



Bamberg Studies in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Ba-TEFL

No. 3

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May 2024

Edited by Theresa Summer

To cite this article: Bauer, Katrin; Götz, Selina Anna; Höfler, Marie (2024): Bringing gender awareness into the ELFL classroom with the concept of transdifference: Three literature-based suggestions for teaching practice. *Bamberg Studies in Teaching English as a Foreign Language* 3. 1-19.

About *Ba-TEFL*

Bamberg Studies in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (Ba-TEFL) provides a forum for the exchange of information, ideas, and research findings among teachers and researchers interested in TEFL. The contributions address the concerns of practising teachers and learners across all school types and aim to share relevant findings and spread innovative and research-based teaching ideas.

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Bringing gender competence into the EFL classroom with the concept of transdifference: Three literature-based suggestions for teaching practice

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Abstract

In this contribution, the authors want to highlight the significance of incorporating the topic of gender in the EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom and provide practical examples using literary texts for (lower) intermediate and advanced learners. Each text will be accompanied by a vocabulary activity and an empathy task that draws upon the concept of transdifference to foster gender competence among EFL learners. This concept enables EFL learners to acknowledge diverse positions on gender identity and at the same time enables them to broaden their horizons becoming more aware of potential stereotypes and binary structures and how to defy them.

Keywords: gender, empathy, identity, literature, stereotypes, transdifference

1. Introduction

Shaping one's identity and appreciating others in their personal development, no matter how much it differs from one's own, is undoubtedly one of the most challenging processes of growing up and supporting students on this path is a core task of teachers, from the first day until graduation. As Elsner and Lohe point out, "[t]he idea of living diversity in today's classrooms holds a transformative potential, not only to reflect upon one's own identity but also to question the assumptions that we and others make" (Elsner & Lohe 2016: 9). Identity includes the notion of gender, a sensitive topic that, albeit constituting a crucial part of identity formation, is yet to be sufficiently included in the classroom (König 2018: 83). So, what does gender competence entail? With Volkmann, we argue that "gender competence means the ability to question the givenness of gender identity and gender formations" (Volkmann 2016: 119).

Fictional texts hold enormous potential for reflections on gender, as they familiarize learners with different gender-related perspectives and lifestyles. Thus, "the learner leaves their own cultural frame of reference, resists interpreting the foreign culture with their own culture-bound interpretative patterns, and instead tries to understand the foreign culture through their own culture-bound norms and standards, i.e. seeing the foreign culture through the eyes of the other" (Merse 2017: 24). Following Volkmann's ten elements of gender competence and gender awareness, the presented texts and activities aim to help learners understand the multiple layers of gender as performance-based social construct that can be open to change (Volkmann 2016: 119ff.).

The literary works chosen for this contribution not only offer fluid perspectives on binary gender roles that can be subject to reflections on how society "does gender" (and deals with deviant agents who do not adhere to the norm), but also encourage the learners to negotiate identity concepts on a personal level. If we want our students to be able to negotiate identity concepts, debunk stereotypes and challenge heteronormativity, they need gender-specific language competencies (Summer 2018: 43). Using derogatory terminology is often a result of a lack of said

competencies and might lead to adopting implicit negative concepts. It is therefore essential to equip our learners with precise vocabulary. Therefore, each of the three examples is accompanied by a suggestion on how to broaden the learners' **vocabulary** to spark dialogue as the basis of expressing ideas.

Furthermore, the examples aim to make use of the imaginative potential of literary texts through the development of creative and personal activities. These, we argue, can raise empathy and foster gender competence among learners. The concept of transdifference can be used here to apply the demands of theoretical approaches of gender and queer studies (see e.g., Butler 1990 and 2004) for the EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom. In our understanding of transdifference, we agree with Lösch et al. that “[i]t does not do away with the originary binary inscription of difference, but rather causes it to oscillate” (Breinig & Lösch 2002: 23). When growing up and trying to define their personalities, categories referring to gender identity might be helpful for students to find orientation. Allowing for the perception of differences, for instance in terms of gender, but not stopping at a negatively coined othering is in our view more feasible than the negation or overcoming of binary oppositions as sometimes found in queer theory (e.g., Butler 2004).

Focusing on the development of **empathy** in the individual tasks, learners are encouraged to put themselves in another person's shoes by acknowledging and respecting their feelings. Empathy is in line with transcultural didactics in EFL classes which aims to question fixed concepts of identity through a didactically initiated change of cultural perspective (König 2018: 87, 110). Adopting an “inner perspective” as titled by Merse (2017: 24), however, is particularly challenging if the respective person's opinion or lifestyle differs fundamentally from that of the individual, or if they are not in line with common cultural discourses. Yet, it is through the confrontation with different perspectives that awareness is increased and the “seemingly indisputable validity to the continuous repression of alternatives” is tackled (Breinig & Lösch 2006: 110). Consequently, students' empathy for others largely contributes to the concept of transdifference as their willingness to engage with unknown perspectives allows the uncovering of societal complexities, of the excluded and the invisible (König 2018: 122f.).

The current Bavarian curriculum *LehrplanPlus* for *Gymnasium* is used as a reference throughout this contribution, but the suggestions made are applicable to all EFL classrooms where topics of gender and identity are negotiated. The curricular guidelines for the Bavarian *Gymnasium*, for example, state in year 5 that “living in a social environment” (own translation) is a topic that needs to be considered, and this open definition allows teachers to include questions of identity (ISB, Fachlehrplan Englisch 5 2024). In year 10, gender issues are explicitly mentioned, and a (YA) novel is to be read (see ISB, Fachlehrplan Englisch 10 2024). Year 11 then asks Bavarian students to reflect their own positions and values in the engagement with literature (see ISB, Fachlehrplan Englisch 11 2024). Further elaboration on the respective references to the curriculum is included in the subchapters.

The three literary texts chosen for this contribution – *My Shadow is Purple*, *Felix Ever After*, and *Girl, Woman, Other* – are works that challenge fixed and often heteronormative concepts of identity and that entitle minorities to become protagonists. Suitable activities and tasks can broaden students' horizons, give them tools to detect and dismiss stereotypes, and engage in meaningful and empathetic dialogues. In our first example, we elaborate on how a picturebook addressing the topics of gender stereotypes and the gender binary, originally designed for younger children with English as their first language, can be used in EFL classes in years 5 and 6. Talking about taboos – and in many cases, sexual orientation and/or identity can still be counted as taboos – in years 9 and 10 can be especially challenging. That is why a YA novel that features a transsexual protagonist, their search for their place in the world, and a compelling love story was chosen to tackle gender stereotypes and racism. Lastly, one of the most influential and experimental contemporary texts serves to expand learners' gender competence in year 11 (*Gymnasium*).

The following section introduces the aforementioned literary works and, after a brief summary, offers approaches of working with vocabulary as well as raising empathy, thus fostering gender awareness which leads to gender competence.

2. Scott Stuart: *My Shadow is Purple* (MSIP)

“My Dad has a shadow that’s as blue as a berry, and my Mum’s is as pink as a blossoming cherry. There’s only those choices, a 2 or a 1. But mine is quite different, it’s both and it’s none.” (MSIP: 2)

The engagement with literature offers the opportunity to expand cultural, historical, and societal perceptions and understanding, even of the youngest learners of English (Gardemann 2021: 63). In choosing age-appropriate forms of literature, EFL teachers cannot only raise awareness but even inspire the potential for change amongst their younger students. The picturebook *My Shadow is Purple* (MSIP) by Scott Stuart aims to defy gender stereotypes and move beyond the gender binary. The book’s protagonist is a young child who does not identify as either a girl or a boy. This is represented through their shadow having the colour purple, in contrast to the shadows of their parents, which seem to align with the stereotypical colour scheme connected to their biological genders (MSIP: 3). Throughout the picturebook, the main character encounters everyday situations in which their gender identity does not seem to fit within the stereotypical binary gender norm. For example, the protagonist can be seen dancing ballet with a group of girls with pink shadows. In contrast, their shadow remains the only purple one (MSIP: 5). The same can be seen when the picturebook depicts a football match, perceived as a stereotypical male hobby. The main character’s shadow is again different compared to the blue shadows in their football team (MSIP: 6). At the same time, stereotypical character associations regarding a person’s biological gender are also explicitly pointed out and contrasted in the story. The protagonist describes their mother as strong (MSIP: 8) and their father as loving and caring (MSIP: 8). The central conflict arises once the protagonist is pushed to choose between belonging to the group of students with either pink or blue shadows (MSIP: 19) at the school dance. They experience this situation as upsetting and cannot understand why people are forcing them to make a choice (MSIP: 20). The main character, therefore, refuses to make a definite choice and starts to leave the school dance as a consequence of believing to never fully fit in because of their purple shadow (MSIP: 21). However, the conflict is resolved by another student standing up and sharing that their shadow also has a different colour which leads to more and more students revealing their shadows, some of which have a very different colour than the reader might expect, while others stay closer to the stereotypical colour connected to their perceived biological gender. Ultimately, the separation of pink and blue shadows is dissolved (MSIP: 29 f.).

Following the definition of transdifference by Breinig and Lösch, transdifference refers to a phenomenon in which opposing characteristics, affiliations or elements co-exist with each other, and this co-presence is “regarded or experienced as cognitively or affectively dissonant, full of tension, and undissolvable” (Breinig & Lösch 2006: 105). This phenomenon of transdifference can be experienced by individuals and groups (Breinig & Lösch 2006: 105). The protagonist of *My Shadow is Purple* experiences this phenomenon of transdifference as their gender identity does not fit into the gender binary and causes them to feel ostracised by their communities. As mentioned in the introduction, the concept of transdifference does not intend to dissolve binary structures completely but allows the perception of differences – in this case, differences in gender identity. Scott Stuart’s picturebook therefore offers an excellent basis for introducing the topic of gender identity and gender stereotypes to EFL students in the fifth and sixth grade.

Since the Communicative Approach in the 1970s, incorporating picturebooks as a form of children’s literature into EFL primary education has become a common practice. The potential of picturebooks lies “within their authenticity,

motivational character, and the interplay of pictures and words to convey a compelling story” (Gründel 2023: 1). When it comes to addressing the topic of gender diversity and queerness, Gründel argues that queer picturebooks can be utilised to “foster an understanding of gender diversity at an early age and create a safe and welcoming environment for all learners for all family backgrounds” (Gründel 2023: 1). In the appendix of her article, Gründel provides a vast list of suggestions of queer picturebooks for primary EFL teaching, which cover the topics of transgender identity, gender fluidity, sexual orientation, and (gender) diversity (Gründel 2023: 7).

Indeed, picturebooks prove to be a valuable literary resource not only in the context of primary education but within the first two years of ELT at the *Gymnasium* as well as beyond (Alter & Merse 2023: 19). As picturebooks can be interpreted in different ways, they can be put to use at different levels of English language learning, spanning from pre-primary to secondary level (Ellis & Mourão 2023: 47). At first glance, using a picturebook with the intended age range of three- to seven-year-olds could appear inadequate to the expected level of language learning in the fifth and sixth grades at the *Gymnasium*. However, it is essential to keep in mind that most students in the fifth grade are only in their third official year of learning English. In addition, the transition from primary school to secondary school comes with its challenges for students and teachers of EFL alike. Fifth graders often enter the *Gymnasium* with varying levels of knowledge and skills, so using a form of literature that they are already familiar with as a foundation can prove helpful in bridging knowledge gaps.

The following lesson sequence shows how the picturebook *My Shadow is Purple* can be incorporated into the EFL classroom. It is connected to the topic of daily life, especially when discussing family and friends or free time activities (ISB, Fachlehrplan Englisch 5 2024). Students should already have achieved specific learning requirements to take part in the lesson sequence successfully. These include basic lexical fields such as colours, family, and spare time activities, as well as the use of adjectives. Additionally, learners should be able to form simple sentences in the simple present and present progressive. Therefore, it is recommended that the lesson sequence be carried out towards the end of the fifth grade.

The lesson sequence follows two macro-learning objectives, the first of which is for learners to improve their competencies in listening, writing, and speaking. The book *My Shadow is Purple* will be presented to them in the form of an asynchronous read-aloud video on the platform YouTube in which a native English speaker reads the children’s book out loud while the corresponding pages are displayed on the screen. While a read-aloud video cannot replace the face-to-face experience of a read-aloud event, it does provide a useful digital alternative for the students (see Ellis & Mourão 2023: 53). Not only do the students have an auditory input, but they can read along the story simultaneously and follow the pictures which helps to reduce the possible difficulty of encountering unknown lexical items. After dealing with the text on a comprehension basis, learners should draw parallels and connect their thoughts to the topic of gender identity presented in the story by creating a personal version of their imaginative shadow, which they could introduce to their classmates later. The second macro-learning objective is for learners to relate to the idea that there are more factors to a person’s identity than their perceived gender which intends to address the question of the gender binary. Throughout the lesson sequence, students will encounter stereotypical descriptions of what it means to be a boy or girl and then will be encouraged to question that way of thinking in a general manner.

2.1 Vocabulary Activity

The lesson starts with a task to activate students’ already existing knowledge of gender stereotypes. The students’ ideas are written onto the blackboard as a mind map, structured around the two subject headings “girl” and “boy”. It is to be expected that the students will name stereotypical hobbies, colours, films, books, or clothing (appendix 1.1) for each biological gender. The mind map is supposed to make gender stereotypes tangible to the students.

As an initial activity, the students are presented with the cover of the picturebook *My Shadow is Purple* and are supposed to guess what the story they are about to listen to might be about. Then they are shown the read-aloud YouTube video of *My Shadow Is Purple*, read by an American native speaker (Reading Rocket 2022). Before watching the read-aloud video the teacher notes down three thematical questions, which the students should be able to answer afterwards. After developing a general understanding of the story's subject matter, the focus of the lesson shifts towards vocabulary work. During the second viewing, the students note down three unknown lexical items they encounter on their worksheet (appendix 1.3). For homework, they are asked to search for the German translation in an online dictionary. This homework is supposed to prepare them for the upcoming vocabulary activity during the second lesson of the sequence.

The vocabulary task for *My Shadow is Purple* is structured into three phases: the presentation of unknown lexical items, the practice of these items, and finally their application (Grimm et al. 2022: 107f.). All the new lexical items used during the vocabulary activity can be found in the picturebook. Therefore, the students have already encountered all the words while watching the YouTube read-aloud video. For the practicing phase, the students are separated into four groups and are given an equal number of lexical items (appendix 1.2.2). In total, sixteen words were chosen, including the word classes of nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Additionally, two phrases are featured in the vocabulary activity (appendix 1.2.1). Each group is given four lexical items, the German translations, and the corresponding explanations in English (these can include either a definition, an opposite or a synonym of the new lexical item). These are printed on single snippets of paper, and the students are asked to match the lexical item with its corresponding explanation and translation. For example, a group of students could be asked to match the new lexical item "invite" with its English definition (e.g., "something you send to your friends and family when you want to have a party") and its German translation "Einladung" (cf. for a broader view of the vocabulary activity see appendix 1.2.2). To help students understand and practice the new lexical items, they need to be embedded in meaningful communication (Meyer: 108f.), which will be part of the empathy task.

2.2 Empathy Task

For the empathy task, the students find a blank outline of a shadow on their worksheet (appendix 1.3). They are encouraged to reflect upon the question of what their own shadow might look like and think about what exactly makes them the person they are. In four short sentences, they are supposed to answer what colour their shadow has and why their shadow has that colour. When writing their answers, they are instructed to use at least one of the new lexical items they have encountered during the vocabulary activity.

The students are also asked to colour-in and draw their shadows. The teacher must ensure an open and accepting space for all possible representations of the students' shadows. Free and creative expression should be encouraged, as there are no right or wrong answers to this task. To help to establish an accepting and open-minded climate in the classroom, the English language teacher could lead by example and present their version of their shadow to the class as an example first. A group activity based on the different representations of the shadows might be possible depending on the classroom atmosphere. The students could be encouraged to walk around the classroom and ask others about their shadows while introducing their own (appendix 1.3)

3. Kacen Callender: *Felix Ever After* (FEA)

“But if I’m not nonbinary, and I’m not a guy, and I’m definitely not a girl, then what am I? I came here for answers, but it just feels that my questions are growing.” (FEA: 181)

For the 10th grade, the Bavarian curriculum calls for “youth culture – then and now” and explicitly mentions “gender issues” (ISB, Fachlehrplan Englisch 10, 2024). The novel *Felix Ever After* by Kacen Callender, a work that has been banned from school libraries and classrooms in at least two US states (Texas & Arkansas), not only offers an unusual love story, but also contemplates Felix’s journey of self-discovery. The protagonist and narrator Felix is black, trans, queer and comes from a humble background which adds to his teenage problems and unknown future. As Felix is open about his insecurities, progress and setbacks, the novel has a lot of potential to reflect on (gender) identity. At the same time, it deals with controversial and highly emotional aspects, such as his mother’s choice to abandon her family. Felix’s relationship with his father is equally demanding, as he does not fully understand Felix’s struggles and is unsure of how to be supportive while staying true to himself. Felix’s peers are not at ease either; one of them exposes Felix’s former identity by displaying old photos before his transition at Felix’s art school, which leads to his detective-like search for the culprit.

The language of the novel is straightforward and written in informal and colloquial style. At times, teenage slang and tabooed lexis is used (“They won’t do shit.” FEA: 34), which could be challenging for teachers when swearwords and charged topics are included. In addition, technical terms from the field of gender are found. Fundamental questions of how to deal with shifting and non-binary gender identity are raised – often accompanied by an easy-to-understand explanation integrated into the plot, for instance when Marisol who used to go out with Felix before his transition states: “You can’t be a feminist and decide you don’t want to be a woman anymore.” (FEA: 30) The activities presented are designed for learners of year 10 (B1+) but can be applied to year 11 (B2) as well. Reading the whole novel or listening to the audiobook is recommended. The following two activities serve as pre-reading activities to reading the whole novel.

3.1 Vocabulary Activity

The lesson starts with the teacher showing the book cover of the novel and asking the students to collect their first associations in an interactive word cloud. Answers such as “beautiful, boy, girl, flowers, scarves, tattoos, black, etc.” are expected. The topic of gender is picked up and the class is asked if they see a boy or a girl. Presumably most students will answer that they see a boy (or a girl), but some may already question this very binary question. In a plenary discussion, stereotypical male and female attributes that can/cannot be seen on the cover, are discussed. This first impulse is followed by an auditory presentation of a passage from chapter 13 – Felix’s second visit to the LGBT community centre (FEA: 180-184). The students’ task is to pay attention to Felix’s emotions while listening.

In a think-pair-share activity, students should discuss their impressions of Felix and his emotions. The students are asked to consider why Felix feels insecure in general and at the meeting in particular. The teacher collects the contributions and ideas on the board. They will be used for the empathy task. Depending on the proficiency of the learners, they can reread the section themselves. The learners are provided with a worksheet with scaffolding and a matching exercise for the correct definitions of gender-related words (appendix 2.1.1). It is vital that the learning objective is transparent, namely, to acquire the lexical means to fully comprehend the novel and, more importantly, to address the topic of (gender) identity beyond the text. In this context, the students might also come up with derogatory phrases which need to be tackled as well, unveiling the mechanism of othering via language. Since this is only the first encounter with the novel, more terms need to be added and it is advisable to create an interactive glossary that can be expanded and consulted while reading (see appendix 2.1.2 for possible entries).

3.2 Empathy Task

After introducing the new vocabulary and addressing Felix's anxiety and insecurities, the students are asked to perform the discussion, this time with Felix contributing and being open. The objective of this activity is threefold: Students practice the newly introduced vocabulary in small groups of four to five and are aware of the impact of the language they use and the reactions they can provoke with non-verbal communicative factors. At best, negotiating of meaning takes place while interacting with each other. Second, they can indeed "re-enact" Felix's insecurity, even though his identity issues may not be theirs. Thus, acting out his role fosters empathy with the protagonist and the other characters, stimulating critical thoughts on the arguments that are presented at the same time. Finally, this activity arouses curiosity: By role-playing a section from the middle of the novel, the learners are encouraged to find out more about Felix and his quest for identity.

In a plenary discussion, the other members of the discussion group and their impact on Felix are examined before the group work. Bex, Zelda, and the other characters are rather flat and thus offer a greater void to explore. During the group work, the learners are then asked to switch roles several times so that they can adopt different points of view and "rewind" the discussion. The topic is personal, and the students do not have any knowledge of Felix's story yet, so they have to make use of their creativity and empathy to develop ideas and pay attention to the information delivered in the pages they have read. The learners are provided with process scaffolding on the worksheet (see appendix 2.2). They do not have to perform the discussions but are asked to reflect on how the outcome changes and these reflections will be collected and used when proceeding with the novel.

4. Bernadine Evaristo: *Girl, Woman, Other* (GWO)

"[...] being born female isn't the problem, society's expectations are, I get this now"

(GWO 2020: 325)

The novel *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernadine Evaristo is a collection of stories about women who navigate issues of intersectionality, such as race, class and gender. The 12 stories tell of their individual struggles and destinies but are also interlinked as the women are related to each other. The story of Megan, later Morgan, who uses they/them pronouns, informs about their journey of identifying as non-binary. It includes the obstacles they faced in their childhood environment due to not conforming to gender norms. After going through another rough phase in their youth where they try to figure out their identity, they find a safe space in the transgender community. There, Bibi helps them to answer their questions and understand themselves. The story ends with their present situation where they act as an ally for other gender non-conforming people and educate gender-conforming people by giving university lectures and sharing information on their Instagram account.

The topic of gender is not explicitly mentioned for years 11-13 in the Bavarian *LehrplanPlus* which is in line with the fact that "gender in foreign language education has long been an under-researched field" (Merse 2017: 133). Instead, intercultural learning achieved high popularity in TEFL while gender was neglected even though it is "an all-pervasive and powerful category of cultural difference that affects human existence and our perception of ourselves and others so fundamentally that a non-gendered way of being seems impossible" (Merse 2017: 132). Its recognition in TEFL demanded an extensive legitimisation process which seems especially disturbing as it is, like cultural learning, "concerned with issues of cultural difference" (Merse 2017: 133). As such, we argue that the topic of gender should be included in years 11-13 despite not being an explicit topic in the Bavarian *LehrplanPlus*. However, what can be found in the curriculum for year 11, is the following target:

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler hinterfragen bei der analogen und digitalen Begegnung mit authentischen, auch komplexen Texten (z. B. aus den Bereichen Literatur, Film und Musik) eigene sowie fremde Wahrnehmungen, Werte, Einstellungen und Normen, auch indem sie Perspektivenwechsel vornehmen; sie erkennen durch die kontrastive Betrachtung von Nachrichten deren kulturelle Prägung (ISB, Fachlehrplan Englisch 11 2024)

This quote is reminiscent of the concept of transdifference that “presents a challenge to accustomed modes of binary thinking” according to Feldmann and Habermann (2006: 99). Binary thinking is deeply rooted in Western philosophy for instance in the form of Descartes’ Cartesian Dualism (Mingucci 2018: 159-176). Regarding gender, Rauchfleisch (2007: 112f.) states that people are therefore often overstrained by transidentities as they confront them with contradictoriness. Further, he claims that transdifference can be applied to gender to foster more inclusive attitudes towards non-heteronormative identities (2007: 116-119). Consequently, the topic of gender can be used to fulfil the call of the curriculum for a change of perspectives and a rethinking of values. Furthermore, it would serve Merse’s call for an “integration of gender-related issues into the scope of cultural learning” (2017: 133).

The Penguin Reader edition of *Girl, Woman, Other* was adapted by Alexander Saffron and is intended for learners with language proficiency B2, which would correspond to year 11, Oberstufe. The adaptation has been condensed considerably regarding both content and vocabulary. This serves the purpose of making the original in its entirety readable to language learners. For the chapter about Megan/Morgan, however, the reduction entails the elimination of the majority of gender-related vocabulary. The chapter is utilised to educate learners on the topic of gender variety by means of Morgan’s and Bibi’s transformation. The goal is, firstly, that the students reflect, in line with transdifference, on their possibly binary attitudes towards gender by engaging with an authentic text in a foreign language. In doing so, the skill of respectfully navigating foreign situations and other unknown cultural phenomena will be fostered, which is in line with TEFL objectives. Secondly, the aim is to broaden their vocabulary skills by working with online resources. Thus, learners will be able to have conversations about this important topic. Due to this elimination, it is sensible to read the adaptation as a whole while resorting to the original to carry out a more in-depth analysis of the chapter *Megan/Morgan*. Yet, slight adaptations can be made to the original text to cater for differentiation. This could include, for instance, leaving out passages with overly colloquial language or topics that are not necessarily tied to the subject of gender and could be overburdening for the learners. Furthermore, notes on some advanced terms should be included to provide scaffolding. The following activities provide examples of how this chapter could be implemented in the classroom.

4.1 Vocabulary Activity

The students are expected to make sure they understand the adapted version of the original at home. As this lesson is intended for year 11, the learners will have encountered the topic of gender. To begin the class, the teacher poses the question “How do people do gender?” to trigger an open discussion that connects to the text. The terminology of “doing gender” will be used to draw the students’ attention to the performativity of gender.

Thereby, it will be exposed how certain cultural normative ideas, about for instance clothing, style, physical features, or body language, exist regarding sex and gender (König 2018: 104). Following König (2018: 120), the first step should be to raise awareness on behalf of the learner that there is an existing norm that others everything and everybody outside this norm. This is encapsulated by the concept of “doing gender” which refers to the construction of gender and highlights that gender is not a characteristic that is assigned to each person by birth and cannot be changed (König 2018: 104). Individual answers will be shared anonymously using the “Open Ended”-tool on the website AhaSlides so that students are less apprehensive about sharing personal information. For this, students simply scan the QR code and can enter their ideas right away.

After that, the vocabulary activity (appendix 3.1) about gender-specific terms will introduce the topic and establish a basis for the upcoming text analysis which could consist of the empathy task mentioned below. To familiarise the learners with the new terminology from the original text, such as “tomboy” or “non-binary”, they will be divided into two large groups. Each group receives four words which they then have to research using online resources such as dictionaries and encyclopaedias together with their neighbour. Thus, students improve their methodological competencies at the same time. They should be able to give a short definition using their own words because they will then work together with a person from the other group, explaining their respective terms which trains their communicative skills. To test their knowledge, the class will revise the terms in plenary. At the end a Kahoot quiz (appendix 3.2) on the vocabulary will be carried out.

4.2 Empathy Task

In the following activity, the concept of “doing gender” will be applied to the text. Looking at how Megan refuses to do gender then also includes Hirschauer’s notion of “undoing gender” which ignores and/or rejects gender differences as non-relevant (Hirschauer 2013: 153-171). This indifference is not meant in the sense that the category of gender as such is completely eradicated or that differences are simply brushed over. Instead, differences are undone as established hierarchies are broken up, which happens through the recognition and appreciation of differences. Learning from each other’s differences will ultimately help to reduce established power hierarchies. To draw students’ attention the fact that Megan does not adhere to the gender norms established by society, the teacher asks the question: *How is Megan (not) doing gender?* The students are then expected to find the following answers by working with the text:

- “Megan preferred wearing trousers as a child, which she found more comfortable than dresses” (GWO: 307)
- “the Barbies with their stick legs and rocket breasts were another problem Megan had to endure [...] she’d once tried to commit Barbicide, defaced them with coloured marker pens, chopped off hair, extracted eyes with scissors” (GWO: 309)
- they prefer running around the farm with Mark instead of learning to bake (GWO: 310)
- “then her body started to show womanly curves and it didn’t feel right [...] she hated catching herself in mirrors, hated the breasts that appeared without her permission” (GWO: 312)
- “she wore men’s shoes, black lace-ups, liked how comfortable they were, how powerful she felt when she walked in them” (GWO: 312)
- “she slept with the women who took a liking to her discovered she preferred them” (GWO: 314)

The following question then aims to further encourage empathy and understanding under the premise of transference: *How do people react in Megan’s/Morgan’s environment?* The name that the protagonist adopts after their transformation as well as they/them pronouns will be used to alert students to Megan’s new identity. When posing this question, the teacher should touch upon the protagonist’s new name to clarify this change. This activity sensitizes learners to what helpful and harmful reactions to alterity can look like. These insights can impact the students’ behaviour in their private lives as well. The students are expected to come, among others, to the following conclusions and mention the following aspects:

Parents:

- parents do not accept them as they are
- mother is upset and worried about what society thinks
- “she was determined to dress Megan up for the approval of society” (GWO: 308)
- “there’s something not quite right about Megan, she overheard her [mother] telling Aunty Sue [...] she’s such a beautiful child but there’s not a feminine bone in her body” (GWO: 308f.)
- father has an old-fashioned way of thinking and wants to change his daughter

- father negates their identity by thinking they need to be fixed
- “[d]ad came from Malawi where he boasted everything was repairable: watches, pens, furniture, clothes, lamps, broken crockery superglued together jigsaw-style, and yes, his daughter” (GWO: 309)

Grandmother:

- grandmother does not care about whether they want to present as a boy or a girl
- grandmother does not understand their gender
- “GG, her great-grandma on Mum’s side, was the only one who accepted Megan just as she was” (GWO: 310)
- “GG can’t get a handle on Morgan’s gender identity” (GWO: 331)

Bibi:

- is supportive, offers explanations, helps them to figure out their identity
- understands them because Bibi is transgender

The chapter about Morgan in the novel *Girl, Woman, Other* examines queerness from the perspective of a transgender person in contrast to a well-meaning and a dismissive environment. The text is well-suited for the ELT classroom where it can help to foster empathy and openness towards otherness, taking into account the complexity of the issue that requires both emotional and linguistic flexibility.

5. Conclusion

This contribution shows that “doing gender identity” is a topic that can and should be included in various stages of ELT. We aimed at highlighting how different literary texts and types of activities can cater for different age groups and proficiency levels with vocabulary work and empathy raising tasks being the core elements of the materials provided: Only if our students are equipped with gender-related terminology that is precise and not derogatory can they tackle this potentially difficult topic with a certain lexical ease.

Empathy, adopting Merse’s much-cited “inner perspective” of the other, can only be achieved through the willingness to accept lifestyles and opinions that deviate from one’s own. The concept of transdifference helps to acknowledge the (presumably) still binary thought patterns and at the same time create an awareness for a more flexible and fluid concept of gender identity. As this contribution illustrates, all three texts hold immense potential for detailed discussion from different angles and offer numerous opportunities for analytical and creative activities and projects. They not only focus on gender topics but also provide insights into intersectional aspects. When interpreting and debating the three literary texts, teachers do well to acknowledge Rosenblatt’s claim that “[t]here is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work” (Rosenblatt 1995: 24), thus the chosen texts not only require empathy from the learners but also from the teachers.

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Teaching Materials

<https://ahaslides.com/>

<https://create.kahoot.it/share/gender-vocab/9e980644-1467-4df3-ab74-28bd23ba769e>

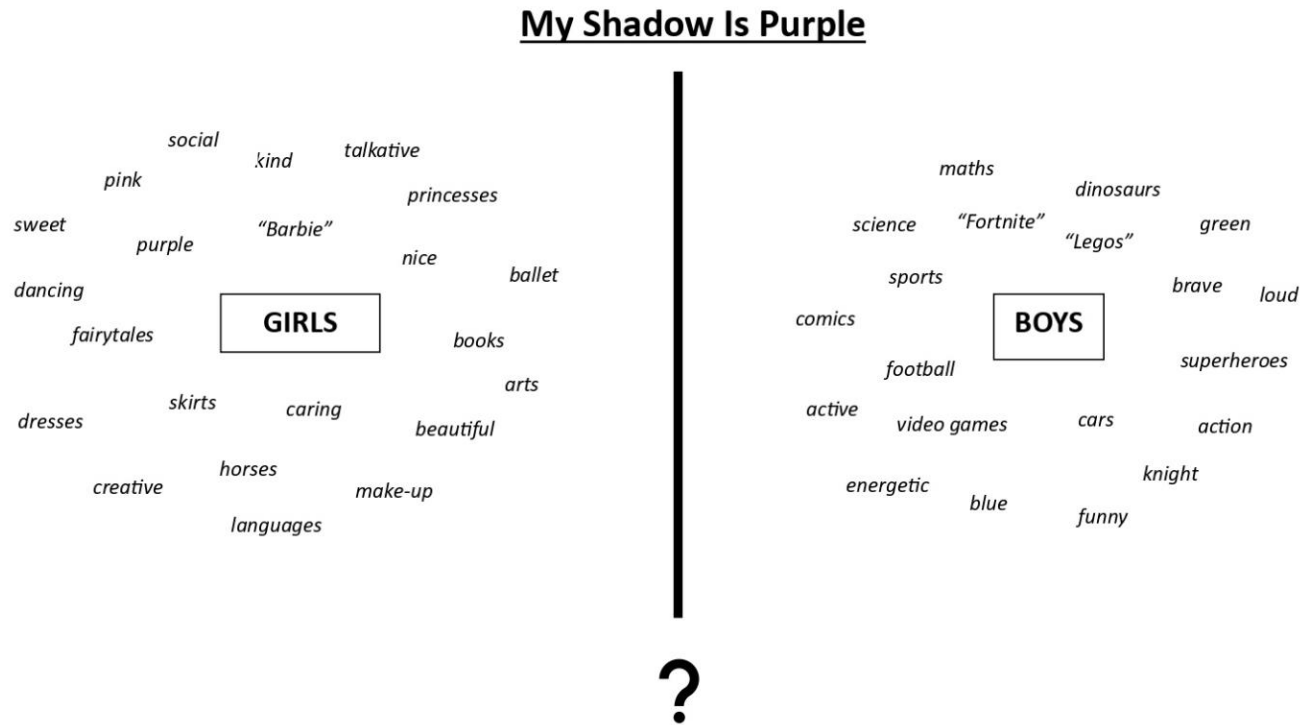
Reading Rocket. 2022, May 18. *My Shadow is Purple READ ALOUD Book with Music by Scott Stuart* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pjQJ2t1qQw> (11 January 2024).

<https://www.taskcards.de/#/board/1b26b7ac-1893-4420-9123-45ef30b2eba5?token=8938602b-4814-4ca2-927b-d1fd26a01ef5>

Appendix

1. My Shadow Is Purple

1.1 Mind map of gender stereotypical associations



1.2 Vocabulary Task

1.2.1 Overview of total lexical items

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Phrases
1. invite 2. zone	3. to choose 4. to lose >< to win 5. to care 6. to share 7. to gasp 8. to kickstart 9. to join 10. to split	11. both >< none 12. confused 13. amused 14. unique	15. to break the silence 16. to fit like a glove

1.2.2 Distribution of lexical items per group

	Lexical Item	Definition, Opposite or Synonym	German Translation
Group 1	to choose	= to pick option one or two	wählen
	unique	>> special	einzigartig
	invite	= something you send to your friends and family when you want to have a party	Einladung
	to break the silence	= to talk about something, you haven't talked about before	das Schweigen brechen
Group 2	to lose	>< to win	verlieren
	amused	>> funny	amüsiert, belustigt
	to kickstart	= to quickly start doing something	etwas schnell starten
	to fit like a glove	= something fits perfectly	etwas passt wie angegossen
Group 3	to care	= you feel that something is very important	sich kümmern, sich sorgen
	confused	= you don't know what is happening or what to do	verwirrt
	to split	= to break something into two parts	aufteilen, spalten
	to gasp	= taking in a quick breath when you are surprised or shocked	nach Luft schnappen
Group 4	to share your feelings	= to talk openly about how you feel	Gefühle teilen
	both	>< none	beides
	zone	>> space, area	Zone, Platz
	to join	= to become part of a group	beitreten, teilnehmen

1.3 Empathy Task: Worksheet

Name: _____

Date: _____

My Shadow Is Purple

by Scott Stuart



1. While watching the story, **write down three words** that you do not know. Research their German meaning at home. You can simply scan the QR code to get to the PONS-Dictionary online.

1) _____ → German: _____

2) _____ → German: _____

3) _____ → German: _____

2. With the help of your group, try to **connect the new words** to the correct explanation and the German translation.

to choose	= <i>sth. fits perfectly</i>	das Schweigen brechen
to split	= <i>you don't know what is happening or what to do</i>	Zone, Platz
to fit like a glove	= <i>you feel that sth. is very important</i>	teilen, spalten
confused	= <i>to pick option one or two</i>	wählen
to join	= <i>to talk openly about how you feel</i>	beitreten, teilnehmen
unique	>> <i>space, area</i>	verwirrt
to share your feelings	= <i>to break sth. into two parts</i>	sich kümmern, sich sorgen
to break the silence	= <i>to become part of a group</i>	einzigartig
to care	>> <i>special</i>	etw. passt wie angegossen
zone	= <i>to talk about sth. you haven't talked about before</i>	Gefühle teilen

Name: _____

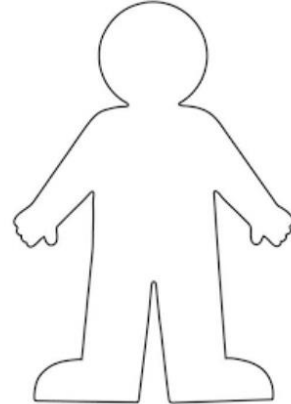
Date: _____

And My Shadow Is ...

3. Now it's time to think about how your shadow might look!
Answer the following questions ...

- ✓ **What** colour(s) does my shadow have?
- ✓ **Why** does my shadow look like that? Is it because of my hobbies, a personality trait, or something completely different? (Please give three reasons)
- ✓ Try to fit **at least one new word** in your sentences!

You can colour in your shadow once you have finished writing your sentences! Feel free to add your own drawings to the outline.



4. Let's find out about some other shadows! **Walk around the classroom** and **talk to three** of your **classmates**. Ask them questions about their own shadows and note down the information about their shadow.

Name	What does their shadow look like?	Why does their shadow look that way?

2. Felix Ever After

2.1 Vocabulary Activity

2.1.1 Worksheet

Kacen Callender: Felix Ever After

1. Vocabulary (p. 180ff.)

1.1 Useful words – add definitions/synonyms.

niggling

fraud

agonizing(ly)

validation

1.2 gender-related vocabulary – match the right definition.

nonbinary identity	expected behavior of men and women
transgender	initialism that stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer"
gender roles	hatred of or prejudice against women & girls
patriarchy	umbrella term for people who define their identity not as only male or female
misogyny	pronouns often used by nonbinary people for whom he/she pronouns don't fit
LGBTQ	A transgender person (often shortened to trans) is someone whose gender identity differs from that typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth
they/them pronouns	society controlled by men in which they use their power to their own advantage

2.1.2 TaskCards Screenshot: Glossary (possible categories and entries)

The screenshot shows a digital glossary interface with a red background. At the top left, there is a hamburger menu icon and the text 'Glossary Felix Ever After'. Below this, there are five category tabs: 'Gender-related words', 'Words for feelings', 'Phrases to remember', 'Education', and 'Slang words'. Each tab contains several cards with text and icons. The 'Gender-related words' tab shows 'bisexual' (being attracted to men and women) and 'straight'. The 'Words for feelings' tab shows 'awkward' (not comfortable, ashamed) and 'frustrated' (very unsatisfied and unhappy). The 'Phrases to remember' tab shows 'I screwed my face up in confusion.' and 'to live a lie'. The 'Education' tab shows 'Ivy League School' and 'portfolio'. The 'Slang words' tab shows 'be pissed', 'stupid ass', and 'You don't know shit about me.'. Each card has a plus icon in the top right corner and a heart icon in the bottom right corner. At the bottom of each category, there is a red button with a white plus icon.

2.2 Empathy Task: Worksheet

2. Discussion Group

In groups of 4-5, act out Felix' visit to the LGBT discussion group, this time with an atmosphere that enables Felix to be more open. Switch roles so that everyone gets to play Felix at least once.

People taking part in your discussion: Felix, Bex, Zelda, optional: Sarah, Tom

Note: You do not have to perform your discussion unless you are willing to but **please analyze how your discussions differed from the one in the novel. Present your results.**

Think of aspects like:

- welcoming the newbie
- gestures, body language, facial expression
- language
- asking questions, giving answers
- Felix' introduction and the reactions to it
- additional prompts

3. Girl, Woman, Other

3.1 Vocabulary Activity

Research the following terms using online resources with your partner and provide a short explanation using your own words. You can also use the text for help. You will then get together with a person from the other group and exchange your vocabulary definitions.

Group 1:

tomboy (GWO 2020: 310) trans spectrum (GWO: 318), difference between transsexual and transgender (GWO: 318), gender-free (GWO: 325)

Group 2:





gender confirmation (GWO: 325), phalloplasty (GWO: 326), non-binary (GWO: 333), pansexual (GWO: 336)

[HTTPS://CREATE.KAHOOT.IT/SHARE/GENDER-VOCAB/9E980644-1467-4DF3-AB74-28BD23BA769E](https://create.kahoot.it/share/gender-vocab/9E980644-1467-4DF3-AB74-28BD23BA769E)



3.2 Kahoot Quiz

Fragen (9) Antworten ausblenden

1 - Quiz
"Tomboy" is used to describe 20 Sekunden

 a girl who is mean ✗
 a boy who likes to wear dresses ✗
 a person who doesn't conform with gender stereotypes ✗
 a girl who acts and dresses in a way usually associated with boys ✓

2 - Wahr oder falsch
"Transpectrum" refers to everybody whose gender identity doesn't differ from the sex that was assigned to them by birth 20 Sekunden

 Richtig ✗
 Falsch ✓