared structure each group followed, often without realising it.

Table 1. Three trajectories across five data sources

Trajectory	Video (embodied signs)	Reflections	Interviews	Group observation	Survey (baseline)
High-change	~50% drop in eye-avoidance; open voice; relaxed shoulders	"I hear myself"; "recognising my voice"; low defensiveness	Calm self-descriptions	Confident in giving feedback	Moderate confidence
Medium-change	Oscillation between open–closed	"Steady breath"; "adjusting"; "holding on"	Slow, deliberate self-regulation	Opening gradually with peer support	Low confidence
Near-still	Minimal visible change; tense voice; withdrawn gaze	"Afraid of exposing weakness"; "fear of doing it wrong"	Moral anxiety	More reassurance than critique	Lowest confidence

Interviews provided the strongest cross-reading. Those who opened quickly in the videos were also the ones who described a sense of "unfolding." The gradual group tended to over-interpret small mistakes, showing a careful, almost defensive rhythm of self-adjustment. The near-still group articulated a moral unease—what several called "the feeling of being examined." The convergence of video, reflection, and interview evidence produced stable clusters more solid than any single source.

Group-discussion observations reinforced this pattern. Students in the opening group often noticed details in their peers' recordings that those peers had missed—slightly raised shoulders, a shift in gaze to the right, a break in breath during a climactic line. The gradual group used these observations to refine their own pacing. The near-still group received more reassurance than critique, which illuminated their minimal change: they were afraid of failing both before the camera and within the collective gaze.

When the datasets were analysed within a unified coding structure, three lines of evidence aligned:

- the survey and bodily markers traced initial tension and its movement over time;
- the reflections and interviews revealed the psychological and moral reasons behind those movements;
- the group observations showed how the learning environment amplified or constrained change.

This triangulation produced the analytical reliability of the study. When a shift appeared in video but not in reflection, interviews explained why. When a reflection conveyed hope but the body remained closed, group observations revealed the social pressures that muted physical expression. The three layers did not compete; they lifted one another, avoiding the twin pitfalls of emotional over-interpretation and misreading bodily cues.

A deeper pattern emerged when the entire arc was viewed together. The unstable changes in the videos—shoulders opening and closing, gaze holding and slipping—mirrored an inner negotiation over professional identity. The rise in confidence in the end-of-term survey aligned with reduced muscular tension and more frequent direct gaze. This convergence suggests that digital storytelling acts not simply as a technique but as a mechanism that exposes and reorganises the moral stance of the learner. Storytelling competence revealed itself less as the ability to deliver content and more as the capacity to adjust one's body, voice, and self-reading to inhabit a teacherly presence.

Digital microteaching made this process visible. It compelled students to confront their own image, and the interplay of quantitative and qualitative evidence showed that such confrontation generated either movement or stasis, depending on how safe the student felt and how strongly the learning community held them in place.

DISCUSSION

The three trajectories uncovered in this study—rapid opening, gradual adjustment, and sustained stillness—reveal a far more coherent structure than the scattered first impressions suggested. When students released tension in the eyes, voice, or shoulders, as the high-change group eventually did, the shift did not signal mastery of technique. It reflected a moment in which they began to treat their recorded image as a source of knowledge. This

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echoes Feld's (1982) insight that expressive practices become intelligible only when one learns to "hear oneself" within them. Their reflections, marked by repeated phrases of recognition, suggest that the camera moved from freezing device to reflective surface, enabling a form of agency that resonates with Rancière's (1991) idea of emancipation: confidence arises not from praise but from seeing that one is capable of reading oneself.

The slower-moving group traced a different rhythm. Their process resembled a kind of sensory detour—piecing together intention and bodily adjustment in small increments. This recalls the Reggio Emilia emphasis on learning through textured, indirect pathways (Edwards et al., 1998; Bodrova & Leong, 2010). Yet the resemblance ends there. Unlike the expansive creativity celebrated in Reggio spaces, these students opened with caution, balancing technical effort against a desire to maintain a credible teacherly bearing. Their movement was not toward artistic freedom but toward a careful recalibration of presence.

The near-still group illuminated a dimension that Western models of storytelling rarely foreground: moral restraint as a boundary of expression. Their language—"afraid of overdoing," "afraid of exposing weakness"—revealed not technical deficiency but a protective stance toward a professional image they believed must be preserved. This aligns with Noddings' (2013) view of teaching as an ethos before it is a method. In their case, the ethos of correctness and modesty acted as a shield, limiting bodily openness even when intention shifted.

Placed alongside international traditions, the distinctiveness of the Vietnamese data becomes sharper. Reggio Emilia foregrounds the "hundred languages" of expression, yet in this study expressive expansion occurred only when students reconciled with their own image—an inner negotiation absent from Reggio's accounts. Anglo-American performativity approaches frame storytelling as an efficiency-producing act (Feld, 1982; Garcia-Lazo, 2022), while the students here oriented toward not violating moral expectations rather than producing effect. Northern European embodied pedagogy assumes an existential safety in which body and intention may align (Wood, 2013); the near-still group shows that when safety is thin, the body protects itself even against its owner's will. Posthumanist readings portray devices as agents in pedagogical assemblages (Rosiek et al., 2024), yet the data here point elsewhere: the agentive force is not the device but the student's own mirrored self inside it. And while culturally sustaining pedagogy highlights the continuity of cultural practices (Smith et al., 2022), what is sustained here is the moral contour of the profession—evidence that Vietnamese teacher education moves on a cultural plane where professional ethos outweighs expressive expansion.

At the level of operational logic, no single tradition fully explains the tripartite structure evident in the data. Each framework captures one layer and misses another, and the gaps they leave open are precisely the spaces illuminated by the Vietnamese case. From that intersection, the study's theoretical contribution emerges: digital storytelling in Vietnamese teacher education functions as a process of *moral–embodied micronegotiation* among body, image, and professional norms. Students did not change because they mastered a technique; they changed when these three elements reached a fragile, temporary balance that allowed them to appear coherently before children. The high-change group opened through trust in their recorded selves; the gradual group through fine-tuned adjustment; the near-still group held their ground because professional ethics warned them against vulnerability. These are not three types of competence, but three modes of negotiation.

Seen through this lens, the learning process unfolds as a mesh of reciprocal adjustments among image, body, and moral expectation—a configuration rendered most clearly in **Figure 1**, where the interplay stabilizes briefly in a form of teacherly presence before looping back into further recalibration.

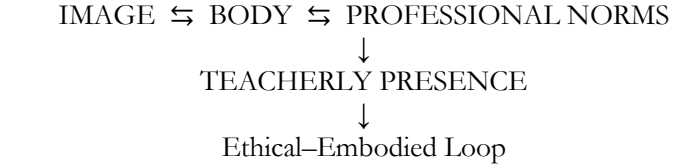

Figure 1. Moral–Embodied Micronegotiation Framework

This Figure shows the dynamic interplay between captured self-image, embodied expression, and moral–professional norms in the formation of teacherly presence within digital microteaching.

What extends the relevance of these findings beyond Vietnam is precisely this mechanism. As education systems across the world move toward digitally mediated teacher preparation, learners everywhere will face the task of working with their own image, calibrating their bodies to professional norms, and managing dignity under the gaze of devices. Rather than concluding with a call to improve training, the findings suggest something larger: the moral–embodied micronegotiation identified here is not a local peculiarity but a structural dynamic that any digitally oriented teacher-education system will have to confront. The Vietnamese case, therefore, does not merely explain a classroom; it reveals a deeper movement quietly shaping the future contours of teaching on a global scale.

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CONCLUSION

The shifts in voice, gaze, and shoulder tension across the video cycles, the hesitations captured in written reflections, and the subtle strains within group discussions all converge on a shared insight: digital microteaching does more than refine techniques of storytelling. It exposes how student teachers negotiate their professional stance through the mediated presence of their own image. Each learner moves at a different pace, yet all follow the same underlying rhythm: the body opens only when they discover a way to appear before the camera without compromising the dignity they attach to the role of teacher. The transformation, then, does not originate in technology but in an ethical self-making that unfolds in a space where image, community, and professional norms intersect.

The three trajectories—quick openings, slow adjustments, near-stillness—suggest that storytelling competence cannot be read as an isolated skill. It emerges from a reconciliation between felt self and reflected self, a form of self-reading that existing models of performativity or embodied pedagogy only partly illuminate. The Vietnamese data reveal the missing layer: storytelling doubles as the preservation of a moral boundary, where hesitation is not merely a deficit but a way learners protect the standard of conduct they believe the profession demands.

Seen from this angle, the contribution of the study extends beyond a single storytelling class. Learning to face one's own image through digital devices is rapidly becoming a universal condition in teacher preparation. The tensions between body and representation, between the desire to open up and the fear of appearing misaligned, between professional expectations and personal expression are no longer local; they mark a broader shift across systems moving into digital environments. The three trajectories identified here therefore resonate as more than local patterns—they hint at a deeper structure shaping how teachers come into being in the digital age.

If storytelling was once treated mainly as expressive craft, the findings show that it is evolving into a process through which the moral fabric of the profession is re-assembled within multimodal practice. In every context that places the camera at the centre of teacher education, micro-negotiations between body, image, and professional ethos become the motor of change. The Vietnamese case is, in this sense, an early glimpse of a wider transformation: wherever future teachers must encounter themselves through a device, the profession is reshaped through the small but decisive movements by which they learn to stand, once again, in front of others.

Declarations

Funding
This research received no specific grant from any funding agency, public, commercial, or not-for-profit.

Conflicts of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval
The study was approved by the Ethics Review Board of Author's University, and all procedures complied with institutional and international guidelines for research involving human participants.

Informed Consent
Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews, surveys, and documentation. Respondents were informed about the study objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any point without consequence.

AI Statement
The author used OpenAI's GPT-5 model as an academic writing assistant to refine language, structure, and stylistic clarity. The model was employed after the completion of conceptualization and data analysis, and it did not generate or modify empirical data, interpretations, or scholarly arguments. All intellectual content, citations, and analytical conclusions are the author's own and have been independently verified.

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