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How to write inclusive materials

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Seburn, T. (2021). *How to write inclusive materials*. ELT Teacher 2 Writer. <https://eltteacher2writer.co.uk/our-books/how-to-write-inclusive-materials/>

In his 2021 contribution to the ELTTeacher2Writer series, *How to write inclusive materials*, Tyson Seburn, an expert language teacher, trainer and materials writer, speaks from his own experience with multicultural and queer identities to second/foreign language (L2) teachers with different expertise in inclusive practices. To use his own metaphor of ELT materials as “a bigger flowing river” of ideologically-driven contents, Seburn’s (2021) fluid writing style eases navigation through toxic inequalities such as heteronormativity, racism, ableism and linguicism (pp. 117-118). The eight-part handbook aims to develop a practical framework for producing all-embracing materials. In this endeavour, he exploits comprehensible glosses, graphic organisers, end-of-book commentaries on sample tasks, topically classified hyperlinks to audiovisual repositories, and further readings, which makes foundational and in-depth knowledge of inclusive education accessible for a wider readership.

As befits a proponent of communicative pedagogies, Seburn (2021) starts his book with reminding us of our main responsibility to provide meaningful and relatable content in order for learners to change the status quo through language. With the help of a content-analytic task, he gets us to discover ourselves the manner and frequency with which the characters in our immediate teaching materials are visually and textually portrayed, as well as their efficiency in connection-building. After noticing the distortedness of textbook representations in terms of range of genders, races, age groups, relationships and body types, we obtain procedural information as to the meaning of inclusion. The author here defines inclusion by its opposite, othering, combined strategy of downgrading, erasing, isolating and homogenising people. Based on this comparison, Seburn (2021) not only formulates four principles governing the equitable treatment of minority groups, i.e. as distinct individuals that get represented regularly and authentically alongside the majority, but he also graphically demonstrates the impact of the specific actions to improve their visibility without discomforting teachers and learners that identify with the marginalised.

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In the second chapter on the writer's positionality, we are made aware of what lies beneath the invisibility of minority groups, and how aspects of our identities influence language choices. Through self-comparison with Seburn's (2021) examples imbued with Canadian queer urban values, we understand that materials writers, who cannot acknowledge their own unconscious biases, become more prone to (un)intentional tokenism and/or misrepresentation, and cause disappointment to learners seeking validation for their diverse identities. Chapters 3 to 5 stress the importance of positive portrayals in student goal-setting and achievement, especially in the absence of role models, and set out the primary condition of showing a variety of (non-)marginalised individuals experiencing the same life situations as others. As he delves further into the issue of fairer representation, Seburn (2021) skilfully guides us through more elaborate processes of content and media selection, including choice of universal topics over aspirational and imaginary ones. Therefore, we get to know how to diversify (non)verbal texts, namely through power-positioning marginalised individuals in the company of non-marginalised characters, and increasing exposure to inclusive language and a wider range of vocal tones, accents and languages. Upon learning to multisource information on minority groups, we also become preliminarily acquainted with problematic features of follow-up tasks for inclusive consumption of the content developed.

The two penultimate chapters describe how best to create more inclusion through the combination of usualisation and disruptive approaches to materials design. The former involves ensuring marginalised individuals' frequent and "matter-of-fact" co-existence as "normal, relatable members of society" and keeping learners' attention not on their peculiar characteristics but on aspects of L2 (Seburn, 2021, pp. 146, 176). The latter advocates providing meaningful L2 practice while focusing their attention on the examination and reduction of social inequities in problem-solving tasks. Besides detailing a five-step procedure for developing disruptive materials, Seburn (2021) warns us against risks of producing unrealistic portrayals of minority members for reasons of political correctness, and creating an unwanted outlet for both discussion of their natural rights and othering of materials users. In the last chapter, he seeks more inclusive draft units from our online community of practice to demonstrate understanding of the inclusion principles.

Overall, the current title can be rightfully considered as an indispensable guide for training teachers, teachers-turned-writers, teacher leaders and educators in evaluating and improving the inclusiveness of L2 materials. As we sail together through the muddied politics of ELT textbooks, its timely arrival facilitates novice and expert teachers' integration of inclusive representation features into their (non)texts. However much his illustrative examples are oriented towards sexual and gender diversity, Seburn's candid and humorous appraisal of such perspectival limitations and the scope too can be counted among the highlights of his work.

Yet, some organisational changes can still be introduced to his final checklist and hypothetical lesson scenarios. Instead of the seven you-statements that merely restate his inclusive principles, one may consider developing a list of clear criteria not only for identifying how well teacher-created units cater to all user needs, but also for enabling objective comparisons of responsiveness between candidate coursebooks. It might also be a good idea to provide ample opportunities for examining inclusive models from existing resources and rehabilitating traditional counterparts through various adaptation techniques because less-experienced writers can have more difficulties in concocting a whole new unit with their own

choice of language items and (non-)linguistic content for contextualisation. The addition of full lesson plans and teacher/student vignettes on classroom implementation could thus prove helpful in structuring inclusive lessons with different language/skills-focus and proficiency groups.

Consequently, despite its few deficiencies, this training guide offers an informative and interactive course on inclusive materials development. While the intended audience seem to be limited to ELT professionals, Seburn deserves our gratitude for having proposed a flexible and user-friendly framework that can be applied by materials writers, producers and providers beyond the L2 classroom, and at differing levels of involvement in creating inclusive learning-friendly environments.

References

Seburn, T. (2021). *How to write inclusive materials*. ELT Teacher 2 Writer. <https://eltteacher2writer.co.uk/our-books/how-to-write-inclusive-materials/>