

Perceptions of Spanish EFL¹ trainee teachers on the introduction of queer issues in the classroom

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Abstract

In this paper we pursue to know how EFL teacher trainees perceive the introduction of queer issues within their teaching practices. The qualitative study has been conducted at the University of Granada (Spain) with ten would-be teachers who are in their final year of university studies and have completed their school practi-

ce period. In order to underpin this research we analyse the postulates of Queer Theory for the pedagogical field, some of the Spanish educational foundations regarding gender, and the roles played by teachers to implement these practices.

Keywords: Gender; Queer Theory; teacher training; English as a Foreign Language; Spanish educational system.

1 EFL stands for English as a Foreign Language

1. Introduction

The increased visibility of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersexual, transgender) people in Spain is an expression of freedom of speech and sexuality reflecting that they are relevant and that they are fighting for their rights. But this has been reflected neither in the educational system nor in everyday educational practices. This is a case of submerged discrimination because we understand that omission is equal to discrimination. As Malinowitz points out,

Leaving sexual identity out of the classroom is not an accident, it is an expression of institutionalized homophobia, enacted in a classroom not randomly but systematically, with legal and religious precedents to bolster it and intimidate both teachers and students (1995: 23).

The body of research on the concept of gender in the teaching and learning processes as the result of the feminist and Gay & Lesbian movements is still a marginal issue within the Spanish university system of foreign language teacher training, since it is quite an academic and theoretical debate and has not been put into practice. Most of the gender information provided to students focuses on distinguishing cultural roles assigned to men and women. We need to use education to foster tolerance towards other people, to be aware of the existence of the Other, and to recognize the Other in ourselves as the result of a complex psychological and cultural process of internalization of differences in a multicultural world.

In this work we present a study of how a sample of EFL teacher trainees from Granada University (Spain) perceive the introduction of queer issues within the general trend of the curriculum in Primary Education. These views could affect their own education because the demand of queer issues content should impregnate their training period at university. This work is important because it is the first of its class to be carried out in Spain, due to the fact that it is still an emergent field of research.

Our aim with this work is twofold. We pursue the comprehension first of how EFL teacher trainees perceive the introduction of queer issues within their teaching practices and second of the fighting of heteronormativity and homophobia in teacher training at the university level. Homophobia, explicit or latent, should be avoided to prevent labelling and we need to gain a better understanding on how people's own preconceptions and notions of sexuality and gender have been shaped by their culture.

2. Epistemological and pedagogical contexts

There have been various attempts to introduce the gender perspective in the foreign language area in Spain, but we cannot affirm that there is a clear-cut position on it. When addressed, it focuses just on the binary position man-woman, and this is a very constraining perspective, for believing that gender is a matter of talking of men and women is a distorted view of the issue (a sample of this can be appreciated in the work of García, 2006). This narrow conception contributes to maintaining the traditional, dual system of gender where people who do not conform to these categories are hardly accepted and are widely considered as different/Others and hence, discriminated against (Guasch, 2000). Therefore, it is the lack of a real pedagogical approach to rethinking about the traditional binaries or labelling that drives our efforts toward a more open perspective in our classes, based mostly on the premises of Queer Theory. It provides us with some challenging critical ideas on the traditional conceptions on gender. It goes beyond the idea of duality: man vs. woman; heterosexual vs. homosexual, etc. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler, grounding on Foucault and Derrida, provides us with the notion of performativity and understands gender as variable and changeable according to things we say and do and not in terms of inherent identity. It is through this perspective that we can try to dismantle tra-

ditional discourses on gender discrimination, violence, homophobia, patriarchy, or heterocentrism.

A review of the literature reveals an emphasis on two basic ways of addressing LGBT questions in educational contexts. This may well be done by following a poststructuralist view on sexual identities which includes, either pedagogies of inclusion (Gay and Lesbian theoretical framework), or pedagogies of inquiry (Queer Theory).

So far, the Gay and Lesbian theoretical framework is mainly associated with the introduction of “authentic images of gays and lesbians” (Britzman, 1995: 158) in curricular materials. Nelson questions this approach to classroom practice by arguing that although it is well intentioned, there are still many gaps. She underlines several objections:

How is a lesbian to be represented in curricula or materials? Which characters or characteristics will be included, which excluded? If these representations come only from the target culture, are they sufficiently inclusive? Will teachers, teacher educators, and material developers have the knowledge to be able to include sexual minorities? Will students consider such inclusions relevant to their own lives and to their needs as language learners? After inclusive references are made, what happens next? Who decides? (1999: 376-377).

Through this approach, one perceives that the inclusion of gay and lesbian issues in the classroom is made in a patchwork fashion. Facts concerning gays and lesbians are thus considered as funny and interesting anecdotes to silence real problems. Nelson commits herself to Queer Theory and draws on poststructuralist identity theories to form the theoretical framework for classroom practice by acknowledging that the domain of sexual identity may be important to a range of people for a range of reasons; examining not only subordinate sexual identities but also the dominant one(s); looking at divergent

ways of producing and reading sexual identities in various cultural contexts and discourses; identifying prevailing, competing, and changing cultural norms that pertain to sexual identities; exploring problematic and positive aspects of this identity domain; and, considering sexual identity in relation to other acts of identity and vice versa (1999: 377).

Within the area of foreign languages, in the last two decades there has been a growing interest (see Carscadden *et al.*, 1995; Nelson, 1991, 1992a, 1992b; Summerhawk, 1998; García, 2006; Guijarro, 2006; Guijarro & Ruiz, 2011) in introducing gender/queer issues. Most of the efforts concentrate on the development of gay-friendly pedagogies, materials and teaching practices in order to create more meaningful environments for those who identify themselves as lesbian, bisexual, or gay; interact with gay people at work, at school, at home, or on the street; and encounter lesbian or gay issues simply by watching television or reading a magazine (Nelson, 1999: 372).

By means of the Queer Theory, educators are provided with a more flexible theoretical scaffold for addressing sexual identity topics in the intercultural contexts of ELT. Moreover, “on a practical level, inquiry may be more doable than inclusion because teachers are expected not to have all the answers but rather to frame questions, facilitate investigations, and explore what is not known” (Nelson, 1999: 377).

In a nutshell, by means of looking at the way identities are constructed, we can demystify the preconceptions around them. Accordingly, EFL and culture are seen as heterogeneous and changing, and sexual identities are depicted from an intercultural perspective, widening ethnocentric standpoints. From an educational point of view, this serves to “remind learners and teachers that identities are, after all, not truths, facts, or things but theoretical constructs ‘that arise at specific times, in specific places, to do specific work’” (Poynton, 1997: 17; in Nelson, 1999: 379).

2.1. Relevant research in the European context

To our knowledge no studies have been carried out about this topic in the field of foreign languages in the Spanish context. Notwithstanding, some research conducted in the general education and generalist teacher training gives us clear evidence on the attitude and prejudices of Spanish people toward sexual differences. In 2007, a study titled *Actitudes ante la diversidad sexual de la población adolescente de Coslada (Madrid) y San Bartolomé de Tirajana (Gran Canaria)* [Attitudes towards sexual diversity among teenagers of Coslada (Madrid) and San Bartolomé de Tirajana (Gran Canaria)] was conducted. The general findings of this survey reveal that girls are far less homophobic than boys and that the knowledge of queer people favors positive attitudes toward them. Especially relevant is the affirmation of one boy who said: “odiar a los maricones nos hace más machos” [Hating queers makes us more machos]. This is a troubling rejection of transgendered people. It is also relevant that two thirds of the gay boys declare that they have suffered homophobic bullying. Being religious is a variable which leads to being more homophobic, the same as to having been born outside of Spain. The only family pattern recognized by students is that of the heterosexual family with children, whilst some other forms like one-parent families are not considered when they are, in fact, the most common pattern in Spain. They also reject homosexual couples with children. It is extremely important to mention the unmistakable approval on the part of parents because they considered it to be good for the education of their children, since these topics are rarely discussed at home. Teenagers declare that they would like to have more information on these issues at school because they only get slanted information from mass media, friends, or the Internet. Thus, we deduce that there is a real need of future teachers so that they can provide (in)formation to their students when they become in-service teachers.

The study called *Evaluación de Contenidos LGBT en la Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación de Málaga* (2009) [Evaluation of LGBT Content in the Faculty of Education of Málaga] (just 150 km from Granada) (academic year 2007-2008) is quite enlightening for this research. Relevant is the position of the researchers who claim that queer issues should be taught at school from primary education because waiting for secondary education, as most teachers believe, may be quite late as most prejudices are already established in their psychological development. Moreover, there is a call to formally integrate these contents within the general curriculum design of the most convenient school subjects.

Another interesting European study is that carried out by Røthing & Svendsen (2010) in which the authors, through classroom observations in some Norwegian secondary schools, checked the level of homotolerance and heteronormativity in these classrooms. They found out that Norwegian education focuses on the Other and never discusses Us. Norwegian secondary schools claim to be homotolerant, but the authors argue that by keeping the binary system (homosexuality/heterosexuality; men/women) as fixed identities and the otherness separated from Us they actually reinforce the privileged position of heterosexuality.

Plainly, it is acknowledged that because teachers lack specific training to address these requirements, universities should train future teachers in education in tolerance. When it comes to LGBT issues, academic staff should be trained in matters relating to gender, homosexuality, the needs of LGBT students and society, strategies to prevent violence, psychological bases for possible crises, and appropriate strategies to fight homophobia. This meets the strategies devised by Summerhawk (1998) to help teachers in the introduction of LGBT topics in the class without implying a demanding challenge to normal practices.

3. Method

3.1. Context

This research was conducted at the Faculty of Educational Studies of Granada University, located in the South of Spain. Founded in 1531, this institution is ranked among the best in the country with an outstanding image in Europe. Some 80,000 students are registered yearly.

3.2. Participants

A total of 10 students—5 women (50%) and 5 men (50%)—participated on a voluntary basis in this study. At the time of completion of the questionnaire all of them were in their third year (final year) of the Degree in TEFL for Primary Education. For this reason, they have all completed at least 4 months of Teaching School Practice in Primary schools in the city of Granada.

The age of participants ranged from 21 to 42, with a mean age of 26.7. When it comes to sexual orientation, they identified themselves as heterosexual (70%), homosexual (20%), and bisexual (10%). 50% of the participants declared that they were unemployed and 50% had a remunerated job in different sectors such as teaching, personal assisting or dancing monitoring. Politically speaking, 40% of the students expounded that

they voted for a left-wing party, 30% of the participants voted for a moderate (centre) political party, and the rest 30% voted for a right-wing political party. With respect to religion, 50% of the participants were Christian-catholic, 30% atheist, and 20% agnostic, having been Christianized by their parents.

3.3. Procedure

We selected 10 students at random (out of 75) considering gender equity: 5 men and 5 women. Once we chose them from the list, we asked if they would mind completing the questionnaire designed for this research. They were given two weeks to reflect upon the target issues and answer them in depth. During the month of March 2010, all the questionnaires were returned to us.

3.4. Instrument

We have implemented a modified version of Ideas about Gay and Lesbian Issues in a School Setting (section V) of the interview protocol elaborated by Soloff (2001) where we have added question number 1 and modified some other questions to adapt them to the field of EFL. Originally, the questionnaire referred to gay and lesbian people but we opted for queer people, since we adopt a Queer Theory perspective in our edu-

TABLE 1

Participants and independent variables

Participant Gender	Age	Sexual orientation	Employment	Political views	Religion
Man 1 (M1)	33	Gay	Unemployed	Left wing	Agnostic
Man 2 (M2)	24	Gay	Unemployed	Left wing	Atheist
Man 3 (M3)	30	Heterosexual	Teacher	Left wing	Atheist
Man 4 (M4)	26	Heterosexual	Dancing monitor	Right wing	Atheist
Man 5 (M5)	24	Heterosexual	Sports monitor	Left wing	Christian Catholic
Woman 1 (W1)	21	Bisexual	Unemployed	Centre	Agnostic
Woman 2 (W2)	21	Heterosexual	Unemployed	Right wing	Christian Catholic
Woman 3 (W3)	25	Heterosexual	Unemployed	Right wing	Christian Catholic
Woman 4 (W4)	42	Heterosexual	Personal assistant	Centre	Christian Catholic
Woman 5 (W5)	21	Lesbian	Post office	Centre	Christian Catholic

cational practices and research projects.

FIGURE 1

Questionnaire: Ideas about gay and lesbian issues in a school setting

1. Is sexual identity relevant for being a good English teacher? Why?
2. Is talking about queer people in the EFL classroom the same as talking about sex?
3. Is it ever appropriate to discuss queer issues in the EFL classroom? And if so, at what level is it appropriate to discuss them?
4. What are the dangers of talking about queer people with children? What are your concerns?
5. Have you ever discussed the issue of queerness in an EFL class?
 - a. If yes, could you tell me some more about it? How did your class respond? Did you have any concerns at the time?
 - b. If not, why do you think this is the case? Would you feel comfortable presenting material on queer people in your classroom? Why or why not? Would you include it in the curriculum?
6. What would you need to feel comfortable including queer issues in the EFL curriculum?
7. Do you think it is appropriate to use books or other EFL materials portraying queer people?
8. Do you think that an EFL teacher should work to prevent prejudicial attitudes toward homosexuality, queerness? Is that part of the teacher's role?

3.5. Data analysis

Answers to questionnaires have been analysed using content analysis. Each answer was read carefully by the researchers and recurrent and unique topics were identified to put them in dialogue with previous theory and studies. When differences of gender, age, sexual orientation, employment, religious or political views appeared, data were structured to account for these trends.

4. Analysis and discussion of results²

Teachers are encouraged to deal with diversity in the classroom, but from the results of this study we suspect that the reality is far different from the postulates of Educational Laws. This situation is mainly due to the lack of (in)formation to address these issues in the EFL classroom and not to a conscious homophobic position. In the past, and even in present times, it was generally believed by conservative teachers that talking about sexuality was synonymous with sexual intercourse. But, nowadays, we need to clarify, following Smith (1997), that sexuality is a complex term involving subjects of being and identity and not simply sex.

As pointed out by Khayatt (1994), gay students have a more difficult adolescence than straight students because they feel even more confined by the pressure to conform, and believe that an essential part of them is being dismissed, despised or deleted from school life. Given this fact, the results of this study are especially relevant because we advocate that from our field of work something can be done to prevent these discriminatory situations. Uribe explains that gay students "are perhaps the most underserved students in the entire educational system... discrimination often interferes with their personal and academic development" (1994: 112). For this reason, fighting homophobia is beneficial for both LGBT and straight people. As for straight students, they could be negatively affected because they may grow with the feeling of hate and narrow-mindedness toward homosexuals. As Grayson (1987) comments, homophobia makes heterosexual boys conceive narrow limits of gender or sex roles. This situation may lead them to discriminate against girls when it comes to sports or other facets of life out of fear of being considered gay.

To begin with, all the participants agree with the fact that sexual identity is not relevant to be

2 In this section we have reproduced literally some of the answers provided by the would-be teacher participants. For this reason, these quotations are subject to have some grammatical or discursive mistakes.

a good teacher no matter the age, gender, sexual orientation or political views of the teacher trainees. What can be perceived from the answers of participants is that when they talk about sexual identity, they usually refer to homosexuality, not making explicit that it could also include heterosexuality. Also highlighted is the fact that pedagogical skills or the moral quality of a teacher is what makes him or her valuable as a professional. M4 reveals a quite homophobic posture “[i]t does not affect the teaching practice, unless the teacher were some of pederast.” Some of the features they emphasize as important for a teacher are a good knowledge of the subject (W3), being a good person (W3) and “to have some skills” (W4). Sexual identity is conceived by one female student as “... who you like to go to bed with.” Thus sexual identity is still associated, in some cases, with the sexual act, which turns out to be quite striking for our study. Notwithstanding, this narrow view on sexuality does not seem to have a very negative effect on this person when answering the questions. As claimed by Robinson & Ferfolja,

[p]re-service teachers reflect on their life experiences in relation to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, and so on, across a variety of contexts including family, work, school, and personal relationships (2001: 123).

This posture of Australian students is not that clear with our would-be teachers when they say that “... we should focus in the teaching practice and put on the side some other questions which do not affect this practice.” There is evidently a clearly cut distinction among the public and private spheres of identity.

Regarding the resemblance between sex and LGBT, our participants’ responses are quite unanimous. We cannot say that our teacher trainees support the idea proposed by Hinson of hipersexualization, which means that sex is the centre of every discourse around queer people. In that sense, our students adopt rather a queer perspective. Among the pillars for this argumen-

tation, repression (M1) and taboo (M2) appear to be pivotal in Spanish society (at least, that is their perception). It is not very unusual to say this in Spain since it is predominantly Roman Catholic. Notwithstanding, we cannot forget that the Spanish Constitution (1978) declares the country as a secular state. In this respect, M1 puts forward that “... Spanish people are quite repressed to talk about any topic related to sex.” Discussing sexual identity is also conceptualized as another aspect of a whole person’s identity, together with other personal factors. Besides, there is a need to de-problematize these issues within classroom discourses. In fact, the school setting is viewed as an adequate arena to fight against homophobia, as it is, at the same time, a place where homophobic discourses and bullying emerge. M2’s position is more ethical as he reasons that

[t]here is always a moral fact which affects our attitudes, but we should ignore them and adjust our behaviour to the law. We must respect all the attitudes, cultures and religions when they are not against of current law.

M3 stresses the urgent need for debating about diversity in general, explaining that:

We must speak about tall people, and fat, thin, small, funny, boring people. We must speak to our students about gays and, because we are all part of the same cultural context. They mustn’t be uncomfortable.

W5 remarks that there is a need to change classroom discourses and a need to fight against the hipersexualisation of homosexuality. She points out that “[i]n elementary school nowadays they are talking about them”, but that this was something different when she was at elementary education. In the university context, the atmosphere is freer and there is no problem in discussing sex and homosexuality as two related but not identical terms. There are no big differences in the thinking of our informants if we consider the diverse independent variables of this study: gender, age, sexual orientation, em-

ployment, political views, or religion. The position is quite odd when it comes to women because there is one who suggests that sexual orientation is to be addressed as something experiential. This is what Butler (1990) or Nelson (1999) uphold: sexual identity in terms of what we do or say and not in terms of what we are.

In spite of agreeing on the introduction of sexual identities within EFL classroom practices (highlighted by the 10 students as, for example, in M2's answer: "... it is appropriate to make the pupils know the different sexual options and to make them understand that all of them are at the same level and that there are not better sexual options than others"), when the issue of when arises, there are some divergent perspectives. For example, one gay man says that these topics should be introduced from the very beginning in the form of equalizing discourses: "it would be appropriate since they start school" (M2); one heterosexual man considers the age of 10-12 (pre-adolescence) as the right time to begin to talk about this. The reason given is very interesting from a queer perspective since he insists that: "... we must teach to live together with everything and everybody that lives in contact with our environment" (M3).

Although with our reduced sample we cannot make generalizations, which is not our aim, we can interpret this divergence in terms of experiential sexuality of gay and heterosexual men. We could affirm, in this case, that the gay man may have suffered from homophobic bullying when he was a very young boy and that is why he commits himself to talking about these topics from the very beginning. It is very interesting to consider that they also envisage these practices as excellent to prevent homophobic attitudes in children (W2). The same opposed views are true for women. From the answers we deduce that even if they consider appropriate the inclusion of queer issues in the Primary classroom discourses, there is a manifest lack of training or psychological formation, which allows them to

specify the grade at which it should be treated. W3 assures that "... these issues are normal topics that children talk about. And adults should not hide the topic as if it were wrong." Sexuality is thus viewed as experienced by children also. This is considered by Guasch (2000) as one of the central pillars of patriarchy and heterosexuality as it is a perfect way to configure sexuality: sexuality is restricted to adulthood.

Nonetheless, the strongest opposition to dealing with queer subjects comes from students' families. M2 is of the opinion that "... what we talk to them could go against what they hear at their homes." That is why he argues that "... teachers have to follow the law." In the same line, M3 states that "we must be careful with parents because they can have a different opinion to mine." Again, M5 acknowledges that

the problem of talking to children of this issue may be that parents do not agree with us. Some parents think in different ways and don't want these areas to be addressed with their children in class.

Thus, although educational laws allow the treatment of these topics in schools, among Spanish families and in-service teachers there is still quite a conservative view mainly due to the lack of (in)formation. A fact worthy of note is signaled by informant M4 (26 years old, heterosexual, atheist and conservative), who warns us that children may self-access these topics in a wrong way, full of stereotypes and prejudices. M4 ascertains that the main problem is not the opposition of families, but the possibility of children learning about these issues by themselves:

I think that we should talk to them about the matter because otherwise they will learn it themselves and this could be dangerous as far as misunderstanding possibilities are concerned.

It is noteworthy that besides the legal support mentioned earlier in this paper, there is also a conceptual and pedagogical framework highly developed in the field of foreign languages, na-

mely that of multiculturalism. As M1 suggests,

[i]t is important to start avoiding prejudices when we talk with children about gay people and not allow them to express themselves in a bad way if they talk about that. They must get ready to share a multicultural society.

This is necessary to develop satisfactorily positive attitudes in a multicultural society, which is the cultural reality nowadays in Spain. For one female student the only problem about this issue is that homosexuality has been hidden for a long time in the Spanish culture, referring mainly to the effects of Spanish Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975). This veiling of sexual differences is what makes them appear as secret, morbid and why we are not used to verbalizing them. Again, there are no considerable dissimilarities among students in terms of gender, age, sexual orientation, employment, political views, or religion.

W5 thinks that families are the main danger and is afraid of their reaction because they usually consider that the topic of sexual identities should not be learnt at school. She also adds that despite the hypothetical problems posed by families, talking about gays and lesbians in the classroom may be beneficial to consider family diversity: "... is very important to talk about it with children because it can affect in the types of families..." W3 doesn't "... find any danger in talking about this issue with children, because this is a reality that they should know earlier than later." W4 admits that "... this topic should be under debate from time to time in order to encourage new and different attitudes," though she has a special concern about the most suitable age for tackling this topic.

From the data provided by the students, we appreciate that the majority of them have discussed homosexuality in class (though only two have done it outside the university). Just one gay student claims that people did not find the debate appropriate when he was in secondary education. M2 says:

once in the University, because I wrote an essay about homosexuality in the schools and at which we were trying to prove that teaching about homosexuality in the schools could be as important as giving it about disable people. The gay phenomenon is something invisible but many children suffer the consequences of the ignorance and really have traumatic experiences, and the adults do not do anything to make their life easier. For a homosexual child, who is realizing about his or her own sexuality, accepting it is hard enough, specially when the environment around him or her, emphasizes how different he or she is all the time, just because is not feeling attracted by the gender at which he or she should.

The others who did talk about queer issues affirm that people showed positive attitudes toward it. Remarkable are the terms that popped up in discussions: invisibility, suffering, ignorance, traumatic experiences, acceptance, hardship, acquisitioned... M4 admits to having discussed about homosexuality in a university course and "[m]ost of the people thought homosexuality was acquired. I just didn't mind because I like gay people (and lesbian)." These are all highly interesting terms which can be easily introduced in the classroom discourses in order to deal with sexual identities. It is through discourses that we can adhere to the postulates of queer pedagogy, which, in our opinion, are axiologically valuable to address these matters. In this area of knowledge, i.e., foreign language teacher training, we want to comment on the supporting ideas of one of the female respondents (42, heterosexual, personal assistant, centre political ideas, Christian Catholic). W4 reveals that she came across these topics once when talking about sex discrimination and AIDS: "... we have spoken about sex discrimination, or AIDS. People in my class responded in different ways." This is a major handicap in some societies, as they tend to relate homosexuality to AIDS. AIDS is still one of the powerful weapons used by the homophobic community when they want to demonize queer people. Even in Spain where AIDS is much

more associated with drug addiction, people always associate it with homosexuality, against the medical and sociological studies which determine that the majority of people who suffer from AIDS are heterosexual.

A controversial and relevant topic they have had to answer is the appropriateness of using books or other materials depicting lesbian and gay people. Although there is a general consensus for it, we find some voices that add interesting reflections on the topic. A gay student is hesitant because students might get a wrong view on queer people. Following a reasonably queer position, he says that he “is not sure because they could get a wrong impression about that”, otherwise, he adds “But if the book is appropriate for them why not using it” (M1). This connects with Nelson (1999) who exposes how a gay or lesbian is to be presented in a book. M2 is in favor of using models for children:

I strongly agree with using them [...] giving good models, even if they get good feeling toward them, like kindness, we will get the homosexuality closer to them and they will see it in a natural way and talking about that won't be anymore a need. This is what has been happening on TV, where we could see homosexual people, and in a very short period we have seen a huge change in the people's minds toward homosexuality.

Another heterosexual male student opposes the idea because he considers that using special materials makes the topic somehow extraordinary and he considers that it must be treated with absolute normalcy, integrating the topics within the general flow of the course. M4 envisages it as part of the curriculum, avoiding the need to use special materials:

If we used special material we would be expressing that this is a special matter. It should be included in the textbook or whatever tool we use as one of the contents.

M3 thinks it fits perfectly if dealing, for example, with parts of the body or speaking about the family. One heterosexual woman suggests

that it would be fine to use photos, but both of homosexual and heterosexual people. The dominant posture of the participants reveals that there is a growing preoccupation with the out of the ordinary tag that may be unconsciously implied. This may problematize marginal sexualities, because when we discuss sexual identities, heterosexual discourses are also of pedagogical interest. W3 discloses that “the books should include materials portraying the society and this includes heterosexual and homosexual people.” This is a very queer position since there is a claim to problematize not only marginal homosexuality but also heterosexuality. This corresponds to Nelson's ideas (1999) as she states that not only subordinate sexualities must be analyzed but also dominant ones, referring to heterosexuality, as the central sexual orientation which always intends to condemn homosexuality. As noted by Robinson & Ferfolja (2001) there is a tendency to adopt a universal model of queer pedagogy that discloses the binary Heterosexual Us – Homosexual Them devised by Sedgwick (1990).

As far as the teachers' role is concerned, there is a general agreement that one of his or her roles is to prevent prejudicial attitudes toward homosexuality. The general idea of students is that promoting respect and tolerance for all is part of the teacher's work. The supporting opinions are very interesting for our study and quite revealing. The answer of M2 is comparatively elaborate and helpful:

This is a must in the general teacher's work, either about homosexuality or any other fact which could hurt the mental and physical children's health. This not a teacher's role, it ought to be a general role of the society. Everybody should feel implicated to defend children and take care about their rights. With the new family models, we are going to find children with two mothers or two fathers, divorced parents, just one mother or one father. The teachers have to add to their speech all those models, otherwise they would be discriminating one part of the classroom, which is going to be bigger in a not very far-away future.

This gay male suggests that it may be beneficial for preventing mental and physical disorders in gay students. He goes beyond and adds that this is not only the role of teachers, but also the role of the entire society because it is a matter of children's right to feel free. Besides, the new family models call for a non-traditional approach toward it since our students may belong to a one-parent family, same-sex couples, divorced parents, etc. If we do not include these discourses in the classroom, he adds, part of the students will be discriminated. In this sense, Grayson (1987) adduced that homophobia is not only damaging for gay students, but also for heterosexual students who grow up narrow-minded, with fear and hatred. M₄ talks about the importance of the teacher who "... must show students that prejudicial attitudes only contribute to make our mind smaller." For example, W₁ puts forth that "it is important that the teacher has a very objective point of view on the topic. Also I think that the most important role is part of the family." For this bisexual female, teachers' role must be accompanied by that of families. She even considers the latter as more important than the former. A heterosexual woman (W₂) goes beyond homophobia and asserts that the role of teachers is not only preventing homophobia, but all kinds of prejudicial behavior: "We cannot forget that our pupils are the citizens of the future and we do not want a homophobic society." And when it comes to English teachers, it is made clear that they do not only teach a new language or culture, but they must contribute to a broader education of students: "An English teacher not only teaches a new language, rather contributing to a solid education" (W₄). The position of M₅ could summarize the general impression: "Promoting respect for all is part of the teacher's role."

If we draw all of these comments together, we can infer that our would-be teachers are individuals with a high awareness of sexual differences in life and in the educational system. This fact leads them to be open to new learning cha-

llenges. It is especially relevant that they see sexual differences as learning opportunities to create a more democratic society where people are addressed with a desire and an openness to learn. They are empathetic and ready to picture the world from others' point of view. Summing up, we could affirm that our students are initially competent to address queer topics in the classroom and that is why they ask for a more explicit training at tertiary level.

5. Conclusions

The work presented in this paper is the product both of a personal and a scientific position acquired through deep reflexive processes. It is not an easy task to carry out this type of research within the Spanish educational system, since sexual identity topics are still considered to be marginal within the area of Foreign Languages. We are aware that this is an arduous task, but we are sure about the benefits of these queer practices from an axiological and educational point of view. Through these experiences, we get the impression that we are creating a favorable milieu for the always-silenced subjects, i.e., queer people.

The authors of this article wish to make a call for teachers to begin talking about sexual identities in the classroom as a means of fighting intolerant attitudes toward LGBT people in society and in the educational system. But it is not only the responsibility of teachers to do so; the main part must be played first by government policies on education and secondly, by the powerful and dominant publishing houses.

The experience described in the paper intends to help teachers in the domain of gender (sexual identity) and facilitate its instructional application in the FL classroom through the disclosing of discourses. We must highlight the idea that developing multicultural learning is not just a matter of acquiring cultural knowledge, but it rather implies changing attitudes and skills on behalf of language teachers. Concepts, procedures, and attitudes contained in queer discourses

must be systematically observed, practiced, and discussed as our trainee teachers plead for in our study.

Throughout the discussion on sexual identity issues, we conclude that EFL teacher trainees should get involved in a process of critical thinking and dialogic creation of meaning. Teacher trainees question whether the received cultural patterns can be improved in order to achieve greater tolerance, or, on the contrary, it is worth continuing our lives in a performative way.

Teacher training should incorporate queer discourses as an integral part of their training in order to have a beneficial effect on social education and moral development.

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