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**ANALYZING LGBTQIA+ LIFE STORIES THROUGH QUEER CRITICAL LITERACY: A
DUOETHNOGRAPHY STUDY**

BY

ELIANA DOMINGUEZ OLIVERO (--eliana d.)
Licenciada, Universidad de Antioquia, 2012

DIEGO ALEXANDER ZAPATA PESCADOR
Licenciado, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, 2011

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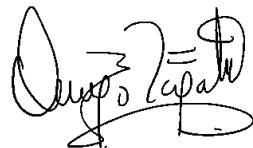
Raúl Alberto Mora Vélez, Ph.D. (Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana), Thesis
director and Chair
Kate Kedley, Ph.D. (Rowan University)
Stephanie Shelton, Ph.D.(University of Alabama)

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Eliana Dominguez.

ELIANA DOMINGUEZ OLIVERO



DIEGO ALEXANDER ZAPATA PESCADOR

Abstract

This duoethnography study seeks to describe the results after analyzing the journeys and roles of two LGBTQIA+ life stories through queer critical literacy as a way to understand their positionality in different moments of their lives in relation to the way they constructed, conceived and embraced their sexual and gender identity.

The researchers used a duoethnography approach where they used a dialogic methodology through the juxtaposition of their stories in a shared document, and then, with an unstructured conversation in order to obtain differences in the narratives in relation to their queer experiences. Queer critical literacy emerges from the conversation between critical literacy and queer theory in order to question the heteronormative and cisgender assumptions that govern the way in which every person must think, talk and behave in different scenarios such as family, school and work. The aim of this study is to show the blind spot that our educational system has in relation to the inclusion of queer topics and awareness in their curriculum and every day practices.

This research is a referent for other educators interested in literacy, critical literacy and queer theory as a way to question social realities such as the LGBTQIA+ community. In addition, it opens the possibility for ESL education in relation to discuss and include divergent forms of literacy in the materials in the English classroom. Considering option for future research, it is important to contemplate the positionality of students, transgender studies and LGBTQIA+ representation in Colombia.

Key words: queer critical literacy, LGBTQIA+, duoethnography, ESL education.

To the people that make part of my life story:

*“Cuando éramos niños
los viejos tenían como treinta
un charco era un océano
la muerte lisa y llana
no existía.*

*luego cuando muchachos
los viejos eran gente de cuarenta
un estanque era un océano
la muerte solamente
una palabra*

*ya cuando nos casamos
los ancianos estaban en los cincuenta
un lago era un océano
la muerte era la muerte
de los otros.*

*ahora veteranos
ya le dimos alcance a la verdad
el océano es por fin el océano
pero la muerte empieza a ser
la nuestra.” Mario Benedetti.*

*Teacher Researcher and Advocate,
--eliana d.*

To my mom: you are an inspiration for all of us, you are my ally, my guide and my strength... And then a hero comes along with the strength to carry on, and then you finally see the truth that a hero lies in you.

A mi madre: tu eres la inspiración para todos nosotros, tu eres mi aliada, mi guía, y mi fuerza.. y luego un héroe viene con la fuerza para seguir, y finalmente ves la verdad que un héroe esta en ti.

Diego Zapata (Coco)

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--eliana d.

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Chapter 1. Queer Critical Literacy: Questioning The Heteronormative And Cisgender Privilege In Education

Through our experiences as gay (Diego) and lesbian (--eliana) learners and teachers, we have noticed that there is a lack of visibility of LGBTQIA+ realities and needs in the practices inside public schools in Colombia, which are normally designed for privileged audiences, such as those with a heterosexual and cisgender perspective of the world. Although this study is based on the experience of the researchers in the Colombian context, it is not possible to deny this is a global issue happening in different circumstances and conditions.

Miller (2019) affirms that schooling practices about gender and gender identity are built within hegemonic structures and essentialist notions of the male/man and female/woman binary. We can say that the idea of justice is limited when we as teachers are not exploring different concepts of relationships, lifestyles, gender-appropriateness and ways to see and do things; students from minorities do not necessarily feel related to the type of topics and situations exposed in the activities in the ESL classroom. At the same time, as learners and teachers, we do not feel comfortable using situations out of the norm; in this case, being heterosexual and cisgender are seen as what it is correct, normal and accepted, while using ideas different from this fact, are taken as wrong, inappropriate and uncomfortable to talk about (Lander 2018).

Understanding the Meaning of LGBTQIA+

One of the main reasons why talking about LGBTQIA+ topics is still difficult in schools, even for us when we started this study, it is the lack of understanding of the acronym but also to comprehend the characteristics of each one. In order to understand this research, it is completely necessary that readers have clear the meaning of LGBTQIA+. It is very important to clarify that the north American and European thought have been for Colombians the way we have learned and taught about sexual diversity since the beginning of the LGBTQIA+ movement in Colombia. In Colombia, it has become more popular the use of LGBT as the order in Spanish would be: "lesbianas, gais, bisexuales, transexuales or transgeneristas" (Guerrero & Sutacha, 2012). However, it is also used as a way to describe community in a way to use it as a social political movement. In this study, we consider important to use the acronym LGBTQIA+ as a way to raise awareness of the importance to understand the possibilities in gender and sexual orientations but also to point out they are not completely understood not only on our context but in the world in general. According to Amnesty International (2008), these terms can be defined as:

Sexual orientation

It refers to a person's sexual and emotional attraction to people of the same gender (homosexual orientation), another gender (heterosexual orientation) or both genders (bisexual orientation).

Gender identity

It refers to a person's experience of self-expression in relation to social constructions of masculinity or femininity (gender). A person may have a male or female gender identity, with the physiological characteristics of the opposite sex.

Gender Expression

It refers to a person that shows gender conforming or gender non-conforming in forms of mannerisms and appearance or activity. (Horn, 2007) In other words, it is the way people project their sexual identity in different ways to others.

LGBTQIA+

Abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersexual and asexual; the plus sign is added to make room for other emerging concepts (e.g. : demisexual, non-binary, gender fluid, pansexual, polyamorous, etc.), as well as to explain the flow and complexity of describing sexual orientation.

Lesbian

Usually refers to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation toward women. Some non-binary people also identify with this term.

Gay

Used in some cultural settings to represent men who are attracted to men in a romantic, erotic and/or emotional sense. Not all men who engage in same-gender sexual behavior identify as gay, and as such this label should be used with caution.

Bisexual or Bi

A person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction to more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.

Transgender

A person whose sense of personal identity or gender does not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth, or does not conform to gender stereotypes. Sexual orientation varies and is not dependent on gender identity. This can include people who are male-to-female or female-to-male binary trans+ people (though some reject the MtF and FtM labels as they have always been men/women), people who are gender fluid (experiencing different genders at different times), people who are agender (experiencing no gender), people who are androgynous (experiencing a mixture of male and female genders), and many others.

Queer

A multi-faceted word that is used in different ways and means different things to different people. 1) Attraction to people of many genders. 2) Non-conformity to cultural norms around gender and/or sexuality. 3) A generic descriptor for all non-heterosexual people. We use this term as the characteristic of a person that has a non-heteronormative sexual identity or expression: in addition, we use this term interchangeable to refer to any person that makes part of the great sexual and gender spectrum of possibilities to self-identify or self-gender express, taking into account the great political implications. which here in Colombia reflect the resistance to a heteronormative way to govern the day by day of all citizens. it is important to clarify that this concept is not commonly used in Colombia, and it is often avoided in the acronym.

Questioning

It refers to an individual who is unsure of and/or exploring their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

Intersex

It is an umbrella term that describes people born with any of 30 different variations in sex characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals.

Asexual

It refers to a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior. They may or may not experience emotional, physical, or romantic attraction. Asexuality differs from celibacy in that it is a sexual orientation, not a choice. People who are asexual may call themselves ace.

Heterosexual

It is usually considered a person who is romantically attracted to or sexually oriented toward people of the opposite sex. This means a male would be attracted to a female or, likewise, a female attracted to a male.

Cisgender/ cis or cissexual

A person whose sense of personal identity or gender does correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth.

It is important to say that although we recognize ourselves as gay and lesbian, it was also a discovering and understanding of the acronym through the making of this thesis, considering that we did not know many of the terms before. Subsequently, we

recognize we were not aware of all of the realities due to our own privilege as cisgender people. Additionally, it is important to say that not understanding these terms can cause that the practices we have inside schools just benefit a certain group of the community, but at the same time, putting others in situations of struggle when we do not fit into the standard of how to look, act or be.

Purpose of this Study

The motivation for doing this research starts with our feeling that education at public schools is not making justice for the LGBTQIA+ community, not only for those of us who belong to it, but also to those, who being heterosexual and /or cisgender, do not sympathize with the reality of others, usually in an unconscious way. Colombian Law has enacted in their texts different principles regarding the protection of different rights as they are considered inherent to any colombian citizen, based on these rights many LGBTQIA+ members have won legal fights. (Sánchez, 2017) However, it is not correct that any person should be alleging the right that they already should enjoy.

Normalizing the curriculum means that all of us can feel related to the content and practices used in the classroom, and that they permeate the daily practices and policies at schools. It also opens the possibility for everyone to feel included in the process of learning, and the interaction created inside a school, without being the center of attention or excluding others in the process of trying to create inclusion for the queer community.

Since we were students in high school and later at a university program, we have seen that English teachers, and in general in any area of knowledge in education, do not deal in class with content related to LGBTQIA+ issues. We question the role of the school as part of our own sexual and gender identification and recognition. Due to the fact that none of the places where we studied were part of our coming out stories or provided any positive role while we were realizing our own sexual preference. It is important to say that the role and the position of the school and teacher is crucial in order to promote new practices inside the language classroom, in relation with the concept of gender and identity as a creation from the interaction with others and not something standard from birth (Mojica & Castañeda, 2017).

While looking for literature in this research, we found that queer critical literacy (Zapata-Pescador & d., 2020) is a term hardly explored in the Colombian context, so even its definition is not well understood by the majority of teachers and students involved in the education process. As a consequence, we see that there is a lack of policies in our schools related to the topic denying the possibility of including LGBTQIA+ realities and needs in the daily practices at school. These policies must be part of the manuals of coexistence that our schools create in order to regulate processes regarding the rights and duties of the educational community, and subsequently at students' contexts out of the school.

From our own view as researchers and part of this study, we want that queer critical literacy questions the traditional practices used in the classroom and make changes in the type of materials teachers and schools use in class. The fact of having new stories that are usually not visible in class is also a way to increase the versions

and voices of literacy in the class, having as a result new forms of knowing and acting in the world. In this study, we used the concepts of critical literacy and queer theory as a way to construct and unify the idea of queer critical literacy.

This study will use a duoethnography approach to analyze our life stories through the concept of queer critical literacy taking into account our past experiences and current situations we face in relation to the way we see, live and represent the LGBTQIA+ community. Although both of us are openly gay and lesbian, our contexts, work places and personal beliefs are different. Therefore, our life experiences in relation with our own sexual and gender identity has been different. It would be interesting to realize about what is the impact of theory in the life of a person, in this sense, we carried out this study with the following research question: What are the conclusions after analyzing the journeys and roles of two LGBTQIA+ life stories through queer critical literacy in a duoethnography study?

Context

From this part until the end of the research paper we will show parts of the storytelling from our life experiences using the researcher's names in their respective part.

Educational system in Colombia: a brief summary

In Colombia, there are more official institutions than private, the amount of students per classroom (40-50 students) in the official high schools can double the ones in the private sector (20-25 students), we can affirm this, as we researchers of this study have been teachers in both sectors. In 2019, the country had 143.000 graduated students

from high school holding an additional diploma as technicians in modalities like marketing, accountability assistants, electricity, construction, among others (GOV.CO, 2020). All the high schools have the responsibility to teach a second language according to the Law 1651 of July 12th of 2013.

Most of the institutions have English as its target since this language have been favored by the government for decades with their endless agreements with institutions like Cambridge or the British Council. There are few schools that changed English for a different one. As each school can make emphasis on different areas, there is not uniformity among schools concerning the amount of hours that students should receive. To give two final details, there is a suggested curricula but it is not obligatory as its own name indicates and for finishing we can add that most language teachers are in high school. Elementary and kindergarten language teachers do not have the specific formation for it.

Heterosexual- cisgender assumption and privilege

Diego: When I was in my 12 years old, I always thought gay people were wrong, they were like aliens for me; like a strange species; and my family promoted those ideas with jokes to the people they knew were gay.

--eliana d.: When I was 11 or 12 years old...I learned what God expected from me, it was to be a good daughter, to have a daily relationship with him and to make all the things like if they were for him. Homosexuality was a taboo topic, I did not think about that. It was not a concept closed to my life.

Heteronormativity refers to the privileging of cisgender heterosexual male, masculine men pairing with cisgender heterosexual female, feminine women. Behind heteronormativity is the idea that there is a right or correct ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality (Bryan, 2014; Kedley, 2015; Wargo, 2017; Ryan & Willmarth, 2019).

Currently, education is mostly connected to the idea of being heterosexual and cisgender as synonym of being right and good, giving a power of negotiation where the participants in education do not even consider being queer as a reference to be used in the classrooms (Castañeda-Peña, 2008).

As teachers and scholars, we need to create spaces for reflection on different realities affecting the idea of justice in the world. While we applaud efforts by educators to be inclusive of LGBTQIA+ students, inclusion is not enough (Blackburn & Pennell, 2018). If public schools are to promote a fair and equitable society, they have an obligation to permit students to understand these terms and take positions of what they need to do in order to stop inequities and lack of conditions for all of the members of the school. The assumption that everyone is heterosexual and cisgender creates that every day practices inside our schools are limited for an exclusive and privilege part of the community; thus it leaves others behind and in disadvantage.

Daily practices at our schools are still conditioned for those who have the privilege of not dealing with simple aspects such as wearing a type of uniform, going to a specific bathroom, wearing some type of accessories or designing in the hairstyle they want to have. Heterosexual and cisgender identities hold systemic power, and individuals who belong to these groups receive unearned privileges, which are not

provided to individuals with minority gender and sexual identities, simply based on their dominant group membership (Surette, 2019).

Not only, this assumption is not fair for all the people out of the privilege group, but also it creates spaces of hate where discrimination is more frequent inside our schools. We have often seen that teachers fail to intervene in LGBTQIA+ bullying and missed teachable moments conducive to inclusive curriculum; an inclusive and culturally relevant approach to teaching not only helps to reduce discrimination against marginalized populations (including women, people of color, and people with disabilities), but also creates more equitable education for young people (Prince, 2019).

Lack of LGBTQIA+ topics in the classroom.

--eliana d.: In this school I made new friends, this school was not Christian but they did not teach me anything about sexual diversity.

Diego: From my classes, I never saw an approximation to talk about sexual or gender diversity in class; same as what happened at home, teachers did not talk about the topic. I do remember taking classes such as religion (from a catholic view) and social studies talking about the concept of family from a traditional heterosexual and cisgender perspective. I do not think I learned those words at school, I actually heard them after I finished high school

Like most minority groups, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students face a number of challenges in school, not limited to a severe lack of

representation and support (Presscot, 2019). From being involved with public education and the needs we have around the country, we can see that it is not easy to find LGBTQIA+ roles in the materials teachers usually have in books, videos or any type of literacy inside the public school classroom in the Colombian context.

From the government, there are suggested books and curricula for public institutions, but none of them consider the importance of including realities from minorities in the country, including the queer community. Although more children and youth have started to express their sexuality with more freedom in this generation, they see themselves facing situations that can be uncomfortable or even that can leave scars in their memories when they do not see any relation between their lives and the classroom practices. (Snapp et al., 2015).

The role of the schools needs to transcend to all the scenarios where students read the world and the characteristics of their own realities. Additionally, there is an opportunity for teachers to learn about different identities and LGBTQIA+ history, at least at a basic level in order to create spaces for empathy and justice; queer inclusion refers to the practice of using instructional materials that include LGBTQIA+ characters, stories, histories, or include some discussion and recognition of gender and sexual identity (Prescott, 2019).

Laws are trying to protect minority groups but this cannot have the same effect on children's lives if there is no teachers' agency. All people and students need to know that all children and teenagers have the right to self-determination in any context. The

world is giving steps, and it is a process that needs willing teachers that teach about LGBTQIA+ realities (Blackburn and Pennell, 2018).

Lack of School Policies Related to the LGBTQIA+ Realities

Diego: As a teacher, I have noticed that public schools, or at least the one where I work, still has rules that are gender oriented such as the use of uniforms and accessories; when I go back in time, I remember my life as a student in high school and it's sad to see that not much has changed after all these years.

--eliana d.: The school did not have any policy related to LGBTQIA+ people. I knew there were rights but as teachers I did not dimension the effect of being openly gay. As society had a bad concept I think that to be openly gay was like a rebellion act that surely finish with a firing letter.

The implementation of new school policies to protect the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community is connected to the situation of the country and its idiosyncrasy. In making decisions in hostile political contexts where public opinion is overwhelmingly against protecting marginalized minorities' rights, courts can and do play a central role in recognizing, protecting, and enforcing those fundamental rights (Wilson & Malca, 2019).

In relation to education and according to one of the requirements of the Secretary of Education, the inclusion of all children must be visible, but sometimes, it stays on the paper and it is not visible in the reality that children live day by day at school. There are still forms of discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community in the Colombian society

due to the lack of opportunities to talk about this topic at schools. As a result, there is not a clear concept or knowledge over terms such as gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, queer, cisgender or even heterosexual creating wrong stereotypes and stigmatizations. “Authorized agencies such as government ministries, school boards, and teacher councils may in fact have an ongoing mandate to make policy, but in certain cases they may still lack the actual will to policy” (Levinson et al 2009). It is not enough to simply recognize a problem from a critical perspective; educators must use their internal ethical compass to drive decisions and initiate change. Infusing educational policies with greater inclusivity is only possible when policy-makers begin with the institution’s mission statement, which is a public declaration of commitment to shared values (Kuehn, 2020).

Sergio Urrego, a teenager and a student of a private institution in Colombia, he committed suicide after living an uncomfortable situation because their sexual preference did not fit the heteronormative discourse of the religious teachers and administrative staff at his high school (Caicedo, 2013). After this event, the government realized the importance of making pressure on schools for them to create boards of coexistence that promote and protect sexual rights of boys and girls across the country, a law that should work as a shield for minority groups and that intends to guarantee safe and equitable spaces for every person.

Lack of safe spaces inside schools for the LGBTQIA+ community

--eliana d.: I have a memory of two girls kissing one each other very passionately during the break, many students whistled to the couple of the

girls as a sign of disapproval because they were doing something inappropriate, since they were a homosexual couple. Immediately the couple was addressed to the discipline coordinator, like if they did something very wrong.

Diego: From the view of teenagers, especially at that time, it was easier for me to hide those ideas about being gay in my mind rather than trying to understand them and accept them; I do not know if my school time had been different if I had embraced and accepted my sexuality at that time.

Safe space is usually apprehended as a protected and inclusive place, where one can express one's identity freely and comfortably; a safe space is supposed to be a protected place, facilitating a sense of security and recreating discourses of inclusion and diversity (Hartal, 2018). The lack of using LGBTQIA+ topics and clear schools policies generate that schools are not spaces where the queer community can feel safe and supported. From our experience as gay teachers and also learners, we question the role of schools and teachers on addressing this topic. It is urgent to address gender identity complexity in educational settings and create new policies to promote the protection of every member of the community (Miller, 2019). As learners, the school was not a support or safe space for us, and as teachers, we see the inequality that exists in the protection of our students rights and how the school does not necessarily act as a place for students to feel safe.

With this study, we also look to discuss about the consequences of creating safe spaces inside of schools in order to permeate the rest of scenarios where the students are part. In many cases, children and teenagers do not receive the support of their

families, transforming homes in dangerous places, not only from a physical but also mental damage.

Chapter 2. Queer Critical Literacy: A Connection between Critical Literacy and Queer Theory

The objective of our study is to identify the impact of queer critical literacy as a way to promote advocacy for the LGBTQAI+ community in schools. Therefore, we need to explore the roots of queer critical literacy that are enacted in the concepts of critical literacy and queer theory. After reading the framework of the concept you will find a literature review of some of the studies done in the last ten years related to the core concepts: critical literacy, queer theory and advocacy. In this chapter, we will also present the researchers' points of view in order to generate a discussion of the concept of queer critical literacy.

Critical literacy

Critical literacy found its roots in the work of Paulo Freire under his premise that pedagogical practice becomes a political act. Mayo (1995), based on the studies by Freire, found that "Violent racist, sexist and homophobic acts are examples of the kinds of behavior that indicate the presence of the 'oppressor's' image inside the oppressed" (p. 365). "Critical literacy is language use that questions the social construction of the self." (Commons, 1999, p. 3). Coffey (2008) defined critical literacy as "the ability to read texts in an active, reflective manner in order to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships" (p. 1). Comber (2013) described critical literacy as "an evolving repertoire of practices of analysis and interrogation which move between the micro features of texts and the macro conditions of institutions, focusing on how

relations of power work through these practices” (p.589). Bishop (2014) defined critical literacy as “a kind of literacy about structures, structural violence, and power systems” (p. 52). Dooley and Exley (2015) stated that critical literacy is seen as “a way of reappropriating not only reading, but also learning, teaching, curriculum, language and sociocultural contexts” (p. 5); Vasquez (2017) described critical literacy as “a perspective and way of being that should be constructed organically, using the inquiry questions of learners, beginning on the first day of school with the youngest learners” (p. 54).

Reviewing Studies on Critical Literacy

In order to develop the ideas with fluency in the following part you will find the synthesis of scholars who have focused their research studies on developing a critical literacy curriculum. We will focus on studies by Coffey (2009), Dunkerly-Bean (2013), Bishop (2014), Mora (2014), So (2016) and Dunkerly-Bean et al, (2020) to understand the relevance of critical literacy through their findings and its connections to our study on queer critical literacy.

Coffey (2009) carried out a case study where she focused on the experience of a novice English Language Arts teacher in her successful attempt of applying a methodology on critical pedagogy to develop critical literacy skills on her students. This study found that teachers have to value the voice of their students (potential secondary discourses) in order to facilitate their development and thus forming critical literate students that later may involve in social action. In addition, teacher should share a similar background, this way, it is easier to understand the student’s context and the

dominant discourses that should be read from a resistant perspective to produce counter narratives, teacher should model the way students question dominant discourses setting conversations in the classroom about different social issues (sexism, stereotypes, culture, among others) pointing at feelings on those. Through the use of a critical pedagogy framework, teachers can empower students to fight for social changes and find their own voices.

Dunkerly-Bean (2013) made a critical ethnography study to investigate the experiences of two teachers and 16 students when literacy instruction was framed within human rights education. Data sources included semi-structured and informal interviews, scholar and intern artifacts including multimedia projects, and recorded classroom discussions. Data were analyzed utilizing Michel Foucault's concept of regime of truth in order to examine how the Children Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom School and Human Rights Education articulated notions of freedom, knowledge, rights and power as a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse in literacy education. She found that while both discourses (teacher's discourses) pursued to empower students through literacy and in learning of their rights, the particular naming of literacy, identity and rights within each were constraining as well as liberating for the participating scholars. Critical literacy has a healing factor that allows people to retake hard experiences and transform them into opportunities to go out of ignorance.

Bishop (2014) made a literacy research dissertation of urban youth organizers in New York City, to understand the function of critical literacy in productive activist spaces where urban youth organize around social justice and human rights. Some of the main research questions that called our attention were: "How do urban youth organizers

engage in critical literacy praxis as they become activists? b. In what ways do urban youth organizers consume, critique, and respond to texts? c. How do urban youth organizers create texts to support their activism? What kinds of texts do they produce; how do they disseminate their work; to what audience(s); with what purpose(s)?" (p. 56). Those questions have to do with the journey of an activist to become an advocate or an ally of a cause"

In Bishop's study, she collected the data using qualitative interviews, and then she analyzed each interview through the taxonomy of critical literacy praxis (Comber & Simpson, 2001; Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002). What she found as commonalities among their participants were that they articulated the need for educative spaces that were safe and inquiry-based, they spoke to the influence of family, friends and community on the organizing work that they do.

They shared priorities around immigration, LGBTQ rights, information security and access to quality education. These major themes are reflective of the current domestic and geopolitical landscape. Beyond policy, they are all defined by the action that they take. Around shared concepts of collectivity and bringing stakeholders together, they are characterized by their orientation as anti-oppressive, radically non-violent, and morally pluralist. (Bishop, 2013, p. 167)

The necessity to emancipate from hegemonic discourses, like heteronormativity, makes necessary the appearance of critical literacy in the curriculum.

Mora (2014) made a reflexivity exercise in his graduate seminar on literacies in second language contexts at the MA in Learning and Teaching Processes in Second

Languages to connect critical literacy with their experiences using textbooks. They had to write essays between 1500 to 3000 words, in their analysis 4 issues became salient: (a) breaking the attachment to the textbooks as a precursor to critical literacy, (b) developing a more critical consciousness, (c) questioning the status quo in the textbooks, and (d) viewing themselves as advocates. Here, we vanished the idea that literacy is reduced to its functional role of decoding and writing, literacy goes beyond the traditional overview of reading and writing processes and looks at it as an opportunity to make social changes to the realities we do not want to accept during another long time.

So (2016) did a case study where he wanted to know if it was possible to use early critical literacy as a space where 5 years old children examine books and articulate their voices on subjects related to cultural/racial diversity and equality. Kim analyzed data that came from audio recordings, participant observation, dialogical interviews, observational field notes, and children's written materials. The study found that writing alternative texts followed by reading multicultural books enabled children to question facts, share their own ideas, and develop critical perspectives on issues related to racial/cultural diversity and equality. He found that early literacy teachers should promote a supportive literacy environment where young children are encouraged to read literature for its subtext as a way to prompt diverse responses. This is a show of the possibility to use critical literacy since early ages, at school settings where voices can be stimulated instead of castrated, silenced or denied as it occurs with sexuality topics at educational institutions.

Finally, Dunkerly-Bean and colleagues (2020) wanted to know how multimodal writing projects might help in the construction of an environment free of prejudices

fighting heteronormativity and cisgender assumptions with 73 pre-service elementary teachers. They found that it was necessary a queer pedagogy in the classroom. Nobody talked negatively about Critical literacy as elementary grades in order to combat heteronormativity. Teachers change their minds on dealing LGBTQIA+ topics in the classroom and with parents and the rest of the educational setting; they (the participants) made emphasis on transgender people. They agree with us demanding the use of LGBTQIA+ material to normalize sexuality issues that are not far away from the students.

Previous studies are connected to this one since in critical literacy, one of the main roots of queer critical literacy, serves as a lens to reveal injustices towards LGBTQIA+ population, at educational settings. These studies showed that critical literacy helped to change teachers' minds when all it's about dealing with sexually diverse topics, this research studies and articles allow others to see the necessity of queering the curriculum so we can really teach about freedom, respect and gender justice to fight against social inequalities at our schools and communities.

Queer theory

Queer Theory Basics

The beginning of queer theory became stronger in the 1990's; like much of gay and lesbian studies scholarship, academic queer theory was largely inspired by activist social movements in that time. The methods that scholars used to establish gay and lesbian studies in the decades prior to queer theory were often quite queer themselves, particularly when guided by social constructionist approaches to the study of

homosexuality. This was certainly true in sociology, as Steven Seidman (1994), Arlene Stein and Ken Plummer (1994), and others have noted. From another angle, the political context that inspired early queer theory might also have translated into an inaugural focus on queer methods.

It is important to understand where the term queer had its origin from the vision of different researchers in the field. It started with the works by Teresa de Lauretis, who first mentioned the term, and Judith Butler, who expanded it through her ideas on gender performativity (Jagose, 1996). The idea of gender for Butler within queer theory is to say that gender is not reducible to hierarchical heterosexuality, that it takes different forms that are non-binary and unstable (Butler, 2004).

Understanding the Concept.

Queer has become an umbrella term to refer to the LGBTQIA+ community without choosing a specific label in relation to gender identity or sexual orientation (Jagose, 1996). Queer refers to a suspension of rigid gendered and sexual orientation categories by attempts to interrogate and interrupt heteronormativity, reinforced by acknowledging diverse people across gender, sex, and desires, as well as to foreground the sexual” (Blackburn & Clark, 2011). Queer theory is described as a way of thinking that does not use heterosexuality or binary gender constructs as its starting point, but instead argued for a more fluid concept of identity. Miller (2015) defines queer as a concept that challenges our accepted social conceptions; queer refers to a suspension of rigid gendered and sexual orientation categories. Shelton (2017), based on Kumashiro (2001), points out that the term “queer” is one that traditionally has

included all LGBTQIA+ individuals, but because there is a permanent relation between race and other identity markers, queer research offers unique possibilities to have connections between sex, gender, race, and among others. Kedley (2018) affirms that queer theory often conflated concepts of gender and sexual identity. Queer theory explains that there is not a link between gender and sexual identity or practice.

Studies on Queer Theory

A great amount of LGBTQIA+ community recognizes United States of America for having great models in LGBTQIA+ right movements, and who little by little have achieved to awaken people from the enchantment of hegemonic discourses at the service of powerful people to maintain the normalcy they need to continue perpetuating moral religious principles and discourses that rule and govern by impositions, to whom? -To the others that do not fit with their ideal heteronormative world. In Latin America there are a few studies on the topic, who may help to understand the circumstances and conditions that may be different from the US context. However, we understand that studies on LGBTQIA+ topics are a global issue which may benefit from the experiences of countries where the embracing on these issues are more developed.

To begin with, Blackburn (2009) has worked on combating homophobia and promoting teacher activism. In this study, she reviewed scholarship that represents urban students who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning. It draws on empirical examples to illustrate prominent themes across this scholarship, including the homophobia they experience, the impact it has on their academic performance and the activism it sparks. She found that homophobic school

climates hinders academic achievement and that the reported grade point average of students who were more frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was significantly lower than for students who were less often harassed.

Blackburn and colleagues (2015) examined a collection of lesbian, gay, bisexual and Trans (LGBT)-themed books discussed by lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and questioning, and ally students and teachers across 3 years of an out-of-school reading group. Through a textual content analysis of a sub-set of these books, they examined what queer literature looks like, identifying qualities it shares, and considering particular resources and possibilities it offers readers that are distinct from the broader category of LGBT-themed literature. They said that queer literature discourses not only create emotions on feeling equal, but it needs to go beyond; literature with queer themes creates new ideologies and open up the space for homosexual visibility, gay assimilation and queer consciousness, having as a consequence the questioning on what counts as normal and how it affects the way teacher choose materials to use in the classroom.

Kate Kedley (2015) studied the categories in relation to sex and gender in English language classroom in the United States, in addition, Kate explored the positions of heteronormative as an institutionalized aspect in institutions when they refer to sex and gender. In Kate's findings, Kate explained that there is a challenge in including these discussions but that it is necessary to start including them in order to fight the dominance of heterosexuality in institutions. Kate also addressed the fact that it is not only necessary to focus on the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ literacy in the classroom,

but also, it is necessary to have the role of the teacher as a text as part of being engaged in the disruption of heteronormative narratives. As part of this, teachers need to be aware that students read them causing an influence on the ways they think and act. Therefore, teachers have the responsibility to understand and have a position over topics such as sex and gender in order to influence in the practices that institutions have.

In relation to LGBTQIA+ materials, Kedley (2017) also studied the benefits from specific vocabulary and practical methods to promote critical discussions about gender and sexuality. In Kate's findings, Kate claimed that the format and content of graphic novels that depict LGBTQ experiences are a unique and effective pedagogical tool to engage students in critical discussions about topics that are not commonly used such as gender and sex. For some people, there is not a clear difference between these concepts based on the traditional forms of seeing the world, and the binary way to embrace gender and sexual orientations. Societal definitions and individual performances of gender and sexual identities change over the course of a lifetime, through time and over place, from generation to generation, and from context to context.

Shelton (2017) studied the intersections of race, sexuality and gender. The study was conducted with a focus group. It consisted of members of a senior-year undergraduate English Education teacher preparation program cohort at a research-intensive university in the southeastern, United States. As part of her findings, it is relevant that the objective of queer theory might be interrupted when we do not consider all of the other aspects in the personality and reality of the individual. Diversity is so extensive that we cannot talk about one specific way of being LGBTQIA+. Aspects like

race, social status, religious beliefs, backgrounds, education, and others are important to consider if we want to create safer spaces for everyone. Additionally, she points out how the depiction of LGBTQIA+ roles in materials might also fall into the error of using stereotypes on how queer people look, live and think. If there are also other types of privilege in trying to foster justice, all of the different aspects in life should be considered.

Queer theory in the Colombian context

The birth of the LGBTQIA+ movement in Colombia might have started with two gay scholars, Manuel Antonio Velandia Mora and Leon Benhur Adalberto Zuleta Ruiz, who wanted to win the autonomy over the body and the self, based on the North American and European thought. The different organizations that looked for sexual and gender equality in the country appeared since 1976 where it was created the first organization named Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual en Colombia. Some years later, Project Planeta Paz was an opportunity for different social leaders to participate in the construction of peace in Colombia. In this project it was possible to link different organizations from different cities of the country representing gay men, feminists and lesbians that started the movement with 3 main objectives: to make research on the different realities of non-heterosexual people in the country, to fight for the acknowledgement of rights for couples of same sex and the visibilization of the LGBT movement as a political actor. The wins of the movement took place in the courts since 1993 to 2016 the last one. (Sanchez, 2017)

It is important to say that studies in the LGBTQIA+ field are limited in Colombia; in comparison with other countries such as the United States, there are fewer

references of people working on the area of queer theory. One of the few, Lander (2018) conducted a study focused on the role of LGBT teachers in Colombia, and the difficulties they have to face in the classrooms, studying their image, and the perception they can have on the school community. This study showed that being a gay language teacher in the Colombian context report instances of homophobia which have impacted the participant's day-to-day lives and their careers.

Castañeda- Peña (2009) remarked the importance of creating new voices resulting from the experiences with gender. In addition, he went deeper into the idea of being good and what it means for most people. Being good, it has been always connected to the idea of being cisgender and heterosexual. His important research also questioned the role of sexual identities and desires in the learning of an additional language. In our research, as English teachers and learners, we have lived both scenarios of feeling questioned because of our sexual orientation as a synonym of being inappropriate or not normal.

In comparison of Colombia with other Latin American countries, we highlight studies by Cornejo and colleagues (2020) where they mapped the possibilities for LGTBT studies in Colombia and Peru. In their results they mention the influence by religion and social conservative ideas to go against LGBT rights and spaces. This study also show the importance of representation with different projects that both countries have constructed through years, and they have an influence in movies and literature. This study supports our statement on how representation helps to create educational spaces that focus on intersectionality such as race, gender, sexuality, and others. this text also question the role of universities in the creation of academic spaces where their

students can reflect on these topics. In this work, the authors also made clear the distinction between LGBT studies and queer studies, putting the interest of the second one in the area of normativity regardless the sexual orientation or gender identity.

Wilson and Malca (2019) do a similar study showing the situations of Colombia and Costa Rica in their individual actions to protect LBT rights. One of the main conclusions in this study is the importance of legal opportunity structures that has facilitated successful litigations in both countries. The text also compares the gap between the US experience with the situations happening in Colombia and Costa Rica, however, we cannot deny the advances and achieves that have merged though the years in both countries in relation to LGBT rights, specially in Colombia, when it is clear the work by “Colombia Diversa”, one of the most representative organizations in pro of the LGBTQ community.

Advocacy

Advocates specialize in producing counter narratives. Mora (2014a) describes counter-narratives as narratives that arise from the perspectives of historically marginalized people looking for the visualization of realities that should be changed by others that imply education and respect for the other.

According to Oxford dictionary, advocacy is support, advice and help given to people, often with special needs or aims, who are unable to speak for themselves (Advocacy, 2019). LGBTQIA+ population have had to suffer many different ways of legitimated discrimination, but after understanding their reality, the reasons why we need to work for a change and the way we have to organize ourselves to raise our

voice, it can be said that, we already know the tools we need to start an active role in the community, we can advocate social issues to generate a change in our community. In our case, learning about critical literacy started our advocacy process, where the understanding of our role and the impact of our actions as teachers in the context where we live, arrived.

Studies on Advocacy

Toporek (1999) defines advocacy as "action taken by a counseling professional to facilitate the removal of external and institutional barriers to clients' well-being". Adapting that definition to our study, we can understand it as actions taken by teachers to facilitate the removal of external and institutional barriers to student's well-being. In her paper, she recognizes that the professional position of the counselor (in this case teachers), their institutional involvement, and the ascribed credibility of their role and stature, may influence policy and practice in a way that is unavailable to many clients. In her paper, she presents a framework and definitions that may be useful in considering the role of advocacy in counseling, and discusses examples of a range of advocacy actions. At the end, she proposes some of the possible reasons why advocacy has historically experienced marginalization in counseling. Toporek concluded that using a model of advocacy that includes a range of activities from empowerment to social action may be helpful in identifying action that may facilitate clients' well-being, [we would say students instead of clients].

It is important to say that different kinds of advocacies exist, and each of those has different characteristics. According to Lawless (2012), who wrote a paper that

explores the way queer men saw their role in advocacy, mentions the existence of circular advocacy “a kind of advocacy that is unique to queer communities. The process of coming out and shifting personal opacity has much power.” He adds, “That certain individuals can become transparent about their identities is central in the quality and direction that advocacy on their behalf will take”. In this case, we both are openly homosexual teachers, this will give us the opportunity to speak freely and give direction to our thoughts without hesitating because of fears. The author interviewed 16 queer male leaders and at the end he found that: gender and sexuality are stratified in advocacy efforts, advocacy has been affected by the transportation of pervasive ideologies by those who sit at equality’s table.

Advocates described a process of integrating their experience and learning into an advocate identity (Goodman et al, 2018). In this research, both participants analyze their life experiences in order to recognize the oppressor image, understand the power relations that surround us and do not want us to speak, to finally, organize ourselves to raise our voice, as we also make part of the marginalized community, we do this with the intention of being heard, to help others to get an educational process where LGBTQIA+ realities are included and are not demonized.

Conceptualizing Queer Critical Literacy

Queer critical literacy is a way of thinking, talking, living, teaching and learning about sexual and gender diversity. This way of reading and understanding the world has its bases into critical literacy and queer theory. On one hand, critical literacy empowers the possibility to change people’s perspective on topics that are hardly explored

because of lack of exposure, lack of people who cover them or because of stereotyped beliefs. On the other hand, queer theory contrasts the heteronormative and binary constructions of sexuality and gender, understanding that they can be fluent and that the spectrum goes beyond the limited versions that society has historically accepted.

Queer critical literacy is a way of questioning the literacy practices that rules the interactions given in the daily life where heteronormative and cisgender assumptions commonly govern the way in which every person must think, talk and behave to fit in the world. In order to create safer spaces and social justice for all the members of a community, queer critical literacy opens the possibility to hear the voices of those who have been historically invisible in the construction of materials and practices in education (Zapata-Pescador & d., 2020).

The importance of using queer critical literacy at school reside in helping other (teachers, administrative staff, students, and other actors of the school) LGBTQIA+ people to change their realities by showing them different social inequities to fight against them through the design of counter narratives which will make visible their voices, so they can be heard by many others who can self-identify with their stories to start an advocate journey together or can join to their fights as allies.

If LGBTQIA+ people know how to name their reality, then ,they are able to call and fight against the inequity and injustice. Queer critical literacy opens the possibility to point at the difference between heteronormative and queer discourses, highlighting that sexual diverse realities continue being censured by hegemonic powers in the different governments in the world. Queer critical literacy teaches people how to use the right

terms to name other's realities that make part of the world, a world where they live coexisting with all types of difference, diversity and pluralism as we are intersectional human beings.

Queer critical literacy gives us the tools to create a space in which we can live peacefully, free of the many myths that reigns in our culture discourse, because we recognize who we are, what we think, what we believe, what we feel for ourselves and for our world, this queer critical literacy is the one that we use to read the word and the world since we open our eyes every day.

Teacher and student roles in Queer Critical Literacy

According to Coffey (2008), critical literacy education has an activist component, thus queer critical literacy is not the exception. Teachers using queer critical literacy must serve as facilitators for understanding power structures and the way they privilege one sexuality conception over the others. This position places the other different options as less important affecting the way diverse people enjoy or claim for gender and sexual justice. Teachers are models of active citizenship to their students. Showing the way to question heteronormativity as the only accepted and privileged assumption for society members, teachers give the opportunity to students to self-determine what they would choose for their own lives without judging their elections, but promoting the possibility of coexist with other ways of reading, living, feeling and dreaming the world.

Students who use queer critical literacy as a way of being are able to expose social inequities regarding sexual and gender identities, discuss the way in which those inequities can be reduced or eliminated, and attempt to solve social injustices near or

within their own lives regarding sexuality issues through acts of advocacy at any scenario, home, school and work. In this way, the chances of discrimination discourses become smaller, the knowledge about sexuality can avoid misconceptions and power abuse.

Queer critical literacy: a way to generate gender and sexual justice education

The lack of the display of LGBTQIA+ topics, policies and safe spaces inside schools creates inequities in education, and in the contrary, promotes situations of discrimination and violence that are becoming usual inside schools. Different gender identities that are not recognized can cause their members feel threatened, intimidated and experience situations where their lives are in danger. The condition and practice of reinforcing cisgender privilege, cismormativity, and the cisgender body, unknowingly or with intention contributes to the marginalization and erasure of complex gender identities (Miller, 2019). Same author also defines the idea of gender justice as the recognition state in which all gender identities are afforded the same dignity as any other individual. The idea of complex or complexity opens the opportunity to include every manifestation of gender avoiding limitations or lack of dignity.

Considering the context of this study, it is generally observed that public schools rarely consider the implications of sexual and gender identity for the design of policies, curricula and practices in the school. The idea of stop this heteronormative perspective in education also implies social justice commitments, where all members of the community including teachers, students, families and administrative staff understand that there is a variety of possibilities related to sexual and gender identity. Students are

taught to deconstruct the homophobia and heterosexism that exist in society, in literature, culture, history, politics, and every scenario in and out of the classroom (Lin, 2017). It is unfair to see that members of LGBTQIA+ community need to adapt themselves to the heteronormative scenarios, when schools and education are the ones who must provide conditions for justice and participation for all.

The idea of justice is also to regulate the use of words such as acceptance and tolerance, where it is implied that heterosexual and cisgender people have the power to accept and tolerate others. These words carry with the connotation that being queer is implicitly or explicitly compared to the imaginary norm of being heterosexual and cisgender (Miller, 2019). Justice is to understand that every member matters and that we all have the responsibility to create these conditions for everyone to feel actively part of every process inside the school.

In other words, it might give the chance to schools and educators to be more prepared in social issues such as the LGBTQIA+ situation in the country, and at the same time, they might have the tools to control problems at the interior of the institutions related to discrimination, homophobia, and even aggression. Sometimes, teachers are part of the problem when they refuse to adapt their practices in order to be more inclusive. Miller (2019) says that students hear comments by other specially educators, “why do I have to change my language if it’s only for one student”, teachers need to understand their role as creators of justice inside the classrooms. Additionally, it provokes the need to extend these practices to other problems that are affecting the development of meaningful practices in the schools. Teacher training in this topic is needed not only to know how to handle the situation but also to help teachers to

develop a certain level of empathy and positive attitudes in relation to inclusive teaching practices (Montaño and Vera Rodríguez, 2012) using queer literacy in different modes.

Chapter 3. Our Stories through Queer Critical Literacy with a Duoethnography

Approach: A Qualitative Research Study

This research aims to describe the journey of two scholars from the perspective of queer critical literacy in pursuit of becoming advocates of the LGBTQIA+ community in their current contexts. In this chapter, we will present the type of research we conducted and the approach we used. Additionally, we will present a brief description of us as participants and our contexts, as well as the data instruments that we used to narrate our stories. Finally, we will include the data organization and analysis of this study. To guide our research project, we proposed the following question to be answered: What are the conclusions after analyzing the journeys and roles of two LGBTQIA+ life stories through queer critical literacy in a duoethnography study?

Qualitative Research

According to Blackburn (2009), qualitative methods are most effective at capturing and making sense of people's unique accounts, voices, and perspectives. This type of research is an opportunity to reflect on our own experiences guiding us to a self-discovery journey on who we were, who we are and who we are aiming to be inside the queer community and its effects in education.

There is a grand collection of ways for qualitative thinking, it is interpretative, experiential, situational and personalistic (Stake, 2010). Qualitative research is an inquiry project but it is also a moral, allegorical, and therapeutic one; considering this statement, it opens the space for liberal and radical politics of action including queer

and critical theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) as realities to be studied. Being critical in a qualitative study can give us hope in the construction of a better place for everyone.

In qualitative research, the researchers explore the meaning as understood by the participants, in a natural setting. From our experience as researchers in this study, it is connected with the stories we will narrate based on our memories and the realities we have lived in different scenarios of our lives.

Queering the Methodology in Qualitative Research

The significance of qualitative research as it meets the framework of queer theory is that it offers a practically and institutionally queered set of voices, perspectives, and understandings with which to think about the everyday in schools (Wozolek, 2019). The idea of queering the methodology is to have the possibility to question the realities in our context from the queer literacy experience that we have lived, not only as learners but also as teachers in the process of becoming advocates in the implementation of queer critical literacy as a way to transform the scenarios where we live and work, and hopefully, transforming them also for our students and all members in our school community. “Queer theory is therefore not only important to the productive movement of qualitative research and education, but also to questions of equity and access for some of the most vulnerable youth living and learning in schools today” (Wozolek, 2019, p. 2). There are a group of scholars who have traced the path in queer methodologies in qualitative research, and it is necessary to keep the research in all of our contexts, providing new perspectives and queer voices in the construction of educational experiences and literacy.

Duoethnography approach

According to Sawyer and Norris (2013), who are the pioneers of this research method, duoethnography is a conversation, which fosters the generation of new meaning of any aspect. Duoethnography is a collaborative research methodology in which two or more researchers juxtapose their life histories in order to provide multiple understandings of a social phenomenon. Duoethnography presents narrative spaces in which readers identifies themselves and their background to produce new concepts and narratives. This research method does not pretend to propose a universal or closed conclusion (Castaño, 2020). Through the text, readers can participate with an implicit invitation to add their thoughts to the mix. Using their own biographies as sites of research and creating dialogic narratives, they provide multiple perspectives of this phenomenon for the reader, inviting the viewer to enter the conversation. The dialectic process of creating duoethnography is also designed to be transformative to the writers. This experience can affirm our beliefs, challenge them, and call us action. Such an approach rejects the notion of a single, fixed, and absolute reality existing independently of human consciousness and imagination. Instead, meanings are constructed in the process of interpretation (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012)

The conversations of duoethnographers assist readers in recalling and reconceptualizing their own stories. As such, duoethnographies are both participatory and emancipatory because they do not strive to impose conclusions on readers; rather, they encourage readers to juxtapose their stories with the ones in the printed text (Norris et al. 2012). The duoethnographers provide theses and antitheses, and each reader will provide their own synthesis based on their unique life histories.

Although both researchers in this study identify as gay and lesbian, their experiences in life have been different considering their stories as queer teachers, scholars and advocates and how they became every one of these roles, and also their personal characteristics such as race, religion, family, relationships and education under the lens of queer critical literacy. As researchers, we want to incite the discussion of queer critical literacy as a way to embrace all the voices in the classroom promoting justice in schools practices based on the analysis of our own stories.

Tenets in Duoethnography

Duoethnography has developed into a unique qualitative research genre with its own set of principles and practices. Although an underpinning belief is that the methodology should not dictate the form of a conversation of sentient beings in quest of meaning, a set of tenets that distinguish duoethnography from other legitimate forms of research has emerged (Norris et al, 2012). Currere, dialogic, disrupt narratives, difference, dialogic transformation, trustworthiness, audience accessibility, ethical stances and trust were considered by the researcher while designing and working in this study.

Participants and contexts

--eliana d. (she, her, hers)

I recognize myself as a cisgender female homosexual person, I do not reject the category of “lesbian,” but personally, I prefer to be named homosexual. I am part of a homo-parental family, I am married to another woman with whom I share the

responsibility of raising his 15-year-old only son. I have 5 years working at a public educational institution of my site of residence, Medellín-Colombia. I am an openly homosexual English teacher in my high school, a place where I feel happy being part of; there, I am free of fears for being sexually diverse and where with the help of other colleagues, I form citizens with a great awareness of the importance of respect for diversity, autonomy and pluralism. Although my institution has a beautiful way to see its role as educational institution, I have realized that the school needs to give another step in its way of helping students to find their happiness, I think that, as part of a minority, I have the responsibility to make visible inequity issues that affect LGBTQIA+ students' lives, and my personal experience demonstrate that there is a lack of sexual topics as if it was not part of life. Consequently, this research is an attempt to help Colombian government to understand the necessity of demanding to all institutions coexistence manuals and diversity tables that help to normalize the coverage of sexual diversity topics. At the beginning of my master program I wanted to do something very different, but I always felt attracted by the idea of dealing with such a personal topic. Once I decided to change my topic, the development of critical literacy skills towards LGBTQIA+ issues started, a healing process took place and my advocacy work found its cause. I believe that society needs to know that they can differ, but they cannot disrespect others by their life choices.

Diego (he, him, his)

I identify myself as a cisgender gay man. By the time of this study, I am 36 years old. I am an English teacher at a public school in Medellin, Colombia but I was born in a different city, Pereira, the capital city of the department of Risaralda. I had my first

coming-out at the age of sixteen, to what I consider a before and after-life experience. Dealing with the struggles of growing up in a traditional Colombian family, I have seen my sexuality as a relevant part of my existence, not only because of who I have chosen to love, but also because of the conditions it has created in all aspects of my life. As a student, I did not feel that school had a role in the construction of a role model in relation to all types of diversity, and as a teacher, I do not think I was aware of my responsibility in the process of opening safe spaces for all my students, not only in my classes but also in the school practices we have every day. It was just when I started the master program when I realized how research could be a tool to take action and reflect on the role of education in normalizing the realities of the LGBTQIA+ community in public education where I belong. Being part of a duoethnography study has been a self-discovery journey which has also led me to my second coming out moment as an LGBTQIA + scholar and advocate.

Data collection methods

After deciding duoethnography as our approach and before we started to write, there were a series of virtual conversations where we discussed how we would write our stories, what would be the focus of the narratives and the topics we would like to explore from our experiences. We agreed that we needed to divide the stories in times focusing on how we read the world in relation to our identity in different moments of our lives. Based on the focus of duoethnography, the stories are related to the topic of research and not the researchers as individuals. In this case, we wanted to see the role

of different scenarios in our lives in how we learned, conceived, accepted and reflected our own sexual and gender identity.

Storytelling: Our Stories through Queer Critical Literacy.

We decided to use a shared Google Docs file to write our stories to have access to the other participant's story in order to contrast and compare it with our individual experience. We initially started to write as a spontaneous writing following the ideas of autobiography, but after reading the story of the other, we decided to write subtitles based on the topics that emerged from the experience of reading to each other. The narrations were divided in different subtitles evoking individuals' memories but following a chronological order to the events. However, and as a characteristic of duoethnography studies, the narratives did not necessarily follow a sequence; they were back and forth memories and contrasts. We decided to focus on three different scenarios: life as a child, educational experience, and life as a teacher.

After organizing the story, we used the subtitles to write about our experience in relation to them, and constantly reading the story by the other. Stories were separated using our names at the beginning to know specifically to who corresponded every part. Both experiences and positionalities are separated in order to give the reader the chance to be also part of the narratives, in a constant contrast between the alternate stories. Additionally, we wanted to provide different perspectives considering the view, the time and the space to convey meaning of the realities.

Although not all duoethnographers use artifacts and photos as data sources (Norris et al., 2012), we decided to use them as promoters of memories and also as

representations of moments we considered were connected to expressions of literacy. We also made reference to cultural aspects involved in our stories such as television, music and movies that eventually became part of the analysis as a relevant factor in our stories.

Although the stories were divided in the main three aspects, the subtitles made reference to topics we were considering relevant while writing. The name of these subtitles were: family and youth, school time, university time, our journey as gay teachers, master education discovering queer critical literacy, advocacy, marriage, and finally love stories. The fact to write in a shared document having the titles as reference and the possibility to read the other story was also a chance to guide our positionality and avoid solipsism and support both expression and explanation. Egocentricity is mediated through the conversation (Norris & Sawyer, 2020).

Unstructured Interview as Conversation

As a first attempt to analyze the data, we read the stories together, asking questions to each other during the process. We found that there were some gaps we did not mention in the text, so we decided to have an unstructured interview in the form of a conversation. We used a virtual meeting application and we recorded the session. The idea of complementing these data collection methods emerged from the premise that duoethnography studies are more than stories, they also consider the analysis and the open possibilities to explore those narratives. The stories provided a chronological and reflected data while the conversation covered different and mixed times in a more spontaneous collection of the information.

After that we read to Oliver et al. (2005), Stuckey (2014) about how to deal with the interview we had had, we found that there were verbatim and non-verbatim transcriptions. Naturalized transcription (Verbatim) demands that the transcription include until the smallest sign of breath in the interview. This kind of interview transcription should be used in studies where the findings are centered on e.g. grammatical, syntactic or morphological issues; those have a different impact in the way data can be analyzed. However, in this study we are looking for the semantic, the real meaning, agreeing on a version of our stories, and with the intention of “saving” time we chose to use a denaturalized transcription where fillers, utterances among other aspects of language we consider irrelevant for the aim of our study. Stuckey (2014) pointed out to a possible threat for the validity and reliability of our study:

“If verbatim transcription is omitted to save time, bias can occur if the researcher reaches conclusion before the data are checked. Memory can be flawed and selective and is not a substitute for careful examination of the actual transcriptions. For this reason, it is preferable that the researcher produce full transcripts of the interviews.” (p. 4)

In this order of ideas, we wanted that our answers were understandable for any person, as English is not our first language we did a naturalized transcription and then we both checked our ideas and we both transformed it into a denaturalized transcription erasing utterances, fillers, word repetition and correcting the verb tenses of some ideas which could get our readers to get lost in translation. Finally, we added the punctuation marks.

Data analysis

Inductive analysis of data

Thomas (2003) affirms that the primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies. In other words, we applied this kind of method to be loyal to our participants' voices avoiding the invention of categories that mislead the findings and hinder the existence of trustworthiness in the research.

The data were analyzed and broken into small units or codes using a color coding strategy, and then we clustered it into groups, taking into account the connections we found among them. After this process, we assigned some categories to identify the main aspects of our life experiences in relation to queer critical literacy characteristics, based on what we repeatedly mentioned in our stories. In qualitative studies where the data are mostly narrative, data analysis involves a categorizing strategy through coding (Maxwell, 2013). Finally, we made a critical analysis of the narratives considering the patterns and codes that we found in the categories to withdraw the main conclusions that answer our research question.

Coding and categorizing our narratives

We divided our stories into three main parts from the beginning of the writing process: Childhood and family; schools and education; and finally our professional life. There are some sub categories in each part considering we found them relevant to be

described. When talking about those parts of our lives, we focused on aspects such as the coming out experience, religion, education at elementary and high school, formative process in the university and as a master candidate, marriage, and finally, advocacy. We took into consideration some of the concepts tackled during our research seminar at university.

When talking about our childhood and family we mentioned about our beliefs and traditions, our way to establish a relationship with parents and siblings, the way our families expected us to fit the heterosexual assumption, our ways to read the world and the perception of homosexuality based on the conceptions from our context.

Then we focused on our academic journey, in this part of our stories, we tell each other about the coming out experience, its implications at social scenarios like family and friends, our practices at school and university looking for ways to learn about our discovered, accepted and embraced sexual orientation.

And finally, we detailed the current experiences in relation to marriage, our professional growth experience thanks to this encounter with queer critical literacy at the MA program and its influence as LGBTQIA+ teachers and advocates at schools.

Data reduction

Charting. We created a chart to reduce the information according to the main aspects we found during the reading of the narrations. The objective was to focus on those aspects related to literacy practices and moments, and how they were connected to our own discovery and acceptance of the sexual and gender identity. We kept the three main moments of the stories: family literacies, educational literacies, and finally, work literacies. We selected some topics in relation to every era such as: backgrounds, representations, religion, education, coming out and advocacy. We used colors to represent who said each part. In each section of the chart, we looked for repetitions and points in common, so we could draw the structure for the analysis.

Dialogic analysis

After organizing the data in the chart and finding out the intersections in the stories, we created a new document to structure the analysis. We kept the main categories such as family, education and work, but we also considered two new dimensions; the first one was the social LGBTQIA+ representations we have seen through our lives, and the second, our coming out experiences seen as a round cycle process and not like a one moment in life event. Having as reference the data, we created summary discussions after every title with individual analysis for both researchers. As part of the intention of duoethnography studies, we do not look to have specific conclusions but a dialogue in which the reader sees the positions of the researchers and eventually become part of their own conclusion. These findings were based on how stories differentiate from each other and the transformations we had after

contrasting our experiences. In order to write the analysis, we initiated every part of the discussion with fragments taken from our stories, and in some of them, we added pictures that represented the essence of the analysis. Then, we wrote our summaries using both names --eliana d. and Diego to make clear the voice of each researcher. For the final conclusion, we decided to write a whole paragraph in one voice, as the result of this study in the transformation of the both of us as a unit.

Chapter 4 Analyzing LGBTQIA+ Stories through Queer Critical Literacy

In this chapter, we will present the main categories from the analysis of our stories, evoking fragments of both sources of data, the narratives and the unstructured interview, and we will introduce the conclusions for all the aspects based on the juxtaposition of our stories. This chapter is willing to answer the question: What are the conclusions after analyzing the journeys and roles of two LGBTQIA+ life stories through queer critical literacy in a duoethnography study?

The Role of the Family

Diego: I never heard that my parents explained me these topics related to the gay community when I was a kid or a teenager; they explained me the general ideas about sex and relationships but always from a heteronormative vision.

--eliana d.: God and his principles were my guides, referring to the correct way of thinking, saying and acting. The bible has the rules of this game, what the pastor said and my parents said was the absolute truth, I did not question anything.



Figure 1. Diego and --eliana d. evidences of gender expression in their family contexts.

Diego. Family is the first scenario which helps us to read the world and take positions over the situations happening around us. As kids, we received as input all the ideas that our parents and adults gave to us, and based on our contexts, we just got a traditional way to see and do things. We received a traditional vision of the world where being heterosexual was the idea of being right. Not even we had the chance to see other roles out of the context of the family, because the practices inside of it like television and media were also limited by the preferences that our families had. How can we reflect on something we do not even know that exists?.

Back in the 80's and 90's it was evident the distinction in roles for masculine and feminine, and we both lived the experience of following these ideas usually promoted by our families. Nevertheless, I still see that it is a situation that has not changed, new generations in my family are living under the same concepts of masculinities and

femininities that we lived as kids thirty years ago. I understand this process as the result of not knowing about something and always receiving the promotion of what is supposed to be right based on what the family has lived. In the Colombian context, religion has an important role in the construction of knowledge and morals in most of the families. In our cases, there is an evident difference in how strict our families were in relation to religion rules, however, the constructions of norms and practices were highly influenced in both cases by these beliefs.

Understanding my position of privilege in relation to my gender role was part of reading --eliana d.'s story. I could understand that in our context, being a woman in traditional families can be more difficult considering the restrictions and limitations in the roles that are assigned to them. It helped me understand the roles my sisters, my mother, my aunts and my grandmothers lived in their own context. At some point, I admit I was part of the problem accepting these inequities in roles, but my position of privilege did not allow me to see that.

--eliana d. The fact of talking about our context is not a reason to generalize things with other homosexual life experiences. We can recognize that our parents had a strong influence of religious thought, although Diego said that his father became atheist, he led Diego's mom to raise his kid under catholic education. Christianity, which is the base of both families religion, -Diego's family is catholic and mine is protestant- is patriarchal, binary and heteronormative which implies that men are in a privilege place, in this order of ideas the possibility of seeing a men with feminine likes is offensive. Same way with women (As I also have a lot of religious thoughts I can recognize this - and I laugh at that astonishment feeling that I have).The religious leaders always have

had the power of deciding on how, when and what to share to its followers. And although there are many intelligent followers, this society lacks criticism. It's hard that people start questioning the ideas of religious leaders. It's like a sin to understand that there are many biblical texts that are not loyal to what people translate to its mother tongue. As we can remember the church and the political world have had a close relationship. The religious moral delimits the way in which a Christian has to live his life, and the manual of instructions is the Bible. We didn't have to live in a homosexual context to become homosexuals. So, homosexuality is not teachable. Our parents are not homosexuals and believe in God in their own ways. Sadly, this lack of criticism reproduces many situations where people are judged and freedom does not exist. Finally, if I think of the feelings I can identify, I could say: enclosed.

Family language in relation to LGBTQIA+ topics

--eliana d.: My mom often scolded me, she was very chauvinistic, she said things like: "you are not different to boys, you want to spend all the time in the street, instead of being here at home learning to cook or to do something different than running everywhere and getting scars on all your body like a donkey"

Diego: One of my uncles used the word "gris" (grey in English) to refer to them. Even today, this uncle still rejects the idea of being gay, although he has always been respectful to me he has manifested publicly his rejection to the community.

Diego. In our context, it is common to use offensive words to name the LGBTQIA+ community; in fact, to say gay or lesbian are even used to make fun or offend others. In our families, the lack of knowledge on what it means causes it became usual to use these derogatory words. However, I do not blame my family because of these actions because that is the result of lack of education in our system. We grew up under the premise that being gay or lesbian was negative, it is now our purpose to avoid this situation in new generations and embrace the diversity existed in each one of the words in LGBTQIA+. Although I understand that words can have a negative history in our lives, queer critical literacy is a way to give the dignity and correct use to vocabulary that people can be related to. Nevertheless, every person is free and has the right to use the words, pronouns, adjectives that they consider appropriate for themselves in the same fluent identification that we all have. This is one of those cycle moments in which we play the part of educating and correcting our own families in order to avoid the repetition of these words now and for the new generations.

--eliana d. None of our families knew the proper names to call any sexually diverse person, so as Colombians we are very creative and people used to make up names to call what they don't know. Anyway, when a person is named in an inappropriate way it is going to feel bad. What could happen if Diego's uncle called somebody sexually diverse "Gray". Surely, he will not have any reply from any person, as it seems a construction he does from the fact that people did not choose in a cisgender way, where the object of desire has to be from the opposite sex. If you are gray you do not match with any of the colors white or black.

Language is a social construction, Moms are the first persons that talked to us and taught us how to express our world. Those moms are religious women who believe that they need to give the voice to the men, who are seen as the leader of the family. With this way of acting, they reproduce a social system that privileges men over women. There is no gender equality, there is no possibility for a diverse sexuality and it seems that most women believe that must be the way to establish a good relationship. However, when women raise their kids with these kinds of thoughts, children grow up learning to be silent in front of injustice that they themselves experience. They know that if they raise their voice, they would be punished; with this kind of thought reproduced by the oppressed, the oppressor will always be in the power place.

Family: first ally roles

Diego: In a conversation with my mother, she told me that she had an argument with my father a day he wanted to force me to go but I was just crying saying I did not want to. My mother finally helped my father in the process of acceptance, that even today, it is still easier for my mother to address the topic.

--eliana d.: My oldest brother said: "if you're happy there is no problem, it's difficult for me to understand it, but it's not something that's going to split our lives, we are brothers and we are going to be brothers the rest of our lives. My oldest brother is more, more acceptable. It's now open, he sees the relationship like any other relationship, so he is always taking care if I'm good with her, if we're happy, if everything at home is ok."

Diego. Although not all the people in the family accepted immediately, and I also understand why, we were lucky enough to have people in our families that in a way or another, supported us and helped us in the process of acceptance. Even if they are closer or not, they were important allies in this process, probably not in a conscious way, but with the effectiveness of what we needed in that specific time. My mother has been the biggest support of my life; and one of the reasons why I know this study is relevant; we need to work on education because this is nor the reality for all the people in relation to find allies in their families. Respect is a mandatory act, the ways in which we disagree on something cannot take us to violate the presence of the other. We cannot deny the existence and the right to be of each other. Having allies and advocates inside families are the result of going against the generalized rules that usually exist in the cores of the traditions and beliefs in context like Colombia.

--eliana d. To get the help of people, in situations where you are vulnerable, feels so good and teaches us to help others in future opportunities. The only ally and the first I had was my oldest brother, he expressed his inability to understand but at the same time, he supported me. I always thought that my first ally was my older brother Elmer, and it was Mario, my oldest brother. Allies can be gained as we understand that they also deserve respect. In my case, I decided to show that I was not going to fail because of my sexual orientation. It is not possible to believe that insulting or protesting without an appropriate language and expression we can gain visibility. Education and manners are the ways we can teach our families what kind of people are LGBTQIA+ members. There is a thin line that could easily be trespassed, the line of respect. Sometimes, we believe that we are doing actions to gain visibility, but having an incorrect positionality

does not help to construct relationships based on the respect where dialogue can have a space. Communication is the key for success. Both communities, LGBTQIA+ population and Heterosexual population need to find a devoted place to share and dialogue in order to understand their points of view and get to an agreement of coexistence as we cannot be changed and they shouldn't have to think on change completely. There should be the possibility of difference.

The Role of Education

--eliana d.: have a memory of two girls kissing very passionately during the break, many students whistled at the couple of the girls as a sign of disapproval because they were doing something inappropriate. None of my teachers were homosexual, there was a word of mouth about the coordinator being gay, but I did not pay attention to it. That did not have anything to do with me.

Diego: Although there were a gay and a lesbian teachers at school (I realized about that years after I graduated), I never saw them as roles since they pretended to be a couple, probably as a way to avoid comments by the students or even coworkers.



Figure 2. At our schools where we did not have any instruction on LGBTQIA+ topics.

Diego. Back in the day, schools were not aware of the importance of addressing these topics. Unfortunately to say, many years after, it is still not a reality happening in education. In the reflection, it is evident that although the change has not been completed, there is hope that inclusion is happening and there is a need to open the spaces at school to discuss this topic. I identify myself with the LGBTQIA+ teachers at my time at school, because it was not easy for me to open completely with my students and families, but I understand now the importance of creating these model roles for new generations to come. Schools need to become safe spaces not only for students but also for teachers. School was not present as a guide in my acceptance process, and that absence also creates the tensions and fears for many members to accept and open themselves with freedom. This is still the reality that we have in schools nowadays.

--eliana d. Schools have to take care of the integral development of children, and sexual education makes part of an integral education as it touches one important part of the self. Our country declares itself a lay country but school teaches religion from a

catholic perspective, it should be taught from a historical perspective where at the end children can choose freely what to believe, if they keep their home traditions or if they change to other discourses; otherwise the learning process became an act of indoctrination. As the school and home followed Christian rules (where parents, teachers, and administrative staff reinforce cisgender, binary and heterosexual assumptions), it became more difficult for us to understand that we could be sexual diverse people and that sexual orientation is just another of the many conditions of human beings.

The lack of criticism at school allows the reproduction of misinformation and social inequities. This way of ruling the practices, based on decontextualized religious principles, explains the heteronormative, cisgender and binary nature of school policies, materials and contents, denying and banning the existence of sexual diverse families, students, teachers, and administrators. Thus, it was not possible for us of even knowing the existence of LGBTQIA+ population. Lack of knowledge of our own realities creates the necessity of being hiding, triggering the feeling of being in danger, and allowing the presence of violence. In our stories, we knew that something was happening, but we were not able to express it to another person for fear to be judged and rejected by the majority of heterosexuals who were also part of our families, the most appreciated gift for a kid. Contrary to the role of an ideal education, actual policies are not helping LGBTQIA+ people to emancipate from their jails. An education that does not promote real changes in the society cannot lead to the improvement of the same.

Diego. In the same analysis, public education has a responsibility of addressing LGBTQIA+ topics. We see the result of generations of not talking about these topics,

and members of the community do not have any chance to feel identified, or more importantly, to understand that their feelings and perceptions of identity are more diverse than the ones promoted by a traditional education. It did not happen back then, and there is still some work to do now. We cannot deny the work of entities like the ministry of education with programs such as Best T, that are aware of the importance of changing the practices at schools and be more aware of the realities of the students considering them in the materials teachers use in the classroom.

--eliana d. Although the queer movement has been gaining strength, Colombia continues being a country where society supports their rules on binary religious principles. I can remember the failure of the secretary of education at attempting to include sexual diversity topics at school. Conservative parents went out to the street to protest against the initiative, most of the families belong to religious communities. That happened 4 or 5 years ago, Back in our times, families would have done the same or maybe they could have taken harder measurements, as they were more radical. Here, we can evidence that there are families who do not want to give space to this discourse, and the government is not in the mood of fighting to convince parents to get that content for their children. Even when the many statistics of children abuse, suicide, child depression, and teen parenthood are significant, Colombian society seems to ignore the benefits of teaching your kids about sexuality issues, about diversity.

Queer Critical Literacy in the ESL Class

--eliana d.: My English class in this school was the best; I learned and understood simple present tense, and present progressive. It was grammar oriented. In the English classes the main topic, grammar, the

present simple, the books which I worked were very, very beautiful, they were colorful, I remember that they were not real pictures, but they were drawings like cartoons.

Diego: Although I had a different teacher in the last years, and by far, he was better with the language, there were no opportunities to learn different topics through English rather than grammar aspects. The material used at that time, usually books, were always full of stereotyped versions of American and British families, and roles of what it was supposed to be right and successful, also supported by the idea of the American dream, very popular in the 90's.

Diego. The use of grammar was evident in the practices of education we both had at high school. The purpose of English classes was related to understanding structures of the language but the intention of communication was low. Therefore, to think about using a more critical approach in the English class was not part of the picture. Understanding the past and the context we lived in high school, it is also an opportunity to be more aware of the transformations we need to do now in education. Looking back to the visions we had in the past in relation to language instruction is sad, and I do not feel satisfied with the educational system that we had. I cannot say we still have the same conditions, for sure they have changed, but there is still work to do in order to use the ESL class as a scenario where not only grammar is instructed but also the critical reflections of our own realities are part of the understanding of a language.

--eliana d. Communicative language teaching was the base of teaching and learning experiences when we were children and teenagers; this approach is centered in the development of skills and competences. Our classes in that time were centered on developing grammar, which is not bad, at the moment that was the boom, so teachers flew with the tendency. Although materials were very attractive, it was difficult to feel connected to these ones when the realities portrayed were far away from our own. Now that we are teachers, socio-critical approaches, the current ones, centered his attention on teaching students to solve problems in their communities, this way students can make innovations that contribute with the development of a better social tissue and the eradication of inequities. It is important to highlight that when teaching a language we are also teaching a culture and our job impacts the way students think and make decisions.

Policies at schools

--eliana d.: Well I think that we had it, we had it in the past, why do I say we had it, when like 2 or 3 years ago we started to receive trans transgender students so they asked to use the skirt of the school they did it they asked to go to the bathroom that they wanted to go based on the gender that they identified themselves we permitted but those changes are having place while we live with the situation.

Diego: I think that they are gender oriented alright like for example the color of the hair or accessories in women are allowed while men are not so that was actually that we just change last year that they delete this paragraph

in the manual of coexistence because it was a discussion that we had inside of the school why women they don't have any problem wearing earrings for example but men do when they are in the same situation and probably it's because if we go to the past there was a conception that men shouldn't be wearing earrings.

Diego. Manuals of coexistence at our schools still preserve a code that benefits just a part of the community but not all of them. In this case, the heterosexual and cisgender assumption has denied the opportunity to LGBTQIA+ students to have more equitable spaces at their schools. These binary perceptions have put in a struggle to those students who do not fit in the standard; unfortunately, schools have taken actions after the situations emerge and create trouble. Schools need to redesign their policies, but more than that, the government needs to establish more specific guidelines for all the schools; this should not be an election but a mandatory request for all the educational institutions in the country. Uniforms, accessories, bathrooms and gendered activities cannot be longer obstacles for people to feel safe in a place, especially if we are talking about schools.

--eliana d. As our schools taught based on catholic views, it was impossible to find a transsexual or transgender person for us. This transgression of the rule (admit transgender students into classrooms) provokes serious confrontations with conservative people that feel fear of the new possibilities for life. Policies at schools should consider the importance of respecting self-determination, the same way you decide what to wear, how to think, what to share, should be the same situation for any person without giving importance to what others can think. So, it is important to go back

in time and recognize the teacher figure as a powerful person in society, a model to be followed. Based on critical pedagogy, teachers are the representation of the system; thus, we can help to do agency by creating policies from our classrooms to the community that permits a better understanding of people that live in unequal conditions. Doing agency could be promoting spaces and ways of interacting with sexually diverse people to contribute in the normalization of that situation, for example: when I meet my students for the first time I encourage them to call me "Nana" as a way to show love and respect to me, that behavior students learn and suddenly I got surprise by a parent calling that way. Same way we can teach our students to use the appropriate language and expressions to name their world without making mistakes because of the ignorance Education should stimulate criticality in students, so students can question everyday aspects of life from different perspectives for them to have a better understanding of the world and the social complexities that always have been accompanying our society. Having a better understanding of the world, it is expected that they can become advocates or allies of different social issues.

Schools as Safe Spaces

Diego: We were not really aware of our sexual orientation, probably there was something or at least in my case that I felt very inside of me. I knew what was happening but I didn't want to accept it.

--eliana d.: and another thing is that in that part of accepting ourselves, I think, classmates were like the hints I have to know something was happening to me, because...

Diego: ok yes

--eliana d.: I said like: "what happened to me that I am not worried about the color of the dress, I'm not worried for the lipstick I'm going to use, I don't like it either", so I questioned myself, but that was inner, in my inner, I never said something...at this moment, I'm recognizing that fight in myself; retaking my story I could recognize that I had that fight.

Diego. I wish that my schools would have had a role in my own journey of acceptance and self-recognition. I know that from my family that was difficult, because none of them had the instruction and knowledge to think differently from the binary. However, the school was absent in this process, so it made my process of acceptance. Different from --eliana d. I was more passive in looking for a revolution at that time; I just thought it was the way it should be, and I realized about that absent so many years later. In order to create safer spaces at schools we need to open the space to LGBTQIA+ focus groups in order to understand the lack and failures that can be changed inside; and also it is necessary to train teachers and administrators in order to change wrong stereotypes and create a more reflexive and critical positionality by all individuals inside the schools.

--eliana d. Schools should create spaces where students can express their doubts and incertitude about sexuality, if they do not have an academic help at home, then school should cover that blind spot, these spaces will give the opportunity of not feeling threatened by others, of sharing with others their realities to be understood, to be heard, to be taken into account. In Diego's story, an open space where to talk about his

questions could have made the difference. Academy and teachers as facilitators of enriching dialogues between students can help to normalize sexual diversity conditions in the school environment. I wonder if in my story, a space like the one I described, would have made me question my feelings and if maybe I could have done something different and avoid the many times I felt empty after trying to answer those questions which were really deep in my heart.

Queer critical literacy in teacher training programs

--eliana d.: There was a course where I learned the way children develop their minds, the course was “Sujeto y educación” [“Subject and Education”], in this course I learned about the self and the ego, about objects of desire and other topics that have an impact in the construction of the sexuality of a human being. However, the course did not teach me how to work with LGBTQIA+ students who need to be included in my discourse, people that have been segregated from heteronormative classrooms.

Diego: I learned about critical literacy, probably not as much as I wanted, or with importance as I see it now. Most of our seminars at university were created to promote professional development in terms of theories and approaches on second language teaching. From the vision I have now, I wish I had received more development on critical literacy, not only from the perspective of queer theory, but in general.

Diego. There is a need in teaching training programs to address more topics from a critical perspective. We did not have a deep emphasis in how to address these topics

when we were in the program, and as teachers, it is necessary to consider that our students will have different realities that need to be addressed in the classroom.

Teaching training Programs at the universities should consider that the reflections on LGBTQIA+ topics and other representations of oppression are necessary in those who are going to become teachers. Critical literacy courses need to be mandatory in these programs if there is an intention to create safer spaces at schools where teachers are aware of these reflections. To be aware of this absence at university programs can also be an opportunity to generate more research studies in these topics, expanding the possibilities to investigate.

--eliana d. Being the highest sphere of academy, university needs to start hitting these topics in the curriculum and encouraging the creation of sexually diverse groups since undergraduate students, as they are going to be the ones who will have to connect their micro-curricula to the reality of different students who have the same rights. LGBTQIA+ should be a topic to cover by pre service teachers and in service teachers. Consequently, ignorance, misinformation and discrimination can be out of the picture. It is not difficult to recognize that when we had to face these topics, it is impossible not to feel some kind of fear thanks to previous reactions we have seen looking for the reaffirmation of heterosexual and cisgender assumption and binary treatments to students, these reactions have come from parents, students, coworkers and even administrative staff.

Master in second languages

--eliana d.: I heard Diego talking about LGBTQIA+ and the importance of hitting that point. Then, we got into a critical literacy seminar, there I found the first topic I could write for the rest of my life, but I needed the other ingredient, and I listened to Diego again, at that point I left my fears aside and I asked him if we could work together.

Diego: when I was in the master program when we start to think about the possible topic for our research project and then in the different classes especially the one for research with Raul when I realized about ok it is something that I can talk but it was something that never cross my mind before it was just until that moment when I realized that it was a topic I could talk about.

Diego. I appreciate the role of the master program, and especially my research course, considering it was an opportunity to understand the importance of addressing this topic. Before entering in the program, I was thinking in a more language instruction project but not considering that there were more critical topics that need to be addressed in research. As our mentor mentioned to us, these research projects should be topics we want to keep working with after the master process. I understand now the importance of having more research programs addressing LGBTQIA+ issues, because we see the lack of them in our context.

eliana d. Our master study is giving us a lot of opportunities. This is the best way

to advocate, the academy serves to validate our thoughts, consequently leaders can listen to our voices, can believe in our voices and can help us to get a change that we need for living in harmony with all kinds of different thoughts. Although as I said we cannot make generalizations, I am sure that what is in our stories as students can be seen in many other LGBTIA+ life experiences. As we still believe in the teacher as an agent of power, we can use it to help others by teaching new ways in our classrooms; hopefully what is learned can be shared and reflexed out of school spaces.

Our Roles as Teachers and Advocates

LGBTQIA+ Teachers' Role

--eliana d.: I graduated from the University in 2012; I got my first job in a female Catholic private school, in Medellín. I tried to adjust my way of dressing to the code of an adult woman, and I bought tight shirts, blouses, and pants, the most unbelievable part was that I used makeup.

Diego: I started to work as a teacher in 2007, when I was in the 5th semester of the program; I had the opportunity to work in the same university where I was studying at that time. I was quite young and there was not a big difference in age with my students. Some of them were even older than me.

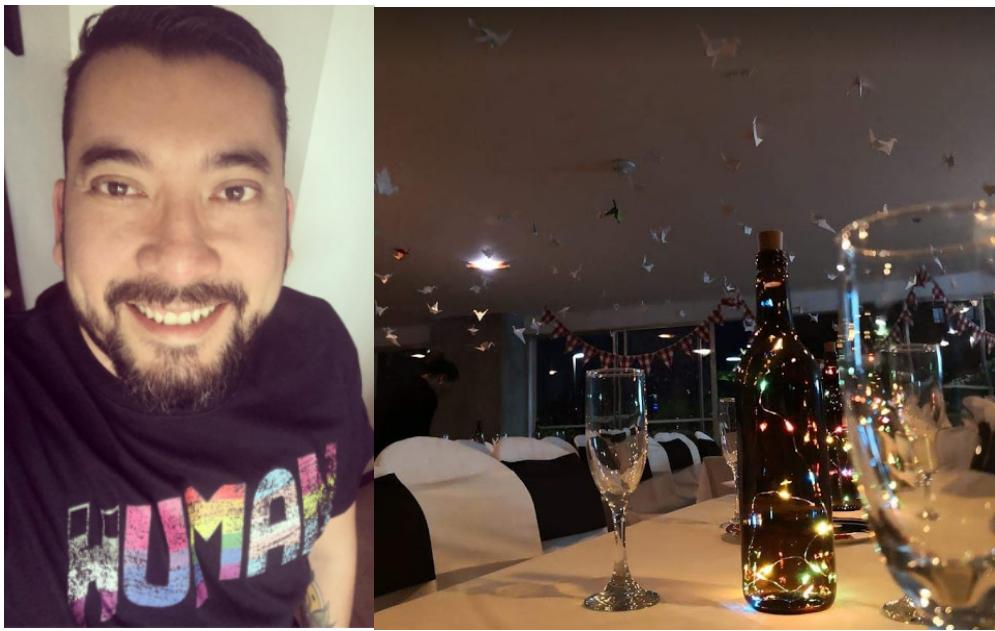


Figure 3. Diego shows activism through accessories and clothing that his students can observe. --eliana d. invited her students to help her with the decoration of her marriage by making paper birds.

Diego. My role as a teacher has always been a coming out experience. From my own position to the expectations that schools and universities have on their teachers, my sexual orientation has always been a topic of discussion, especially in those institutions with no progressive views, like in my case, a military school. Different from -- eliana.d, my dress code was never a problem but if I think clearly, the use of uniforms in that place, was also a way to control the personal expressions of the teachers, especially at a private institution. Queer teachers constantly have to suffer a moment of anxiety or repression when they want to be part of a new school. Teachers and schools need training on LGBTQIA+ topics, not only during the process of training but also during their careers. The role of the teacher is crucial to create these reflections inside

the classroom but if there is not a constant instruction, it is difficult to think this is going to be a reality.

--eliana d. When we started our working life. I could find a difference in our stories. It is very evident that as a woman, I felt questioned for my dress code, my image which did not fit with my gender because of my masculine likes, according to the way society learned to classify this factor. Diego instead was worried for its capability, his competence to be an excellent teacher. If we go deeper, society demands from men strength and capability to do things as they are the providers. At the same time, society demands from women to accomplish beauty standards. There is no worse feeling for a woman than self-identifying with ugliness. Diego was a white man in a privileged place but for him to enjoy those privileges, first he had to demonstrate he was able to do his job. I was a woman with an inappropriate dress code that needed to adjust it to fit in the heterosexual and cisgender assumption that a “decent” women had at a catholic school. Finally we both could overcome our fears and we stayed with our ideas of how to do and what to wear.

Advocacy

Diego: Working with queer critical literacy has made me realize about the importance of taking action in order to promote justice inside schools for every member of the institution. I have started to implement materials such as reading texts, videos and audios showing different queer.

--eliana d.: There are actions that I do to advocate this cause; the first one is to put myself in the scenario, my personal life as a model to be followed. The

second act is to defend my students from all ways of segregation. My advocacy for this topic has changed. Before I felt bad because many people suffered, since they did not have anybody to teach them about what it means to be LGBTQIA+.

Diego. Before the master program, I was not aware of the relevance of my role as a teacher in relation to address LGBTQIA+ topics in the classroom. I identity as gay but I was also part of a privilege group in relation to other identities; that sense of privilege did not allow me to see that it was important to address these topics in my class; I was comfortable with the material I used and I thought there was not connection between sexual and gender identities and the English class. I have found that creating a critical perspective in the classroom is also my responsibility as teacher. Being an advocate is just the result of understanding my own reality, the realities of my students and the realities of my context. I also see that having a dialogic analysis with --eliana d. has made me realize the importance of using myself as a model and an open text for my students, not necessarily using my private life as a story but showing clearly my positionality on queer topics and other issues that are part of the intersectionality of individuals and societies. Advocacy is not only necessary, being an ally is also, or even more important. This study let me understood that even as gay person I was also in a position of privilege over transgender, black, women and many other positions that have not been a struggle for me. There is a need to understand that the fight is not individual or fragmented, we need to work as a collective.

--eliana d. This is the result of having learned that we need to do more than pointing at the problem. This necessity, this urge to change our students' realities

emerge from the desire of offering a better education process that touches all our students' intersectionality. Learning became advocacy acts. There is an obstacle that Diego needs to overcome, the fear to be judged. I'm more open, because I do not give importance to what people say, when they continue reproducing discourses that need to be abolished. I think that it can be achieved through a learning process and maybe the impact of these advocacy acts cannot be interpreted immediately, but we hope that at the end this generation can tell a different story of their education on a sexually diverse population.

Queer Representations in the World

Diego: As a kid I always played with my sister and my youngest aunt because there were no more kids at home. Our games included dolls, barbies and cooking but we also played with cars, toy soldiers, and construction. I never liked contact sports, not to watch or play.

--eliana d.: I preferred to play with my father's soccer ball or with my brothers' control remote cars. I did it but I had to hide otherwise I would be scolded. I only played to be a mom or have a family when my church girl friends came on Sunday.



Figure 4. Our first positive representations of LGBTQIA+ members

Diego. As a kid, it was clear that representations of masculine and feminine were conceived and promoted from a binary perspective; my family followed the standards of the time where certain things were related to boys and other to girls; between --eliana d. and I the situation was not so different. We both grew up with a tendency to like all types of games, roles and activities. However, there is a distinction between how we conceived and accepted; I always was afraid of showing my interest in showing things related to girls, on the other hand, for --eliana d. was an opportunity to challenge the perception of others. She saw herself as a strong woman who was not afraid to express her likes. As an adult, I see the importance of having these representations in media, and the moment that people live right now; we have the chance to understand about LGBTQIA+ in an indirect way; we have lots of role models in music, TV, movies and social media. We see the improvement in these representations, and I also admire those that in my time decided to start showing some kind of representation. Although it was not necessarily right it was the first step to start this revolution and trace the path in a context traditionally wrong about the idea of being LGBTQIA+. We decided to include the category of LGBTQIA+ representations because from queer critical literacy we can

conceive the different forms of text we can see in them, but most importantly, the challenge they represent in going against the heteronormative and cisgender view that were mostly shown in the past. Additionally, these representations can be also part of the materials we use in the ESL classroom, and they are a very important source of literacy our students use every day not only as a way to improve the language but also to be critical about the realities of the world.

--eliana d. Culture left us very clear the distinction and the expected behaviors that society wanted to see in us. Our families wanted to help us in shaping our thoughts, our manners, our acts, our preferences, our way to dress, our way to interact with others. I think that Diego's family didn't see anything wrong in their games because he was fluid between dolls (girl preference for society) and videogames (men preference for society) and in their minds they justify his games because it was impossible to isolate him just because his gender did not match with the rest of the children at home. So it was ok to play with dolls. In my case, I heard all kinds of reproaches because for my mom, who did not have an academic formation beyond high school, but who was a very religious woman, it was impossible to understand how a girl can behave like a boy. And I know, that should not be the order of things that was the order that society imposed through religious beliefs and that my mom learned and tried to reproduce. As children are left in charge of women while our fathers were working, it was impossible for us not to watch soap operas, a literacy practice that helped us to understand heterosexual relationships, and all the different dramas that can cause to be with somebody else with different social and economic status. Our musical likes were marked by commercial standards but once again they were opposite likes to the ones

expected by society, may people could read that I like boy bands because they were handsome boys, but that was not the real reason, it was that I loved the way they dressed and sometimes I caught myself wishing to have some clothing that they wore in different musical videos. But as we grew up, we also learned about how difficult was being gay. With the time our likes have been arriving to our true likes, focusing on our realities, on our own conception of beauty.

Religion and Queer Critical Literacy

Diego: My parents were educated under the catholic religion and its perceptions of life and morality. My father became atheist at a young age, but my mother, although she has never been completely devoted, she has followed most of its traditions, rites and ideologies.

--eliana d.: I was born in a Protestant Christian Home in Bogotá. My daddy and my mom were Pastors at a Church. I have two older brothers that always took care of me when sharing our time. The ceremony had a pastor, a group of family and friends and some symbols. The Bible was a representation of the word of the Lord present in our lives, the light symbolized the knowledge that will help us in the construction of our family. And finally, a guitar was a representation of the music that will worship God.

Diego. During the writing process of this research, I also saw the influence of religion in --eliana d., not only now but it has been an important aspect throughout her life. In my case, it was different; I just had a period of time of six years from when I was twenty-one to when I was twenty seven years old. In my case, that period of time was a

complete conflict with my sexual orientation, but more specifically, with me as a person. I still believe religion was guilty of the negative perceptions about the LGBTQIA+ community that exists in the world, and especially in the Colombian context. I still believe that religion made me unhappy during that time because I felt wrong and I thought my sexuality was a sin, and therefore, I was a bad person. I still see the same conflict in people I know; and for the same reason I have no interest in being part of a religious group again. However, I learned from this experience that not necessarily a relationship with religion needs to go against the idea of being queer. From --eliana d. I learned that this is something possible. We found that this topic was an important aspect to consider in the research because in a context like Colombia, religion plays an important part in the representations and practices we do not only have inside schools but also in our families.

--eliana d. Different to follow the order of your parents, religion must be a personal space. In our case, Diego preferred to be aside from institutions and labels. I continue constructing that relationship, I do not go to a specific church but I surely read the bible and pray to God. The many questions I had, the many fears I had cultivated through years went off when I started to see from a critical perspective the Bible and I started to question the reasons why the authors wrote those texts that have served to condemn homosexuals. I remembered that all literature texts are written by a person that is immersed into a culture that grows in a context and flows under a powerful political view that authorizes some voices and disavows others.

Coming Out Experiences

--eliana d.: I told my story to my close friends, classmates from my high school and university, and to one of my older brothers, the one who was before me, at that time I was 22 years. My friends got surprised but they supported me, my brother told me something like: "it is ok, you can try, but do not stay there". By this time, one of my cousins saw a picture of me in a social network and she thought I was too masculine. She talked to my mom and told her that possibly I was lesbian. My mother felt really bad, she felt guilty, like a bad mom. my father arrived from work, he saw the scene and said: why are you mom crying? I replied: "I just told my mom that I am homosexual" immediately he sat down and took his head with his hands, and said: "Fortunately, it is not hereditary, when you want to change tell me and we will look for help."

Diego: I came out with my family at the age of 17. The first person I told was my sister, because I felt she knew it. We were always very close, and although she always says she did not have an idea, I still believe she did. After I broke up my first relationship, I was sad and my mother noticed my behavior. One day, after she tried hard to know what was happening, I just told her I was gay. This is a moment I will never erase from my mind, the place, the conversation, the reaction, are all stuck in my mind as it was yesterday. My mother was so confused because of all the misconceptions she had on the topic.

--eliana d. & Diego: In our story, the coming out experience is something cyclical.

Coming out to our families was one of the most important moments of our lives, and it definitely marked a life before and after that experience; however, we have lived other coming out moments through our history, not only because we have faced the situation of talking about identity and address personal topics when meeting new people, but also because we have discovered new ways to understand our lives through the lens of queer critical literacy. In this analysis, we had the chance to explore some of the most relevant scenarios in our lives analyzing those characteristics which let us read the world at specific moments of our lives and our self- discovering being part of the LGBTQIA+ community and what it means to be part of it. As part of these coming out moments, we are also living a new before and after moment in relation to our position as queer scholars wanting to create conditions for justice. As we learned in our conversations, coming out is not always an easy process. We both come from strict religious and machista environments, making it difficult to consider the possibility of being a sexually diverse person.

Our stories find a common place when we found that the first person that listened to us was one of our siblings where we found support, they were our first allies; different to some of the rest of our respective family members that had to go through a learning process with us, where the myths are arriving to an end, and as time passes by, they are learning that queering their lenses does not make of them bad people nor sinners. In any case, a critical perspective in education is necessary so it can transcend to all the contexts out of school, especially families who bring more allies and supporters for the coming generations of kids coming out. The meanings that we gave to our different

coming outs started by our families, it was a jump of faith and the start of our freedom. In our working life, and the way we decided to face our reality with the rest of the world (no family members) there was a difference because of our personalities and our conceptions about what you should share and not were different, but this was also a victory, since our stories transformed our thoughts and we reaffirmed and got totally convinced of showing ourselves as a text.

What you normalize in your environment will be normalized by the ones that are close to you. There, the agency of our lives start at gaining allies of sexually diverse people by sharing how natural is our life as representative of a queer discourse. Deep in our structure there will be behaviors, words, feelings that will be harder to change as they have made part of our essence for so long, those “unnegotiable” parts of ourselves that were constructed under gender thoughts because those beliefs, conceptions, ways to read the world were learned from our parents, however the experience that we had with queer critical literacy led us to start questioning our realities and as time passes by we are getting to a master of using a queer critical lens that allowed us to transform our beliefs, conceptions and practices.

We both experienced the lack of knowledge about LGBTQIA+ realities, and the knowledge that we have gained through the process of this research project is evidence that people can give a chance to these kind of topics spread through the national territory for the sake of thousands of children, teenagers, teachers, administrative staff among other school agents that made part of the LGTBQIA+ community, those agents are daughters, sons, fathers, mothers, members of families, human beings. Finally, this coming out into the academic research community is not different to an advocacy act for

us, we hope to repeat it as many times as we continue discovering a queer critical view of the world to our community from our schools and from our discourse in the academic research worldwide network as teachers researchers and LSLP (literacies in second languages project) members.

Chapter 5. A Discussion on Queer Critical Literacy in the Analysis of LGBTQIA+ Stories: Implications, Limitations and Future Directions

In this research study, we used the idea of queer critical literacy as a way to analyze and explain the characteristics of our stories from the position as LGBTQIA+ members in a journey of self-discovering and positionality in different moments of our lives. In this chapter, we will discuss our findings based on the analysis of our stories in a connection with the literature we reviewed as a way to detail our final interpretation. We based the structure of this chapter using the research question and the categories in our findings.

We will also present the implications of this study in two main fields: literacies in second languages , the connection to ESL instruction and general education in Colombia; additionally we highlighted the importance of the ministry of education in order to make changes that consider the issues of inequity in the educational system. In addition, we will explain the limitations we had while doing this study in queer critical literacy and how to use it to analyze our stories in a duoethnography study. Finally, we will present the possibilities for future research and our final conclusions on the personal experience in doing this research.

Family as a Space for Initial LGBTQIA+ Understanding

It is not possible to deny that the first way to read the world; children reproduce it from their parents. The expressions parents use to name things, places and people are the same their children are going to use later. Children are not really aware of the implications of using this word or another; but they are smart enough to understand

feelings, and parents always have the responsibility of teaching about life principles and values to coexist with the other before they belong to any school.

Many people go through childhood without ever having such conversations. Even as late as high school, many students say that they have never, to their knowledge, had any personal interactions with queer and/or gender-nonconforming people, or they have met queer people but didn't feel comfortable talking with them, or the queer people they met were in no mood to teach them about their identities (Blackburn & Pennell, 2018).

sj Miller has focused helping others understand why we need to choose and use the correct and accurate terms to refer to human beings that have a queer gender or sexual identity (Miller, 2015). It is important that parents earn their children's trust and hold a conversation about the many possibilities they can see out of their homes, parents can express their thoughts about how they think their children should address their relationships in order to clarify certain rules and ideas to them: to do that, it would be mandatory that parents receive any kind of instruction before holding the conversation or that they have an accessible attitude that allow them and their children to consult together, read and withdraw their own conclusions for then to share and arrive to agreements in the conceptualization or realize that they differ without placing the contrast as a reason to fight among them.

It is the family's responsibility to teach the accurate terms from the beginning in order to avoid misconceptions and misrepresentations about, for example, LGBTQIA+ community. The creation of names and the jokes we do in front of children can create

fears to express their likes and desires or can create an excessive rejection to queer expressions which can finish in misunderstandings and unconscious rejections. If a kid cannot talk about sexuality with their parents, it would be inevitable that they experiment out what an adult considered insecure for a boy or a girl.

The Role of the School as a Safe Space for LGBTQIA+ Members

After the first learning experiences at home, children continue their academic lives. Parents choose the educational institution where children should spend most of their days learning under some principles and philosophies that would mark the school practices. In addition, school approaches and practices should match with parents' thoughts. Here in Colombia, there is not much analysis to select the school of the children, most of the time that selection is given under economical or geographical reasons; however those are not the reasons for all cases.

Diego's: He took me to this school because it had a great soccer team.

--eliana d.: I changed my high school because my father believed that it was better to get my graduation from a public institution, if I made it, then university would not be so expensive.

The school is the representation of the system in the students' lives. What a school considers correct became the way a family found to continue projecting its culture in their children's lives. Our families, that accepted Christianism as the base for shaping our behaviors, put us in a contradictory discourse which provoked an inner fight between what we desire and what society allowed.

In short, our societal assumptions about gender and sexuality, not to mention our laws, have always been in tension with the ways many people actually lead their lives. And nowhere has this tension been more pronounced than in our public schools, which have been shaken many times by fierce conflicts over teachers' and students' gender identities. (Blackburn & Pennell, 2018).

Children are known because they cannot dimension properly the effect of their actions and sometimes they behave with cruelty. If at home parents taught us that sexually diverse people are wrong, then they are going to reflect the same kind of thought. Maybe they can hide or they can strongly discriminate against others.

Schools must promote the creation of focus groups where students can learn about what it means to be queer, but also, to raise awareness on the community about what they can do in order to create better conditions for all. These initiatives can also start the reflection of other minority groups so they can work collectively and find opportunities to promote justice. Considering that there is just a little knowledge of LGBTQIA+ students' experiences and its relevance for inclusive learning environments, schools are not aware or interested in addressing these topics or generating the spaces to learn about them (Presscot, 2019). Subsequently, it is necessary to design strategies to support students and generate changes in the manuals at schools considering the struggles and necessities of every member, including the LGBTQIA+ community.

Wargo (2017) pointed at the fact that gender non-conforming middle grades were the target of harassment and at the same time have a lack of access to resources with LGBTQ content. When we think that we were attending institutions that offered an

integral development of the self, that was our right as Colombian kids, we could find that in our lives that integrality was not complete, and where there are not clear policies, violence gets in at sneaky steps; that's why it is also important to separate school from religious discourses, as students know that the majority of people are heterosexual and just a minority are sexually diverse, they can feel supported to express their discriminatory conceptions making of the school a dangerous place for LGBTQIA+ community.

Finally, schools must ask themselves about the role they have in making the process of self-acceptance and recognition of a student's gender and sexual identity easier. If students do not have the support at home, schools should be the scenario that helps, supports and guides. In addition, for those students that are part of the privilege, it is also important to realize how these safe spaces can help them to understand their positions and the possible actions they can make in order to be part of the solution and not the problem.

The Role of the Teacher as an LGBTQIA+ Advocate / Ally and Transformative Agents in the Classroom

As we suggested in our reflection, teachers need training on LGBTQIA+ topics considering that in the Colombian context it is evident the lack of knowledge in this area. It is impossible to conceive that a transformation in the classroom can happen if the teachers are not part of this process. The role and positionality of the teacher is crucial to create these reflections inside the classroom generating a more critical vision of the queer reality at schools. Miller (2015) points out the battle against inequality and

discrimination of people that does not accomplish with the heterosexual assumption demanded by powerful forces in society and he makes a call for other teachers to raise awareness in the importance to become allies in this situation. From our analysis, we found that there is still a need in Colombian teachers to move from the position of knowledge transmitters to agents of social transformations for better conditions to all of the students.

From the position of teachers as advocates, one of the main statements that was present during the interpretation of our stories was the role of the teacher as a text that can be read in the classroom. This reading not necessarily relates to LGBTQIA+ teachers but also to those who play a role as allies looking for intersections in relation to discrimination and relations of power. From our duoethnography study, it was evident the reaffirmation and transformation of this idea for us, and part of that understanding is now reflected in our positionalities on how our stories can be part of a form of literacy that can help students understand LGBTQIA+ realities. As a support and main promoter of this idea in our analysis, Kedley (2015) suggests that teachers need to be aware that students read them causing an influence on the ways they think and act. For this reason, teachers need to develop a critical position over topics such as sex and gender in order to influence positively in the perceptions students have and the practices that institutions use in their daily interactions.

As a conclusion, we would suggest making 3 main changes.

1. Professional development for teachers, administrative staff and collaborators should focus on the right way to name others as a way to show

respect and to make space for all possibilities in the framework of inclusive education; thus people could avoid the costume of making up names to refer to people with different ways to see and live life in relation to sexual orientation or gender expression.

2. Teachers who share long hours of interaction with students and who are in charge of explaining this part of life (Sexuality) should know better and deeply the physical, emotional and cultural implications of living a divergent sexuality from the hegemonic one established and promoted for our culture, the heterosexual. Those sessions should look for developing empathy for the realities and challenges that sexually diverse people have to face everyday at the different contexts where they are.

3. The different activities done at the inner of classrooms should show these realities without spotting them as the central part of the class. For example, in a class where students are learning about different types of energy, they could find descriptions that mention this realities but when it comes to the activity the objective of the questions are not focused on the sexuality of the subjects but on the type of energy that they can use taking into account the geographical characteristics where they live, however the activities can also have questions to check the understanding of the text as we are also developing skills and competences in a foreign language. (See Annex 1). Doing activities of this type will help students to normalize these realities.

The Role Of LGBTQIA+ Representation in the Process of Self-Acceptance and Class Instruction Materials

From our experience, we saw the evolution of these representations in the media, and we could analyze how they play an important role in our self-discovery and acceptance. As this is the result of a duoethnography study, it is also important to connect with the works by the pioneers of this approach. Norris and Sawyer (2020) points out the role of cultural influences, whether made implicit or explicit, are at the core of duo “ethnographies.” Stories of self are employed to provide glimpses of what it means to live within a culture. In this sense, they talk about the influence of television, songs, movies and books in the narratives of stories and dialogues in this type of research.

As part of our findings, the representation of the LGBTQIA+ characters in different means plays an important role in how we understand, conceive and identify with sexual and gender roles. In the classroom, this representation is an opportunity to expand the voices used in the materials and it opens the space for new literacies where queer narratives can also be included as part of the curriculum. Blackburn (2015) explains how queer literature offers new ways of reading the world, new lenses that expose students to new conflicting ideologies about sexuality and gender. These orientations have an objective to go against the already accepted stereotypes of sexuality and gender based on heteronormative and cisgender perspectives and creating limited ideas on how families, home, and society should be.

Wargo (2017) explores how prospective teachers and their students hacked heteronormativity to remix traditional reads of gender expression and identity in literature in a way to contrast the prevalence of heterosexual voices in the traditional stories and literature for children. In the Colombian context as we found, the situation is not different; it is common to constantly use the same examples, roles, and voices that have been in the classroom and families for generations; the idea of hacking the heteronormative in the literature seems like a first step in order to start its implementation in our context. In addition, this study complements our finding in relation to the use of queer narratives as ways to create more critical opportunities for the students, where they can also analyze the figures of power in the original texts and how they can be transformed to new realities, putting them in a position of agents in this change.

One of the main aspects to consider in our study, it is the role of intersectionality and the representations we receive on how LGBTQIA+ characters should look and act. The ideas of representation need to find the balance among all the different characteristics that every person has and stop assuming that there is a generalization in the characteristics that queer people have. From our experience, we found that although we both identified as gay and lesbian, there were other components of our lives that modify our experience, such as race, gender and religion. Shelton (2017) allowed us to understand that belonging to LGBTQIA+ community is not the only thing that affects the way in which we interpret the world as a queer person, there are other characteristics that intersect our persona, besides of being sexually diverse people, we can also belong to other minority groups that are also oppressed by hegemonic

discourses. Following that necessary component, there is then a need to connect race and racism with sexuality, in an effort to promote greater intersectional understandings and actions.

Implications of this study

Connecting It to Critical Literacies in Second Language Research

Critical Literacies in second languages empowers the possibility to change people's perspective on topics that are hardly explored like the ones related to minority issues because of lack of exposure, lack of people dealing with them or because of stereotyped beliefs of a society. Although there are different researchers working on critical literacy in Colombia, there is still a need to keep working on the specific topics of queer phenomena in the country from a critical perspective. This kind of literacy goes deep in the words and allows people to rethink their worlds, recognize that any text is neutral, then this experience takes place as the opportunity to analyze how language forms and social meanings are linked and contribute to the perpetuation of wrong ideas about sexual and gender identity.

Connecting to ESL Instruction and Education in Colombia: Expanding Second Language Research

As part of our research project, queer critical literacy is connected to our own experiences as language learners and teachers. We have found that queer topics are not visible in the materials and practices that teachers usually use in the second language classroom. This is an opportunity to not only create safer spaces for students

at schools, but also to expand the type of materials and topics that teachers can implement while teaching a second language.

It is difficult to think that under conditions of privilege, most teachers are prepared to deal with content related to LGBTQIA+ issues with concepts that they barely manage. It is relevant to say that the way a teacher exposes this topic is crucial with the objective to encourage new practices inside the language classroom in relation with the concept of sexual diversity as a creation from the interaction with others being aware of the heteronormative and cisgender construction of the social practices in Colombia. Being aware of queer critical practices in language classroom is also a possibility to move the class from the literal and limited perception of just learning a language structure and communicative skills to a more integral approach as humans and citizens.

The LGBTQIA+ representation in media is also a space to generate new roles in the materials that teachers use in their classrooms, but also, it is a wakeup call to all the entities in the government in charge of creating the standardized materials used in public education in Colombia such as books and virtual platforms.

Policies in the Ministry of Education in Colombia

As part of the finding in this study, we suggest that the government in Colombia and the ministry of education should have a more open vision on LGBTQIA+ policies inside of schools. Although there are general orientations on how to address sexual and gender topics at schools, there is still a gap in the implementation of standardized policies in relation to sexual class instruction as part of the curriculum and the conditions of justice for all members of the institutions. From our own experience, we found that for most of the teachers, it is not easy to deal with LGBTQIA+ topics,

especially because they do not have the instruction and knowledge on the topic. In addition, it is common to see that practices and regulations at schools such as uniforms, accessories, and bathroom use are designed from a heteronormative and cisgender vision. The implications of this study suggest that policy makers in our country need to create more specific regularizations that schools implement as part of their manuals of coexistence.

Limitations

We will explain the main limitations while doing this research project as an analysis of opportunities to improve and understand the issues that emerged in the process.

Research in 2020: facing a global pandemic

One of the main limitations in our study (but also an opportunity) was the global pandemic for SARS-CoV-2 (Coronavirus) during the year 2020. Our initial design for the research contemplated having students from our schools as participants and members of the diversity groups we wanted to create at our workplaces; however, the need to be in quarantine for some months led us to the decision to work with a duoethnography approach and focus our research to the analysis of our own stories. These changes generated moments of tension but at the same time, they were an opportunity to learn and guide this research to a self-discovering journey to our own reality as LGBTQIA+ members.

Lack of Queer Studies in the Colombian Context

During the process of looking for literature related to queer critical studies, most of the reviews we found were studies in countries like the United States, and it was evident that in Colombia this is a hardly explored topic. Considering the context and the particularities of the families and system education in this country, it was challenging to find data that could relate to our reality, not only in the past but now.

Privilege as Limitation

This study is based on the positions of inequity and the heterosexual and cisgender assumption that has permeated most of the realities in the Colombian context. Although we wanted to make a study that could relate to all the types of sexual and gender diversity, we also found in the process that we were part of privilege scenarios in relation to these assumptions. Intersectionality plays an important role in queer studies, they are not different; they are connected. Being cisgender is part of the privilege in where we have lived, and we think that although we feel empathy and we position ourselves in favor of the trans community, our stories do not reflect the real struggles and needs for them.

Future Research: Probabilities and Recommendations

LGBTQIA+ Students and their Positionalities

As we mentioned in the limitations, the initial idea for this research suggested the use of high school students as the participants of the study. Although in our study we

analyzed our own perceptions as students when we were in high school, the contexts and possibilities have changed a lot during the last 20 years. We consider that it is important to keep the research from the perspectives and positionalities of the new LGBTQIA+ generations.

Trans/ Non-Binary Studies in Colombia

In the development of this research, we always used the complete acronym LGBTQIA+ referring to the context of our study. We understand the intersectionality of our study and the importance of tackling the queer phenomena as a whole. However, the analysis of our stories left a space in relation to the specific context for Trans/ non-binary people in our country. As we mentioned in our analysis, even for the gay community in Colombia, there is a lack of knowledge and empathy for the Trans realities, especially in this context where the conditions of justice are even more difficult for them.

LGBTQIA+ Representations in Colombia

Representations are the most important factor to develop a symbolic language that allows us to communicate with others without having to explain too much. The representation we had, when we were young, came from the perspective of a North American person, at least the representations we preferred came from abroad. Colombia still has a very strong influence of religious views which limits the production of LGBTQIA+ representations in television, books, music, among other cultural artifacts to expand this reality in a massive way.

Conclusions

This duoethnography study is the result of an analysis in depth of two life stories that as a common factor had the condition of being sexually diverse. The purpose of this study was to analyze our stories through the lens of queer critical literacy, a concept that emerged after the correlation of critical literacy and queer theory characteristics. The study reflected the main characteristics of how we read, conceived, and positioned ourselves in three main specific moments of our lives: our family as the first scenario to understand the bases of our vision of the world, our experience in schools as students and the role of education in the process of the self determination of our sexual orientation and our experience as teachers and scholars looking to position ourselves as advocates in our contexts. Additionally we found the importance of representations in cultural references and media as part of the understanding of concepts and self-identification with our own sexually diverse reality. We also found that these representations can be also used as part of the literacy practices, materials and roles that teachers can use in the classroom expanding the possibility of voices in the language classroom and also opening the space for a more critical approach in order to create more equitable spaces and a sense of justice.

As part of the methodology of this study, we used spontaneous narratives of our stories in a shared document where we could read each other in order to find similarities and differences and analyze the different reasons why our stories took that specific path in relation to the discovering and acceptance of our own sexual orientation taking into account the characteristics of a queer critical lens that helped us to realize about the hegemonic structures through the ones we had to surf and the effects in our lives at

suspending the cisgender and heteronormative nature of our culture to live our lives with self-determination for the sake of our happiness. We also included an unstructured conversation that we later transcribed as a way to find the answer to gaps we found after reading each other's story. The question we used to guide our research was: What are the conclusions after analyzing the journeys and roles of two LGBTQIA+ life stories through queer critical literacy in a duoethnography study?

The findings in this study showed that the positionalities of our families and schools did not play a relevant part in the identification of our own identity making it more difficult to embrace it at a time where queer representations were almost non-existent. Culture has a great impact in the development of sexually diverse people. Factors like gender, race, religion, economic status, among others shape the way that people think, behave, dress, and express. Political powers authorize some manners and disavow some others that equally exist and should not be banned; this action is reflected in different settings, even the school that is in charge of educating people denies the possibility of seeing queer discourses that promote more critical views. The school became a tool for the powerful to continue reproducing policies that maintain the same order, where the powerful maintains its place.

This study may be a reference for other researchers working with the implications of using a queer critical perspective to address LGBTQIA+ topics in the classroom and its relevance to create safer spaces in and out of the school. It is also an invitation to teachers to be aware of the importance of understanding and include LGBTQIA+ topics in their classes, so they subsequently can transform the policies in the manuals of coexistence in their schools.

Analyzing our Stories to Queer Critical Literacy: A Personal Study and its Meaning to Us

--eliana d. this study has been an amazing journey where discovering about myself have emerged through the constant questioning of the context where I lived, and I had lived. At the beginning of this journey, my expectations were others. I was worried about how to make my students learn a second language easier and funnier, but the different courses related to social issues called my attention. The second does not exclude the first one, both things were important to me. On the other hand, I am a mom of a sexually diverse teenager, and I love to see that he has more opportunities than I had to express himself in a queer way. As a mom with a critical perspective of our life, I had to teach my boy how to read the world critically and how to remove brushwood from the roots. This study is an advocacy act to me, children are the most vulnerable part of society, they need adults to guide their steps towards their own happiness and school must accomplish its job of providing an integral education. This is also a way to point to a blind spot in education that needs to be covered. Last, but not least, this research was a shared journey that taught me the importance of an open attitude to learn about those things that are isolated from our reality for a reason that need to be found.

Diego. This study represents a journey to the past in which I have the opportunity to embrace every moment and understand why they were relevant to who I am now; it was a therapeutic experience. Several times in my life I have regretted or wished some things would have been different but just until now I appreciate every one of them. This experience also gave me the clarity to understand and thank all of the participants in my life story, this has been a cycle of experience where now I can go back and be in peace

with the past. As a teacher, the journey in discovering how queer critical literacy could bring something new and purposeful to my academic life was a coming out experience, it was a wakeup call to realize that my job as a teacher goes beyond a curriculum. It also opened a lot of questions on what else needs to be done; this journey is not over and there is much to learn and grow. This experience also brought people around who helped me and made the experience easier for a new researcher: all of the authors, the LSPL Legion, our mentor, Dr. Mora, and of course, --eliana d., and the best partner I could have joined in this ride. All of them are proof that research is not a lonely act; it is a chance to work together and learn from the others. Finally, this research also gave me hope that all situations of inequity and lack of justice in my country can be different but as teachers, we need to have the commitment to be part of the change and not the problem.

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Authors' Biography

--eliana d. teaches at a public institution in Medellin. She holds a bachelor degree in Foreign Language Teaching from Universidad de Antioquia and she is also an M.A Candidate in Learning and Teaching Processes In Second Languages at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. She has an experience in teaching for the past 8 years, including private and public education. She is a researcher at the Literacies in Second Languages Project. Her research conceptualizes queer critical literacy as a way to promote advocacy for the LGBTQIA+ community in public education. She is willing to continue working and researching about queer critical literacy, duoethnography and advocacy.

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Diego Alexander Zapata-Pescador works with the Secretary of Education of Medellin. He has a bachelor degree in Language Teaching from Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira and he is also an M.A. candidate in Learning and Teaching Processes in Second Languages at UPB-Medellín. He has been a teacher since 2007 including his experience in private and public schools and universities in Pereira and Medellin-Colombia. He belongs to the Literacies in Second Languages Project. His research uses queer critical literacy to advocate for the LGBTQIA+ community in public education. He is currently in the process of keep the process of writing about queer critical literacies and duoethnography and promote actions inside of his school.