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"What if it's been space all this time?"
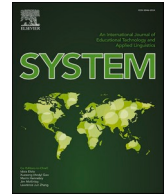
"What if it's been space all this time?": Understanding the spatiality of language teacher education

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Space is critical in teacher education because it shapes and is shaped by different aspects of teacher learning. This study examines how a group of language teacher educators and student-teachers understood space and the effects of that understanding on their practices and conceptions before, during, and after Covid-19 restrictions. Set in Argentina, the study collected data by means of walking interviews, drawings, photos, and follow-up interviews. Qualitative content analysis shows that space and matter can exert a powerful influence on educational trajectories as they affect educational actors' wellbeing, perceptions, and practices. The study proposes a model of spatiality of language teacher education.

1. Introduction

Since the shift towards spatiality in the social sciences (Biesta, 2018; Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1986; Lefebvre, 1992), there is increasing interest in how educational spaces shape and are shaped by social relations (e.g., Abraham, 2021; Acton, 2018; Benade, 2021; Benson, 2021; Kariippanon et al., 2018; Mulcahy, 2007).

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a sharp reconfiguration from face-to-face education to online/distance/hybrid education has led to studies on how buildings are constructed, reproduced, and contested (e.g., Ellis et al., 2020; Scull et al., 2020). Studies of spatiality have the potential to support, as Biesta (2018) suggests, the development of agentive and inclusive teacher education. They can also respond to UNESCO's (2021) call for "a new social contract in education" which can capitalise on what the Covid-19 has taught us to repair injustices and transform education.

This study is in response to a critical situation shared with me by the director of an initial English language teacher education programme in Argentina. Upon return to the main building in 2021 after the Covid-19 restrictions, teacher educators alongside student-teachers began to voice feelings of estrangement. According to the director, they had lost their sense of belonging, and such a feeling of disaffection was beginning to tarnish their professional practice and performance. Some of them were reluctant to be on campus because they found the building uninviting, or even oppressing. Some others complained that they were more comfortable working/studying from home, and felt that digital technologies, despite having issues with accessibility to Wi-Fi and devices, allowed them to complete activities that would prove difficult in the building (e.g., having different groups working in a small classroom). Motivated by this situation, this paper examines how emergency online teaching and the "return to campus" impacted on a group of Argentinian teacher educators and student-teachers' understanding of space in language (teacher) education.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. On space

As Benson (2021) notes, in everyday life, space is synonymous of emptiness, and spatiality evokes the presence of objects that reduce that void. However, the physicality of space is more complex. Critical theories of space are concerned with what Benson (2021) calls *objects-as-space* in social practice, i.e., the social production of space. This refers to the production, reproduction, transformation, representation, and lived experiences around space.

Since the production of space is human experience-bound, space is relational, political, and agentive (Acton, 2018; Benson, 2021; Massey, 2005). Due to its agentive nature (Benade, 2017), there exists a dialectical relationship between people, space, and social practices (Bourdieu, 1977; Lefebvre, 1992; Soja, 1989). According to Lefebvre (1992), space is produced through a triad of elements: (1) perceived space (this is physical), (2) conceptualised space (knowledge of space represented in maps or plans), and (3) lived space (the felt experience of real places and how the self makes sense of the world). Space, and the objects that constitute it, is understood as an assemblage, "a socio material mélange that exists, becomes, and evolves in the relations between non-humans and human beings" (Acton, 2018, p. 9). Assemblages are objects composed of other objects. Therefore, assemblages or objects are "assemblages of assemblages" (DeLanda, 2016, p. 3).

2.2. Space in educational research

Studies on space are central to educational research. As the archetypal space of education, a classroom is an assemblage of other objects (desks, board), and school life extends to corridors and other places where people come together for knowledge co-construction (Biesta, 2018; Eisner, 1995). Approaching educational spaces from sociomaterial places a great emphasis on the *who* (teachers and students) of education and the multidirectional interactions nested in them.

A few studies have investigated the impact of school spaces on learning and wellbeing (e.g., Hughes et al., 2019; Kariippanon et al., 2018; McGregor, 2004). Other studies have examined the complexities of space in education as institutions offer spaces that deconstruct traditional classrooms (e.g., Reinius et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021), create partnerships (e.g., Abraham, 2021; Cuenca & Gilbert, 2019; Daza et al., 2021), and/or incorporate virtual learning environments for hybrid education (From, 2020; Granito & Santana, 2016). These studies underscore (1) the necessity to contest educational space, and (2) sociomaterial notions of space as inextricably linked to the tangible and semiotic power that matter has in mobilising education. With this postulate in mind, it is necessary to explain why new materialism can help explain spatiality in teacher education to make the latter inclusive, agentive, and relevant.

2.3. New materialism and space

Since the material turn, materialist ontologies have resurfaced to explain the agentive role that matter plays in human behavior (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Bennett & Joyce, 2010). Matter is agentive and active, and since space consists of matter, it has those same properties discussed above. To Gamble et al. (2019), new materialism "embraces a non-anthropocentric realism grounded in a shift from epistemology to ontology and the recognition of matter's intrinsic activity" (p. 118). As Monforte (2018) explains, the material world cannot be detached from the cultural world; therefore, matter needs to be studied in terms of its agency. Thus, these authors emphasise that human activity is space-mediated and material.

Only a handful of studies have adopted new materialism to investigate the spatial relations of classroom territories and the agentive influence that educational assemblages exert on other objects and humans. For example, Charteris et al. (2017) recognise that matter influences socioeducational relations and that space acts as an organising factor of behaviors and modes of thinking and being. The authors depict classrooms as complex spaces, an assemblage of "bodies, subjectivities, objects, ideas and discourses" (p. 813).

2.4. Space and language education

According to Benson (2021), "the *where* of second language learning is now emerging as one of the most important factors of difference that influence second language learning outcomes" (p. 4, emphasis in original). Space is therefore connected to practices in the dynamic architecture of language education as additional languages ca be found across overlapping sites. Recent studies have interrogated the *where* of language education, such as out-of-class/informal settings (e.g., Cabrera Arias, 2022), online language teaching and collaborative tasks (e.g., González-Lloret, 2020), or the relationship between material resources and (non-)linguistic behaviours in language learning (Villacañas de Castro et al., 2021). These studies concur that space exerts a powerful influence on the multiple and overlapping settings in which language learning occurs.

Despite such advances, there is a dearth of studies on the spatiality of language teacher education. Understanding the spatial influence that language teacher education has on teacher educators' and student-teachers' trajectories is pivotal since space exerts a powerful role in shaping ideologies, agency, and practices. Against this background, the following questions guided this study.

1. How do language teacher educators and student-teachers understand the space of language teacher education before and after Covid-19 restrictions?
2. In what ways does the post-lockdown spatiality of language teacher education influence their practice and understanding of (language) education?

3. Research design

Given my interest in understanding the relationship between the teacher-educators' and student-teachers' feelings of estrangement, the return to campus, and spatiality, I framed this study as qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Silverman, 2020) which combined walking methodologies and visual methodologies given their affinity to space and matter (Benson, 2021). Both methodologies can help participants describe their relationships to places and the agentive force that objects and sites can have on them.

Walking methodologies adopt the physical and social act of walking, or walking-with, as a method and a methodology to explore the relationship between participants and their environment (the human and the non-human) while moving along and remaining still to make sense of places and lived experiences attached to them (O'Neill & Roberts, 2020; Springgay & Truman, 2018). In this study, walking methodologies were realised through the walking interview (Jones & Evans, 2012) as the participants were interviewed while walking with the researcher "on a route that is relevant to the focus of the research" (Benson, 2021, p. 139). According to Franklin-Phipps and Gleason (2019), walking methodologies can be seen as critical praxes as they promote reflexivity. While most walking methodologies have been employed outdoors (e.g., walking in the wild) (e.g., Bates & Rhys-Taylor, 2017), in this study walking was circumscribed to a school building.

In line with an interest in matter and spatiality, visual methodologies have the potency of offering "participants an alternative to verbal means to express their experiences and feelings and to reflect on their language practices, identities and learning and teaching processes" (Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018, p. 159). Visuals can emancipate thinking and activity by opening multimodal participation (Villacañas de Castro, 2020). In this study, photos and drawings were employed as semiotically rich instruments of data collection (Spenceley, 2012). As mechanisms for meaning making, photos and drawings allow participants to show their lived experiences, harness self-reflection and provoke discussions that a typical interview may fail to generate (Greenier & Moodie, 2021; Mannay, 2016; Rose, 2016).

3.1. Context

This study was carried out with a four-year initial English language teacher education programme in a province of southern Argentina between August and October 2021. I approached this study as an insider since I was a former member of staff where the investigation took place, and I am often in contact with some of the participating teacher educators given our shared interests in language teacher education.

Programmes are managed by the provincial Ministry of Education through a number of tertiary education institutions. Due to limited infrastructure, teacher education institutions are located in school buildings which house other educational institutions, a situation that creates, what I call, *forced third spaces*. Drawing on third space theory (Bhabha, 1994), I shall define a forced third space as a site where different entities (e.g., institutions, people) are spatially pushed to come into contact as a result of contextual circumstances. In the context of this study, the school building accommodates a secondary school in the morning and afternoon, a primary school in the afternoon, and a teacher education institution in the evening. For the latter, courses run from 6 to 11.20 p.m., and often, student-teachers and teacher educators need to wait outside the building for the cleaning personnel to clean the classrooms between shifts.

In this institution, each class has one specific classroom assigned and it is teacher educators who move from one classroom to another. Posters or other learning artifacts that belong to primary, secondary, and teacher education students are found in the classrooms and corridors. Because the building and furniture are shared with two other schools, in some classrooms, the seats are suitable for primary school pupils rather than adult learners. Desks and seats can be moved to encourage group work or other seating arrangements. However, due to safety measures in 2021, seats and desks could not be moved as "return to campus" operated on a 1-m distance protocol and the use of facemasks inside the building.

During 2020 and the first term of 2021, face-to-face delivery migrated to a virtual learning environment. While this decision allowed some level of continuity, it created several hurdles among teacher educators and student-teachers such as: (1) lack of stable internet connection or a personal device, which intensified socio-economic inequities among educational actors, (2) disruptions with institution/personal schedules as coursework was not centrally arranged, creating clashes with synchronous activities (online session on Google Meet) or increasing teacher-educators' workload, (3) student-teachers interrupting engagement with coursework as a result of living through difficult circumstances brought about by the pandemic (e.g., job loss, new caring responsibilities, being unable to pay utility bills). In 2021, the building had Wi-Fi connectivity but when all students were connected to the network, this would crash, which translated into teacher educators avoiding online activities.

3.2. Participants

I invited the 18 teacher educators and 45 student-teachers from the initial English language teacher education programme. They were recruited through the programme's closed Facebook page. Twelve teacher educators and 33 student-teachers voluntarily agreed to participate. They signed a consent form and they were assured that their wellbeing, anonymity, and confidentiality were protected. All names used in this paper are pseudonyms chosen by the participants.

The 33 student-teachers (22 women and 11 men) had a mean age of 22 (*SD: 3.21*) and were at different stages of the programme. Of the 33, 15 (Cohort 2020 and 2021) had never had face-to-face lessons until August 2021. Seven of them were from rural areas or from other cities in Patagonia. With reference to the 18 teacher educators (16 women, 2 men), their mean age was 43 (*SD: 6.33*) and their years in teaching/teacher education oscillated between 6 and 10 years. They all had teaching degrees and ten of then had completed

postgraduate courses in teacher education, psychology, or digital technologies for education.

3.3. Data collection instruments

Data collection combined walking and visual methodologies. Due to time constraints, I could only conduct the walking interviews with the teacher educators. I carried out all the interviews in Spanish. They were audiorecorded and orthographically transcribed for qualitative content analysis.

- Walking interviews: The 18 teacher educators were randomly assigned to six groups (three teacher educators per group). I *walked* the school interior with each group. The purpose of each walking interview was to explore the participants' understanding of educational space before, while, and after the Covid-19 lockdown. During each walk, the interview questions were: (1) How was your view of the space of language teacher education prior to the pandemic? How did you use that space? How do you feel about the same space now? How do you see space today? What are your thoughts on the virtual learning environment as a space? How do these spaces affect your practice? The walking interviews lasted for 20–30 min.
- Photos: The participants (i.e., the student-teachers and teacher educators) were asked to take photos of the teacher education institution and choose one they would like to talk about prompted by this question: In what ways does the selected photo represent your thoughts and experiences about space in language teacher education?
- Drawings: The participants were asked to represent their insights and feelings about their space of teacher education using this prompt: What does the space of language teacher education you share mean to you? There were no guidelines about what the drawing should (not) contain.
- Visual-elicited interviews: Each participant was remotely interviewed to discuss their chosen photo and drawing guided by the prompts provided. The interviews lasted approximately 30 min.

3.4. Data analysis

Qualitative content analysis (Cohen et al., 2018; Krippendorff, 2004) became an iterative process of reading and rereading the data before engaging in inductive and individual coding of items. I favoured inductive coding to explore whether space was indeed a critical issue (and how) in language teacher education. Individual coding was followed by axial coding and themes unification connected to the research questions. I established a codebook to re-examine the data to elaborate consistent categories (Appendix 1). Finally, I used Atlas.ti version 8 for comparative analysis across data sets. To ensure rigor, transparency and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), a colleague from another institution coded 60% of the data. We engaged in discussing our coding until we reached an inter-rater agreement of 87%, a figure we considered satisfactory.

4. Findings

4.1. Understanding language teacher education space before lockdown

The participants exhibited different understandings of the space of language teacher education before lockdown. While there was agreement about understanding space as convergence (i.e., a conducive site that brings people together with shared goals and aims), the student-teachers recognised teacher education at large as a site of uncertainty.
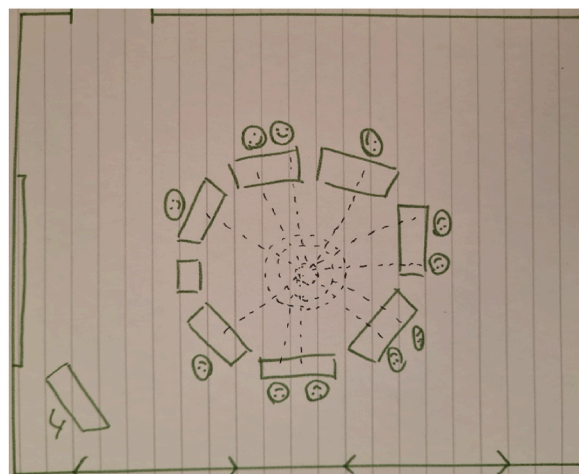

Fig. 1. Space as convergence.

4.1.1. Space as convergence for knowledge co-construction

The participants saw the building as a relational site (Eisner, 1995) for teacher learning. Out of the 33 student-teachers, 12, particularly those who were Year 3 or 4, envisaged the educational space as a converging place to learn (including language development) with peers and teacher educators. For example, Marcela made an aerial representation of her classroom highlighting space as convergence (Fig. 1).

When I asked her to explain her representation of space, Marcela said:

> Before the pandemic, the building was a place to meet with like-minded people, I mean, we want to be teachers and here we had the opportunity to be surrounded by teachers. We would meet to see language teaching in action. (Marcela, Extract 1)

Extract 1 shows that although Marcela's thoughts signaled collaborative learning as the aim or activity that would bring student-teachers and teacher educators together, the relational act of meeting was of paramount importance. As an active participant (Monforte, 2018), the classroom was a relational space around a common interest: language teaching. Marcela stressed the physicality of that shared interest: "see language teaching in action".

By the same token, the teacher educators saw the building as a site of convergence of "theory" and "practice":

> I think that sharing the same building with the primary and secondary schools is a great characteristic because we have overlapping levels of education and our level prepares teachers for the other two. So the student-teachers can feel what schools are like, they see the pupils leave and can sometimes do their practicum right here. (Helena, Extract 2)

The notion of convergence also emerged through the photos taken by the teacher educators. For example, Corina chose a photo where teaching artifacts could be seen on the classroom walls (Fig. 2).

On Fig. 2, Corina explained:

> I chose it because this is what I like about this environment, pre- and post-pandemic, it is a place where we can also see how pupils learn. This time I couldn't find any pupils' posters written in English but I always find it fascinating that we can get a glimpse of the resources that teachers use and how they use the classroom space and corridors to transform them into language learning opportunities. (Corina, Extract 3)

Extract 3 shows that by accommodating three different institutions, the building was an effective *forced third space* to encapsulate teacher learning as student-teachers were exposed to the dynamics of everyday school life. In addition, the extract reveals that the teacher-as well as pupil-made resources displayed on the classroom walls is an exemplar activity for student-teachers to become aware of how space can be maximised for language education. The extract also proves the ubiquity of language learning in formal spaces.

4.1.2. Space as a site of uncertainties

Twenty-one student-teachers expressed ideas of uncertainty around the school building. These uncertainties represented the unstable context in which (language) teacher education was delivered: teacher strikes, unannounced tutors' sick leaves, closing the building due to lack of water supply or problems with the heating system. For example, Ramiro juxtaposed a photo of his classroom and a question mark (Fig. 3).

In the visual-elicited interview, Ramiro explained:

> Before the pandemic, the building was a place of uncertainties. One would come without knowing whether there would be sessions, or whether we'd finish earlier because there was not running water in the toilets. I started to feel that I was wasting my time coming here because the place was an organisational mess. What if it's been space all this time what really affects our language teacher learning journey? (Ramiro, Extract 4)

Whereas some student-teachers saw the space of language teacher education as relational space to use English; others, or sometimes the same participants, would perceive it as an irregular space due to out-of-their-control circumstances. They felt passive to the agentive capability of the building.
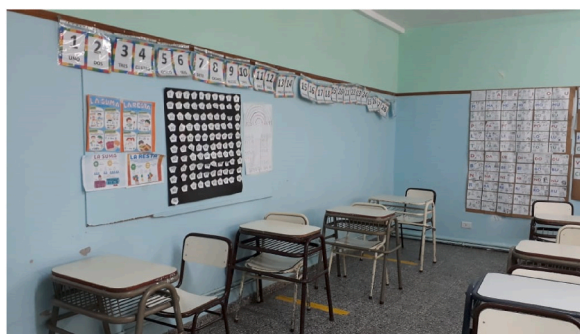

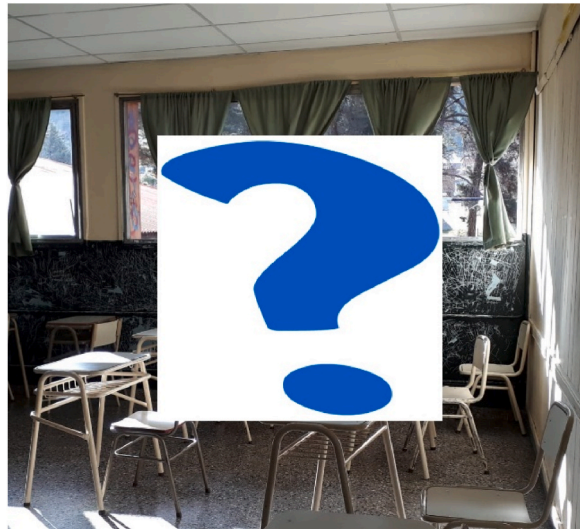**Fig. 2.** The classroom as a forced third space.

Fig. 3. The classroom as a site of uncertainty.

In general, the participants understood the space of language teacher education before the pandemic as a complex, multi-layered territory which was a site of relational convergence of (1) people with shared interests in language education, and (2) educational levels and concomitant situated practices. However, this shared space was also agentive of less favorable views such as uncertainty or lack of appeal as the participants acknowledged that access to resources hindered (Villacañas de Castro et al., 2020) their experiences.

4.2. Understanding language teacher education space after lockdown

With the return to campus and blended teaching implementation, the participants exhibited different attitudes towards the spatiality of language teacher education. Two complex themes were identified: (1) the role of space on wellbeing, and (2) space for inclusion.

4.2.1. The role of space on wellbeing

Forty-six participants recognised that they still had banking attitudes towards education, i.e., the *depositing* of information by teachers into learners through a teacher-fronted/unidirectional approach (Freire, 2000), where the accumulation of declarative knowledge was a quintessential factor. However, the Covid-19 pandemic enabled them to prioritise wellbeing over declarative knowledge. Wellbeing referred to providing/being provided with spaces that guaranteed physical and emotional health for academic development.

The return to campus initially had a negative effect on 41 of the participants' wellbeing as they assessed the building as "sad", "uninviting", "depressing", "limiting", and "restrictive". When inquired about these negative feelings, which explain their feelings of estrangement, a student-teacher said:

> I think that the lockdown put things into perspective. I always knew it wasn't the most resourceful building, but now, after studying from home, coming here makes the lack of infrastructure more dramatic. (Rita, Extract 5)

Equally, a teacher educator shared a photo (Fig. 4) and expressed:

Fig. 4. Post-lockdown space.

This [Fig. 4] is what I found after lockdown; it can't get any more depressing. The blinds cannot be lifted because something happened and no one has fixed it, and the small radiator at the back is also faulty. I'm much better working from home, it's warm, and windows are OK. (Sabrina, Extract 6)

The demotivating nature of space and matter was exacerbated when the classroom, as the archetypal space of teacher education, was compared to the VLE used for emergency online teaching. For example, a student-teacher said:

I find coming back to face-to-face backwards. Perhaps we can do something hybrid, and come once or twice a week for something more physical, hands-on, but the VLE provided us with opportunities to do more interactive and multimodal stuff online, navigate resources, or take time to edit our forum contributions. Face to face only doesn't help any more with our wellbeing or education. (Marcos, Extract 7)

Marcos' insights seem to indicate that the post-pandemic spatiality of language teacher education does not need to be restricted to a building. It can also conflate physical as well as virtual spaces for effective space and time management. Regarding the latter, 35 participants (of which six were teacher educators) reflected on the relationship between the spatiality and temporality of teacher education. Romina, a student-teacher drew Fig. 5.

In her interview, Romina explained that the return to campus "crushed" her time management. She added:

During lockdown, I had more control of time as we could do most of the things asynchronously, except for some live meetings or lectures. Now, it's coming back to doing things between 6 and 10 pm and sometimes it feels like a waste of time. I mean, the space of teacher education makes learning restricted to one specific time period I cannot longer manage. (Romina, Extract 8)

Despite the articulated concerns with the return to campus, 14 teacher educators and 10 student-teachers agreed that returning to face-to-face provision allowed them to achieve a healthier life-work/study balance and learning experience. A teacher educator said:

Coming back to campus means regaining control over my working hours. During lockdown, my dining room was the classroom, or everywhere I was in the house since I'd receive mails, text messages from student-teachers and the institution all the time, every day, even at weekends. I felt I was working 24/7 and there was no division between my personal space and time and my professional one, even English became a burden! (Catalina, Extract 9)

In a similar vein, a student-teacher said:

I thought it'd be easier to study from home, but with two little kids it's hard because they don't understand that their mum is studying or attending an online session. The kitchen became a classroom, a playground, everything. My kids need my attention. So, I feel relieved that I can come back to campus and concentrate on my studies for four hours. (María, Extract 10)

In addition, 11 participants acknowledged that returning to the school building offered an end to isolation and promoted spontaneous interaction in English, which "helped us improve our L2 proficiency" (Josefina, Extract 11). As Banegas et al. (2022) have noted, L2 proficiency is a distinctive feature of language student-teachers' identity. During a walking interview, a teacher educator also said:

I'm glad to be back because of the spontaneous chat that I can have with the students as they approach me for something in particular, or perhaps I meet another colleague down the corridor and we arrange something work-wise quickly and perhaps catch up too. (Renata, Extract 12)

Extracts 11 and 12 show that the physical dimension of teacher education extends the opportunities for language learning through collegial interaction. However, when people are online, they "seem to be desperate to log out because they can't stand another minute in front of the screen" (Extract 13) as Helena, teacher educator, put it.
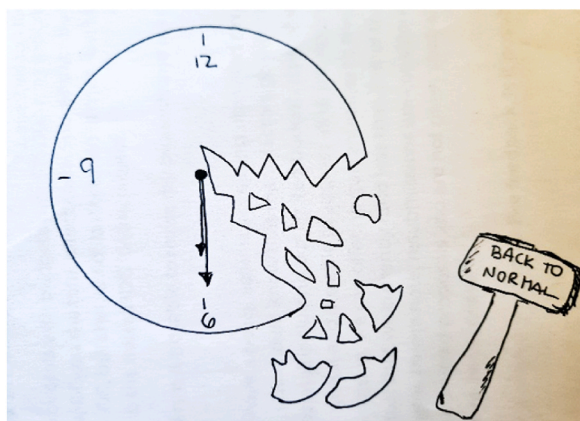

Fig. 5. The temporality of space.

The impact of the pandemic on space and people's wellbeing can be summarised using the words of a teacher educator:

> The pandemic diluted buildings. I found myself supporting colleagues and students because they couldn't cope with isolation or because they didn't feel comfortable with returning to the building. So, I've started to be less stressed with time and deadlines and pay more attention to the students' as well as my own wellbeing. What's the point of education if it's not a healthy act? (Sandra, Extract 14)

Extract 14 reveals that the pandemic may have prompted teacher educators to be more sensitive to colleagues and student-teachers' emotions which became an invitation to think about education as a healthy act, i.e., an activity in which participants feel respected and considered. Similarly, a student-teacher explained:

> I couldn't deal with the stress of studying, working, and self-isolating. That made me realise that studying in higher education cannot be the only thing I did. So, when I did the practicum this year, I'd give the pupils just one meaningful activity as homework, or no homework at all. Having struggled with online learning or with coming back to campus made me see that I need to limit somehow the space and time of education. (Sabrina, Extract 15)

Both extracts illustrate that the participants made complex connections between space, time, and wellbeing as they experienced first-hand some of the issues that other students were undergoing. Space exerted a direct influence on the participants' wellbeing, which impacted on their attitudes and performance in the context of language teacher education. Such relationships may have contributed to the adoption of a reflective and understanding attitude which influenced their practice and understanding of education in general as a meaningful wellbeing-oriented activity (Hughes et al., 2019).

4.2.2. Inclusion as a spatial act

This theme reconciles different understandings of inclusion such as how the participants extended the spatiality of language teacher education, or how space acted as a springboard to delve into inclusive language education.

The participants demonstrated an encompassing understanding of the spatiality of teacher education as they included entities they had not considered before lockdown. In the walking interviews, all the teacher educators acknowledged that before lockdown their vision of space was circumscribed to the institution's building, but the remote teaching phase and the "back to campus" scenario allowed them to experience an inclusive dimensionality of space. As an example of this view, Nuria, a teacher educator, drew Fig. 6 after the walking interview, which she called "the spizza [space + pizza] of language teacher education". Her representation included not only the institution's building itself and the resources and furniture in it, but also other assemblages such as her own home, the

Fig. 6. The pizza of language teacher education space.

schools where the student-teachers undertook their practicum, the "instituto" (private language schools also used for the practicum), the local library (where student-teachers and teacher educators would have meetings), and the VLE used to deliver remote/hybrid teaching. Her pizza, unlike the other representations provided by the other teacher educators, included a human element: "ourselves."

On Fig. 6, Nuria said:

> These two years have made me realise that I navigate overlapping spaces and that everything in it is the space of what we do because they're all connected by the common goal we have, and that includes ourselves, I mean, our body and mind because we are part of that space and with us we transport experiences, emotions, knowledge, if you will. So I'd say that space is not just immaterial items, but also people as we're part of that space and we make sense of it and give sense to it. (Nuria, Extract 16).

Nuria's view represents the participants' understanding of space as including different physical and digital sites, objects, and beings as space, i.e., multiplicities of assemblages (Charteris et al., 2017). Such views reveal that language teacher education is a multi-dimensional third space where different spaces, knowledges, and multimodal practices merge.

The student-teachers also exhibited an expansive understanding of space in language teacher education and the ubiquity of English use across spaces. In their visuals, they included places such as their homes, partner schools, their classroom, and examples of favouring matter such as mobile phones. They also stressed one assemblage that was special to them as they recognised it as a meeting place to study together: the institution's library. Manuel, a student-teacher took a photo of the library (Fig. 7) to represent the space of teacher education.

In the follow-up interview, he explained:

> For many of us, this [the library] is like an oasis where we can work on an assignment or study. Sometimes, we don't have a quiet place at home, and so, even when there are others around, the library is a place of communion. I think the pandemic made us value this space a lot more. We can help each other out and feel OK with using English. (Manuel, Extract 17)

While the findings presented above exhibit a rather literal understanding of *inclusion* as what items can be embedded in space, 25 student-teachers and five teacher educators established connections between space, inclusive education, and a learner-centered curriculum. For example, a teacher educator highlighted the benefits of engaging in online and blended learning:

> Even though I don't have to do it now, I still pre-record some of my lectures because the students have told me that they can watch them again if there's something they didn't understand, content/language-wise, before they come to the class face to face. It's also helpful for those students with caring responsibilities that sometimes would miss a session, but now they can follow the module without problem. I'm creating inclusive practices by using the online space. (Sandra, Extract 18)

The participants accepted that the new online spaces triggered by the pandemic encouraged teacher-educators to provide students with autonomy-oriented activities. For example, a student-teacher said:

> I think the pandemic has shown everyone that we students need more time, need to exercise our autonomy, so our participation as students has increased as we're given activities that promote our autonomy and participation. Education is about space, and it's also about quality time. (Laura, Extract 19)

The participants also acknowledged that flexibility was a skill they developed to respond to learners' needs. A student-teacher expressed:

> The teacher educators and ourselves have become more flexible, more creative to accommodate to different needs. I think we've become better at observing our pupils in the practicum too and we engage in inclusive practices by using a wider range of resources and spaces. I now understand education through the lens of inclusion by acting on it. (Francesca, Extract 20)

Extract 18–20 demonstrate that variations to the spatiality of language teacher education shifted the participants' views of education towards a paradigm that responds to learners' different needs and provides them with opportunities for participation and autonomy in a conducive environment. Such an inclusive paradigm allowed them to prioritise depth over breadth in curriculum development. For example, a teacher educator said:

Fig. 7. The institution's library.

> You know the saying less is more, well, I'd say less but more. Thinking about space and my own reactions to space, the classrooms and the VLE has been a wake up call. I deliver less content, I prioritised content and did some curating, but with more quality, more in-depth, more language awareness raising tasks. I include further examples and I ask the student-teachers to design activities and other tasks that translate the content I'm delivering into something more practical so they have more chances of manipulating that content and engaging with it in more complex ways. (Helena, Extract 21)

Extract 21 demonstrates that the lived and perceived spaces prompted the teacher educators to carry out curricular and pedagogical recalibrations. These changes indicate that the teacher educators still understood education as place of convergence, but they underscored the interactive and critical deconstruction of content. Also, they exposed the agentive nature that space can have on shaping practices and understanding of education.

As the findings show, the participants exhibited different views of space. Before lockdown, space was seen as highly relational, in which people converged for the co-construction of knowledge and the bridging of theory and practice despite the recognition of destabilising matter and conditions. Notwithstanding, after lockdown, the participants voiced negative feelings indicating that their wellbeing had been affected with the return to campus. Together with these negative sentiments, the participants also developed broader notions of the spatiality of teacher education by including new assemblages.

Overall, the findings have shown that despite the open-ended nature of the data collection instruments, the participants showed a positive response to the notion of a spatial perspective in language teacher education, possibly due to their mixed feelings about the return to campus and concomitant sense of estrangement. Notwithstanding, language was only mentioned by student-teachers' acknowledging its ubiquitousness and opportunities to use and improve their English. Enabling teacher educators and student-teachers to think about space allowed them to share a wide range of views that indicate the agency of space in language teacher education. These findings lend support to Biesta's (2018) call for agentive and inclusive teacher education, which has the potential to become a powerhouse to reimagine education from a socially just perspective in line with UNESCO's (2021) orientations.

5. Discussion

5.1. Understanding the space of teacher education

The first research question investigated the participants' understanding of the spatiality of language teacher education before and during Covid-19 restrictions. In line with the literature, the participants conceived the space of language teacher education as a socially-constructed, dynamic, relational, and agentive site (Benade, 2017, 2021; Benson, 2021; Mulcahy, 2007) for the co-construction of meaningful language education experiences.

In this study, space was a dynamic and agentive site in which centripetal and centrifugal forces operated, i.e., it was a shifting process (Massey, 2005). Sharing a common interest in the English language, teacher learning, the co-construction of professional knowledge, and the addressing of the theory-practice gap acted as centripetal forces that united people to converge into physical and digital spaces. Institutional physical spaces became conducive for student-teachers L2 development (Extracts 11 and 17). These forces allowed the participants to reimagine the space of language teacher education as inclusive of different sites, experiences, and objects. Some of these sites are exclusive of language education such as "instituto[s]" (Fig. 6). This centripetal conception of space also remarks the agentive nature of matter as the participants adhered to a vision of objects-as-space (Benson, 2021; Villacañas de Castro et al., 2020) since, as Figs. 4 and 6 show, objects such as institutional and personal resources as well as institutional furniture exercised a strong influence on the participants' experience of teacher education. Their experiences confirm how space and matter can mediate language teaching and learning (Benson, 2021), and highlight the relational nature of teacher education (Eisner, 1995). In.

Space was also shaped by centrifugal forces such as the pandemic itself, unpredictable circumstances (e.g., teacher strikes), and structural issues (e.g., lack of water, or little availability of resources). These forces, particularly after the easing of restrictions, led the participants to feel estranged about the same spaces that had been portrayed under a positive light before, which was the issue that triggered this study. Time management and matter (resources) acted as both centrifugal or centripetal forces depending on individual circumstances. While online and then blended learning allowed some participants to maximise time and profit from autonomous, self-paced learning, for others it became a source of new challenges as they grappled with personal issues. Both centripetal and centrifugal forces may show that while the conceptualised space is the same, educational actors' experiences of the lived space (Lefebvre, 1992) can be diverse, fluid, and sometimes contradictory. These forces also stress that for a new social contract to enhance education to be successful (UNESCO, 2021), structural injustices need to be repaired to avoid deepening inequity.

The participants identified the space of language teacher education as relational (Eisner, 1995); it was a meeting place to grow together. Their lived experiences illustrate the connections between the relational nature of education, the agentive nature of space, and the ubiquity of language learning. Space made the participants nurture relationships not only among themselves but also with the assemblages that constitute language teacher education. Nevertheless, the same space could also set people apart. Thus, as a complex third place, the spatiality of language teacher education changed according to different variables such as the use of personal spaces (homes), community places (library), and the access to resources such as a personal laptop or stable Wi-Fi connectivity. The agentive nature of space highlights its dialectical force (Bourdieu, 1977; Lefebvre, 1992) as the participants perceived powerful connections between language teaching, learning, and themselves. Such multidirectional connections confirm the heterogeneous ways in which space shapes and is shaped by the social context in which it is found and constructed.

Under the influence of the centrifugal/centripetal forces mentioned above, the participants expressed how the lived experiences from 2020 to 2021 affected their wellbeing, which shows another agentive effect of space. As reported in other levels of education (e.g.,

Hughes et al., 2019), space constrained or permitted the participants' development not only in academic terms but also in relation to their personal lives. The space in which teaching and learning occurred was decisive in the participants' (un)willingness to return to campus and abandon the complimentary online space entirely.

The fluctuating views of the spatiality of language teacher education show that the participants were aware of the complex nature of space and the constructions of assemblages (Acton, 2018; DeLanda, 2016). The assemblages that the participants acknowledged as properties of the space of teacher education ranged from the traditional classroom to other institutional spaces such as corridors or the library, to digital environments, and to personal spaces such as a home kitchen. Not only do these assemblages show the multifaceted sites comprising teacher education, they also illustrate, as discussed in Monforte (2018), how matter is pivotal in teacher education as the participants in this study assigned space and matter a wide array of agentive features. For example, the participants reported engaging in making the curriculum inclusive by becoming selective about content, reading material, activities, and meaningful use of time while occupying the assemblages of teacher education, which, as noted above, shows how time can reconfigure and be reconfigured by spatiality.

5.2. A spatial understanding of education

The second research question sought to interrogate the ways in which the post-lockdown spatiality of language teacher education influenced the participants' broad understanding and practice of education. The participants' reflections on space, which could be considered the enactment of forms of a sociomaterial approach (Mulcahy, 2016) to education, reveal how they translated their lived experiences of space into pedagogical decisions and personal theories of education. Drawing on their lived spaces, the participants, as in previous studies (From, 2020; Granito & Santana, 2016; Reinius et al., 2021), first deconstructed and reconstructed the traditional classroom, which highlights the cultural construction of space, and incorporated digital spaces as part of the teacher education territory.

As noted in the section above, reflecting on the spatiality of teacher education prompted teacher educators to change their practices. So did the student-teachers as they were completing their practicum. Influenced by space, the participants shifted their understanding of education in general, which shows how space can contribute to ideological and curriculum transformations in education. This change could be regarded as a powerful step towards a new social contract of education (UNESCO, 2021). It can be said that the pandemic allowed the participants to embrace a social justice view of education, a view with a clear inclusive orientation which stressed a humanistic approach, i.e., an approach that is built on/for/by the people involved in education. Without educators and students, education has no space, no matter, no meaning. It cannot exist.

Coherent with a socially just approach, the participants acknowledged that education cannot be circumscribed to academic performance. It needs to be a conducive and memorable experience through which students thrive. Hence, their views embraced well-being and concerted efforts to attend to students' emotions and needs. Acknowledging that education should cater for different needs and acting upon this recognition is a step towards quality and equity in education; i.e., socially just education that enables participation and relevance in terms of students' interests and contextual circumstances. Thus, the participants assumed that education needs to be stress-free and flexible so that students can also develop their autonomy and other transferable skills.

Regarding flexibility, this not only entailed a laxer use of time, but also a responsible curriculum design. The phrase "less but more" (Extract 21) synthesises the participants' understanding of education not as the accumulation of declarative knowledge, but as students' ability to manipulate and create knowledge to solve different situations beyond the space of education. The views of education exhibited by the participants confirm that matter and space can mobilise different modes of thinking (Charteris et al., 2017).
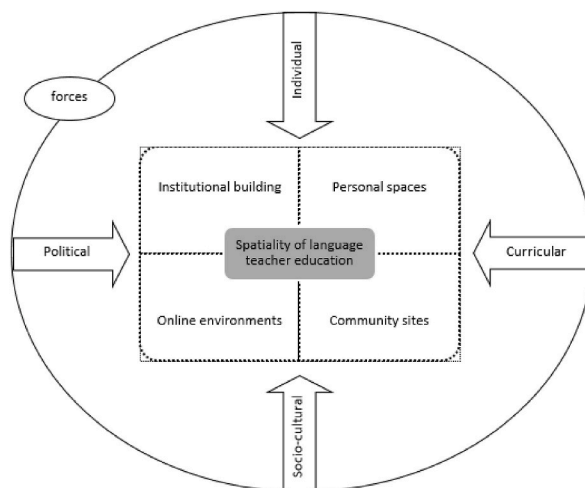

Fig. 8. The spatiality of language teacher education.

5.3. Spatialising language teacher education

As investigated in other levels of language education (e.g., Villacañas de Castro et al., 2020), how teacher educators and student-teachers envision, live, and contest the spatiality and materiality of language teacher education is an important dimension of their teacher learning experience. Thinking about the space and matter present in their trajectories does affect their own beliefs and practices of education. In this complex geography, educational actors constitute the materiality of teaching and learning, and their own agency enters a synergetic relationship with the agentive nature of space and matter.

Fig. 8 represents a model of the spatiality of language teacher education with macro and multi-faceted assemblages (DeLanda, 2016) which reinforce the relational and co-constructive nature of (teacher) education (Biesta, 2018; Eisner, 1995). The purposeful absence of language in the model reinforces its pervasiveness as it is found across sites. These promote L2 use and improvement, and some are only meaningful to L2 teaching (language schools). The assemblages are spaces of spaces, and in them matter is embedded in the form of resources, furniture, and other material elements that educational actors deploy to engage in the practice of inclusive language teacher education.

The spatiality of language teacher education comprises four encompassing macro assemblages that can be seen as porous educational plates since they are in constant tension, where language is ubiquitous and mediating.

(1) Institutional building: This assemblage includes traditional classrooms, corridors, the library and other spaces (e.g., pronunciation labs) and objects nested within the most visible site of teacher education. This place is the prototypical site of professional knowledge in teacher learning, but it needs other spaces. However, this plate can sometimes serve administrative purposes only since there are teacher education programmes entirely delivered online (e.g., Banegas & Manzur Busleimán, 2021).

(2) Personal spaces: This assemblage refers to the teacher educators' and student-teachers' own homes and resources. While in some types of provision, the personal can be configured as an extension of the institutional building, this is a vital space, for example in online language teacher education, in its own right as educational actors not only make agentive sense of it in their practices and insights, but also associate it to their own wellbeing.

(3) Community sites: This category includes assemblages such as the schools and language schools where student-teachers complete their practicum and professional practice modules. This macro assemblage also encompasses spaces such as the local library, a café, or other public places where teacher educators and student-teachers meet. While these are not formally part of language teacher education, they become so through the purpose of such encounters.

(4) Online environments: These macro assemblages represent institutional VLEs as well as applications, websites, and networks that are used for language teacher education provision. These can be accessed through institutional or personal log-in details and can be complimentary to face-to-face education or the primary site of language teacher education (e.g., Banegas & Manzur Busleimán, 2021).

The tensions, gravitations, disruptions, and overlaps between these four agentive plates shape the spatiality of language teacher education and create and recreate new third spaces that integrate physicality, thinking, and ways of being and doing for educational and societal transformation which seeks to repair injustice. Nevertheless, they are also subjected to different contextual forces such as political (e.g., government funding), individual (e.g., family responsibilities, motivation, wellbeing, L2 development), curricular (e.g., pedagogical organisation, institutional policies, timetabling, classroom distribution, staffing), and sociocultural/ideological (e.g., beliefs, expectations on L2 proficiency, mainstream discourses) forces that shape the space of language teacher education and influence educational actors' wellbeing, beliefs, and practices of (teacher) education. These forces come equipped with their own spatiality and materiality and they are perpetually present in the architecture and mechanics of language teacher education. The synergetic movements between the four spatial plates and the forces that operate on them demonstrate the power that the space of language teacher education can have on ostensibly inclusive educational systems.

6. Conclusion

As an extraordinary global event, the Covid-19 pandemic has foregrounded the need to examine space given its implications for the future of language teacher education. The study revealed that the lockdown had an intricate impact on attitudes, feelings, conceptions, L2 development, and practices of language teacher education and education in general. The disruptions in the traditional sites of language teacher education encouraged them to consider space as a critical, social, agentive, and multi-faceted component of language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, these findings are not free from limitations. The study was contextualised in one programme, and one institution in particular with rather suboptimal conditions for in-person as well as online teaching.

This study is a call for institutions and educational systems to consider to the agentive role that space and matter exert on L2 development, teacher learning, professional practice, individuals' wellbeing, and above all, the development of inclusive and socially just education. Policies, political decisions, and curriculum changes cannot ignore that space is central to the equation of (language) teacher education since its enactment needs to take place somewhere, and the where is as important as the whos, the whats, the whys, and the hows. This study also reveals that language teacher education occurs in multiple settings and that, as the field and society moves forward, digital environments acquire decisive roles in studying to become a language teacher. Hence, language teacher education programmes may wish to include space and matter in their curriculum. Allowing future teachers to discuss relationships between space and language learning can prompt the generation of innovative practices and enhanced language learning

environments (Benson, 2021). Simultaneously, they can develop sustainable VLEs and other digital landscapes or "learnscapes" (Coyle & Meyer, 2021, p. 126) while deconstructing and reimagining physical sites and hybridising teacher learning to offer inclusive territories.

Future research can probe further into the spatiality of language teacher education through the deployment of instruments that can help participants reflect on dimensionality and place themselves in space. For example, they could be asked to create, what I call, a *teachorama* (teaching + diorama), i.e., a three-dimensional data collection instrument that can allow teachers to represent teaching, themselves and others, their beliefs, identities, and practices in relation to space and matter. A teachorama can characterise different educational environments, and it can be followed by an interview in which the participant explains their 3D teaching space.

Author statement

Darío Luis Banegas: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Software; Validation; Visualization; Roles/Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing.

Appendix 1

This appendix shows the axial codes and unifying themes and examples from the data. The unifying themes were used to organise of the Findings section.

Axial codes	Unifying themes	Data extracts
• Shared interests • Collaborative work • Learning together • Places for socialisation and teacher preparation • In-person learning as beneficial	Space as convergence for knowledge co-construction	"Working in groups in the classroom was really educational"
• Unstable environment • Mismanagement • Incongruences • Chaotic practices • Messy places	Space as a site of uncertainties	"I don't know where or even when stuff takes place!"
• Detrimental return to campus • Happy with return to campus • Estrangement • Detachment • Isolation • Personal spaces • Time management • Space management • Socialisation needs	Space and wellbeing	"I need to be on campus more. All day at home is driving me nuts"
• Inclusive practices • Physical inclusion • Digital inclusion • Objects & tools for all • Autonomy • Flexibility • Learning needs • Curriculum change due to space	Inclusion as a spatial act	"When I am in the classroom, I feel more supported with my issues with understanding Phonetics and Phonology"

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