

English Language Preservice Teachers' Identity Construction Within Academic and Other Communities

La construcción de identidad de los futuros docentes de inglés dentro
de las comunidades académicas y otras comunidades

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This article reports on a doctoral research that sought to unveil the identities present in the communities to which four English as a foreign language preservice teachers belong. The study was carried out with a decolonial perspective that included an interepistemic dialogue among narrative inquiry, narrative pedagogy, and the indigenous research paradigm. The main instrument of data collection was autobiographies. The participants and the researcher analysed data jointly. The findings indicate that the preservice teachers' identity construction is mutable and not essentialised. Mutable as it changes over time and not essentialised since it involves social, cultural, and personal dimensions.

Keywords: communities, identity, preservice teacher education, professional identity

Este artículo reporta una investigación de doctorado que buscaba identificar las identidades presentes en las comunidades a las que pertenece un grupo de futuros docentes de inglés. El estudio tiene una perspectiva descolonial que promueve un diálogo interepistémico entre la indagación narrativa, la pedagogía narrativa y el paradigma de la investigación indígena. El principal instrumento de recopilación de datos fue la autobiografía. Los hallazgos indican que la construcción de la identidad de los futuros docentes de inglés es mutable y no esencializada. Mutable ya que cambia con el tiempo y no esencializada ya que involucra dimensiones sociales, culturales y personales.

Palabras clave: comunidades, identidad, formación docente inicial, identidad profesional

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How to cite this article (APA, 7th ed.): Posada-Ortiz, J. (2022). English language preservice teachers' identity construction within academic and other communities. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 24(1), 247–260. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v24n1.93110>

This article was received on January 27, 2021 and accepted on October 15, 2021.

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Introduction

Language teacher identities (LTIs) have gained considerable attention during the last decades (Barkhuizen, 2017; Miller, 2009; Torres-Rocha, 2019; Varghese et al., 2005). According to Norton (2013), identity must be understood in relational terms, a concept that suggests that individual teachers need to join the communities to which they desire to belong (Barkhuizen, 2017). In this sense, LTIs are “struggle and harmony: they are contested and resisted, by self and others, they are also accepted, acknowledged and valued by self and by others” (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 7).

The purpose of this article is to show the identities present in the communities to which four English as a foreign language (EFL) preservice teachers belong and how these identities contribute to the construction of their professional identity. I would also like to point that, rather than problematizing the issue of identity that would give way to a doctoral thesis on its own, what I intend in this article is to acknowledge the identities that emerged in the joint analysis that was carried out with the participants that I will call research collaborators. The results of this research might contribute toward enhancing the knowledge of identity construction from a situated perspective.

Within the modern concepts of community, namely, communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), target communities (Higgins, 2012), and imagined communities (Anderson, 1983), the EFL preservice teachers are constructed as apprentices, native speakers vs. non-native speakers. According to Norton (2013), English language learners might resist or accept identities that are presented and sometimes imposed on them, an idea that also applies to EFL preservice teachers. In doing so, these dominant discourses

construct essentializing discursive “borders” of who individuals “are,” and “can” and/or “should” be or become, both in terms of the ownership, learning, use, and instruction of English in ELT, and of community membership in the context in which the ELT is constructed and located. (Yazan & Rudolph, 2018, p. 7)

According to Yazan and Rudolph (2018), we can imagine that essentialisation leaves little room for the EFL preservice teachers’ identity construction. However, this would mean ignoring individuals’ agency in their learning and decision-making process. The research collaborators of this study presented different identities within the constellation of communities they belong to: a constellation of communities inside and outside scholarship and in which they negotiate different identities.

Due to the characteristics of the research process, the research collaborators presented the identities associated with their daily life and practices. This is the reason why we found identities not only connected to their academic life, but also to other communities, such as their family and interest groups.

In what comes next, I will describe how preservice teachers’ identities construction has been studied recently and the commonalities and differences between those studies and the one I carried out.

EFL Preservice Teachers’ Identity Construction

Identity construction is the process through which a person comes to define who they are. A key element of identity construction is identification, that is, the extent to which a person internalizes a given identity or part of it as a self-concept (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

The EFL preservice teachers’ identity construction has been studied in Latin America and Colombia from a local perspective. This perspective has shown the confluence of four different factors. Firstly, the EFL preservice teachers’ previous experiences as learners, identification with teachers they admire and whom they want to emulate, construction, de-construction, and re-construction of their projected identities according to the experiences they live day by day, as well as a commitment to grow personally and professionally (Quintero-Polo, 2016; Torres-Cepeda & Ramos-Holguín, 2019). Secondly, social interactions

and experiences within their learning environments that involve professional and personal dimensions (Salinas & Ayala, 2018). Thirdly, overcoming imposed marginalising conditions (Quintero & Guerrero, 2018); negotiations that involve emotions such as love, desire, imagination, and fluidity (Sarasa, 2016; Sarasa & Porta, 2018; Valencia, 2017). Finally, Archanjo et al. (2019) and Viáfara (2016) found that in the construction of their identities, the EFL preservice teachers still struggle to achieve native speaker proficiency.

The studies mentioned above share some similarities to the ones carried out by Timmerman (2009) and Izadinia (2015). According to Timmerman, preservice teachers' identities construction is a longstanding process to develop a professional identity in which role models—especially the secondary school teachers' role—are a key factor due to the vivid memories the preservice teachers have about them. Izadinia found an interplay between mentoring relationships and the development of the professional identity of preservice teachers. Timmerman's and Izadinia's recognition of role models is related to the identifications and disidentifications mentioned by Torres-Cepeda and Ramos-Holguín (2019). Although these studies have focused on identity construction, these views have been constructed from the researchers' perspective and do not acknowledge the identities the preservice teachers identify by themselves as does this study.

The description of the identity construction of the English language preservice teachers made by the scholars mentioned above shows that these studies are moving beyond dichotomies such as master/apprentice, opening the room for an emergent body of literature drawing on socio-cultural studies, and postcolonial, postmodern, and poststructuralist theories in approaching identity (Méndez & Clavijo-Olarte, 2017; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018).

The EFL preservice teachers' identities, present in the communities described by the research collaborators of this study, also move beyond the essential and

monolithic identities that the modern view of community envisions for them. The EFL preservice teachers who collaborated on this project belong to a constellation of communities that drive them to undertake agentic initiatives through which they “exert control over [their learning and decision-making processes] and give direction to the course of [their life]” (Huang & Benson, 2013, p. 13).

The research collaborators identified their families, primary and high schools, the university, and transmedia communities, among others, as their main communities. Within these communities, they present different identities through which they develop a sense of self over time that represents what they would like to become, and are afraid of becoming, as well as the attributes they believe they ought to possess. In a nutshell, their possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Context and Research Collaborators

This study was carried out with four students from a public university in Bogotá (Colombia); they are part of an English language teacher education programme that is characterised by a critical pedagogy approach and that has a strong focus on developing the research skills of the EFL preservice teachers (Posada-Ortiz & Garzón-Duarte, 2014). The ages of the participants ranged from 17 to 25 years and at the time the data were collected they were in the sixth semester of the programme.

According to the decolonial turn (Grosfoguel, 2011; Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, among others), names and concepts matter (Ortiz-Ocaña & Arias-López, 2019); therefore, the participants in this project are called “research collaborators” because they were people with whom I worked throughout the research process and we all were accountable. This is also the reason why, instead of a data collection process and analysis, I will refer to an interaction to exchange and generate knowledge since I carried out a research process *with* the EFL preservice teachers and not *about*

them. I worked with Luna, Marcela, Santiago, and Camilo,¹ who volunteered to take part in this study.

Type of Study

This study is framed within qualitative research. It was designed with a decolonial perspective that includes an interepistemic dialogue (Parra & Gutiérrez, 2018) among narrative pedagogy (NP), narrative inquiry (NI), and the indigenous research paradigm (IRP). Although NP, NI, and the IRP seek to decenter the ways research is conducted by privileging the participants' voices, the first two approaches are framed within the Western qualitative paradigm and the latter incorporates ancestral traditions (Kaltmeier, 2012). These three approaches were used taking into account their intersections and resonances, one of them being the use of narratives to understand how people make sense of their life, place, and history, and how they give shape and meaning to their experiences and life in the interplay with others (Barkhuizen et al., 2013; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Moreover, they promote the co-construction of knowledge, dialogue, and respect (Posada-Ortiz, 2021). Therefore, NP, NI, and the IRP were useful to understand the identities present in the different communities the preservice teachers belong to from their own perspective and aided the design of the research methodology.

Thus, the interepistemic dialogue allows an expansion of Western qualitative research by incorporating the indigenous epistemology that stands on the principles of holism, equalizing asymmetry, and flux (Kovach, 2018). Holism refers to the connection of the universe around us as human beings, including the spiritual energies. Asymmetry entails negotiation that emulates the balance the universe creates through interconnectivity and coexistence. Equalizing asymmetry minimizes the dual superiority/inferiority relationship and individualism in concepts such as property ownership that character-

izes Western research. Flux is about the evidence of the two former principles in our daily lives, which are in constant flux, that is, they come in cycles and follow repetitive patterns. We applied these principles as we agreed on where to carry out the sessions to write our autobiographies and where to publish them. We analysed data together thus letting go of the privileged role of the researcher. This is how we met at a yoga centre, a place that let us approach the project not only as an academic endeavour but also as an encounter in which we learned who we were, are, and want to become. We decided to post the autobiographies in blogs and we agreed on poetic representation as a means to show data.

NP, NI, and the IRP rely on narratives to understand how people make sense of their experiences and, for that reason, narratives are key to understanding identity construction (Barkhuizen, 2011). The main instrument of data collection was the EFL preservice autobiographies because, according to Larrosa (1995), the use of autobiographies in initial teacher education is a pedagogical practice that allows producing and mediating certain subjectivation forms, in which the one who reflects, modifies, and analyses their own experience is the one who writes it. We also used the transcriptions of the sessions that I describe in what comes next.

Interaction to Exchange and Generate Knowledge

The data were collected in five sessions. Each session followed a protocol as a way to show respect towards the research collaborators since everyone knows what they are expected to do. These sessions consisted of a mindfulness exercise, writing about a topic jointly selected, reading aloud the written document, and a session of questions (if there were any) focused on those aspects we had listened to and wanted to know more about in-depth.

The sessions were organized in talking circles (Chilisa, 2012), which is an ancestral tradition that

¹ Pseudonyms used to protect the participants' identity.

consists of sitting in a circle to listen to each other without any interruptions; this is why while reading, nobody could be interrupted and the questions came afterwards. This practice allows listening profoundly, which implies active involvement and attention and reciprocity between hearing and being heard as well as seeing and being seen (Santos, 2018). It also allows creating a stimulating environment in which democratic and equal participation diminishes power relations and allows the co-construction of knowledge, similar to what happens when dialogic gatherings are used as a centred-person methodology (Barros-del-Rio et al., 2021). The sessions and autobiographies were carried out in English at the request of Camilo, Luna, Marcela, and Santiago. After each session, we shared some refreshments and left with the commitment to write and modify our autobiographies according to what we had done in the sessions.

Co-Construction of Knowledge

The co-construction of knowledge started when the research collaborators asked me to teach them how to analyse data. I provided them with a chart divided into four columns. In the first column, they had to write their own names; in the second, the communities and identities they had identified in the transcripts and autobiographies; in the third, they had to write the excerpt related to those communities and identities; and, finally, in the fourth column—labelled “comments”—they had to explain what they had written in column two. Each research collaborator analysed their own autobiography and I asked for some clarifications when I did not understand the comments.

Once we identified the communities and identities, we used them as the topics to re-present data by resorting to poetic re-presentation. Leavy (2009) and Richardson (2001) state that when we use poetic re-presentation, we should resort to excerpts from the narratives that we have, transcribing verbatim what the participants say. Thus, this offers the researcher an

opportunity to write with the research collaborators and challenge the academic discourse that names, categorizes, and constructs colonized selves (Leavy, 2009).

In this study, we took excerpts from the autobiographies and sessions in which we had identified the communities and identities. I would like to make clear that by the time poetic re-presentation began, Marcela and Santiago had already started to work, so they did not write the poems with me. So I asked for their permission to complement the poems on their behalf and they accepted. Thus, these poems exhibit a dialogic character (Bakhtin, 1984) since they contain Marcela's and Santiago's voices and my perspective. Camilo and Luna, on the other hand, wrote their own poems following the guidelines by Leavy (2009) and Richardson (2001). Each collection of poems received the same name the research collaborators gave to their blogs. Each poem is identified in this paper with Roman numerals (Poem I, Poem II, etc.).

Poetic re-presentation contributes to the preservice teachers' identity construction “as it involves reflective self-construction” (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 140) while selecting and refining the excerpts taken directly from their autobiographies and words from the transcripts (Leavy, 2009).

The communities identified by the research collaborators can be grouped into kinship and interest/academic driven communities. Within the first group, Luna, Marcela, and Santiago identified their families, and in the second group, Camilo, Marcela, and Santiago described their interest communities. These interest communities are transmedia communities, which I define as a group of digital media technologies and practices around which young people organize their life as members or not members of communities. These technologies include YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, mobile devices, and video games among others. The practices are related to informal learning, participation, consumption, production, and collaboration in the production of

knowledge as well as the configuration of old and new communities in social networks. (Posada-Ortiz, 2020)

The primary and secondary schools, the teacher education programme, and the placement school were signaled by Luna, Marcela, Santiago, and Camilo as their academic communities. Within these communities they presented the identities I describe below.

Results

The construction of identity within the communities the preservice teachers belong to were grouped into three main categories: (a) Becoming a Language Teacher Is Linked to my Family and Origin, (b) Exercising Agency in Transmedia Communities, and (c) Developing a Reflective Professional Language Teacher Role.

Becoming a Language Teacher Is Linked to my Family and Origin

Most scholars who have studied the LTI construction process have concluded that it begins due to an interest in the English language or as a result of rewarding experiences with English in the teachers' educational settings (Archanjo et al., 2019; Sarasa, 2016; Torres-Cepeda & Ramos-Holguín, 2019). Although there are similarities in the findings of this study with these assertions, it was also found that the research collaborators expressed that their interest in becoming language teachers began in their families (their kinship communities) and not necessarily in connection with the language but with larger areas—such as interest in human sciences—or by the desire to change family traditions, as happened with Marcela and Luna.

Poem 1 portrays Marcela's identity construction process as a journey, in which her mother inspires her relatives to move to Bogotá.

I

You may wonder why I chose this path
I will start from the very beginning
When my mother left her hometown.

Marcela was born in Bogotá and feels she belongs to two cultures, the *llanera* and *rola*² ones, and that she has characteristics of both. This makes Marcela interested in these two cultures and, at the same time, in other cultures. She describes her identity as “regional,” meaning:

My identity is not determined by geography or ethnicity; rather, I'm pointing to the fact that my identity is influenced by a mixture of two cultures and even by my perceptions of foreign ones. My perception of identity is not static; in contrast, I explicitly say that it can change according to my experiences. (Co-construction of knowledge, Session 2)

Marcela feels that having the characteristics of a *rola* and a *llanera*, and because she is a language learner, her identity goes beyond the territory and that her “regional identity” is more of a mixture of different cultures, thus showing her bicultural identity, which entails both a local and global identity that “gives [her] a sense of belonging to a worldwide culture” (Arnett, 2002, p. 777). Marcela is also constructing a glocal professional identity, which refers to a “teacher whose identity is not attached to a particular place but to the world” (Quintero & Guerrero, 2018, p. 91).

Marcela spoke of a contrasting identity that opposes the normalized choice in her family of careers related to numbers. She, as her father before her and unlike the other members of the family, leans toward the social sciences.

As for Luna, she grew up in a family without a father figure but with a strong female presence. She thinks that she can be instrumental in making the women in her family break away from their self-assigned roles (which, perhaps, stem from societal expectations) such as having to care for everybody, even at their own

² The term *rola* is used in Colombia to refer to someone from Bogotá. *Llanera*, on the other hand, is for someone from the eastern part of the country.

expense. Luna sees that her mother and grandmother have assumed that role:

For example, my grandmother is always worried about everyone, except for herself, and it also happens to me all the time, so...the idea is to break with that thought, that DNA...so that the other people, the other women in my family can see that there is another way out. (Co-construction of knowledge, Session 3)

For Luna, that way out is education; through education she can become a heroine who, as a teacher, can contribute not only to changing that traditional role of women but also to improving the school system in Colombia.

Exercising Agency in Transmedia Communities

According to Archanjo et al. (2019) "pre-service teachers' identity oscillates between identifying as students and as teachers" (p. 62) and that is one of the reasons why they seek to legitimate their future language teacher's role and language proficiency by trying to achieve an ideal language level. Honing their language skills represents their agentive actions. Nevertheless, in this study, the preservice teachers exert agency on developing their whole selves. They seek and take part in cultural interactions in transmedia communities mediated by English and other languages, where they seem to achieve holistic learning.

Marcela's, Camilo's, and Santiago's interactions and self-motivated learning in transmedia communities are not defined by institutional authorities "setting standards and providing instruction but from [Marcela, Camilo, and Santiago] observing and communicating with people engaged in the same interests and in the same struggles for status and recognition that they are" (Ito et al., 2010, p. 22). That is, they are recognised as speakers of English and of other languages, as non-binary gender people, and above all, as agents of their own decision-making, growing up, and learning process.

In transmedia communities, Marcela, Camilo, and Santiago find relationships that center on their interests, hobbies, and career aspirations. They construct and express their likes and identifications; keep up-to-date; learn about languages, music, and politics; among other things.

Marcela feels that learning English in transmedia communities is less tense than learning in the classroom and she enjoys it:

In order to practice and have more contact with the language, in my free time I watch movies and series. I not only resort to "serious" and "professional" things, but I also enjoy doing things a native speaker would probably do, such as watching talk shows, for example. I like them because I learn a lot of informal vocabulary. (Marcela's blog)

In her analysis, Marcela noted that she is "an active language learner," something that she finds "a very positive" trait in her identity building: "I can perceive that the most positive aspect of my identity is the one of a language learner, in these excerpts I want to portray that I am an active language learner" (Co-construction of knowledge, Session 2). She, as a regular user of transmedia communities, resorts to Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Instagram not only to learn English but also to learn about politics, economics, Korean and pop cultures, among others.

Santiago, who describes himself as a videogames fan, recognises that, derived from his fondness for videogames, he not only has learned English but also some values for his life. In addition, the English that he learned through games helped him to become very popular in high school, as he helped those students who did not have good results with English. Later, this ability to help others would play a very important role in his decision to become a teacher, as I will explain further on. We can see these aspects in these extracts from Poems I and II:

I

In front of the console
I learned sounds and words
That allowed me to play and
Undertake missions
English was in all my visions
A video games fan
I became

II

English made me a class hero
I helped those who understood zero
I enjoyed being a little teacher
Although at school English
Was just another subject
At home, it was my hobby

Camilo re-presented Youtube, his favourite trans-media, in Poem III. He stated that Youtube allows him multiple activities: from watching series to learning the English language, interacting with people from other countries, and developing the identity with which he is most identified: a singer.

III

YouTube is my daily basis
I have to confess
There is not a single day
That I am not there.
I can see video blogs
Main channels and people
All around the world.
YouTube helps me to discover
Who I really am
What I still have to learn
This platform can be chaotic
And not reliable at all
But if you give it a chance
You can enjoy what it has to show:
From learning languages,

And listening to songs
To watch lots of series
And even learning to talk.

In sum, Marcela, Santiago, and Camilo negotiate different identities in transmedia communities where they interact and carry out activities to construct different aspects of their whole selves, away from the supervising eye of their teachers and parents. This is how Marcela identifies herself as an active language learner, Camilo as a non-binary gender person, and Santiago as a game fan.

Luna explained to me that she is not keen on trans-media communities. When we talked about transmedia communities she claimed: “I canceled all my social networks, I realize they made me waste my time and, to be honest, I do not miss them” (Co-construction of knowledge, Session 3). This is an interesting aspect that shows that the so-called “digital natives” is a fixed and monolithic term since “most of the empirical evidence demonstrates that it is not obvious that such a digital generation actually exists homogeneously” (Gros et al., 2012, p. 191). Therefore, labeling young people as “digital natives” does not acknowledge some young people’s subjectivities and agentic actions, as in Luna’s case.

Developing a Reflective Professional Language Teacher Role

Previously, we learned that transmedia communities are interest/academic driven communities where Camilo, Marcela, and Santiago acquire practical and academic knowledge. Within these communities, they construct identities related to their whole selves. Now we are going to see that these preservice teachers within their academic communities, namely, primary and secondary school, the programme in which they are enrolled, and the placement school where they carry out their practicum, construct their future by foreseeing themselves as transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 2001); that is, as free men and women whose function

is to contribute to the education of active and critical citizens. Luna, Marcela, Santiago, and Camilo visualize themselves as teachers with the ability to transform the contexts in which they work through reflection and using the language as an excuse for such reflection.

For Torres-Cepeda and Ramos-Holguín (2019) preservice teachers construct and reconstruct their identities across previous experiences with different teachers. These experiences influence the kind of teachers they would like to become. In this sense, the role of secondary school language teachers is key, since preservice teachers tend to have a detailed memory of the experiences they went through with these teachers (Timmerman, 2009). Nonetheless, in this study, I found that not only secondary school teachers, but also primary teachers and classmates impact the desired self the researcher collaborators of this study want to achieve. In Poem II, Luna tells us about her experience during primary school:

II

Primary school
Brings me bad memories
Teachers looked like Trunchbull.
They seemed to be stuck,
Using methods that even then
Were old

Unfortunately, for Luna, her elementary school years seem to have been spent in a very unpleasant environment, generated mainly by teachers who resembled Trunchbull (one of the characters in *Matilda*, a book by British novelist Roald Dahl). Trunchbull is a cruel teacher who bullies children, and thus, Luna remembers her elementary teachers as having “no patience with children, they were rude and strict and their methods were out of date,” just like Trunchbull.

In contrast, her high school years offered Luna a very different experience as we can see in Poem III:

III

In high school
I used to live
The average life of a Colombian girl
When I met the person who changed my way
Alicia my teacher, who inspired me to become
An English teacher.

It is during high school that Luna has an experience that would change her life: meeting her English teacher. We can see how the primary and high school learning experiences had an impact on Luna's identity construction as an English language teacher, as she affiliates her future profile with a teacher she admires and seeks to become a good teacher herself, projecting a desired teacher image who differs from the ones she encountered in primary school, as she stated in Session 5: “As a teacher, I would like to give the people the opportunity to become the best version of themselves, and but doing so, contribute a little bit to change education processes.” Luna's words allow us to see the construction of a teaching role assumed as a reflective professional, an intellectual capable of taking charge of a socially and politically contextual pedagogy that considers social transformation as an explicit objective of its practice (Giroux, 2001).

In Poem III, Marcela recognizes the influence of her father, her classmates, and teachers in the construction of her professional identity, which she sees as an ongoing process with a happy ending in which she visualizes herself as a language teacher with a master's degree.

III

Friends come and go
Each one leaves a footprint
The same is true for teachers
Whose print I will reflect
In every part of who I am

In one of the sessions, Marcela expressed that she did not like “the task giver” kind of teachers and that she knew that teaching was about “very much more.” These words suggest that Marcela understands that education goes far beyond instrumental issues (Giroux, 2001).

Santiago, who had initially started studying electronic engineering, decided to drop out and enter the language teacher education programme encouraged by the good memories he had of secondary school, where he could help his classmates improve their English skills. He finds this more satisfactory than the competitive and material world of his previous career studies where “there is no human interaction because there everyone is...very...very selfish. They do not care about you. They just think about money” [*sic*] (Co-construction of knowledge, Session 1). The above evidences that Santiago’s professional choice is part of a professional identity construction based on his desire to exercise intellectual and moral leadership as a teacher (Giroux, 2001).

Camilo thinks that the values he finds in the teacher education programme are well in line with his own, since this programme stimulates a diversity of ways of thinking that develop a critical attitude and an interest in transforming the existing reality towards the construction of a better world (Méndez & Bonilla, 2016):

[When] you teach, you learn...[and learning is]...like crossing a river that is always changing [because] knowledge is always changing...it is the same with education, you need to educate yourself to understand that the society is falling apart...you need to change the perspective of education. (Co-construction of knowledge, Session 4)

When Camilo states that “you need to change the perspective of education,” he shows his interest “to promote new forms of social relations and modes of pedagogy within the school itself” (Giroux, 1983, p. 241).

Camilo, Luna, Marcela, and Santiago were doing the teaching practicum. For Izadinia (2015) the teaching practicum and the role of the mentor teachers in this experience are key in the construction of the preservice teachers’ identities.

For Camilo, the teaching practicum was an opportunity to develop an institution-identity derived from the fact that, at the placement school, they associate the programme with practitioners whose pedagogical skills and language level are good. As he indicated: “When my homeroom teacher knew I was part of this programme she exclaimed: Superb! [and] that made me feel very comfortable” (Co-construction of knowledge, Session 5). Nevertheless, Camilo developed a burnout feeling with the teaching practicum since there was too much paperwork and he found himself “spending day and night preparing lesson plans” (Poem IV).

For Marcela, the teaching practicum showed her “what teaching is really about” and for Santiago it was a “great responsibility.” Marcela and Santiago also experienced conflict derived from the difference between the theory they learn and the realities of the classroom.

Luna postponed the teaching practicum and undertook it on her own “on Saturdays with my cousins” (Co-construction of knowledge, Session 4) and with her boyfriend as her mentor. She decided to do so as she did not like the mentor assigned her because she asked Luna to have her hair cut, something Luna refused to do as “my hair is part of my identity” (Co-construction of knowledge, Session 4). In terms of her identity construction, Luna’s determination demonstrates her agency through a personal decision related to the sequence of her mandatory teacher education programme in which she prioritizes her well-being over academic requirements (Sarasa, 2016).

For Luna, her boyfriend is an important part of her academic and professional growth since they attend conferences, study together, and, as I have just described, support each other, even in the teaching practicum.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the research collaborators who took part in this study construct their identities in “their daily interactions with significant others” (Izadinia, 2015, p. 2) and that these interactions take place in the interplay with the different communities to which they belong (Wenger, 1998).

Although Izadinia (2015) affirms that professional identity starts in teacher education and begins to form during the practicum, the findings presented in this report confirm that professional identity construction commences earlier within the preservice teachers' families, through the processes of identification or disidentification with their parents' or relatives' professions.

Identification and disidentification continue to happen in school with the experiences the preservice teachers went through with their teachers and classmates. Although Timmerman (2009) has suggested that secondary teachers have a strong influence on the identity formation of preservice teachers, our results cast a new light on this aspect since we found that some of the preservice teachers have clear memories of their primary teachers and their influence on their desired selves.

We also found that transmedia communities bring to the fore the agentic action of preservice teachers in the construction of their identities, not only in terms of the improvement of their language and pedagogical skills but also in their whole selves. The results of this study are aligned with Sarasa and Porta's (2018), which recognises the temporal disinvestments of preservice teachers in the mandated programmes in favour of their well-being, as in the case of Luna, who postponed her pedagogical practicum due to her mentor's demands, with which she disagreed.

Camilo, Luna, Marcela, and Santiago see themselves as transformative teachers who understand that teaching is more than dealing with instrumental and methodological issues and, instead, is a call to contribute to the

education of their future pupils as agents of change in the construction of a better world.

To sum up, the identities present in the communities identified by the research collaborators of this study contribute to their professional identity construction. These identities cannot be reduced to what the communities they belong to expect them to be and, therefore, cannot be essentialised; instead, preservice teachers' identities are the result of their interests, likes and dislikes, agentic actions, and interactions as members of different collectivities (Norton, 2013; Torres-Rocha, 2019).

The present study confirms that identities are always changing, as Marcela stated “I am still building my identity” (Co-construction of knowledge, Session 1) and Luna summarizes in Poem XI:

XI

My main question is
Who am I?
I will find the answer
By living my life

Limitations of the Study

From my experience as a researcher transiting to a decolonial research perspective, I would like to state this endeavour was full of tensions, among which the most important was my internal struggle with the mainstream researcher who still dwelled inside and against whom I had to fight several times. This struggle made me go back and forth during the research process, especially in the co-construction of knowledge that took place during the interaction to exchange and generate knowledge and the poetic re-presentation stages where I was tempted to interpret the data from the privileged researcher's perspective. Consequently, I forgot I was researching *with* Camilo, Marcela, Luna, and Santiago and not *about* them. Fortunately, the voices of the decolonial scholars I had read; the helping hand of my tutor; Camilo's, Marcela's, Luna's, and Santiago's willingness; and my

own determination to contribute to the decolonial project gave me the strength to start anew.

As a doctoral student framed within academic and time constraints, the project contained questions and objectives that were set up in advance and not with Camilo, Marcela, Luna, and Santiago. The way the research sessions were designed make them appropriate for small groups only; a larger number would demand too much time, not only in terms of what we usually know as data collection but also in the co-construction of the knowledge process.

On a more personal note I would like to add that I was pleased to find that Camilo, Luna, Marcela, and Santiago stated that, by having taken part in this project, they not only had learned about research but also about themselves by reading and re-reading their autobiographies in order to write the poems. Luna stated that she learned about her capabilities, Marcela about her strengths, Camilo, of how much he has changed, and Santiago understood why he has come to be the person he is right now.

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