

## A TEACHING INNOVATION PROJECT: GENDERING (AND QUEERING) EFL TEACHER TRAINING

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**ABSTRACT.** *In this presentation we address the importance of introducing gender (and queer) discourses in the EFL teacher training practices as the result of a Teaching Innovation Project titled “Género e identidad sexual: De los discursos culturales a la innovación docente en formación del profesorado” of the University of Granada. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (2001) (hereafter, CEF) states that otherness related issues should be treated in the FL classroom as a means to achieve Existential Competence. Given the fact that our EFL teacher trainees claim that they lack (in)formation to develop these traditionally silenced topics in their classrooms, we try to show different practices which may be beneficial to make implicit discourses explicit when it comes to LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Transgendered) people, sexism, or homophobic attitudes. We consider of paramount importance to treat these issues from an attitudinal perspective working with its three components: cognition, affection, and behaviour. Resources such as movies, photography, mass media, or anthropological perspectives on gender and sexual orientation worldwide are positive ways to deal with gender diversity in our classrooms.*

**KEYWORDS:** *EFL teacher training, Teacher Training Innovation, Gender, Queer Theory*

**RESUMEN.** *En esta comunicación tratamos la importancia de introducir los discursos del género y de la orientación sexual en las prácticas de formación del profesorado de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera como resultado de un Proyecto de Innovación Docente titulado “Género e identidad sexual: De los discursos culturales a la innovación docente en formación del profesorado” de la Universidad de Granada. El Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas: Aprendizaje, Enseñanza y Evaluación (2001), establece que los temas relacionados con la alteridad deben ser tratados en el aula de lengua extranjera como medio para adquirir la competencia existencial. Dado el hecho de que nuestros maestros en formación de EFL constatan la falta de (in)formación para tratar estos tópicos en el aula tradicionalmente silenciados, mostramos diferentes prácticas que pueden resultar beneficiosas para hacer los discursos implícitos explícitos en lo relativo a las personas LGBTQ (Lesbianas, Gays, Bisexuales, Queers y Transexuales), el sexismo o las actitudes homófobas. Es especialmente importante tratar estos temas desde las tres perspectivas de las actitudes: la cognición, el comportamiento y la afectividad. Recursos como las películas, la fotografía, los medios de comunicación o las incursiones antropológicas sobre el género y la orientación sexual son medios muy positivos para tratar la diversidad de género en nuestras aulas.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Formación del profesorado de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera, Innovación docente, Género, Teoría Queer.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we present some of the practices of a Teaching Innovation Project held by the Faculty of Education of the University of Granada titled “Gender and sexual orientation: From cultural discourses to teaching innovation in teacher training.” It is an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental project made up of members of the Department of Didactics of Language and Literature (English Section) and the Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology. We estimate that a total sum of 1000 students participate in this project of which around 500 are enrolled in the degree “TEFL for Primary Education.”

The general idea underpinning this project is that social discourses establish what we may consider “true” or “false” within every cultural setting. This is also true when it comes to sexuality as stated by Michel Foucault. Gender is a highly relevant factor of a person’s identity and, thus, must be taken into account in educational practices and cultural discourses.

The *CEF* (2001) states that besides communicative competence in foreign languages, there is a set of general competences which must also be addressed in foreign language teacher training. Existential competence makes part of these general competences, where we can insert gender and sexual orientation practices in the EFL teacher training process.

The current transition towards the ESHE (European Space of Higher Education) calls for reconsideration of the classroom praxis and for the use of the possibilities of language to build concepts and relations (beyond its use as a communication tool) and as an instrument of humanization. Moreover, our role as teacher trainers is to provide our trainees with materials, techniques, and intellectual resources to face gender and sexual differences in a globalized world.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

With this paper, we aim to achieve the following objectives:

- To make our EFL teacher trainees aware of the importance of addressing gender and sexual orientation issues within their training practices both in theoretical and practical perspectives.
- To establish a well-planned, explicit framework to foster the value of tolerance toward gender and sexual orientation differences.
- To present some of our gender-related innovation practices within our everyday classroom practices to eradicate sexism and homophobia among our EFL teacher trainees.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1. *The Spanish context*

It is acknowledged that teachers lack specific training to address gender and sexual orientation requisites since universities do not train them in education for tolerance. When it comes to LGBTQ issues, academic staff needs basic information about gender, homosexuality, LGBTQ students' needs, strategies to prevent violence, psychological bases for possible crises, and appropriate strategies to fight homophobia.

Following the needs analysis carried out by the Spanish Educational Reform and the major guidelines (R.D. 1006/1991; BOE 26-6-91), Madrid and McLaren (1993:10) propose the following goals for an elementary and intermediate level of education related directly to values and the appreciation of foreign cultures where we can insert gender topics:

1. Appreciating the communicative value of the foreign language and the student's own capacity to use it, showing a positive attitude, understanding and respect towards other foreign languages and other cultures.
2. Improving the students' general and basic education by introducing cross-curricular contents and activities through the FL syllabus.

Madrid and McLaren (2004: 24-25) also present a series of general and specific objectives to be achieved by EFL teachers in order to fulfil the requirements posed by Spanish Educational laws. Below, we identify some of the most noticeable ones which refer directly or indirectly to the axiological component in teacher training.

1. To be able to practise the profession efficiently within an autonomous community, in Spain and in present-day pluricultural and plurilingual Europe, by recognising and accepting the multicultural diversity of modern society and be prepared to work in multicultural educational contexts. This will mean in turn a) to be able to relate the students' home culture to the foreign culture; b) to encourage cultural sensitivity and developing strategies which help the learner relate to other cultures; c) to be prepared to act as intermediary between speakers from different cultures; and d) to overcome cultural stereotypes.

3. To be open to new cultural experiences in the country where the FL is spoken by spending time in the country, which will allow them to a) identify specific semiotic features of the culture; b) recognise sociocultural characteristics; c) compare social and cultural features of the foreign society with those of the home culture; d) distinguish social rules and appropriate behaviours; and e) organise future exchange programmes for teachers and students, etc.

### 3.2. *Queer Theory Framework for gender and sexual orientation*

Literature reviews offer us two basic ways of addressing queer issues in educational contexts. This may be done by following a Gay and Lesbian theoretical framework (pedagogies of inclusion) or the Queer Theory (pedagogies of inquiry).

So far, the 'gay and lesbian' theoretical framework is mainly concerned with the introduction of "authentic images of gays and lesbians" (Britzman 1995: 158) in curricular materials. Nelson (1999) questions this approach to classroom practice saying that although it is well intentioned, there are many uncovered gaps. In the form of questions, she underlines several objections:

- How is "a lesbian" to be represented in curricula or materials?
- Which characters or characteristics will be included, and/or 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? (Nelson 1999: 376-377).

Nelson (1999) prefers the Queer Theory, opposing the Gay and Lesbian identity framework and draws on poststructuralist theories of identity to form the theoretical framework as the basis for classroom practice. The first steps in Queer Theory can be traced back to the 90's when Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* was published. Queer Theory understands gender as variable and changeable according to things we say and do and not in terms of inborn identity. Thus, there is a strong opposition to labelling and a strong celebration of differences. Nelson (1999: 377) proposes that it is Queer Theory which might settle the bases for classroom practice by:

- acknowledging that the domain of sexual identity may be important to a range of people for a variety 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;
- considering sexual identity in relation to other acts of identity and vice versa. (p. 377).

In sum, by means of looking at the way identities are constructed, we can demystify the preconceptions around them. Thus, EFL and culture are seen as heterogeneous and changing, and sexual identities are seen from an intercultural perspective widening ethnocentric perspectives. Furthermore, what can be considered more beneficial from an educational point of view is that 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).

#### 4. EFL TEACHER TRAINING INNOVATIVE PRACTICES: GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Below, we present in a schematic way the different tasks we ask our students to carry out in order to make them aware of the gender and sexual orientation differences. We bet for an inquiry-based perspective to perform the following tasks since it can provide our students with the necessary tools to develop critical thinking and co-operative work. As stated by Kuhn (2004), it is of paramount importance that teacher trainees acquire work processes of inquiry, analysis, and inference.

##### 4.1. *Participants*

The research projects and tasks described in this paper are performed by the students of the following courses given at the Faculty of Education of the University of Granada:

- *Idioma extranjero (inglés)*. 1<sup>st</sup> year. 120 students.
- *Idioma extranjero y su didáctica (inglés)*. 3<sup>rd</sup> year. 300 students.
- *Fonética (inglés)*. 2<sup>nd</sup> year. 80 students.

##### 4.2. *Context*

Granada is a Spanish city located in the East part of the very southern region of Spain known as Andalusia. It has around 300,000 inhabitants of which 60,000 are students of the University of Granada. In the last decade it has become a relevant multicultural city where people from all over the world co-exist pacifically: Europeans, Chinese, Arabs, Latin Americans, Gypsies, etc. One of the most outstanding minorities is that of Muslim people coming from the North of Africa and Middle East.

##### 4.3. *Presentation of research projects and tasks*

###### 4.3.1. Queer Theory as a method for informing teacher practices

Readings: Choose one of the following authors and make a general profile of his or her contribution to the conceptual development of Queer Theory. Present your findings to your classmates:

- Judith Butler
- Eve Sedgwick

- Michael Warner
- Teresa de Lauretis

#### 4.3.2. Movies

##### *Brokeback Mountain*

1. Analyse *Brokeback Mountain* from a Queer Theory perspective. Take into account the following terms: performance, deconstruction, culture. In order to successfully perform this task, you need to study the following volumes: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) by Judith Butler and *History of Sexuality. Volume 1* (1990) by Michel Foucault.
2. The social construction of masculinities in *Brokeback Mountain*.

##### *Bend it Like Beckham*

1. Consider the following concepts in the film *Bend it like Beckham*: Prejudice, Stereotype, and Intercultural Awareness.
2. What is the most striking aspect for you about the different aspects related to gender in the film?
3. What is a “woman” in Hindu culture? How is it different in the British culture? What about “men”?

#### 4.3.3. Mass Media

##### *Gender violence*

1. Please, provide a working definition for “gender violence.”
2. In groups of four, dive into all the resources available to you to find all those news, advertisements, or information which may be subjected to be considered sexist or homophobic. Please, gather as much information as you can around “gender violence”.

##### *Gender terminology*

1. Look for the meaning of the following terms: Homosexuality, heterosexuality, intersexuality, pansexuality, queer, LGBTQ, metrosexuality. Provide a detailed explanation of their epistemology.
2. Look for examples of the above terms in the mass media available to you: TV, newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts, etc. Are they all visible? Can you outline a clear pattern of behaviour related to these terms?

#### 4.3.4. Photography

##### *Del Lagrace Volcano*

1. Research into the biographical data of Del Lagrace Volcano and outline the most salient aspects of her work: photography and films.

2. In depth work with *Love Bites*. Please, select the three most interesting photos for you and analyse the different latent discourses which are being evaluated within them.
3. Make an analysis of Lagrace's vision and treatment of marriage in her work as represented in *Love Bites*.

*Robert Mapplethorpe*

1. What is it interesting about Mapplethorpe's conception of nudism in women and men?
2. In your opinion, why hasn't he been given his place within the pop culture worldwide?

*Gender and sexual orientation in Arts in historical perspective*

1. Look at the following pictures and contextualise them in its historical time providing a clear and schematic gendered framework. (Source: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)).

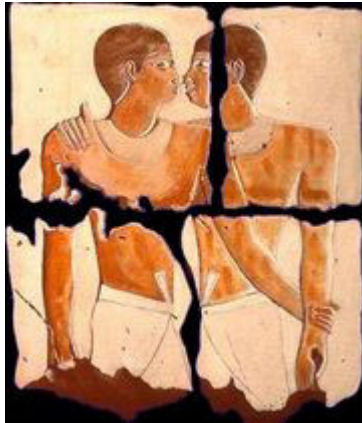


Figure 1. *From the tomb of Niankhkhnun and Khnumhotep. Illustration from photograph © 1999 Greg Reeder.*



Figure 2. *Zephyrus and Hyacinthus. Attic red-figure cup from Tarquinia 480 BC (Boston Museum of Fine Arts)*



Figure 3. *Shah Abbas I embracing his wine boy. Painting by Muhammad Qasim, 1627. The poem reads “May life grant all that you desire from three lips, those of your lover, the river, and the cup.” Louvre, Paris*



Figure 4. *Two male lovers are burned at the stake, Zurich 1482 (Zurich Central Library)*

#### 4.3.5. Anthropological perspective

##### *Margaret Mead*

1. Read and analyse from a critical perspective the following works by the most important pioneer anthropologist on gender issues:
  - a. *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (2001)
  - b. *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (2001)

##### *Pakistan*

1. Research on the figure of Hijras and present it to your partners.
2. What steps must a person give in order to become a Hijra?
3. Can you compare Hijras with other members of your own community?

##### *Native Americans*

Please, research on the following gender and sexual variances within Native Americans in North America:

1. New Mexico, Indios Pueblo: Weiwa

2. Hopi, Navajo: Na'del
3. Omaha: Mixu'ga and Minguqa
4. Paiute: Tubas
5. Patwin: Pamero
6. Salinan: Joyas
7. Lemhi: Tubasa
8. Two Spirits
9. Berdaches: Research on the epistemology of this term and its current use in gender discourses.

#### *Thailand*

1. Kathoey: life, life-style, show, discrimination, and performance.

#### *Sub-Saharan Africa*

1. Research on these silenced topics in Sub-Saharan Africa:
  - a. Boy-wives
  - b. Female-husbands

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

Within the current transition towards the ESHE (European Space of Higher Education), EFL teacher training requires a holistic approach which considers not only linguistic-instructional knowledge, but also the development of the existential competence which comprises topics such as gender or sexual orientation. A proper teacher training needs reflective students who are able to build their own teaching identity according to the current challenges, namely, those which are derived from self-construction as an individual and social self (gender, interculturality, diversity, bullying, etc.); i.e., learning to accept oneself and the other.

With our Teaching Innovation Project we aim at changing teachers' roles as having and administering knowledge to become ethnographers and philosophers through objectives, contents, methodologies, or evaluations and consider that knowledge is fluctuation, resistance, and instability.

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