GENDER-DISSIDENT

IDENTITIES IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

From gender normativity to transformative pedagogies

FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS Y EDUCACIÓN
UNIVERSIDAD DISTRITAL

UNIVERSIDAD DISTRITAL
FRANCISCO JOSÉ DE CALDAS

October, 2023

Researchers

Ángel Cortés Segura
Yeltsin Gómez Ortiz

Collaborators

Adrián Ortega
Danile Sánchez
Sebastián Jacome
Miguel Rodríguez
André Escobar

Advisor

Eliana Garzón

Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas
Facultad de Ciencias y Educación
Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés

Bogotá D.C, Colombia

CONTENT

PRESENTATION

When we become language teachers we make some decisions: we may choose to teach the language itself as an isolated system or we can teach the world through the language. If we stand on the second possibility, we get to understand that communication is a process impacted by our cultural backgrounds and that language is a social practice rather than a set of structures. Likewise, a communicative approach also involves an intercultural perspective that reflects upon how different and diverse people encounter each other. In this scenario, we may also understand that interculturality is not only restricted to the interactions with people from the culture of the target language we are teaching, but also the differences that exist within our classrooms based on ethnicity, age, functionality, and particularly in this case: gender.

Language curriculum, particularly English as a foreign Language (EFL) classroom, introduces several contents that convey world representations and discourses. In terms of gender, pedagogical practices, language use and instructional material are still rooted in normative and binary visions. Therefore, mainstream EFL teaching practices reinforce discourses about gender normativity and exclude sexual and gender diversities. This exclusion does not take place only in the symbolic sphere, but also affects gender-dissident people’s wellbeing.

We are aware that EFL classrooms are a minimal interaction scenario within the whole educational system and that teachers' agency might be restricted by the institution policies or parents' decisions on children and youth. However, we created this guideline not to impose a set of teaching practices that might not be implemented considering school demands, but to invite EFL pre-service and in-service teachers to think of the possible contributions within their classrooms to transform or at least interrogate gender normativity.

This guideline is the result of a research project we developed in the Bachelor´s Degree EFL program in the Faculty of Science and Education at Universidad distrital Francisco José de Caldas. We invited other gender-dissident classmates to participate and cooperate with the research project considering our life stories as sexual and gender diverse students who are also becoming teachers. As the result of several discussions and reflections, we propose this guideline as a set of pedagogical orientations to transform gender normative practices rooted in the EFL curriculum.

The booklet is divided in two sections: initially we present some general recommendations for schools, and then we move to specific orientations for EFL teachers. The pedagogical orientations are not aimed to be lesson plannings or instructional material, but show some experiences and examples that suggest teachers how they can adapt their material and activities to avoid normative and binary discourses on gender. We hope these recommendations can invite our colleagues to stand on a critical perspective of EFL contexts and contribute to cultural change in education.

1. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The pedagogical orientations in this section are recommendations for general educational settings that involve not only EFL classrooms, but the decisions concerning the whole educational institution.

1.1. Use of bathrooms

Promote use of neutral bathrooms or allow you students to use the bathroom that matches their gender identity.

For trans and non-normative gender coporalities, use of public bathrooms can be uncomfortable since people around them can overlook them and even push them out. Public bathrooms are an essential need in education institutions and gender-dissidents students should not inhibit form using them.

I was in the women bathroom and since my appearance was not as feminine as expected, the concierge took me out.

1.2. Dressing codes

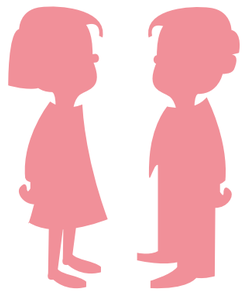
The coordinator from the school banned me from using the masculine uniform and I was forced to use a skirt that affected my self-esteem.

Do not impose dressing codes that can break students' autonomy to perform their gender expressions.

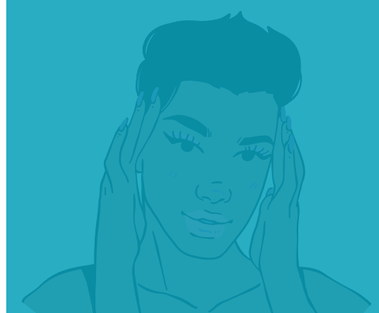
School manuals must not impose models of how students can express their gender. This breaks their right to perform their free personality development. As well, imposing dressing codes doesn't only affect trans and non-normative students, but also boys and girls that do not feel comfortable with certain clothing, hair style, accessories, among others.

1.3. Use of public space

When the teacher divided the classroom in boys and girls rows, the guys made fun of me and told me I should not be with them.



Do not split the classroom space considering gender categories.



Educational space fragmentation following gender categories reproduce controlling and policing of gender-dissident students. Within these spaces, they are bullied as they do not fulfill the expectations around being a boy or a girl.

1.4. Interactions

Ask your students their chosen names and pronouns. Do not assume the names you have in the official documents in the school match how your students want to be treated

As well as cisgender people may choose a nickname they feel comfortable with instead of their legal names, trans students as well may prefer to be treated with a name and pronouns that match their gender identity. Being aware of this recommendation can help your students to engage enjoyably in the classroom.

She

They

He

Elle

Even when my family and classmates already acknowledged my gender identity there were a few teachers who refused to use my current name and pronouns.

1.5. Active listening

Listen actively and carefully to what your gender-dissident students have to say.

Teachers are social actors who have a social responsibility for students' wellbeing. If they perceive unsafe situations in the classroom, they must show willingness to help within the educational context possibilities and consider if the students may receive support from their environment before making any decision.

I was bullied by some classmates about my feminine gender expression. I told my teacher to listen to me, but instead of helping me in the classroom, she disclosed my identity to my parents and relationships at home got even worse.

2. EFL RECOMMENDATIONS

The pedagogical orientations in this section are specific recommendations for teachers from EFL classrooms. The suggestions consider language teaching curriculum with examples of what can be implemented in the classroom.

2.1. Instructional material and contents

Several topics commonly taught in the language classroom involve gender representations. The following orientations consider gendered topics and examples of how non-normative gender vision can be embraced. It's also important that teachers look for authentic or alternative material that can be adapted to the lessons out of mainstream textbooks.

2.1.1. The family

Include family representations that challenge the heterosexual model as the only valid possibility

Families are not only made of father, mother and children as traditionally though. Family is primarily a scenario where growing and caring takes place, no matter the gender or number of individuals that are part of.

When reviewing vocabulary about the family include the next representations: homoparental, nuclear, single-parent, grandparents, extended, childless, recomposed (adopted, foster, step). You can ask your students questions such us:

- Who do you live with?
- What are the most important values in your family?
- What is necessary to guarantee love and care?

2.1.2. Professions and occupations

Incorporate alternative representations of professions traditionally occupied by men or women.

Men historically have been positioned in power roles within public life. On the other hand, women have been placed in caring and private occupations. Gender-dissident individuals have also been positioned in limited occupations, such as sexual work, aesthetics and entertainment. Nowadays the situation is evolving but instructional material still reproduces the stereotypes.

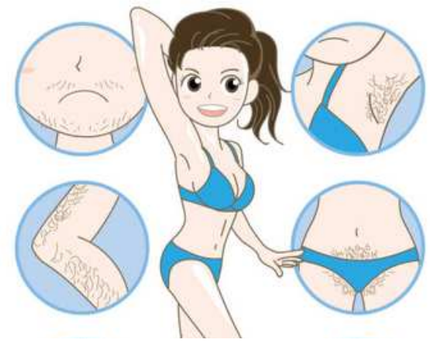
When teaching professions and occupations you can use images of women and men in non-expected positions. For example, you can use women characters in areas such as politicians, engineering, science and business. On the other hand, you can include images from men in positions such as nurses, flight attendants, secretaries, kindergarten teachers, dress designers, among others. You can also include life stories from women and gender-dissidents participating in science and government affairs and ask your students the following questions:

- Have seen more women and gender-dissidents in these positions?
- What difficulties do you think they had to face to achieve those positions?
- What do you think you can do to promote gender equality?

2.1.3. The body

Include representation of gender and sexually diverse corporalities.

Transgender and intersex bodies are portrayed from a pathological and abnormal view. They are excluded from body representations in instructional material. Also, the homogenous view on women and men's bodies exacerbates stereotypes about corporal features that do not necessarily represent real bodies.



When reviewing vocabulary about body parts, include images from men and women that do not fit expectations about masculine and feminine bodies. For example, you can include representations of hairy women and ask your students:

- The women that are close to you shave their bodies?
- Why do you think women are imposed to shave?
- Why do men not have the same imposition?

2.1.4. Dressing

When studying vocabulary about clothes you can include representations of cultures where men use skirts (Scotland or Ireland, for example) and ask your students the next questions:

- What associations do you make about skirts in your own culture?
- Check on the internet in what other cultures men use skirts and find out the reason they wear it.
- After reviewing how clothing varies depending on culture, do you still think that clothes are assigned to a specific gender?

Clothes have no gender. Transform the representations that reinforce this idea.

Traditionally it is assumed that clothes, hair styles, accessories, colors and even smell are assigned to a specific gender. This view limits the possibilities for personal expression and ignores that culture is heterogenous and transformative. Clothing evolves over time and varies depending on the place people wear it.

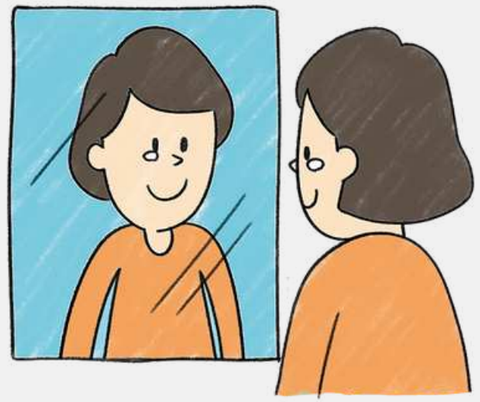
2.1.5. Self-esteem

Avoid reproducing discourses about how boys and girls should look when growing.

Students, especially when growing and becoming adolescents may experience different changes on their bodies. Usually there are several assumptions about how their bodies would evolve depending on their gender and they may experience frustration when these expectations do not match the traditional images of beauty about feminine and masculine bodies.

When studying the body you can use an image of sexual secondary characteristics that appear during puberty in teenegers (voice changes, body hair, body curves, height, muscles). Ask your students the next questions:

- Do you know adult men who do not have a beard? Do you know adult women who are not curvy?
- How do you imagine your body when becoming an adult?
- Does your body necessarily have to fit this expectation for you to feel confident?



2.1.6. Emotions

When talking with your students about emotions you can show news and statistics about higher rates of suicide in men. You can ask your students the next questions:

- Do you feel comfortable when sharing your weaknesses with somebody else?
- What are the reasons why usually men limit themselves to express vulnerable emotions?
- What can you do for your male classmates when they are going through a difficult situation?

Create a safe environment where students, no matter their gender, can talk about their emotions and feelings.

Sexist discourses position women as delicate and emotional, and men as rational and brave. These assumptions keep men away from acknowledging their feelings, which may result in higher rates from drug consumption and suicide. It's necessary that men are allowed to express vulnerable feelings as well as women are able to express anger without being considered hysterical.

2.1.7. Routines/housechores

Show your students house-chores are activities all members at home should cooperate with.

Gender roles at home are reinforced in the activities men and women are supposed to perform. Men traditionally go to work and get home to rest, whereas women are in charge of cleaning the house, cooking, looking after children, which is a labor not compensated economically. It's important for students to become aware about gender inequal roles reproduce at home and how they can interrogate these practices.

When studying routines and housechores within the family, show pictures of men also cooperating with these activities. You may also ask your students the next questions:

- What housechores do you cooperate with in your family?
- What are the tasks assigned to each member of your family?
- Do you notice women do more activities than men? What are the reasons for this situation to happen?

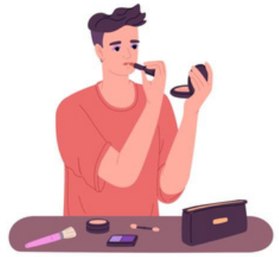
2.1.8. Leisure activities

Include representations of boys and girls choosing non-expected activities as hobbies.

Instructional materials provide several examples of hobbies when students are invited to talk about their interests and how they spend their free time. The problem emerges when representations are gendered. For instance, men choose “rude” activities such as playing a sport, videogames or going fishing, and women choose more “delicate” activities such as taking pictures, going shopping or going to a beauty salon. Students should know leisure activities are meant to be enjoyed no matter gender.

You can show pictures of adolescents performing different hobbies and ask your students the next questions:

- What are your hobbies?When you hangout with friends, what activities do you do? Are your friends mostly boys or girls?
- Is there any activity that you would like to do but you feel ashamed because it does not “match” your gender?
- Why do people feel ashamed about their tastes and interests when they do not affect somebody else?



2.1.9. Sports

Incorporate representations of women participating in sports traditionally played by men

Women were historically excluded from sports. In the last decades they were allowed to participate in professional competitions but they face inequality in terms of financial support and visibility. Likewise, intersex and trangender women continue to be excluded from competitions despite there are no rigorous studies of how hormonal treatments affect sport performance on these populations.

You can show news about the feminine Colombian team succeeding in football international competitions and also news about how their salaries are considerably lower than male players. You can ask your students the next questions:

- Are you interested in watching women's sports on TV as well as mens’?
- In the school, girls sport teams are supported as well as boys’?
- If women have achieved higher positions in football international competitions, why do they receive less support?

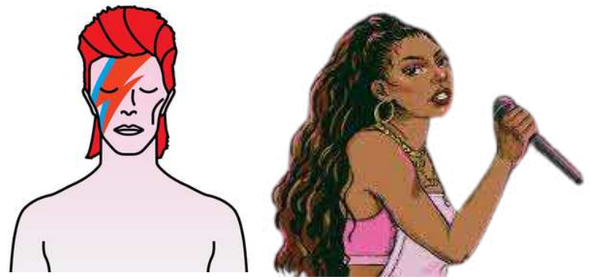
2.1.10. Music

Show your students that music genre is not created for specific genders.

Music narrates stories situated within specific sociocultural contexts. Music genre is usually associated with certain feelings and values. For instance, rap has been associated to male singers and pop to female artists. It's necessary that people become aware of women and men opening spaces for music genres they were not always welcomed and students become aware there is no music for boys and girls, but they can enjoy the whole variety of existing genres.

When talking about music genres, you can include songs and life stories from women and sexually diverse artists that opened a space in traditional male scenarios. For instance, you may include life stories from pioneer female rapers such as Queen Latifah and some of her songs "Ladies first" or "UNITY". As well you can include sexually diverse referents such as Lil Nas X and his stories struggling with homophobia. You may also ask your students:

- Who are your favorite singers? The majority of them are men, women or gender dissidents? What genres do they belong to?
- When listening to the rap genre, singers are mostly men, women or other genders?
- What difficulties do you think initial women and sexual-dissidents found when becoming rap singers?



2.1.11. Animals

Show your students that sexuality is also diverse in other animals different from humans.

Frequently, detractors of sexual diversities argue homosexuality and sex variability is unnatural. However, other animals demonstrate how natural sexual diversity is: some species may have homosexual behaviors, others may transform their bodies from male to female features over life, and others have combinations of both sexes. It's important people become aware that sexual diversity is natural and that discrimination is ideological.

When studying vocabulary about animals, show pictures of animals and fun facts about species such as penguins, lions, clown fish, hyenas and others who have different sexual behaviors and features. Ask your students:

- Do you know any other examples of animals with diverse sexual behaviors?
- Considering the previous examples, would you think sexual diversity is natural or unnatural?
- Why are humans the only species who discriminate against sexual variability?

2.1.12. History

Incorporate a gender perspective when studying historical events where women and gender-dissident individuals are banished.

History usually presents a series of important events performed mainly by men despite women's actions were also important. Gender-dissident individuals are erased completely from these stories. It's important teachers give more visibility to other identities rather than men when narrating and representing historical events both in international and national contexts.

You can use the material from "Comisión de la Verdad" about the Armed Conflict in Colombia and use the report about "Mi cuerpo, mi verdad", which narrates how women and gender dissident- individual survived the war. You can ask yours students the following questions:

- What do you find common among these stories?
- What do you think were the motivations of violence towards women and gender-dissent people?
- Why are the roles of women and gender-dissident people hidden in history?

To access the source click on the image or scan the code

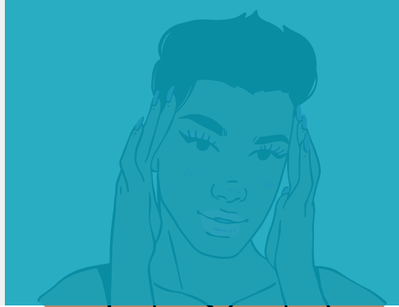
2.2. Language use

The following orientations include recommendations to use language inclusively. In Spanish, recommendations are usually broader since gender is also a grammar category that affects several structures such as determiners, nouns and adjectives. On the other hand, in English gender is not grammatical but primarily lexical. The next following orientations show English can become more inclusive for women and gender-dissidents avoiding using binary and sexist words.

2.2.1. Use of inclusive language

Avoid using specific gender words in professions and occupations.

Instead of words such as policeman, fireman or foreman you can use police officer, firefighter, supervisor. Also, instead of actress, hostess, waitress and stewardess you may say actor, host, waiter, flight attendant.



Avoid using masculine words as generic

Instead of saying man, mankind or manpower as collective nouns you can say humans, humankind or workforce.

When greeting the audience avoid gendered words

Instead of saying “ladies and gentlemen” or “guys” you may say “folks” “colleagues “ or “everyone”.

Do not assume sexual orientation of people if it is unknown

Instead of saying boyfriend or girlfriend, or husband or wife, you may say, couple, partner or spouse.

Be respectful about sexual and gender diversity

Do not ask trans people what their names were before transition, what surgeries they have or what genitalia they have. Do not ask people with diverse sexual orientations about their intimacy preferences if they are not close to you at all.

2.2.2. Use of the pronoun “they”

You can use and teach your students the pronoun “they” has more than one function.

Usually when teaching grammar and specifically pronouns, “they” is explained as a plural pronoun and the verb conjugations are adjusted to the plural form. However, in English the pronoun has a singular function as well in terms of gender inclusion:

"They" can be used when the gender of a subject is unknown.

Instead of saying:
I scheduled an appointment with the doctor, but I'm not sure if he or she is going to show up.
You may say:
I scheduled an appointment with the doctor, but I'm not sure if they is going to show up.

"They" can be used when the subject is non-binary and uses neutral pronouns.

Instead of saying:
He came out as non-binary. He will be changing the clothes he wears.
You may say:
They came out as non-binary. They will be changing the clothes they wears.

2.3. Activities

The following orientations consider communicative skills: productive and receptive. We suggest some activities that can be implemented in the language classroom and students can practice not only communication, but also foster a critical perspective on gender normative discourses.

2.3.1. Productive skills: roleplay

Propose theater/role play activities where students are able to perform the character they want regardless gender.

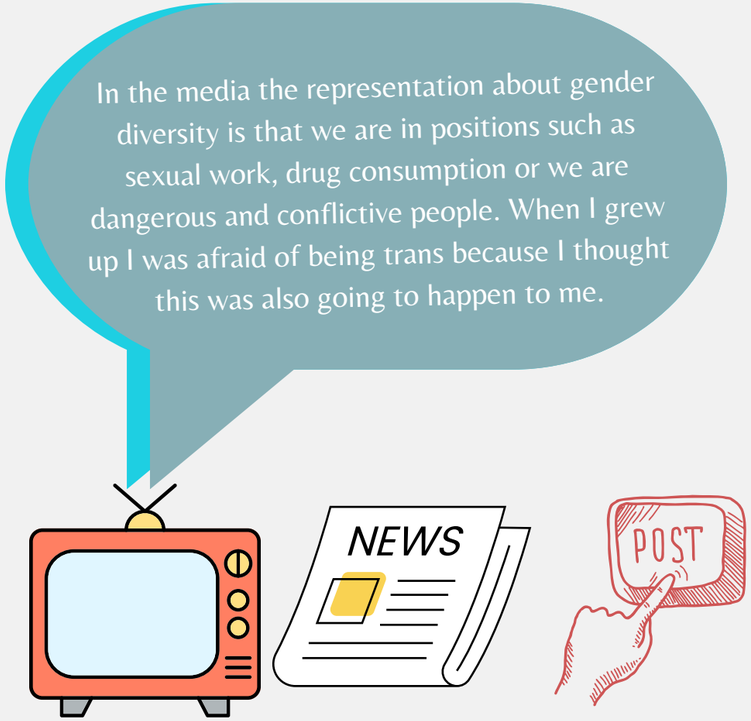
Roleplays and theater are activities where character construction takes place. As in the real world, characters are gendered and students are supposed to play the roles that match the gender assigned in real life following gender devices such as: tone of voice, body features, dressing and so on. You can debunk the assumptions and explore possibilities in theater as an alternative representation of the world. For example, in a roleplay you can ask them to perform the lipsync of a song. In the activity they should be able to choose the voices and the characters regardless of the gender assigned in real life. This opens a possibility for each student to explore and have fun with gender expressions and escape from normative gender views.

When I was a child there was a theater show about a fairy tail that narrated the story of butterflies and the sun. I wanted to be a butterfly but my teacher did not allow me because I was a boy and then I had to be the sun. I was very sorry during the show

2.3.2. Receptive skills: media analysis

Analyze with your students gender representation on media

Media has gender representations that reinforce the stereotypes, sexist practices, and asymmetry of power among men, women and gender dissidents. You can debunk these gender normative discourses analyzing from a critical perspective these representations. Ask your students to bring magazines, newspapers, advertisements and other media sources. You can request them to gather text fragments and images created about women, men or gender dissidents and extract the meanings that are associated with each gender. At the end you can think with your students what alternative representations would change these discourses.



GLOSSARY

Gender
Cultural construction upon the sexual difference. These constructions vary over place and time and include several representations of what is understood by women and men.

Sex
Set of biological features individuals develop at the moment of birth and also during adolescence. These features may include hormones, genitalia, gonads and chromosomes.

Gender identity
Self-image of one's corporalities resulting in the sense of belonging to one or more gender categories

Gender expression
Personal decision from an individual to express their gender following certain conventions such as clothing, accessories and so on.

Sexual orientation
Affective and sexual attraction to one or more gender categories. Under these categories people may be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual and so on.

Intersex
People who develop a variation in the combination of masculine and sexual features.

Trans/transgender
People who transition corporally or socially to a gender different from the one assigned at birth.

Cisgender
People who remain along their lives with the gender identity assigned at birth.

Non-binary
People who develop a gender identity that doesn't match binary categories of men and women.

Gender-dissidents
Umbrella term used to describe people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Gender-non conforming
Umbrella term used to describe people who are out of gender norms but not necessarily are trans or non-binary.

Gender normativity
Set of sexist practices and discourses that reproduce power hierarchies among genders and exclude gender representation out of the binary models of men and women.

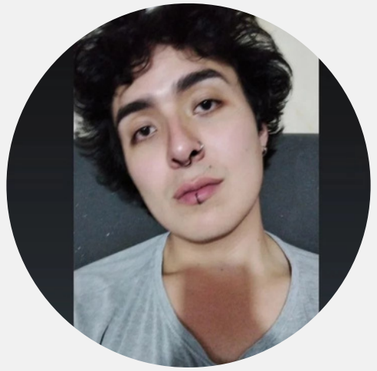
Secondary sex characteristics
Sex features that appear during adolescence due to hormonal development and include tone of voice, body hair distribution, height, muscled and fat distribution, breast growing and sexual organs mature.

Researchers

Yeltsin Gómez

I'm a transgender girl who decided to be a language teacher. I'm interested in promoting awareness about gender and social justice in educational scenarios particulary language teaching.

Ángel Cortés



I'm a gender-fluid person and I've been studying to be an English teacher. I'm interested in working especially with population with special needs, who may find challenges accessing education.

UNIVERSIDAD DISTRITAL
FRANCISCO JOSÉ DE CALDAS
Acreditación Institucional de Alta Calidad

FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS Y EDUCACIÓN
UNIVERSIDAD DISTRITAL