

## ***Existence: Eight LGBTQIA+ Inclusive ELT Resources* by Peter J. Fullagar**

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### **Visibilising and usualising**

As Fullagar states at the opening of this resource pack, LGBTQIA+ people are not present in mainstream ELT materials, which often keep their existence *hidden*. This lack of representation is what has driven him to design his own materials to make the LGBTQIA+ community and their contributions visible since “invisibility feeds shame” (Sanders, 2021, 5:54). Sanders holds that having been made invisible, either deliberately or by omission, in history and particularly in books/materials, *visibilising* them is the first step and this is exactly what Fullagar has done in his handbook with the intention of helping other teachers of English build a more inclusive learning environment that embraces all students. While the lessons clearly intend to fight against discrimination based on gender identities, gender expression and sexual orientation, by positively portraying LGBTQIA+ people, they also fight against racism, ageism and ableism, by *usualising* (Sanders, 2021) marginalised groups so that they are embedded in regular didactic proposals and their worth can be recognised.



### **Analysis of the eight lesson plans in the collection**

This collection of resources is composed of eight lesson plans for different levels of the language, ranging from A2 to C1. It is described as Collection 1, which anticipates the willingness to develop subsequent materials in the series. Below, I will discuss its content, paying special attention to what I consider the most innovative aspect this material has, which is LGBTQIA+ representation. Even though linguistic activities will be considered, I will not delve into them.

#### **Lesson 1. Working life, A2 (Page 1-8). Present simple questions, be / do, non-binary, trans identity**

It is interesting how subtly, through the careful choice of images, inclusion is sustained visually and stereotypes are challenged. In this lesson, photographs<sup>1</sup> depict women in roles of authority or in jobs that require physical strength, men being

<sup>1</sup> In all photographs, a very respectfully-written caption is displayed when the cursor is placed on them in the e-book version.

collaborative, kind, delicate or nurturing, as well as trans and gender diverse people co-working. Intersectionality is also strongly present in visuals, for example in the photographs of a brown Pakistani, a male ballet dancer a black female lawyer, a cook with down syndrome, two black men (one with vitiligo and the other one in a wheelchair) working over a laptop and an old man working with wood, displaying in all cases autonomy and a sense of fulfilment. This lesson fosters communication among students with the aim of, not only asking and answering as a language exercise, but also of encouraging students to get to know each other (such as in the case of “Find someone who...”). In one of the activities, students have to assume other people’s roles and jobs and think of their imaginary lives and duties, which fosters empathy, imagination and creativity to place themselves in someone else’s shoes. It is important to mention that students are asked to research some jobs, both common and rare, some of which require studying at university or having a practical disposition. In that way, no job is assigned a higher value and the panorama is opened for students to know possible future work options that also do *exist*. This first lesson invites those who are interested in seeking more information on LGBTQIA+ identities, in particular, and inclusion, in general, through useful links to external resources.

**Lesson 2. I’m having a great time, A2 (Page 9-17). Present continuous, non-binary, trans identity**

At the beginning of the lesson, photographs show a young lady with down syndrome doing yoga, a woman playing the guitar, other people with different body sizes and different degrees of mobility. Visual representation of diversity is also achieved by means of incorporating illustrations of individuals doing a wide range of leisure activities. Although Fullagar resorted to usualising, there is one which might catch the students’ attention and it is that of a person in a bikini with a beard. It may trigger a talk—not a debate since existence is not debatable—around breaking binary stereotypes and distinguishing gender identity from gender expression. Along the lesson we get to know about the life of a trans and non-binary person, Marley. They appear carrying out ordinary actions such as cooking, talking with their father, texting their friends, etc., which might generate empathy, as students see that these are just humans with the same bodily and social needs for food, for connections, among others, making them an actual person, not an abstract label that other people might misunderstand simply for not knowing them. The representative flags of trans and non-binary people are introduced but students are encouraged to do research on them, which is empowering, relying on their agency to find things for themselves instead of being given all the answers. Students are also motivated to sort out language rules on their own.

**Lesson 3. Behind the lens, B1/B2 (Page 18-26). Verb patterns, lesbian, gay, trans identity**

In this case there is a photograph of a gay couple made up of a black man and a Latin man, who are hugging and watching a film at home. It is this everyday activity that exemplifies Fullagar’s *usualising* approach to the design of this lesson and it is his inclusion of the biography of a lesbian film maker of Asian roots that illustrates his aim of decolonising the curriculum and *visibilising* LGBTQIA+ community members’ cultural contributions, as Esther Eng was the first female director of a Chinese-language film in the USA. Students are invited to do research on other film directors of different gender identities. There is a list of suggested names that quietly shout: “We do exist!” but this activity allows for learners’ choice beyond such a list. Thinking skills are promoted in the language tasks posed as they involve a cognitive challenge. Students’ critical

thinking is also fostered through comparing and contrasting roles in filmmaking (writing, directing, acting) and sharing students' arguments with their peers. Students can also explore other websites by clicking on links the author provides at the end of the lesson.

**Lesson 4. The place where..., B1/B2 (Page 27-33). Relative clauses, gay, lesbian identity, disability**

The photograph of a surfer with a prosthetic leg in this third lesson highlights the idea of independence and movement despite an apparent bodily limitation. Once we read the text, we get to know that he is a Colombian gay photographer who has just broken up with his ex-partner. However, it is not his sentimental situation but his agency, as designer of his own surfboard and of his Mexican lesbian friend's skateboard, that is foregrounded. Students are presented with some key data collected from recent research studies on health—in a broad sense, including mental health—issues suffered by disabled LGBT+ people, e.g., addiction and suicidal attempts, and the UK charities that support them. There is a proposal for learners to do some research of similar organisations in their local contexts. There are external links related to the charities mentioned above.

**Lesson 5. Family units, B2 (Page 34-40). Prefixes, LGBTQIA+ identities**

Diverse family configurations are represented in the photographs: a single parent, an extended family, a couple made up of a trans and a non-binary person, a gay couple of mature men without children, interracial relations (black parents with a white daughter/niece), a mother and a father with a son with down syndrome, a grandfather and his granddaughter, Muslim men belonging to the same family and holding horizontal generational relations, two mothers with their daughter, a pregnant mother and her husband with a little son in his arms, and a *chosen family*<sup>2</sup>, featuring people of different gender identities and/or sexual orientations, as well as ethnic origins and degrees of (dis)ability. Family is a complex concept to define as it can encompass a multiplicity of bonds, be it biological, legal and affective. ELT coursebooks usually portray one kind of family unit, that of a well-off, white, cis-heteronormative nuclear family, often from Britain or the USA and this resource depicts variety. It is extremely important to explore all these different families for two main reasons. Firstly, to find ourselves reflected in the materials and secondly, to get to know about others' realities, which are as valuable as ours. Students are asked to express what family means to them, to define, in their own words, some terms associated with family relations and to reflect upon representation of families in the media, all of which aims at the development of their critical thinking and communicative competence. There is a link to an audiovisual docu-ad in which a real gay family is shown and the voice of the young son is valued.

**Lesson 6. Housing, B2+ (Page 41-49). Future perfect simple, gay identity, disability, age**

This sixth lesson starts with photographs of different front doors in terms of colours, shapes, sizes, materials and styles, enabling students to hypothesise about who might live behind them, without leaving aside the fact that people's identities permeate the choices they make. Then, a house plan is used to make students think about who they believe lives there choosing from three options: an elderly person, a man in a wheelchair or a big family. Students can think of valid arguments for each case until they realise who the house is most suitable for due to its accessibility, which enhances both visual literacy

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<sup>2</sup> Chosen families are those established among friends instead of blood-related people. This term applies mainly to gay, lesbian and queer individuals who have been rejected by their families of origin and have found a friendship-based support network (Weston, 1991, in Kang et al. 2017).

development and critical thinking skills. After that, Fullagar incorporated a letter, which discusses the shared ownership of an apartment in a retirement community that is accessible for wheelchair users and has a welcoming atmosphere for LGBTQ+ residents. A hyperlink leads to the actual retirement community for LGBTQ+ people based in London. Reflection, as in the other lessons, is promoted, too.

#### **Lesson 7. A is for..., C1 (Page 50-56). Compound adjectives, asexual identity**

To exercise critical thinking, students are asked to justify their agreement or disagreement with certain statements on LGBTQIA+ people from their own perspectives. If the teacher who implements the lessons does not guide the talk effectively, it might open their existence to debate, which I think might be a risk here. However, it is clearly intended to collect the readers' assumptions and contextualised experiences on the treatment of the LGBTQIA+ community. There is a subsequent explicit message that reflects the author's standpoint. Students are also encouraged to think by retrieving interspersed information from an interview on Asexuality in order to answer some questions in their own words and by making new meanings out of the partial meaning offered by morphemes in compound words. Another instance of critical thinking is that students are asked to distinguish known information from new one after watching a video and comparing its content with that of the previous interview. Towards the end of the lesson there is a link to a webpage with advice for asexual allies, which learners have to organise hierarchically.

#### **Lesson 8. She got the girl, C1 (Page 57-61). Idioms, fixed expressions, lesbian identity, age**

This final lesson begins with varied and inclusive photographs, in line with prior proposals, for students to hypothesise about the stories behind the people they see in them and exchange thoughts. The love story of Vivian and Nonie is later introduced. It is approached via multimedia texts—a written one and a video—, which lets students know them better and be acquainted with the circumstances they had to go through to be together, catering for different learning styles and inspiring empathy. Students are invited to do research on the current situation regarding same-sex marriages in countries from different continents to gain a global perspective. Once students have informed themselves and each other by investigating online and presenting their findings, they will write a comprehensive opinion piece.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

This collection is one of a kind and fulfils its intended purpose of filling this gap of LGBTQIA+ representation in ELT materials. This is highly achieved by a curated selection of photographs that *visibilise* and *usualise* diversity with an intersectional perspective, contributing to breaking gender, ability, age, class and ethnic stereotypes and supporting the message of inclusion verbally and non-verbally. This booklet is inclusive in both its content and its form as when you place the cursor on top of the photographs, a caption is displayed describing what is happening in them in very carefully chosen words that promote respectful treatment. Talking about treatment, the use of pronouns, when a person is introduced in fact files or full texts, models a respectful practice that teaches—ELT learners and teachers as well—not to let ourselves be misled by appearances. Lessons contribute to the students' development of visual literacy, language learning, communication skills, critical thinking skills and research skills.

The booklet has some points that could be improved in further editions or considered for future collections in the series. Some links to external sources are repeated

at the end of different lessons, which is a pity as, surely, there must be other reliable web pages that students and educators could be invited to explore. In the second lesson the “Find someone who...” activity is very similar to the one in the first lesson. It prevents teachers from using both lessons with the same course as students might be asking their mates some questions they already know the answer to. A possible reason for these isolated “repetitions” is that lessons are not consecutive but originated as single proposals before being thought of as a collection. In lesson Two, students are given the answers/language explanations right below the task and, due to idleness, anxiety or just challenge avoidance, students might read the language references first, without resorting to their thinking skills to solve the task. That could be sorted out either by placing the language explanation on another page, maybe at the end of the lesson or perhaps by taking a screenshot and pasting it upside down to add a level of complexity so that they are not easily tempted by taking a shortcut.

By no means do these minor observations overshadow the collection’s relevance as the existence of “Existence” is in itself an invaluable contribution to ELT materials since, for a change, it makes LGBTQIA+ people—in all their colours, shapes, sizes, abilities, origins, economic situations—visible and, therefore, conceived of as worthy in the eyes of others and in their own. Understanding that a lack of representation is discrimination should mobilise the ELT world into the design of more inclusive resources.

## References

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