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Non-Normative Corporalities: Transgender/Blind Identity in an English as a Foreign Language Student Teacher

Corporalidades no-normativas: Identidad transgénero/ciega en un estudiante profesor de inglés como lengua extranjera

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Abstract

Little international research exists on EFL (English as a Foreign Language) student teachers regarding non-normative corporalities: transgender and blind identities. Similarly, few studies in Colombia have investigated transgender/blind EFL student teachers to understand the various dimensions of their identities. This research study explores the transgender/blind identities of an EFL student teacher in Colombia. The study interpreted identity as multiple and fluid in order to understand how transgender identity serves as a lens to shape the process of becoming a teacher. Findings suggest that transgender/blind identities are molded from experiences that either modify or re-construct the self. The study revealed that the notion of gender/disability is contested when the idea of transgender/blind works as a personal mechanism to question the existing normativity of one's own body and self.

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Identity is then presented as a series of choices and performances situated in time that are validated in the transgender and blind status.

Keywords: blind, EFL, non-normative corporality, transgender, student teacher

Resumen

Existe poca investigación internacional sobre estudiantes en formación docente EFL (inglés como lengua extranjera) con respecto a corporalidades no-normativas: la identidad transgénero/ciega. Del mismo modo, pocos estudios en Colombia han investigado a los estudiantes de EFL que son transgénero/ciegos para comprender las diversas dimensiones de sus identidades. Este estudio de investigación explora la identidad transgénero/ciego de un profesor de inglés en Colombia. El estudio interpretó la identidad como múltiple y fluida para comprender cómo la identidad transgénero/ciego sirve como lente para dar forma al proceso de convertirse en maestro. Los hallazgos sugieren que la identidad transgénero/ciego se moldea a partir de experiencias que modifican o reconstruyen el yo. El estudio reveló que la noción de género/discapacidad se cuestiona cuando la idea de lo transgénero/ciego funciona como un mecanismo personal para cuestionar la normatividad existente del propio cuerpo y de uno mismo. La identidad entonces se presenta como una serie de elecciones y actuaciones situadas en el tiempo que se validan en el estado transgénero y ciego.

Palabras clave: ciego, corporalidad no normativa, EFL, estudiante docente, transgénero

Introduction

This study seeks to explore the identities and non-normative corporalities of an EFL teacher student through border thinking and queer theory lenses. We, the researchers, want to generate a dialogue to question some practices that involve discourses of inequality, exclusion and 'identity theft'[3] when educating. Yet, we are also interested in developing a perspective of knowledge from a specific time/space, where the locus of enunciation, understood as "the geo-political and body-political location of the subject that speaks" (Grosfoguel, 2011, p. 5), does not come exclusively from us, the researchers, but from the *other* that has been historically marginalized and ignored: Valentina, a blind and transgender EFL student teacher. We aim to do this by exposing and rethinking mechanisms or techniques that frame how student teachers relate to the world within the ongoing processes of normalization; and how they become language educators.

This study also intends to provide some ground for future studies based on an interest in exploring blindness and transgenderism as non-normative corporalities for student teachers in EFL. As such, this study has no other purpose than to provide some accounts of teacher-identity formation that might better unpack the ideologies and discourses which, in Colombia, those who want to become language teachers confront inside and outside the

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[3]   Although identity is "a diverse, dynamic, often contradictory, multiple rather than unitary concept" (García-Pastor, 2017, p. 39), it has been constructed from essentialist perspectives.

classroom. We also want to make the connection to non-normative corporalities (e.g. being transgender and blind) since we hold the view that they are personal dimensions of teaching that have been subjected to the hegemony of normative discourses and as such need to be multi-signified from the local.

Theoretical Considerations

The rationale underpinning this theoretical section draws on Galafassi, Daw, Thyresson, Rosendo, Chaigneau, Bandeira, Munyi, Gabrielsson and Brown's (2018) metaphor of weaving along with the movements of unraveling, meshing, and raveling. Firstly, we aim to disentangle normalized notions of (trans)gender and disability (blindness). Secondly, we will explain border thinking and queer theory which constitute an interlaced theoretical net supporting (meshing) the unraveled concepts of (trans)gender and blind for them to become newly raveled, as Figure 1 illustrates.
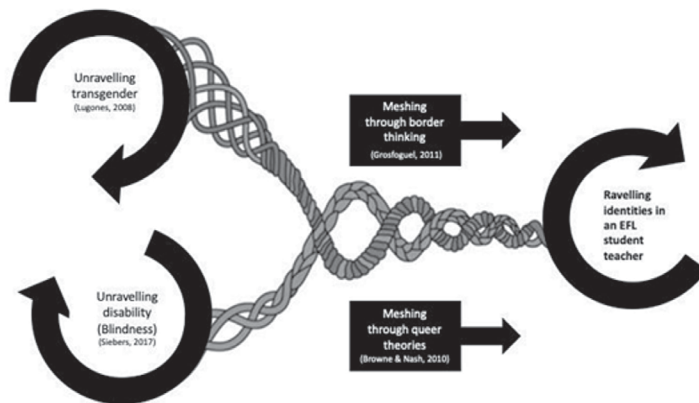
Figure 1
Theoretical Framework Based on Galaffasi Et Al's (2018) Metaphor of Weaving

For the purposes of this study, we use the term non-normative corporalities to interpellate established sexual orders regarding the sexual and corporal norms the study refers to. Therefore, not only do we want to discuss gender from the notion of colonization itself, from which gender is understood as an act to build colonial societies (Connell, 2014), but we also want to question blindness as a marker of 'ab'normality.

Becoming a language teacher is much more than acquiring a set of linguistic skills. Instead, it appears to be a journey in which places, people and experiences are used to construct and

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narrate our identities as individuals, language learners, student teachers, and future EFL teachers. For some scholars, developing a professional identity involves finding a balance between the personal and professional side of becoming and being a teacher (Lipka & Brinthaupt, 1999). However, to do so, it is important to understand how identities get to be developed in an ongoing process, and how identities are influenced by personal and social representations of the self, where 'who I am' is most of the time what others make of me.

Identity and Non-Normative Corporalities: The Transgender

This article acknowledges that by being "Euro-centered, global capitalism was constituted through colonization, [and] gender differentials were introduced where [potentially] there were none" (Lugones, 2008, p. 7). Given that gender is a complex biosocial–cultural construct (Steensma, Kreukels, de Vries, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2013), we hold the view that to be able to comprehend student teachers' identities, these must be seen as rooted in the individual performance of identity, as identities *in the plural*, are acts, but not facts (Nelson, 1999). However, since notions of gender and identity are also colonial remnants of the coloniality of power, this study is interested in moving away from certain discriminatory discourses that have generally been used as tools for domination (Connell, 2014) by understanding gender identities from the notions of trans and cross (e.g. unravelling).

In as much as "the terms homosexual/heterosexual and transsexual as well as other markers like man/woman, masculine/feminine, whiteness/blackness/brownness are all historically variable terms, untethered in fixed or for that matter natural or inevitable ways to bodies and populations" (Halberstam, 1961), we take on the notion of trans to refer to " individuals whose gender presentation is so different from ideals for the sex assigned to them at birth that it defies traditional notions of what it means to be male or female" (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p. 1728). Similarly, we regard the notion of cross as an imaginative gendered embodiment conceived through self-identification (Halberstam, 1961).

In spite of this, it is pivotal for us to refer to both concepts to raise some awareness of the onto-epistemological orientation both notions offer this study. Even though transgender identities have been commonly referred to as a condition in which the "transgender person may have any sexual orientation and may or may not present a biological intersex condition" (Quintanar, García, Medina-Mora, and Pérez, 2019, p. 53), we hold the view that transgender and cross gender identities are self-representations of individuals who not only reject binary notions of gender, but also to individuals who refuse to be linked to "a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity" (Halberstam, 1961, p. 4).

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Identity and Non-Normative Corporalities: The Blind

Most of the time, students who do not meet the normative profile are referred to as people with special education needs (SEN). This term has been coined to group certain populations that are in a physical or mental condition different from the general one at schools. In the literature, a person who is visually impaired is one who has some sight, but a blind person is one whose sight is absent (De Witt, 1991). Even though this might sound a bit technical, this definition serves this article as it touches upon many visually-impaired people in Colombia that are involved in learning activities.

Regarding learning a foreign language, this activity requires students to make use of different yet specific skills. Arguably and to unravel the notion, **"**foreign languages are considered difficult for blind and visually impaired people who have to learn them by using memory, spelling, and oral ability" (Arenas-González, 2012, p. 147). In a more personal dimension, some others argue, "certain emotional and social problems of people with disabilities are due to the attitude and behavior of society rather than the actual disability" (Punia & Berwal, 2017, p. 429). In fact, Siebers (2017) echoes this by presenting identity, from the perspective of a disability, as something "not based on impairment similarity but on social experience that includes a shared encounter with oppression and discrimination" (p. 119). Therefore, we believe this is quite important as identity in the ELT field has been mainly an epistemological construction that has been subjected to fixed categories in which the body has not been taken into account when it comes to identity formation. Then, no matter what the context may be, in most countries of the world, including Colombia, the social model of disability is grounded on the notion of institutions and their repressive and discriminatory discourses (Mittler & Mittler, 2000).

Border Thinking

Mignolo (2000) coined the term border thinking to express and explain all subaltern knowledge that can be generated (meshed) from the opposition of modern/colonial world systems. "Critical border thinking", understood as the epistemic and ontological "response of the subaltern to the Eurocentric project of modernity" (Grosfoguel, 2011, p. 26) is in fact "the epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside" (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006, p. 206). It could be argued that within the Colombian teaching context, most of the principles that support teaching and learning regarding student teacher's identity have been taken from Western traditions. Consequently, there is room to criticize systems of coloniality that are embedded in the educational setting of the country as there is an axiomatic need to highlight local epistemologies that can help rethink/mesh the language-teaching field.

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In this study, we also want to echo Cervantes-Soon and Carrillo's (2016) notion of border thinking. They argue that border thinking encompasses the embodiment of epistemological processes emerging from and responding to colonial domination (Grosfoguel, 2011). As border thinking originates from coloniality and subalternity, and it confronts Western thought, we hold the view that understanding teacher transgender identities and non-normative corporalities, from a border thinking perspective, has the potential to offer a new logic and to decolonize dominant constructions of identity in (language) teacher education that have been replicated and reinforced in Colombia.

Queer Theory

To understand transgender identity, queer theory may serve as the framework for this study. Queer theory draws upon poststructuralist notions of identity and "challenges the normative social ordering of identities and subjectivities along the heterosexual/homosexual binary as well as privileging of heterosexuality as its deviant and abhorrent 'other'" (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 5). Then, when referring to the 'cross' and the 'trans' to understand teacher identity, we aim to destabilize (e.g. mesh) notions of the sexual and gender in teacher education; we then try to disrupt fixed biological notions of sexuality and gender, to allow non-licensed teachers to challenge current pedagogies. Lastly, queer theory provides this study with a more political stance from where to foster social change (Plummer, 1995) within the context of teacher education.

Methodology: Queer Narratives

In this study, narratives are the life stories represented in discourse. Since the life story is in essence the story one chooses to tell about life or life as lived (Atkinson, 1998), queer narratives may serve as an answer to the heteronormative cultural norms of classrooms discourses pre-service teachers encounter in their process of becoming EFL teachers. As Andrews (2007) reminds us:

> Stories are not only the way in which we come to ascribe significance to experiences [...] but they are one of the primary means through which we constitute our very selves [...] we become who we are through telling stories about our lives and living the stories we tell. (pp. 77-78)

Our approach to narrative research aims to portray narratives not just as a means of empowering participants since this, we believe, has been a fallacy installed by the rationale of modernity. Instead, we mean to advocate that narrative research should no longer be limited to the voices we report and analyze but to a more multidirectional endeavor in which the mere act of listening to those voices brings forth what Barkhuizen (2011) refers to as narrative knowledging (e.g. raveling).

We hold the view that narrative inquiry as a decolonial option implies breaking down the "culture of silence" which still allows the oppression of certain groups (Cole, 2009, p. 569) within the educational field in teacher education. Therefore, narrative research, within a decolonial spirit, intends to move away from what many critical feminist academics have argued in terms of the amount of qualitative research that has "reproduced, if contradiction-filled, a colonizing discourse of the other and can be a tool of domination" (Fine, 1994, p. 70). All in all, we hope both to comprehend those multiple subjectivities that make of identity a life story (McAdams, 2003) and to learn from and with those who have been constructed as subalterns (Mignolo, 2000).

Context and Contextualization

The study inspected the narrative experience of a transgender EFL student teacher in a public university in Bogota (Colombia). The study made use of a set of life story interviews to dig into the different queer narratives. Valentina, the participant of the study, is a 25-year-old student of the languages department and is the spokesperson for a Foundation which fights in favor of guarantees of rights for dissident corporal, sexual and gender populations within high impact areas in Bogota She also belongs to a group of educators which moves between popular education and alternative pedagogical projects.

Valentina was invited to cooperate in this study since we, the researchers, were interested in exploring the different identity constructions a transgender pre-service teacher had gone through as an individual. Thus, by considering that not only had Valentina recently crossed certain normative lines to become a transgender woman, but also that she was in the process of becoming a language teacher and possessed a varied social experience, she seemed to be really close to our interests as researchers. However, this does not imply that Valentina's role was merely to tell her story. Rather, she worked alongside us, the researchers, to trace the constructions of identities in the stories collected regarding non-normative corporalities. Regarding this, Valentina was asked to give further interpretation on several moments we found relevant to understand her narrations. This approach served as a member check technique to find out "whether the data analysis was congruent with the experiences" (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92) and made part of the raveling process of co-constructed knowledge (Galafassi et al, 2018). Finally, to start building bridges (e.g. meshing, Galafassi et al, 2018) between decolonial border thinking, queer theory, and narrative inquiry, Valentina's own way(s) of understanding identity were highlighted. So, it was her thinking and the narration of her own experiences in the life world.

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Data Analysis Procedures

However, we kept traditional ways of dealing with data to (co)construct such bridges. Interviews were transcribed to get closer to the information provided by Valentina. This

data analysis procedure agrees with Ochs (1979), who argues that transcription is theoretical in nature, and therefore, "transcription is a selective process reflecting theoretical goals and definitions" (p. 44); the study also relied on Lapadat (2000, p. 208), who contends that transcripts are "theoretical constructions".

As for the coding process to analyze those transcriptions, the study, firstly, used the coding elements of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) to approach Valentina's oral narrations understood as life stories in more depth, and secondly, discourse analysis principles since it is through our language choices that we build a version of the world (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

As its approach is neither reductionist nor positivistic, the analytical elements of grounded theory were mostly geared towards abstracting and relating 'personal' categories to each other in the data analysis. Coding and analytical procedures under the frame of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and discourse analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) were adopted in order not to generate theory from the data, but to approach them from a more reliable and holistic perspective. Regarding this, we attempted to understand Valentina's views and actions from her own perspectives by exploring language as a tool for saying, doing, and being, and not simply as a passive tool for representing reality.

Nonetheless, the process carried out took into consideration that narrative analysis can assume multiple forms in a variety of analytical practices in diverse disciplines (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). Some narrative approaches can employ literary tools (such as metaphors), linguistic devices (such as pronouns), or cultural conventions (such as time) to generate insights (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004) since there is no single or right way to analyze stories (Riessman, 1993).

Data Analysis and Findings: A Short Notice

The following analysis aims to break the 'conventional' understandings of identity and gender in teacher education. It intends, for the most part, not to replace incorrect or lesser knowledge with correct or better knowledge but to present some subaltern positions and voices that contest the dominant positions that have so clearly depicted who and how a teacher should be.

Valentina

Identity is in essence an ontological construct of the self. As such, "individuals may have as many identities as they have distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and take on the associated roles" (Pekerti & Thomas, 2016, p. 110). Arguably, in acquiring these identities individuals may either construct themselves or be constructed in

particular ways that can in fact validate or contest certain existing dominant and normative roles in society. It is argued that identity, although affected by forces outside the individual, is primarily situated internally (Gee, 2000). We understand subjectivity as a situated discourse that is "precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (Weedon, 1987, p. 33).

The following discussion revolves around Valentina's life story regarding her status as a trans and blind student teacher. Nevertheless, since this study aims to provide more evidence to understand identity construction during teacher education by touching upon notions of cross and trans gender, the subsequent analysis also presents our personal views on the issues of gender and identity. Our voices as researchers interplay with Valentina's own narrations as an individual. We assume that her life story, here reported in a narrative form, is "the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity" (Weedon, 1987, p. 33).

By identifying herself with feminist struggles and the demands of people with non-heteronormative sexual orientations, gender identities, or non-normative corporalities, Valentina decided to materialize her transit as trans-gender in 2016. Interestingly, from her career as an activist, she has fought to display actions in support of sexual, corporal and gender divergence in Colombia. These networks of relationships, associated with the groups she ideologically identifies herself with, have had an impact on Valentina's identity construction.

Having been born in Bogotá (Colombia), not only has Valentina validated her transit to identify herself as a transgender woman but she has also identified herself with the struggles of many who, by being labelled 'abnormal', have been silenced, isolated, or just publicly excluded from the different scenarios of the country. Thus, Valentina, in narrating her life story, demonstrates what it takes to become a woman in a society that often obscures that same sense of femininity.

As gender is "a relational construct embodied in social structures, rather than a common sense essentialist view" (Francis, 2014, p. 540), Valentina narrates her life story by giving a central place to the patterned relationship that constitutes gender as a social structure (Connell, 2012).

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P 1: Codes: [featured identity as a woman] [Where I come from][4]

My name comes from struggles against the established formation in the search for an identity; and it is in the encounter of that identity that precisely I have seen that being a woman implies losing many privileges that I had as a man. Assuming the female role implies eating all the shit and all the

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4   P stands for Primary Document which is a narrative excerpt. The codes in brackets are the names we assigned to parts of the narrative excerpts.

violations that being a woman in a society as macho and hetero-patriarchal as this implies. All the misogynistic comments, all that social pressure that you put up with for being a woman. It is to assume those social costs, get off privileges and lose many comforts that you once had.

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain (1998) echo what is stated by Valentina since identity exists within the tension between obligations to cultural norms and expressions of individual agency. For Valentina, her personal decision to become a woman implies being shaped by the conditions of the particular circumstances of the Colombian society where she lives. Importantly, by stating that she is "struggling against the established formation", she posits that there are tensions between diverse social discourses of masculinities that are constructed.

According to Quijano (2000a), there exist patriarchal and heterosexual understandings of the disputes over control of sex. Regarding this, there seems to be a permanent remnant of coloniality that has worked as a mechanism of social identification becoming the expression of colonial domination (Quijano, 2000b). Since this colonial notion Valentina presents about being a woman is indeed rooted in the complex societal structure she is immersed in, there is a personal dispute over what being a woman is.

Valentina narrates and positions herself against reproduced gender norms, and she resists hegemonic forms of masculinity that for her have influenced how she decided to stop enacting this masculine hegemonic role. Valentina denounces the hegemonic hierarchical status men have exercised in society. Connell (1995) claims that men take up subjective positions in relation to this dominant enactment of masculinity getting in exchange benefits of patriarchy.

For Valentina, becoming a woman implies losing certain privileges she had as a man. Regarding this, Johnson (1997) states that "privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they have done or failed to do" (p. 23). Valentina's struggle to be a transgender woman has meant giving up privileges she was attributed when she was a man in order to deliberately be part of a group of individuals made to feel powerless in a variety of ways because of systems and institutions that act as oppressors (Pedersen, Crethar & Carlson, 2008).

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P 1: Codes: [My right to be a woman]

I have to be defending my femininity, my right to be a woman as I want to be a woman; being a woman without the need to have breasts, to use hormones; if I want to use the clothes that are commonly assumed to be feminine, because if I want to wear sweatshirts and tennis, I can also be feminine as I want, it's a struggle for the defense of that, of femininity, of my own dynamics as a trans.

Valentina's own sense of femininity departs from her own understanding of what being a trans woman is for her. Since masculinity is a cultural construct that influences notions of gender, Valentina's idea of femininity is constructed in opposition to these socio-cultural notions endorsed through her own agency. If agency is conceived in terms of "the capability of individual human beings to make choices and act on these choices in a way that makes a difference in their lives" (Martin, 2004, p. 135), agency is pivotal to understanding Valentina's personal struggle to defend her right to be a woman. Her identity is something actively constructed on an on-going basis; this is why the notion of identity could be thought of as something not merely conditioned by cultural, national, or external exigencies, but more on the individual's ability and willingness to exercise agency (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). As such, Valentina's identity as a trans woman has been an object of normative characterization inasmuch as she has been depicted in many ways that differ from the depiction she took on for herself.

In her narration, Valentina addresses the social constructions that validate her condition as blind but disprove her identity as a trans woman. Regarding this, Valentina claims that her condition as a blind person is socially accepted since being blind seems to be more 'normal' than being a trans woman. This validation is made through several discourse constructions she has been exposed to and that have exercised some power to constitute a social identity as blind. On this, Norton (2010) argues that:

> Every time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to the larger social world and reorganizing that relationship across time and space. Our gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, among other characteristics, are all implicated in this negotiation of identity. (p. 350)

Valentina's understanding of her own identity also presents a second dimension of the self that has to do with her identity as a blind trans woman. Even though this identity can be a personal or social construction, Valentina's identity as a blind trans woman emerges as well as a self-driven space in which she depicts and is depicted by others and society. Explaining this, Howell (2016) argues that "individuals understand themselves according to the language they are given and the structures in which they are fixed" (p. 86). Nonetheless, Valentina seems not to conform to these interplays of subjectivities.

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Therefore, to understand Valentina's identity from the perspective of non-normative corporalities, it is essential to explore her personal narrative to comprehend the extent by which being blind redefined her status as trans.

P 1: Codes: [How others see me] [What I will fight against as a teacher]

I am aware of how people see me. They accept the fact I'm blind, but not trans. Discriminations come from different sides in these two contexts; trans struggles and disability struggles are very

similar; [therefore,] in the sense that we are fighting for the social stigma as blind, people feel sorry for me [and] I am underestimated: then if I do something different [it] is something admirable because nothing was expected of me. But as a trans, we are sexed, bitches, because children are given a bad example, the boys start with the question, and if there is one of them who has feminine expressions or a woman's feminine expressions, the father will think that this will be promoted by me and they're going to see that as something that needs to be corrected and not something to be applauded. Then it will generate new social charges.

According to Valentina, being a blind person is something others conceive as 'normal'. A social category emerges that, by being acknowledged and validated by others, challenges the non-normative narrow understandings of modern/colonial constructions of an individual. As a blind woman Valentina feels some oppression not for being blind, but for being trans. This normative understanding of being blind and trans is linked to notions of the coloniality of being (Quijano, 2000a) since there is a particular identification of an individual according to some normative attributes recognized by society and that, in turn, position Valentina in a subaltern condition ascribed to her to maintain her in an inferior category.

Following this, being a blind individual makes Valentina the recipient of social stigma. For Valentina, being blind is a status that positions her as someone who deserves recognition for minor accomplishments. Nonetheless, it is at this juncture of Valentina's identity in which we could start 'decolonizing' the violent reality, of any kind, identity construction is subjected to.

P 1: Codes: [Defining my femininity] [How I understand some discourses of Inclusion]

I think beyond fighting for the same, it is a fight for the defense of that, of femininity, of my own dynamics as a blind person to defend my ways of visualizing the world, of assuming it. For example, the discourse of inclusion also has its problem, it is about cutting off the person's identity, and homogenizing it, making it normal, that is the problem of assuming inclusion of gender, disability, race, anything, it is to remove the person's own expressions.

The fact of homogenizing a person's identity is indeed problematic. If definitions of identity are revised, identity will be framed under two main paradigms. For Kumaravadivelu (2008), identity can be either explained by a modernist view where identity is pre-existent, fixed, and we might say it is a subject of unchanging societal norms; or on the other hand, identity can also be seen from a more postmodernist view where it is constructed on an ongoing basis e.g. it is fragmented. Thus, if identity, as a dynamic concept, is homogenized, it is framed within the modernist and static paradigm.

Ontologically speaking, Valentina's identity may come into play as a two-way process: the way she speaks about herself as a blind-trans woman (affiliation) and the way she is spoken about (attributions) (Fairclough, 1992). This study attempts to contribute to this by exploring teacher identity through the transgender lens. By doing this, we can see that Valentina's life

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experience reveals certain social discriminatory practices that involve inequalities and that, in turn, marginalize those who are subjects of these positionings.

As this study seeks to create space to question some discriminatory practices that involve inequalities when educating, it is important to explore Valentina's narrative on this issue. Regarding pre-service teachers, we need to acknowledge that "a teacher's personal sense of identity lies at the forefront of everything the teacher thinks, does and reflects upon in the classroom" (Woods, Barksdale, Triplett, & Potts, 2014, p. 112); and so, teacher identity is what shapes one's own pedagogy and as such it is who one is in a classroom (Duru, 2006).

P 1: Codes: [How I imagine my future as a blind-trans teacher]

First, I think my speech of resistance will go no matter what! I did not learn this in vain, I have given workshops in public schools, I think I will have to soften it. How[ever,] I will not take away the forcefulness, but I will adapt words so that it is not violent in the verbal [sense]; yet in the ideological it has to be violent. Second, I cannot talk about an emancipatory speech and make rows of boys and girls, or say if a person has a piercing, he has to remove it, or if a girl puts on makeup, she has to remove it. I cannot contradict that; their parents are something else but my classroom will be my space.

If what we are is what makes our pedagogy, Valentina has certainly imagined herself spreading and defending what she believes in as a teacher. For Wenger (1998), imagination can be conceptualized as "a process of expanding oneself by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves" (p. 176). Thus, this process of extending one's identity in the future may be the key to decolonizing pre-service teacher conceptions and practices in teacher education programs. For Valentina, being a teacher implies opening spaces for accepting personal identity performance. It will imply contesting normative discourses of masculinity and femininity and even contesting discourses of being blind.

Valentina's status as a blind student is also worth inspecting. Learning to become a teacher, in personal or structural matters, implies adapting to certain circumstances. In Valentina's narration, being a blind student teacher has also been a burden.

P 1: Codes: [Learning as a blind student]

As a blind student, I have to do a whole process. If there are photocopies, I then need to convert them to Word to be able to read them; if they are language readings, either in French or in English, I have to print them in Braille to be able to read them, especially those in French that have so many accents and things. Therefore, they are still major social burdens, but if it is the challenge to fulfill, I feel that I have to work harder than the rest, that makes me feel tired and exhausted.

If these behaviors are then interpreted as social burdens, Valentina's identity as a student struggles with this conception of assimilationist education in which personal processes of learning are determined by normative factors already common in the academy. We might think, then, that Valentina's personal experience would be a primary reference to the lived experience of colonization and its impact on language teacher education.

Since Valentina has dealt with traditional methodologies of education, she has had to adapt to given materials to make meaning out of them. Above all, not having access to material in Braille seems to work as an emotional catalyst to condition Valentina's personal understanding of her own learning process. Regarding this, it is acknowledged, "the importance of previewing material for students is becoming more widely recognized for all students, including those with learning disabilities and those who are learning English" (Topor & Rosenblum, 2013, p. 81). We might argue then that Valentina's identity as a student language teacher is not just defined by 'people's judgements of her capabilities' but also defined by her own beliefs of her capabilities to perform a learning task.

Final Thoughts

As teacher educators, we are urged "to recreate the space for construction of an individual, meaningful, resilient professional identity underpinned by strong beliefs and values" (Smethem, 2007, p. 478). Nonetheless, to do such a thing, there must be room to contend already existing identity discourses within the educational field which operate inhibiting the emergence of other identities through the colonial mechanisms rooted in global capitalism (e.g. initial language teacher education that 'ignores' the existence of trans and blind students who will be future teachers). Thus, as far as this article is concerned, the impact of a teacher's gender and recognition of his/her own corporality in language classrooms are crucial elements. If more thought is given to these issues, we might argue that there is a strong relationship between language students' achievement as well as their attitude and motivation toward language and the gender of their language teacher (Manjari, 2005). We could also argue that apart from the binarism that characterizes gender, the teacher's gender and normative or non-normative corporality are linked to traits that can have an impact on the personal construction of the self, regarding the teaching education milieu.

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This study aimed to provide more ground to understand student teacher identity. As such, we might say that "the formation of teachers' identities has emerged as an area worthy of study over the last decade" (Kukari, 2011, p. 134), yet we also hold the view that we must keep on studying this issue due to the multiple biographical events student teachers can narrate. We strongly believe that it is in these narrations of life, before and while being a teacher, where we can trace how identity shapes and is shaped by personal and external circumstances.

To move away from existing colonial paradigms in teacher education, we need to open spaces for recognizing the *other* far from the normative constructions of gender and self. Valentina's self-constructions as a teacher shows traces of agency and role reversal. Nonetheless, her own construction of self as a trans-blind student teacher exposes colonial notions of gender and sexuality that are contested; yet, these discourses continue to maintain dominant discourses of 'normality'.

Since Valentina's idea of herself as an individual contains her identity in terms of resistance and in constant change, there is an urgent need to get rid of fixed and monolithical understandings of identity within the language-teaching education panorama. Pre-service language teachers need to begin conceptualizing themselves and their identities within existent normative discourses that need to be torn down in order to question and contest some discriminatory practices that hinder the construction of new knowledge in teacher education. In a decolonial perspective, the emergence of *non-previously* acknowledged/existent identities such as the trans-blind language student-teacher could inform differently processes of initial language teacher education where these non-existent identities dialogue with the 'normalized' ones in a sort of epistemological healing.

As far as this article is concerned, we might argue that teacher identity construction at the pre-service teaching stage is a process that is not only individualistic but also reliant on social interaction in a range of socio-cultural groupings (Twiselton, 2004). As such, personal constructions of gender as well as the personal understanding of one's own corporality can provide meaningful data to comprehend and resist the nature of symbiotic relationships and discourses that modify and help construct teacher identity.

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