



# Propuestas de investigación educativa

José Enrique Anguita Osuna  
Esther Ruiz Simón  
Arcadio Sotto Díaz  
*Editores*



Universidad  
Rey Juan Carlos

Máster  
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# **LGTBIQ+ Literature in Education.**

## **A Didactic Proposal using Project Based Learning**

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### **Abstract**

*The Great Gatsby*, *Orlando*, and *Carol* are masterpieces of English literature that have frequently been examined through the lens of queer literary analysis. Furthermore, because in LO 3/2020, better known as LOMLOE, inclusion and the knowledge of affective-sexual diversity is pivotal; and given the valuable role that literary texts can play in the English classroom because they represent authentic language samples, a didactic unit is suggested. The proposal uses PBL methodology to combine, on one hand, knowledge of these novels and the development of communicative competences, and, on the other hand, the edition of a final product which is a self-edited book including the students' short stories. In general, the aim is that students will appreciate equality and social justice, in order they learn to cohabit and coexist in an inclusive and democratic society.

## **1. Justification, Objectives and Methodology**

Because of the consistent oppression, persecution and censorship to the LGTBIQ+ group, authors had to conceal their queer love interests. Nevertheless, these relationships did influence their writings. It is for that reason that in the last decades of the 20th century it emerged LGTBIQ+ literary scholarship to denounce the mistreatment the aforementioned group had to bear, and to be visualize those realities different to the cisheterosexual one.

Moreover, because literature has a vital role in the development of critical thinking and can indeed create learning situations in which equality, equity and social justice are fostered, a didactic approach is proposed in order to expose students to LGTBIQ+ literature including characters who can be identified as members of the community. Additionally, two secondary objectives are, on one hand, to aid in the overcoming of the scholarship censoring of LGTBIQ+ matters on the above listed specific novels; and, on the other hand, to implement Project Based Learning to enhance student's autonomy and creativity.

In order to do so, academic references that pursued an analysis of those books from a Queer perspective have been sought, as well as publications that detailed Project Based Learning's methodology characteristics. After an initial skimming and scanning of all the resources, it was essential synthesize and organize all the information that was meant to be gathered in the theoretical framework. Then, the procedure was to actually elaborate the didactic proposal, whose activities' final focus is the student's development of their four communicative skills in written and oral expression and comprehension. Intending to do so, after some initial analysis, commentary and communicative activities, the students will emerge themselves in the adventure of writing and editing their own book.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The foundation for the theoretical framework of the present chapter will be the queer literary analysis of *The Great Gatsby*, *Orlando* and *Carol*. Then, it is going to be analyzed the presence of procedural and attitudinal LGTBIQ+ thematic contents in high schools and the use of literature as a further tool in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

## 1. LGBTQ+ Literature

The three LGBTQ+-themed literature chosen will first be examined using Queer Literary Analysis, which will support the proposal of application that follows subsequently. Notwithstanding, in order to do so, this literary approach must first be defined and described.

### 1. *Queer Literary Analysis*

“Queer Theory”, or “a segment of academic thought that focuses on the constructedness of gendered and sexual identities and categorizations” (Gamson, 1995, p. 397), emerged in the 1990s. It raises questions about the “unity, stability, viability, and political unity of sexual identities” (ibid), consequently its major aim is to emphasize the fluidity of sexuality and gender, with the target of deconstructing a socio-cultural order where the cisgendered straight white male is the one with the greatest privileges, as Callis (2009, p. 215) explained:

Thus, queer theory also destabilizes and denaturalizes genders (masculine/feminine) and biological sex (male/female), questioning the assumed connectivity between sex and gender, or the legitimacy of presumed scientific classification.

In this sense, Queer Literary Criticism is a transdisciplinary approach to Literature in which heteronormativity is, for the first time, contested, challenged and deconstructed and whose scope of influences extends still to modern days.

It is this transdisciplinarity that makes the connection between didactics and queer literary analysis feasible. In particular, we chose three literary works which feature a narrator or protagonist who is part of the LGBTQ+ group.

### 1. *The Great Gatsby (1925), by F. Scott Fitzgerald*

In Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," narrator Nick Carraway recounts his encounters with the mysterious millionaire Jay Gatsby in 1920s New York. His queerness shall be considered from the celluloid closet outlook. This concept, coined by Hannich Bech, refers to pieces of art “in which ‘gay characters’ are hidden away and never allowed to come out with their life or dignity intact” (1997, p. 65). That is why there is enough data to consider that the character may deviate from heteronormativity.

A key scene highlighting Nick's potential bisexuality involves a drunken escapade with the "effeminate" Mr. McKee, where they end up in McKee's bedroom. Nick said to be “standing beside his bed [McKee's] and he was sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear” (39). In this sense, the picture is more than intimate. And it is for that reason that his bisexuality is really worth, at least, of consideration.

Furthermore, despite initially admitting to suppressing his inner self (“I am full of interior rules that act as brakes for my desire” [59]). Nick, upon arriving in New York, expresses satisfaction, noting the city's liberal attitude toward diverse experiences, and satisfied about the fact that “anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge [...], anything at all” (67). Additionally, Nick's descriptions of Jordan Baker, the girl with whom he is involved, as masculine (356), stand in contrast to his admiration for Gatsby, praising him for his rare, reassuring smile (49).

Overall, Nick is a paradigm of how literary critique has consistently erased any non-cisgender reality, particularly the bisexual and transgender one, as it is done with Orlando's.

### 2. *Orlando (1928), by Virginia Woolf*

In her novel "Orlando," Woolf introduces an androgynous protagonist spanning four centuries, whose identity undergoes a remarkable shift from male to female. Woolf justifies this transformation by asserting that there is an inherent vacillation between sexes in every human being, with the opposite often residing beneath the surface (Woolf, 1928, p. 92-93). In this sense, although initially depicted emphatically

as a man, Orlando experiences a transformation while he/she was dreaming in Constantinople about how the virtues of Purity, Chastity, and Modesty attempt to conceal "the truth!" within him/her.

Contrary to a simplistic notion of Orlando merely becoming a woman, the narrative clarifies that "Orlando remained just as he had been. The change of sex did nothing whatever to alter their identity" (67). This suggests that Orlando has always embodied both male and female qualities. In relation to this, Kaviola (1999, p. 235) states that "Orlando's androgyny is mobile, not static: presenting not a smooth synthesis of oppositions but a more chaotic intermix".

In conclusion, as a feminist classic, "Orlando" challenges the notion of gender as a social construct of no biological basis, emphasizing that, "though all these changes she had remained, she reflected, fundamentally the same" (Woolf, 1928, p. 177). The novel also explores bisexuality and it vividly portrays the experience of being a woman in the Victorian era.

### 3. *Carol or The Prize of Salt (1952)*, by Patricia Highsmith

*Carol*, or *The Price of Salt*, a lesbian pulp fiction by Patricia Highsmith, portrays the relationship between Therèse and Carol, initiated in the toys section of a department store where Therèse works. The novel is a statement that it is possible to encounter with alternative manners of understanding the sexual, emotional and intellectual components of our own identities. Through her experiences, Highsmith disclosed some strong characters like Carol and Therese whose "identity is lost under the veil of patriarchal gender dichotomy and binary oppositions" (Adhikiri, 2019, p. 10). In contrast to other lesbian-themed novels of its time, "Carol" concludes with a surprisingly happy ending, as Carol ends her marriage to Harge.

Similar to Nick's experience, New York positions itself as a symbol of liberty to enjoy self-discovery and the exploration of one's own:

Mrs. Semco put her arm around Therese's waist, and suddenly, Therese embraced her and kissed her firmly on the cheek, her lips sinking into the soft powdered cheeks in that one second pouring out in the kiss, and in the convulsive clasp of her arm, the affection Therese really had for her that Carol look down at the lap. (Highsmith, 1952, 53)

When all is said and done, Nick, Orlando, Carol, and Therese might demonstrate to be the ideal representations of affective and sexual diversity from which students can learn to respect this multiplicity of identities through an effective exposure to the optimal texts, and an appropriate attitude from their teacher.

## 2. **LGTBIQ+ in Education**

According to Paiz (2019), students, even younger ones, are ready to discuss LGTB themes in classrooms. Currently, debates on LGTB representation in classrooms intensify, notably with Florida's "Don't say gay" statute (Phillips, 2022), restricting discussions in lower grades and empowering parents to control their children's exposure. Similar issues arise in Spain's Region of Murcia with the "pin parental" law allowing parents to veto topics related to gender identity, feminism, or LGTBI diversity.

This controversy is concerning, given the higher risks of suicide, depression, and social isolation faced by LGTB youth due to phobia and heterosexism (Collier, 2013; Downey, 2013). It underscores the urgency of providing resources for teenagers to learn about issues that affect them and integrating LGTB representation into teaching practices to challenge heteronormativity (Blackburn & Smith, 2010, p. 626).

Teachers, as both instructors and role models, can contribute to dismantling gender and sexuality stereotypes in classrooms, creating spaces for open discussion (Mayer, 2010). Addressing this is crucial to fostering inclusivity and understanding, especially in light of legislative measures that seek to limit these discussions in educational settings.



### 1. *LGBTBIQ+ in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)*

In the pursuit of creating inclusive environments, Clark & Blackburn (2009, p. 25) argued that English language arts classrooms can play a pivotal role in combatting homophobia and heterosexism, advocating for the integration of LGBT-themed literature into educational curricula.

Despite ongoing efforts for LGBT-inclusive curricula in English as a Foreign Language classes, evidence indicates substantial work remains. Jennings and Macgillivrai (2011) scrutinized twelve multicultural English textbooks, revealing that seven portrayed LGBT youth as at risk, perpetuating harmful stereotypes. In this sense, these depictions hinder LGBT youth from being perceived as empowered individuals, reinforcing their exclusion from societal norms. Furthermore, the study highlighted significant shortcomings, such as conflated terms, undefined concepts, and inappropriate applications, including the problematic use of terms like "gender orientation" and "sexual preference." Notably, transgenderism and bisexuality were systematically omitted from the texts.

Similarly, Smestad (2018) conducted an examination of 129 textbooks published in Norway, unveiling a higher prevalence of LGBT representation in both English and Norwegian textbooks. However, the study also revealed a notable neglect of bisexual and transgender issues compared to the focus on gay and lesbian realities.

Research underscores the crucial need to introduce new teaching materials, especially literature, to address LGBT topics in education. Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan (2015, p. 436) propose various approaches, including reading books with LGBT characters, interpreting straight books through a queer lens, and queering LGBT-inclusive books. These methods contribute to disrupting stereotypes, exploring marginalized identities, and challenging societal norms in sexuality and gender expression.

In alignment with the Common European Framework for Languages which states that "it is a central objective of language education to promote the favorable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity" (Council of Europe, 2014, p. 1), Spain's educational legislation, including *Ley Orgánica 3/2020, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 2/2006 de Educación*, and specifically, the *Decree 64/2022, which establishes the curriculum for Bachillerato in Madrid*, mandates the inclusion of feminist and LGBT topics in language classes. In this sense, one of the contents for the first foreign language subject is the "estrategias de detección, rechazo y actuación ante usos discriminatorios del lenguaje verbal y no verbal", by the "empleo de expresiones alternativas para nombrar por igual a todas las personas sin discriminación" and the "uso de formulas concretas para el uso de un lenguaje más inclusivo" (Comunidad de Madrid, 2022, p. 279).

In conclusion, while EFL classes serve as a natural platform for exposing teenagers to LGBT realities, instructors must proactively curate relevant and adapted materials due to a persistent lack of comprehensive information on the topic. Embracing inclusive teaching practices not only aligns with legislative mandates but also fosters a supportive environment for diverse identities within language education. It now seems appropriate to outline how these contents will be proposed to be introduced: through Active Learning Methodologies, in general; and via Project Based Learning (PBL), in particular.

## 3. General Characteristics of Active Learning Methodologies

Active Learning Methodologies encompass instructional approaches that actively involve students in meaningful discourse, writing, reading, and reflection on academic subjects, as articulated by Meyers and Jones (1993, p. 6). Whether employing Project-Based Learning, Flipped Classroom, Gamification, Game-Based Learning, or Portfolios, each methodology varies in execution yet shares common elements. Johnson et al. (2000) emphasizes the role of the learning environment, stabilizing the context for group work and knowledge discovery, while Morales and Landa (2004, p. 155) highlight the crucial aspect of continuous evaluation.

Originating from the New Schools movement, a pedagogical renewal initiative in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Active Learning Methodologies aim to cultivate active, critical, and generous citizens (Luelmo del Castillo, 2018, p. 9). Their overarching objective is to shift students from passive roles to dynamic thinking, necessitating teachers to serve as guides rather than mere content transmitters. Breen and Mann (1997) stress the importance of teachers' self-awareness, belief in students' autonomy, and the desire to promote it.

In this symbiotic relationship, teachers engage in investigative activities, prompting questions that raise students' awareness of learning, fostering autonomous reflection. Ultimately, Active Learning Methodologies, as affirmed by Boswell and Edison (1991), contribute to enhancing students' attitudes,

thinking, and written expression. These methodologies are pivotal for fostering learner involvement in their own learning processes, crucial for academic success.

### 1. *Project Based Learning*

Project-Based Learning (PBL) represents a student-centered instructional approach grounded in three constructivist principles: context-specific learning, active learner involvement, and goal achievement through social interactions and knowledge sharing. Furthermore, along Helle et al. (2006), PBL emphasizes collaborative group efforts to attain a common objective, fostering experiential learning and active thought. All participants contribute actively to the shared goal, engaging in authentic tasks that enhance responsibility, personal autonomy, and foster creativity and interaction among students.

Which is true is that PBL poses challenges for teachers, in the sense that it requires from them of a strong preparation of materials. In this sense, some practical advice includes time management, student orientation, fostering a culture of self-management, and encouraging students to work beyond the classroom (Kokotsaki et al., 2016).

In conclusion, PBL comprises two essential elements: a driving topic that encourages students to research and create something new, as well as the finished product itself. In specific contexts, such as exploring non-cissexual sex-affective realities through literature, PBL is deemed an optimal approach. It lends such a serious assignment an air of team play, motivating students to comprehend diverse circumstances through the creation of a book.

## 4. Legal Framework

In consonance with the interdisciplinary approach that Active Learning Methodologies encourage teachers to follow, these PBL implementation will be oriented to the development of both, the specific competencies which the English curriculum sanctions as mandatory, and the ones of *Literatura Universal*, a subject, which can take those students following a social and human sciences path. In this sense, the PBL which will be hence presented in the didactic proposal is one thought to be guided by the teacher/teachers of both subjects, as it will take two sessions a week from each one.

### 1. *Specific competencies*

In the case of *Lengua Extranjera*, it is the existence of the last specific competence that motivates the idea for the didactic proposal on this article. Specific competence number six holds that it is compulsory in the first course of Bachillerato to “valorar críticamente y adecuarse a la diversidad lingüística, cultural y artística a partir de la lengua extranjera, reflexionando y compartiendo las semejanzas y las diferencias entre lenguas y culturas, para actuar de forma respetuosa y eficaz, y fomentar la comprensión mutua en situaciones interculturales” (Comunidad de Madrid, 2022, p. 275). In such a manner, interculturality in Bachillerato deserves special attention, and it is for that reason that the usage of cultural resources, —such as literary classics—, let students to relativize one's own perspective and cultural value system; and to reject and evaluate the consequences of attitudes based on any type of discrimination or reinforcement of stereotypes. However, because the activities *per se* are communication-oriented the consecution of the specific competencies number one, reading and listening; and number two, oral and written expression (272-274), should also be objectives to follow.

Instead, from the *Literatura Universal* curriculum, the ones specific competencies which have been considered to pursue in this didactic proposal, are the following: the first (“leer, interpretar y valorar clásicos de la literatura universal”), and the last (“participar en la construcción de un canon literario universal que integre la perspectiva de experiencia de las mujeres a través de la lectura de obras de escritoras”) (307, and 309, respectively). On the one hand, the first one is chosen because the idea is that students get to initiate in the queer analysis of three novels from the twentieth century, so, consequently, they are supposed to understand the context that surrounds those works; on the other hand, two of the three selected novels are written by women, both offering, however, two very different perspectives of what it is

like to be one. It is for that reason that it shall be understood that the second mentioned specific competence is, indeed, in very much relation with the proposal.

## 2. Contents

The contents (saberes básicos) which are going to be covered if the proposal is finally implemented are the following. The contents from Lengua Extranjera that have been contemplated for its implementation are those in which the knowledge of cultural, artistic and literary diversity, which aims at the progressive extinction of stereotypes and prejudices, is related to the communicative use of the language in an effective and fluent way. Due to space limitation reasons, it is mandatory to synthesize them:

1. Plurilingüismo. Estrategias para responder eficazmente y con autonomía. Léxico específico para reflexionar sobre la comunicación y el aprendizaje.

2. Interculturalidad. La lengua como medio de comunicación y entendimiento entre culturas. Aprender a apreciar la diversidad lingüística, cultural y artística. Estrategias para detección y actuación ante los usos discriminatorios del lenguaje.

3. Comunicación. Estrategias para la planificación, ejecución y control de la comprensión y producción oral y escrita. Léxico de interés para el alumnado y convenciones ortográficas útiles. Utilización de géneros discursivos comunes. Recursos para la curación de contenidos. Respeto a la propiedad intelectual (Comunidad de Madrid, 2022, p. 270-272).

Furthermore, for *Literatura Universal*, the contents that we have selected to develop are, on the one hand, the literary analysis of texts in which it is described one's personal space –and inequalities which invade it; and, on the other hand, the creation of literary pieces following some given models after an argued interpretation of the prototypes.

## 3. Evaluation criteria

The following is a summary of the evaluation criteria that have been selected, for our didactic proposal, from the Decree for the implementation of LOE modified by LOMLOE in the Autonomous Community of Madrid. For *Lengua Extranjera* in 1º Bachillerato:

1. Extraer y analizar ideas de textos orales y escritos.

2. Interpretar su contenido, intención y rasgos.

2.1. Expresarse oralmente con fluidez y corrección.

2.2. Redactar textos de cierta extensión y complejidad.

2.3. Aplicar conocimientos y estrategias de planificación, producción, revisión y cooperación para componer textos de estructura clara y adecuados.

6.1. Actuar de forma respetuosa en situaciones interculturales, rechazando la discriminación.

6.2. Valorar la diversidad lingüística, cultural y artística de los países donde se habla la lengua extranjera.

6.3. Aplicar estrategias para defender y apreciar la diversidad lingüística, cultural y artística (Comunidad de Madrid, 2022, p. 302-303).

In the case of *Literatura Universal*, it is going to be evaluated the ability of the student to argue their interpretation of the literary pieces (1.1), to create coherent literary texts (1.2) and to elaborate critic commentary to oral or written texts, and their participation in debates on the readings (5.2) (p. 302-303).

At last, having considered all the aforementioned, it will be subsequently presented a proposal of a learning situation which aims at the development of the communicative skills of our student body, through the expansion of their cultural knowledge, using a PBL methodology.

### **3. Didactic Proposal**

The following is a Didactic Proposal for the implementation of *The Great Gatsby*, *Orlando* and *Carol* in a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in a 1<sup>st</sup> of *Bachillerato* bilingual class.

#### **1. Activities and Resources**

The final product of this Project Based Learning is going to be a self-edited book with different LGTB-themed short stories composed by the students, which they will be able to compose using Amazon's free tool KDP. However, in order to scaffold which of the literary characteristics of stories including LGTBQ+ characters are, they will first do some preliminary continuous assessment activities.

##### *Sessions 1, 2 & 3. Warming-up and Listening activities*

In the initial class, following an overview of our collaborative objectives, students will view curated YouTube videos on "The Great Gatsby," "Orlando," and "Carol." Next, organized into triads, they engage in a warm-up task discerning shared and distinct elements among the novels.

Working in groups, students will revisit the videos in subsequent sessions in order to respond to comprehension, commentary and analysis queries. Internet use is permitted, especially for inquiries stimulating critical thinking which demand them to find specific examples that support their answers.

##### *Sessions 4, 5 & 6. Reading activities*

In sessions 3, 4, and 5, students delve into Queer Literary Criticism. Session 3 kicks off with a "Queer Book Discussion Circle". Following a brief introduction to Queer Literary Criticism and its focus on LGBTQ+ themes (5 minutes), students explore Heartstopper characters in their base groups, reading excerpts on specific queer issues and reflecting on LGTBQ+ elements (15 minutes). Subsequently, they examine the themes, character development, and personal connections (20 minutes), leading to a class-wide discussion on observations and perspectives (10 minutes).

This way, they will be prepared to sessions 5 and 6, in which each group addresses questions on passages from the assigned books, marking a student's introduction to Queer Analysis. Some passages proposed for analysis will be Nick's description of Gatsby, Orlando's transformation, or the moment in which Therèse writes the first letter to Carol. In general, they will all be passages which depict some of the psychological characteristics of LGTB people, and the social conjectures in which they become involved for the very reason of being themselves.

##### *Sessions 7 & 8. Writing a Short Story*

Sessions 7 and 8 focus on the creation of a short queer narrative. In their base-groups, students write a tale using a provided worksheet showcasing typical linguistic structures of such kind of texts. Examples include common phrasal verbs and adverbs of simultaneity. The worksheet also suggests issues faced by LGBT youth, like a first date between two girls or a trans boy's experiences at the beach. Additionally, students can seek language guidance from the teacher, and the written piece is submitted by the final session.

##### *Sessions 9, 10, 11 & 12. Speaking activities*

In sessions 8 and 9, each group prepares an eight-minute presentation analyzing, from a queer perspective, a different narrative composition from their's. After a concise plot presentation, they are asked

to explain how the specific LGTB matters are covered; and to describe, from a socio-psychological point of view, the main queer characters. Guided by a teacher-selected YouTube video on literary analysis, they will eventually propose improvements for peers' stories, suggesting alternative endings, character modifications, or intriguing plot twists. Presentations will be held in sessions 10 and 11.

#### *Sessions 13, 14 & 15. Preparing the final product*

Ultimately, students progress with the book editing. Following peer corrections in session 13 of the previously committed short story, the teacher ensures home verification for orthography and style. In the subsequent session, two group members handle story illustration, while the other formats the text using Amazon's templates. In session 15 one committee, featuring a representative from each group and the teacher as an experienced voice without voting rights, will combine the illustrations and formatted stories into a single document. The committee then uploads the book with democratically chosen selling conditions.

## **2. Evaluation**

The following factors will be utilized on a weighted average in order to accurately assess whether the specific competencies have been met or not: 50% of the final grade will be determined by the mark attained on the final product, which will be evaluated using a rubric. Moreover, the Continuous Assessment Activities will be used in order to calculate the remaining 50%, with 20% each for the reading and speaking activities and 10% for the listening one. Likewise, there will be a rubric utilized for the grading of the oral presentation.

## **4. Conclusion**

In his Nobel Prize in Literature acceptance speech, Vargas Llosa emphasized the role of literature in fostering rationalism and critical thinking. However, despite literature's potential to equip students with analytical tools, national literature is often marginalized, and its use in teaching foreign languages is overlooked.

This article advocates for integrating LGBTQ+ themes from classic English literature into the curriculum, while addressing the heightened risk of social marginalization and suicide among LGBTQ+ students. In order to do so, a didactic unit is proposed aiming at promoting equality, equity, and social justice by using literature as a medium for understanding sexual and gender diversity.

Intending to be applied in the first year of Bachillerato, it focuses on LGBTQ+-themed literature, fostering the development of communicative skills and critical thinking. Nevertheless, it is true that time and space boundaries has affected the course of the paper. It is for that reason that some suggestions for improving future related works include, first, the creation of more warm-up activities and, second, the augmentation of the suggested didactic unit with another piece of literature, such as *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* or *The Color Purple*.

Notwithstanding, overall the proposal seeks to raise awareness of social issues and encourage cultural engagement in English classes, nurturing not only language skills but also fostering respect for diversity and critical thinking among students.

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