Creativity in the English language classroom

Edited by Alan Maley and Nik Peachey

Outside the Box

Being inside the box
was comfortable –
warm and cosy.
We curled up
with cushions of routine,
wadded with words,
blanketed by books,
swaddled in certainties.
A bit stuffy perhaps,
and we sometimes felt cramped,
but never mind,
we were so used to it
that it felt normal –
and, as I said,
comfortable.

Out here we are exposed,
and cold winds blow.
We need to hold on tight,
keep our eyes open
for sudden snow squalls,
hidden crevasses.
It's a precarious existence now –
but here we can move and breathe,
see clear to the far horizon.

And if we come to a cliff,
we know we can step off it
into empty air,
trusting it to bear us up.
We have no fear
of
falling.

Alan Maley
Nagoya, November 2010

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Foreword

It is worrying in our market-driven world that, in domains such as politics, business, and education, certain concepts, and the words used to express them, lose their value through over-use or ill-definition. We can all think of such items and we have our pet hates. The danger is that such terms may be hijacked by public bodies and private institutions which employ them as convenient but opaque policy pegs on which practitioners, including educators, are expected to hang their approaches and behaviours. 'Creativity' is one such term, and UK government reports on the subject in the last few years show the concept of creativity being used to support a particular instrumental political view as a means of promoting the economy, rather than as a focus for developing individual skills and talents.

It is refreshing therefore to see Nik Peachey and Alan Maley, the editors of this volume of articles on creativity in ELT, adopting the latter focus on individual development. They are not especially concerned with defining terms, avoiding a narrow definition of creativity which would be open to contested interpretations. They prefer to present a kaleidoscope of practical case studies to illustrate what practitioners regard as creative. Readers may then work 'bottom-up' towards their own meaning, though the writers of the case studies do almost give an implicit definition in their description of varied activities that stimulate the imagination and result in something new and of value to the individuals and groups concerned.

Developing creativity is not an easy option and poses future challenges. It has been compared to a muscle that needs the constant constraining discipline of exercise to strengthen individuals' innovative thinking and problem-solving. There is a tendency to devote time to its development with children and young learners, when it is as important to extend its use to give positive satisfaction to all ages. Finally, we need to consider ways of diffusing good practice, and perhaps most important of all, ways of integrating approaches across the curriculum and across institutions so that the professional innovations represented in this volume can influence not only ELT situations but other, more general educational contexts.

I would like to end with an amusing but revealing anecdote from one of Sir Ken Robinson's talks on creativity with which readers may be familiar. A six-year old pupil in a drawing class said she was going to draw a picture of God. The teacher said: 'But nobody knows what God looks like'. 'They will, in a minute', the child replied.

Chris Kennedy
March 2015, Birmingham

Introduction

This collection of chapters on various aspects of creativity in language learning and teaching arose partly from discussions at the IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) Conference in Harrogate in 2014, in the context of the newly formed C Group (Creativity for Change in Language Education). A majority of the contributors to the volume are, in fact, members of the C Group.

The call for papers attracted over 200 proposals, from which we had the unenviable task of selecting just 18.

It was the aim of the editors in sorting and selecting these chapters to show that creativity isn't something which is reserved for a specific part of a course or a lesson, but that it is something which can and should be integrated into every aspect of our classroom practice and at every level of our learners' experience.

The final selection comprises chapters which cover a range of levels – from young learners, through secondary school, to adult and tertiary settings; a number of geographical contexts worldwide – from Brazil and Vietnam to Greece and Bulgaria; and a number of different perspectives – from focus on learner creativity, to focus on teacher creativity, and on the contributions which materials and teacher training can make.

This volume mixes contributions from a wide range of authors, from those with many years' experience and previous publications to those who have just started their journey. We feel that this demonstrates that creativity in the language classroom isn't limited to the 'gifted' and 'talented' but is something that any teacher can try to apply.

Creativity is an endangered species in the current model of education, which is increasingly subject to institutional, curricular and assessment constraints. We hope that this collection will serve to encourage and inspire teachers to allow their creativity to flourish, and to foster it in others.

For more information on the C Group, see: http://thecreativitygroup.weebly.com

Alan Maley and **Nik Peachey**

About the editors

Alan Maley has been involved with English language teaching for over 50 years. He worked with the British Council in Yugoslavia, Ghana, Italy, France, China and India (1962–88) before taking over as Director-General of the Bell Educational Trust, Cambridge (1988–93). He then worked in university posts in Singapore (1993–98), Thailand (1999–2004), Malaysia and Vietnam (2004–11). He is now a freelance consultant and writer. He has published over 50 books and numerous articles. He is a past President of IATEFL, and recipient of the ELTons Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012. He is a co-founder of The C Group.

Nik Peachey is an author, blogger, teacher trainer and educational technology expert. He has worked as editor and consultant on many major web-based language learning initiatives around the world and has more than 20 years' experience in the field of ELT. At present he works as Head of Learning for a web-based language school and is a frequent presenter at ELT conferences.

Overview: Creativity – the what, the why and the how

Alan Maley

Introductory chapters to collections like this usually offer some kind of summary of the content of the following chapters. I have decided against this. Instead, I shall attempt to trace common threads running through the chapters in this book. Many of these threads then feed through into the second part of this chapter, where I shall try to clarify what we mean when we talk about 'creativity', to explain why I think creativity is important in language teaching, and to offer some generic ideas for implementing creative ideas within our practice as teachers.

Some common threads

There are quite a number of themes and beliefs which recur right across this collection. I shall take up most of these issues in the second part of this chapter.

Unsurprisingly, virtually all the chapters subscribe to the view that creativity is really important both in life and in teaching and learning a language. Creativity is widely believed to be a 'good thing', enriching the quality of life and of learning – but these chapters offer a practical demonstration of how this belief can be realised.

There is also a good measure of agreement that the current educational ethos is damaging to creativity. This is largely due to the increasingly tight curricular constraints, the obsessive concern with objectives to the exclusion of broader educational aims, the intense focus on testing and measurement, and the love-affair with 'efficiency' expressed in statistical terms and quick results – all of which characterise so much of what currently passes for education (Robinson, 2001). The following chapters, directly or indirectly, all propose ideas which seek to restore a balance, so that creative teaching can find its place in this otherwise hostile and increasingly sterile environment.

Many of the chapters do not seek to define the nature of creativity, assuming perhaps that we all know it when we see it. Those which do attempt to define it, admit the difficulty of finding an inclusive definition.

Many of the chapters subscribe explicitly to the belief that everyone has the capacity to exercise creativity, that it is not the preserve of a privileged elite. While not everyone will have the big 'C' creative genius of an Einstein, a Picasso, a Mozart or a Dostoevsky, everyone can exercise what some have called little 'c' creativity, which is inherent in language itself. The chapters also demonstrate how creativity extends right across all age ranges, all levels of competence, all teaching contexts and all geographical regions. And it applies equally to teachers as well as learners. Creativity is universal, though its manifestations may be specific and local.

Creativity is widely believed to be about letting the imagination loose in an orgy of totally free self-expression. It is, of course, no such thing. Creativity is born of discipline and thrives in a context of constraints. It is therefore reassuring to find this view repeatedly expressed throughout the collection. The issue of the value of constraints both as a stimulus and as a support for creativity will be addressed again later in this chapter.

Related to the issue of constraints is the frequency with which low-resource teaching environments are cited. Many of the chapters amply demonstrate that we have no need of expensive and elaborate equipment and technological gizmos to stimulate the latent creativity of our students. In a sense, the less we have, the more we make of it. And no classroom lacks the single most important resource – the human beings who make it up, with their richly varied personalities, preferences and experience (Maley, 1983; Campbell and Kryszewska, 1992). It is also clear that creativity in the classroom does not have to involve epochal changes. Even very small changes can bring about disproportionately large creative benefits.

There is also broad agreement that creating the right atmosphere is central to fostering creativity. Encouraging an environment of trust – between teacher and class and among class members – is absolutely crucial. Among other things, this implies curbing the teacher's impulse to constantly intervene and over-correct. There is an acceptance that creative effort and communicative intent trump accuracy and correction in this situation. 'Creative thinking cannot be purchased, downloaded or guaranteed but it can be fostered with the right environment. Developing individual conceptual frameworks for understanding and interpreting the world also means encouraging individuals to have the confidence to question and deconstruct dogma and traditional views, to possess the courage to make new associations without fear of the opinions or cynicism of others' (Greenfield, 2014).

Over time a learning community can come into being, where co-operation, sharing and the valuing of others' contributions become a natural part of the way things are done – what Wajnryb (2003) calls a 'storied class'.

There is a consensus too that teachers need to act as role models. It is no good preaching creativity to our students unless we also practise it ourselves. If we want our students to sing, we must sing too. If we want them to act and mime, we must act and mime too. If we want them to write poems or stories, or to draw and paint, then we must engage in the same activities as they do. If we want the bread to rise, we need to provide the yeast. In order to do this, we need to relinquish our excessively 'teacher-control' persona, and become part of the group, not someone who is above it or outside it. Stevick's words are relevant here too: 'we should judge creativity in the classroom by what the teacher makes it possible for the student to do, not just by what the teacher does' (Stevick, 1980: 20).

Another thing to emerge from these chapters is the need for teachers to develop a creative attitude of mind which permeates everything they do – not to regard creativity as something reserved for special occasions. This also requires of teachers an unusual degree of awareness of what is happening both on and under the surface, and an ability to respond in the moment to the unpredictability as the action unfolds (Underhill and Maley, 2012; Underhill, 2014). This kind of reactive creativity complements the proactive creativity of the 'activities' the teacher offers.

Clearly too, creativity is facilitated by a wide variety of inputs, processes and outputs (Maley, 2011). This implies that teachers need to be open to such variety, and willing to 'let go', and to 'have a go' by trying things they have never done before. A playful attitude and atmosphere seems to be a key ingredient for creativity (Cook, 2000). The notion of varied outputs reminds us that creativity encourages and facilitates divergent thinking, and frees us of the idea that questions always have a single, right answer.

The what

Creativity is a quality which manifests itself in many different ways, and this is one of the reasons it has proved so difficult to define. As Amabile (1996) points out, 'a clear and sufficiently detailed articulation of the creative process is not yet possible.' Yet we readily recognise creativity when we meet it, even if we cannot define it precisely. For all practical purposes this is enough, and we do not need to spend too much time agonising over a definition.

There are of course, some features which are almost always present in a creative act. The core idea of 'making something new' is at the heart of creativity. But novelty is not alone sufficient for something to be recognised as creative. We could, for example, wear a clown's red nose to class. This would certainly be doing something new and unusual but it would only count as creative if we then did something with it, like creating a new persona. It is also necessary for creative acts to be recognised and accepted within the domain in which they occur. They need to be relevant and practicable – not just novel. Sometimes creative ideas are ahead of their time and have to wait for technology to catch up. Leonardo da Vinci designed an aeroplane in the 15th century, but before aeroplanes could become a reality, materials and fuels had to be available.

Among the earliest modern attempts to understand creativity were Wallas' (1926, 2014) ideas. He outlined a four-stage process: *Preparation, Incubation, Illumination, Verification*. Given a 'problem', 'puzzle' or 'conceptual space', the creative mind first prepares itself by soaking up all the information available.

Following this first preparation stage, there is a stage of incubation, in which the conscious mind stops thinking about the problem, leaving the unconscious to take over. In the third stage, illumination, a solution suddenly presents itself (if you're lucky!). In the final verification stage, the conscious mind needs to check, clarify, elaborate on and present the insights gained.

Koestler, in *The Act of Creation* (1989), suggests that the creative process operates through the bisociation of two conceptual matrices, not normally found together. He believed that putting together two (or more) things that do not normally belong together can facilitate a sudden new insight. This is another idea that we can put to use in the classroom through

applying the random principle (see below) to create new and unexpected associations.

Bisociation was also one of the key principles of the Surrealist movement in art, photography, music, film, theatre and literature which flourished mainly in Paris in the 1920s and '30s. But they also emphasised the importance of the unconscious mind, especially dreams, of playing around and experimenting, and of seeing ordinary things from unusual viewpoints. They also explored the creative potential of constraints: one novelist (Perec, 1969) wrote an entire novel without using the letter 'e', for example. There are lessons we can learn from the Surrealists too.

By contrast, Boden (1990) takes an AI (artificial intelligence) approach to investigating creativity. She asks what a computer would need to do to replicate human thought processes. This leads to a consideration of the self-organising properties of complex, generative systems through processes such as parallel distributed processing. For her, creativity arises from the systematic exploration of a conceptual space or domain (mathematical, musical or linguistic). She draws attention to the importance of constraints in this process. 'Far from being the antithesis of creativity, constraints on thinking are what make it possible' (p. 82). Chaos theory (Gleick, 1987) tends to support her ideas. Boden's approach is richly suggestive for language acquisition, materials writing and for teaching, in that all are rooted in complex, self-organising systems.

Csikszentmihalyi (1988) takes a multidimensional view of creativity as an interaction between individual talent, operating in a particular domain or discipline, and judged by experts in that field. He also has interesting observations about the role of 'flow' in creativity: the state of 'effortless effort' in which everything seems to come together in a flow of seamless creative energy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). He further explores creativity by analysing interviews with 91 exceptional individuals, and isolates ten characteristics of creative individuals (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Amabile (1996) approaches creativity from a social and environmental viewpoint. She claims that previous theories have tended to neglect the power of such factors to shape creative effort. Her theory rests on three main factors: domain-relevant skills (i.e. familiarity with a given domain of knowledge), creativity-relevant skills (e.g. the ability to break free of 'performance scripts' – established routines, to see new connections, etc.) and task motivation, based on attitudes, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic constraints and rewards, etc. The social and environmental factors she discusses include peer influence, the teacher's character and behaviour, the classroom climate, family influence, life stress, the physical environment, degree of choice offered, time, the presence of positive role models and the scope for play in the environment. These factors clearly have relevance for learning and can be blended into an approach which seeks to promote creativity.

There is sometimes a confusion in the relationship between creativity on the one hand and discovery and invention on the other. Discovery is about finding something that has always been there – but was until then unnoticed. For example, the phenomenon of gravity was not created or invented by Newton: he discovered it. By contrast, invention means bringing something into being which had not until then existed. A new poem or a picture would be instances of this – but it could also be extended to creating a new recipe, or a new game, or a new way of using paper… Is discovery an instance of genuine creativity? Perhaps it is simply a different aspect of creativity from invention: the outcome is not a new 'product' but a creative solution to a problem never solved before.

This is related to the tendency to regard problem-solving and critical thinking as integral to creativity. There is a good deal of overlap but before we treat them as equivalent, we should be aware of the differences. Problem-solving may indeed involve students in experimenting with multiple possible solutions, in making unusual connections, acting on a hunch, engaging with the Wallas model above, and so on. But it may also be conducted in a purely logical, rational way which has little in common with creative processes. In problem-solving, we are given someone else's problem to solve. In problem-finding, we need to make an imaginative leap to perceive that a problem might be there to solve.

One issue frequently raised is whether creativity can be taught. There are many, such as de Bono (1969) and Seelig (2012), who believe that it can. And there are shelves full of self-help books claiming to teach us how to be creative in our lives and in our work. What is certain is that creativity can be tacitly learned even if it cannot be explicitly taught. But unless we as teachers demonstrate our own commitment to creativity, and unless we offer our students a richly varied diet of creative practices, they are unlikely to learn it.

The why

We cannot avoid it. The human species seems to be hard-wired for creativity. Humans are innately curious about their environment, which they explore tirelessly. Put in a maze, we will find our way out, but unlike rats, we are also capable of forming the concept of a maze, and of designing one.

Creativity is also necessary for survival. The history of our species can be mapped with reference to key creative breakthroughs: agriculture, the wheel, writing systems, printing – a cumulative and constantly proliferating series of discoveries and inventions. Without this creative capacity, we would still be living in caves. Creativity helps us to deal with change, and as the world changes ceaselessly, so will more creative solutions be needed.

Linguistic creativity in particular is so much part of learning and using a language that we tend to take it for granted. Yet from the ability to formulate new utterances, to the way a child tells a story, to the skill of a stand-up comedian, to the genius of a Shakespeare, linguistic creativity is at work. In Carter's words, '…linguistic creativity is not simply a property of exceptional people but an exceptional property of all people' (Carter, 2004: 13).

In the learning context, creativity also seems to stimulate, to engage, to motivate and to satisfy in a deep sense. Many of the chapters in this book testify to the motivational power which is released when we allow students to express themselves creatively.

Likewise, creativity tends to improve student self-esteem, confidence and self-awareness. This enhanced sense of self-worth also feeds into more committed and more effective learning. When we are exercising our creative capacities we tend to feel more ourselves, and more alive.

The how

I will first of all suggest some ways in which we can lay the foundations for a more creative climate. These are important because creativity in teaching does not simply happen in a vacuum. We need to create favourable conditions for it.

I will then suggest some generic ways in which we can develop creative activities – for students, for teachers, for the classroom and for materials.

General factors

■ Establish a relaxed, non-judgemental atmosphere, where students feel confident enough to let go and not to worry that their every move is being scrutinised for errors. This means attending to what they are trying to express rather than concentrating on the imperfect way they may express it.

■ Frame activities by creating constraints. Paradoxically, the constraints also act as supportive scaffolding for students. In this way both the scope of the content and the language required are both restricted. By limiting what they are asked to write, for example, students are relieved of the pressure to write about everything.

■ Ensure that the students' work is 'published' in some way. This could be by simply keeping a large noticeboard for displaying students' work. Other ways would include giving students a project for publishing work in a simple ring binder, or as part of a class magazine. Almost certainly, there will be students able and willing to set up a class website where work can be published. Performances, where students read or perform their work for other classes or even the whole school, are another way of making public what they have done. The effects on students' confidence of making public what they have written is of inestimable value.

■ Encourage students to discuss their work together in a frank but friendly manner. We get good ideas by bouncing them off other people (Johnson, 2010). Help them establish an atmosphere where criticism is possible without causing offence. This implies creating a 'storied class' (Wajnryb, 2003) – a co-operative learning community.

■ Explain regularly how important accurate observation is, and encourage 'noticing' things. Encourage them to collect data which may be used later: pictures, games, DVDs, videos, websites, books and magazines… Students also need to be encouraged to be curious and to follow up with 'research' – looking for more information, whether in books, on the internet or by asking other people.

■ Do not try to do too much. Take it easy. And be kind to yourself (Casanave and Sosa, 2007). Try introducing small changes over a period of time. And allow time for activities and for talking about them. Johnson (2010) among many others talks about the need for the slow burn of hunches and ideas.

- Make it clear that what they do in the classroom is only the tip of the iceberg. To get real benefit from these activities, they need to do a lot of work outside class hours. Most of what we learn, we do not learn in class.

- Do the activities regularly in order to get the best effects. Maybe once a week is a sensible frequency. If you leave too long between sessions, you have to keep going back to square one. That is a waste of time and energy.

- Be a role model. This means working with the students, not simply telling them to do things. This is especially true for reading and writing activities. If they see you are reading, or writing, they will be more likely to engage in these activities themselves.

- Never underestimate your students. Their capacity for creativity will astound you, if you can help them unlock it.

- Make sure you offer a varied diet – of inputs, of processes and of products (Maley, 1999). This diversity helps to promote an atmosphere of 'expectancy' (I wonder what will happen today?), rather than the feeling of 'expectation' (Here we go again. Unit 4…).

- As a teacher, apply the four golden principles: *acknowledge, listen, challenge, support.* Acknowledge the individuality of students who make up the class group by showing that you value what they bring to the group. Learn to listen carefully and without pre-judgements to what they say or try to say. Make sure that you provide the right level of challenge in what you ask them to do. And offer support to them while they struggle to meet that challenge. It sounds easy but of course, it is not.

Some generic principles for developing more creativity

My intention here is not to provide a set of oven-ready activities but rather to suggest some principles which can be used to develop various forms of creativity.

Use heuristics at all levels

By 'all levels' I mean that many of these heuristics (and others not mentioned here for reasons of space) can be used for teacher decisions, for developing materials, for varying classroom routines, and for devising student activities. It will be for the teacher to decide exactly how a given heuristic is applied.

A heuristic is a kind of 'rule of thumb'. Rather than applying a formula with a pre-determined outcome (an algorithm), heuristics work by trying things to see how they work out. The 'suck it and see' principle. Here are some examples of heuristics to try:

- Do the opposite. This has been extensively described by John Fanselow (1987, 2010). Essentially, it involves observing the routines and activities we consciously or unconsciously follow, doing the opposite and then observing what happens. Examples would be: if you always stand up to teach, sit down; if you teach from the front of the class, teach from the back; if you usually talk a lot, try silence.

- Reverse the order. Here you would do things backwards. For example: in dictation, instead of giving out the text at the end, you would give it out at the beginning, allow students to read it then take it away, then give the dictation; if you normally read texts from beginning to end, try reading them starting at the end; if you normally set homework after a lesson, try setting it before; if you usually give a grammar rule, asking them to find examples, try giving examples and asking them to derive the rule.

- Expand (or reduce) something. For example, increase (or decrease) the length of a text in various ways; increase (or decrease) the time allotted to a task; increase the number of questions on a text; increase (or decrease) the number of times you do a particular activity. (Maley's books, *Short and Sweet* [1994, 1996] suggest 12 different generic procedures, including this one, to develop more interesting activities/materials.)

Use the constraints principle

The idea here is to impose tight constraints on whatever activity is involved. For example:

- Limit the number of words students have to write – as in mini-sagas, where a story has to be told in just 50 words.

- Limit the amount of time allowed to complete a task – as when students are given exactly one minute to give instructions.

- Limit the amount of materials – as in a construction task where each group is given just four file cards, ten paperclips and two elastic bands with which to build a structure and write instructions on how to construct it.

Use the random principle

This is essentially using bisociation – putting two or more things together that do not belong together and finding connections. For example:

■ Students work in pairs – all the As write ten adjectives each on slips of paper, all the Bs write ten nouns. The slips are put in two boxes. Students take turns to draw a slip from each box, making an unusual combination, e.g. a broken birthday. When they have ten new phrases they combine them into a text.

■ Students are given pictures of five people taken at random from magazines. They then have to write a story involving all five characters.

Use the association principle

This involves using evocative stimuli for students to react to. For example:

■ Students listen to a sequence of sounds, then describe their feelings or tell a story suggested by the sounds.

■ Students are given a set of character descriptions and a set of fragments of dialogue – they match the characters with what they might have said.

■ Students are all given a natural object (a stone, a leaf, etc.). They then write a text as if they were their object.

■ Drawing on their own experience, students choose a taste, a smell, or a sound which brings back particular memories.

Use the withholding-information principle

This involves only offering part of the information needed to complete a task. Jigsaw listening/reading are examples of this. Other examples would be:

■ A text is cut up into short fragments. Each student has one fragment. They have to reconstitute the text without showing their fragments to others. (The same can be done with a picture.)

■ A picture is flashed on the screen for just a second. Students must try to recall it.

Use the divergent thinking principle

The core idea here is to find as many different uses as possible for a particular thing or ways of carrying out a task. For example:

■ Teachers find alternative ways to do some of their routine tasks: set homework (Painter, 2003), take the register, give instructions, arrange the seating, do dictations (Davis and Rinvolucri, 1988), etc.

■ Students find as many uses for a common object (e.g. a comb) as possible.

■ Students have to find as many different ways of spending a given sum of money as possible.

Use feeder fields

Feeder fields are domains outside the limited field of ELT but which may offer insights of use in ELT (Maley, 2006). Examples would be:

■ *Neuro-linguistic Programming* (NLP) (Baker and Rinvolucri, 2005).

■ *Multiple Intelligences* (Gardner, 1985; Puchta and Rinvolucri, 2005).

■ *Literature* (Maley and Duff, 2007).

■ *The Arts* (Maley 2009, 2010) – *Music* (Paterson and Willis, 2008), *Art* (Grundy et al., 2011; Keddie, 2009), *Drama* (Maley and Duff, 2005; Wilson, 2008), *Clowning* (Lutzker, 2007), *Story-telling* (Heathfield, 2014; Wright, 2008), *Creative Writing* (Spiro, 2004, 2006; Wright and Hill, 2008), *Improvisation* (Nachmanovitch, 1990).

■ *Technology* (Dudeney and Hockly, 2007; Stannard – see web reference below).

Use the full range of materials available

All the above principles can be used to devise new and interesting ways of doing things. However, there already exist a wide range of resource materials which teachers can draw upon to augment their own creativity. The list below offers a necessarily incomplete sample of such resources. Some have been referred to above, others have not.

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Conclusion

This book is intended to add to the growing demand for more creative approaches to the teaching of languages. The variety and stimulating content of the chapters which follow are testimony to the interest in this direction in language education. It is our sincere wish that teachers everywhere will find inspiration and encouragement to experiment for themselves.

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1

Medium: companion or slave?

Andrew Wright

'…a relationship between humans and the things they create which is both a love affair and a dependency.'

(MacGregor, 2012)

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the idea that a sensitive awareness of the characteristics and potential of the media and materials available to the teacher can lead to ideas which are fresh, relevant and efficient. Examples in the chapter are limited to those media which are probably available to the teacher even in financially deprived areas.

The language teacher must help the students to use the target language for purposes which they care about. In this way, the students experience English rather than merely studying it, and this helps to make the language meaningful and memorable. With this aim, the language teacher must first of all be an 'event maker': events which the students want to be part of.

Examples of the creative use of media and materials in order to contribute to this 'event making' are described and discussed.

Historically: a creative response to materials

From the beginnings of time inventions have arisen because someone has observed the potential of a material which may have been considered irrelevant or even inconvenient at the time. Only after thousands of years was the sharpness of broken flint noticed and its potential for cutting realised. It was only realised in about 3500 BC that solidified drops of copper in the charred remains of a fire might offer the potential for casting metal tools and weapons. In some societies the wheel was never invented even though people had to dodge rocks spinning like wheels down hillsides!

Some authors have described how they conceive the nature of their protagonists and then begin the story and the protagonists almost write it for them. Media and materials can be like living companions for the teacher, creating new ideas and new ways of doing things.

I submit that most people use media and materials in the way that they have been used to. Sometimes, aspects of a material's character are regarded as a nuisance (like a rock bouncing down a hillside or having a very large class of students). It takes a creative person to see that a nuisance might be a potential for doing something never done before.

Language teaching methodology

My chief focus is on revealing the normally untapped potential of common media and materials available to the teacher. For this reason I am not giving many details of classroom organisation. However, it is important to stress that we must maximise the chance of every student, even in a large class, taking part. For this reason, pair and group work are very important. For example: when you ask a question of the class, normally say 'Please tell your neighbour what you think the answer is.' Only when this has happened, ask someone to call out their idea.

Methodologically, it is important to note that an ingenious use of the media or materials is normally not enough. We have to combine this with ways of engaging the students. Broadly, ways of engaging the students can be summarised by:

- challenging them (to identify something difficult to identify; match things objectively or subjectively, group, order, sequence and remember things)
- inviting them (to hypothesise, create and share)
- showing you care about the content of their contribution more than the language forms.

For more on ways of creating engaging events in the classroom, see Ur and Wright (1992); Wright et al. (2006); and Wright (2014).

In the remaining part of the chapter, ideas for using commonly occurring media and materials in a fresh way are combined with ways of challenging or inviting students to respond. The media and materials are in five sections:

- the language teacher as a resource
- the students
- the classroom
- the school
- the neighbourhood.

The language teacher as a resource

The first medium and resource is the teacher! I fully appreciate and respect that there are special conventions of behaviour and of relationships in the classroom in each culture. Furthermore, there is the question of the teacher's own nature and personality. Each reader must, of course, find their own way related to their own nature and to their local conventions. At the same time, I think it is reasonable to say that 'creativity', by definition, means new ideas and a fresh way of doing things!

Voice

We all recognise the heartfelt complaint of the person who says, 'It's not what she said that hurt me! It's the way she said it!' Central to our daily experience though this experience is, little attention is given to the use of the voice in language teacher training. The focus for language teachers is on the words themselves, not on the way they are spoken.

The teacher can significantly increase communicative clarity and expressiveness by giving more value to the characteristics of the voice as a rich medium rather than a mere articulating device for words. For an actor the voice is subject to a lifetime of training. Here are just a few indications of what a teacher can do in order to use his or her voice more effectively:

- Be driven, above all, by using your voice to help the listeners to hear the words you are saying and to understand them and to understand the added feeling implied by the way you use your voice. Some people are driven by the wish to sound authoritative and they tend to bark their words, and let their intonation fall at the end of every sentence. Others want to sound light and interesting and speak in a lighter voice, using a lilting pattern of rise and fall. Others just articulate the words and hope the listeners will understand. I believe we should use the potential of our voice to articulate clearly and expressively, each part of every sentence.

- Speaking in sense chunks/related to the content/ but also to the ability of the listeners/to grasp the content/is the most important skill/in my opinion.//Sense chunking/does not necessarily follow/written punctuation.//The length of the pause/between each sense chunk/can be shown/ with an oblique stroke/as in this paragraph.

- Stress and pitch, volume and pace each have their important part to play.

- The quality of one's voice, whether it is hard or soft, positive or uncertain, is important.

- And, of course, how your voice works in harmony with your body is important.

- A sensitive and appropriate use of the character of the voice can transform a communication from the plain to the memorable. A great example? The speech by Martin Luther King, 'I have a dream!' (Luther King, 1963).

- For more on the use of the voice in language teaching, see Maley (2000).

Body

Just as actors study and develop the use of their voices over their lifetime so do actors, clowns, opera singers and mime artists work on the communicative power of their bodies. There are some things we teachers can do in order to make more effective communicative use of our bodies.

For a number of years I toured as a storyteller in schools in about 30 countries. Working in Europe, I did six lessons a day in every school and in the evenings drove to the next school to be ready for the next day. I became very used to walking into a classroom with two or three classes waiting for me… 60 to 90 children… sometimes more and sometimes less. I learned that my job started the moment the children saw me. How I walked into the classroom affected them. Any hesitancy, any tension, any self-doubt would be picked up within an instant (Gladwell, 2006).

The old fashioned idea of a good posture certainly affects people, positively. Walking firmly, but not showing any sign of pressure… no uncertainty. Being firm with how I want the children to be arranged, being firm without tension, good-naturedly conveying that I know what I want: slow, slightly 'heightened' gestures… indicating, 'Settle down', 'Stop speaking', 'Can I help you?' etc.

Slowing down and slightly simplifying and heightening movement seems to have a powerful effect and creates acceptance of your leadership, readiness to be involved, to give and to share as well as to listen.

Body language is also a powerful communicator of meaning and expression while you explain things or while you tell stories. Small movements allow me, as an old man, to represent a young woman, a baby or an elephant or a butterfly. Awareness of the medium of my body creates a vividness of experience in my listeners' (and viewers') imaginations. Body language is, of course, a traditional part of an actor's and a mime's expressive form of communication.

Just as the voice can be used to increase the clarity of our speaking and the expressiveness of what we are saying, so can the body support the grasping of meaning and add qualities of association, making the impact richer and more meaningful and memorable.

The body is a largely untapped medium in the classroom. Lutzker (2007) among others has drawn attention to the effects of incorporating clowning in training programmes.

Life experiences

I do understand that some teachers, in some contexts, might feel reticent about sharing stories from their life experiences with their students. However, doing so can be extremely powerful and can lead to the students being willing to reciprocate.

What a way of making language meaningful and memorable! These are rich assets in materially impoverished classrooms and as rich and important as any in materially fortunate classrooms! If you have not used this immense resource yourself, then here are a few tips:

- Don't feel you have to have climbed Mount Everest in order to have a story to share! Losing your house keys, having a snake come into your house, having a bad dream and worrying about your grandmother are perfect subjects, depending on the age and concerns of your students, of course.

- What is a good story? Above all the story needs someone for the students to identify with, then a problem that person has, and then the struggles to overcome that problem and then a happy or an unhappy end. Details are important so the students can see, hear and sense the people and place you are talking about. Stories can be based on fact or be fiction.

- Perhaps finish the story with a question – not a comprehension question, but a real question about what the students think about what happened, what you did and thought, and if anything like that ever happened to them.

- In my, very strongly held, opinion, it is wrong to follow up a real story which you care about with old-fashioned, sterile comprehension questions. Work of this kind immediately devalues your perceived intention of human sharing.

Pets

Here is an unusual example in order to demonstrate that any medium or material is potentially useful in the classroom!

Recently, a teacher in my school was unable to take her lesson with a class of five- to six-year-olds. They had been 'doing prepositions' in the last lesson. What could I do to make prepositions 'come alive' and without any time for preparation? Toffee, one of our dogs, is small with white curly hair. He loves children and children love him. I left him outside the classroom door. I told the children that the classroom was a giant's house and I acted out a giant to teach them the word. I showed them my table and chair. 'This is the giant's chair and this is the giant's table. Where is the giant? Is he in the room? No, he isn't. He's walking in the garden.' I pointed through the window and acted out the giant.

Then, I told them that Toffee was outside and wanted to come in. 'Call, Toffee! Toffee! Come in!' The children called, 'Toffee! Toffee! Come in!' Toffee came in, wagging his tail. The children had made a delightful dog come into the room by using English!

Then I said, 'Toffee is walking towards the giant's table. Say, Toffee! Walk towards the giant's table!' So the children all called to Toffee to walk towards the table.

In the sequence, Toffee came into the classroom, walked towards the table, walked under the table, between the legs of the table, around the chair and onto the chair. He then fell asleep, on the chair. When he didn't do these things immediately it was perfect for 'classroom drilling of the appropriate forms'!

Then, I said, 'Oh! The giant's coming!' And I got all the children to stamp their feet in unison. For a giant you need as many feet as possible – that is when big classes are better than small classes (a class, like a dog, is a medium; a characteristic of a big class is the potential for a lot of noise which can be bad or good, and a characteristic of a small dog is delight).

Toffee was tired by this time so I asked a child to act out his part in the story and we re-enacted it. Some parents came and we re-enacted it again and Toffee was the star. He had been just a dog but now he was a medium or 'material' which made language live, meaningfully and memorably.

We also used Toffee in a class of 20- to 30-year-olds, at elementary level. The students had spent a large part of the lesson interviewing each other, and at the end of the lesson my wife, Julia, told the class that they could interview Toffee. She put him on a chair and he looked at the class with interest, head on one side and smiling. The class asked him questions and Julia interpreted for him!

Seeing the potential in a dog is seeing the potential in any medium or material which is around you and perhaps, unused, not even considered.

The students

Yes, a big class has its problems. Yes, it's difficult to help each individual student and to give them the focused attention they each need. At the same time, a large class offers some possibilities a smaller class cannot. In the media selected in this section the size of the class is seen as a potential strength. When singing, how much more powerful, moving and memorable 100 students are than 15! Carrying out surveys has far more significance with large numbers!

Drama, stories, music, song, chants, poetry and dance

How deep the expressive arts go, in our beings, as humans! And, in some societies, these expressive arts are central to the nature of daily life, outside the school. In some visits to countries in Africa I have seen prime ministers and archbishops start to dance! On one outing, with a coachload of teachers in Sierra Leone, we came to a village which was celebrating. Then, I learned that every single teacher among my colleagues was a drummer, as well as a dancer! What a resource! But there is no mention of this resource in normal language teacher training!

Not to use this deep, rich, relevant and free resource in language teaching is a tragic waste! I once had about 150 students. I divided them into two groups: one group said 'Good' and the other group said 'morning' and then the whole group chanted 'Good morning to you', with rhythm and goodwill. What power! What working together! What a memorable sound! What a positive start to the lesson! Cost? Nothing!

'Jazz chants', most notably pioneered and developed by Carolyn Graham, take the idea further than 'Good morning'! Her chants embody functions and grammatical items galore: perfect for large classes and especially for classes in cultural areas where song, chant and dance are central to their way of life (Graham, 1978, 2006).

Writing poetry

Poetry means a heightened use of language in describing ideas and feelings. The easiest and most rewarding writing of poetry is based on the simple repetition of sentence patterns. You give them the patterns and they compose their poems and then walk around and tell them to at least 20 other students: speaking and listening: intense, meaningful and memorable!

> Every day
> Every day, I get up at 6 o'clock.
> I get dressed and eat my breakfast.
> I walk to school.
> I work and talk to my friends.
> Today!
> Today is Saturday!
> I am lying in bed!
> I am listening to music!

For more on writing poetry see Maley (1989).

Hypnogogic imagery, 'seeing in the imagination'

The majority of people have the ability to see pictures in their imagination, usually with their eyes closed. Some can see their inner images even with their eyes open. William Blake, the English writer and artist, saw angels sitting in a tree. Hypnogogic imagery is a rich resource, rarely tapped into in the English lesson. Here are a few summaries of activities which you might try out.

You hold up or describe an old key. The students close their eyes. You ask questions about what they can see and later hear and smell. They don't call out their answers but just look in their imaginations. Here are some of the questions you might ask:

■ This key is for a door. Is it an old door or a new door?

■ Is it big or normal in size or small?

■ What is the door made of?

■ What does the wall around the door look like?

■ What is it made of?

■ You put the key in the lock and open the door. What can you see? What can you hear?

■ Now close the door and when you are ready, open your eyes. Ask your neighbour what he or she saw and heard, etc.

Then, you might question some individual students in the class. Push them with your questions to describe what they saw and heard, in great detail. For example:

■ You saw a table in the room. Tell me about it. Was it a big or a small table? What was it made out of? What colour was it? Was there anything on the table?

Writing or just inventing an imaginary situation or journey

Launch this activity by preparing an imaginary situation or journey yourself.

■ Ask the students to close their eyes. Read your description slowly and clearly.

■ Now ask the students to each prepare a short text which they can then read out to their neighbour or group member, who listens with their eyes shut.

■ If the students enjoy this then their texts cannot be thrown away! They must be kept and published or made available for use in another class. And if you tell them this is going to happen, there is a reason for getting the grammar and punctuation and spelling perfect!

Drama and mime

Acting out dialogues, given in a student's book, is a well-established language classroom activity. However, creative acting and creative mime is not so common and represents a huge potential for emotional involvement that is a meaningful and memorable use of language.

Miming animals, emotions, objects, jobs

■ Students take it in turns to act out an animal, an emotion, an object or a job, etc. The other students call out their ideas. Vocabulary practice!

Miming tense forms

■ Students, by themselves, or in pairs, take it in turns to act out particular tense forms. The other students call out their interpretations. A meaningful and memorable focus on tense forms!

For more on the vast area of drama in language development, see Susan Hillyard (susanhillyard. blogspot.com.ar). Also see the classic book in this area (Maley and Duff, 2005).

Stories, legends, and proverbs and personal and family anecdotes

It is often the case that financially deprived parts of the world are rich in traditional stories, legends and proverbs. And every family is rich in personal anecdotes. Stories are a huge potential for language use in the classroom and then in future life when English is used as an international language. People must not only transact with English but represent themselves as characterful human beings. What better way than telling stories? This is a free resource, which the students care about, providing teachers don't dominate it, with a concern for accuracy!

For more on stories and storytelling and story writing, see Heathfield (2014); Wright (1997); Wright (2008); Wright and Hill (2008).

Stories from imagination

The students can create an imaginary soap opera with locality and people who live there. Once invented, the information cannot change except through dramatic events. The people can be drawn, or be made out of clay or wood. During the first few weeks of learning the people can be named, given ages, jobs, likes and dislikes, etc. At higher language proficiency levels they can have more subtle relationships and take part in more complicated situations.

The community can be realistic or fantasy or a mixture. Imagine a swarm of strange monsters invading the community. Students can describe the colours, shapes, features, numbers, and characteristics and behaviour of them! And what they did and what the community did! Such an imaginary community can be created in the first few weeks of learning.

The classroom

Noises

- Ask the students to make themselves comfortable and to close their eyes. Ask them to listen and to try to identify all the noises they can hear.
- After a few minutes, tell them to open their eyes and to share with their neighbour what they heard, and then to another pair of students and do the same. Then, have a class sharing.

This activity is peaceful and calming but it also provides a natural context for the use of simple and continuous past forms of actions, e.g.: 'Somebody dropped a book. Somebody was whispering. A car drove past the school. A bird was singing'.

Walls

If you use the same classroom for every lesson then the walls become very important. You can build up on them a vast picture dictionary of words and phrases related to the events you have been creating with the students during your lessons. The pictures can be on paper, of course, but they can also be drawn directly on the wall. Re-assure the school director. The wall can be whitewashed at the end of the year! I have drawn and painted pictures on mud walls in Nubia. The pigment I used was made from grinding local, soft stones and mixing it with water, but egg yolk would have been better. No evidence of this enterprise is left, I am sorry to say: it is now under the Aswan Dam.

Reading from left to right: actions in the past can be on the wall on your left, in the present on the back wall of the class and in the future on the right. Points in time are no longer an abstract and immaterial concept but physically there. A time line can be drawn around the room.

What can you see through the window?

The teacher (or a student) stands by a window in the classroom. If the students cannot see through the window from their sitting position, the teacher asks questions. If the students can't see, then it is a challenge to their memories.

Teacher: If you stand by the window and look through it, what can you see? You walk on that street everyday: what is there?

Students: A street. Shops.

Teacher: What sort of shops?

Students: There is a grocery shop.

Teacher: And next to the grocery shop?

Students: I think there's a greengrocer's shop.

Hiding somewhere through the window

The teacher or a student says 'I am hiding in the school/town. Where do you think I am hiding? You've got twenty questions'. This provides good practice for asking questions and for the use of prepositions and places. (The hiding person should write down where they are hiding before starting the game.)

Are you in the town hall?

No, I'm not.

Etc.

Using the windows for shadow theatre

If you cover the window with paper or with a white sheet, you can then use it as a shadow theatre if the students can safely stand outside the window – for example, the ground floor or a balcony. Small groups of students work out a play and then perform it outside the window, the sun casting their shadows on the paper or sheet. The students can make and use card puppets held and moved on sticks.

Benefits from the activity:
- engaging
- fun
- using English for real purposes in creating the story, rehearsing and performing.

A cotton sheet fixed to a wooden frame can also be used for shadow theatre: it is more convenient than the window!

Clouds seen through the window

Finding pictures in clouds, fire or patches on walls is an old idea.

> 'I think it's a dragon. That's its head. These are its legs' etc.

You can also make Rorschach inkblots and ask students to interpret them.

Materials

Paper and card

In most parts of the world paper is supplied in the international paper sizes. We normally use A4 paper in computer printouts and in photocopying. When we use A4 paper for making notes we normally start writing at the top and work to the bottom. Nothing wrong with that!

However, the nature of paper is that we can do other things with it. We can turn it round and write on it horizontally.

Here is an extreme idea, invented by a student aged 14 in one of my classes:

- He wrote a story on a piece of A4 paper and then crumpled it into a ball. Bits of the writing could be seen.
- He then said the challenge was to read the complete story without 'uncrumpling' it!
- How? He said 'you must look at it and write down the words and phrases that you see. Then, you put it behind your back and you 're-crumple' the paper, look at it again and once more write down all the words you can see.
- You keep on doing this until you are sure you have seen all the words. Then, you arrange them so that they tell the story so you can read it.
- Only then can you 'uncrumple' the paper fully and compare the original with your own.

Time-consuming? Unforgettable! I have remembered this for twenty years! Most activities in the classroom are forgotten after twenty minutes!

Paper is happy to be folded!

Here is one of my favourite examples, created by a teacher in Germany. 'He is going to make himself invisible.' 'He is making himself invisible.' 'He's made himself invisible.' You can show all three pictures together or fold them to show just one picture.
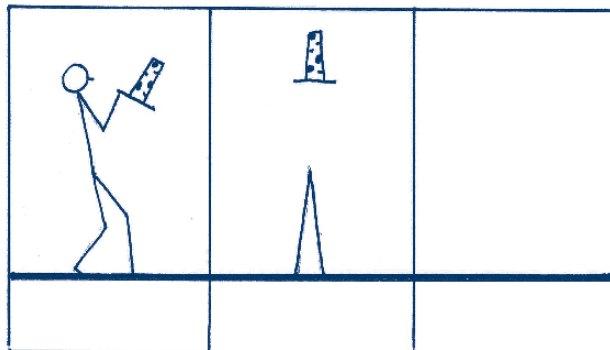
Illustrations in this paper are by Andrew Wright

The students make these 'tense form cards' and take it in turns to show them to the class. What a concentrated grammar focus practice! Time-consuming? Meaningful and memorable!

And the idea comes out of the character of paper – it 'likes' to be folded! Of course, this can be done on a computer but the paper is tactile, not elusive on a screen.

Don't forget paper aeroplanes: making them, flying them, competing for distance, measuring, numbers, comparative forms!

The classroom: paper is translucent!

Usually, the translucency of paper is a nuisance! Here is an idea for pair testing using the translucency. Draw a picture on one side of a piece of paper, for example, a face.

Put the paper against a window with the drawing of the face against the glass. You will see the face perfectly because the light is coming through the paper.

Now write the words for the features of the face, for example, eyebrow, nose, etc. next to the feature in the drawing (but on the back of the paper).

He can see the face drawing through the paper and the words on this side of the paper

He can see the face drawing

light through the window

Pairs sit facing each other. A sits with his back to the light and looking at the face. He cannot see the words written on the other side of the paper because the light is behind him. He points to each feature on the face and says the word for it in English. B sits on the other side of the paper and sees the face through the paper and the words on his side of the paper. He also sees the shadow of A's finger touch a feature and he can then check the accuracy of the word which A says.

Paper can be folded, torn, cut and crumpled. Play with paper, see what it likes to do and then perhaps you will get an idea for how each bit of playfulness can be used in language teaching.

For more on using paper creatively, see Wright (1989).

Other materials?

The chalkboard, the floorboards, tiles or earth floor, furniture, boxes, cardboard rolls, bags, string, washing lines and pegs: each has its own character and with empathetic appreciation can offer all kinds of 'events' for language use. The ceiling? How about a mobile slowly swinging round with different word cards slowly spinning round?

The school

Corridors invite time lines illustrating events for storytelling and for the use of tense forms. Stairs invite words or phrases to be written on each step: a story, a dialogue, proverbs, jokes!

Hopscotch in the playground

The game of hopscotch is played all over the world: chalked on the path or yard or scratched in the bare earth. This, particularly for children, is a perfect way of practising sentence patterns!

like

Drawn in chalk on the pavement or playground.
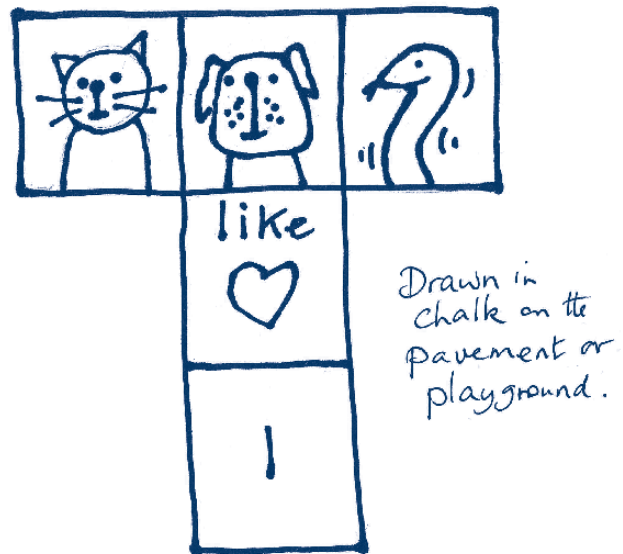
In this example, the child hops onto square 1 saying, 'I', then onto square 2 saying, 'like', then onto square 3 or 4 or 5 choosing his or her favourite drink or food or animal, etc.

The child can hop a negative sentence by hopping onto square 1, 'I', and then jumping down with both feet on either side of square 2, 'don't', and then back with one foot onto square 2, 'like' and then onto the third square, for example, 'coffee'.

I...

hopping

Instead of chalked hopscotch, use a tiled floor or corridor with pictures and words on each tile. Tiled floors can also be used as giant language game boards.

Other things

- The life of the school, for describing everyday activities and for special events; a school newspaper.
- Growing plants and keeping school pets: recording their lives, care, problems, rates of growth, etc.
- Making a sundial for telling the time.
- Using a mirror to reflect the light onto everything which can be seen; naming places and using prepositions.
- Trees or high buildings and working out their height by using the triangulation method: measuring the distance to the base of the tree and measuring the angle from the beginning of the base line.
- Making a pile of stones and guessing how many there are. Choosing stones to represent characters in a story: creating the story and telling it using the stones. A class of 100 students, working in groups of five, would mean 20 stories from 20 different collections of stones. Having invented the story, every student in each group must try telling it to his or her group and then when everybody can tell their story, every student must retell their story, at least five times, to students from other groups.
- Collect a large number of stones and write a word on each one – make sentences, tell stories.
- Clay, for making people and objects which can be used to illustrate situations and stories.

The neighbourhood

Nature

Nature is all around even in poor areas of the world and even in the centre of every city. Nature is 'material' plentifully available to the teacher and is usually not even noticed, let alone used as a medium, topic or material. For example, the present habitual tense is useful in describing the repeated actions of insects, animals, birds and plants. Migrating birds can lead to a study of maps, countries, distances and months of the year.

The students can work in groups in order to make a class collection of a wide variety of wildlife in the area of the school. An exhibition can be held in the local community centre using real objects, posters, diagrams and stories.

Conclusion

One way of being able to create fresh activities which engage the students so that the language associated with the classroom activities is experienced rather than only studied is for the teacher to have an empathetic awareness of the character of media and materials available. Openness to potential is a fundamental characteristic of creativity, hence, the title of my chapter, 'Medium: companion or slave?'.

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2

Challenging teachers to use their coursebook creatively

Brian Tomlinson

Introduction

For me, fostering learner creativity is a vital role for any teacher, as doing so can help learners to develop predictive, analytical, critical and problem-solving skills, to develop confidence and to develop self-esteem. Fostering creativity is even more important for a teacher of a second or foreign language as it can help to achieve the affective and cognitive engagement vital for language acquisition as well as helping learners to understand language used for natural communication and to use language for effective communication themselves. Teachers of EFL therefore need to be creative in order to encourage their learners to be creative too. I have been involved in teacher training/teacher development for over 50 years in many different countries and I have yet to work on or visit a course where developing teacher creativity is an objective or is even encouraged.

Most language teachers still rely on coursebooks to provide the activities they will use in the classroom and most coursebooks do not typically provide activities which foster creativity (Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2013). It is therefore important that teachers make use of their coursebook as a resource rather than follow it as a script and that they develop the confidence, awareness and creativity to adapt coursebook activities in ways which can foster creativity. One way of adapting coursebooks so that they foster creativity is by opening up their closed activities so that they invite a variety of personal responses instead of requiring all the learners to give the same correct answer. If you open any global EFL coursebook at a random page you will find that most of the activities on that (and every other) page are closed. I have just opened an intermediate level global coursebook published in 2012 and picked at random from my shelf. I have turned to page 72 and I have counted ten student activities. Seven of these

activities are completely closed in that they require the one and only correct answer, two of them are semi-open in that the topic and structure of the learner utterance is prescribed but slots are left open, and one is almost open in that learners are invited to 'Tell other students your ideas.' When writing textbooks myself I have tried to provide a lot of open-ended activities but have nearly always been prevented by my editor, who has usually told me that teachers want closed questions because they can use them as tests. If you have experienced the many education systems and institutions around the world which demand regular testing of their students, you will understand the teachers' needs and the publishers' reasons for catering for them. But this does not mean that every teacher has to be ruled by assessment. The teacher can very easily open up the closed activities which they are not using for testing and in so doing can increase their enjoyment of teaching and their students' chances of acquiring language and developing skills.

The numerous ways of opening up closed activities is the focus of this chapter, and I am going to discuss and exemplify them by reporting a mini-case study I conducted in Bogotá, Colombia.

The case study

Prior to a workshop session on adapting the coursebook for English teachers at Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá in May 2014, I asked the participants by email to form pairs and then in each pair to suggest adaptations for using a page from a global coursebook which I provided (selected at random from a recent coursebook on my study shelf). I suggested they spend only 15–30 minutes on the task and I gave them a table to use in noting and explaining their adaptations. I did not ask them to be creative or to foster creativity in their learners.

When I met this group of teachers in Bogotá I thanked them for doing the task and I collected in their task sheets. Then I led a two-hour workshop during which we discussed the value of creative language teaching and what this involves. I then demonstrated how the use of coursebooks could become more creative by replacing or modifying closed activities with open activities which encourage:

- personal response to meaning
- language discovery by the learners
- authentic communication
- the taking of risks
- affective engagement
- cognitive engagement
- being different.

My demonstration included 11 different types of adaptation of closed activities from currently 'popular' British coursebooks, each one being exemplified by me acting as the teacher and the course participants being the students. The workshop was interactive, with the participants discussing the activities and evaluating their likely effect with their students. In every case they were optimistic about the potential effect of enlivening and engaging their students, who they disclosed were usually bored and demotivated by all the closed activities in their coursebooks.

In the last 15 minutes of the workshop I asked the participants to sit in the same pairs they had done the pre-workshop task in and I gave them a new task in which they had to come up with ideas for adapting a different page from the same global coursebook for use with a class of learners of English in Colombia. I did not ask them to be creative or to foster creativity in their learners.

After the workshop I compared the adaptations suggested by each pair in the pre-workshop task with those they suggested in the post-workshop task (13 pairs gave me a pre-workshop adaptation and 15 pairs handed in a post-workshop adaptation).

Ways of opening up closed activities

These are the ways of opening up closed activities which I demonstrated in my workshop in Bogotá. They are creative ways of adapting prosaic coursebooks which I have been using in my teaching for many years, some of which I also advocated and demonstrated in a symposium with the Creativity Group on *Creative Use of the Coursebook* at the IATEFL Conference in Harrogate in 2014 (Maley, 2014) and all of which I would recommend teachers to use in order to open up their coursebooks for their students.

Lead-in texts

- The teacher tells a relevant and ideally bizarre 'personal' story before asking the students to read a rather dull text in the coursebook. For example, the teacher tells the following story before asking the students to read a passage about the advantages and disadvantages of modern technology.

  Being pretty ancient, I'm not great with computers. Last week I printed something out and the type was very faint. So I phoned my local computer repair shop and asked them what I should do. The guy on the phone said, 'Your printer probably just needs cleaning. If you bring it in it'll cost you £50. You could easily do it yourself though. Just read the instruction book which comes with the printer.

  'Thanks very much', I said. 'But does your boss know you're helping people like this?'

  'Oh yes,' he said. 'It's his idea. We find we can charge even more if customers try to fix things themselves first.'

- The teacher tells 'humorous' stories before asking the students to read an uninspiring story in their coursebook. For example, the teacher tells these 'stories' about misunderstandings before the students read a story about a misunderstanding in their coursebook.

In life we often listen to one story and hear another. Here are two examples:

I saw a man at the beach yelling 'Help, shark! Help!'

I just laughed, I knew that shark wasn't going to help him.

'What would you like?' says the barman.

'What would I like?' says Bob. 'A bigger house, more money and a more attractive wife.'

'No,' says the barman, patiently. 'I meant what do you want?'

'To win the lottery, for my mother-in-law to disappear and for my child to be born healthy!'

'What's it to be?' says the barman, less patiently.

'A boy or a girl, I don't care.'

'You misunderstand me,' says the barman, impatiently, 'I only asked what you want to drink.'

'Oh,' says Bob, 'I see. Why didn't you say so? What have you got?'

'Nothing at all,' says the barman. 'I'm perfectly healthy.'

And some people look at one event and see another. Here's an example:

I was out having a meal last night with my long-term girlfriend when, all of a sudden, I got out of my chair and slowly got down on one knee. 'Oh my god,' my girlfriend shrieked, 'let me get my phone so I can show my mum and remember the moment for the rest of my life'. 'OK,' I replied, 'but I'm sure they've seen somebody tie their shoelace before.'

What are all these examples of? It's a word beginning with M.

Readiness activities

These are activities which get students to think about their own experiences so as to activate their minds in relation to the theme, topic or location of a text in the coursebook they are going to be asked to read (Tomlinson, 2013). For example, before getting students to read a text about the advantages and disadvantages of 'modern technology' tell students to:

'See a picture in your mind of you using technology. Is the technology working well? Are you happy with it?'

'Tell a partner about this experience with technology.'

Discovery activities

These are activities which help students to discover things for themselves about language features highlighted in their coursebook. They modify, come before or replace the closed testing or teaching activities in the coursebook.

Example:
'What are the comparatives and superlatives of the adjectives in the table?' changes to:

1. In pairs find examples of words which are comparing things in the passage on p. 52 and in the transcripts of 2.13 and 2.14 on p. 148.

2. Use the examples to write about the different ways of forming the comparative, e.g. 'He's taller than me' and the superlative 'He's the tallest player in the team'.

3. For homework, find other examples of the comparative and superlative. Use them to check and revise your discoveries in 2 above.

Peer activities

The students develop activities for their peers to do in relation to a text in the passage. They are told to make their activities challenging and interesting. For example, one group asked another group to turn the description in the coursebook of a robbery in a mall in New York into a scene from a film set in their town.

One creative teacher I observed in Jakarta got her 12-year-old students to decide which activities they wanted to use with texts from their coursebook. Each Friday one group would meet the teacher and give her the activities they wanted her to use in class on the following Monday.

Examples of modifications of coursebook activities

The following examples of coursebook modifications are those I demonstrated with the teachers in the workshop in Bogotá.

- The teacher acts out a text from the coursebook. For example, when reading a passage about a park in China which activates spikes when somebody sits on a bench for too long, the teacher actually acts out going to the park, being tired, sitting down on a bench, falling asleep, being woken up by spikes, screaming with pain, jumping up and running away.

- The students act out a text from the coursebook as the teacher reads it aloud as dramatically as possible. For example, before reading aloud a Korean folk tale about a hard-working but poor farmer and his lazy, greedy and rich brother, the teacher divides the class into two halves and tells one half to act out what the hard-working brother does and the other half to act out what the lazy brother does.

  After this dramatisation of the text the teacher asks the yes/no questions from the coursebook, as personal questions to the brothers. For

example, instead of asking 'Was X lazy?', the teacher asks 'Were you lazy? Why?'

Then, instead of asking the question from the coursebook about the lessons to be learned from the story, the teacher asks the students in character to think about what they have learned, if anything, from what happened to them. These small changes are easy to make and, in my experience, bring the story to memorable life.

■ The teacher writes and performs a bizarre story using the words of a coursebook drill. The students in groups then write and perform another bizarre story using the same words. This way the students hear and pronounce the target sounds many times in ways more engaging and memorable than repeating them without context in a drill. For example, the teacher performs the story below, which makes use of these words from a drill:

Cycle; cyclist; cycling; thunderstorm; bike; tornado; gym; dog; vacuum; chores; clouds; rainbow.

'It's not been a great week to be a cyclist. On Monday I went cycling in a thunderstorm and was blown off my bike. On Tuesday I went cycling in a tornado and was lifted off my bike. On Wednesday I went cycling in the gym and was knocked off my bike by a dog who was vacuuming the floor. On Thursday, after doing my household chores, I went cycling in the clouds and was washed off my bike by a lion who was cleaning a rainbow.'

■ The students perform dialogues in character. For example, in a dialogue in which A is a salesman in a shoe shop and B is the customer, A is told that he is the ex-husband of B and has not seen her since the divorce. Or in a dialogue in which A asks B how to operate her new office computer, B is told that he is in love with A but she doesn't know this.

■ The students find ways in which wrong answers could become right. Example:

  – 'In pairs, decide on the rules for a library. Complete the sentences with: can, can't, have to or don't have to.'

  – 'You _____ keep quiet in the library.'

    Changes to:

  – 'Use 'can't' and 'because' to complete each of the sentences.'

  – 'You _____ keep quiet in the library.'

The examples above of additions and modifications are easy to think of and to apply and yet they make the experience of using a coursebook much more creative and potentially much more enjoyable and rewarding for both the teacher and the students.

Other creative adaptations I have made to coursebooks include:

■ the students drawing their interpretation of a text rather than answering questions about it

■ the students interviewing characters from a text

■ the students developing a text by, for example, continuing it, re-writing it from a different perspective or in a different culture or location, responding to it with a letter or email

■ the teacher turning a closed activity into a competition by getting each group to develop an extra question to challenge their peers with

■ the teacher giving the students the comprehension questions and getting them to create the text

■ groups of students chanting out a drill in different voices (e.g. a very young child; a headmaster; a very old person).

The pre-workshop suggestions for adaptation

When asked before the workshop to adapt a page from a global coursebook to make it more suitable for Colombian students, the teachers in Bogotá came up with an average of 3.5 adaptations per pair. Of their 45 suggestions, 16 would add open-ended activities and ten would be likely to stimulate student creativity. Twenty-five of the additions involved student activity and 12 provided extra help to the students. It was noticeable that only three deletions were suggested and that most of the pairs intended to retain all the coursebook activities but add more activities to them.

The post-workshop suggestions for adaptation

When given 15 minutes at the end of the workshop to adapt a different page from the same global coursebook to make it more suitable for Colombian students, the teachers in Bogotá came up with an average of 5.5 adaptations per pair. Of their 101 suggestions 99 would add open-ended activities and all 99 would be likely to stimulate student creativity. All 99 of the additions involved student activity and six of them involved the teacher being creative too. It was noticeable that only two deletions were suggested and that most of the pairs intended to retain all the coursebook activities but add more activities to them. Many of the additions and modifications were driven by the principles I had applied in my workshop demonstrations, but not many were direct imitations of my procedures.

Some of the suggested procedures did, however, resemble some of those I had demonstrated in other workshops in the same university in the same week, but interestingly with different groups of teachers and student teachers. I had not referred to these procedures in my creative adaptation workshop and they had featured in demonstrations of original units of material rather than adaptations of material.

Conclusion

The effect of my workshop demonstrations exceeded all my expectations. I expected an increase in teacher creativity between the pre-workshop adaptation task and the end of the workshop adaptation task but I was delighted just how large the increase was and how rich the adaptations were both in variety and in quality. But then I should have learned by now not to underestimate teachers. I knew this already from workshops and projects with such different groups of teachers as rural Botswana primary teachers, Indonesian junior high school teachers, Namibian senior high school teachers, Turkish EAP teachers, Ni-Vanuatu remote island primary teachers and Vietnamese university teachers. All you need is to provide teachers with new learning experiences, get them to reflect on the principles driving those experiences and stimulate them to design principled learning experiences for their students, and they will be creative in providing opportunities for their students to be profitably creative too (see Tomlinson, 2014, for further discussion of the value of materials development workshops for teacher development). Most of the other workshops and projects I have listed above involved teachers developing new materials. What was so remarkable about the Bogotá workshop was that the teachers were able to dramatically improve activities from a global coursebook in just 15 minutes and in ways which did not involve cutting and pasting or other time-consuming preparations.

Recommendations

I would strongly recommend that sessions on creative adaptation of coursebook material be included in all teacher training, teacher education and teacher development workshops and courses, whether they be for aspiring, inexperienced or experienced teachers. I would also recommend the following workshop structure:

- trainer demonstration of creatively adapted materials
- participant discussion of the principles and procedures which drove the adapted materials
- trainer presentation of other principles and procedures of creative adaptation with exemplification of each one

- participant adaptation and justification of materials provided by the trainer
- post-workshop participant adaptation of materials they are using with their students
- while-use and post-use evaluations of the adapted materials developed above
- revision of the adapted materials.

Including such sessions can help the participants to achieve more understanding and more awareness as well as develop more creativity, confidence and self-esteem than they would from months of lectures (Tomlinson, 2013).

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3

Seven pillars of creativity in primary ELT
Carol Read

Introduction

Creativity is often described as thinking 'out of the box', coming up with fresh, divergent responses, original ideas and objects, new solutions to problems, or ways of looking at problems. Children who learn English as a foreign language at primary school may have limited language skills but they come to class full of creative potential. By establishing a classroom environment in which the development of creativity is fostered from the start, the experience of learning another language is considerably enhanced. Through the integration of creative thinking in English lessons, children develop relevant cognitive skills, such as observing, questioning, comparing, contrasting, imagining and hypothesising, that they need in all areas of the curriculum. They also develop metacognitive skills, such as an ability to evaluate and reflect critically on their own performance and learning outcomes. In addition, the development of creativity in the primary ELT classroom:

■ increases children's engagement and motivation in studying a foreign language

■ makes language learning enjoyable and memorable

■ gives children a sense of ownership and a feeling of success

■ allows for divergent responses and, for children who may be strong in other areas of the curriculum, e.g. art, music or dance, to use these to support their learning

■ promotes children's ability to think in a flexible way

■ provides a personalised challenge

■ develops qualities such as patience, persistence and resourcefulness

■ provides a basis for the development of more sophisticated, conceptual and abstract creative thinking in future.

Foundations of creativity in primary ELT

When laying the foundations for developing children's creativity in the primary foreign language classroom, there are a number of general factors to keep in mind:

■ Creativity doesn't happen in a vacuum. There is always something that stimulates and underpins the generation of children's original thinking, such as an idea, picture, text, story, object, question or problem, or some combination of these.

■ Creative thinking arises from the emotional quality of children's engagement and involvement in an activity. This leads to a state of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) in which children's attention is positively focused on a personalised goal and they feel motivated to achieve a particular creative outcome.

■ Children need a framework in which to develop creative thinking skills, and it is usually helpful to provide a model or build up an example outcome with the whole class first. The framework delimits the scope of an activity and allows children to focus on their ideas. The model or example provides necessary language support.

■ Creativity involves the opportunity to play with ideas freely and spontaneously. At the same time, it involves disciplined thinking, curiosity, and attention to detail and effort. It also needs to be underpinned by the development of specific strategies and skills.

■ Creativity is best fostered by the development of a 'growth mind-set' (Dweck, 2006) in which children are encouraged to believe that they can improve their performance and achieve better outcomes through their own effort, persistence and hard work. One way this can be achieved is through constructive feedback and praise, which focuses on the effort children make to be creative rather than on their innate talents (*ibid.*).

Big 'C' and little 'c' creativity

There are two types of creativity that have been identified in an educational context: big 'C' and little 'c' creativity (Craft, 2005). In the primary ELT classroom, big 'C' creativity refers to learning outcomes, which are new and original for a child in terms of their current age, stage of development and level of English, and are valued as such by the teacher. An example of big 'C' creativity in a primary ELT classroom is the following poem about a conker by two 11-year-old boys (Read, 2007: 83):

> *Conker*
>
> *From a chestnut tree*
>
> *In autumn*
>
> *On the ground*
>
> *Round and brown*
>
> *Hard and shiny*
>
> *The winter is coming*
>
> *I feel cold and sad.*

Little 'c' creativity refers to the process of children creatively constructing and communicating meaning in the everyday, interactional context of the classroom using the foreign language repertoire that they currently have available. This kind of creativity involves children in predicting, guessing, hypothesising and risk-taking as well as using non-verbal communication, such as mime and gesture.

In order to establish a classroom environment where creativity thrives, it is important to provide opportunities for both kinds of creativity. In the case of big 'C' creativity, this means planning and structuring lessons in ways that systematically equip children with the skills and strategies they need in order to be able to achieve a creative outcome in relation to the topic and their current language level. This may be expressed through writing, acting, music, art, dance, multimedia, or any combination of these, and the outputs may take a wide variety of forms such as poetry, riddles, stories, role plays, sketches, dances, posters, paintings, videos or multimedia project presentations. In the case of little 'c' creativity, it is important to provide frequent opportunities where you 'loosen the reins' in terms of language practice and children experience using any and all the language they currently have available in real communicative situations in a variety of contexts. When given regular opportunities to construct and communicate their own personal meanings, children usually prove creative and resourceful, and this helps to develop their fluency and self-confidence.

By using English as the main language of communication in the classroom, you will naturally provide opportunities for little 'c' creativity. It is also worth systematically planning for little 'c' creativity in lessons at appropriate moments, such as when you brainstorm what children know about a topic, find out their opinions, or ask for their personal response to a story. By responding to children's meanings, and using techniques such as remodelling and recasting, rather than insisting on language accuracy and correcting every mistake, you will encourage children to use and acquire language in a natural, creative and memorable way.

Seven pillars of creativity

The establishment of a classroom learning environment, in which both types of creativity flourish, needs careful nurturing and doesn't just happen by itself. The seven pillars of creativity are a series of generic considerations, which enable you to develop creativity in your classroom whatever age and level of children you teach, and whether or not you are using a coursebook and digitally sophisticated materials or no technology at all. The seven pillars are rooted in educational literature on creativity (Craft, 2005; Fisher, 2005a; Fisher, 2005b) but above all based on many years of classroom experience. The section on each pillar contains a rationale for its inclusion followed by practical ideas and activities for immediate classroom use.

Pillar one: build up positive self-esteem

Self-esteem is characterised by five components: a sense of security, a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose and a sense of personal competence (Reasoner, 1982). If children feel threatened or insecure and lack a sense of personal competence, this acts as a barrier to creativity. By building up children's positive self-esteem through recognising their individual strengths, valuing their contributions, respecting divergent views and establishing a classroom community in which collaboration and interaction are the norm, children are more likely to engage in the kind of fluent and flexible thinking, as well as the willingness to take risks, that characterise creativity.

You can build up children's positive self-esteem in ways that permeate your whole teaching approach and transmit to children that you care about them and value them as members of the class. You can also use a range of specific activities and procedures to build up different aspects of self-esteem. Three examples are:

Self-esteem fan

Use this activity to help children to develop a positive sense of identity.

■ Give each child a sheet of A4 or A5 paper. Ask children to fold the paper concertina-style to make a fan and demonstrate this. They should have as many folds as letters in their first name.

■ Children write the letters of their name at the top of each section of the fan. They think of a positive adjective about themselves, which starts with each letter, and write this vertically on the fan, e.g. *Helena – Hardworking, Enthusiastic, Lively, Energetic, Nice, Active*.

■ Children compare their fans and say why they have chosen the adjectives, e.g. *I think I'm hardworking because I always do my homework*.

■ Children illustrate and colour their fans. The fans can be displayed and also used or referred to whenever children need reminding of their positive characteristics.

Circle time

Use circle time to personalise learning, foster a sense of security and belonging, and encourage social skills such as listening to others, turn-taking, cooperating and showing respect for views which are different from your own.

■ Children sit or stand in a circle. Have a soft ball or other item ready to pass round the circle.

■ Children take turns to pass the ball or other item round the circle and complete a sentence. This can relate to a text, topic, story or personal feelings and be graded appropriately to the age and level of the children, e.g. *I like…, I feel happy/ sad/angry when…, I think the story/video/poem is…, I think wild animals are in danger/we need to save water/global warming is worrying because…* Rules of circle time are that you only speak when it is your turn, you can say 'Pass' if you have nothing to say, or use your mother tongue if you need to. When the focus of circle time is on a particular topic or issue, such as the latter examples above, you may like to note children's responses on the board in a mind map (see Pillar six) and use this afterwards to get children to write about the topic.

Word tennis

Use a version of this game to reinforce children's sense of personal competence as well as listening and turn-taking skills.

■ Divide children into pairs.

■ One child pretends to serve and says, e.g. *I'm good at swimming*. Their partner pretends to hit the ball back and says, e.g. *I'm good at dancing*. The pairs continue taking turns to say sentences about what they're good at in the same way and make their rally as long as possible.

■ At the end, children report back to their partner to check they can remember, e.g. *You're good at….* They can also tell the class, e.g. *Marco is good at…/ We're both good at…*

Pillar two: model creativity yourself

An essential rule-of-thumb for developing any skill or quality in others is to model it yourself. For example, if you want children to be polite and show respect, then you need to be polite and show them respect too. By the same token, in order to encourage children to see things in new ways, explore ideas and come up with original outcomes, it also helps if you model creative processes in the way you teach. These can be reflected in many ways, for example, how you motivate and engage children, the kinds of tasks and activities you offer, how you cater for individual differences and diversity, and the way you manage and organise your class. It is often useful to think about how you can be creative in small ways in the routine aspects of teaching. Here are some ideas:

Lining up

This can typically waste time and be dull. So why not think of little challenges to make it more creative, e.g. lining up in alphabetical order of first names or surnames, either forwards or backwards, lining up in order of height or age or month of birthday. Once children have got the idea, they will almost certainly suggest other ideas as well.

Taking the register

This can be made more creative by relating it to vocabulary that children are learning. As you go through the register, children respond by naming e.g. an animal. Children need to listen to what others say, as no repetitions are allowed. By varying the order in which you call the names on the register, this allows you to make it easier for some children and more challenging for others. Alternatively, you can pre-assign an animal to each child in the register. When you call out the name of their animal, children respond by naming its baby, e.g. *Dog! Puppy!/Tiger!/Cub!* You can also do this with, e.g. names of countries and languages or capital cities, e.g. *France – French!* or *Paris!; Argentina – Spanish!* or *Buenos Aires!*

Learning routines

Learning routines make children feel secure as well as provide opportunities for personalisation and natural acquisition of language. You can vary learning routines appropriately with different ages and levels. For example, with younger children an enjoyable opening lesson routine is a rhythmic gym sequence in which you cumulatively add different actions. With older children an opening lesson routine such as 'News of the Day' gives different children in each lesson an opportunity to share their personal news with the class.

Classroom management

You may like to think about creative techniques to manage your classes effectively, for example, the signal you use to get attention, e.g. a tambourine, a bell, a special gesture, or counting down to zero from five. Other examples of creative ideas for managing behaviour include a yellow and red card system as in football, or a 'noisometer' based on traffic lights: red = *Too loud!*, orange = *Turn the volume down!*, green = *Our quiet voices!*

It is also useful to have 'up your sleeve' simple, creative ideas that need no materials or preparation and use these to change the mood or as a warmer, closing or revision activity. Two of my favourites are:

Spelling gym

This activity helps children associate the shape of lower-case letters in the alphabet with physical actions and is an active and enjoyable way to practise spelling. Children start with their hands on their shoulders. This represents the line on the page. For vowels or consonants like 'm' or 'n', children cross their hands to the other shoulder. For consonants with a stalk above the line, e.g. 'd', 't', or 'h', children raise their arms in the air. For consonants with a stalk below the line, e.g. 'j', 'p', or 'q', children stretch their arms down to the floor. Either you spell words children know in chorus, e.g. apple, and children do the actions for each letter or, once children are familiar with the activity, they take turns to spell and guess words in pairs or groups.

Red or blue

This activity allows for a personal response to familiar vocabulary. Children stand in the middle of the classroom. Say two words from the same category or lexical set, e.g. *'red… blue…'* and point to either side of the room. Children go to the side of the room of the colour they prefer. Children then talk to each other and explain the reasons, e.g. *I've got a blue bike./My favourite T-shirt is red*. Repeat with other vocabulary, e.g. *dog/cat, hot, cold/milk, fruit juice/ sweet, salty/swimming, cycling/seaside, countryside*.

Pillar three: offer children choice

By offering them choice, children learn to take responsibility for their decisions. They also begin to develop autonomy and have control of their learning. This leads to a sense of 'ownership' and motivation to go the extra mile to produce creative work. Exercising choice also helps to make learning more personalised and memorable. You can offer children choice in a range of ways from micro-decisions, such as who to work with, to macro-decisions such as choosing topics to study. Offering choice can be a powerful tool in behaviour management too. Some examples for offering choice are as follows:

Friendship groupings

Although not always desirable, it is beneficial to allow children to choose the friends they work with at times, e.g. for projects (at the same time making sure that no child ever feels left out). By choosing whom to work with, children generally feel more motivated. They also have an emotional investment in making the collaboration work successfully.

Lesson menu

Write a list of, e.g. five activities to do in the lesson on the board. Ask children to choose, e.g. three of them and explain that they can do them in any order. By giving children choice, you will find that they usually work in a more motivated and attentive way than if you impose a lockstep progression through activities. Children also often voluntarily choose to do the most challenging activities.

Format freedom

Whenever possible, allow children to choose the format for their work. This encourages both creativity and effort. For example, for group projects, children can choose the format in which to present their work, e.g. a poster, a digital presentation or a video. Similarly, when giving a personal response to a story, it may be appropriate to ask children to choose whether to, e.g. write a letter to, or from, one of the characters, or a newspaper report, a dialogue, a poem or a story review. Children usually find having the choice energising, and put greater effort and creative thinking into their work as a result.

Behaviour choices

Offering choice helps children to take responsibility for their decisions and to regulate their own behaviour. For example, in the case of a child who is not settling down to work, instead of telling him or her off, you might say, e.g. *I see you haven't started the activity yet. What would you prefer to do? Would you like to do the activity now in our lesson? Or would you prefer to stay behind and do it at break time?* The

child will almost certainly choose to get the activity done in the lesson and comply with what you want. In this way, you avoid potential conflict and there is no loss of face for the child, as the outcome is a choice rather than an obligation that has been imposed.

Pillar four: use questions effectively

The way you use questions to engage children and lead them to think creatively is an essential skill. The stereotypical initiation-response-feedback (IRF) pattern of questions, e.g. T: *What colour is the car?* P: *It's red.* T: *Yes, very good*, is often prevalent in primary ELT lessons but has limited value. Although it can encourage participation, especially with younger children, if it's the only question type used, it can close down thinking. It is important to ask questions which interest children and open up, probe and extend their thinking. You also need to give children sufficient thinking time to answer questions and provide opportunities for them to construct and ask interesting and challenging questions themselves.

In order to differentiate, grade and sequence questions from easier to more challenging, it is helpful to use Bloom's revised taxonomy of thinking skills (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). This is divided into lower order thinking skills (LOTS) identified as remembering, understanding and applying, and higher order thinking skills (HOTS), which are identified as analysing, evaluating and creating (*ibid.*). LOTS are essentially to do with recall, identification and basic comprehension. HOTS are more complex and demand greater cognitive effort. Developing LOTS is vital for foreign language learning especially in the early stages. However, if lessons never move beyond LOTS, this can lead to boredom and demotivation. Lessons that include HOTS make learning more engaging and memorable. They also develop thinking skills that are transferable across the curriculum and can lead to 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) and creative thinking. Below is an example of how you can use Bloom's revised taxonomy to plan questions and scaffold thinking skills based on a story.

Question staircase

OR in another form, e.g. a role play.

OR tell or rewrite from a different point of view.

Create: Invent a new ending.

Evaluate: Which part do you like/ don't you like? Why/Why not?

Analyse: Classify the characters./Explain how different parts of the story relate to each other.

Apply: What would you do in the same situation? How would you feel?

Understand: Why...? How...? What's the main idea? Sequence..., Order... Match... Describe...

Remember: Who...? What...? When...? Where...? Identify..., Name...

Question dice

The ability to ask questions is an effective way of learning and also helps children think creatively. Question dice can be a useful and enjoyable activity to practise this. Children make dice out of paper or card and write a Wh-question word on each face: *What, Why, When, Where, How, Who*. Children work in pairs and take turns to roll the dice and ask their partner questions using the question word on the face where the dice lands. This activity is suitable to do e.g. after a story or topic-based work, or as a way to get children to talk about and share personal information.

Pillar five: make connections

Making connections and seeing relationships between things generates ideas and underpins creative thinking. It is helpful to encourage children to make connections between home and school as well as between subjects across the curriculum. Similarly, children can be encouraged to make connections between present and previous learning, between experiences inside and outside the classroom, and between ideas learned from different sources such as books and the internet. They can also make connections between English and their own language and culture, and between skills, which may be developed in one context or subject and transferred and used in another. The awareness of connections between different areas of their lives helps to build children's confidence and provides the foundations for them to become increasingly adventurous and creative in work they produce.

There are also specific activities that you can use to develop children's ability to make connections between ideas and objects and to think in divergent and creative ways. Some examples are:

Random association

This activity encourages children to make connections between things that don't have an obvious connection. Write words that children know on small pieces of card and put them in a bag or hat. Children take turns to take three cards at random and make a sentence or invent a story that connects them. You can also do the same activity using small objects, rather than word cards.

Odd one out

This activity typically has one right answer. In this version, children identify an odd one out according to any criteria they can think of. For example, if children have been learning about how fruit grows, the activity can be done using five flashcards,

e.g. peach, strawberry, melon, pineapple and grapes. Children take turns to identify an odd one out, e.g. *I think it's peach because peaches have a stone./I think it's strawberry because the seeds are on the outside*.

Comparative moments

Playing with the use of simile develops flexible thinking skills and often produces creative and amusing outcomes. Give children sentences to complete, e.g. *A lesson is like a sandwich because… / A school is like a funfair because…* Alternatively children choose words and create their own similes, e.g. *Homework is like a dessert when you aren't hungry*.

How many ways?

This activity develops flexible, inventive thinking and can be used to extend children's vocabulary in an enjoyable way. Choose an everyday object such as a paperclip, plastic cup, metal coat hanger, peg or ruler. Children work in pairs and brainstorm all the different things you can use the object for, e.g. *You can use a ruler as a sword*. If they don't know words in English, they use a dictionary to find them. They can also draw pictures to illustrate their ideas.

Pillar six: explore ideas

In order to foster an open, creative mind-set, you need to regularly provide frameworks and stimuli that encourage learners to explore, experiment and play with ideas. This needs to be in an atmosphere of mutual respect where divergent views are valued and judgement is withheld. Brainstorming techniques, problem-solving tasks and activities in which learners consider issues from different points of view all encourage exploration and lead to creative thinking. Some examples of these are:

Mind maps

Mind mapping, based on the work of Tony Buzan (2003), allows children to explore their thinking on a topic in a visually appealing way. Mind maps can be useful to build up ideas collaboratively with the whole class. Write the name of the topic in the centre of the board, e.g. '*Elephants*', and three initial headings to guide the children's thinking, e.g. *appearance, where/how they live, why they are in danger*. Choose one heading at a time, listen to the children's ideas and add them to the map. Use different colour pens and add sub-headings as appropriate, e.g. *colour, size, African, Asian* etc. Children can then use the mind map to write a description of elephants or make their own mind map about another animal of their choice.

Wh-question web

Write the topic in a circle, e.g. *Rainforests/The water cycle*. Draw lines and write question words around the circle: *What? Why? When? How? Where? Who?* Children work in pairs and write questions they are interested in, beginning with each word. They then do research using suitable websites you have previously identified, and note and compare their questions and answers with the class. They use this as preparation for writing about the topic.

Five senses web

This is a variation of the above activity. Write the topic in a circle, e.g. *The playground*. Draw lines from the circle and write: *see, hear, smell, touch, taste*. Children note their ideas, either individually or collectively, and use the results to write a poem or description.

Imagine that…!

Use this activity to explore hypothetical possibilities and elicit creative ideas, e.g. *Imagine that… animals can talk/we don't need to sleep/children rule the world/we live on Mars. What happens?*

Creative observation

Use images to encourage creative thinking and an awareness of how images, particularly in advertising, influence our feelings. Ask, e.g. *What does the image make you think of? How does it make you feel? Why?* As a follow-up activity, children take digital photos designed to encourage a particular response, e.g. to make you feel hungry, or that a toy or game is fun. Children take turns to share their images and invite responses and compare if these are the same or different to the ones they intended.

Pillar seven: encourage critical reflection

Finally, as part of promoting creativity, we need to train children to evaluate and reflect critically on their own ideas, performance, actions and outcomes. As well as being an integral part of developing learner autonomy, it is only through critical reflection that children can assess the validity and value of their own creative work. This forms part of a reflective learning cycle and over time leads to the development of enhanced creative thinking. You can do this by reviewing learning outcomes against success criteria at the end of activity cycles and lessons, and through the regular use of learner diaries or self-assessment sheets. Two examples of other activities that encourage critical reflection are:

Reflective continuum

Give children a sheet with four to six areas for reflection and self-assessment on a continuum, e.g.

| I didn't make an effort | ——————— | I did my best. |
| I didn't use interesting words | ——————— | I used interesting words |

Children reflect on the work they have produced and mark where they think they are on the continuum for each area.

Self-assessment dictation

Ask children to make three columns in their notebooks and write 'yes', 'so-so' and 'no' at the top of each one. Use gesture to explain the meaning of 'so-so'. Dictate sentences, e.g. *I worked hard./I co-operated.* Children listen and write the sentences in the column they think applies to their work. They then compare and talk about the results. How many sentences in the 'so-so' column can they move to the 'yes' column next time?

Conclusion

This chapter outlines the benefits of developing creative thinking skills in primary ELT. It looks at general factors to bear in mind when laying the foundations of creativity in the classroom and the difference between big 'C' and little 'c' creativity (Craft, op. cit.). Although there are often barriers to developing creativity in primary ELT, such as a rigid syllabus, a dull coursebook, a lack of time, and the washback effect of external exams, developing children's creativity has many benefits for language learning and for developing broader educational objectives, attitudes and values. Whatever the age and level of children you work with, the seven pillars are designed to help you establish a classroom learning environment in which creativity flourishes, and to provide you with realistic and practical ideas for how to go about it.

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4

Making thinking visible in the English classroom: nurturing a creative mind-set

Chrysa Papalazarou

Introduction

By integrating creative activities in English language teaching, we encourage learners to practise an important element in language learning which also lies behind personal growth and the development of culture and society: thinking creatively. Creative thinking involves a focus on exploring ideas, generating possibilities, looking for many right answers rather than just one, and sharing of results. Creativity, then, is present not only in terms of a product, but in a process that promotes a more open, curious and questioning relationship to others and to the world. In this chapter I will be dealing with how we can encourage creative thinking in the English classroom by using artful/visual stimuli and the visible thinking approach. First, I will briefly describe Visible Thinking and its link to creative thinking. Then, a more practical part will follow with suggestions on how the approach can be useful in the English classroom. This part draws on classroom experience from working on a project with sixth grade primary school students (11 years old) in a state school in Greece.

What is Visible Thinking?

Visible Thinking is a research-based approach that looks into how we can encourage learners' engagement, independence and understanding. The underlying idea is to nurture students' thinking by 'externalising' it when they engage with content, by making it visible. The approach stems from Project Zero, an educational research group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Three principal ideas are important here: a) learning is the outcome of thinking, b) thinking is intricately connected to content and c) thinking does not happen in a linear manner (Ritchhart et al., 2011).

Visible Thinking has a double goal: it deepens content learning and it fosters thinking skills and dispositions. These are dispositions such as 'curiosity, concern for truth and understanding, a creative mind-set, not just being skilled but also alert to thinking and learning opportunities and eager to take them' (Visible Thinking website: www.visiblethinkingpz.org). Thinking dispositions, or alternatively habits of mind, that nurture a creative mind-set (Ritchhart et al., *ibid.*; Tishman, 2000) involve elements such as:

- wondering and asking questions
- observing closely and describing
- building explanations and interpretations
- reasoning with evidence
- making connections
- capturing the heart and forming conclusions
- looking for many possible answers rather than one
- not jumping into judgment quickly
- making mistakes
- sharing thinking with others
- thinking about thinking (metacognition).

Why make thinking visible?

Thinking is largely an internal process. We are so used to most of it staying out of sight that 'we don't notice its invisibility' (Perkins, 2003). Making students' thinking visible is about getting an insight into what and how they understand something. When we do so, we are giving them more to build on and learn from.

How do we make thinking visible?

Visibility of students' thinking rests upon three elements: questioning, listening and documenting.

■ **Questioning**

This is where thinking routines come into play. Thinking routines are at the heart of the visible thinking programme. They are short, flexible structures like a short sequence of steps or a set of questions − questions which promote curiosity and discovery, ask students to observe, make interpretations, make connections, and build on ideas. They are easy to learn and teach, and within the classroom students can work on them individually, in pairs or in groups. When these routines are used systematically − in this case in combination with the use of artful/visual learning stimuli − and made relevant to specific content, they are instrumental in stimulating student curiosity and imagination, and in nurturing a creative mind-set.

■ **Listening**

Listening is understood as active sharing. It involves both the extent to which we sincerely listen to and value individual students' thoughts and ideas, as well as our ability to listen and respond to one another's ideas. We learn from those around us and our interaction with them. This is a view of thinking as a social endeavour. It involves a constant interplay between the group and the individual that allows for a better relationship between teachers and learners, while at the same time encouraging community building.

■ **Documenting**

Documentation of thinking may include:
– keeping blogs
– use of sticky notes where students' responses are recorded
– sheets of construction papers on the walls
– taking notes
– writing learning journals.

Journal writing is a powerful tool. When students enter the process of reconstructing classroom experience in writing it helps them become more attentive and concentrated. Their commitment levels grow and their note-taking skills too; they become more actively involved. Active involvement fosters their motivation, self-confidence and responsibility. Students monitor their progress better, there is a deepening of self-understanding and awareness of group dynamics. They feel they write with a purpose.

Visible Thinking put into practice

In this section I will be dealing with a selected number of thinking routines and how I applied them in the classroom. Ideas, suggestions and examples will be discussed. Description of the routines draws on *Making Thinking Visible* (Ritchhart et al., *ibid.*) and the Visible Thinking website.

During a project that explored how artful/visual stimuli and the visible thinking approach can be integrated in the English classroom, we worked on five themes. This was done bearing in mind that a) thinking cannot be nurtured without content and b) I wanted to include the wide use of artful/visual stimuli (paintings, images, short videos and animation films). Some of the themes we dealt with were: *bullying, war/peace, Asperger's and autism*, and *school*. Each theme lasted about eight 40-minute teaching sessions. Students' thinking was revealed and promoted through sticky notes, construction paper on the walls, taking notes in class, a class blog, and through writing learning journals.

I should add that for every theme, apart from the thinking routines, activities that focused on vocabulary and grammar were also developed. Evaluation was continuous through the students' notes and learning journals. No tests were given. Project time was coursebook-free, since the one available had little to offer in terms of triggering students' interest and providing content opportunities for thinking beyond the surface to occur. The two groups I worked with each consisted of 21 mixed-ability students aged 11, their level of English ranging from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate. They were 6th grade state primary school students.

Below are the descriptions of the thinking routines that were used in the project.

Step inside: perceive-believe-care about

This routine asks students to step inside a character, and deepen their understanding of the other's perspective.

Aim

- It helps stimulate empathy.

Materials

An event portrayed in a work of art, a photograph, a story the class has read, a video.

Note: events having to do with issues of social justice and fairness (racism, bullying, a historical event, slavery) can evoke an emotional response and lead to more creative understanding.

Procedure

- Introduce the source material. Ask students to step inside, place themselves within the situation and imagine they are a person from the source material. From this perspective ask them:
  - What do you perceive?
  - What might you believe?
  - What might you care about?

  Note: *perceive* here can be replaced by see, observe or understand. Likewise, *believe* can be replaced by know or think. Generally, the visible thinking approach invites teachers to adapt the wording of routines as they see fit.

- Students can work individually, in pairs or in groups. It depends on how many ideas you want to generate.

Classroom experience

I used this routine when introducing the theme of bullying. The source material used was a detail from the painting *Children's Games* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The detail showed six boys holding another boy by feet and hands. It was the bump bouncing game which involved bouncing someone's buttocks on a wooden plank as a form of punishment. I asked students to step inside and imagine they were the boy in the middle of the picture. Here are some of the students' ideas:

- 'I perceive that they are playing a game – I believe they might make fun of me – I care about my physical wellbeing.'

- 'I perceive I shouldn't play with them – I believe they might hurt me – I care about my family.'
- 'I perceive I have no future – I believe my end has come – I care about escaping.'
- 'I perceive I am frightened – I believe I am in danger – I care about myself.'
- 'It's not fair because everyone makes mistakes.'
- 'It's not fair even if he had done something because they are six and he is one.'
- 'In my opinion, the children are cruel. They're six against one.'

What makes you say that?

This routine asks students to observe, describe and interpret.

Aim

- Students have to share their ideas about what they see, read or hear. They have to back them with evidence. It encourages them to understand alternatives.

Materials

Works of art, photographs, poetry, readings that invite making predictions.

Procedure

- Introduce the source material. Ask students to reflect on the questions:
  - What's going on?
  - What makes you say that?

- The question 'What makes you say that?' should convey a genuine interest in how the students understand something. It should not sound like a challenge or test. Students can work *individually*, in *pairs* or in *groups* depending on how many ideas you want to generate.

Classroom experience

One of the occasions I used this routine was again on the theme of bullying. The source material used was the painting '*Bullying*' by the American painter, illustrator and filmmaker Matt Mahurin. The painting shows an older girl with clenched fists and an aggressive stance leaning over a younger one, at the edge of a cliff. Some dark and gloomy shadows are at the back of the painting. Here are some of the students' ideas:

- 'An older girl is threatening a younger one because some other people told her to do it. I say that because the little girl is at the edge of a cliff. Some shadows are behind the girls.'

- 'The older girl is threatening the younger girl. I say that because the older girl has tight fists.'

- 'I can see an older girl who is threatening a younger girl and I understand it because the young girl is at the edge of a cliff. I think that someone told the older girl to do it, because I can see some shadows behind them.'

- 'In the painting I can see two girls and six shadows. The older girl is laughing at the little girl and says words that hurt it. She is very threatening because she has tight fists. If I were the little girl I would be very afraid and frightened. I think it is an argument or something like that. I am sure the little girl is in danger.'

- 'The title of the painting is *Bullying* and it is symbolic. We can see two girls, an older and a younger. The younger is at the edge of a cliff. There are some shadows, too. They're witnesses. Sometimes witnesses don't know what to do.'

Looking ten times two

This is a routine from '*Artful Thinking*' (another Project Zero programme). It also aims at developing thinking dispositions that support thoughtful learning.

Aim

- This routine asks students to slow down, observe and think about words or phrases to describe what they see. It encourages them to go beyond obvious descriptions.

Materials

Any kind of artwork, especially visual art.

Procedure

- Introduce the source material. Ask students to take the following steps:
  - look at the image quietly for thirty seconds
  - make a list of ten words or phrases about any aspect of what they see. Share them with the rest of the class
  - repeat steps one and two. Look again and try to make a list of ten more words or phrases. Share them.

- The 'Looking Ten Times Two' routine is useful in generating descriptive language before a writing activity. Be flexible with the number of words and phrases students can come up with, depending on their language level. The routine works best as a whole-class brainstorming activity.

Classroom experience

I used this routine when introducing students to the theme of war/peace. The source material used was Picasso's *Guernica*. Students' responses were made visible through the use of a concept map, a circle map. Red colour is used for the phase when we repeated steps one and two.
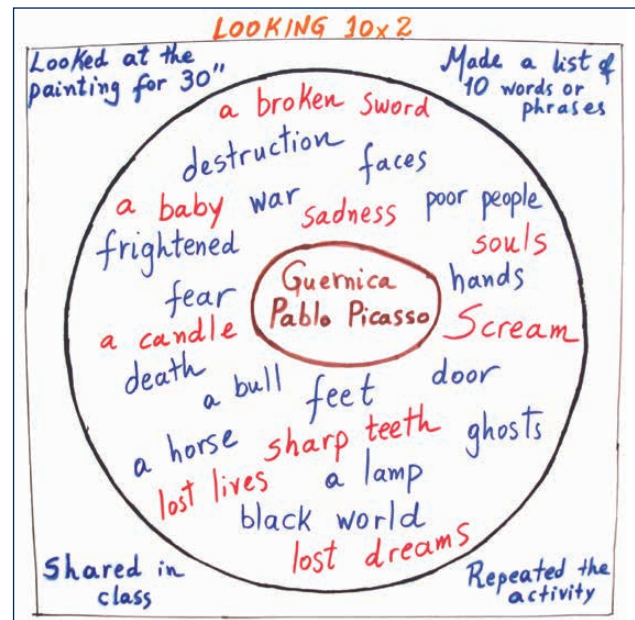
Here are some of the students' ideas:

- 'I saw in *Guernica* animals, people and destruction. I think this amazing painting depicts a frightening event, a war. Lost dreams and lost lives travel fast in the painting.'

- '…then of course we shared our ideas with each other. We did that for two times and every time we found new incredible words and phrases. We call that a thinking routine.'

- 'It is a black world with a lot of sadness and screaming. It is a war that never stops and keeps you thinking. Is that real life? Or just an imaginary room?'

See think wonder

This routine asks students to observe carefully, then think and ask questions. It emphasises how important it is to observe closely as the basis for the thinking and wondering steps that follow.

Aim

- It stimulates students' interest and curiosity.

Materials

A painting, photo, object, video or excerpt of text. Almost anything that can encourage observation, interpretation, and wondering. It is critical, however, to use a powerful stimulus.

Procedure

- Introduce the source material. Ask students to reflect on the questions:
  - What can you see?
  - What do you think about it?
  - What does it make you wonder?

- If students begin by providing a response only to 'I see', ask the follow-up question (i.e. 'What do you think about it?') to prompt the next response. Students can work individually, in pairs or in groups. They can first take notes of their ideas before sharing them.

Classroom experience

One of the occasions I used the 'see, think, wonder' routine was in the theme of war/peace, again with Picasso's *Guernica*. It was the follow-up to the 'looking ten times two' routine. The painting is complex and the students I worked with were quite young, so I wanted to encourage more careful observations and deepen their understanding. Out of the children's wonderings I developed the next activity, which was a text about the historical facts behind *Guernica*.

Here are some of the students' ideas:

- 'I see dead people, sad faces, lots of animals fighting with humans – I think it is a fantastic painting, extraordinary – I wonder what was happening when Picasso was painting *Guernica*?'

- 'I see a war of shapes, frightened faces, a huge dinosaur who eats a man, and a dying horse – I think it is a strange painting, but a fantastic painting, too – I wonder is this painting from real life?'

- 'I see a fight where many people lost their lives and then they became ghosts and monsters – I think people are drowning in chaos – I wonder what does the painting symbolise?'

- 'I see many people and animals. Many people have cut their hands maybe in a fight, and two ghosts are looking at them. Someone holding a broken knife or a broken sword – I think there are animals and people that escaped from a fight – I wonder what Picasso wanted to show with this painting? What's the true meaning of *Guernica*?'

- 'I think that the violence or sadness are strong, but when people fight for their freedom or peace, the violence and sadness become weak.'

- 'Out of this we must say that peace is more important than war. Because *Guernica* I believe was painted about the wrongs of the people and one of these is war.'

- '...what made Picasso draw like that. It's because the Nazis bombed the ancient capital of the Basque Country, Guernica, and many people died. That event shocked Picasso so much so he painted *Guernica*.'

Colour symbol image

This routine helps students capture the essence of ideas they explore in the selected source materials. They express themselves creatively in both verbal and non-verbal ways.

Aim

- They make connections and develop their metaphoric thinking.

Materials

A story, a poem, a song, a short video.

Procedure

- Ask students to take the following steps:
  - Choose a colour that you feel represents the ideas we have discussed. Explain why you chose it.
  - Choose a symbol. Explain why you chose it.
  - Choose an image. Explain why you chose it.

- The routine works well as a small group activity. Ideas can rush in and members of the group can contribute in diverse ways. Some may offer the verbal part, others the more creative drawing part. Some groups may find it easier to start with the other parts of the routine first, i.e. symbol or image. The order is not binding. Use the student-made output as a teaching input. Have groups present their work and co-ordinate a plenary discussion.

Classroom experience

This routine was the last activity in the theme of war/peace. Students organised themselves in groups and chose what they wished to represent – war or peace.

Here are some of the students' ideas:

- 'Colour: we chose red and black because black symbolises death and red symbolises blood.'

- 'Symbol: we chose the cross on a tomb because many people die in a war. The spirit symbolises the lost souls like in Picasso's painting.'

- 'Image: we chose the bare tree because it symbolises sadness and no life.'
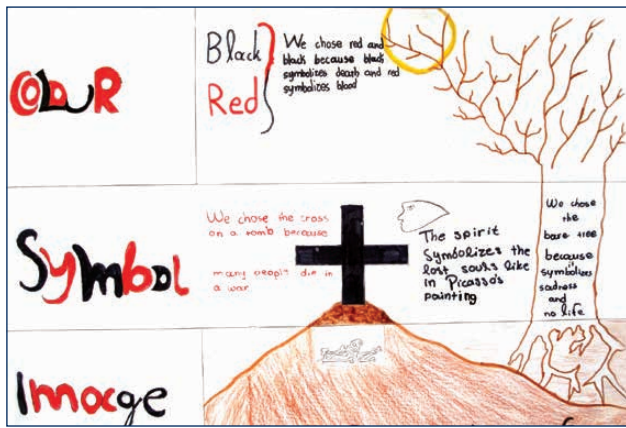
I used to think... Now I think...

Aim

- This routine helps students reflect on how their thinking and ideas might have changed over time as they have developed their understanding of an issue.

Materials

After reading or discussing new information, watching a short film, completing a unit of study.

Procedure

- Ask students what they used to think about the topic when you started and what they think about it now by using:
  - 'I used to think...'
  - 'Now I think...'

- By reflecting on what they used to think about a topic before, and what they think about it after a period of instruction, students have the chance to think about thinking itself, and develop their metacognitive skills. Students work individually in this routine.

Classroom experience

This was the routine I used when we finished the theme of Asperger's and autism. The artful stimuli that had been used during the theme included a painting by an artist with Asperger's, a short animation film, and relevant short videos.

Here are some of the students' ideas:

- 'I used to think people with autism weren't normal. Now, I think that with our support, love, faith... we can make people with autism feel better in our world.'

- 'I used to think, what is autism? I believed people with autism aren't so clever. Now, I think they can be exceptionally clever and that autism can't stop life for anyone. I think we learned to respect difference.'

- 'I used to think that autism is always a bad thing. That they are not (so) normal people. Now, I think that Asperger's or autistic people can be smarter than the non-autistic people. I also think now that they are normal.'

- 'I used to think nothing about Asperger's and autism because I didn't know anything. Now, I think people with autism are normal people. They can go to school, they have families, jobs, and they can do what we do, just differently.'

- 'I didn't use to think anything about autism. Now, I think that they are very normal people and that I want to have an autistic friend.'

Chalk talk

This routine asks students to think and respond silently a) to a prompt and b) to the thoughts of others.

Aim

- It helps them read others' points of view and comment on them or ask questions. It helps them build understanding collaboratively. It is actually a silent conversation on paper.

Materials

A single word, a phrase, a question relevant to a topic of study. Questions generally trigger more thoughts and comments.

Procedure

- When starting a topic, give students a relevant prompt to reflect upon.

- Ask them to write their thoughts, ideas and questions about that theme on a big piece of paper.

- Invite them to comment on their classmates' thoughts, ideas or questions.

- Tell them that this has to be done in silence. They can stand up, and move freely, but they cannot talk.

- Chalk talk works best when done in two rounds. One at the beginning of a topic, and one at the end after more aspects of the issue have been explored.

- While working on the routine the flow of ideas is more important. In the end students can work in groups and focus on the accuracy of the sentences they have written.

Classroom experience

The primary school students I worked with liked the fact that they could stand up and move freely around the classroom in a circular way, reading and writing. They found the silent element of the routine game-like and responded warmly to it.

I tried chalk talk when we worked on the theme of school. We first looked at some paintings with diverse school settings, observed and described them. Then, I wrote on the board: 'What ideas, feelings or wonderings do you have about school?'

After the first round of chalk talk we elaborated more on the theme of school. At the end of the theme we had the second round of chalk talk.

This gives an idea of what finished chalk talk papers look like:
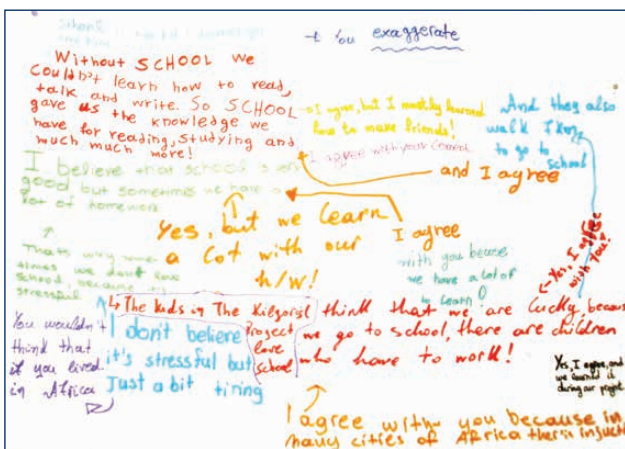
Conclusion

Visible Thinking has been developed within the context of the American education system. A mixture of professional curiosity and interest in the potentials it could have in ELT has led the author of this chapter to start exploring it and experimenting with its transferability in her English classroom. The approach can have rewarding effects, provided that the thinking routines are not used just once or occasionally and that they are attached to meaningful content. They need time, careful choice, and systematic use to bear fruit. My aim during the project was to teach English in a way that would encourage my students to unleash their creative thinking, improve their self-esteem and motivation, and have a more memorable learning experience in their English class. I also wanted the approach to be associated with values, and a sense of community, respect and trust. Through an ongoing, exploratory effort visible thinking has been of considerable help to that end.

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5

Personal and creative storytelling: telling our stories

David Heathfield

Introduction

Storytelling is a deeply creative part of being human. We learn about ourselves from the stories we are told and the stories we tell. This chapter shows that the language classroom is a perfect environment for teachers and students to tell stories about our own lives and experiences. The practical and enjoyable activities are designed to build confidence and fluency in personal storytelling, so that our students get a clear sense of themselves as creators of their own stories and, at the same time, they learn to communicate more creatively in English.

This chapter offers nine activities:

- for large and small classes
- for pre-intermediate to advanced level and mixed-ability classes
- for students aged ten to 100
- which involve face-to-face communication
- where the creative content comes from the students and teacher
- which provide clear frameworks within which students share their personal stories
- which promote speaking and listening skills
- which require no written prompts.

Personal storytelling

Humans are narrative beings. We filter the data we are constantly exposed to and make stories to tell our lives. A huge proportion of our daily conversation is made up of personal stories, most of them featuring some kind of problem that needs resolving. As narrative beings, we aspire to be fluent and confident when telling our stories in our mother tongue. So when language learners say that they would like to 'speak English better', what they are often imagining is being able to take part in social conversation more fluently and confidently. In other words, 'speaking English better' often means being able to share personal stories in a fluent and engaging way.

Storytelling is not a one-way process. Face-to-face storytelling is a co-creative act in that the listener's brain activity mirrors the brain activity of the storyteller. This 'neural coupling' (Stephens et al., 2010) means that the listener tells and anticipates the story along with the storyteller and influences the course of the story. Our imagination is stimulated when listening to someone's story: experimental psychologist Stephen Pinker writes 'A recent brain-imaging study reported in *Psychological Science* reveals that the regions of the brain that process the sights, sounds, tastes and movement of real life are activated when we are engrossed in a compelling narrative.'

Students bring their lifetime of stories with them into the classroom and these stories are our richest resource. We simply need to provide activities which give students opportunities to develop as co-creative storytellers and story-listeners in English. The ideal source of listening material to start off a storytelling activity is of course you, the teacher. You provide an ideal model for your students because they can aspire to speak English as well as you one day. Some teachers have reservations about doing more 'teacher talk' in class, but it is important to value the personal and interactive live storytelling you can offer above pre-recorded listening materials. Your personal presence as the live storyteller is worth any amount of new technology.

Creative tasks

A challenge for many teachers is to get their students listening closely to each other in the language classroom. But it is only when students do genuinely listen that they can build up their own speaking skills. To develop as personal storytellers, we can give students creative peer listening tasks which involve predicting, finding out, remembering, discerning between truth and lies, acting out scenes and making connections with their own experiences. These tasks encourage students not only to pay close attention to each other, but to build on each other's responses

and develop as a community of learners. We can encourage students to do the following – as suggested by Alida Gersie in *Earthtales* (1992):

■ encourage a free flow of ideas and value every contribution

■ enjoy and recognise different ways of doing a task

■ allow for and acknowledge different and unexpected responses

■ show genuine interest in one another's contributions

■ make sure all the group members have an equal share of time and attention.

Nothing comes more naturally to students than listening to their English teacher or to each other telling a personal story, and then to reciprocate with another story on a connected theme. Becoming English language storytellers leads to improved memory, language development, fluency and confidence in public speaking.

Personal and creative communication

When storytelling with you and with each other, students are responding to a live and present person and using non-verbal language. As teacher, it is important to be aware of your posture, facial expressions, gestures and the other subtleties of interpersonal communication so that you make your story engaging for your students and provide a useful model. Equally important is the way you use your voice: the changes in rhythm, tempo, volume, pitch and emotion all convey meaning. Students learn a great deal about pronunciation when listening attentively to and looking at the face of their storytelling teacher. Generally, the best idea is to keep the storytelling simple and articulate words clearly, but avoid slowing down too much or you might lose the energy and impact of the story.

You can finely adjust the vocabulary you use according to your students' ability. It is important to challenge your students; they do not need to understand every word in order to understand the story. But remember that, in the case of the activities presented in this chapter, you are providing a model for your students to aim for. This subtle tuning in to what your students need comes naturally with experience. The same story can be adapted and told with students at very different stages of their English learning. With monolingual classes of students starting out with English, it may be entirely appropriate to do mixed-language storytelling, to instantly translate key vocabulary or even to tell the whole story in the students' mother tongue before telling it in English. As Shakespeare himself put it: *'An honest tale speeds best being plainly told.'*

When students themselves start to tell their stories, it is very often the longest piece of uninterrupted speaking they have ever done in English. The activities offered here involve students conversing in pairs or small groups, so it is not possible for the teacher to hear everyone. Encourage students to focus on fluency and clarity and not to be overly concerned with accuracy. The main thing is that students closely listen to and understand each other. If they do not know how to say a particular word or phrase in English, they can say it in their mother tongue the first time they tell the story. They can then find out (from you, from other students or from a dictionary) how to say it in English before they tell the story again.

This extended interpersonal storytelling is hugely satisfying and boosts their confidence as English speakers. When evaluating their own English learning, students comment that regularly doing these kinds of personal storytelling activities in class develops their confidence, fluency, pronunciation, use of vocabulary and their ability to communicate creatively.

Listening and remembering

The first two activities focus on attentive listening and remembering – fundamental in a class where creative storytelling is valued.

I tell your story

Procedure

- Ask who has a good memory and invite this student to stand face-to-face with you.

- Explain that you are going to tell this student a short one-minute personal story about something that happened since you last met.

- As soon as you finish, challenge the student to tell it back to you in exactly the same way as if they were you, using the first person 'I': same emotions, same energy, same pace, same gestures, same facial expressions, same voice, same words.

- The other students will listen and notice similarities and differences but must remain silent until the end.

- Once the student has retold the story, find out similarities and differences the other students noticed in terms of emotions, energy, pace, gestures, facial expressions, voice and words and then ask them light-heartedly to award the student a percentage grade according to how similar their storytelling was, e.g. 76 per cent.

- In groups of three, students do the same. A listens to and then repeats B's story and is then given feedback and a grade by C. B listens to C, and finally C listens to A.

Problem stories

Procedure

- Tell students the story behind a problem that is on your mind and finish by asking 'What should I do?' For example, today I might tell them the story about my car needing repairs three times in the last three weeks and each repair being more serious than the one before.

- In pairs, students have one minute to listen to and remember the advice their partner would give. As a whole class students report their partners' advice to you.

- Ask students to think of a current problem they feel happy to talk about in class and which they would like advice about, e.g. a sick animal, equipment that's not working, something they have lost, or forgetting someone's name. When half the students have indicated that they want advice, tell them that they are all A.

- Put each A student with a B partner. B listens to A tell the story causing their problem, ending with 'What should I do?' and then summarises the story back to A to check they have understood and remembered correctly.

- Every B student finds a new A partner and tells them the problem story they learned from their former A partner. The new A partner responds to the story with a piece of advice.

- Every B student returns to their initial A partner and gives them the advice.

- Invite the A students to comment on the advice they have received to the whole class and whether they will follow it.

This is adapted from an activity I did in a personal storytelling workshop led by Dr Alida Gersie. It is best used where an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust is already established among members of the group and can be a genuinely effective way of sharing advice with peers.

Truth or lie

The next three activities involve students guessing how much of their partners' stories is true. There's no more effective technique for encouraging students to listen to each other than challenging them to work out whether their classmates are telling the truth or not. One reason for this is that it's just as much fun to guess lies as it is to get away with telling them. As well as this, the listening students focus not only on the content but also on their partner's body language and voice. This attentive listening supports the speakers and gives them more confidence in their ability to communicate creatively. In fact most students find it surprisingly easy to invent a believable lie.

What's the lie?

Procedure

- Let students know that you are going to tell a short true personal story but that one detail will be a lie.

- Tell the story of something that happened since you last met the students and do your best to hide the lie among the true details.

- After listening to you, students in pairs guess the lie.

- Find out students' guesses without letting them know if they're right or wrong. When all the guesses have been made, reveal the lie.

- Students in groups of three take it in turns to tell their recent story, while the other two listen and afterwards guess the lie.

- Find out which students proved to be the best liars and who told the most interesting stories.

This activity has become a favourite among students I teach and they enjoy repeating it at regular intervals. They become increasingly astute at disguising their own lies while picking out each other's.

Tell a lie

Procedure

- In this activity you are going to play a gentle trick on your students so that they all spontaneously create a believable story. In advance of the class, you need to prepare enough small pieces of paper marked only with a cross so that there is one for each student and one for you. Fold them up and put them in a box. Fold just one piece of paper marked with a tick.

- In front of the students unfold the one piece of paper with a tick and take out and unfold another one with a cross from the box and show them both to the students.

- Tell them that each piece of paper has either a tick signifying 'real story' or a cross signifying 'made-up story'. Fold the two pieces again and secretly discard the piece of paper with a tick. Take another one (which of course has a cross) from the box, look at it secretly and tell a personal story about a lie someone once told you.

- Your story must be completely made up. In your story include answers to the prompt questions below.

- Give students a minute to quiz you about the story and then guess in pairs if it is a real lie someone told you. Then they say in open class why they believe or disbelieve your story. Do not reveal that your story is made up yet.

- Tell students that they are going to tell their own story about a lie someone told them to at least three different students. Invite each student to take out and unfold a piece of paper from the box, making sure nobody shows their paper to anyone else.

- Remind them that if they have a tick they must tell a real story and if they have a cross the story must be completely made up, but they must make other students believe them so the story should be realistic (of course they will all have crosses). Ask them to hide away their piece of paper. Tell students that their stories should include answers to the following prompt questions and read them out slowly, allowing time for students to imagine:
  - When and where did it happen?
  - Who lied to you?

  - Why?
  - What was the lie?
  - How did you feel?
  - Did you believe the lie?
  - What were the consequences?

- Students stand in pairs ready to tell their stories. Remind them that after each story the listener should quiz the storytelling student who should answer but should not reveal whether their story is about a real lie or a made-up lie (of course they will all be made up, but you are the only one who knows this). As each pair finishes, they split and form new pairs and tell their stories again. Retelling the same story a few times helps them to improve their made-up story and develop their storytelling skills.

- Once every student has told their story at least three times, bring all the students together and let them discuss and guess whose stories were real. After they give their reasons for believing a story, the storytelling student reveals their paper which, of course, will show a cross.

- When students finally realise that none of the stories are real, let them all show their crosses and then reveal your cross too. Students can say how they feel about the fact that you didn't tell them the whole truth about the ticks and crosses. You can justify this by pointing out that by having to tell a believable lie, they had to use creative thinking skills.

Whose loss?

Procedure

- Choose a theme and prepare to tell a short true anecdote. For example if you choose the theme of 'losing things', elicit and write up some suitable common collocations to complete a phrase starting with 'I lost…' , for example, some money, a book, my pet, my phone, my glasses, my pen, my way, or my heart to somebody. Tell the students a short true anecdote about something you once lost, using the prompt questions in the stage below to guide you.

- Ask the students to sit with a partner they don't know very well. Say: 'In a moment you're going to tell your partner a true story about something you once lost. Before you start, think about your answers to these questions:
  - What did you lose?
  - When did this happen?
  - Where were you?
  - Who were you with?
  - What was happening at the time?

- How did you lose it?

- When did you realise you had lost it?

- How did you feel?

- What did you do?

- Did you find it again?

- If you did, how did you find it? If you didn't, when did you stop looking?

- How do you feel now when you remember this experience?'

■ Then tell them to listen to their partner's story to remember the details. Set a time limit of five minutes for both partners to tell their stories.

■ When the pairs have finished, say: 'In a moment you're going to choose one of those two stories. Both of you are going to tell the same story to other students as if it happened to you. You want to make them believe you. They are going to guess whose story it is. One of you will be telling your own true story. If you're telling your partner's story, you'll probably need to change a few things to make us believe it could have happened to you. OK, you've got three minutes to decide which story to tell and to learn it from your partner.'

■ When they are ready, ask each pair to sit facing another pair. Say: 'Listen to the same story told by two different people and then you can ask them both a few questions before you guess whose story it is that you've just heard.'

■ As each group finishes, ask the pairs to form new groups. Give students the opportunity to practise telling the same story at least three times and to embellish it a little more each time. Finally, invite the whole class to say how they managed to identify the students who were lying and who the most successful liars were.

Finding out

Knowing that it is up to them to find out what happens in their partner's story before they listen develops students' creative thinking and prediction skills, builds anticipation and focuses attention when they then listen.

Guess what happened in the end

Procedure

■ Choose a topic and prepare to tell a two-minute true personal story with an unpredictable ending. For example, if the topic is travel, I might tell the story of when a friend and I were involved in a car crash while hitch-hiking from Italy to France.

■ Let students know that they are going to finish the story, so they'll need to listen closely. Tell the story, establishing clearly who was involved and where and when it happened and then stop and say, 'Guess what happened in the end!'

■ Put the students in pairs and ask them to guess two different endings to your story.

■ Invite one willing student to tell their ending to your story to the whole class. Then invite students with very different endings to tell theirs. Next, tell them the actual ending.

■ Ask the students to think of a short personal story with an unpredictable ending on the same theme. They should raise a hand only when they've thought of one. Make equal-sized groups of between three and five students with one storytelling student in each group.

■ Remind the storytellers to stop and say, 'Guess what happened in the end!' and remind the others to guess and tell at least two different endings. Finally, the storytelling students tell their true endings.

Personal story questions

Procedure

■ Choose a topic and announce the title of a two-minute personal story you are happy to tell within that topic. For example, if the topic is the weather, my story could be 'The day our house flooded'.

■ Before they listen, ask students to fire you with questions about your story for one minute. Mentally note the questions but don't answer them yet. This will focus their attention.

■ After a minute, immediately tell your two-minute story incorporating answers to as many of your students' questions as you can. After finishing, point out that you didn't answer the questions as a list but integrated the answers into the story.

■ Students each decide their own topic-related story title and form groups of three. A announces their title and B and C fire questions for one minute, followed immediately by A's story. The same process is repeated for B and C.

Act it out

Physically acting out events in a story together promotes expressive storytelling and use of gesture and enables students to connect closely with their partners' experiences.

Celebration

Procedure

- Tell students the story of a celebration you remember well. Use the prompt questions below in the fourth stage to guide you, for example I might tell the story of the night I went to a carnival rehearsal with Brazilian friends in São Paulo, when I tried to do the samba in the summer heat among incredibly vibrant dancers and drummers. Use mime to bring the experience to life and engage with the students as if they're there at the celebration with you. For example, you say:

  'It's so hot in this warehouse, isn't it? Look over there! Can you see the way that couple are moving their hips so quickly to the rhythm? Look how their costumes are shimmering silver and gold. Have you ever seen anything like it? Listen to that deafening samba rhythm – there must be at least a hundred drummers. Let's get out there and join in the dance procession – are you ready?'

- Encourage students to ask you questions along the way.

- Say, 'In a minute you're going to tell the story of a celebration – it could be a ceremony, a festival, a party or another kind of special occasion. It could be something really big or a small family celebration.'

- Ask students to close their eyes. Read, slowly pausing between questions: 'Breathe in … and out … As you breathe, feel your body relax … You're going to remember the celebration and I'm going to ask you some questions … Please answer them in your head so you don't need to speak yet … Where are you at the start of the celebration? … Who are you with? … What kind of place are you in? … What time of day is it? … Look, what do you see around you? … Look at the people, the movement, the colours, the light and shade, all the things you see … What sounds do you hear? … What do you smell and what do you taste? … How do you feel? … What's the best thing about the celebration? … Is there any kind of problem? … Now it's coming to the end … One final question – how do you feel when you remember this celebration? … Now listen to your breathing, you're back in the classroom … you can open your eyes.'

- In groups of three to four, students stand and, in turn, invite their classmates to their celebration. Before they begin, remind them to use present tenses, gesture and mime and to ask and answer questions.

An act of kindness

Procedure

- Learn and tell this short tale to your students. An Iraqi student called Jalil Kwad told me this story.

> ### The pigeon and the ant
>
> A pigeon was thirsty and flew down to a pool of water to drink. There in the water the pigeon saw an ant. The ant was drowning in the water and the pigeon felt sorry for the ant. The pigeon found a dry leaf and dropped it into the water. The ant climbed onto the leaf and was safe.
>
> Some time later the ant saw a hunter. The hunter was going to shoot the pigeon. The ant remembered the pigeon's kindness and the ant bit the hunter on the foot. The hunter cried out in pain. The pigeon heard and flew away, safe.

- Tell students a personal story that 'The pigeon and the ant' reminds you of – an occasion when someone's act of kindness helped you out of a difficult situation. Start the story by giving them some background information about the situation; be clear about your relationship with the person who helped you and describe what happened and what was said.

- Ask a confident student to stand with you and play the role of the person who helped you and act out the story physically and verbally in front of the class. Invite the other students to watch and listen closely. It is not important if this conversation is a little different from the original interaction.

- Ask students to think of a personal story which 'The pigeon and the ant' reminds them of. It should be a difficult situation when they helped someone out or were helped out by someone not in the class, e.g. by giving something, by lending something, by carrying something, by explaining something, by giving directions, by looking after someone or something. When half the class are ready with a story to tell, ask them to pair with ones who haven't and to tell them the story.

- After a couple of minutes invite all the pairs to stand and act out the scene in English.

- Ask for pairs who are willing to show their scene to the rest. The others watch and listen in order to work out which student's story it is, the details of the relationship, the situation and the act of kindness.

Each of these activities can be extended very effectively with a writing stage or can easily be adapted for use as an interpersonal creative writing activity.

Conclusion

By bringing creative personal storytelling activities, such as the ones outlined in this chapter, into your teaching, you are sowing seeds on fertile soil. With your gentle nurturing, students' stories grow and flourish and bring colour to the learning in your classroom in ways that cannot be foreseen. One student responds to a classmate's story by telling another, deepening their appreciation of each other's thoughts, feelings, experiences and differences. The reciprocal nature of storytelling means that students begin to share their stories spontaneously with minimal teaching input. The content is rich and meaningful so students become increasingly involved in each other's life stories and their learning environment evolves into a self-sustaining community.

You can find examples of most of the story activities included in this chapter on David's YouTube Channel at: www.youtube.com/channel/UCscW6lz3okT_y_69SsY0LGw

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6

Teaching grammar creatively

Jill and Charlie Hadfield

Introduction

Four main reasons have been advanced for using creative activities with students. The first is that they are motivational, leading to positive affect.

'Creativity stimulates and motivates. Students given the opportunity to exercise their own creativity tend to respond positively. Language use and language learning are inherently creative processes. I would argue that these features should at least be given some space in teaching materials.' (Tomlinson, 2003: 187). Similarly Hadfield and Hadfield find that creative writing activities 'often demonstrate to students how powerful they can be in the foreign language, even at a fairly elementary level. Every new discovery they make in the foreign language is in a sense an "act of creation", but when they produce words on paper which are original and creative, they see written proof of the process. This is a great encouragement to them for further learning'. (Hadfield and Hadfield, 1990: viii)

Other writers find creative activities encourage learners to take risks, engage more deeply with the language and exceed their current language abilities. Tan Bee Tin (2007) finds that creative activities enable learners to 'push past their current language abilities'. Murugiah (2013), citing Craik and Lockhart (1972) in turn, states that 'as learners manipulate the language in interesting and demanding ways, attempting to express uniquely personal meanings (as they do in creative writing), they necessarily engage with the language at a deeper level of processing than with expository text.'

A third reason is that such deeper processing of language also acts as a memory aid (Nematis, 2009; Schmitt, 2000). Schmitt finds that the creative techniques of mental linkage and imaging improve retrieval of language items, and Nematis explains that 'the more cognitive energy a person exerts when manipulating and thinking about a word, the more likely it is that they will be able to recall and use it later' (2009: 14).

Finally, creativity plays an important part in L2 identity building (Hadfield and Hadfield, 1990; Maley, 2012; Norton, 1995; Tin, 2007). Tan Bee Tin (2007) finds that through creativity learners 'become themselves' in the foreign language, and Hadfield and Hadfield (1990) explain that:

'By thinking up new ideas of their own in the foreign language, students begin to make a personal investment in the language and culture. In a way they begin to "own" part of it, so they are no longer "foreigners" and "outsiders"'.

Using creative techniques for grammar practice will thus motivate students, by making what could be a routine and repetitious activity into something novel and exciting. It will increase their self-esteem by proving to them that they can use the new grammar patterns in an original and entertaining way. And it can increase retention of the grammar items by leading to deeper processing of the language. Finally, through the identity-building function of L2 creativity, it can give them a sense of ownership of the new language.

Combining grammar and creativity: constraints and freedom

There may be compelling reasons for using creativity in the classroom, but at first sight, grammar practice and creativity do not seem compatible. Practising grammar involves following rules, writing to prescribed patterns, following established connections and repetition – all ideas which seem antithetical to creativity, which is associated with the freedom of breaking rules and making new connections.

However, creativity, paradoxically, thrives within constraints: the adherence to rules, or following of a pattern, as in a limerick or a sonnet, both of which have tightly prescribed forms. Additionally, many poems, stories and songs gain their effect through use of repetition. This paradox can be exploited to provide opportunities for grammar practice in creative activities by the provision of tightly controlled frameworks within which to write. The activities provided in this chapter will demonstrate these frameworks: 'pattern poems', and 'listing' activities.

Helping students with what to say and how to say it

Providing constraints will also help students with the 'what' and 'how' of creative expression. The activities in this chapter demonstrate two other ways in which students can be scaffolded into thinking of and expressing creative ideas: providing an imaginative trigger and providing an audience.

Imaginative trigger

The activities in this chapter have three kinds of 'imaginative trigger' designed to engender ideas.

- The simplest is a concrete stimulus: pictures, visualisations, texts, objects, music. These can help students by providing something for them to describe, an example of ideas or style of writing, or by setting a mood. Guiding questions can be provided to help the students exploit the stimulus.

- The second trigger involves activities which group students in pairs and asking them to brainstorm a large number of ideas, from which a selection can be made for the creative product (poem, story, etc.). Several writers on the creative process have seen this process as crucial to creativity. Campbell (1960) for example proposes a three-stage model: the blind generation of large numbers of ideas – blind because it is not known in advance which ideas will be selected and finally retained – then the selection of certain of these ideas for further elaboration, and finally the retention of those most useful. Simonton (2003) elaborates on this theory, seeing creativity as beginning with chance combinations of ideas which are then subject to a selection process to determine which will finally be retained. Smith et al. (1995) have a similar theory in their 'Geneplore model' which consists of a two-stage process: the generation of large numbers of ideas which are then explored to find which are most productive.

- The third kind of imaginative trigger also derives from writers' observations on creativity, suggesting that creativity involves somehow connecting two apparently unrelated ideas. Heraclitus wrote that 'a wonderful harmony arises from connecting the seemingly unconnected', and in more modern times, Koestler took up this theme in *The Act of Creation* (1964), finding that the basis of all creativity is 'bisociative thinking... the creative leap which connects two previously unconnected frames of reference.' It is of course difficult to think of unconnected ideas that might be creatively connected, so scaffolding has been provided for students in two ways: 'Idea Collision', where two normally unconnected ideas are provided for the student, for example providing instructions for eating spaghetti or falling in love – activities which do not normally come with instructions – and 'Making the Familiar Strange', where students are asked to take an unusual viewpoint on the world, for example writing about a day's events from the point of view of a toy rather than from the child who played with it.

Providing an audience

One of the difficulties of writing is caused by the absence of audience. A speaker has an interlocutor who can react to what is said or ask for clarification. Whereas a writer is communicating with a void. It can help students immensely with the organisation and expression of their thoughts if they have an audience. In these activities, students act as both writer and audience. Two techniques are used, 'Chain Writing' and 'Read and...'.

In 'Chain Writing', the students are simultaneously writer and audience. In 'Overheard in a Café', for example, students work in pairs, writing a line of an overheard conversation at a time, then passing it to their partner who writes the next line, thus mimicking spoken interaction.

In 'Read and...' students write first, then become each other's audience. They not only read each other's work, but have a task to complete, for example to read and guess what is being described, and to read and match descriptions and pictures. This ensures that students have an audience in mind while writing and are suiting their writing to the task their audience must perform.

The table below shows how each activity we have described uses constraints, imaginative triggers and audience.

Activity	Target language	Genre	Constraint	Imaginative trigger	Audience
Mystery object	Place prepositions	Place description	Pattern poem	Picture stimulus	Read and guess
My day so far	Simple past	Narrative	Listing	Object stimulus Brainstorming Making the familiar strange	Read and identify
Platform 17	Present continuous	Description of a scene	Pattern poem	Picture stimulus Brainstorming	Read and identify
How it's done	Imperatives	Instructions	Listing	Idea collision Brainstorming	Read and match
Emotive objects	Adjective order	Object description	Pattern poem	Visualisation Brainstorming	Read and give an explanation Chain writing
Maternal advice	Constructions with gerund and infinitive	Advice/rules	Listing	Text stimulus Idea collision Brainstorming	Read and guess
Overheard in a café	Reported speech	Dialogue	Listing	Picture stimulus Making the familiar strange	Chain writing Read and identify

Mystery object

Aim

For students to write a poem describing a scene.

Level

Elementary and higher.

Language practised

Place prepositions.

Preparation

Find a picture of a scene from Creative Commons: (http://creativecommons.org). The scene can be indoors or outdoors but should have various objects, for example a table, chair, bench, tree or umbrella that objects can be beside, next to, under, etc.

Prepare the bubble table like the one below. Adapt it to cover prepositions/lexis that your students know or that you want them to practise.
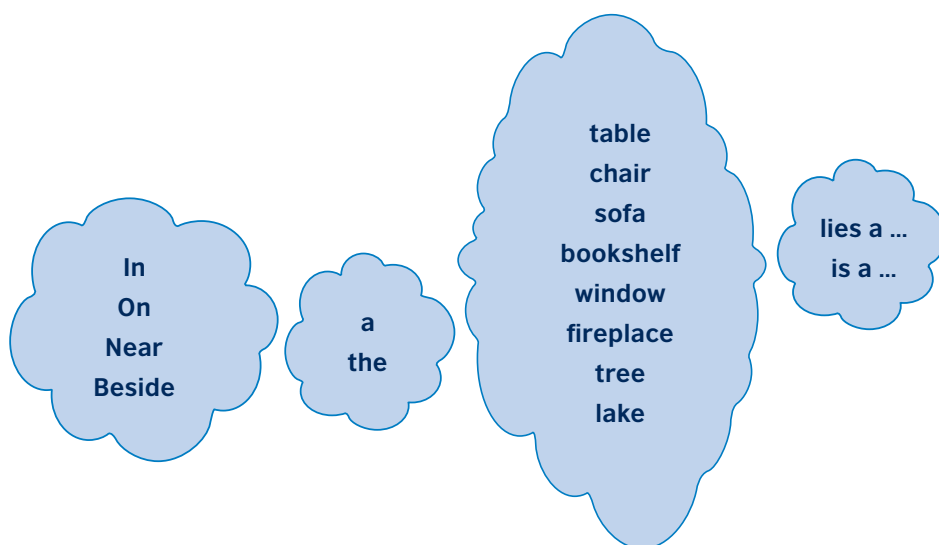
Procedure

- Show students your picture from Creative Commons.

- Create a poem like the one below and read it to them and ask them to guess the final object at the end of the poem.

  On a bench

  Next to a tree

  Beside a lake

  Beneath the mountains

  Under a deep blue sky

  Lies a....

- Ask them to think a bit about the story behind the book – what kind of book? Why is it there? Where is the owner/reader?

- Ask them to close their eyes and imagine a scene. It can be indoors or outdoors. There should be a special object somewhere in the room. What is it? Who owns it? Why is it there?

- Put up the bubble table to help them with vocabulary and structure and ask them to write a poem like the example above. You can specify a number of lines or give them the pattern:

  (preposition)... a /the ...(noun)

  (preposition)... a /the ...(noun)

  (preposition)... a /the ...(noun)

  (preposition)... a /the ...(noun)

  (preposition)... a /the ...(noun)

  lies/is a...

- When they have finished, put them in groups of four or five and ask them to read each other their poems, but without saying what the object is. The others should try to guess the object, and work out its story.

- Round off the activity by asking for feedback from each group. They should read one poem and tell the story.

My day so far

Aim

For students to write a short narrative about the day's events.

Level

Pre-intermediate and higher.

Language practised

Past simple (plus other narrative tenses if at higher level).

Preparation

Source a number of pictures of objects from Creative Commons for display in class, or bring in a number of different objects, for example, pen, computer, mobile phone, camera/CCTV camera, glass or balloon.

Procedure

- Display the pictures or objects.
- Ask students to work in pairs and choose one object.
- Then ask them to work individually. They should think of all the things that the object might have done during one day. Give them a time limit of around five minutes to write as many things as they can think of, for example:
  - for a pen: lay on the desk, wrote a love letter, drew a picture, scribbled on the wall, ran out of ink, ended up in the wastepaper bin.
- They should compare lists in pairs and then use the ideas to write a short narrative of the object's day.
- Pairs can read their narratives out and the others should guess the object.

Platform 17

Aim

For students to write a collaborative pattern poem describing people waiting on a station platform.

Level

Elementary or higher.

Language practised

Present continuous.

Preparation

Find an atmospheric picture of people waiting on a station platform. You can do this by searching Google Images (www.google.com/imghp) or Creative Commons (http://creativecommons.org).

Prepare the questions and the poem pattern in the second and third sections of the procedure for display on the board/screen.

Poem pattern

Line 1: Where are they?

Line 2: An (adjective) (woman/man) with (clothes or physical features)

Line 3: What are they doing?

Line 4: And thinking of…

Procedure

- Project the picture or give it out to the students. Ask them a few questions to familiarise them with the picture.

  Example:
    - Can you find someone who is texting?
    - Can you find someone who is sitting on a bench?
    - Can you find someone who is reading?
    - Can you find someone who is looking at the clock?
    - Can you find someone who is watching out for the train?
    - Can you find someone near the clock/by the stairs/by the lamppost, etc.?

- Ask students to work in pairs and choose one of the people on the platform. Ask them to discuss the following questions:
    - Who are they – what job do they do?
    - What do they look like?
    - Are they happy?
    - Where are they standing/sitting?
    - What are they doing?
    - Are they catching a train or waiting for someone?
    - Who are they going to see/who are they waiting for?
    - What is on their mind at the moment?

- Give the students the poem pattern.
- Each pair should use ideas from their discussion to write the verse.

  Example:
    - sitting on the bench
    - a sad woman with a long nose
    - staring into space
    - thinking of wasted time.
- When the pairs have finished, get them to read out their verse. The other students should try to guess who they are describing.
- Finally you can put all the verses together to form a poem called 'Travellers' or 'Platform 17'.

How it's done

Aim

For students to write a set of instructions for common actions.

Level

Pre-intermediate or higher.

Language practised

Imperatives, sequencing words.

Preparation

Prepare enough 'making tea' instructions for each pair of students to have a set. Cut them up.

How to make a cup of tea

First, boil some water in a kettle.

When it is hot, pour a little in the teapot to warm it.

Then throw out the water and put in two spoons full of tea leaves.

Bring the water back to the boil.

Pour the boiling water on the tea leaves in the pot.

Leave the tea for two minutes.

Serve in cups with milk or lemon.

Add sugar if required.

Prepare enough of the 'lucky-dip slips' for each pair of students to have one each. Cut them up and put them in a hat.

Lucky-dip slips
- Eating spaghetti
- Falling in love
- Getting a promotion
- Having a relaxing evening
- Bathing a dog
- Going to a wedding
- Looking after a two-year-old
- Taking an exam

Also prepare the activities list, for each pair to have one copy.

Activity	Number
Eating spaghetti	
Falling in love	
Getting a promotion	
Having a relaxing evening	
Bathing a dog	
Going to a wedding	
Looking after a two-year-old	
Taking an exam	

Procedure

- Put students in pairs and give them each a list of the 'making tea' instructions. Ask them what language helped them to sequence the instructions.

- Then ask each pair to take a slip from the hat. Explain that these are common activities that do not normally come with instructions, but that they are going to write a set of instructions for their activity.

- When they have finished, collect the slips in. Give each a number and pin them round the walls.

- Give each pair an activity list. Get them to walk around the room, reading the instructions and matching them to the activities on their list. They should write a number by each activity. When they have found one set of instructions for each activity, they can sit down.

- Go through the answers.

Emotive objects

Aim
For students to write a collaborative description of an object.

Level
Pre-intermediate or higher.

Language practised
Adjective order.

Preparation
Prepare a set of adjective strips for each group of five or six students in your class.

A/n	box
A/n	necklace
A/n	pair of shoes
A/n	photo frame
A/n	notebook
A/n	vase
A/n	clock

Prepare a poem framework for display.

She/he (action) the
………….. Adjective 1
………….. Adjective 2
………….. Adjective 3
………….. Adjective 4
………….. Adjective 5
………….. Adjective 6
Noun
That (more information about the object)
And (action)

Procedure

■ Put students in groups of five or six, sitting round a table. Give each group a set of adjective strips. Each student should take one.

■ Each student in the group should look at the noun (for example, necklace) and write one adjective describing it. They should leave space either side of the adjective for other students to add adjectives.

■ They should then pass the strip to their right, and the next student should add an adjective. Remind them to leave space between each adjective for other adjectives to be added in the correct order.

■ When the strips have been right round the group, they can look at and read the finished results. Each group should choose one to read out for the other groups.

■ They should read it out, but without saying the name of the object, e.g. 'A small, round, red, lacquered, Japanese wooden…' The other students should guess the object.

■ Ask the students to work in pairs and imagine:

 – more information: about/history of the object, for example, how did the owner get it? (bought it on holiday/inherited it from an aunt/was given it by a girlfriend etc.)

 – action: a situation where the owner does something to the object, puts it on/opens it/takes something out/destroys it, etc. (work out a reason why).

■ Put up the poem frame. Students should put the ideas they discussed into the poem frame. Example:

She took the:

delicate

antique

Spanish

silver

ring

that he had given her for their engagement

and threw it into the river.

■ They should then read out their poems. Others can try to deduce the reason behind the action.

Maternal advice

Aim

For students to imagine giving advice from an animal to its young.

Level

Intermediate and higher.

Language practised

Imperatives, infinitives and gerunds:

■ should, must + bare infinitive

■ remember, try, take care, don't forget, be careful + full infinitive

■ avoid, beware of, forget about, refrain from, resist+ing.

Preparation

Copy the 'Motherly Advice' text for each student, if you want to use it.

Advice

In this extract advice is being given to someone younger and less experienced. Read the extract and decide who is speaking.

Motherly Advice

'If … anyone scolds you – wash,' she was saying. 'If you slip and fall off something and somebody laughs at you – wash …. Whatever difficulty you may be in, you can't go wrong if you wash. If you come into a room full of people you do not know, and who are confusing to you, sit right down in the midst of them and start washing. They'll end up by quieting down and watching you. Some noise frightens you into a jump, and somebody you know saw you were frightened – begin washing immediately.'

'If somebody calls you and you don't care to come and still you don't wish to make it a direct insult – wash…'

'And', concluded Jennie, drawing a long breath, 'of course you also wash to get clean and to keep clean.'

'Goodness!' said Peter, quite worried, 'I don't see how I could possibly remember it all.'

From *Jennie*, by Paul Gallico

Procedure

■ Give out the 'Motherly Advice' text. Get students to read it and discuss in pairs who is speaking (a cat).

■ Brainstorm with the class what other advice a mother cat might give to a young cat.

■ Ask students to give you names of different animals (bird, dolphin, dog, etc.). Put these up on the board as they offer them.

■ Get students in pairs to choose an animal and write some maternal advice from that animal to a younger animal. For example, 'Remember to watch out for cats'; 'Try to avoid fishing nets'; 'Be careful not to come in the house with muddy paws'.

■ Students read their advice to each other in small groups or to the class. The others try to guess the animal.

Overheard in a café

Aim
For students to report overheard dialogues.

Level
Pre-intermediate and higher.

Language practised
Reported speech, said, replied, asked, denied etc.

Preparation
Display around eight art portraits of men and women so that students can see them all, or make one copy for each pair. The portraits should be numbered.

Write the numbers one to eight on small pieces of paper. Make enough for everyone in the class to have one. Put them in a hat.

Procedure
- Display the portraits or hand out copies. Tell the students they are in a café and these are the people they can see around them.
- Pass around the hat and get each student to take a number. Make sure each member of the pairs has a different number.
- Ask the students to look at the picture with that number.
- Ask them to imagine:
  - who is their character? (Name, job, married, town/country they live in)
  - think of three adjectives to describe them.
  - what are their hopes and fears?
  - what do they worry about?
  - what is on their mind at the moment?
- Put students in pairs. Ask them to imagine they are sitting in the café and can overhear a conversation between their two characters.
- Ask them to take a piece of paper and write a report of the conversation. Student A should begin, for example, writing at the top of the paper: *She said that she wasn't very happy.* Student B should write the next line, for example: *He asked her why she felt like that.*
- When they have finished, get the pairs to swap the conversations with another pair. They should try to identify the two characters.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated a number of techniques for generating creativity – often thought of as the breaking of rules – in order to practise grammatical pattern, and the application of rules. We believe that such activities will prove more motivational to learners, cause them to process language more deeply, and to engage with the language more personally than traditional grammar activities, and in doing so will enable them to take possession of the language, making it their own and so develop an L2 identity.

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7

From everyday activities to creative tasks

Judit Fehér

Introduction

Creativity is not for special days and not for a select few; it is a life skill we use on a daily basis. We combine elements of a language in a way that we have never heard before and express thoughts that are truly ours. We make decisions in situations we have never been in before, form our opinions on things we never knew of before. We improvise food we never ate before, find ways of using faulty objects we cannot replace, or use tools differently from their designated use. We are humans and we simply cannot help but be creative. This is how we survive. Why do we then think that creativity is something extra in our classrooms and not an integral part of what we do? Couldn't we integrate creativity into the everyday practice of our teaching?

In this chapter, I aim to give tips to teachers on doing just that: to integrate creativity into everyday classroom practice and typical language learning activities and exercises. I will use a framework of thinking that is used by many teachers around the world to think about and plan their lessons, namely:

■ working with the language system:
  – presenting and practising vocabulary
  – presenting and practising grammar
  – improving pronunciation.
■ working with skills:
  – developing speaking
  – developing writing
  – developing listening and reading.

While sticking to this familiar framework, I would like to show that small changes introduced step-by-step at different levels of teaching can gradually lead to a richer and more motivational, more creative learning environment for the learners and a more fulfilling, more rewarding teaching experience for the teachers.

With each typical classroom/coursebook activity discussed, I will use the following format:

■ How is the activity normally done?
■ What alternative do I suggest?
■ How does the proposed change affect teacher and learner creativity?
■ Adaptation, variation, extension – how can the idea be used in different ways?

Background to the activities

The activities in this chapter were designed with secondary and adult classes in mind and they are informed by a variety of current approaches including learner-centredness, holistic learning, multiple intelligences, neuro-linguistic programming, humanistic teaching and task-based learning.

Presenting and practising vocabulary

When teaching vocabulary, we normally aim to help our students to connect the form of a word with its meaning so that they can get to the meaning if they come across the form (they see or hear the word) and that they can come up with the form (say it or write it) when they have the meaning in mind. When we present vocabulary, we provide the form, spoken and/or written, and give some guide to the meaning through a context, images, objects, mime, sounds and verbal clues or by creating a situation in which the meaning is clarified. This often calls for a lot of teacher creativity, as they try to find ways to clarify meaning without using the mother tongue, but the students can do some of this creative work.

From meanings to words

Students present meanings of words they don't know in English.

Procedure

■ Give students an example of what we mean by different clues for the meaning of words. For example, if your topic is *travelling by train*, choose the word 'train', give a simple definition, imitate the movement and sound of a train and show students a simple drawing of a train.

- Ask groups of four to six students to write down in their mother tongue five words on your topic that they do not know in English but they think would be useful to know, e.g. station, ticket office, seat reservation, timetable, platform, written in the students' mother tongue.

- Ask groups to provide clues to the words they have chosen. They can use drama, mime, sounds, drawings, gapped texts, paraphrasing – anything but the mother-tongue word.

- Ask groups to give their clues, one at a time. For example, students in a group pretend to be trains while some students make sounds like a loudspeaker and they sing the tune you hear before railway announcements in your country for the meaning of 'station'.

- Ask if another group thinks they have a clue for the same meaning. If there is a group with the same meaning, get them to give their clue, for example, 'You can get on and off trains here', or they show a picture they drew. Check with the first group if it is the same meaning.

- Ask students if any of them know the English word, and ask them to say the word. If not, provide the word yourself. Get them to repeat the word and write it on the board.

- Continue like this, asking groups to repeat their clues from time to time and say the word, to recap.

Variation

- If you have a specific list of words you need to teach, make a big poster/slide of the words in the students' mother tongue and ask groups to choose the five they want to learn the most.

- This technique can be used with any topic which students have some experience of and knowledge about.

Lessons from the box

Student-generated vocabulary games, activities and exercises.

Michael McCarthy claims that 'seven repetitions seem to be enough for most people to be able to memorise a word' (McCarthy, 1990: 117). Whether it is more or fewer depends on many factors, such as the number of new words, the quality of repetitions and the lapses of time between the repetitions. For a word presented to a student to become a part of their active vocabulary, we need to create opportunities for them to experience and use the word in a memorable way soon after the first encounter, and then at longer and longer intervals. Thus to keep a record of the new words is an important aspect of effective teaching. The easiest way is to have a word box in your classroom and ask a student every lesson to make word cards for the new words and put them in the box. The box then becomes the class's word bank, where you find the words that need to be recycled. Apart from using the words in skills work, recycling can be done at three different levels of creativity.

The teacher makes the game/exercise

Every now and then you can use the word cards to devise games and exercises. These may include:

- matching and dominoes, e.g. matching word to definition, word to picture, word to phonetic sign, two parts of a word, collocations, etc.
- pelmanism
- snap
- miming competition
- crossword puzzles
- word search
- word jumbles
- snakes and ladders
- gap-filling
- multiple choice.

See the links at the end of this chapter to sites that give you rules, tools and ready-made word games.

Students make a game/exercise using a familiar framework/rules

Once your students are familiar with a game or activity, they can provide the cards, boards, dominoes and the necessary task sheets for each other.

- Choose a game/activity your students know well, and get them to revise how it goes.

- Put them into small groups of about four to six. Give them a selection of word cards from the box. Tell them that their task is to make the game/ activity using these words. Give groups the necessary art supplies (paper, cards, coloured pencils, etc.).

- When the games/activities are ready, get the groups to swap games and play each other's games.

- Ask groups to give feedback to each other on the games/activities they made.

Students invent a new game

This can be a class or school project/competition. Teams of about six students work together to invent a vocabulary game. Tell students that:

- the games have to be original

- teams need to write up the rules and make all the tools (board, cards, dominoes, etc.)

- there is a deadline

- they can organise a games session where they can play each other's games.

Presenting and practising grammar

Typically, grammar structures are presented to learners in texts written by a third party, most often the coursebook writer. The involvement in the procedure for the learner is limited to:

- understanding the use and the 'meaning' of the structure

- identifying it in the text

- generalising rules

- applying rules.

This procedure engages the learners linguistically and logically, which is a rather limited engagement given that our learners have a variety of skills, a wide range of experiences, and their own unique imagination and preferences for learning. The alternative suggested below results in a more complex engagement of the learner – thus a more memorable learning experience for most.

From blues to bliss

Presenting and practising the different uses of the past simple and past continuous with a personalised story.

Procedure

- Ask students to remember their previous day and find a time when they were a bit bored, tired, unhappy, etc. Ask them to write down this time of day on a sticky note and wear it, e.g. 'around six in the evening'.

- Get students to line up from the earliest to the latest time of day. Then make small groups of students who chose similar times. Ask students to share what they were doing at the time they chose and demonstrate it saying 'I was correcting tests around six yesterday evening. What were you doing around six?'

- Get groups to report to the whole class, e.g. 'Sue and Peter were revising the physics homework and I was washing up around six yesterday evening.'

- Ask groups to find a person or a group of people they think could have changed that time of day for the better for them, and write this name down, e.g. 'Superman.'

- Ask pairs to imagine that the person(s) really arrived and the changes their arrival caused. Ask them to write this down as a short story. Write the starting sentence on the board: '☺ ☺ were ___ing and ☺ was ___ing when ___ arrived.'

- As groups are writing their stories, monitor and help as needed. An example of a possible story: 'Sue and Peter were revising the physics homework and John was washing up when Superman arrived. First he did the washing-up for John in twenty seconds and then we did a lot of interesting physics experiments. We laughed a lot and we understood and learned everything easily. We were looking at some Superman comic books when we heard "Help! Help!". Superman said goodbye and left at once.'

Follow-up

- Get students to write them/part of them on the board and use them to explain the grammar, ask concept questions, represent them on a timeline, etc.

- Collect and redistribute them, making sure pairs do not get their own story back. Ask pairs to mime the story as other students tell the story.

- Collect them and make a grammar exercise using students' stories, e.g. put the verb into the right tense. Or ask the creators of the stories to make up the exercises themselves and then swap with another pair.

- Get students to combine all the stories into one adventure story.

Variation

- You need to find the appropriate context that relates students' lives and/or their imagination to the grammar point, e.g. a dream holiday for future continuous, or a report about arriving on a faraway planet for present continuous.

Improving pronunciation

Pronunciation is most often improved by recognition – repetition activities. Some form of this can be very playful, like using tongue twisters, which gave me the idea for this activity.

I'll twist your tongue

Students write tongue twisters collectively.

Procedure

- Choose some tongue twisters for your class (see the sites below). Cut them into smaller parts.

- Give each student a part of one of the tongue twisters.

- Get them to mingle and keep repeating their lines, and find other students with the same tongue twister and sit down together.

- Ask groups to put the parts in order, and then perform the tongue twister.

- Ask them which English sounds they find hard to pronounce and elicit the ones that are typically difficult for people in your students' country. Write the phonetic symbols of these on one A3 sheet each with an example of a word that contains this sound, e.g. /θ/ *think*. To the same sheet, add a sound that is in contrast with the first sound and an example, e.g. /s/ *sink*.

- Put the sheets on the walls/floor/desks or pass them around and ask students to write more words on the sheets with the same sounds. Add some yourself as you walk around and monitor.

- Put students into groups of four and tell them to choose one of the sheets. Ask the groups to write as many sentences as possible using words with the sounds on their sheet. They can use any of the words on the sheets or other words that come to them with the same two sounds. They can also add 'grammar words' as needed, e.g. 'The <u>th</u>ree <u>s</u>illy <u>S</u>mi<u>th</u> <u>s</u>isters <u>th</u>ink that the ma<u>ths</u> cla<u>ss</u> on <u>Th</u>ursday is awe<u>s</u>ome.' All the students should make a copy of the sentences.

- Ask students to decide who is A, B, C and D in their groups. Ask students with the same letter to sit together, taking the sentences they wrote with them. You'll have four groups (A, B, C, D) this way. If groups have more than eight members, subdivide them. This will mean that you'll have groups A1 and A2, groups B1 and B2, etc.

- Ask groups to put their lines together to make a tongue twister. They need to find the best order for their lines, and they can add to and take away from any line as they think best. They will all need a copy of the tongue twister they make.

- Ask them to write the group's letter sign on their copy of the tongue twister and return with it to their original groups.

- In their original groups, they then read out their tongue twisters and get each other to repeat them.

- Ask groups to vote for the tongue twister that they find the most challenging. Tally the votes and do the winning tongue twister with the whole class.

Follow-up

You can use these new tongue twisters in many ways:

- to raise students' awareness of different sounds: give (groups of) students cards with one of the phonetic symbols in the tongue twisters. Read out the tongue twisters. (Groups of) students stand up and sit down quickly every time they hear the sound on their card

- run a tongue-twister competition

- use them as a warm-up activity before a speaking task.

Variation

- To practise the stress-timed rhythm of English, you can use jazz chants in a similar way. After teaching some to your students, they can write their own.

Developing speaking

Typically, speaking activities fall into three categories:

- Students talk about themselves. They are asked to share facts about themselves, their feelings, ideas, opinions, etc.
- Students talk as someone else. They act and speak in a role. They receive some information about a situation, a problem, the character they are, etc. and they pretend to be that person in the given situation.
- Students talk about someone or something else. They talk about a situation/story they are not part of.

Students talk about themselves

Telltale objects

They identify with one of their own objects and talk about themselves in this role at a 'party'.

Procedure

- Ask students what objects they use regularly at home, at school and in their free time. Write the objects students mention on the board, e.g. plate, fork, school bag, maths book, mobile phone, computer, television, bicycle, toothbrush, ball, armchair, etc.
- Ask students to choose an object they have, e.g. they can choose 'computer' if they have one. Check who chose which object and make sure you have a good variety.
- Give students a sticky note/card each and ask them to write the object they have chosen on their sticky note/card and wear it.
- Explain that they are to become the object on their sticky note/card, i.e. they become their own plate, fork, school bag, etc. Give them a minute to imagine what it might feel like to be that object, e.g. their own plate, fork, school bag, etc. Are they a happy object? Sad? Clean? Dirty? Busy? Relaxed? Bored? Old? New? Write these adjectives on the board.
- Ask students to imagine that this is a party of their chosen objects. They will mingle and meet each other and chat with each other as these objects. They need to find out if the objects they talk to are happy, sad, clean, dirty, busy, relaxed, bored, old, new, etc. (refer to the adjectives on the board), and they will need to explain why they think so. To be able to do this, they will need to have a chat and ask each other questions. Demonstrate this with a student.

Example:

- – Judit: Hello, I'm Judit's bathing suit. You are Joe's trumpet, aren't you?
- – Joe: That's right. Nice to meet you.
- – Judit: And you. How are you?
- – Joe: I'm a little tired.
- – Judit: Does Joe often play on you?
- – Joe: Yes, every day for several hours.
- – Judit: Good for you! Judit only takes me to the swimming pool once a week.
- – Joe: How long have you been with Judit?
- – Judit: Ages! etc.

- After the demonstration, ask students what adjectives could describe the objects (Judit's bathing suit: bored, neglected, old; Joe's trumpet: tired, busy).
- Give students a time limit of about ten minutes to mingle and ask them to take notes. You may want to play some party music in the background.
- When time is up, ask students which objects they found happy, sad, clean, dirty, busy, relaxed, bored, old, new etc., and why.

Variations

- In lower-level classes, only use two objects, which all your students have, e.g. half of the students become their schoolbag and the other half become their shoes. Students talk to each other in different object pairs.
- The basic idea of this activity is to aid students with, and give them an aim for, talking about themselves. This can be done in many different ways, e.g. through asking them to choose some coloured paper to represent an experience they had or through asking them to compare themselves to different objects, etc.

Students talk as someone else

Prompts for roles

When we would like our students to act and speak as a different person, we need to communicate to them who this person is and what the situation is. This can be done using different prompts.

Role cards exchange

When students speak in role as a different person, the question is: to what extent can I rely on my students' knowledge about the world, their experience and their imagination to be able to act in this role? If the situation is familiar to them, a short scenario may be enough. If it is something that the

students have little experience of, we tend to give them information on how to act and what to say, too. This, however, can be done by the students.

Procedure

- Explain the situation you want students to write role cards for, e.g. 'We are in a shop. The customer bought a T-shirt yesterday and at home they realised it was torn. The customer is now talking to the shop assistant that sold the T-shirt to him/her.' Have a chat about students' experiences in similar real-life situations.

- Put students into pairs and give them two blank cards. Ask them to write one of the characters on top of one of the cards and the other character on the other card. Ask them to divide the cards into two columns and then write prompts in the two columns, like this:

Customer

Do this	Say this
Show the hole in the T-shirt	I bought it from you yesterday.
	When I got home, I showed it to my mother and this hole was there.

- Give each pair a paperclip and ask them to clip the two cards together. Collect the cards and redistribute them. Make sure pairs do not get their own cards back.

- Pairs act out the situation using the cards as a rehearsal.

- Pairs perform their dialogues as others listen and say if they think the dialogue was acted out using the role cards they made.

Change of feelings scenarios

Short scenarios often work better if we impose some kind of limitation, as this gives a direction to students' thoughts, and triggers their problem-solving thinking. Here the limitation is the emotions they need to express.

Procedure

- Choose a situation students are familiar with, e.g. A: You are at the disco. You are sitting at a table alone. B: You are at the disco. You see Student A at a table alone. Ask him/her to dance.

- Prepare cards with two different feelings written on them, e.g.: friendly → impatient, reserved → infatuated, etc. Have two extra cards for demonstration.

- Describe the situation to your learners and give everyone a feelings card. Tell them not to show it to anybody. Explain that as they act out the situation, they need to start talking with the first emotion on their card. They change to the second emotion when their partner uses the first one in a sentence about them, e.g. 'Oh, you are so friendly!', or 'Why are you so reserved?' Adjectives with similar meanings are OK, e.g. kind/nice or unfriendly. They finish when both of them have named both of the feelings, or when the time you set is over.

- Demonstrate how this works with a student. Then set a time limit of about three minutes.

- After the role plays, ask students if they managed to get the emotions and how they worked out how the other student was feeling.

Variations

- In lower-level classes, give students only one emotion.

- Some other creativity-triggering limitations include:
  – start your reply with the last word your partner says
  – one of the pair can only speak using questions
  – one of the pair cannot say 'Yes' or 'No'
  – the speakers have to start their utterances with a word starting with the next letter of the alphabet, e.g.

  A: **A**re you Peter?

  B: **B**e sure I am.

  A: **C**an you dance with me?

  B: **D**o me a favour. Ask someone else.

Find my picture home!

Students describe their life in a picture, while the others select the picture. Visual cues can make a situation clear at a glance while leaving it open for personal interpretations.

Procedure

- Select about five or six landscapes and put them on the walls so that everyone can see them. You'll need to have at least A3 sizes. Alternatively, make a slide-show and project them. Assign a letter to each picture.

- Ask students to mentally choose one of the landscapes and imagine that they live in that picture. Who are they? What is their life like? What do they do? Are they lonely or do they live in a family? Are they rich or poor? etc.

- Ask them to mingle and chat about their lives in the role of the person they imagined. They must not say which picture they are from. As they talk to each other, they try to match the people they talk to with the pictures and write down the person's real name with the letter sign of their picture.
- Check with the class how they matched people to pictures. Ask them if they liked their life in the picture and why/why not.

Variation

You can ask students to identify with characters or objects in a picture:

- choose a picture with quite a few objects and people in it
- project it, and ask them to choose a person or an object in the picture and speak about their life as that person or object. The others guess who/what they are
- the student who makes the correct guess first is the next person to talk.

Musical dialogues

Students make up a dialogue prompted by music.

Procedure

- Play four or five short instrumental pieces of music that suggest different moods. Ask students to listen to the pieces and imagine two people talking. They should then think about:
  – Who is talking?
  – What are they talking about?
  – What is their mood?
  – Is there a conflict?
  – Do they agree or disagree?
  – Is there a change of topic/feelings?
- Before playing an extract, announce the number you have assigned to it.
- Stop after each extract and give students a minute to jot ideas down.
- Play all the pieces again in the same order with the same numbers announced.
- After each piece of music, give students one or two minutes to compare in pairs what situations, people and dialogues they imagined.
- Play the pieces again and ask students to jot down what people in their imagined situations may be saying.
- Ask pairs to compare notes and then choose one of the imagined dialogues and get prepared to perform it.

- Play the pieces again, and then ask pairs to perform their dialogues. The class guesses which music inspired the performers.

Students talk about a third person

As with speaking in role, students will also need prompts to talk about a third person.

Tell me my story!

Procedure

- Put students into small groups and ask them to decide about a story they would like to hear.
- What kind of story should it be? A fairy tale, an adventure story, a science fiction story, a romantic story, etc.
  – Who are the main characters?
  – What is the storyline?
  – What is the title?
- Ask students to draw an illustration related to this story on a sheet of A4 paper. Ask them to write the title on it, too.
- Ask two groups to exchange drawings. Give groups about five minutes to prepare to tell the story of the other group based on the drawing. All the students in a group must take part in the story-telling.
- Put the two groups that exchanged drawings together and ask them to tell each other the stories.
- Get different groups to exchange drawings two or three more times, and repeat the second and third steps each time.
- Ask original groups to discuss which story based on their drawing they liked the most. They may decide to give their drawing to that particular group.

Variations

- Instead of drawing, groups can write key words to prompt the story they would like to hear.
- You can use music to trigger students' imagination. Play some extracts for characters, the place and the problem.

Developing writing

We often ask students to write something similar to what they have read and/or we give them a scenario and some prompts on what to write about and what language to use. A lot of what has been said about developing speaking applies to developing writing, too. Creative speaking activities can often be run as creative writing activities and/or followed up by a

writing activity. You need to make sure, however, that your students are familiar with the genre you want them to write, e.g. they are familiar with letter formats if you want them to write a letter.

Telltale objects

Students write a letter to themselves in the role of the object they identified with.

Role-cards exchange

- Pairs describe a scenario in which someone returns an object to a shop:
  - What is the object and what is wrong with it?
  - When and where was it bought?
  - What does the customer want?
- Pairs exchange scenarios and write an email/letter of complaint using the prompts.
- Pairs read each other's letters and comment on them/reply to them.

Change of feelings scenarios

Instant messaging like real or simulated online chats/text messages work best. If students cannot do the real thing, they can send a sheet of paper back and forth.

Find a scenario that works for instant messages, e.g. making an arrangement or appointment or discussing what happened at school. Engage each student in two chats at a time to keep them busy.

Find my picture home!

Students write about their life in the picture. This can be done as diary entries, blog/Facebook posts or tweets. Then they match each other's texts to the pictures.

Musical dialogues

Ask students to write up their dialogue with stage instructions and give it to another pair to perform it. They could also write a letter as one of the characters to the other character in the dialogue.

Tell me my story!

Students write the stories instead of telling them.

Developing listening and reading

When we want our students to practise their receptive skills, we want some evidence of what they understand and how they interpret what they have read or heard. We usually get this evidence through comprehension questions, like open-ended questions, true or false questions, completion, ordering, or multiple-choice exercises.

Comprehension tasks fall into two main categories:

- **Hard listening/reading tasks**
  These allow for one interpretation and one correct answer. If you misinterpret this kind of factual text in real life, you are in trouble. You miss the bus or sign a contract that goes against your interests.

- **Soft listening/reading tasks**
  These allow for many interpretations. They rely on the reader's/listener's imagination and personal judgement. How you imagine a character in a story and what your opinion is of their actions does not fall into the categories of right or wrong. This open-endedness, which establishes a very intimate, personal relationship between the reader/listener and the text, is an essential element of stories.

Our comprehension tasks need to reflect the nature of the different texts. Both text types may allow for some learner creativity, but more so with the soft ones.

Hard listening/reading tasks

Pre-reading/listening questions and predictions

Ask students to predict information they will get from a text, or get them to write questions they would like to be answered. Discuss these after the listening/reading.

Comprehension exercises from the students

Procedure

- Divide the class into two groups. Ask groups to read/listen to different texts, parts of the same text, or ask them to focus on different aspects of the same text. Ask them to make comprehension exercises for each other. It also works if they get the same text and the two groups need to make two different types of exercise. It is also possible to ask students to make a summary of the text and make some factual mistakes in it, which another student will have to find and correct.
- In different groups they swap and do each other's exercises.
- They then get the solutions for the tasks they have done and check them.
- Those who have done each other's exercises discuss questions and solutions in pairs or groups.
- Discuss any issues in plenary.

Soft listening/reading tasks

These tasks invite students to share how they imagine or interpret the text. They can also be invited to elaborate on details or influence the developments in a story.

- Ask students to draw an illustration or a cartoon strip after listening to or reading a story. Then get them to compare with each other. It is also possible to ask them to make some mistakes with the illustrations, which other students then need to find.

- Stop the recording or students' reading at a point where a description of a character, their feelings or a scene can logically fit. Ask students to imagine it and write it down or talk about it in groups or pairs.

- Stop the recording or students' reading at a point where there is a decisive moment in the story. (If they are reading, make sure you ask them before they start reading to cover the part of the text you don't want them to read.) Get them to imagine what happens next and share it through talking, mime, drama or drawing. Then they compare these with what really happens. If you tell them the story orally, you can stop at any point and ask them to decide how the story goes on and continue the story the way students suggest. If there is more than one suggestion, take a vote or you can make the rule that you always take the first suggestion you get.

- Give the descriptions of the main characters in a story to different groups of students. Ask them to make a drawing of their character. Then groups swap drawings and describe the character based on the drawing. Groups return the drawings with the descriptions they wrote on them. Groups compare the description the other group made with the original description, and they give each other feedback.

- Ask students to choose pieces of music to represent different characters in a story. Ask them to play the pieces and explain their choices.

- Ask students to sit facing each other as you play a dialogue/story with several different emotions/events. Get them to show each other through gestures and facial expressions how people in the story feel. Then discuss.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen a number of more creative alternatives to typical, everyday classroom exercises and procedures. They included activities in which students create exercises and games for each other that they normally get ready-made in books or from their teachers. With others, students have a chance to tap into their own experience and imagination, reflect on their own life, act in roles, animate objects or use their artistic, dramatic and musical skills. The beauty of engaging our learners in a creative process instead of keeping them in a more passive and receptive role is that this decision automatically takes care of a lot of other considerations such as:

- How is the topic/text going to be relevant and motivating?

- How am I going to keep my learners busy?

- How are the learners going to be able to rely on their other skills and knowledge?

- How are they going to use the language instrumentally, i.e. to achieve an aim?

- How are the learners going to derive pleasure from what they have done and achieved?

Through their creativity and the freedom creative thinking gives to them, students get involved more deeply and in more ways than with activities that do not call for the use of their creativity. The result of their work is more characteristic of them as individuals and expresses more who they are and where they are at the moment. Taken together, this tends to lead to a richer, more memorable, more enjoyable and more motivational learning experience.

References

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8

Fostering and building upon oral creativity in the EFL classroom

Jürgen Kurtz

Introduction

Creativity is a fascinating phenomenon. We typically view it in terms of thinking outside the box, in this way generating partly unexpected, unconventional, or novel ideas. 'Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun' (Mary Lou Cook, attrib.). When we think of it in this way, we are inclined to associate it with a high degree of mental agility, flexibility and, ultimately perhaps, exceptional intelligence. So when we think of creativity as an outstanding product or an expressive outcome, we commonly think of great pieces of art, literature, drama or music. This tends to make us consider creativity as a special, very personal gift, and many of us admire creative people for their talent and their extraordinary achievements. In academia, this kind of creativity has been referred to as big 'C' creativity. However, we can also observe a lot of creative processes and acts in everyday life. These are less spectacular, but nevertheless equally remarkable instances of creative thought, expression, and behaviour, referred to as little 'c' creativity in scholarly discussions (Sawyer, 2012).

Everyday cooking is a good example of creativity with a little c. We often start off with an idea or immediate desire, and proceed with a memorised recipe or written script we find in a cookery book. But sometimes we suddenly decide, or are forced to decide, to change or add a few ingredients, and this can result in a unique, tasty meal (in the best case). But usually, we are not aware of the creative character or potential of daily cooking and all the other things we do in daily life.

When we learn a foreign language, we also engage in multiple instances of little 'c' creativity. I remember little Jenny, aged ten, who tried to ask for the rubbish bin in one of my primary EFL classes in Germany a few years ago. 'Herr Kurtz, where is the dirty basket?' she said in a shaky, uncertain voice. This was a pretty clever guess, because she managed to get her message across, stretching her word knowledge to its limits. An equally remarkable example of little 'c'

communicative creativity and oral spontaneity in foreign language learning is this utterance by Lucy, aged 13, who tried to express the notion of 'living upstairs' in the target language, coming up with 'In our house, my grandparents live over me'.

I would argue that this kind of improvised speaking or spontaneous communicative creativity in performance is vital to target language development and growth, mainly because of its inherent potential for 'failing forward'. Good teachers are alert to and pay close attention to all kinds of little 'c' communicative creativity occurring in class and are prepared to respond adequately, on the spur of the moment. However, in order to enhance target language communicative competence in systematic ways, foreign language teachers also need to be able to create windows of opportunity for flexible, creative, and partially learner-regulated and improvised target language use on a regular basis. Waiting for little 'c' communicative creativity and oral spontaneity to emerge in the EFL classroom is simply not effective and efficient enough, given the limited amount of class time and the number of learners in a typical class. Ultimately, teachers should have the necessary know-how to design attractive learning environments that can help nurture little 'c' oral creativity in EFL classroom interaction.

This chapter begins by briefly looking at typical patterns of interaction in EFL classrooms worldwide and at potential threats to creativity in language education in the current age of competency-based standards, testing and outcome-oriented accountability, underlining the pressing need for flexible, more process-sensitive instruction. Placing strong emphasis on communication as participation and on learning as transformation of participatory competency and skill, it presents a small selection of task-driven, learner-centred communicative activities designed to engage foreign language learners in increasingly self-regulated oral interaction in the target language. The activities are henceforth referred to as 'improvisations'.

Oral interaction in EFL classrooms around the globe

In many foreign language classrooms worldwide, there is often very little room for learners to voice their own thoughts and ideas and, furthermore, experiment with the target language in meaningful contexts and ways. As a considerable body of research shows, instruction in many EFL classrooms is usually largely pre-planned and scripted, predominantly organised in terms of (teacher) initiation, (learner) response and (teacher) feedback sequences (IRF). More generally speaking, foreign language instruction is all too often viewed in terms of implementing a carefully structured curriculum, attending to a particular approach or methodology, following a specific procedure, actuating a fixed lesson plan, and interacting in pre-arranged, often teacher-led ways. However, as already mentioned above, in contexts like these there is usually very little communicative space for learners to participate spontaneously – from peripheral to central – in an experimental, experiential and improvised manner (Legutke and Thomas, 1999).

Current education reforms initiated and implemented in many countries in recent years seem to exacerbate this problem by placing primary emphasis on the ability to perform to fine-graded standards of competency and skill. Imagination, creativity and flexibility are chiefly viewed from this restrictive perspective. Moreover, creativity is typically thought of as an individual process or product, not as a co-operative endeavour. In general, current reform initiatives focus much more on accelerating measurable individual progress in discrete areas of language learning than on fostering mental agility, communicative flexibility, resourceful spontaneity and a commitment to lifelong foreign language learning.

Looking at recent education reforms in the United States, Berliner (2012) cautions against placing too many expectations on standards-based reforms, on thinning down school curricula, and ultimately, on conceptualising education in terms of testing and measurable outcome primarily. In his view, reducing education to competency-based instruction and the demonstration of knowledge and skills in centralised performance tests may eventually have some undesirable backwash effects. Sooner or later, instructors might adopt a 'teaching to the test mentality' which in turn could contribute to a classroom learning atmosphere overshadowed by fear of failure and speaking inhibitions among learners. By analogy to the English word 'suicide', Berliner (2012) warns against 'creaticide by design' in this context.

Avoiding 'creaticide by design' in the EFL classroom

In current international second language acquisition (SLA) and TEFL research, there is growing evidence that thinking of classroom instruction and interaction in terms of a dynamic interplay of routine and novelty, planning and improvisation, and predictability and unpredictability appears to be highly important for promoting creative and flexible language use and, ultimately, for successful learning and teaching (van Lier, 2007). However, conceiving of learning and teaching in terms of disciplined improvisational practice is by no means new. Johann Friedrich Herbart (1964) referred to this fundamental issue as pedagogical tact or tactfulness. In his inaugural lecture at Göttingen University, he originally framed learning in schools in terms of cultivating the voice of the learner, placing strong emphasis on teaching as theory-informed, quick-witted professional decision-making in the here-and-now of the classroom. Viewed from this perspective, promoting learner-centred, spontaneous interactional flexibility within a supportive, thoroughly planned, but not entirely scripted learning environment is a key to orchestrating lively and fruitful EFL classroom interaction. In sum, it appears to be important that teachers distance themselves from what Sawyer (2001) refers to as educational 'script-think'. Underhill and Maley (2012) and Underhill (2014) address this issue in terms of 'expecting the unexpected' in class.

Fostering little 'c' oral creativity through improvisational practice

In order to avoid educational 'script-think' and, ultimately, 'creaticide by design', teachers need to question their individual beliefs about, and their role in, developing oral proficiency in the EFL classroom. It is essential that they reflect upon their personal repertoire of teaching strategies and techniques, including the ways they use EFL or ESL textbooks and materials in class. Last but not least, they have to be honest with themselves about their own level of English proficiency and, if they feel it is necessary, they need to invest extra time to improve it. They should then consider the following, very broad guidelines for orchestrating flexible, instantaneous interaction in class.

Listening carefully to what learners say is of utmost importance to fostering learning. This may sound obvious, but is complex and demanding, because teaching a foreign language encompasses paying attention to meaning (what do learners want to say?) and form (how do they say it?) simultaneously. In many classrooms around the globe, teachers seem to focus overmuch on forms, especially on formal mistakes or errors in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. Tolerance of error is usually low. In addition, teachers frequently do not make it clear whether their focus of attention is on formal aspects of language or on the messages learners are trying to convey. In consequence, learners are very hesitant to respond to questions related to what they did over the weekend, if teachers react only to the linguistic mistakes and errors they produce, disregarding the content of the message. In the long run, interactional routines like these can severely hinder learning because they undermine learners' willingness to take risks and speak spontaneously and freely.

Being tactful means acting mindfully with learners and respecting their dignity. Viewing learners as deficient communicators who produce lots of errors when given the opportunity to speak freely is a highly questionable instructional approach. Rather, learners should be seen as increasingly successful and effective communicators who can participate productively in many different ways in the classroom, if confronted with 'do-able demands', that is, with meaningful questions, cues, tasks and activities which are just within their reach (Underhill and Scrivener, 2012; Scrivener, 2014).

Nevertheless, the importance of IRF sequences is not to be underestimated in this context. Good questions and cues are those that facilitate learning, including simple display questions, but these should only be used when appropriate and necessary, and certainly not exclusively. Ultimately, the traditional IRF pattern of interaction remains as an important part of promoting learning, depending on the specific goals and objectives to be attained (Kirchhoff and Klippel, 2013).

In general, it does not make sense to think of successful instruction in terms of an 'either-or logic'. Teaching needs to be approached in terms of a 'more-or-less logic', depending on the specific instructional contexts, goals and learners. This calls for tact or intuitive tactfulness which cannot be planned in advance. After all, teachers can only set conditions for learning to happen, and – in the actual teaching process – modify these settings flexibly, simply because learners do not always learn what they are taught.

Viewed from this perspective, lesson planning and improvisation are equally central to instruction. It is perfectly clear that teachers cannot and should not be expected to fully anticipate what is going to happen in a lesson. Thus, unanticipated and sometimes erroneous learner utterances are not to be viewed as an undesirable result of poor planning in the first place. Rather, they should be welcomed as valuable learning opportunities. We do not learn from getting things right all the time; it is mistakes which fuel learning.

In sum, in order to promote oral proficiency in the target language, it is essential to create attractive environments for more adventurous, partly self-regulated classroom interaction within an error-tolerant, but not error-insensitive classroom setting. Making good use of improvisations is of course only one of many teaching options, as this publication shows.

Improvisations in the EFL classroom

Improvisations are task-driven opportunities for flexible communicative interaction in the classroom, primarily designed to promote spontaneous, increasingly complex, fluent, accurate and contextually appropriate language use between learners. The overall focus is on promoting experimental oral practice in carefully planned, but partially unpredictable situations in which learners are allowed and encouraged to get their individual ideas and messages across in many different ways, both verbally and non-verbally, activating and stretching their entire communicative repertoire.

As communicative journeys into the unknown, improvisations offer EFL learners a carefully designed communicative framework for context- and culture-sensitive talk-in-interaction. In this way, they are intended to bring together two fundamental aspects of natural face-to-face exchanges outside of the classroom:

- the predictability of everyday communicative events and social scripts as well as behavioural patterns and routines
- the unpredictability of spontaneous ideas and thematic shifts within a given socio-communicative framework.

However, in order to enhance target language learning and learning awareness systematically, improvisations consist of two parts: an improvisational framework for increasingly self-directed peer-to-peer communication, followed by teacher-guided or teacher-supported whole-class or group reflection, conducted in the target language as well. Here, teachers ought to avoid focusing primarily on learners' communicative problems and target language deficits. Since nothing succeeds like success, enhancing and adjusting learners' communicative contributions have to go hand in hand. This does not mean that explicit error treatment (attention to language form) is to be

neglected, but it needs to be integrated in a way that is not threatening the learners' willingness to speak. If, and only if, the reflective part of an improvisation is approached and conducted this way, it can serve as a fruitful basis for subsequent enactments, reflections and, ultimately, participatory empowerment in the target language.

All in all, improvisations are complex learning activities that seek to combine experientially grounded learner action with teacher-guided communicative reflection in a cyclical, rather than a linear way. The following diagram sums up the underlying instructional concept:

Next improvised action (focus on communicative interaction on a slightly higher level of target language fluency, complexity, accuracy and appropriateness)

Reflection (focus on enriching and/or adjusting language and necessary world knowledge in terms of promoting culture-sensitive learning; systematic error treatment and language work if necessary)

Improvised action (focus on partly scripted and unscripted, spontaneous meaning-making and intention-reading in the target language)

The complex architecture of an improvisation requires teachers to adopt different roles in the EFL classroom, ranging from role model ('the sage on the stage') to facilitator ('the guide on the side'). In general, good communicative timing is essential throughout the whole instructional process.

A few sample improvisations

Geared towards intermediate, upper-intermediate, and more advanced learners, the interactional formats presented in the following were examined thoroughly in terms of goal-specific design and potential effects, but due to the highly contextualised nature of the research project in which they were developed and evaluated in Germany, they should not be approached and misinterpreted as rigid procedural scripts or recipes for instruction. Rather, they should be seen as flexible instructional frameworks or classroom scenarios that need to be 'brought to life' by adapting them to the specific social and cultural contexts in which teachers wish to use them.

Each of the exemplary improvisations outlined below is designed to provide learners with a flexible, situated dialogical framework that consists of:

■ a brief opening sequence (a scripted opening part or lead-in intended to break the ice and to reduce speaking inhibitions among learners)

■ an unscripted middle part with a few communicative cues or incentives that leave enough space for a wide range of spontaneous ideas, interpretations and learner-learner exchanges, based on prior knowledge and skill

■ in contrast to the traditional role plays of the early 1970s, a communicative 'emergency exit' sequence (a scripted final part with which the improvised dialogue can be brought to an end once the participants feel that they cannot or do not want to go any further).

The suggested situational contexts bear resemblance to real-world settings and communicative encounters. They vary in terms of (imagined) location, number of participants involved, level of thematic and linguistic challenge, and, last but not least, creative demand. Roughly arranged in terms of required/targeted proficiency level (as outlined in the *Common European Framework for Languages*; see: Council of Europe 2011), they range from A1/A2 (beginning) to B2/C1 (upper-intermediate and advanced), but, in principle, teachers can adapt each of the suggested activities to the specific needs and interests of their learners as well as to the special communicative goals and objectives sought to be attained.

London Zoo, Regent's Park, London, UK

Level

■ Beginning EFL learners, proficiency levels A1/A2.

Preparation

This is for a group of two learners. The learners' roles need to be defined or negotiated beforehand.

Materials

■ You can download materials about London Zoo from:
  www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo

Procedure

■ Opening sequence (scripted and needs to be introduced, contextualised and practised in advance).

> L1: I'm so excited about our school visit to the London Zoo next week.
>
> L2: Me too! I bet there's a lot to see and learn.
>
> L1: My mum says the zoo has over 700 different kinds of animals.
>
> L2: I hope they have lions and tigers, too.

■ Middle sequence (unscripted and spontaneous, based on communicative cues drawn from a box).

> What animals do you hope to see there?
>
> Do you think we can touch and stroke the tiger cubs?
>
> I'd love to feed the [monkeys] and [giraffes]. What do they eat?
>
> I'd like to be a junior zoo keeper for a day. My favourite animals are [elephants] …
>
> What do you think the Friendly Spider Programme is all about?
>
> I would like to take some pictures, but I don't have a camera …

■ Exit sequence (scripted, memorised through repeated practice).

> L1: Well, *OK then, I've got to go* home now. I'm late already. See you tomorrow?
>
> L2: See you tomorrow. Take care.

La Jolla Shores, San Diego, California, USA

Level

■ Intermediate EFL learners, proficiency levels A2/B1.

Preparation

This is a group activity for up to four learners. The learners' roles need to be defined or negotiated beforehand.

Materials

Recommended internet search for: 'dog sitters San Diego', 'dog training San Diego', 'dog day-care centers San Diego', 'The Original Dog Beach San Diego'.

Procedure

■ Opening sequence (scripted, needs to be contextualised and practised in advance).

> L1: Let's go to the beach tomorrow. The weather report says it's going to be very sunny and warm.
>
> L2: Great idea! Where to?
>
> L3: Del Mar beach is nice. I love it. Nice waves over there.
>
> L4: Too many surfers. What about La Jolla Shores?
>
> L1: Cool, but lots of tourists. If we get up early we should find plenty of space for all of us.
>
> L2: Can I take Murphy with me?
>
> L4: I don't know. Let's ask Mom or Dad if we can take him with us.
>
> L3: That's not necessary. We were there a few weeks ago. Dogs are definitely not permitted.
>
> L2: So what do I do with Murphy? I can't leave him alone at home all day.

■ Middle sequence (unscripted and spontaneous, based on communicative cues drawn from a box).

> Why not? Give him a bone and leave him in the dog kennel in the garden.
>
> Leave Murphy in the car, air-conditioning on, while we are on the beach.
>
> Arrange for a dog sitter (quite expensive).
>
> Murphy jumps up on every person he meets; one-day dog training.
>
> Drop Murphy off for dog day-care (trim nails, clean ears, shampoo fur, etc.).
>
> Find a nice dog beach in the area.

■ Exit sequence (scripted, memorised through repeated practice).

> Oh look, there's Mrs Miller from next door. She's just coming back from walking Pluto. He is such a nice dog. Let's ask her if she can take Murphy tomorrow.

Flinders Street Station, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Level

■ Intermediate to upper-intermediate EFL learners, proficiency levels B1/B2.

Preparation

This is a pair-work activity for two learners in role. The learners' roles need to be defined or negotiated beforehand.

Materials

■ You can find visuals and other context-related materials at: http://ptv.vic.gov.au and www.melbourne.vic.gov.au

Procedure

■ Opening sequence (scripted, to be contextualised and practised in advance, V = visitor; R = resident).

> V: Excuse me – is this the tram to catch to Flemington Road?
>
> R: No, Glen Huntly Road, you want a 19 or a 64.
>
> V: Where do they go from?
>
> R: Well, the 19 stops right here, but for Flemington you must change to the 59 at Elizabeth Street.
>
> V: OK, what about the other one you mentioned?
>
> R: The 64? It doesn't stop here. Walk up to Bourke Street right around the corner.
>
> V: Thank you, but I think I better wait for the 19 right here.
>
> R: OK. The 19 runs every ten minutes. You just missed it. Are you new in town or just visiting?

■ Middle sequence (unscripted and spontaneous, based on communicative cues drawn from a box).

> V: I'm a backpacker from Germany. I have only just arrived and …
>
> V: I'm a travel writer and I'm looking for some genuine Aussie food …
>
> V: I'm just visiting family, but they don't know I'm coming …
>
> V: Yes, I'm new here. I'm trying to find [a job; love …]
>
> V: I'm a professional photographer travelling around the world …
>
> V: I'm just staying a few days. Do you know if I can use cash to pay for the tram?
>
> V: I won't be staying long. Does Worldwide Bank still have an office on Flemington?

- Exit sequence (scripted, memorised through repeated practice).

  Either:

  > R: This is my tram. Sorry, I got to hop on now. Nice talking to you. Enjoy your stay. Bye.
  >
  > V: Many thanks again.
  >
  > R: No worries.

  Or:

  > V: Look, the tram behind this one is a 37. Thank you very much again. Nice talking to you.
  >
  > R: No worries.

Pier 21 National Immigration Museum, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Level

- Upper-intermediate to advanced.

Preparation

This is a pair work activity for two learners in role. The learners' roles need to be defined or negotiated beforehand.

Materials

- You can download context related materials from: www.pier21.ca

Procedure

- Opening sequence (scripted, to be contextualised and practised in advance).

  > L1: What a great exhibit, L2 [name; real or imaginary]. Take a look at this poster. It says 'It was hard to leave our friends, but it was impossible to stay'. These must have been very difficult times, forcing people to leave their country, their loved ones, everything they knew, and a home they might never see again.
  >
  > L2: Waiting here to be let in must have been equally difficult: 'People were talking in different languages, hands and arms gesturing wildly as they tried to make themselves understood', this woman writes.

- Middle sequence (unscripted and spontaneous, based on communicative cues drawn from a box).

> This person says they were given cornflakes to eat when they came here. Because of this, some felt unwelcome. They believed the idea of eating corn was ridiculous – to them it was cattle feed, or food for chickens. What do you think of this?
>
> This poster is about language problems: 'How grateful we were for those kind souls who, speaking our language, were on hand to ease complete strangers through the formalities of officialdom.' What languages do you speak?
>
> Just imagine we were forced to emigrate. What would make you leave Germany forever? [push and pull factors?]
>
> Canada is a huge country. Where would you go to live? In one of the big cities, perhaps?
>
> How do you think immigration has shaped Canada?
>
> Many people say that Canada is a nation of immigrants. What about Germany today?

■ Exit sequence (scripted, memorised through repeated practice).

> L1: I'm so glad that I'm not forced to emigrate and leave everything behind.
>
> L2: Yes, but the good thing is, you could go, if you really wanted to. Let's find out more about immigration to Canada today and talk about all this later again.

Conclusion

Empowering foreign language learners to communicate increasingly freely takes time and patience. As case-study research carried out in various EFL classrooms in Germany indicates (Kurtz, 2011), learners are more likely to participate actively, creatively and autonomously, if teachers offer appealing communicative scenarios or frameworks for partly self-directed target language use, and, furthermore, orchestrate oral classroom interaction tactfully, as it emerges. This entails being prepared for and accepting errors and mistakes as a natural part of the overall learning process. Interrupting and explicitly correcting learners while they are trying to get a message across will almost certainly reduce their willingness to improvise and take communicative risks.

The exemplary improvisational activities presented in this chapter are intended to function as stepping stones towards establishing a learning culture in the EFL classroom which is less mechanical, less scripted and less teacher-dominated. Ultimately, however, creativity will only flourish if teachers break old patterns and embrace spontaneity and unpredictability as essential parts of everyday classroom interaction.

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9

Old wine in new bottles: solving language teaching problems creatively

Kathleen M Bailey and Anita Krishnan

Introduction

The editors of this volume shared with us the following definition of creativity: 'the ability to produce something new from imaginative skill, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form.' They also note 'as applied to education, we may see this broadly as the developing of creativity in teachers, and the developing of their skills in developing the creativity of learners.'

But as teachers, we do not think that creativity should be limited to 'a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form.' Indeed, the possibility that creativity can be manifested in 'a new solution to a problem' is the aspect of creativity which is most closely related to the daily work of teachers. From our perspective, creativity can also involve using existing materials in novel ways to address problems in language teaching. In fact, we agree with Andreasen (2014) that 'the essence of creativity is making connections and solving puzzles.'

This chapter documents a number of creative uses of images and objects by English language teachers who have worked in under-resourced areas. We gathered these ideas from email correspondence with teachers working in several different countries around the world. We describe creative activities and tools that these teachers have developed, working entirely with free or very inexpensive materials.

We begin by summarising some information about Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. We use that framework to explore several low-cost strategies that English language teachers use to generate creative new solutions to problems. We will provide examples of how teachers have helped to prepare their own students to be creative learners and users of English.

Brief background

The concept of multiple intelligences has been used widely in general education, and in recent years it has been applied in language education as well (Puchta and Rinvolucri, 2005). Multiple intelligence theory, in essence, is the idea that everyone has various kinds of intelligence, and that these intelligences influence the ways in which we learn. The theory posits eight types of intelligence (see, e.g. Armstrong, 2000; Gardner, 1983, 1999, 2011):

- **visual-spatial intelligence**
  The ability to create visual images of a project or idea, and to act on such visualisation
- **bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence**
  Using one's own body for expression or to solve problems
- **musical-rhythmic intelligence**
  The ability to perform musically or to compose music, to think in musical patterns, or to see and hear musical patterns and manipulate them
- **verbal-linguistic intelligence**
  The use of language; the ability to read, write, or talk to others
- **logical-mathematical intelligence**
  Using numbers, understanding patterns, and exhibiting logical reasoning skills
- **naturalist intelligence**
  Being in tune with nature; being interested in living things; understanding features of the natural world
- **interpersonal intelligence**
  Sensitivity towards others; the ability to work well with other people, understand others, and assume leadership roles
- **intrapersonal intelligence**
  Being self-aware; understanding personal wants and abilities, and acting according to this knowledge (Gardner, 1983, 1999).

Driscoll and Nagel (2010) cite the work of Armstrong (2000), who claimed that people possess all of the multiple intelligences and that these intelligences can work together to promote learning. We believe that while learners may have varying levels of ability in the different intelligences, most people have the potential to develop each one further.

Teachers who are aware of, and intentionally work with, these kinds of intelligences can draw upon students' existing strengths. While it can be assumed that most activities in language classes involve verbal-linguistic intelligence, teachers can help learners develop their other intelligences as well. In this chapter, several of the creative ideas teachers shared with us exemplify activities or resources that cater to various intelligences, in order to enhance learning.

Practical suggestions from teachers

In this section we will share several creative ideas we gathered from experienced English language teachers who have worked in under-resourced contexts around the world. Much of their creativity involved generating innovative solutions to problems, particularly the problem of having limited materials. The teachers gave us permission to share their ideas in this chapter.

Creating postcards

By Kait Decker

Level

Secondary school students, lower-level learners.

Intelligences

Visual-spatial and verbal-linguistic intelligences.

Materials

Paper, colour pencils/markers, and tourism brochures (or other sources of information about the local area).

Procedure

- Have your students read the brochure information about the local area and copy down different parts of the text.
- Ask them to each create a postcard with the information by drawing a picture to accompany the written text.
- Have students share their postcards either with a partner, a group, or with the whole class.

Variation

If you are working with more proficient learners, you can adapt the activity so that students have to write their own original texts rather than copying them from brochures.

To give the activity a real-life context, you can also match your class with another English class (either from your school or another school), and have students from the different classes exchange postcards like pen-pals.

Name placards

By Kait Decker

Level

Secondary school students.

Intelligence

Visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic and bodily-kinaesthetic intelligences, with elements of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences.

Materials

Paper and colour pencils/markers.

Procedure

- Ask your students to make signs with their names on them.
- Instruct students to illustrate the signs with drawings that represent information about themselves.
- Have students present their placards to their classmates by describing their drawings and sharing information about themselves.
- Encourage students to be as creative as possible with both the writing and illustrating steps.

Variation

Instead of drawing, students can cut out and paste images from magazines or brochures on their name placards.

Guided drawing

By Kait Decker

Level

Secondary school students/adults.

Intelligence

Visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, and bodily-kinaesthetic intelligences; the variation adds an interpersonal element.

Materials

Paper and a writing instrument (e.g. pencil, pen, marker).

Procedure

- Draw an image constructed of simple geometric shapes (e.g. a house consisting of a large square, two smaller squares for windows, a rectangle for the door, a triangle for the roof).
- Describe the image to your students and ask them to listen to your directions and to attempt to recreate the image.
- Show students the original drawing and ask them to compare the pictures they have created with it.
- Ask students to draw their own simple figure using similar geometric forms.
- Put students into pairs and have them take turns describing to their classmate how to draw their particular image.

Variation

Once students are creating and describing their own images in partners (steps four and five), you can vary this activity by using 'tango seating'. In this seating arrangement, paired students sit side-by-side facing opposite directions, so that their right shoulders are nearly touching. Tango seating is a useful variation because when the two learners can neither see each other nor see the original drawing, they are forced to express themselves verbally, to produce the target language, and to listen closely to their partners' descriptions.

Grocery store flyers

By Kait Decker

Level

Secondary school students.

Intelligence

Bodily-kinaesthetic, mathematical-logical, verbal-linguistic, and interpersonal intelligences.

Materials

Paper (construction paper, when available), scissors, glue, colour pencils/markers and grocery store flyers.

Procedure

- Ask your students to look through grocery store flyers and to cut out pictures of food items.
- Have them paste the cut-out pictures on a sheet of paper.
- Instruct students to make up their own prices for each item. You can allow students to arrange the images into categories if they wish (e.g. dairy products, meat, vegetables, fruit).
- Ask your students to invent original names for their stores, and to write the names decoratively on their flyers.

Variations

Students can use these flyers to enact role plays in English in which some students play the role of shopkeeper while others act as customers.

The materials created from this activity help students engage in target language practice and can be used to focus on different features of English. For example, you can use this activity to draw students' attention to grammar points (e.g. count and non-count nouns); for vocabulary practice (the names of foods); to practise mathematical functions and numbers; to teach common phrases used while grocery shopping.

Other kinds of two-dimensional images that can be used creatively in language teaching include maps, timelines, mind maps, charts and graphs. In addition to working with existing resources like these, students can create their own graphic organisers. For instance, students can draw timelines representing important events in their own lives or the history of their country. These timelines can be illustrated with drawings or photographs or cut-outs from old magazines.

Simple objects can also be used productively in language lessons to activate students' various intelligences. Household items or available school supplies (pencils, paperclips, scissors, etc.) can be used creatively to generate language practice for vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation lessons, as illustrated below. None of these activities require expensive materials.

Guess the item

By Keri-Ann Moore

Level

Beginner level, including children.

Intelligence

Bodily-kinaesthetic, verbal-linguistic, and visual-spatial intelligences; the variation may activate naturalist intelligence.

Materials

A box (or any kind of large container), and several household items or school supplies that are available locally.

Procedure

- Collect several items and place them in the box. Show your students all of the items before turning away from them to remove one item from the box.
- Show your students the contents of the box once again and ask them to guess the missing item.
- Let the students lead the activity by giving each one a turn to remove an item and having the other students guess the missing item.

Variation

You can fill the box with rocks, shells, leaves, twigs, feathers and other natural items from the surrounding environment.

This simple game focuses the students' attention and provides an engaging way to reinforce vocabulary learning. Items should be selected based on the target vocabulary aims you have for your students. For example, these items could include familiar foods such as fruits or vegetables, or other common items like combs, brushes, pencils, keys or spoons.

Pronunciation awareness raising

By Aya Matsuda

Level

This procedure is probably best used with teenagers and adults rather than children.

Intelligence

Bodily-kinaesthetic and verbal-linguistic intelligences.

Materials

Flat lollipops, one per student.

Procedure

- Have the students say words with different vowel sounds while the lollipops are in their mouths.
- Have the students describe the tongue movement involved in producing each vowel.

Variations

For lower-level learners, students can mark tongue placement on a vowel chart instead of describing the tongue movements verbally. If lollipops are not available, you can use spoons or tongue depressors.

The use of lollipops in this activity helps learners understand the somewhat abstract concept of tongue placement in English production in a more concrete and physical way.

Total physical response (TPR) with paper shapes

By Kathi Bailey

Level

Any age; any level.

Intelligence

Visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences.

Materials

Colour paper, scissors; variations require building blocks or several sets of playing cards.

Procedure

- Cut out basic geometric shapes (squares, circles, triangles, rectangles) of varying sizes from the colour paper.
- Distribute a set of shapes to each student.
- Give your students instructions like these: 'Put the small red circle on top of the large blue square. Put the large green triangle under the small red circle.' (You can make your instructions as simple or complicated as you would like, depending on the level of students.)

Variations

You can do a similar activity using either a set of building blocks or by stacking playing cards in a particular sequence. If you use playing cards, for example, start by giving each student just one suit (such as clubs). If there are desks or tables, you can give commands such as 'Put the three on the desk. Put the seven to the right of the three. Put the two between the seven and the three.'

These TPR activities provide good practice with numbers, prepositions and directions. In addition, students get listening practice while simultaneously handling objects, which can facilitate learning and memory of the target language.

If colour paper is not readily available, you can substitute plain white paper by simply eliminating the colour from the commands. If paper is not an available resource, you can use local objects, such as leaves, seedpods or shells. In fact, teachers can use any materials that are locally available for this activity. Using Cuisenaire rods, from the silent way method, is also an option for teachers who have access to them.

Games are yet another creative way to engage learners in memorable and motivational activities in the language classroom. The following games all use inexpensive or free items in a fun and engaging way, promoting communicative language use and evoking a range of intelligences in language learners.

Fluency relay

By Doug Brown

Level

Most effective with teenagers and adults.

Intelligence

Visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, verbal-linguistic, interpersonal and logical-mathematical intelligences.

Materials

This game is most effectively played with building blocks, but playing cards can be used if blocks are not available.

Procedure

- Divide your students into groups of four.
- Assign each team an observer, a watcher, a communicator and a builder.
- Explain the roles to your students: the observer watches the entire process of the game and takes notes on the language being used, but cannot speak until the game is over; the watcher sees the teacher's original structure as it is being built and relays the information to the communicator; the communicator hears the watcher's description of the structure and tells it to the builder; the builder must attempt to recreate the teacher's structure from the information they have received.
- Build a structure out of blocks or arrange the playing cards in a particular pattern and only allow the watchers to see the structure. (You can hide it behind a book or cardboard folder, or simply build it while facing away from your students.)
- The watchers observe the original structure being built.
- The watchers describe the structure to the communicators.
- The communicators instruct the builders how to recreate the structures, without having seen the structure themselves.
- Following the communicator's instructions, the builder is charged with recreating the hidden structure from second-hand directions alone. (Note: throughout steps five to eight, the observers are watching and listening to the entire process, noting down the language and communication strategies used by their teammates.)
- When the game is over, the teams get to see the original structure that you built and discuss why their structure may differ from the model.

Variations

If the builder has questions for the communicator, it is up to the teacher to decide whether the students can speak to each other multiple times for clarification, or if they only have one chance to deliver the information.

The student teams must all have the same set of blocks as the teacher, as their goal is to replicate what the teacher has built by communicating with each other about the structure. The first team to correctly recreate the teacher's original structure wins the game.

This game is a more complex variation of the previous TPR activity. By adding in a co-operative-competitive element, the simple activity becomes more fun and challenging. Fluency relay also requires learners to produce different kinds of language in the classroom, based on the varied nature of each role, while simultaneously increasing their language awareness.

Personal event timeline

By Christina Baldarelli

Level

Adults/teenagers; appropriate for all levels.

Intelligence

Verbal-linguistic, visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal intelligences, and to a certain extent, mathematical-logical intelligence.

Materials

Strips of paper and pairs of dice.

Procedure

- Give each learner three slips of paper, instructing them to write the following two things on each one: a) the date of a significant event in their lives; b) a sentence describing the event.

- Divide the class into groups of three to five students each.

- In their groups, ask students to arrange the slips of paper chronologically on a flat surface.

- Have each student select an individual marker (any small item that is locally available, e.g. a shell or a rock) as their playing piece.

- One person in every group rolls the dice and moves their marker to the corresponding slip of paper, reading the date and event aloud.

- The student who wrote the chosen date and event is then required to speak for approximately one minute, describing the event and why it is significant to them.

Variations

Include a specific grammar focus (e.g. past tense), or require the student who had the previous turn to ask a question to the student who's just told a story.

A creative variation of this game is based on the ice-breaker 'two truths and a lie'. In this version, students must write two true statements and one false one. Christina felt that this added twist required the students to listen very carefully so they could decide which statement was false.

These kinds of small group activities are very effective in large classroom settings because they allow for all students to be engaged at the same time. Christina shared the following comment: 'This activity struck me as so fundamentally accessible for any student, and in repeating it for various classes in the years since, I still have yet to find a student who hasn't been engaged by it.'

Vocabulary flip cup

By Jeramie Heflin

Level

Teenagers/adults; suitable for all levels.

Intelligence

Visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, verbal-linguistic and interpersonal intelligences.

Materials

Cut-up bits of paper, paper or plastic cups, a long table or flat surface.

Procedure

- Write new vocabulary words on strips of paper.
- Cut up the words into individual letters.
- Put the cut-up letters of each word into different cups (each word gets its own cup).
- Line up the cups on opposite sides of the table.
- Divide students into two teams.
- In a relay style, the students compete against each other by trying to flip the cup over, then arranging the letters to form the vocabulary word. (Note: Students flip cups by placing them on the edge of the table and using their fingers to toss the cup up so that it lands upside-down on the table).
- Once a student has correctly arranged the letters, the next student on the team can begin their turn. The first team to finish wins the game.

Variations

This spelling game could also be expanded to having the students use the vocabulary in sentences. They could even challenge the other team to make up sentences using particular vocabulary items.

As English does not always have a strong phoneme-grapheme correspondence, spelling in English can be very challenging. This is particularly the case for students whose first language spelling system closely matches the sound system of that language. This game allows students who are not normally good at English spelling an opportunity to succeed, as their ability to spell English words may be scaffolded by seeing the cut-up letters.

When Christina Baldarelli was teaching in Kazakhstan, she had very limited access to teaching materials. Fortunately, the US Embassy sponsored an 'American corner' in the local library with a shelf that offered simple free materials for teachers to use. It often had several copies of *National Geographic.* Christina wrote, 'Since there were not many other resources available, I tried to make use of these in any way possible to break up the monotony of our mandated textbooks (or sometimes lack thereof!).' The following activity is based on this context.

Narrating photos

By Christina Baldarelli

Level

Low-level learners; variations make the activity suitable for any level.

Intelligence

Visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic and interpersonal intelligences.

Materials

Old magazines with photos (*National Geographic* works well), scissors, tape, paper.

Procedure

- Give each student a photo of a single person performing some kind of action. (You can either cut these out ahead of time or instruct students to find their own photos and cut them out during class.)
- Ask students to write three sentences describing the physical appearance of the person in the photo.
- Collect all of the photos and post them in the front of the room.
- Collect all of the students' descriptions, redistribute them and ask students to read the description they were given and to identify which photo matches the description.
- Instruct students to post the description alongside the appropriate photo on the wall.
- Have students return to the photo that they started with and read the description to confirm whether it was the one they had written originally.

Variations

For higher-level learners, you can creatively adapt this activity in a number of ways, by asking students to:

- generate three sentences describing the people in the pictures without using any colours
- make predictions about the photos
- write a haiku poem from the perspective of the person in the photo
- speculate about the people in the photo, asking them what challenges the person may face and what might contribute to these challenges.

In the original activity, Christina found that her students engaged in interesting discussions after matching the photos with their descriptions, depending on whether the matches were correct or incorrect. Regarding the creative variations, she commented, 'As the task became more abstract, the students showed creativity and stretched the assignment to connect with the issues that meant something to them, whether political, global or personal.'

Christina's lack of materials is a situation commonly faced by teachers working in under-resourced areas. Her use of photographs from old magazines influenced the culture of her school and attracted the attention of other teachers. The students began to use what they had done in her course in their other classes. For example, some of the people in the photos evolved into characters in the students' creative writing projects. Christina shared that the reaction of teachers in her department was rather surprising: 'My local colleagues were always keen to borrow the books I had lent their students, which they believed to be the source

of the characters that were surfacing in assignments or stories in their own classes. They were always disappointed that the only materials I had to share were my tattered photos. They may have been a bit suspicious that I had a cache of special literature somewhere that I was keeping secret and lending out to my favourite students.'

Christina's story demonstrates both her own and her students' creativity, and illustrates how visual images can be used in a variety of ways to promote language learning and target language use.

Teachers in under-resourced areas have also come up with numerous creative ways to solve problems. Some of these solutions have resulted in inexpensive tools that can be used and re-used in language lessons.

Mini-whiteboards

By Sarah Hoch and Keri-Ann Moore

Level
Any age/any level.

Intelligence
Intrapersonal, verbal-linguistic, visual-spatial and bodily-kinaesthetic intelligences.

Materials
White paper, plastic page-protectors, washable markers, damp cloth/paper towel or whiteboard erasers.

Procedure
- To create their whiteboards, instruct your students to insert a plain piece of paper into a plastic page-protector.
- Students can write on the whiteboards with the washable markers and use a damp towel or whiteboard eraser to erase the writing.

Variations
Mini-whiteboards are creative, inexpensive and versatile learning tools that are particularly effective in large classes. For instance, Sarah Hoch asked students to respond to a listening prompt by drawing a picture or writing a word or a sentence. She noted that these mini-whiteboards 'are especially useful for teenagers, who co-operate better in class if they are engaged in activities that involve competition rather than grammar exercises.'

There is no limit to how teachers can use these mini-whiteboards in their classrooms. By enabling students to respond individually, the use of mini-whiteboards allows each student to engage with the task at hand to the best of their abilities. In addition, teachers can also use mini-whiteboards for assessment purposes by monitoring students' answers in class and using them to gauge the individual progress of many students at once. Keri-Ann commented, 'Sometimes I ask a question and have each student write it and display their board so that I can know that each student is understanding. It also helps me as a teacher because I'm easily able to see when a majority of the class is not understanding something.'

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have described several examples of creative activities that teachers in under-resourced areas have shared with us. A parable in the New Testament advises people not to put new wine into old bottles, because doing so would break the bottles. We have flipped the saying around in our title to suggest that old or commonplace materials can indeed be used in novel ways, as the activities clearly show.

The suggestions we have described here, however, only provide a glimpse into the many ways teachers solve problems creatively, using simple images or objects that are readily available in their local environment. Countless activities, tools and games can be adapted to promote language learning, which allows students to tap into several kinds of intelligence at once.

There are many creative solutions to ongoing problems (e.g. limited materials, large classes) which we have not discussed in this chapter. Crafting activities around the arts is one way to achieve this goal. For example, music can be introduced into the classroom by having students write and sing their own songs, draw pictures to illustrate songs or act out different songs. These activities would obviously stimulate musical-rhythmic intelligence as well as several of the other intelligences discussed above.

Learners who are more dramatically inclined can be asked to create skits, improvisations and role plays, or to write and perform their own original plays. As Christina Baldarelli's use of haiku poems illustrates, creative writing is another way for teachers to elicit and assess their students' production of the target language. Other creative writing activities for language learners include writing autobiographies, poetry, biographies, short stories, and radio or television shows. As many of these activities encourage group work, they allow students to develop their communication and language skills within a realistic social context, thus engaging their interpersonal intelligence.

Some readers may feel that the activities described above are simply 'fun and games'. However, in our experience, and in the experience of the teachers who so graciously shared their ideas with us, there is a point to using images, objects and interactive games creatively in the language classroom. We believe that engaging learners in language practice that is simultaneously challenging and rewarding leads to communicative interaction and creates contexts that facilitate language acquisition. In addition, we believe that these activities activate and may even develop students' various intelligences. In the words of Mary Ann Christison, a recognised expert on multiple intelligences and language learning, 'Intelligences work together in complex ways. Because no intelligence exists by itself, language learning activities may be successful because they actively encourage the use of several intelligences' (1995–96: 10).

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10

A creative approach to language teaching: a way to recognise, encourage and appreciate students' contributions to language classes

Libor Stepanek

Introduction

This chapter offers a practical insight into a creative approach to language teaching, which has been developed as a reaction to recent changes in, and the growing demand for, creativity, flexibility and advanced communication skills in the current knowledge and communication society. These social and cultural changes influence all sectors of society and have an enormous impact on the area of education. As schools, universities and their language centres across the world adopt new pedagogies, methodologies and educational styles, the roles of both teachers and learners are beginning to change. Language learners tend to be less and less seen as mere objects of teaching. Increasingly, they become active partners in individualised and interactive learning processes. Similarly, language teachers tend to be less and less seen as authoritative 'truth-tellers'. Increasingly, they become guides, advisers and facilitators of those learning processes.

Such significant changes in roles require higher levels of flexibility and creativity, and these areas have become the focus of recent research at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. This chapter presents an approach which has been developed, tested and successfully implemented at Masaryk University Language Centre. The approach is primarily used by university teachers but it could also be used by teachers and teacher trainers in all types of schools for all levels of language learners. Its main aim is to invite teachers to recognise and value the existing knowledge and the diverse skills language learners bring with them, and to encourage learners' contributions to language classes.

Theoretical background

Creativity is a complex field studied and discussed from many different perspectives. This is one of the reasons why there is no generally accepted definition and we always have to be aware of the point of view we take in defining creativity. A creative approach to language teaching is an approach that presents creativity as one of our many innate skills, a talent that every person and every language learner has. This approach focuses on the idea that we all can enjoy the potential to be creative under certain conditions; that we all abound with many different forms and levels of creativity and that it is the teacher's task to stimulate the creative potential in students.

Language teachers have three advantages that can help stimulate creativity in students.

First, language is creative by its very nature. We can express or communicate one idea in many different ways. Furthermore, every expressed or communicated idea can provoke many different reactions. Every single sentence, phrase or word we say or write is created in a unique moment of communication and can be recreated, reformulated, paraphrased or changed according to the goals of the speaker or writer.

Second, language classes are not limited by any specialised subject or knowledge. Language teachers can, therefore, build their lessons on topics related to sport, management, law or philosophy and still focus on language. This is why a community-of-practice setting, where students and teachers share their individual types of expertise and knowledge, can be more easily established.

Third, language classes can easily engage students in creative situations. By creative situations we mean close-to-reality situations in which students do not use well-known and practised steps that can be applied almost automatically in order to achieve one correct solution to a problem. In creative situations, students have to produce one or more answers to a series of inter-connected problems. They do not know what steps can be used to solve a problem, they may not be sure if the problem has one solution, a wide range of possible solutions or if it has any solution at all. Students simply do not encounter clear-cut situations that can result only in 'succeed-fail' or 'correct-incorrect' solutions, rather they face unclear situations with unclear and tentative solutions. Sometimes, even the setting of a situation or instructions can require a certain level of interpretation. Since language usage represents a form of communication that can be used in near-reality situations can be created more easily than in classes of chemistry or history, for example.

To sum up, a creative approach to language teaching, which is based on the idea that any student can be creative when they are engaged in creative situations, shows students the complexity of a language by exposing them to close-to-real-life situations in a safe, flexible and dynamic environment by means of a class of learners constituted as a community of practice.

Practical suggestions and activities

The range of creative activities that have some potential to enhance language learning is relatively broad. The following section presents five examples of successfully used practical tasks relevant to whole courses, a series of activities and some individual assignments. First, an example of student-generated sources is given in order to offer a range of internet-search-based activities that focus on creative

situations outside of the class in which students have to form opinions, make decisions, look for solutions and respond to authentic reactions from their peers. Then, some writing activities are presented. A 'song' task suggests how to introduce writing from a different perspective, while a peer-review writing activity illustrates strategies that can help learners recognise the absence of absolutely correct/incorrect situations in writing and give them more confidence as authors. Similarly, a grammar activity is put forward in order to illustrate cases that do not expose students to situations with 'wrong' or 'incorrect' solutions. And finally, a vocabulary task is presented in order to show how learning can build on students' existing knowledge and language skills. It also allows teachers to show students some possible barriers to creativity.

Student-generated sources

Teachers often believe it is their duty to choose texts and activities for students, and are sometimes surprised when students are not satisfied with their choice. In order to minimise the danger of spending too much time on preparing materials our students do not find engaging, we can use strategies of the negotiated syllabus method and ask them to find useful materials and decide which activities they would like to try on their own. This activity can improve students' autonomy and cater for individual learning styles.

We can show the principles by using the example of reading skills. We can ask students to:

- explore their fields of interest and find texts they consider both interesting and of high quality
- send samples of such texts to the course online space
- read the text samples before the following session.

At this point, we can choose to take control and decide what activities we are going to do, based on the collected texts. In other words, we have saved our time when looking for texts that could be interesting for the group, and our task then is to find the appropriate sections of the collected samples that can suit our teaching purposes best. Alternatively, we can ask students to identify problematic issues or issues 'of interest' and follow their particular needs. In order to help them identify issues, we may proceed in different ways and ask them to:

- compare their own texts with those of their classmates and see what differences or similarities they find
- choose one text and paraphrase it in their own words
- identify the main ideas in each text
- identify the author's position
- discuss their internet search strategies
- vote for the most interesting text, the least understandable text, a text with the highest level of past tense use, with widest range of vocabulary, or any other feature the class would like to focus on.

This style of work offers several advantages for both teachers and students. Teachers do not have to look for the 'best' material that would suit a particular group. Instead they obtain a database of texts from their students. Teachers can also move away from their traditional positions of providers of 'one ultimate truth' and can become facilitators of complex processes that form part of language learning. Students, on the other hand, are more actively engaged in the search for the texts; they have to create their own criteria for quality, and they practise reading and critical thinking individually and intensively outside of the class. Each student also works in their own area of interest, so they can develop both their language- and non-language-related skills at the same time. What is more, students are engaged in situations with unclear solutions: they do not know whether they can find a suitable text; they have to form their opinions, make decisions, present their results to classmates and be ready to respond to their reactions.

A 'writing song' activity

Writing is a specific skill that some students enjoy and others do not. In order to invite those who hate writing, who are afraid of it, or see no point in it, we can prepare activities that offer different perspectives. This example combines

writing, webquests and music, and its goal is to find a song about writing (e.g. how to write an essay rap).

In this activity we ask students to:

- go to the internet and look for songs that are related to writing in general or to any specific area we want them to focus on
- choose one or two songs and share them with the others. Students can post links to a discussion forum or to any other online space the group shares.

The internet offers some great songs and an enormous number of terrible, weird and embarrassing songs. Both types are equally useful for our purposes. Thanks to the song material they have found, students previously unaware of English writing style can get to know some basic rules and principles outside of the class in a way that allows them to accept writing more naturally. Songs sourced by other students allow students to see the world of writing from a new, more humorous and enjoyable perspective.

Thanks to the flexibility of its outcomes, this activity can also bring diverse benefits to teachers who may obtain a database of interesting materials without any search, or they may avoid situations in which they bring into class materials that are not appealing to their students.

The activity can finish in class with a short discussion. When students have not found any material the teacher would like to use, we can discuss briefly, for example, search skills or the quality of the songs collected. It can generate some in-class activities, such as listening for the main idea or for details of a particular song; or it can also continue with more instructions for more home activities, such as voting for the best, most useful or funniest song (depending on what collection of songs we have compiled) or for a song that offers the most relevant information in different areas. This voting task can also serve just to make sure students watch/listen to most of the songs and spend more time being exposed to the topic of writing in this way.

Peer review

This peer-review activity may help students practise writing in many different situations.

Procedure

- Write a short piece of text (three to five sentences) on a given topic (a summary of a story, of a topic we have discussed in class, or of what we have learned in the session, for example) on a sheet of paper.

- Pass the papers with their texts to the person sitting on their left (or right).

- Read their classmate's text and suggest two changes (we have to clearly explain that a 'change' does not always mean 'improvement'. Students can write a synonym or different version of something which is correct and clear already, or they can correct a mistake if they spot one.) Students get some minutes for this step. Then, students send their papers in the same direction two or three more times doing the same activity with only one new rule – they cannot repeat the changes their classmates have already come up with, they have to suggest new ones.

- Return papers to the authors of the original texts. The original authors read the suggested changes carefully (theoretically six to eight of them) and decide whether they accept them or not.

- Discuss what types of changes they have accepted, and which they have not, or if the ideas of their peers have showed them some new point of view.

This activity makes students realise that writing is a part of language and, similarly to speaking, there are no ideas that cannot be expressed in more than one way. They should realise that the same idea can be written in many different ways and all those ways can (but do not have to) be correct. They also learn that asking a classmate makes sense, because even if they cannot come up with any improvements, sometimes their classmates can find different points of view, thanks to which the original authors can improve their texts on their own.

Real-life grammar

Grammar is too often related to rules and drill exercises where students work in uncreative situations and where they can apply only one strategy to solve the problem, and their answers are either correct or incorrect. They succeed or fail, in other words. The following activity shows a possibility to engage students in creative situations in which they can always succeed.

Procedure

- Show students some grammar feature in real-life use in a film, book, text or any audio material. Examples: *The Hours* film trailer for reported speech, or a section from *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* for third conditionals.

- Ask students to search the internet, or their film, book and audio collections at home for similar examples of the grammar feature they have just seen or heard in your example.

- Ask students to share the samples they have found in their favourite films, videos, texts and audio materials by posting them (or their links) to the course online space.

This activity engages students in a situation that stimulates creativity. They are invited to work autonomously, and preferably in the area of their own interest. They are also asked to think critically and decide which films or videos to watch, which texts to choose or which audio materials to listen to. Moreover, there is no clear solution. They do not know whether they can find such an example or not. Similarly, there is no absolute correct or incorrect answer to this task – they can find exactly the same example or a variation of a particular grammar feature. For example, in the case of reported speech, they may not find an example of 'will-would' change but 'do-did' or 'was-had been'; in the case of conditionals they may not find a third conditional example, but a second conditional one.

This activity is also beneficial to teachers. They can work with materials generated by students, which saves their time and expands their database of materials for possible future use. But what is more important is that they do not expose students to situations with 'wrong' or 'incorrect' solutions: students who find some examples are successful. However, those who do not find any examples but show a list of films, videos, books or audio materials they have worked with are equally successful. The reason for the success of everybody is the fact that its actual goal is not to produce several sentences or phrases with a correctly used grammar feature (e.g. in tasks with instructions of the 'choose the best sentence using the third conditional' type) but to make students spend some time thinking about and focusing on a particular grammar feature in their own real-life preferred contexts. In other words, students normally do not watch their favourite films and videos focusing on grammar. This activity shows them that even videos and films of their choice can become effective language learning tools.

Vocabulary activities based on students' existing knowledge

New vocabulary can be taught in many different ways. Sometimes, we present it in class with no relation to students' existing knowledge, and at other times we present it in relevant contexts. When we are not sure what students already know or how they use their vocabulary and we want to see the range of our students' active vocabulary, we can use simple, repeatable and easily adaptable activities that can be presented as a simple exercise or a competition of individuals, pairs or groups.

Here are four examples.

Letters and words

This activity may help students realise how many words of a certain kind they already know.

Procedure

- Ask students (individually or divided into groups) to write as many different words as possible that start for example with L and end with D in two minutes, e.g. lived.
- Check the highest number of words produced.
- Share some examples students have produced with the class.
- Discuss different types of words (e.g. nouns, verbs, adjectives).

In this activity, it is important to realise that our choice of the letters is essential. It can influence the success of the activity. It can make the task extremely difficult or even inappropriate for teaching purposes. For example, if we choose the combination of letters X–Y, it is extremely difficult to form a word. However, if we choose the L–D combination, we can expect a number of past tense forms of verbs, and similarly, if we choose any combination of letters with the letter 'S' at the end, we can expect a number of plurals.

Letters and sentences

This activity may show students barriers that might influence their learning.

Procedure

- Ask students to write as many different sentences as possible where given words start with the letters 'I,S,A,W,R', in two minutes. I... S... A... W... R... (e.g. I started acting with Robert).
- Check the highest number of sentences produced.
- Ask students with the highest numbers of sentences to share their examples with the rest of the class.
- Discuss the reasons that have prevented others from producing more sentences.

In this activity, students usually produce three to five sentences on average. There are some who do not come up with any and others who write as many as 22 sentences. Those who produce the highest numbers of sentences are usually those who choose a strategy of changing only one word in the sentence (e.g. I saw a wild rat/rabbit/Ralph/Rex/Richard...). In the follow-up discussion, we often hear various types of reasons for not producing more sentences, such as: '....it is just a game'; '...it is not creative, I wanted to have every word in each sentence completely different'; '...I was not sure about spelling of some words'; '...it is not good to use informal words at school'; '...my grammar is very bad'.

If we hear similar explanations, we can challenge students and ask questions, such as 'Did the instructions say the sentences should be grammatically correct?'; 'Did the instructions mention spelling?'; 'Did they say each word should be always different?' or even 'Did the instructions say you should write the sentences in English?' They did not. Those questions should make the students realise that it was not the instructions that made the task complicated. It was rather their own thinking, the barriers they had built for themselves in their heads, which prevented them from getting better results.

This type of discussion may be useful at the beginning of a course. Later, when we deal with more complex tasks, we can always remind our students of this activity and ask them whether they believe the new task is really difficult to solve or if it is difficult because they make it difficult in their own heads.

Synonyms

This activity may help students focus on synonyms at any moment during sessions.

Procedure

- Divide the class into groups.
- Ask students in groups to write as many synonyms for a particular word (e.g. say) as possible in two minutes.
- Check the highest number of synonyms produced.
- Write all the synonyms students have produced on the board.
- Discuss the differences between the synonyms, their meaning and use.
- Ask students to try to use the synonyms in sentences.

This activity may be used when some students tend to repeat one word in their speaking or writing all the time. It can show the class that as a group, they can always generate some synonyms and help each other. The follow-up discussion can also help students understand that synonyms have meanings that are similar, but not exactly the same, and that they can be used in different contexts differently.

'Groups of words'

This activity may help students focus on categories of words.

Procedure

- Ask students to write all words that refer to some idea or concept in two minutes (e.g. name all the things that fly).
- Check the highest number of words produced.
- Ask students to form groups.
- Ask students in groups to divide words they have produced into different groups and categories.
- Let each group present their categories with examples of words that belong to each category.
- Discuss the criteria or systems students have created in order to group words into categories.

This activity can be used before we introduce specific language functions, such as classification. Students who first think about 'flying things' and later classify them into groups may understand the idea of classification easier and teachers can later fully focus on the language function without the need to explain what classification is.

Another illustration comes from the field of language styles, genres or registers. We can ask students to write down, for example, all the words they would never use in an academic article. Then, by dividing particular expressions into groups (e.g. vague words, colloquialisms, local expressions or spoken language fillers) students can find some rules or principles on their own without being told by the teacher.

A great advantage of all four examples is that students share their vocabulary and enrich one another without the necessity of any previous input from their teacher.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed some aspects of a creative approach to language teaching that describes creativity as a natural skill all learners have, and creative teaching as an attempt to engage students in close-to-real-life situations that cannot be solved by one clear-cut, correct solution.

The examples illustrate the potential that creativity can have to improve and broaden personal teaching styles in the areas of methods, strategies and tools. They introduce situations in which teachers can invite students to become active and enthusiastic co-authors of their own learning. They also show possibilities as to how to make language learning more varied by means of a combination of in-class and out-of-class activities. And finally, they emphasise the

idea that a creative approach to teaching allows students to notice and experience their own individual learning processes and help them bring and share their existing knowledge and skills to class.

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11

Teaching children with mascot-inspired projects

Malu Sciamarelli

Introduction

Teachers like using projects with children in language classes for good reasons. The benefits of project-based teaching with mascots are numerous:

- thematically organised materials are easier to remember and learn (Singer, 1990)

- the presentation of coherent and meaningful information leads to deeper processing and better learning (Anderson, 1990)

- there is a relationship between student motivation and student interest, and a student's ability to process challenging materials, recall information and elaborate (Alexander et al., 1994)

- expertise in a topic develops when learners reinvest their knowledge in a sequence of progressively more complex tasks (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993)

- creativity is essential for learning, and with mascot-inspired projects it is developed and not forced.

In this chapter, I will outline some basic features of project-based learning, then show five examples of mascot-inspired projects with the fluffy toy Brownie the Bear and its friends. Based on these projects, teachers will be able to create and elaborate their own original and creative projects with a mascot of their choice. Inexpensive materials can be used, such as cut-outs made from cardboard boxes, and all the activities can be adapted to small or large groups. Finally, I will conclude by identifying the underlying principles of project-based learning within the examples shown, and also share some tips, ideas and suggestions that teachers can apply in their own contexts, wherever they are.

Project-based learning

Project-based learning has been described by a large number of language educators and is widely used in classrooms around the world. Whatever the approach teachers choose to focus on, project-based learning shares some common features.

- Project-based learning focuses on content learning rather than on specific language targets.

Real-world subject matter and topics of interest to students can become central to projects.

- Project-based learning is student-centred, though the teacher plays a major role in offering support and guidance throughout the process.

- Project-based learning is co-operative rather than competitive. Students can work on their own, in small groups, or as a class to complete a project, sharing resources and expertise along the way.

- Project-based learning leads to authentic integration of skills and processing of information from varied sources, mirroring real-life skills.

- Project-based learning culminates in an end project that can be shared with others, giving the project a real purpose. However, the value of the project lies not only in the final product, but also in the process of working towards the end point. So, project-based learning has both a process and product orientation, and provides students with opportunities to focus on fluency and accuracy at different stages.

- Project-based learning is potentially motivational, empowering and challenging, and stimulates creativity. It usually results in building students' confidence, self-esteem and autonomy as well as enhancing students' language skills, content learning and cognitive skills.

- With project-based learning, students see work as personally meaningful, boosting their creativity, but it also fulfils an educational aim.

Practical projects

All the projects presented here can be carried out intensively over a short period of time or extended over some weeks, a full semester, or even a year; they can be completed in small groups, or as a whole class; and they can take place completely in the classroom or can be extended beyond its walls, with other groups in the schools, or even in other schools via different forms of correspondence.

Flat Brownie

This project is a variation of 'The Flat Stanley Project', which was started in 1995 by Dale Hubert, a third grade school teacher in London, Ontario, Canada. In the Flat Stanley children's books, Stanley travels the world in envelopes. Students who read the books send the paper doll and written notes to students in other parts of the world by conventional mail or email. Children exchange ideas, photographs, questions and their culture with students overseas.

With Flat Brownie, students have the opportunity to make connections with students of their own group, and also in their school, and to develop their reading skills and facilitate writing.

Preparation

Choose a short story or book you want to use with a specific group of children. The short story or book may focus on any kind of good teaching activities at this stage: including geography, with locations of travels and destinations; maths, in distances and times; and narrative and writing, with journal entries and biographies.

Alternatively, you can write a story to use in the classroom. I wrote the example below to use in this project. You can focus on the following activities by using this story:

- plants
- fruits
- colours
- animals and insects
- comparisons.

The little girl and the golden bird

Malu Sciamarelli

Among the many treasured trees in the little girl's garden, the mulberry was her favourite. She loved climbing the tallest trees from which she had a view over the whole garden, and spending hours eating mulberries, talking to the tree, flowers, birds, bees, ants and all the varied insects she could see.

What a joy it was to come back, with her lips all red from the berries, contrasting with her pale skin and golden hair, and tell her dad she was full of blood, make up horror stories just to get kisses and hugs, and laugh together!

The little girl and the golden bird (continued)

These lovely purple berries were her favourite fruit, and one day not finding any in the lower boughs, she decided to climb higher and higher and higher. When she finally found more berries, she saw a little door among the branches. As it was open, she decided to go in. To her amazement, it was a beautiful crystal dome, with tiny chairs all fringed with gold and when she touched one of them, a little bird came through the door and started to talk to her. The bird was astonishing! He was made of gold and moon dust, and with a long thin beak of the clearest crystal. When he talked, the crystal emitted the most beautiful and purest light.

Never having seen a talking bird before, in spite of talking to all living beings herself, she could not contain herself and reached out her hand to touch him. However, the moment she did this, his eyes turned black and his tiny body started to disintegrate. The beak was the last part to vanish, and before he crumbled into grey dust, he said: 'Take my beak – it is magical and soon you will know what to do with it', and then he was gone.

The little girl was devastated. She could not stop crying as she was climbing down the tree. For several days, she stayed in her bedroom looking at the crystal beak in her hands. Then one day, she decided to go back to the garden clutching the crystal beak tightly in her hand. As soon as she started to walk among the trees, she saw a bird with a broken wing lying on the grass. She immediately took it in her hands, not knowing exactly what to do. To her surprise, the crystal opened up and a strong golden ray of light blinded her. The intense light seemed to flood her hands with a scorching energy and just as she thought she could bear it no longer, the bird that was lying almost dead flapped its wings tentatively at first then flew away. The wing had been healed by the light in her hands!

And this was the secret the golden bird said the girl would find out. The golden bird had been waiting for someone to come, to get his crystal beak and, with its light, heal all the hurt animals in the garden! As soon as she understood it, she was not sad any more. Since then, she has been walking in all the gardens in her beautiful world, looking for wounded little creatures and healing them with the magic golden light from the crystal beak in her hands.

Procedure

■ Read it to the group as a whole. If it is a short story, it can be done in one class. If it is a book, select parts or chapters to read in each class.

■ Ask students to draw the mascot Brownie (or a mascot of their choice) and make a paper doll.

■ If you are doing the project within your class, ask each student to write some notes or questions based on the activities of the characters they remember or like most about the short story or book they were reading, and that they would like Brownie to tell other students.

Example:

– Brownie is a bear and loves honey.

– The bees in the garden produce honey.

– Does Brownie the Bear eat berries?

– Can Brownie the Bear climb high trees?

- Put the paper doll and the notes in individual envelopes with the child's name, and exchange the envelopes. If you are doing it within your school, and more than one class is involved, exchange the envelopes with students of other groups.

- Each student or group should read the activities written on the notes, add a question and return to the original student or group. In turn, they should then answer the question and add another activity. You can continue this process as long as you want to keep the project going.

- Keep a journal in the form of a notebook, a poster in the classroom or a blog to document all the activities in which Brownie, or the mascot of your choice, is involved.

- At the end of the project, read all the stories for the whole group.

Variation

- You can arrange exchanges with other classrooms in other schools, or ask students to get their parents' permission to address an envelope and send the paper doll to a friend in another state, or even another country.

- You can publish the stories, describe local traditions and scenery, and add photos.

Benefits

- Writing and learning becomes easier, flows naturally and tends to be more creative with this project. This is what teachers may call an 'authentic' literacy project, in that children are inspired to write of their own passion and excitement about the project, and given the freedom to write about many things through the catalyst of Brownie or a mascot of their choice.

Model building

Model building and construction foster spatial play and nurture a child's dexterity, as well as other cognitive skills such as planning, problem-solving and logical thinking. For younger children, they also provide opportunities for fine motor development and for teaching interaction among peers and teachers.

A child's interest in model building will inevitably originate from construction, as most children are brought up playing with colourful building blocks during their early learning years. Building blocks stimulate reasoning and creativity while teaching basic maths and literacy. Combined with language teaching, learning will flow naturally and in a motivational way.

Preparation

Create a name for an imaginary city. For this project, use the same mascot for the whole group – it will live in this city.

Procedure

- Divide the class into groups. Each group will be responsible for building one part of the city, for example a school, a park, a hospital, a pharmacy, a restaurant, a cinema, a petrol station, a museum, houses and shops. Make sure it incorporates every amenity you would want in a city and, most of all, what you want to teach your students.

- Build the different parts of the city in groups using paper, cardboard cut-outs, polystyrene, old newspaper, aluminium kitchen-wrap, or any other material. While the groups are building, make sure you teach all the vocabulary that is

needed for each part to the group as a whole, for example, 'Could you pass the scissors?'; 'Can I have a red crayon?'

■ When the models are ready, each group has to create a story called 'A happy day in my life' using the mascot in their part of the model.

The example below was written by a group of nine-year-old students.

> Brownie lives in a cave in the forest. One day, he ran out of honey, and decided to leave his cave in search for more. On his way, he met a small bear called Dubi sitting under a tree. He was crying. 'Why are you crying?', Brownie asked. 'I have no honey any more, and I am hungry,' Dubi answered. 'Come with me and we will find it together.' They walked and walked all around the forest, but could not find any honey. Suddenly, they saw some bees flying away, and decided to follow them. The bees were flying towards the village. They passed by the local school, the church, the park, and went into a small market. Brownie and Dubi entered the market too and were amazed at what they saw: piles of honey jars in shelves from bottom to top on the walls. They could not believe their eyes! Suddenly, a white bear came in. His name was Snow. When he saw Brownie and Dubi, he said, 'I was waiting for you! Come and have some honey.' Snow was producing honey to give to all the bears who were hungry. On that day, the three friends ate all they could and enjoyed themselves. It was the happiest day in their lives. Since then, Brownie and Dubi visit Snow once a week, eat honey and have a good laugh together.

■ Make them present their stories separately, but before the presentation, model gestures, tone, volume, pace and facial expressions for the groups.

■ Then, assemble all the parts together and make them use all the parts to create a single story.

■ Film the presentation and document it on a class blog.

Variation

■ Instead of a city, you can build a farm and teach them animals, and the environment, and focus on the relationship of the mascot with the animals.

■ If you have a small group, you can build only one part of the city or farm, and create a single story.

■ When the presentation is done and documented, you can make a storybook. Make students draw the parts of the city or farm, and write the story they created. It may also be used as a resource for future activities such as storytelling and vocabulary learning.

Benefits

■ Model building provides opportunities to develop other skills by making use of English.

■ Students will learn structures, mechanisms, control, and designing and craftwork skills.

■ Maths: numbers, shapes, space and measuring skills.

■ It stimulates creativity and communication skills.

■ It is less stressful and more enjoyable.

■ Students will learn how to follow instructions.

■ Storytelling is highly social and each story told reminds students of their experience which they can recount at school and at home several times, increasing the language practice.

Storytelling and creative writing

An observation is something that you notice about the world around you. We make observations using our five senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. Our five senses are very important to us, helping to keep us safe, and helping us experience the beauty and wonder of the world around us.

With this project, and the use of a mascot, students will use their five senses to experience the natural world around them, write and tell stories, draw pictures and write poems, using the vocabulary learned in the garden and from what is around them. They will also learn the differences between the five senses and how they are useful tools for experiencing the world, especially nature, thus learning in a more efficient way, and enhancing their creativity.

Procedure

- Ask students if they know their five senses, and have them demonstrate each one. Ask them why we want to pay attention to our senses when we are out in the garden.

- Before going to the garden, each student should make a mascot with cardboard cut-outs, colour it and give it a name.

- In the garden, start with the sense of sight. Have children find different colours in nature. Have them explore whether the objects that are the same colour are the same thing, and compare them with their mascots. Also ask them if anything they see reminds them of something they usually find inside.

- Next, explore the sense of hearing. Tell children to close their eyes and ask them what they hear. Are there birds singing? If so, is it just one kind of bird song, or are there different ones? Can they hear leaves rustling? Can they tell if the wind is blowing hard or soft by the sound of the leaves? What noises are near them, and which are far away? Ask them to open their eyes, and also describe the sound their mascots can make.

- Explore the sense of touch next. Ask students to find a few different objects with different textures. If there are flowers or plants nearby, have them compare how different flowers of plants feel – some are rough, while some are smooth. Ask them to describe the texture of their mascots and what their favourite taste is.

- The sense of taste is difficult to explore in nature, because it can be dangerous to eat things in the wild, unless you are with someone who knows how to identify plants well, or you know all the plants in the garden. This is a good time to explain this to the children. Bring some fruits and remind the children that they come from nature. Then ask them to imagine what their mascot eats.

- Next, have the children explore their sense of smell. Have them close their eyes and smell the air. Do they smell flowers? Wet earth? Cut grass? When have they smelled these things before? Ask them to imagine what their mascots could smell – since a dog can smell things that we can only imagine.

- Then sit on a nice spot, on the grass or under a tree, and ask them to talk about what they experienced before. Give them plenty of time to talk about each sense, and help them write a story based on their experience, using their mascots.

- Back in the classroom, ask students to tell you the five different senses. Ask them to name one thing they discovered using each.

- Ask students why it is useful to have five senses, and name a situation in their day when it is important to make use of each of the five senses. Finally, ask them to tell their stories out loud, with their mascots.

- Document all the stories in posters in the classroom, or on a blog.

Variation

- Have students repeat the 'five senses' activities inside the classroom. How do things feel, look and smell inside compared to when they were outside? Did they like exploring inside or outside more? Is a classroom a healthy place for animals and plants to live? Why/why not?

- Have students try to draw pictures of the five senses – not just a picture of an eye or a nose, but something that they noticed when studying each sense.

- Ask students to write an acrostic poem using the five senses or the name of their mascots.

  Example:

  Blue sky

  Rough bark

  Orange scent

  Whistling wind

  Nice soft grass

  Itchy mosquito bite

  Eating sweet raspberries

Benefits

- Writing a story (or poem) based on their personal experiences, intuition, close observation and imagination, combined with affective modes of thinking, will flow naturally in this project. The use of a mascot of their own will add a playful engagement to the project and with the language, and the students will work in a fun-loving environment where risk is encouraged.

Comic book writing

Comic book writing is just as interesting and rewarding as a play, a poem, a novel or a film. But just as those genres have certain rules that arise from their forms, so do comic books.

When you practise comic book writing with your students, you will teach them to think visually and then communicate those visuals in such a way that it will spark their imagination and enhance their creativity. You will also teach them not to write the whole story, but instead use language to convey the immediacy of a moment, or the 'flow', in an instant.

Procedure

- Divide the class in small groups of three or four children. Choose two or more mascots for each group and give them names. Alternatively, use a well-known mascot from your country or region.

- Start the project by creating one strip. You can create as many strips as you want later to form a whole comic book, depending on the length of the project.

- Next, create a plan for the beginning, middle and end of the story. Let students manipulate the mascots to let their imagination and creativity flow. They can be made with paper or cardboard cut-outs, or they can be real fluffy toys.

- After that, make them draw an emotion-graph for each mascot: draw a line, write their names and their features (their appearance, emotion, and role in the story).

Emotion Graph – Brownie

Y-axis: 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10

X-axis labels:
- 08.00 Brownie: Bear, small, friendly, funny and happy
- 10.00 No honey anymore: sad and hungry
- 12.00 Met Dubai: hungry and happy
- 14.00 Saw bees: happy and hopeful
- 14.30 Met Snow and entered the market: afraid and surprised
- 17.00 They are now friends: the happiest day of his life
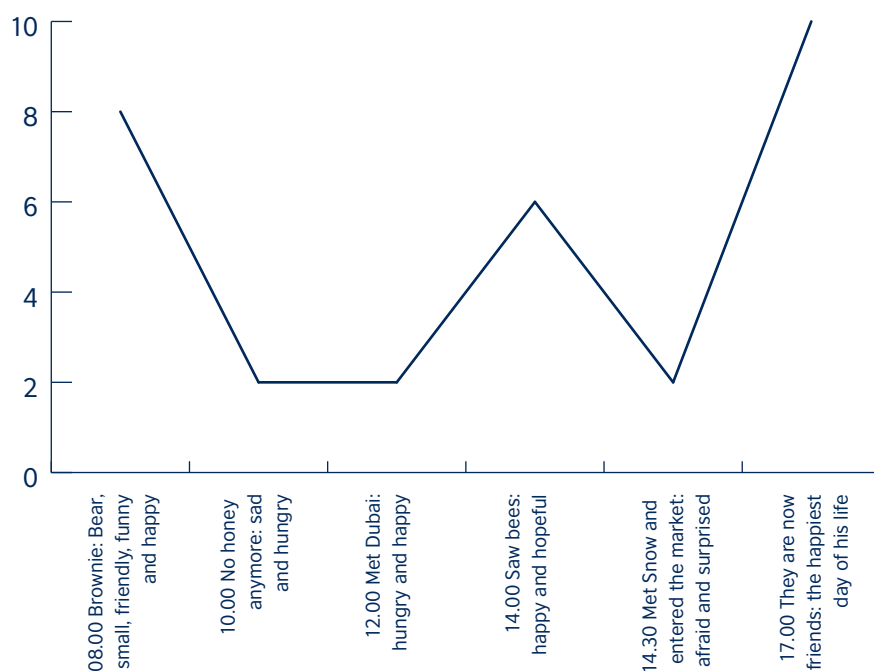
- Before drawing and writing, make students tell the story they created to the whole class, using the mascots.
- Then, make them draw first (from three to five squares to form a strip).
- On a separate sheet of paper, ask them to write sentences to create the story.
- Finally, help them select what should be written in the strip.
- Repeat the steps to create as many strips as you want.
- Gather all the strips (or comic books), put them on the wall displays in the classroom and document them on a class blog.

Variation

- There are many ways of creating comic books, from pencil and ink, to digital pens and pads. Choose what is best for your students, and what is available for you.
- If you decide to use technology, there are many tools available online for free, for instance:

www.stripgenerator.com
www.toondoo.com
www.bitstrips.com

Benefits

- Writing comic books in English is a medium of expression that can communicate a wealth of ideas and emotions. It is a way to channel children's creativity, and to capture it in pictures and words. Also, when you teach children to make a comic strip, a medium where it is all right for their art to look silly or imperfect or childish, you will nurture their creativity and imagination before it gets stamped out. It is an engaging way of teaching concise writing, in which you can teach any subject, including physical appearances, emotions and time, and an extraordinary form of storytelling. It may also help children develop a love of reading and improving their handwriting, without even being aware they are practising.

Theatre

The basic idea of using theatre as an activity for students of English as a foreign language is simple: getting children to practise the language they already know or are learning in the classroom, in a real context. The real context here is amateur dramatics – short plays specially designed for young learners of English. You can use plays that were already written and include a mascot, or write a play for your class with the mascot of their choice. The plays can be used as an exciting, rewarding and challenging classroom resource in their own right. But the real joy of doing theatre both for the children as well as the teacher comes from performing the play in front of an audience made up of their students, teachers and/or parents.

Procedure

- Divide the class into small groups.
- Teach them emotions in English.
- Choose a mascot for the whole class, and decide with them what its main characteristic is, for instance, if it is a happy dog, a bear feeling lost, a friendly sheep, and so on.
- Write mini-sketches (a short story that does not have many details) with them and have them try out simple emotions, including being scared, happy or lost and looking around.
- Make sure you perform with them. Children absolutely love it when they see their teachers performing!
- Each group must have the mascot that will be used in the play, and practise the emotions with it.
- At the end of the class, the groups perform the sketches for the whole class.
- You can use as many classes and sketches as you want to practise language, and put them all together at the end to form a play. The play does not have to be long, varying from five to ten minutes.
- This is an example of an initial mini-sketch, in which the teacher will participate and help practising. The other ones can be done with children only and the teacher facilitating the activity. It is also easy to make it more personal by adding particular traits from your school, country or region:

Cast: teacher and five students

Teacher: Good morning, everyone!

Everyone: Good morning!

Teacher: (Student 1), stop hitting (student 2). (Student 3), let go of (student 4). (Student 4), do not sit on the desk!

(Student 5): Sorry I'm late.

Teacher: Why are you late?

(Student 5): I missed the bus and had to walk.

Teacher: You live over there! Why are you late?

(Student 5): I got lost.

Teacher: Ok, sit down. (Student 1), where is your homework?

(Student 1): Shawn the dog ate it.

Teacher: Shawn the dog does not like paper. He loves biscuits, and he is always hungry for it!

Variation

■ Instead of writing the sketches and play with the children, you can use plays that are already written and add the mascot in the context.

■ You can also practise other drama techniques in the foreign language, such as mime and improvisation, in order to practise language, build confidence and prepare students to act better. A great book with ideas for EFL teachers on how to deal with such areas is *Drama Techniques in Language Learning – A Resource Book of Communication Activities for Language Teachers* (Maley and Duff, 1982).

Benefits

■ Involvement in theatre has an immensely positive effect on an English student. The scripts are not linguistically challenging, written at a level of English with which the students will be familiar and comfortable. The linguistic benefit lies in the increased confidence it gives students in their oral skills, helping improve fluency. However, there are other benefits that are more subtle. When students are acting out the play, the English is full on. Even low-level students, who only have a few lines to say, have to listen to and contend with a good volume of spoken English; they have to follow the script to know when to say their lines. They are, of course, simply repeating a script they have learned by heart, but it will boost their confidence and self-esteem.

■ It is also fun, rewarding, motivational and effective in boosting the speaking confidence of children. If you have the chance to perform for another class or parents, with scenery made from painted cardboard boxes, some chosen props and sound effects, the final performance can be a wonderful activity for students to shine, and an event that the parents and children will not forget.

Conclusion

Project-based learning is an exciting way of teaching children. With the projects described above, you will be able to reach all students and get them engaged in many different ways, thus giving them ownership of their learning by making them lifelong learners. They will also gain critical thinking and problem-solving skills that they will need as soon as they walk out of the classroom into the real world.

The use of mascots in the projects will also:

- increase engagement, imagination and creativity
- increase motivation because they will do something that is meaningful for them
- allow them to write their own stories, personalising them to the maximum
- give them confidence to take risks in a fun-loving environment
- stimulate socialisation and playfulness.

You do not need to have a commercially made mascot. They can be made with inexpensive materials, such as paper, cardboard cut-outs or polystyrene. All you need is the enthusiasm of the children and the teacher to channel and create a reason to carry out the projects.

You can also use mascots from your city, country or region, or create a class mascot. For some projects, children might create their own mascot to follow them through the term or year.

Also, teaching children with mascot-inspired projects is teaching children through play. Children learn better through play, through being curious, through exploring things and then making things and sharing them with others. This transforms how they approach language learning for the rest of their lives, because the experiences children have in their early childhood build the skills that make them able to deal with challenges in the future.

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12

Creating creative teachers

Marisa Constantinides

Introduction

Creative thinking has been a recent concern among English language teaching professionals. This is very much in line with the move away from an over-reliance on methods and approaches as an answer to effective learning (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), and towards a focus on the mental processes that lead to more effective learning of languages as well as of content.

However, this attention has centred mostly on learners, with the very good argument that language acquisition can benefit from activities developing this aspect of higher order thinking, just as creativity itself benefits from language use and L2 learning opportunities.

In this chapter, I would like to focus on the teachers who are expected to generate creative activities for their learners but whose ability to be creative is taken for granted. Yet teacher training courses do not usually include any objectives that would help trainee teachers, novice or experienced, to develop this necessary aspect of their cognitive make-up. For example, syllabuses such as the Cambridge CELTA or the Cambridge DELTA, to mention two publicly available syllabuses, do not include such a category in their syllabus specifications.

In a recent survey among CELTA and DELTA trainers (Constantinides, 2014), the majority responded that they felt creative thinking was necessary, though it was not specifically addressed in their syllabus specifications. Only one respondent felt it was neither needed nor the duty of trainers on these courses to provide help to teachers to develop creative thinking abilities.

Why do teachers need to be creative?

For me, teaching is not an exclusively creative process but neither is it merely a set of repeated action sequences based on blueprints. It is based on knowledge, professional understanding, technical know-how and the personal qualities of the teacher. How this knowledge is synthesised, filtered, interpreted and translated into teaching is a complex process involving higher-order thinking and cannot be 'learned'.

Memorable quotes from the colleagues who responded to my survey include:

> '...creativity is all about responding to the learners in the moment' and ...without developing creativity, we might as well be taught by robots!'

If most of us agree with this, one might question why developing teacher creativity is not already an objective on teacher development programmes. The argument put forward is that the objectives address knowledge of the content and the skills to apply this knowledge in the classroom. Syllabuses do not seem to include objectives such as 'helping trainees develop their creative thinking skills' or, indeed, any other thinking skills or cognitive abilities and still less anything related to the affective domain, assuming perhaps that a trainee teacher is a mature person who comes to a course and to the profession with all these abilities and strategies already in place.

The second point involves our perceptions of the creative person – that is, of someone who can produce original ideas, and possibly also has an artistic bent.

I would like to suggest that the lack of creative thinking skills in an educator needs immediate attention for many reasons, most of which are interdependent.

In the absence of creative thinking, teachers:
- may be unable to develop flexibility in their thinking, think 'on their feet' and respond to the unpredictable and the unexpected, to deal with learner difficulties as they arise and to think of good solutions quickly
- may be unable to do much more than follow a coursebook without appropriate changes to make the material more accessible to their learners
- tend to become more and more dependent on the input and ideas of others – proponents of different approaches and methods, coursebook writers, teacher educators, article writers, and the authorities in general
- may become completely unable to develop their own independent thinking, their own philosophy of education and, thus, unable to make their own decisions and solve problems in their own way

- may adopt techniques and activities unthinkingly; an approach, method, or even the use of a book, may be 'bought wholesale' and often be used without reflection. If the result is not successful, it is quite difficult for the individual to understand why.

Why are we unable to think creatively?

When trainees are asked in training sessions and workshops whether they believe they are creative, most will reply in the negative; few think they are creative. Yet psychologists and educators believe that some creative potential exists in all human beings, although it may be dormant or 'blocked'. These blocks are of various kinds.

- **Blocks created by the social environment**
  An educational system based on memorisation and rote learning does little to enhance creative potential. Parents who frown upon any creative tendencies may be another cause for blocks to the creative thinking process. The attitudes of employers, professors and parents may stifle creativity. And in traditional educational settings, logical, analytical thinking is much more appreciated than the 'flights of fancy' of people trying to be creative.

- **Blocks created by the individual**
  Blocks to creative thinking may also be self-generated; Rickards and Jones (1989) mention four, outlined below, to which I have added some relevant examples:

  - **Strategy blocks**
    The wrong strategy is selected or no strategy is available. For example, a teacher faced with the problem of helping their learners to learn vocabulary falls back on an inappropriate strategy, giving the learners long lists of words and their definitions or translations to memorise.

  - **Values blocks**
    The individual has certain beliefs and holds on tightly to them to the point of rigidity. This creates a negative mind-set that makes them unable to accept a new set of values even if there is a valid reason to do so. For example, a deeply rooted belief that learning a language means a teacher explaining the rules is often seen on training courses. Even though new ways are shown, the teacher is unable to use them effectively, as they do not fit into the old values system. This is a problem trainers often encounter on initial training courses when experienced colleagues find it difficult to abandon their 'old ways' and tend to stay with what they think is tried and tested.

  - **Perception blocks**
    Solutions to problems other than those relating to the teacher's immediate reality or which personally affect him/her are ignored, for example:
    - a teacher rejects adopting games not because they are unsuitable for the learners or the aims of a lesson, but because materials preparation for games takes longer than following the coursebook
    - another teacher rejects the use of educational technology because they don't want to learn how to use it.

  - **Self-image blocks**
    The individual is convinced they are too old or not clever enough to do certain things, therefore no attempt is made to find other creative or innovative solutions to existing problems. For example, faced with a group of students who have difficulty understanding a grammar point, the same explanation, example and exercise sequence is repeated, even if its result may have proved inadequate, because the teacher is not confident enough to try out any of the numerous other ways of teaching grammar.

Clearly, these blocks are not only connected with cognitive processes but with values and beliefs, as well as emotions and self-perception, so working on creative thinking alone may not help, unless work on the other factors is included as well. In the training classroom, knowledge as well as respect, encouragement, reflection and appreciation are all of equal importance.

Creative thinking skills training: the basis of the practical ideas in this article

It has been suggested that creativity, or as it is also termed, divergent production (Guilford, 1967), is not a single unifying ability; it is viewed as a composite of intellectual abilities. Guilford further suggests that divergent production facilitates problem-solving, something which language teachers are faced with on a daily basis in their classes – and that we know enough about the creative process to be able to train individuals. Here are the four main characteristics of the creative process that he describes:

- producing lots of ideas (**fluency**)
- producing ideas of various types (**flexibility**)
- building on and embellishing existing ideas (**elaboration**)
- producing clever and original ideas (**originality**).

These abilities enable the individual to produce not only a multiplicity of answers as solutions to the same problem or tasks, but answers that are also varied; some may even be original.

Benefits to the teacher

Divergent production, then, seems to respond positively to some of the issues mentioned earlier:

- materials can be put to new use in more effective and stimulating ways

- materials and lesson design becomes easier and more varied, as the teachers can come up with more than one solution to the problem of what to include at each stage

- it is easier for teachers to see new ways of changing existing material to fit in with their aims, learners and teaching context

- teachers produce more ideas, and some of them can also be quite original ones

- teachers are no longer 'slaves' to one or another method but may be better able to evaluate, select and be eclectic in a principled way.

Characteristics of creative people

Lateral thinking

Flexible thinking

High productivity

High originality

Variety of solutions

Independence of view

The role of the trainer and/or the institution

Helping teachers to develop their ability to think creatively, including creative thinking skills training, is not going to be enough, and the effects of this training may not be sustainable unless there is a positive culture encouraging and facilitating as well as demonstrating creativity.

Trainers need to model creative behaviours themselves by using a variety of ways of handling course input, from training games to loop input – an idea suggested by Woodward (1991) – not in a relentless pursuit of fun and games but in accordance with the topic and focus of each session.

In addition, work on team-building, generating trust among trainees, is essential from day one and needs to be followed through systematically, either with activities such as those suggested by Hadfield (1992), or with social activities in a school setting or a self-help group.

Creativity needs to be inspired by inspiring leadership that nurtures and appreciates teachers who make the effort to be creative.

Practical suggestions and activities

Clearly, the practical activities and techniques included here are based on the belief that it is possible to provide specific training activities that enhance divergent production in trainee teachers.

Furthermore, these activities and techniques can be seamlessly integrated within the content syllabus without what some colleagues might consider time being wasted on brain training activities.

> *'The ideas and techniques which follow work particularly well in the context of any teacher training course, but can also work in teacher self-help groups or as part of regular professional development meetings in the staff room.'*
> (Aoki, 2002).

The inspiration for the activities has come from a variety of sources: from ideas suggested by Edward de Bono in his famous book on lateral thinking (1985) and some of his later publications, from the work of teachers in primary classrooms, from the work of colleagues in creative writing workshops, from blogs as well as working with colleagues in the context of teacher development programmes and seeking ways to embed creative thinking skills training into our materials design.

I have listed the activities following Guilford's categories (1967) but clearly, some could be listed under more than one category.

Activities promoting fluency

Brainstorming

This is perhaps the most frequently used activity and will be familiar to all who are involved in teacher development programmes. The value of getting teachers in groups to brainstorm lots of ideas, focusing on quantity at the initial stage and quality later, when these ideas are discussed, evaluated and the most suitable ones chosen, is highly conducive to this aspect of divergent production.

Unusual uses

The original exercise involves brainstorming many unusual uses for an ordinary object, e.g. *a chair*. In the training classroom, we can take any coursebook activity and have teams or groups compete to produce the longest list of unusual uses for a gap-fill, a role play, a text plus comprehension questions, or other activity.

Keep it going

One of the trainees begins with a word or expression given on a card. With a partner they must brainstorm as many questions as they can to elicit from their partner the word or phrase they have on their card. This also helps trainees practise different types of questioning for elicitation.

Variation

■ An alternative in the same vein involves being given a question on a course topic. For example, 'Do you believe that your students enjoy listening to songs?' – each player must continue with a further question, never making a statement or a negative sentence. This activity is much more demanding and its main focus is fluency as well as **flexibility** (see below)

20 activities

Trainees are given a single piece of material, song, text, image, or video and are asked to brainstorm 20 (or five, or ten, etc.) activities that use it as a basis.

Variation

■ Using large sheets of paper, trainees can be asked to create a mind map with their assigned topic or a specific piece of material (e.g. a text) at the centre which includes specific, labelled branches to help prompt their brainstorming. These branches may include ideas for practice, such as the ones listed below, or any other the trainer deems suited to the topic used as a focus:

  – grammar

  – functional

  – listening

  – speaking

  – writing

  – reading

  – vocabulary

  – pronunciation

  – contexts.

Activities promoting flexibility

Role plays

With a group of colleagues, state a problem (e.g. My students don't do their homework) and take on different roles to discuss the situation – parents, director of studies, students and even minister of education!

This activity is based on Edward de Bono's *Six Thinking Hats* (1985), and actual coloured paper hats or badges representing different viewpoints or attitudes to the problem can be created by the trainer. In ELT, these viewpoints could be selected from among the many professional roles we are all aware of. For instance, a director of studies, a parent, a sponsor, an ELT publisher, a teacher trainer, a syllabus designer, a researcher, a linguist, etc.

Variation

■ With higher-level courses, such as the DELTA, the roles or the thinking hats could be well-known ELT figures who represent an approach or a way of thinking. Such names might include Scott Thornbury, Henry Widdowson and Stephen Krashen.

Predicaments, or getting yourself out of troublesome situations

A number of strange situations related to teaching can be created and teachers must defend themselves against specific accusations, e.g. 'You were seen leading a group of blindfolded students through a busy department store', or 'A colleague overheard you telling your class to light the candles and switch off the lights.'

Variation

■ Trainees can write their own predicaments in teams and nominate and challenge members of the opposing team to find a quick and plausible explanation for having used a specific activity in a lesson or after a particular stage.

Preoccupations

This is an activity in which each 'player' is assigned a word or phrase to focus on, such as role play, drilling, communicative language teaching, etc. and in a pair or group they must attempt to steer the conversation back to their own word or phrase, keeping it coherent and logically connected, no matter what other members of the group have to say about their own focus words or phrases!

Variation

■ This can also be done as a playful mingling activity in which some of the preoccupations can be matched, e.g. drilling/rote learning, information gaps/communicative language teaching, PPP (presentation, practice and production) and TBL (task-based learning). Trainees walk about the room and change partners on a signal from their tutor until they find their match.

Balloon debates

This may sound a trifle heartless, but deciding whether this or that originator of a method or approach is the one who is chosen to be saved by allowing them to stay in the balloon can generate great discussions and promote both creative as well as critical thinking. I have deliberately opted not to mention any names as examples for this activity but have used it very successfully in 'approaches and methods' sessions on teacher development courses.

Activities promoting elaboration/ embellishing

'Yes, and' or expanding statements

Start with a suggestion, e.g. 'I think we should have a game at the end of the lesson on first conditionals'. Each subsequent player must begin their turn by saying 'Yes, and…', thus being forced to elaborate and expand the previous person's ideas in a positive rather than in a negative way. This is an activity I learned in a workshop by T Rickards, who also commented that it builds a positive mind-set and collaboration. You can see its mirror activity below for a contrast.

'Yes, but' or contradictions

Take opposing sides on a teaching problem, e.g. for and against using information gap activities. Pairs or small groups hold the argument for as long as they can.

Inserting activities

Give trainees a coursebook page. They then start brainstorming as many activities as possible that can be added between activities in the unit. This may mean new activities or changing existing activities in some way. For example, instead of completing the usual gap-fills, the students can be asked to change the sentences and turn them into complete nonsense, or write similar sentences about classmates or famous people they know of.

Creating a new game from an existing one

Trainees can be given a commercially produced game, such as Pictionary or Taboo, and asked to think of ways of adapting it for use with a class. One such example produced by one of my trainee teachers after I had introduced them to a DELTA Pursuits game was called 'Proficiency Pursuits' and involved questions covered in the C2 Cambridge exam.

Imagine what the teacher said

Given a lesson plan or some hand-outs used by a teacher on video, the trainees watch an excerpt without sound and recreate the teacher's words and student responses.

Variation

■ The trainer can supply a group with a teaching practice report and the hand-outs used, and the trainees try to reconstruct the teacher's language (mistakes and all).

Activities promoting originality

Design activities are generally excellent as ways of helping develop original ideas.

Turning coursebook activities into games

Ask the trainees to take an exercise from your coursebook and try to turn it into a game, e.g. The 'sentences in a sentence' completion exercise can be split into halves and used in a mingling activity.

Introducing an innovation into your teaching programme

This is a more demanding activity involving discussion and decision-making, e.g. 'How would you go about connecting your class with another class of learners in another country? Or 'How would you set up an extensive reading programme if you were given ten sets of class readers?'

Problem-solving activities

These are activities that again may focus on your teaching situation, e.g. your beginning students are very reluctant to use English in class. Suggest a number of different solutions to the problem of persuading them to use English in class.

Desert island

Trainees are given a list of teaching supplies and a desert island brief and are asked to decide which eight (or other suitable number) essentials they would take with them if they had to teach a class at a specified level of instruction with no other supplies or facilities (see the image opposite for an example I have used with my trainees).

© Marisa Constantinides

Putting creativity to work

As previously suggested, the activities are listed under one heading but some do more than just one thing. Overall, I consider these activities as practice opportunities focusing both on the content and on the cognitive mind-set. However, trainees need to apply the skill to their designated planning, design and teaching tasks, and this is where, ultimately, these practice opportunities are leading: to enable teachers in training (and at work) to create more, better and with more ease.

Ideas suggested by colleagues

In my survey, I asked colleagues to describe some activities which they include in their sessions and which they believe develop creativity in their trainee teachers. Their suggestions, fall mostly under the umbrella of holistic practice that must also be included in any attempts to work with thinking skills development.

Here are some of their ideas.

Visualisations and metaphors

Many trainers like to use this technique, e.g. draw an image representing your coursebook; choose a metaphor for a lesson (e.g. a play, a concert, etc.); draw an image to show how you visualise teaching.

Imagine you have no coursebook for your next lesson

Some colleagues have also reported abandoning coursebooks altogether for the duration of their training programmes and report positively on the benefits to their trainees (See also Tomlinson, in this volume).

Materials treasure hunts via Google

This idea may not in itself be creative, but it fits with the concept of curating content before producing one's own.

Group projects

These may involve planning a series of lessons or a set of materials.

Sessions in which these ideas are typically used are assisted lesson preparation, materials evaluation and adaptation, materials design based on authentic documents and introducing educational technology into the curriculum.

Curating online and offline content as a stepping stone to creativity

Curation, which can be defined as the archiving and preservation of digital assets, is a new way of describing what teachers used to do in boxes and binders in the past. Creating original and 'clever' ideas is not the only expression of creativity. Creating something new as a result of changing or building on an existing idea has also given us many new works of art, new inventions, new content, new artefacts, new appliances, new technology, new tools.

Curating and organising teaching resources created by others can be key in supporting the creation of original content. New ideas may sometimes originate in a flash of inspiration without previous knowledge or information, but that is not the usual way we create.

There are many great tools on the web to help teachers collect and curate digital assets which in turn may inspire them to blog, write new material, design new lessons, and deal with classroom problems in a novel and more effective way. Some of the most popular include Diigo, Pinterest, and Scoop.it.

Social networking has a significant role to play in such quests; indeed, most of these tools are also social networking tools, encouraging users to share learning and collaborate and learn together. Facebook timelines and Twitter streams belonging to teachers have themselves become great sources of new content for teachers and teacher educators. Learning is, after all, social. We learn best in groups and creativity is often sparked off in the presence and company of others.

Conclusion

This chapter is based on the firm belief that by undergoing some focused training in developing our own creative thinking skills, those of us involved in the teaching profession will enhance our potential for dealing with the problems of daily teaching and find new ways of making our approach to teaching more exciting and stimulating and the tasks of planning and lesson and materials design easier and more effective.

As teacher educators, I believe we need to make a point of including such activities in our programmes to equip teachers in training not only with the techniques and knowledge needed for the classroom, but also with a set of skills which will sustain them in their own development long after a course has ended.

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13

The learner as a creativity resource

Marjorie Rosenberg

Introduction

A simple definition of creativity is not possible, as creativity comes in so many different forms. Creativity can involve using one's imagination, changing existing ideas, being unique, original and innovative, having a vision, or simply having the freedom to come up with new and unusual ways to carry out tasks. Classrooms around the world are filled with wonderful resources for creativity, innovation, ideas and possibilities to 'think outside the box'. Those looking in from the outside may notice not much more than a board to write on, along with some tables and chairs, and wonder where the resources are, perhaps overlooking the fact that the most important part of the classroom is the people in it. Each of our learners comes to class with a unique set of values, experiences, ideas and thoughts, and a wealth of knowledge waiting to be tapped. For this reason making use of the learner as 'a creativity resource' not only makes sense but also provides teachers with an unending source of material to develop and nurture both inside and outside the classroom.

Giving the learners space

Sometimes it is simply a matter of giving the learners the space they need to express their ideas and creativity by setting tasks which enable them to contribute their own thoughts and experiences while experimenting and expanding on the language they need to do this. Bringing in songs, music, artwork, etc. can serve as a springboard to creativity and allow learners to verbalise feelings and emotions which they might instead have left outside the classroom. Learners also bring knowledge of other cultures and languages to class which can be exploited with a variety of activities demonstrating both creativity and innovation. By maintaining a non-threatening atmosphere in the classroom, the teacher can encourage risk-taking and the joy of play, two factors which can help learners to discover their own strategies to learn a language and enjoy the process.

The power of the learner

Our learners have much more power than we may realise. When we walk out of a lesson feeling that it went well, it is most likely because we felt that the learners enjoyed it, made progress, were engaged and motivated, and a positive atmosphere was felt in the classroom. A lesson which is primarily 'teacher focused' stops being an interaction and becomes a lecture, something not normally expected in language learning. Our learners are not usually there to 'learn about the language' but to discover what they can do with it. Therefore it is necessary for us to 'create more situations in which the learners can contribute, initiate, control and create what happens in the classroom' (Deller, 1990). Keeping this in mind can also help us to become partners in the learning process, and the realisation that we can learn a lot from our learners is a valuable lesson for all of us.

The teacher as facilitator

Sometimes it is difficult for teachers to 'let go' and give the learners the chance to take over for a time. However, when this happens it generally creates an atmosphere in which true learning begins to take place. Simply memorising vocabulary or learning grammar rules is not necessarily a sign that learners have internalised language or even dealt with 'how to learn'. But when we step back and give them the opportunity to access the language they need in order to express what they would like to put into words, a very different type of learning begins to take place. This is when creative ideas can spring forth and learners begin to experiment with the language (which is actually how we learn our first language). It is then that an element of fun comes into the classroom – an important element in the creative learning process. It is also vital that we do not think of our learners as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, but as fertile fields which can be cultivated and harvested.

The activities

The activities described in this chapter have been used in a variety of settings. In adult education classes held in the evening or on weekends it very quickly became apparent to me that learners needed to be engaged and be able to put aside their daily persona in order to fully participate in an English class. Coming from the performing arts myself, I found that incorporating drama, music and art were easy to do and came naturally to me. As I was enthusiastic about what we were doing, my learners joined in and took part in the activities. These have then been refined and developed to be used to practise particular areas of grammar or vocabulary and have since been used in courses for government officials, in companies, at the university level and in teacher training sessions.

One of the main factors of these activities is the fact that they fit into the concept of 'NTP' (no teacher preparation). While I fully appreciate the value of prepared and laminated cards and board games and worksheets, the activities described here can be done anywhere and with any group with a minimum of preparation. In addition, most need just the everyday articles we can find in the classroom. The majority of them can be expanded into writing activities which could be done in class or as homework, and they all rely on minimal input from the teacher and aim for maximum output from the learners. Some of them I have learned from other trainers and adapted, some I just tried out because they seemed like fun and my learners seemed to enjoy them. All in all, they encourage learners to think for themselves, add their own personal experiences, thoughts and ideas, and communicate these to others. Being creative is a wonderful thing but if we keep it inside us as a well-guarded secret, no one will ever realise the potential we have for innovation and creativity. Therefore these activities are done in pairs, groups or even with the whole class. Creativity can be a self-fulfilling prophecy: if we think we are creative, we have a better chance of developing this creative talent, and this becomes a 'virtuous circle' as success breeds more success.

The activities also make use of the concept of playfulness, which I like to encourage in all of my learners, regardless of age. Having fun in the classroom, being engaged and overcoming inhibitions are ways to increase motivation, and this motivation can encourage learners to try things out and take chances. Success breeds success and therefore this type of encouragement may be exactly what learners need to go on. Learning a first language is something we do naturally – but learning a second generally involves hard work. Therefore, providing the chance to remember what it was like to be creative, as we were as children, and providing a safe atmosphere in order to do this, can help learners of all ages to discover not only new words and grammar structures, but how to communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings in a new language – the goal of language learners everywhere. In addition, creativity is encouraged when we provide input but allow for a wide variety of output from our learners.

Creating a story

Aims

■ Inspire emotions and feelings with music and images.

■ Give learners freedom to create their own story.

■ Encourage self-access of vocabulary and grammar structures.

Materials

A short excerpt (three to four minutes) of a piece of dramatic-sounding orchestral music.

Examples include:

■ Leonard Bernstein: *Overture to Candide.*

■ Anton Dvořák: *Slavonic Dance No. 2 in E minor.*

■ Puccini: *Overture to Turandot.*

Pictures of places, people, objects, etc. These can come from travel brochures, advertisements, clip art or Eltpics: www.flickr.com/photos/eltpics/, etc.

Procedure

■ Put learners into small groups and give each group a set of eight to ten pictures. Each group can have different sets or you can use the same set for each of them.

■ Instruct the learners to spread the pictures in front of them so that everyone can see them.

■ Ask them to discuss the pictures briefly and to ask if they have any questions about vocabulary.

■ Tell them that they are going to hear a piece of music. Based on what they hear, feel and see, they are to create a story of their own.

■ Play the piece of music for the learners.

■ While listening, they can either begin to put the pictures into order or they can wait until the music is finished and then decide on the story.

■ Give them enough time to finish their story. They can write it down if they like, just make notes or remember it.

■ Play the music again and have them look through the pictures and rehearse the story in their minds.

■ Ask each group to tell the others their story.

Students can write up the story in groups or individually for homework.

Making use of the masters

Aims

- Give learners the chance to imagine themselves in a picture which they use to elicit emotions and feelings.

Materials

Different reproductions of works by famous artists, ensuring that there are enough for each learner to have one. The best types to use are those which show scenes and people rather than just landscapes or single portraits.

Procedure

- Lay the pictures out on the tables or have learners come to the front of the room and choose a picture.
- Instruct them to look carefully at the pictures they have chosen and to imagine themselves in the scene. They should then try to experience for themselves the emotions or feelings that the picture elicits.
- Put the learners in small groups and have them lay out all their pictures together. Then ask each learner to express the feelings they experienced by imagining themselves in the picture and have the others guess which one it was.
- When they have finished, they hold a discussion about the pictures in their groups and compare the feelings and emotions they experienced when looking at them.
- Learners can write a story about the picture describing what happened before the picture was painted, or making a prediction about what will happen in the future.

Students can write up the story in groups or individually for homework.

Creating modern art

Aims

- Use a type of modern art drawing created by the learners as a springboard for 'language drills' and moving on to freer speaking.

Materials

A large piece of paper for each ten learners, and coloured pens or crayons.

Procedure

- Put the paper in front of the learners and make the pens available.
- Begin by drawing a line on the paper and encourage the learners to do the same.
- Once a line drawing is finished, have the learners colour it in using different colours to create a piece of modern art.
- Speak about the finished drawing using sentences such as: 'What could this be?' 'This reminds me of…' and 'I think this looks like…'.

Building a machine

Aims

- Have learners work together to think of an unusual machine.
- Encourage them to use their bodies to create movement and a process.

Materials

A photo or drawing of a machine.

Procedure

- Teach vocabulary of sequences (e.g. first, then, after that).
- Show a photo or drawing of a machine to learners and elicit ideas from them of its purpose.
- Put the learners into small groups and tell them to think of an unusual machine and what it is for (or what it can do). The machine should have a part for each member of the group to act out. The machine has to have a purpose.
- They then work out who does what and present their machine to the class. They can use sounds but no words.
- The others watch and then guess the purpose of the machine.
- To reinforce language, they act out their machine again and narrate what exactly is taking place.

Students can write about their machine in groups or individually for homework.

Co-operative chain

Aims

- Give learners freedom to complete sentences and work together to create a metaphor (the chain) of the classroom.
- Get to know each other with an inclusive and creative activity.
- Transfer from first person singular to third person singular using the correct form of the verb.

Materials

A list of ten numbered stem sentences on the board.

   Example:

   1. My favourite food is...

   2. I like to...

   3. I am good at... -ing

   4. I am bad at... -ing

   5. etc.

You will also need some strips of paper and sticky tape.

Procedure

- Give each learner a strip of paper and tell them to choose three of the sentences to complete.
- Learners write their name on the strip, the numbers of the sentences they have chosen and their short answers, e.g. 4) dancing.

- Make a chain out of the strips by making a loop out of one strip and then adding the others until a connected chain is formed.
- Have the learners stand up and take hold of one of the links of the chain which belongs to another student.
- Ask one learner to begin by saying whose link they are is holding and introducing the person to the group by saying their name and then reading out the completed stem sentences, e.g. 'This is Carol. She is bad at dancing.'
- As each person is introduced they then take their turn to introduce the next person until everyone in the group has been spoken about.
- Hang up the chain in the room and explain that the group is linked together as they are in the chain.

Using 'home' and 'expert' groups

Aims
- Learn to set up an atmosphere of interdependence in group work.
- Make use of combined creativity within a group.
- Encourage a feeling of belonging and peer encouragement.

Materials
- Several short texts – enough so that each 'expert group' has one to work with (these can be on the same topic or different ones), logic puzzles, maps, charts, etc.

Procedure
- Put the learners into so-called 'home groups' of four to six learners. Give each of these groups a letter (A, B, C, etc.).
- Give them some time to choose a name for their group and either a logo or a group cheer. They then tell the other groups what they decided and in the case of a cheer they can act it out for the others.
- Number each of the students within their group and ask them to remember their numbers.
- Form new groups (the so-called 'expert groups'). Each expert group will contain four to six learners drawn from the different home groups. These expert groups can then be used to carry out a number of tasks.
- If you have given them a short text, instruct them to read it and then write short summaries of it or answer questions about it. If they have a logic puzzle, they should try to solve it and discuss how they did this. If they have a map, they can be asked to talk about travelling or terrain, and with charts they can be asked to explain them, etc.
- When they have finished, ask the learners to return to their home groups.
- The teacher then leads the activity by asking someone in a home group to give a short summary of the text, an answer to a question, explain a puzzle, talk about a map or chart etc. The important part here is that the person asked is not the 'expert' on that particular text, so they have to get the information from the person who is the expert. The answers are then confirmed by the other experts in the room, rather than the teacher.

Circle faces

Aims

- Come up with a creative story about a fictional character based on a drawing created co-operatively.

Materials

- A piece of paper for each pair or group of three.
- A coloured pen or pencil.

Procedure

- Tell the pairs or groups to draw a circle filling at least three-quarters of the page on the paper.
- The learners then pass their papers to the right and the next group is asked to draw a nose. They can be reminded to be creative with their drawing.
- The papers are passed again and the next group draws the eyes.
- This continues until the face is completed.
- The last groups to get the drawing can add anything they feel it needs, such as jewellery or freckles.
- The drawings are then passed on one more time and the pair or group who gets the final drawing creates a persona for the face. They should think of a name, come up with a story about how they met the 'person', what the 'person' likes and dislikes, what they are good or bad at doing and add something that most people do not know about the 'person'.
- They then present 'their friend' to the class and answer any questions the others may have.

Students can write up the story in groups or individually for homework.

Personal mind maps

Aims

- Encourage learners to be creative with their own personal information.
- Awaken interest in the stories by others in the class.

Materials

- A piece of paper and a pen for each learner.

Procedure

- Ask each learner to draw a personal mind map. They first draw a circle in the middle of the page and write their name in it and then add six to eight lines which connect the circle to other circles.
- They fill in these circles with dates, names, abbreviations, words, numbers, etc. that mean something to them personally.
- When they have finished they exchange their mind maps with their neighbours who then ask questions about the meaning of the information in the circles.
- After 'interviewing' each other, they then introduce their partners to the rest of the class.

Example:

Creating an ideal home

Aims

- Work together to create an ideal living environment.
- Use creative ideas to produce a poster.

Materials

- A large piece of paper.
- Pens.
- Catalogues or advertisements from furniture stores or homes, travel brochures, etc.
- Glue or tape.

Procedure

- Put the learners into small groups.
- Ask them to talk first about their ideal home and its location; it can be a large loft in a city, an old farmhouse in the country or a bungalow at the beach.
- They then have to create the perfect home for the group. They need to work together and each of the people in the group has to contribute to the final result, and the home must be designed for the whole group to live in.
- The groups can use the pictures they have to create their ideal home. They can draw floor plans or pictures, label rooms, outdoor facilities, etc. or paste on the pictures they have.
- When the groups have finished, they present their posters to the class and answer questions about it.

Soap opera – creating a family

I learned this game from Andrew Wright

Aims

- Create an alternative identity for oneself.
- Work together to join the identities into a family unit.
- Make use of storytelling.

Materials

- A4 paper cut in half.
- Pens.

Procedure

- Give each of the learners a piece of paper and some pens.
- Tell them that they are going to think up a new identity for themselves.
- They then draw a picture of the person they would like to be and make some notes about the details they will need. (Name, job, age, hobbies, interests, traditions, etc.)
- When they have finished creating their new personas they introduce themselves to the group.

- The next step is to form a family. This can be done with six to ten students; larger classes can form more than one family. The groups work together to decide on the relationships of the fantasy identities and the dynamics within the family.
- They can attach the drawings they have to a larger poster and then present the information to the class and answer any questions the others may have.

Changing a story

This too is a game I learned from Andrew Wright

Aims
- Add creative details to an everyday event.
- Remember details and gist by listening.

Materials
A small piece of paper for each learner.

Procedure
- Give each of the learners a small piece of paper and ask them to write their name on it.
- Tell them to think of a small thing that went wrong for them in the last couple of days. This can be something like forgetting to buy milk for coffee or forgetting to set their alarm clock, etc.
- Explain that they are going to exchange their story with another person. As they tell their first partner what happened they exchange the piece of paper with their name on it.
- The learners take their slip of paper with a name on it and find a new partner to exchange stories with, making one or two small changes in the stories. They also exchange the pieces of paper with the names on them. They then look for new partners and the game continues for ten minutes or so. Remind learners that they can be as creative as they like when changing the stories, the only rule is that they cannot tell the story to the person who started it.
- Stop the game and ask the learners to return to their seats. Then ask one of them to tell the story they just heard without mentioning the name of the person who told it. The class listens and people try to guess if it is their story. Once they guess, they tell the original story so the class can see what has been added, deleted, etc.
- Continue until all the stories have been told along with the originals.

Conclusion

The ideas and activities suggested in this chapter are taken from current methodologies and approaches such as Suggestopedia, communicative language teaching and co-operative learning. Suggestopedia takes advantage of learners' fantasy and imaginations by having them create new identities which they use throughout the class. The game about making a family was used in several courses taught using this method. The learners are encouraged to take chances, and as they are able to disassociate from their everyday identities and act as another persona, they do not have to worry about mistakes. Music is used to relax students and create an atmosphere which is different to traditional classrooms.

In the communicative approach learners become acquainted with the functions of language and are encouraged to use it to get their message across. They can also talk about feelings and emotions when presented with pictures and other materials, and the teacher works as a facilitator who sets up the activities to promote communication. The social aspect is regarded as an important factor and speakers have the freedom about what to say and how to say it. As authentic language (at least as much as possible) is the goal with this approach, all the activities suggested would fit into this method and have been used in classrooms in which English is taught communicatively.

Co-operative learning is explained in the activities and is a method which teaches social skills along with language or other subjects. Students learn to develop 'positive interdependence' in group work and the groups are structured in such a way that everyone has to take part. In addition, learners help each other to reach a common goal and learn from each other. As learners interact in the target language and take on responsibilities, they also develop respect for each other and their capabilities, making it easier to use learners as resources in the classroom.

Once teachers have experienced the freedom of giving learners space to try things out, it becomes easier to do it. We may be afraid to let go of control at the beginning but seeing the enthusiasm of learners and feeling the atmosphere of growth and trust can help us to continue on this path. One of the joys of teaching is suddenly coming up with a new way to present a concept and realising that our learners have now gained a new perspective on it.

This is one of the factors that keeps us fresh and helps us to truly enjoy what we are doing. Realising that our learners are people who can contribute significantly to what goes on in the classroom may be the first step to opening the floodgates to creativity. Finding ways to encourage them and support them can be the way to optimise the impact of both the learning and the teaching, a goal that those on 'both sides of the desk' are aiming for.

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14

Practising creative writing in high school foreign language classes

Peter Lutzker

Introduction

In this chapter it will be argued that it is in the deeply human need to listen to and tell stories that the finest potentials of creative writing lie. Stories not only shape the imaginative and emotional life of a child, but also the acquisition of language and the development of thought and self. In her seminal work on the role of stories in childhood Susan Engel writes:

> …stories are not merely a nice or fun decoration added to the real stuff of mental development. They are, in many respects, the real stuff of mental development. The construction, telling and retelling of stories allow children to learn about their world and reflect on their knowledge. The making of stories also allows them to know themselves; through stories children construct a self and communicate that self to others. (…) …it is an essential aspect of what it means to be a human being. (Engel, 1999: 206).

It is these same formative dimensions which listening to and telling stories call upon that also lead her to emphasise the importance of later encouraging children and young people to write them:

> The purpose of encouraging kids to write is not just to get them to write more happily or to become better writers. These experiences have a profound and formative effect on the child's developing narrative voice, and through this, his developing sense of self. The narratives created in writing have a deep connection with the ones created in play and in conversation… (…) They all contribute to the development of the self and to the development of the second world – the one that allows us to live in the past, the future, the impossible, the world of narrative that allows us to share ourselves with others. (Engel, 1999: 221).

One of the precepts underlying the use of creative writing in foreign language learning is that these processes of storytelling and 'story encouraging' can also have wide-ranging implications in learning a foreign language.

Creative and artistic processes in adolescence

In 'entering into' a foreign language, young people not only have continual chances to perceive the world from a new standpoint, but also of experiencing their own language, culture and 'self' from another perspective. It is within this larger context that creative writing can play a crucial role; not as the occasional 'fun and games on Friday afternoons' but as an essential dimension of what can be learned in and through a foreign language.

Learning to express oneself creatively is a highly individual process deeply rooted in one's inner imaginative and emotional life. At the same time, it also calls for a heightened perception and awareness of the world outside of oneself. When adolescents are given opportunities to become engaged in such artistic processes, what they can learn both about themselves and the world goes far past what most traditional schooling generally offers. Maxine Greene writes:

> I believe that the learning provoked by what we call aesthetic education is paradigmatic for the learning many of us would like to see. Learning stimulated by the desire to explore, to find out, to go in search. This is the learning that goes beyond teaching – the only significant learning, I believe. It is self-initiated at some point, permeated by wonder, studded by moments of questioning, always with the sense that there is something out there, something worthwhile beyond. (Greene, 2001: 46–47).

Viewed from this perspective, the task of the teacher is transformed from primarily imparting knowledge into creating opportunities for pupils to be able to take their own initiatives as part of their broader search for meaning and orientation. It is this connection between artistic experience and personal development that lies at the heart of Greene's understanding of a meaningful education:

Most significantly, I think we too often forget that the primary purpose of education is to free persons to make sense of their actual lived situations – not only cognitively, but perceptually, imaginatively, affectively – to attend mindfully to their own lives, to take their own initiatives in interpreting them and finding out where the deficiencies are and trying to transform them. (*ibid.* 206).

At the core of this vision lies a belief in the individual and biographical will of the pupils to grasp such opportunities of growth when they are presented to them:

Surely you recognize that this kind of thing seldom happens naturally. Situations have to be created that release the energies required, that provoke interest, that move persons to reach beyond themselves. (…) With this in mind, we can somehow trust that, if we have taught how to search and let them catch some gleam of the untraveled, they will find their own ways, as we have done, and begin teaching themselves, pursuing their own possibilities. (*ibid.* 47).

In pursuing their own possibilities, young people will need both encouragement and feedback from their teachers. What they will also need are opportunities to practise.

The practice of the arts

Developing the skills called for in creative writing invariably depends on having enough possibilities to practise them. The word 'practice' is often used interchangeably with the word 'training', but they have very different meanings, and the distinction in this context between practising and training is crucial. When training for something, one has clear goals and attaining those goals becomes the focus of the work; the way one reaches them becomes, at most, a secondary consideration. A typical example would be muscle building in a fitness studio.

Traditional language learning relies heavily on the *training* of language skills, particularly with respect to vocabulary and grammar. Coursebooks are carefully designed to train specific skills within clearly defined frameworks. Such training also implies focusing on clearly defined, short-term, testable goals. *Practising* is fundamentally different and involves a longer and subtler process. The carpenter and violinist have in common that they have practised for years and through their practice have been gradually transformed. Their practice sits deeply in their bodies and movements and also shapes the way they feel and think. It is not reaching the goal that transforms a practitioner – they may not even reach a goal – but the nature of the practice itself. It is this crucial distinction between training and practising in language learning that is highly significant in this context.

When creative writing is considered as a long-term process of developing perceptual, imaginative and expressive capabilities, then this calls for practising in the sense that all creative artists continually practise. And it is within this larger and richer context that heightened and transformative learning experiences in a foreign language become most possible. In the context of viewing the practice of creative writing in conjunction with the specific demands of foreign language learning, Alan Maley argues that the challenges and constraints implied in developing one's creative writing skills require disciplined engagement on different levels:

Contrary to what many believe, creative writing is not about licence. It is a highly disciplined activity. However, the discipline is self-imposed: "the fascination of what's difficult". In this it stands in contrast to expository writing, which imposes constraints from without. (…) Creative writing is a personal activity, involving feeling. This does not mean that thought is absent – far from it. The ingenuity of a plot or the intricate structure of a poem are not the products of unthinking minds. (Maley, 2006: 35).

He argues further that precisely because the degree of affective and cognitive engagement in aesthetic creation is so much higher than in those activities driven by specific language-learning goals, it will also foster significant improvement in language capabilities:

> *Creative writing aids language development at all levels: grammar, vocabulary, phonology and discourse. As learners manipulate the language in interesting and demanding ways in their attempt to express uniquely personal meanings (as they do in creative writing), they necessarily engage with the language at a deeper level of processing than with expository texts. The gains in grammatical accuracy, appropriacy and originality of lexical choice, and sensitivity to rhythm, rhyme, stress and intonation are significant. (ibid).*

The deeper level of language processing that Maley refers to can be understood in conjunction with a pupil's desire to express themselves meaningfully. The fact that they are being asked to do this in a foreign language should not be considered as an insurmountable hindrance, but as a potential source of freedom. This is exactly what the Swiss writer Peter Bichsel refers to when he describes his experiences in learning English. In stark contrast to his traumatic experiences in having to learn French in school ('I am a victim – a victim of French lessons') (Bichsel, 1985: 52), he describes his later learning of English:

> *Learning English was for me the realisation of a boy's dreams. (...) ...a language that not only opened a new world, but far more than that, gave me the possibility to take on a new role, a form of acting, a faint breath of change, a faint remembering of the human dream of becoming someone else. I don't have to be someone in this language; instead I am allowed to play.*
> (Bichsel 1985: 54, my translation).

For language teachers to facilitate such creative learning processes, it will be necessary for them to look for possibilities to go beyond the constraints which standardised curricula, coursebooks and testing often impose. It will mean searching for ways to encourage and support the individual development of each of their pupils, not only with respect to language learning but also in their broader search for meaning in their lives.

The argument that I am making is that creative writing offers manifold possibilities of doing this and the following section offers a concrete example of how a creative writing project can help to serve such goals. Although the different exercises which will be presented in the following section were offered within a specific context, they could also easily be used or adapted for use in other situations. They can also be considered as representative of those kinds of exercises which I believe to be most valuable.

Short story projects in EFL high school classes

It has consistently been my experience that it is very helpful to place individual creative writing assignments within the broader framework of a large-scale writing project. Exercises done over a period of weeks are thus viewed as a form of practising designed to enable pupils, for instance, to write their own collection of poems, screenplays or short stories. Working towards such a goal is particularly important in artistic work: just as a music student practises not only for herself, but for a performance for an audience, a focus on working towards a final text which will be read and appreciated by others is a strong motivational factor throughout the entire process. At the same time, establishing from the very beginning a clear and highly challenging goal gives a structure and direction to all the activities and lessons which follow.

The following section details a three-week preparatory unit consisting of ten 45 minute lessons which are designed to prepare pupils to write their own short stories. After this introductory unit they are given at least six weeks to work on their stories as a long-term homework assignment. The classes in which I taught these units were mixed-ability EFL classes in Steiner schools in Germany. I have generally chosen to do this in 11th grade where the average age is 17. It would certainly be possible to also do this project a year later and, perhaps in some classes, a year earlier. At this point in the 11th grade they will have already read, discussed and written essays about two or three modern short stories in that same year. They will also have read a number of short stories in both 9th and 10th grades.

Ten lessons as preparation for writing a short story

Split lines

The announcement that we are beginning a project which will end with the pupils having written their own short stories is generally met with a mixture of curiosity, disbelief and panic. In the first lesson I am thus aiming to alleviate the feeling of dismay that some pupils are already feeling and, at the same time, to awaken their imaginative and creative faculties in a playful way. In this situation I have often chosen to either use or adapt the following exercise taken from Maley and Duff's book *Literature* (1990: 24–26).

Materials

Match the following first lines with the responses given in the next section. Feel free to list different possibilities.

1. I want to talk to you about this letter that you sent me.
2. You don't think much of Australia then?
3. Now what is the matter?
4. Has anything happened?
5. I say, no need to call anyone.
6. Someone will go for her with a bread knife one day – and he won't miss her.
7. I'm sorry I was late. It was unavoidable.
8. Speaking out may get you into trouble.
9. Twenty-five minutes past five.
10. I wanted to ask you something.
11. You should take off your shoes before entering the mosque.
12. Tell me, what kind of man do you prefer?
13. Why are you going to marry him?
14. May I sit up? I will not struggle against you again.

A. Oh, I've never thought of it.
B. That? Oh...
C. I already have.
D. Why, how am I to judge?
E. They consulted, and let him rise.
F. Did you? What was it?
G. My wife has left me.
H. I'm not so sure.
I. I had imagined it was later.
J. Don't you?
K. What's wrong with your voice? Why can't you talk properly?
L. It's often done so in the past.
M. I'm not so sure.
N. I was not going to.
O. Oh, it's nothing, nothing. Go away. Can't you see that I'm not dressed?

Procedure

Working either on their own or with partners, pupils are encouraged to look for one or more possibilities of combining these lines. I specifically make the point that it is not a question of getting it 'right', but rather realising that different combinations lead to completely different situations and possible stories. For that reason, I do not use the answer key and leave the question open as to what lines originally belonged together.

Naturally, there are pairs of lines that don't make any sense and if a pupil proposes one, I gently suggest they should consider another. At the end of the lesson, they are asked to choose one of their pairs and for homework to put this into a larger context, either by describing the general outlines of a situation that could have led to this brief exchange or by writing lines preceding and/or following the given exchange.

The wide range of choices which are thus offered both with respect to the combination of lines they choose, as well as to the type of assignment, is crucial and can also be seen as a thread going through all the following creative writing assignments.

Possessions

One highly worthwhile way of beginning the second lesson would be to listen to some of the homework generated by the first assignment. It has consistently been my experience that the interest in finding out what other pupils did with the same assignment is very pronounced and thus the quality of listening which then occurs in the classroom is unusually high. Achieving this quality of listening to and generally appreciating each other's work is a significant element of the entire project.

In this exercise, pupils are given two possible tasks and are asked to choose one of them.

1. Think of someone you know well and list different possessions which you associate with that person. Then choose one of those objects, the one that seems most resonant to you and write more about it, trying to be as precise in your description of that object as possible. Feel free to bring in any personal memories which this object triggers.

2. Write about a personal possession/object that you would most want to save in case there was a fire in your house. Describe it precisely and explain to your reader why this object is so important to you. (Do not write about your mobile phone, since you already have that in your pocket!)

Procedure

An exercise like this will lead to an extraordinary range of answers. Over the years, I have read loving and detailed descriptions of cars, stuffed animals, personal diaries and a spectacular array of keepsakes. The students write in class. This means, that although dictionaries are provided, the teacher is in constant action, walking through the classroom and providing help with the necessary vocabulary and phrases. The atmosphere in the class is highly concentrated and the pupils are very absorbed in remembering and describing what they're visualising.

Although theoretically such assignments could also be done entirely as homework, it has become clear to me that it is generally far more enjoyable and fruitful to have much of this kind of activity done together in class. The pupils are invariably grateful to have someone who can immediately help them in expressing something that is important to them. Thus, both the presence and support of the teacher, as well as the atmosphere generated by the creative energy of the other pupils, generally lead to a higher

quality of results than when such assignments are only done as homework. Some exercises can be finished in class time, others will require a further 'finishing up' at home. Particularly, if one also takes the time to listen to each other's work, it is evident that one will often need more than one class hour to complete an assignment. This will then lead to either a further extension of the work to be done at home, as was the case with 'split lines' or, in this case, finishing at home what was begun in the lesson.

An assignment such as this one I might collect afterwards and then correct and comment on. This would then lead to them having to rewrite their texts to correct language errors and possibly to having to rewrite the entire assignment so as to have it in a corrected form to be put into their language portfolio. Whether I choose to do this or not will often depend on the amount of work that they had put into it: if a number of them had invested significant amounts of time, I feel that it is necessary to respond likewise by taking the time to correct and comment appreciatively on their work. However, in the context of this unit there are also assignments such as the following that I will choose to leave uncorrected, as 'workshop' pieces.

Working with photographs of people

In the third lesson I like to offer a complete shift of modes. The following exercise, which I have adapted from Maley and Duff's *Drama Techniques in Language Learning* (1982: 128–129), is the task which usually generates both the most active discussions and the most laughter in the entire unit.

Procedure

The class is divided into an even number of groups of four. Each group will receive a large photograph of a person. It is helpful to choose an interesting range of distinctive and striking photographs of people, none of whom should be recognisable as someone the pupils know. Each group will have 15–20 minutes to answer the following questions about the person.

- How old might the person be?
- What might their occupation be (or have been)?
- Family circumstances (married or not, children or not, etc.)?
- What kind of a personality?
- Likes and dislikes?
- Where does the person come from?
- Life story.

Discuss your answers, and then have at least one person write them down.

After 15 minutes exchange pictures with another group, and after only five minutes the two groups meet and exchange their answers. First the 'non-experts' (the group that only had five minutes) give their answers and then the 'experts' tell the others what they 'know'.

The mixture of perception and imagination which this assignment calls for can help prepare pupils to later more clearly visualise and develop characters in their own stories.

Losses

After the last humorous lesson it can be appropriate to offer something completely different. The following assignment is adapted from an exercise devised by Rolaine Hochstein (1995: 44–49) and can generate very moving pieces of writing.

Materials

What can be lost? Write about something/ someone that you lost in your life that was meaningful to you.

Procedure

This is an example of a writing assignment that I might let the pupils work on for perhaps 30 minutes in class and then ask if some of them would be willing to read what they have written so far. A few pupils may not be willing to do this since what they wrote may be highly personal, for instance, the loss of a family member. Other losses that I have heard about over the years, ranging from wallets to guinea pigs, will provide fewer problems.

Working with paintings

Once again a complete shift of modes can be satisfying. The following exercise was adapted from Paul Matthews' collection *Sing Me the Creation* (1994: 30) and requires the use of an overhead or LCD projector.

There is a particular value in working intensively with pictures in language classes. For some learners whose visual sensibilities are more highly developed than their verbal skills it is both more stimulating, and a chance to shine.

Materials

Write a descriptive piece in which the different relationships between the figures in a painting, for example in Rembrandt's 'Jacob and his Sons', are described. What conclusions can you draw about each of the characters and, in particular, their relationships, through closely observing and considering all the details that can be seen?

Procedure

You can either show the picture and hand out the instructions for students to work on, or start with students in pairs or groups to brainstorm ideas before they start to write.

Working with newspaper articles

Over the years I have accumulated a collection of unusual newspaper articles, most of which fit into the category of 'fact being stranger than fiction'; for instance, the story about the missing canoeist who was assumed to have drowned and then five years later walked into a police station, or the man who spent 30 years in jail wrongly accused of a crime he didn't commit, or the story about the woman who bought a vase at a flea market for £20 that turned out to be a rare antiquity worth tens of thousands of pounds. Out of this collection I choose extracts from four articles which I think would best fit that particular class and then read them with the class, in conjunction with the following assignment.

The following four extracts from articles were taken from newspapers. Each of them could provide the potential 'seed' for a short story or film. Choose one of them and draft the outline and/or storyboard for a short story or a film. Think of whose perspective the story or film would be told from and what possible beginnings, middles and ends could be developed. What potential highpoint could you build towards? Feel free to think of different alternatives. You are not drafting something you then have to follow up on, but rather considering different possibilities for treating a non-fiction text in a literary or cinematic manner.

Procedure

The possibility to turn one of these articles into a film scenario and/or a visualised storyboard is usually taken up by more than half of the class. The scenarios that are generated are often quite detailed, including possible camera shots and choices of music. This is an assignment that I carry over into the next lesson. (It takes a while just to go through the four stories and for the pupils to make their choice.) Depending on how intensively the class take up this task and whether I ask them to continue working on it at home, it often takes up a third lesson as well. It is an assignment that can also be done fruitfully as partner work – particularly in the context of the draft of a screenplay or storyboard.

Mr Death

This exercise once again provides a shift of pace. It has been adapted from an exercise designed by Meredith Sue Willis (1995: 44–49).

Materials

So Jamie began to think of Death. Death, that strange being with the huge square toes who lived way in the West. The great one who lived in the straight house like a platform without sides to it, and without a roof. What need has Death for a cover, and what winds can blow against him? He stands in his high house that overlooks the world. Stands watchful and motionless all day with his sword drawn back, waiting for the messenger to bid him come. Been standing there before there was a where or a when or a then. She was liable to find a feather from his wings lying in her yard any day now.

Zora Neale Huston. *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*

Procedure

Ask students to write a paragraph in this manner using one of the following words: depression, satisfaction, greed, embarrassment, fear, amazement, excitement, love, jealousy, joy, hysteria, helplessness.

Story openings

This might be the final exercise before they begin their own stories.

Materials

Choose one of these beginnings and either continue writing the story from this point on for at least another paragraph or two, and/or develop different possible plots of different stories that could be generated from this beginning.

Procedure

The first lines or opening paragraphs from about ten different modern short stories are copied onto one page.

Beginning their own short stories

At the end of this preparatory phase the pupils will begin working at home on their own stories. In class we will be doing something different: a unit that requires little or no additional homework. They have at least six weeks to finish their stories. I ask them to bring their unfinished manuscripts to class at the end of each week so that I can see their work. I'm interested in knowing where they are in their story, what form of narration they have chosen, whether they have an idea of how the story will end, etc. A dialogue between the 'writer' and the teacher as an interested 'encourager' of the work begins here and will continue and intensify in the course of the project.

Six weeks later: handing in their stories

After receiving the short stories of each pupil, the teacher's work begins. Depending on the size of the class, correcting and commenting on all these stories will require a substantial investment of time. With an average of 38 pupils I have generally needed up to six weeks to complete this work. At the end pupils receive both a fully corrected version and a detailed commentary on their work. It is crucial that the commentary presents a full recognition and discussion of what has been written and that the tone of the commentary not be that of a teacher 'correcting' her pupils but of an interested reader responding to a writer with constructive and respectful feedback.

Two months later: reading each other's stories

After getting back their stories the pupils rework them in light of the corrections and, in the end, have a complete and corrected version of their stories. At this point a further highly satisfying phase begins. Over a period of one or two weeks the pupils read each other's stories during class. They are generally quite astounded at the originality and quality of their classmates' (corrected) work. If they don't understand something, they can easily ask the 'author', who is sitting in the same classroom. At the end of reading a story they are asked to write a personal response to it and to put this into the folder in which the story is enclosed. This means that at the end of each class all the authors rush to their own folders to see what their classmates have written. For the teacher such hours usually involve just sitting quietly and observing pupils appreciating the work of other pupils. I have often seen this as a deserved reward for the untold hours I spent correcting those same stories.

Conclusions

It has been my experience that the stories the pupils write are, almost without exception, the finest and most extensive work that each pupil has ever done up until that point. They become deeply involved in writing their stories: imaginatively, cognitively, emotionally and volitionally. In the course of these six weeks, pupils invariably encounter difficulties, resistance and unmotivated phases, as well as periods of creative inspiration and flow. The reason they are so willing to invest so much of their time and energy in this project is that the work is experienced as personally meaningful and it is exactly this sense of purpose that they most deeply seek. The personal and aesthetic satisfaction which is thus gained by accomplishing a task of this order must be seen as a decisive factor in evaluating its value.

The pupils naturally also make significant steps in a wide range of language skills, particularly with respect to vocabulary and grammar. However, it is essential to realise that this was neither their main focus nor mine. The project is both intended and experienced as a creative assignment, not as a language-learning task. Such artistic projects can have long-term transformative effects on pupils, both in terms of their relation to the foreign language and in their perception of themselves. As language teachers, we have a wide range of possibilities to offer pupils such creative challenges and thus a chance to develop through meeting them. If we offer them such opportunities, they will seize them, sensing, as Greene writes, the possibility 'to attend mindfully to their own lives, to take their own initiatives in interpreting them' (*op. cit.*). This is a 'learning that goes beyond teaching', rooted in the creative potentials of our pupils, potentials that they, and only they, can develop – provided they are given chances to do so.

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Peter Lutzker taught English in Steiner schools in Germany for 25 years, as well as teaching pre-service and in-service courses for teachers throughout Europe. In the context of designing different programmes for language teachers, he has worked closely with actors, directors, clowns and storytellers with the aim of enhancing the artistry of teachers throughout different forms of dramatic training. This work was described in his book *The Art of Foreign Language Teaching: Improvisation and Drama in Teacher Development and Language Learning* (Tübingen: 2007). In 2010 he became a Professor at the Freie Hochschule, Stuttgart.

15

Fostering learners' voices in literature classes in an Asian context

Phuong thi Anh Le

Introduction

Teaching literature in EFL/ESL classrooms is widely advocated for its undoubted advantages both for language and for personal development. However, many EFL students still find literature an inhibiting subject, not only because the literary language is usually beyond their ability but because the literary and cultural values are also unfamiliar to their experience (Baurain, 2000; Khatib et al., 2011).

As well as this, teaching literature in the lecturing mode often turns students into passive receivers of knowledge, rather than active readers who can contribute their own ideas (Dagnew, 2013). Even worse, it can lead to rote learning and plagiarism in students' assessments (Nguyen, 2010). In this way, students' own voices are clearly underestimated and ultimately unheard in literature classes.

In an attempt to reverse this situation, this chapter aims to share practical experiences in making literature more inspiring to students and in fostering their contribution and creativity in literature classes.

Brief background

The activities described in this chapter have been used in American literature courses for Vietnamese college students majoring in English. In our context, the literature course occupied a very small part (three credits) in a three-year curriculum, and students had little aspiration to engage with literature in English. Therefore, it was essential for the teacher to create a motivational learning atmosphere where students could play an active and meaningful role in learning literature. In order to achieve this, the course was designed specifically for them with their language, interests and maturity levels in mind.

Practical suggestions and activities

At the start of the course, students were asked about their expectations of it. On the basis of this, the teacher could point out the match of the course and the students' expectations. Specific details about the course aims, organisation, methods of teaching and learning, materials, and assessment were made clear to them. Special attention was paid to ongoing assessment which was aimed at supporting rather than evaluating students' learning. The aim in doing this was to drive away students' fear of literature due to the many challenges they face in the initial stages of their learning. The description of the course below covers four main aspects: aims, materials selection, methods of teaching and assessment.

Aims

The course was expected to achieve the following aims:

- to motivate students to read literary texts
- to enrich their love of literature
- to enhance their thinking skills.

Materials

To make the contents more manageable within the allotted time, the course focused on 20th century American literature. In particular, it concentrated on some key authors whose poetry and short stories were more relevant to students' language levels, maturity and interest.

Specifically, the following texts were chosen to be studied in class, in addition to other texts provided for extensive reading.

Poems
- 'This Is Just To Say' (William Carlos Williams)
- 'Grass' (Carl Sandburg)
- 'The Road Not Taken' and 'Acquainted with the Night' (Robert Frost)
- 'My Brother Lives Too Far Away' (Mark Van Doren)
- 'Dreams' and 'I, Too, Sing America' (Langston Hughes)

Short stories
- 'A Lamp in the Window' (Truman Capote)
- 'The Cop and the Anthem' and 'The Gift of the Magi' (O Henry)
- 'Love of Life' (Jack London)
- 'The Story of an Hour' (Kate Chopin)
- 'In Another Country' (Ernest Hemingway)
- 'Going Home' (William Saroyan)
- 'Sorrow for a Midget' (Langston Hughes)
- 'The Magic Barrel' (Bernard Malamud)
- 'The Snow Goose' (Paul Gallico)

Methods of teaching

Guided by the course objectives, the method of teaching was based on a reader-response approach where the focus was on students' exploration and response to the texts (Amer, 2003, cited in Khatib et al., 2011). Thus, students were not expected to spend time figuring out exactly what was meant by the authors by their works. Rather, they were encouraged to think about what they read and how it was relevant to their own life and experience. Ultimately, they were expected to recreate the meanings of the works based on what they understood and felt.

Realising that literary language was often challenging for students, the teacher made considerable use of pictures and guided questions to help them in the initial stage of exploring the texts. Specifically, these devices were aimed to set students thinking about what they read and to arouse their emotions as triggered by the poem or story. By doing this, the teacher was able to motivate students to further exploit what they had learned.

As a principle, the pictures were chosen on the basis of key themes and images in a poem or a story. These pictures were accompanied by questions to orient students into thinking and finding the meanings of the texts. As a type of scaffolding and guidance (Liang, 2011), the questions fell into four main categories: lead-in, comprehension, analytical/interpretation and evaluation.

The teacher made it clear to students that it was more important for them to justify their opinions than to worry about whether they were right or wrong. Differences in students' opinions were used as the basis for their discussion. In this way, the teacher was able to promote students' higher order thinking skills, such as analytical, critical thinking and creative thinking skills. The following section exemplifies and illustrates a lesson on a famous poem written by Robert Frost, 'Acquainted with the Night', in three main stages of 'pre-lesson', 'while-lesson', and 'post-lesson'.

Pre-lesson stage

Prior to the class, students were asked to prepare for the lesson by reading the poem and showing their initial understanding of it by writing their answers to some general questions set by the teacher.

Example:

- What was the poem about?
- What was/were the main theme(s) of the poem?
- Do you like the poem? Why/why not?
- Do you have/know any similar experience?
- What do you gain from this poem?
- What do you find hard to understand?

Students were encouraged to write as many questions as possible about what they did not understand or would like to know about the poem.

While-lesson stage

At the start of the class, individuals were asked to write down their questions about the poem on the board. These questions would be answered by the class during the lesson.

Then, via a PowerPoint presentation, the teacher showed several pictures of different kinds of people walking alone in the rain in different situations, accompanied by lead-in questions which invited individual responses. All students were expected to share their opinions. Easy questions were often directed to less able students so that they could have more opportunities to share their perspectives and develop their self-esteem and confidence.

The first set of questions was aimed at drawing out their feelings and thinking about a person walking in the rain without a raincoat.

- What is the person doing?
- Where are they going?
- How are they feeling?
- Why are they feeling that way?
- Why aren't they wearing a raincoat or holding an umbrella?
- What do you think about a person walking in the rain without a raincoat?

The second set of questions asked about different impacts that the rain could have on old or young people.

- In what way does the rain influence a person?
- Does the rain influence young people and old people differently?
- What do you think about a person walking in the street alone after midnight?
- Could this person be happy or sad? Why?

The third set of questions made them relate the situation to their personal experiences and perceptions.

- Have you ever been out in the rain?
- How did you feel?
- Have you ever been in the rain when you were sad?
- What was your experience?
- How might you feel if you had to walk in the street alone after midnight?

These questions were supposed to get students mentally and affectively ready to explore the text further. The pictures also aimed to set a suitable atmosphere for this exploration and orient the class towards the main theme of the poem, which was loneliness. Via these questions, students were asked to express their opinions first in pairs and then with their class. Thus, students had more preparation and chances to show their perspectives. This lead-in stage was followed by text exploration.

Text exploration

This was the step when students were formally exposed to the poem, which was analysed in detail. It began with setting the tone of the poem.

- **Setting the tone:** this was done by reading the poem aloud, first by the teacher and then by the students so that they could feel and show the sad, lonely ambience of the text.
- **Overall understanding:** students worked in pairs to discuss their initial understanding of the poem by answering the following questions:
  - What was the poem about?
  - What was/were the main theme(s) of the poem?
  - Do you share similar or different opinions with your friend?

While students shared their opinions, the teacher identified the differences in students' opinions if any, and used these differences for further guidance for the text exploration.

■ **Deep analysis:** in this part, a deeper analysis of the poem was conducted part by part. To do this, a set of questions was posed for each part of the poem and students worked first in pairs and then groups to discuss the answers. The poem was divided into three parts, each with a different set of questions:

> **'Acquainted with the night' by Robert Frost**
>
> I have been one acquainted with the night.
> I have walked out in rain – and back in rain.
> I have outwalked the furthest city light.

– Was the poet an old or young person? How can you know?
– Had the poet been out at night many times?
– Was he out alone or with someone else?
– Is it normal for an old person to walk a long way in the rain alone at night? Why?
– Why did he walk a long way in the rain alone at night? What could be the problems?
– What do all these details tell you about this old person?

Then, each group was responsible for facilitating the discussion using the guided questions and the class responded individually. The teacher joined in the discussion when necessary to explain language problems that arose, to settle conflicts between ideas, and to clarify ideas or to share comments.

The same procedure was adopted for the other parts of the poem until the whole poem was studied.

> I have looked down the saddest city lane.
> I have passed by the watchman on his beat.
> And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

– What had he seen on those lonely walks?
– Did the surroundings look happy or sad to him? How?
– Why did he drop his eyes when he saw the watchman?
– What do the surroundings tell you about his mood?

> I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
> When far away an interrupted cry
> Came over houses from another street,
>
> But not to call me back or say good-bye;
> And further still at an unearthly height,
> One luminary clock against the sky
>
> Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
> I have been one acquainted with the night.

– What did he hear in those nights out?
– What did he do when he heard that cry?
– How did that cry sound to him?
– Was that cry meant to call him?
– How did the poet feel when the cry was not meant for him?
– What did he see in the sky?
– What does this thing signify?
– Why did the poet say 'The time was neither wrong nor right?'
– What is the tone of the poem?
– What are the possible themes of the poem?

At the end of this stage, all the questions raised by students about the poem were answered by the class with or without the teacher's interference. By this time, several students were asked to read the poem aloud again as this helped them to show their understanding of the poem even more through their voices.

Evaluation

In this step, students shared their personal evaluation and experience related to the poem by answering the questions below.

■ Do you like the poem? Why/why not?
■ What do you particularly like or dislike about the poem?
■ Have you ever been in a similar mood or situation as the poet?
■ Do you know of anyone who has had a similar experience as the poet?

Post-lesson stage

After exploring the poem in depth, students were required to write their journals and practised creative writing, in addition to doing extensive reading. This stage was done at home.

For these tasks, students were asked to write down their refined responses to the poem. Specifically, in 100 words, they had to write about their thoughts or experiences related to the poem, using the questions in the evaluation part as a guide. Another option was for them to write a poem about a related experience.

In addition, they were asked to find two other poems either in English or Vietnamese related to the themes of the poem and to identify how they were relevant to each other. Those who could not find such poems were allowed to find and copy down two other poems that they liked and state why and what they liked about them. Evidence of this task was recorded in their journals, which were read by the teacher a few times without giving prior notice during the course, so students knew that they were always expected to do the tasks for each lesson.

Assessment

Various forms of assessment were used, including class participation, aiming to cater for students' diverse abilities and interests. These included the following activities.

■ **Journal writing**
Journal writing has been widely promoted in teaching literature (Khatib et al., 2011). It is thought to be a beneficial way for students to express their personal responses to literary works or to relate them to their personal experience (Knoeller, 2003). In our context, journals were used to record students' perceptions of the texts they had read. These journals were expected to include three main things: a) initial answers to the teacher's questions about the text before the lesson, b) about 100 words to relate it to their own experience, after they had learned the poem in class, and c) a record of their extensive reading of further poems or short stories.

■ **Creative writing**
As creative writing can be a highly beneficial vehicle for students to reflect on their inner life creatively (Knoeller, 2003), students were encouraged to write their own poems. To facilitate the process, the teacher exposed them to poems written in simple English taken from *Life in Words and Words in Life* (Maley et al., 2009) and *Asian Poems for Young Readers* (Maley and Mukundan,

2009). Any poems or 'creative' responses of the students were acknowledged and encouraged by the teacher through feedback in their journals, or shared with the class. This was important as students knew that their efforts were appreciated and valued. The poems written by the students were often edited by the teacher, with encouragement.

The following is an example of students' creative writing after learning the poem by Robert Frost.

'Acquainted with the Difficulties'
by Cao Thi Nhan

I have been acquainted with the difficulties
I have walked those long roads to schools
I have ridden my old bicycle
In the boiling heat of the day
Or in the darkness of the night.

I have lived through such long days.
No rice, no money, and many more.
I have experienced endless nights
When I found it impossible to sleep.

I have gone through Tet holidays alone.
No family, no relatives, no friends.
And no best wishes for me.
Only profound sadness and many tears
For me and my terrible Tet here.

I have lived through those sad rainy nights
When I missed my parents and siblings at home
Whom I haven't met for four years or more.
My eyes were buried in full tears then.

I have dreamt of my skinny Mom.
Her smiling face and gentle voice.
'My baby', she called out to me,
Looking at me with those loving eyes.
But the dream was far too short.
In disappointment I woke up too soon.

I have hoped that in my learning of English
I can have good scores for writing and listening.
To feel happy and to have something to show.
I have made promises with my dear Mom,
That I'll always live honestly and study well.
That I'll pass the next graduation exam.
And come back home to see her again.

At the end of the course, the teacher created opportunities for students to share their creative works with other students and teachers to boost their self-esteem. In reciting their poems, students were encouraged to vary the ways they read, using their voices in different ways, varying the speeds, the voice volumes and adding gestures. In doing this, students found that the different way of reading could lend the poems some novelty and they were happy with this discovery. Even those who chose not to read their works were allowed to read other poems that they liked. This was a great success in terms of motivation, self-esteem and confidence enhancement.

■ **Extensive reading**
This activity aimed to nurture reading habits and thinking skills among students (Rashid et al., 2010), in addition to helping their English improvement (Knoeller, 2003). For poetry, students were often expected to find other poems in English or in Vietnamese on the same themes and to identify what they liked or disliked about the poem and to write them down in their journals. Regarding short stories, they were encouraged to read stories from 1,000 to 5,000 words in the Graded Readers series available in the college library. A summary of 100 to 150 words was expected for each story, followed by about 100 words of their comments on any aspects of the stories of their choice.

The student journals show that each of them read from eight to 14 additional stories of between 2,000 and 4,000 words each. In addition, they were able to share their related experience or literary appreciation by pointing out what they identified as new or interesting to them. They also jotted down questions about things that were not clear to them. Frequent feedback from the teacher turned this into a dialogue between students and teacher about literature and personal experience.

■ **Storytelling**
Storytelling was one of the two alternatives that students had to show their response to the stories they had read or studied. The storytelling task required students to work in pairs to tell a story of their choice. The story delivery was assessed on the basis of their language, acting ability (the use of voice, facial expression, gestures) and the settings (props, pictures and music). Prior to this activity, the teacher held one introductory session on storytelling techniques with video illustrations to clarify the expectations of storytelling activity. Many fewer students chose storytelling than the

dramatisation activity and only those students who did not have much time to prepare for the mini dramas chose to do storytelling. One reason was that students found dramatisation much more fun – and working in bigger groups, rather than pairs, enabled them to get more help from others.

■ **Dramatisation**
Dramatisation is a useful activity for students both intellectually and emotionally. It can develop their thinking skills and creativity by means of their experiences of scripting, casting, setting and dialogue (Smith, 1993). It can enhance their motivation by fostering their self-esteem and confidence (Maley and Duff, 2005).

Those students who decided on dramatisation were expected to give a performance based on one story they liked. In preparation, students worked on selecting scenes, writing scripts and preparing their own props for a performance which lasted from 15 to 30 minutes. During this process, the teacher was available for guidance and advice.

Students were found to really enjoy acting, dressing up and experimenting with their creativity in building an image for a character, making up dialogue for them and preparing props for setting up the scenes for their mini-drama. There was a lot of discussion, negotiation and decision-making in the process. Each performance was done with their best efforts and harmonious co-operation among the team. Peer feedback and teacher feedback was carried out to support, rather than to judge their work. These performances were a highlight of the course.

Conclusion

It is crucial to instil in EFL students the love and the desire to learn literature in English so as to combat the misunderstanding that only highly intellectual people can appreciate and produce literary texts like poetry or stories.

This chapter has shared some personal experience of the author in teaching literature in a way that was not only enjoyable to the students but also beneficial in enhancing their literary appreciation and developing their creativity. The course seemed to be effective in changing the students' thinking and made them more comfortable with the subject. The students did not seem to feel intimidated by the lessons, as our teaching and assessment promoted an open, exploratory and motivational style of learning.

In addition, the course seemed to reinforce the benefits of creative activities such as dramatisation and creative writing as they provided students with a passion for their learning (Rashid et al., 2010) and a desire to discover literature (DeBlase, 2005) – and themselves. The course actually enriched students' lives (Cope, 1998) as in the following poem produced by one of the students in the course.

> **'I like literature' by Hoang thi Thuy Duong**
>
> I like literature
>
> It's beautiful
>
> and interesting
>
> Literature is a teacher
>
> who teaches me life skills.
>
> Literature brings experience
>
> That's necessary for my life.
>
> Literature leads to places
>
> that I've never come before.
>
> Literature is society
>
> that is in miniature.
>
> I like literature.
>
> I love it.
>
> I adore it.

As developing students' creativity is considered an essential part of the teaching job in modern society, this was just one way to enhance students' creativity for a specific group for a specific subject in a specific context. Therefore, any attempt to replicate any aspects of this course need to take students' language levels, interest and maturity levels into consideration, because it is this which decides the success of the course. Specifically, students should be put at the centre in setting the aims of the course, which would serve as the basis for materials selection and methods of teaching so that the course could be relevant to students' levels. Another recommendation is to help students to contribute their opinions to the course and increase their autonomy in learning, as these are part of the long-term goals in teaching. Furthermore, it is crucial to remember that assessment is there to support, rather than inhibit learning. Therefore, diverse tasks should be offered, for students to choose the most suitable tasks for them to do, and in this way they can maximise their abilities in fulfilling the tasks.

As a result, students' different abilities, especially their creativity, can be discovered and nurtured.

In short, literary works selected for EFL/ESL teaching and learning are valuable works of creativity. As such, they should be introduced to the students in such a way that they can feel inspired to explore the texts themselves, to appreciate them, to relate them to, and to enrich, their life experience – and to unlock their own creativity.

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16

A framework for learning creativity

Tessa Woodward

Introduction

When we think of creative individuals, we have a tendency perhaps to call to mind solitary, eminent men in the Western high arts and sciences, names of a well-known elite like Leonardo da Vinci, Beethoven and Vincent van Gogh. We call these and others like them 'geniuses' and, whether they are within the field of music, painting, mathematics or science, we imagine they were quite simply born that way, with clever minds and destined for amazing accomplishments. The rest must have come easy to them, we may think.

This way of thinking has a number of disadvantages. It encourages us to concentrate on what happens in the *mind* of an individual person. It ignores the heart and emotions, the body, the environment, and any creative collaboration between people. It ignores too the work of those in the more popular arts, people such as Ella Fitzgerald with her fabulous vocal improvisation skills. And it ignores the everyday creativity we see in our children, our students, our friends and family, and ourselves. Worse yet, it lets us off the hook. After all, if we are not ourselves lone, creative men in the high arts, we must therefore not be creative geniuses. So that's it. We don't have to do anything. We don't even have to try. In fact we may be afraid to try.

My own view is different. I believe that we can redefine what it means to be creative. We can give ourselves permission to learn, sometimes with others, to be even more creative in our everyday lives than we are already. This way, we start a path we can walk along. In this chapter then, I will suggest ways that we language teachers can become more creative in our own work with learners.

Brief background questions

To break away from the unfortunate thought pattern mentioned above, we need to consider some basic questions.

First, what does it mean to create?

To define a word we can go to outside or inside sources. Here is a definition of creativity from 'outside', spliced together from several dictionaries:

'Creativity is the bringing into existence, causing, developing of original ideas. It can involve a change in the condition of something, the use of something in a new way, or a novel combination of the known that produces interesting and useful results.'

And if we ask fellow language teachers what they would regard as a creative lesson, they might, from 'inside' their own experience, say…

'A creative lesson is one that involves one or more of the following:

- spontaneity
- music
- colour
- variety
- fun
- humour
- movement
- personal meaning
- unpredictability
- a balance between challenge and security, relaxation and tension.'

You will want to add ingredients of your own to the list.

And if any of us is asked, a little more concretely, what activities in our everyday lives make us feel creative, we can all come up with an extremely wide variety, such as 'cleaning out cupboards', 'cooking dinner', 'singing a new harmony to an old song on the radio' or 'making a new pump for the central heating boiler'! These concrete examples usually fall within the four modes of: doing, making, adapting and creating (Sanders, 2005).

All this gives us a refreshing and optimistic view of what we are aiming at.

By the way, does it feel good to create?

If asked, we might say without too much thought that the act of creating feels wonderful, feels easy, free as a breeze. However, when John Tusa, a BBC radio and television journalist, interviewed over 50 established actors, painters, sculptors, musicians, architects, playwrights, film makers and choreographers about how they felt when working creatively, some said they felt worried, others that they couldn't sleep, or felt they were building something painstakingly slowly, pebble by pebble. Others said they felt lonely, that it felt very, very risky. (The Tusa interviews can be found at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00nb1n3

Still, the product of creativity is always welcomed, isn't it?

Not really! We may as well assume that all babies are welcomed, when we know that some are not, being unexpected, unwanted, or coming too early or too late. The world too has always been full of creative people, who were, at least initially, ostracised or persecuted for their ideas.

The German physicist, Röentgen, for example, who first produced and detected in the lab the rays now known as X-rays, freaked his wife out when he showed her an X-ray of her hand! And his whole endeavour was initially declared by the scientific community to be an elaborate hoax.

Ignaz Semmelweis was a Hungarian physician who suggested the outrageous practice of doctors washing their hands before delivering babies, so as to avoid the spread of purple fever. The reaction of the medical community to his idea was so hostile that he had a nervous breakdown and died in an insane asylum.

So there are many different possible reactions to a new idea. I once identified some twenty different kinds of reactions. These range from changing the subject of conversation, to immediately embracing or taking against an idea, to denial that the new idea is even possible, to dismissing the idea for not being new at all (Woodward, 2002).

So we need not expect to feel great while we create nor, necessarily, to be lauded by our colleagues for our creations!

How can we and our students become more creative?

But let's suppose that we are still keen to become more creative and to help our students become creative too, believing that, though it may be hard work, it will bring interesting and useful results. How can we go about it? There follow some practical principles widely agreed upon by many of those interested in creativity.

Practical principles

Wake up!

At the start of class we all need to come together, settle and become mentally alert before much that is useful can happen. We can speed up this readying process by doing unusual things such as:

- Listening to a recording of birdsong, doing some gentle physical exercises, singing together or enjoying the scent of pine oil.

- Asking students to count from one to eight and to clap as they say each number out loud. Next, they clap eight times again but miss out actually saying the number three. Once they can do that, challenge them to miss out saying two numbers (three and five). Then three numbers (two and six and eight) while still clapping the eight times. It takes concentration!

■ Giving the students a puzzle that is easily solvable by just doing a little work. An example is 'Think of the English alphabet written in capital letters. How many letters have curved lines in them?' Students are allowed to use pencil and paper to solve this puzzle. It just gets them thinking (and visualising).

Be prolific!

Once we are all awake, we need to produce a large number of ideas, to go for quantity and not to worry at first about judging the ideas for quality. This enables us to note down even the most obvious ideas and also to include ideas that may at first seem weak or weird but which can later be improved or used to add a new angle. Anecdote reports that Einstein, the physicist and philosopher, was once asked: 'What's the difference between you and a normal person?' He said in reply, 'If you ask a normal person to find a needle in a haystack, the person would stop when they found the needle. I, on the other hand, would tear the haystack apart looking for all the possible needles!'

We don't know how Einstein felt about the implication that he was not normal but he certainly shared an immense productivity with all kinds of creative people!

So, the principle is to go for abundance ourselves and to encourage our students to produce a full quota of ideas. Some ideas follow on how to do this.

■ Invite students to consider an everyday object such as a sock and to dream up 20 things they could use it for, apart from protecting a foot.

■ Ask students to write ten true sentences about what they did at the weekend. When they complain about the number, put it up to 15.
  – *'What? Fifteen!'*
  – *'Oh, okay then. Twenty!'*
  When students realise that every time they complain the number goes up, they usually stop complaining!

■ Invite students to choose a colour. Give them five minutes to check their environment and to list as many things they can see (and think of) that have that colour. Then share the lists.

■ Can students think of ten words beginning with the letter B? Eight hobbies beginning with P? Twelve things that make them happy?

Naturally, when going for greater productivity like this, you and the students will need to defer judgement until later and refrain from too much self- and other correction. Once the pool of contributions is in, then you can start to sort them out and decide which ones you want to keep.

Make unusual connections and combinations

A classic creativity principle is the idea of conceptually blending two or more apparently unrelated ideas or things. Juxtaposition of the normally separated helps to jolt us out of our thinking ruts. Or, to switch metaphors, it causes mental sparks! So, in class, you might:

■ Invite students to discuss how a text that they have got to know quite well can be compared and contrasted to an apparently unrelated picture you have chosen to show them. Ask students to come up with as many ways as they can in which the text and the picture are alike. Although at first glance the text and the picture will seem unrelated, the mind, being what it is, will search for some kind of connection, be it in terms of colour, shape, number, emotion, topic or meaning. (See Woodward 2011: 61).

- Ask students to come up with the similarities and differences between themselves and something they are interested in, such as a tiger, a dinosaur, a princess, a skateboard or a tablet computer. The comparisons can be expressed in the form of a Venn diagram as below:

I brush my teeth

Me

We're both mammals, like sleeping and swimming and can make a lot of noise!

goes barefoot

A tiger

I wear trainers

doesn't brush its teeth
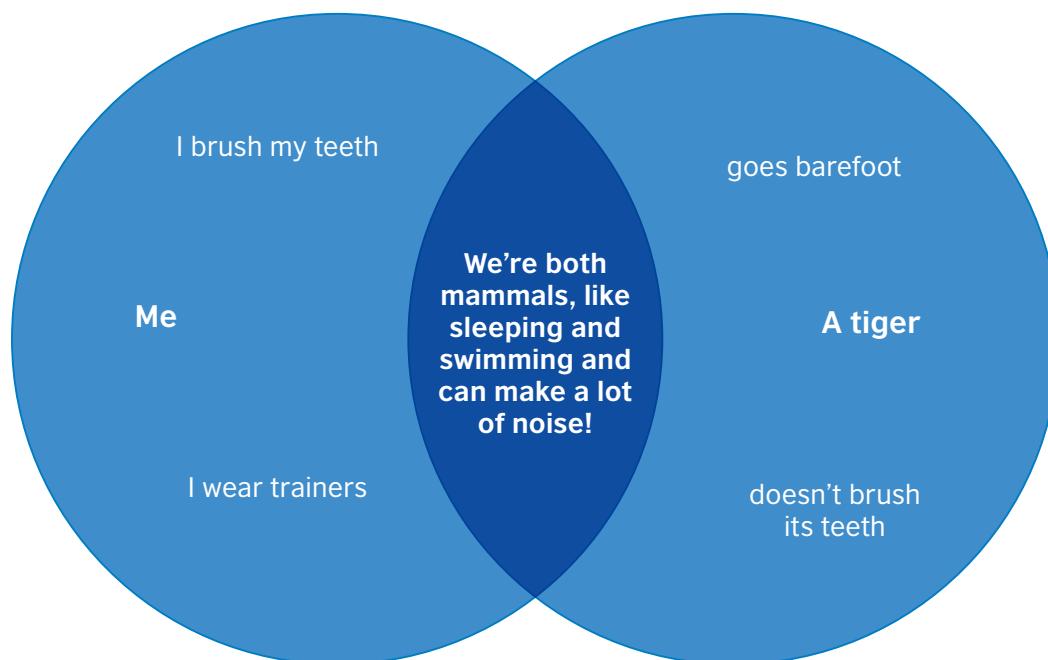
(See Woodward, 2011: 89–90)

- Remind students of the main ingredients of any story, e.g. place, time, characters, important objects, theme, actions. Write these up on the board. Under each of these main headings, brainstorm and write up different possible variations. For example, under 'Place' students could offer: *the moon, my dad's garage, Beijing,* or *an armpit.* Under 'Time' you might get: *yesterday, in the ice age, in 3015,* etc.

- Each group of students then selects one possibility from beneath each main heading and sets to work to create a story combining, for example, a teenage girl, with a cat, in the Ice Age, carrying out a robbery, in her dad's garage.

Use simple generative frameworks

Some frameworks, though very simple and easy to use, are incredibly productive. Take the maxim 'Find out what you usually do and then do something different!' If you followed it, you could go to work via a different route and a different form of transport every day, wearing unusual colours and with your watch on upside down and your jumper back to front. And that is just for starters!

Here's another simple generative framework for class. It's called an 'alteration dictation'. Dictate a simple sentence, true about yourself, to your students. An example might be, 'I like apples.' Students write this sentence down. Next, underneath that sentence, they have to rewrite it so that it is true of *them* not you. Thus they might write 'I like apples too', or 'I only like sweet apples', or 'I prefer bananas' and so on. Share the results.

- The whole idea of novel combinations is itself a simple generative framework. So, to put it into practice, you can give students two lists of everyday objects from home, school, the street and so on. Something like these:

Fridge	Picture
Computer	Hammock
Bedroom	Music
Window	Bar of chocolate
Ticket	Pillow
Garden	A cup of coffee
Chair	A T-shirt
Sun cream	A camera
Pencil	A bottle of perfume
Dictionary	A doormat

Students choose one object from the list on the left and one from the list on the right and combine them in any order. So, a student might come up with a 'Computer T-shirt'. If they wish, they can change it to 'A computerised T-shirt'. Next, they think what this new invention of theirs might look like and be able to do. So a wearer might be able to change the colour of a computerised T-shirt depending on what else they were wearing that day. Or they could type different slogans onto the front and back of the T-shirt in different font styles, colours and sizes, or display a street view to a companion so they know where they are, and so on. In pairs, each student explains their new invention to a partner who has to help them to extend and refine the idea with them in order to make it even better. They can even draw the invention and put it in a class sales catalogue if you like! (See Woodward 2011: 146–7).

Don't forget the heart, and the body, and the environment

We have started off by looking at principles that encourage mental creativity. It is true, however, that creativity is also profoundly affected by emotion. If we and our students feel comfortable, and secure, and are having an enjoyable time, more and broader ideas will tend to flow, whether we are waking up, being prolific, making unusual connections or using simple generative frameworks.

A positive state of mind and the permission and time to be creative will encourage us to engage in the work. It helps if we can move around and express ourselves physically too, and it helps if our work environment is conducive to our doing, making, adapting and creating. So here are a few ideas designed to work on these important areas.

- To improve the environment, can you adjust the temperature, lighting and air flow in your class room so it is more pleasant? Use coloured paper sometimes? Bring in plants, posters, calming or inspiring colours, smells and sounds, and physical objects? Can you use the walls for display? If not, can you import flip charts or cork boards? Can you get a view from a window to somewhere or something natural?

- To break down feelings of isolation and competition among students, ask students to team up with a partner and explore three things they have in common with each other and three things that are different. These six things must not be visible! So, for example, noting your partner's hair colour and whether they wear glasses or not doesn't count! Once the interviews are under way, students write sentences about their pair using starter phrases such as, 'Both of us…', 'Neither of us…', 'One of us… but the other…' (See Woodward, 2011: 178).

- Give students a good reason to get up from their desks and move around by asking them, for example, to give out handouts, clean the board, open a window or do total physical response exercises to learn vocabulary, such as 'Raise your left arm', 'Turn around once', 'Tickle your chin', and so on.

Collaborate and share

At the start, I suggested that our traditional view of a creative person as a lone genius ignores the role of the conversation and collaboration that undoubtedly takes place between them and their colleagues. Historians have discovered, for example, that 13 people collaborated with Michelangelo on the Sistine Chapel and that 200 people assisted him with the Laurentian Library in Florence. So there goes our myth of the lone genius!

When people come together, the number of associations triggered multiplies. So, collective creativity often gives us more than the sum of our individual offerings.

So what tips are there for this aspect of creativity?

■ Foster a culture of participation in your classes. Allow yourself and students to work together, take risks, create, fail and learn from this. So in a board game where students try to come up with names of capital cities starting with the letter 'A', you can reward the first person to come up with, say, 'Amsterdam' as long as they can spell it, thus rewarding the usual speed and accuracy. But you can also add incentives for those who come up with more than one example (say, 'Accra' and 'Athens'), so rewarding the prolific. You can also reward the student who comes up with a city that nobody else thinks of (say 'Asmara') and encourage the student who comes up with other unusual cities, even if they are not capitals or well spelled. You can encourage the whole class to work together to gain a bigger and bigger total together as well as to learn more about what makes a city a capital, which countries the cities are in, and where these countries are.

■ Encourage good conversations by discussing the ground rules for a good conversation with students. They might come up with ideas such as: say what you think honestly and also why you think it. Accept that the other person has different views. Refrain from arguing or trying to change their mind even if they are very different from you. Don't interrupt; listen carefully; extend the ideas of others, etc.

■ You can also discuss the social conditions necessary for good collaboration, e.g. access to shared content, some privacy and quiet reflection, mess-making, support for a range of moods such as playful, serious, stimulating, formal and informal.

■ Try different arrangements of people and space depending on what you are doing. So, for example, brainstorming can be done as a whole class but also in groups or teams. The solving of problems can be done by having different problems at different tables and asking groups of students to work on one problem at one table for a while before moving to a new table and a new problem. Instead of moving groups of students about, especially if your room is cramped, the student groups can stay in the same places but the large pieces of paper used to record their ideas, in a

discussion for example, can be moved around so that groups can see and comment on what other groups have produced. This last idea is sometimes known as a 'pass the paper' or 'carousel' activity.

Make our thinking physical and visible

This is our last principle, but it is an especially important one if your class has been working collaboratively on any of the other principles above. This is because, using these principles, you are likely to end up with lots of ideas. You therefore need recording devices to capture, organise and capitalise on all the ideas that come up. It is demotivating for anybody to see ideas emerge, especially their own, and then see them shot down or ignored.

As well as your normal note-taking methods, consider the use of Venn diagrams, scales, steps, fishbone diagrams, lists, mind maps, collages, sticky or magnetic notes that can be moved around and clustered, posters displayed on walls, clay models, photos, physical tableaux, Lego blocks, wikis and columns in good old-fashioned notebooks.

These flexible and adaptable means enable you and the group to make your thinking visible and to consider what you have produced together. You can then collaborate further to prioritise, refine or extend ideas.

The three-phase creativity cycle

These seven principles will certainly help us and our students to feel and be more creative, both alone and together. Creativity takes time, however, so finally I would like to offer the well-known idea of a three-phase creativity cycle.

■ The first phase is **practice**. We can practise being creative by trying out the ideas above. Practice means doing it!

■ The second phase is **reflect**. Reflection means thinking about what we have done. Here we need:

– to allow wait-time after questions and after answers, allow thinking time and silent time

– time to review, to question, take notes and talk things over so that we can decide on selection, priorities, classifications, refinements and applications of the ideas we have all come up with.

■ The final phase is **relax**. Once we have practised, then reflected, we need to relax or 'switch off' by, for example, taking a break or doing something different, or simply stopping trying so hard.

At the start of this chapter, I suggested that to define a word or concept we can turn to 'outside' or 'inside' resources. So, first from the outside (a newspaper report of a study in fact), I learned that researchers have found that sleeping helps to stimulate creative thinking, allowing people to find solutions to puzzles that had eluded them before they slept.

One way of relaxing after a creative session then is by having a snooze. Well, our internal wisdom knew that anyway, for we do advise anybody trying to make a difficult decision to 'Sleep on it!', don't we?

So, there we have it. In order to be more creative, we can practise the seven principles described in this chapter, reflect on what we have done, and then relax. And if a colleague happens to find you in the staffroom with your head on your desk having a nap, you can always murmur that you are merely taking the time to complete your three-phase creativity cycle!

When we are planning our lessons and thinking on our feet in the classroom, we probably won't have this chapter with us to remind us of some classic creativity techniques. So maybe a mnemonic would help.

Let's play! We can take the first letter of some of the ideas in this chapter, e.g.

W for wake up

P for prolific

M for make unusual combinations

U for use simple generative frameworks

C for collaborate

S for share

N for novel combinations

V for visible

P for physical movement

E for environment and emotions

Then we can make words that start with these letters and then move the words around to make a memorable sentence.

I came up with this one:
We **P**roduce **M**ore **N**ew **U**seful **C**ool **S**tuff if we **V**ary **P**ositions in **E**nglish **E**xercises.

But I'll keep working on it and see if I can come up with some better ones!

The three phases of **P**ractice, **R**eflect and **R**est or **R**elax are easy. They make us purr like a cat. **Prrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr!**

Conclusion

The old way of thinking about creativity was that it somehow only 'belonged' to lone, accomplished geniuses in the high status arts and pure sciences. This may perhaps have led us to think that neither we humble teachers nor our students can be creative and that we need not even try.

If, however, we redefine creativity to include the everyday doing, making, adapting and creating that is part of all of our lives – if we give ourselves time and space and permission to play with this, to work on this, we can create. A possible path to greater creativity exists. We can get to know the classic principles of creativity above, work out our own adaptations of them to our work, practise these adaptations, reflect on what we have done, and then relax.

If we remember to include collective creativity too by working with other staff and by encouraging our students to collaborate with each other, so 'taking their ideas for walks', we may surprise ourselves at how creative we all are and become!

Thanks to the editors of this collection for inviting me to contribute a chapter. This gave me the 'permission' and incentive to represent work I have shared over the last twenty years with language teachers and students all over the world. For many of the principles and insights within the chapter, however, I am most grateful to Michael Michalko and Elizabeth Sanders. They have collaborated with us all by sharing their thoughts in the published works referred to below.

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Drama and creative writing: a blended tool

Victoria Hlenschi-Stroie

Introduction

The digital age has brought state-of-the-art devices and gadgets which are supposed to improve the learning process, but it has also triggered an ongoing debate as to whether this technology is killing or boosting the creativity of our students. Used wisely, it can naturally bring a lot of benefits to today's schools but unfortunately, in developing countries like Romania, where I have been a teacher for 17 years, this is not always available and/or the teachers are not fully prepared to make the best use of it. As a result, we sometimes have to make do with very few materials or little equipment, but we compensate with a lot of energy, creative ideas and enthusiasm.

It is clear that educational drama and creative writing can be applied in the educational systems of developing and low-resourced countries (not necessarily replacing the use of technology but offering a cheaper, more available alternative) in order to lead to both the linguistic and personal and social development of the students. Both drama and creative writing bring a lot of resources and energy to the English class and the main sources of all this are the teacher's and the students' creative ideas. Sometimes modern technology can be incorporated as well, but without excluding those who may not have access to it.

Why drama and creative writing, and how do they work together? Drama is basically action, doing, engaging and improvising, and so is creative writing. Used together, drama and creative writing give ample tools to teachers to develop their students' receptive and productive skills as well as their creativity and critical thinking. They can also offer a deeper understanding of or reflection on the activities students are involved in.

A brief background to the development of educational drama (and creative writing) in Romania might prove useful in understanding how these two approaches have developed and taken shape in a country that was, and still is, struggling to introduce modern and innovative ideas in an ex-communist,

low-resourced environment. Drama and creative writing techniques and activities had already been a component of many teacher training courses and seminars in post-communist Romania, but the year 2001 marked a real breakthrough in this area. In a joint project which spanned three consecutive years, The Ministry of Education in Romania, the British Council and Peace Corps started training teachers of English from Romania and neighbouring countries. For the first two years, educational drama was the main focus of the training courses, while the last year brought in the creative writing component as a welcome addition. These courses – 'Drama without Tears' (Călimăneşti, 2001), 'Exploring through Drama' (Năvodari, 2002) and 'Creative Writing and Drama Advanced Practicum Summer School' (Braşov, 2003) – were followed by local training offered by the participants in these courses.

The year 2001 also marked the foundation of EDAR (Educational Drama Association in Romania), which has since worked to promote free, original thinking, creative writing, community pro-active attitudes and performing arts. EDAR is a non-governmental organisation officially recognised by the Ministry of Education, which, above all, increases the opportunities of Romanian students to participate in drama and creative writing activities, drama days, drama camps, contests, festivals, workshops, creative writing publications and much more. Its members are teachers of English from Romania who want to create an effective network of those interested in using drama and creative writing in schools. Its latest project is the creativity contest 'Speak Out', which has two sections: dramatic monologues and short stories, thus blending drama and creative writing.

Similar to other central and eastern European countries, before 2001 Romania had basically witnessed drama work only as the result of individual initiatives. But since the start of the 2001–03 project and the foundation of EDAR, teachers of English have been using drama in a more confident way. At present, drama techniques are frequently used

in the regular English classes (drama and ELT), drama can be proposed as an elective (drama as a subject) and teachers employ drama in organising clubs, workshops or festivals (drama as an event). However, in Romania, teachers of English interested in drama activities still have a long way to go, especially in their endeavour to standardise their work and find a place for drama in the curriculum.

Readers of this book will mostly be interested in learning how drama and creative writing can be used in ELT, so this will be the main rationale behind the activities proposed here, which are the result of ongoing activity over 13 years. Having the opportunity to participate in all three courses of the above-mentioned project, being one of the founders of EDAR, and dedicating a lot of my teaching and research time to drama and creative writing, I have collected a number of useful activities, tips and resources which have either been offered by our trainers, especially Dr Peter Harrop and Senior Lecturer Jane Loudon from the University of Chester, or discovered through my reading of books and internet websites. Using them together with my students, I have developed them, seeing what works and improving what doesn't. This is one of the beauties of drama and creative writing: continuous reinvention and personalisation. I have reinvented myself as a teacher and I have personalised the activities to suit the groups of students I was working with.

I have found that, on the one hand, there are activities that are guaranteed to work any time with any group of students, and there are others that need to be adapted according to the age, level and needs of a specific group of students. Some activities need practically no materials, while others need minimal material resources. In either case, drama and creative writing require a very clear purpose and careful planning in order to be successful. It is up to any individual teacher to select whatever activities they think might work with their students and adapt them in any way they think fit.

During my career I have mostly worked with teenage students aged 14–19, whose level of English basically ranged from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate, with the occasional elementary or advanced student. With lower level students I tried to simplify the instructions for the activities, translating them into their native language if necessary (but not too often), while with more advanced students I tried to empower them and even allow them to run drama and creative writing activities themselves.

Trying to select and organise drama and creative writing activities is no easy task. The following suggestions for drama activities with creative writing follow-ups should be regarded as just one resource among the many others in existence. I hope they will prove useful for both beginner and more experienced teachers.

Warm-ups and games

These can be used at the beginning of the lesson or school year or when the class starts to lose concentration. They also help enrich vocabulary, practise grammar structures and improve pronunciation.

Name game

This is a name/'getting to know each other' and vocabulary game.

Procedure

- Standing or sitting in a circle, the students introduce themselves, adding to their name an adjective beginning with the same letter as their name and also something they like beginning with the same letter.

  Example:
  – I'm victorious Victoria and I like victories.
  – I'm ambitious Alice and I like apples.

- This could be a good beginning for a description of a friend/desk-mate. Starting from the given sentence, students can write a description of that person.

Truths and lies

This is a 'getting to know each other' game. It can also be used to reinforce vocabulary and the present simple, if sentences are used instead of notes, or in the follow-up discussion.

Procedure

- On a sticky note provided by the teacher, students write some things about themselves (year of birth, brothers/sisters, pets, hobbies, etc.), one of which is a lie.
- Walking around the room they read each other's notes and try to figure out which one is the lie.

Personal advert

At home or in class students write a short personal advert.

Procedure

- The teacher displays them or collects and reads them out loud and the students have to guess who the author is.
- On one occasion, I encouraged them to insert one lie in the advert to make the guesses more complicated.

Never have I ever

This game is suitable for groups of around 15 students but if there are more students in the class they can be divided into groups. This is a 'getting to know each other' game, aimed at introducing or practising the present perfect as well.

Procedure

- Sitting in a circle, students take turns to say things they have never done. The game begins with students raising one hand so that the others see five fingers (or both hands so as to show ten fingers if you have more time to spend on the activity).
- Then students take turns to say sentences containing things they have never done in their life. It could be something like 'Never have I been to the seaside.' If the other students have done that (i.e. been to the seaside), they have to drop one finger, now having four fingers up and one down.
- Students should be instructed that the sentences have to be true and they should think of things they haven't done but the others might have done, because their aim is to make the other students drop their fingers while they keep theirs up so as to stay in the game as much as possible.

- The game ends when all students have dropped all fingers and the winners are the last students to have any fingers showing.
- A possible follow-up would be asking students to write a short paragraph/story starting with the words: 'Never have I ever'.

Blindfolded

This is a trust game which also involves giving instructions and following them.

Procedure

- A group of students (the silent chorus) can move but not talk. One student facing the group can talk but not move.
- One student cannot see (he has been blindfolded) and has to find an object, helped by the other students.
- The teacher hides an object, the chorus can see where the object is and they make gestures to direct the student who can talk and who gives instructions (e.g. straight ahead, to the left/right, behind/under the table) to the blindfolded student who has to find the object.
- A good follow-up would be to ask students to write down instructions to find hidden objects in the class (this could be a good preparation for setting up a treasure hunt).

Grammar and vocabulary

Different drama activities, games and exercises can be used to practise even the most unpopular grammar structures, activate passive vocabulary and lead to the acquisition of new vocabulary, thus enlivening the English class and textbook.

Not doing what I'm doing

This activity is aimed at practising vocabulary and the 'present continuous' tense. It can lead to a very nice writing activity depending on the activities chosen by the students.

Procedure

- Students stand in a circle. One starts miming a simple action (e.g. brushing their teeth) and the person to their right asks them what they are doing.
- They respond, giving any answer except what it is they are actually doing (e.g. 'I'm sweeping the floor'). The student who asked the question then starts miming this new action (i.e. sweeping the floor).

- The person to the right asks what they are doing and the process is repeated.

Variation

- To make the game more difficult, the teacher gives the students two letters of the alphabet, which must be the initials of whatever actions they choose (e.g. R, L: reading a letter, riding a llama, rotating a lamp).

Hidden thoughts

The aim of this activity is to practise grammar structures: conditional and subjunctive.

Procedure

- The students stand in a designated area which represents a platform at the railway station.

- They must stand completely still, forming a frozen tableau representing people waiting for a train which is delayed.

- When the teacher touches their shoulders, they un-freeze and utter their hidden thoughts, first using a conditional, then a subjunctive (e.g. *If the train comes in five minutes, I can still make it to the meeting. I wish I had caught the other train. If I had caught the other train...*).

- The students can then choose a character (i.e. one person waiting on the platform) they find interesting and develop their story.

- Sitting in a circle with the chosen character in the middle, students ask them questions such as 'Where are you going?' 'What kind of meeting do you have to attend?' 'Are you in danger of losing your job?'

- The student-in-role will improvise the answers, thus developing the character and adding details to the story.

- The students can then write down the story which has been sketched by adding other details as they wish.

- An alternative (if your purpose, for example, is to practise if clauses) is to ask your students to write sentences using if clauses, e.g. 'If I don't make it to the meeting I'll definitely lose my job. If I lose my job...'

Snake pit

This activity helps students practise grammar structures with a writing follow-up.

Procedure

- Students stand in a circle (if there are more than 15 students in your class you may choose to form more circles), with one student standing inside the circle and relating the daily routine of someone they know very well.

- Whenever they omit the –s ending of third person singular verbs, the class should hiss like snakes, while the teacher touches them, which means that they have been bitten; three bites are fatal.

- Each student chosen has two minutes to survive the snake pit. The game can be played with other structures, like articles (a 'bite' for each article omitted) and past-tense narratives (a 'bite' for each incorrect verb).

- They can write up what they said as a follow-up activity.

Improvisation and creative writing

Role-play cards and/or improvisation situations can be given to students to ensure a meaningful context for communication. The students who are confident enough in the language may go straight into the improvisation in an effort to practise what they already know. Those who are less skilled will have to go through a complete process of reviewing and preparing the language involved in the situation. It is crucial in improvisation for the teacher to make sure the students use only English during the improvisation stage and do not resort to their mother tongue. The improvisation can be carried out in pairs or in groups, the teacher can give the situation, the beginning line(s) and also the ending, or they can end it whenever appropriate.

Neutral script

This activity gives students the opportunity to put a variety of attitudes onto a particular script and add meaning to it.

Procedure

- Students are given a neutral script (any dialogue that does not reveal too much about the characters or the situation) and they have to act it out after deciding who they are, where the action takes place and what the circumstances are.

- The second time they perform it, they might add some lines in order to develop the situation further.

- The activity can then be followed by a writing activity (letters, diary pages, dialogues, stories). See Maley and Duff (1979) *Variations on a Theme*.
- An example of such a neutral script that I use with my students is the following:

  A.	Well….
  B.	I want to talk to you!
  A.	Not now!
  B.	It's time we did.
  A.	Look, I'm trying!
  B.	I'm not happy with the way things are going…
  A.	Is this my fault?
  B.	Let's forget it!
  A.	No, I don't want to forget it!

Beginning line

This is an activity suitable for students who already have enough vocabulary to be able to have a free conversation. The teacher should encourage students to say whatever crosses their mind and not be afraid to change the course of the dialogue. If there are students who seem reluctant or unable to start the conversation, the teacher can give them a context (e.g. a child who has been hiding from their parents because of a bad mark) or provide a new opening line – maybe an easier one.

Procedure

- In pairs, the students receive an opening line to start a conversation (e.g. 'There you are! I've been looking for you everywhere!').
- The students then improvise a conversation based around the opening line.
- The teacher stops them when the conversation slows down.
- This activity can also be followed by a writing activity, depending on the needs of the students.

Situational cues

This activity is suitable for pairs or groups, depending on the number of characters involved. The examples below are suitable for groups (for the first one, groups of five to six, and for the second, groups of four). Apart from giving students the necessary skills to cope in real-life situations, this is a good activity to generate ideas for a story or even a solution-to-problems essay, if the level of the students is higher and the situational clues are formulated in such a way as to give them the opportunity to come up with such solutions.

Procedure

- Students receive a situation and they have to improvise on it. The teacher can also give them the end point.

  > Two tourists get lost in London and try to find their way by stopping different people (a busy woman hurrying to work, a teenager going to school, etc.) and asking for directions.

- The improvisation ends when they meet a policeman.
- The teacher will send in different characters and in the end the policeman. If you have more groups then the characters will be instructed to enter the scene in turns.

  > Four motorists arrive at the same parking space at the same time and each declares reasons why they should be allowed to park there. The improvisation ends after five minutes or when one of the motorists finds a reason that is powerful enough to convince the others.

- If no one is willing to concede, the improvisation stops after five minutes and the students may discuss out of character how such a situation could be solved.
- This will give them both the subjective and the objective perspectives on a certain problem that requires a reasonable solution in life.

Role-play cards

Similar to the previous activity, this one can offer a lot of material for stories, discursive essays or letter writing (daughter writing to a friend – informal letter; mother to manager – formal letter), an agony-aunt column or an article on the advantages and disadvantages of becoming a fashion model, for example.

Procedure

- Each student receives a card and tries to act accordingly, initiating a dialogue which will usually end when a solution has been found.

  > Mother: your daughter wants to be a model and goes for an interview with the manager of a fashion agency. You insist on accompanying her, because you are very suspicious of the world of fashion. You don't trust the manager and you suspect his intentions.

Daughter: you want to be a model. You have an interview with the manager of a fashion agency, but your mother insists on accompanying you. You are sure you could get the job with this agency, if only your mother didn't interfere all the time!

Manager: you are the manager of a modelling and fashion agency. A young woman and her mother come in. The girl is very beautiful and you have a job you could offer her. But you need to take some photographs to see if she is photogenic.

Chain story

Improvisation can be used in creating a story. Different variations of the chain story can be used.

Procedure

- Sitting in a circle, each student adds one sentence to the story, which can be based on a beginning given by the teacher.

- Alternatively they can develop an alphabet story (first sentence beginning with A, second with B, and so on), or a fortunately/unfortunately story (each sentence beginning alternately with the words *fortunately/unfortunately*).

- One variation of the chain story which my students really like involves flipping a coin. If the student whose turn it is to continue the story gets heads, they continue with their own ideas. If they get tails, they have to pick a card previously prepared by the teacher and try to include in the story the suggestion given on the card. I try to include very random suggestions to make the story more interesting and fun.

Drama conventions and storytelling

Stories are a very good way of introducing and familiarising students with drama conventions so as to be able to use them later on in other class activities. With younger students, fairy tales work best, while with older ones any short story or short literary text can be used. The students can read the story at home or they can read it together with their teacher in class. I found that reading in class first is a powerful motivation for students to start reading in English at home as well.

Freeze frame

Here is an activity that can be used to follow up a story reading.

Procedure

- After reading the text, students work in groups to tell the story in three to four still images (freeze frames) and also add sounds (soundscapes).

- In the next step the teacher will touch each character in the frozen images and when touched they have to say something that reveals who they are (touch-and-tell), for example, 'Oh, that apple looks delicious'. The students then add movement, transitions between the images and some dialogue to make a one-minute scene.

- This can be further developed by bringing in other drama conventions such as narration, hidden thoughts (asides) or captions (e.g. the next day, in the morning).

- The text, drama conventions and the instructions given will be chosen according to the aim of the lesson and what the teacher wants their students to practise.

Once they are familiar with the drama conventions, students have the necessary tools to create their own story. The same procedure explained above can be used when creating a story starting from a variety of stimuli.

Conclusion

Some teachers and especially head teachers might see drama as a useless, noisy activity that would only interest students with artistic qualities. But educational drama is not theatre and it has a tremendous impact on the students' development as complex human beings. Detractors may also state that drama is just playing, but children learn by playing as it helps them make sense of their experiences. Drama can both celebrate and challenge the values of a society; it is a way of making sense of the world and, even more, questioning the world as it is and seeing how it can be improved. Applying drama in education helps students to understand themselves better, the part they are responsible for and the part they can play in shaping the world.

Educational drama and creative writing bring numerous benefits to those who engage in them. They lead to the personal and social development of the students (self-confidence, freedom of expression, co-operation, responsibility, independent opinion, problem-solving skills and personal involvement) as well as to the development of their linguistic skills. Those teachers who have already tried them know these things and have seen the benefits; those who are willing to try them are guaranteed to see them in their group of students. Good luck to those who find inspiration and useful resources in the inexhaustible field of drama and creative writing!

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18

A journey towards creativity: a case study of three primary classes in a Bulgarian state school

Zarina Markova

Introduction

In a 2014 British Council publication there is a grim diagnosis by Anne Wiseman: 'A number of studies have been undertaken analysing the impact of the fall of communism and the subsequent introduction of a free market economy into former Soviet bloc countries and all conclude that the totalitarian regimes stifled a generation in terms of creativity and the ability to develop initiatives. The effect was to be seen throughout Eastern and Central Europe in the following decades' (Wiseman, 2014: 301–302).

Had I read this observation ten years ago, I would have vigorously objected. I would have given plenty of examples where the totalitarian restrictions and absurdities pushed people to stretch their problem-solving capacities, which resulted in various forms of creative expression. I could have even argued that, in many ways, those limitations provoked creativity. More than a decade after the cited studies, however, in a country that is experiencing a severe demographic crisis and brain drain, and whose intellectual capital is decreasing, Anne Wiseman's prognosis is sad, but true. Moreover, it sounds extremely topical for the education sector, where recent analyses show a tendency towards decline: Bulgaria's score in the five-yearly *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS) decreased in 2011 and 2006, and in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 40 per cent of students were classified as functionally illiterate. This is a harrowing situation in which old measures are ineffective, but new solutions have not yet been found.

In such a context, raising the issue of creativity might be considered rather irrelevant. It could be argued that there are more basic, more pressing issues than dealing with an 'elitist' construct like creativity. There is even evidence that creative thinking is negatively correlated with test results. However, a closer look at the analyses shows that Bulgarian students generally struggle with open-ended questions, interpretation and reasoning – areas that are closely connected with creative thinking. Creativity involves discovering patterns, using analogy and metaphor, and brainstorming. It includes self-reflection, empathy and playful engagement with ideas. All these can create a better climate for changing the attitudes and behaviours of students, and also of teachers.

The project

If a stance towards teaching creativity is adopted, creative linguistic expression will be among the naturally expected outcomes. In the foreign language classroom, such expression will have to be in the target language. Is this achievable with primary students, with their beginner level in the foreign language? On the one hand, we have all witnessed children's creative use of limited language resources to convey meaning. We also know that a child's world is rich in fantasy and this can lead to the emergence of creativity.

On the other hand, there have been warnings, from Vygotsky (1967) among others, that children's insufficient command of their language and experience and knowledge of the world can inhibit their creative processes and deter them from imaginative writing. In the primary school context, where students have not yet mastered creative expression in their mother tongue, is it realistic to expect them to do it in a foreign language?

These were the questions arising at the beginning of a one-year project which attempted to understand if consistent focus on creative thinking processes while teaching English could enable young learners to produce creative pieces of writing. The project started in 2010, and involved two classes of nine-year-olds (grade 3 in the Bulgarian school system) and one class of ten-year-olds (grade 4). It took place in Blagoevgrad, an administrative centre and university town in south-western Bulgaria, with a population of about 70,000. The three classes were at a school where foreign language instruction was more intensive than that in other schools, and which had formerly been considered elitist and preferred by families of middle to upper socio-economic status.

Latterly, due to demographic changes and the school's proximity to a district with Roma inhabitants, the school has become only slightly different from an average, non-elite Bulgarian state school (the only difference being the bigger number of foreign language lessons). The children involved in the project were from a range of socio-economic status backgrounds, with about 20 per cent of them of Roma origin. At the beginning of the school year, the 3rd graders had had approximately 200 lessons of English, whereas the 4th graders had already had approximately 360 lessons of English, of 35 minutes in the first and second years and 40 minutes from the third year onwards.

Project activities

There follows a description of the project activities used to create conditions for 'pedagogised' creativity (Carlile and Jordan, 2012), i.e. personal and social creativity that can emerge, and be enhanced, in the context of effective and meaningful English language teaching. They involve the creative processes of brainstorming, guided imagery, associations, multiple uses, expanding and multiplying sentences, and creating metaphors. Most of these activities are familiar to the experienced ELT reader. What is new is their function in the context described above – to lead Bulgarian young learners step-by-step into creative processes, which could result in more confidence and skill at a later, product-oriented stage of creative writing. Some of the activities could be repeated throughout the school year with a different language focus. There is always a linguistic outcome which could be supported by drawing and thus offer one more mode of creative expression. During the project, creative thinking activities were done at least once a week.

What's in a picture?

This is a brainstorming activity where the teacher covers an image in such a way that the visible part is both small enough to prevent guessing and big enough to present an idea and stimulate imagination.

Materials

Images should be expressive, give room for interpretations and stimulate young learners' imaginations. My personal choice would be a modern art painting or a fractal art image, but plenty of alternatives can be found on the internet.

Here are some possible sources:

■ www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/search/collection

■ http://fractalexperience.com/fe/galleries.php

■ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_art

Procedure

■ The students brainstorm the content of the image and then each of them draws what they think the image is about.

■ Their drawings are then displayed on the wall, compared to the original image and the students are encouraged to make sentences explaining how they are similar/different.

■ Depending on the chosen image, the teacher may need to provide a little help with vocabulary and structure, for example 'There is/are…', 'I can see…', 'I have…' in my picture.

■ Alternatively, stories can be set around the students' pictures and the chosen image, then written and displayed together.

This is an adaptation of the popular 'guess the image' activity. Unlike the original, however, the focus here is not on guessing the right image content, but on developing tolerance of cases with more than one correct answer. It is important to help the students with a plan or guiding questions and vocabulary support if they do not have experience of such activities.

Multiple uses

In this activity the students suggest all the uses an object can have. For example, a pen is a writing tool, but it can also be used as a pointer, a bookmark, a fork or knife, or a stick for stirring… Alternatively, they brainstorm objects suitable for a particular use. For example: what objects can be used as a vehicle? How? When and where?

Materials

Simple objects such as pens/pencils, coins, pegs, forks or fruit (lemons, oranges).

Procedure

■ An object is chosen by either the teacher or the students.

■ The students brainstorm its possible uses.

■ The teacher stops the activities when they feel satisfied with the number and the variety of the answers.

Part of this activity will inevitably involve mother-tongue use, but at the same time it can generate interest in the acquisition of new vocabulary. It is valuable in itself for its creative potential, but it is better to extend it with examples of how this new vocabulary works and with subsequent practice. With young learners, it can include drills of the following type: 'A pen can be (used as) a knife because you can sometimes cut with it' (or as a pointer/point, etc.).

Surprise me!

This is a vocabulary practice activity in which the students have fun while making surprising sentences with given words.

Materials

Cards with vocabulary that needs practice; a bag.

Procedure

- The cards are put in a bag.
- Each student picks a word and makes a surprising sentence.
- Alternatively, the students can discuss their words in groups and create surprising sentences together.
- In a variation of the activity, each student incorporates the chosen word in a picture and then describes the picture.

Snap – variation

The teacher prepares two sets of cards with the vocabulary that needs practice. The cards from the first set are put in a box and shuffled.

Preparation

The cards from the second set are randomly distributed among the students, each student receiving one card. If there are some cards left over, they are put in the box.

Procedure

- The class is divided into teams, each team consisting of four to six students.
- Each student shows their card to their teammates and says the word aloud.
- A dice is thrown to decide in what order the teams will play.
- The teacher draws a card from the box and the first team has to make an association between the word from the box and any of the words they have on their cards.
- An association is considered good as long as the students can justify their choice. For example, a kite can be associated with a bird because they both can fly, or because both words contain four letters; a dog can be associated with a table because it has four legs, or because it can be found in people's homes, etc.
- If the association is accepted, the team receives a point, the used cards are put aside, the child whose card was used draws a new one, and the game continues with the next team.
- The game stops when all the cards have been used.
- It is important that all teams have an equal number of turns – the teacher should calculate this in advance.

Variations

- Instead of teams, students can make associations individually, each of them being responsible for their own word, while the competitive element remains. This variation makes more demands on students and was not considered suitable for the purposes of the project.

- Instead of associations, students can make unusual/funny sentences. This can be done in a special 'time for fun' slot. It should be carefully explained that the aim of the activity is to stimulate imagination and that normally some of the sentences can sound meaningless. This variation of the game may be more appropriate for grammar drills, when students play around with a certain grammar structure. Gradually, more poetic expression can be encouraged, and students can come up with suggestions like: 'Autumn is wearing a cloudy dress.' 'Autumn is drinking fog milk.' 'The sun is eating rainbow drops.' 'Spring is wearing a cherry dress.' 'Birds are drinking flower juice.'

Expanding sentences

Procedure

- The teacher gives a sentence framework and illustrates it with a few examples.

  Framework:

  Who (or what)

  is doing what

  where

  with who (or with what)

  why (give as many explanations as possible)

  Examples:

  – The bird is flying in the sky because… it wants food, and because it is hungry, and because it is happy, and because the weather is sunny and because it is not raining and because it is not cold.

  – My cat is playing with a ball because… she likes balls/it is interesting/I am at school/she is not hungry.

  – My friend is reading with his mum because… he has homework/he can't read/she is at home/she is not busy.

- The students follow the framework and make their own sentences.

Adding adjectives

- A similar activity is to expand the sentence by adding adjectives. The students still need a framework and help with the kinds of adjectives they could add.

  Framework:

  The adjective 1 adjective 2 adjective 3 adjective 4 bird is flying in the sky.

  adjective 1 – describing opinion

  adjective 2 – describing a fact: how big?

  adjective 3 – describing a fact: how old?

  adjective 4 – describing a fact: what colour?

  Examples:

  – The scary big black bird is flying in the sky.

  – The beautiful young bird is flying in the sky.

Variations on a sentence

Procedure

- The teacher writes a sentence on the board.
- The students play with the given sentence by changing only one word at a time.
- For example, if the original sentence is 'There is a big vase on the table', a possible path to follow can be:

  There is a big book on the table.

  There is a big book under the table.

  There is a big book under the chair.

  There is a new book under the chair.

  There was a new book under the chair, etc.

Guided imagery

In this activity the students close their eyes and visualise a place, following the teacher's guidelines.

Procedure

- The teacher reads or asks a sequence of questions.
- The students draw pictures of their mental images, compare them and discuss the differences and similarities.

  Example 1:

  Imagine the room of your dreams.

  Is it big or small?

  Is it noisy or quiet?

  How many windows does it have?

  How many doors?

  What can you see through the windows?

  What is there inside the room?

  Who is with you in the room?

  What are you doing?

  What is the other person doing?

  Example 2:

  Imagine you are a parent.

  Are you tall or short?

  What colour is your hair?

  What are you wearing?

  What is your job?

  How many children have you got?

  Are they boys or girls?

  How old are they?

  How do they look?

Some learners at this age may find it difficult to reproduce what they have imagined during the guided imagery process. Therefore, the teacher may decide to limit the instructions to five or six sentences. For the same reason, you may provide your students with a structure to follow while drawing and describing.

■ For example: The room of my dreams is… (adjective 1 – size). It is… (adjective 2 – level of noise). It has… (number) windows, and so on.

Final task

At the end of the school year students were given creative writing tasks. The 3rd graders had to imagine they were an object or an animal and write a story about 'themselves'. The 4th graders had to write a story involving emotions or human traits.

The second task is an adaptation of Deborah Fraser's metaphorical writing lesson in the literacy classroom (Fraser, 2006).

In both cases, the children had freedom to choose the main characters in their stories. To provide them with a sense of security a text format was suggested, and for the 3rd grade this included a description of the appearance of the object or the animal, its place, daily routine, likes, dislikes and feelings. In the 4th grade the writing task was carried out in two lessons.

During the first lesson, the following questions were discussed:

■ What feelings do people show? When? How?
■ What character traits do people possess? How do they show them?
■ Can these feelings and traits be personified? How?

Then two opposite character features were chosen. Students then discussed how they would appear if they were people. The chosen traits were Patience and Impatience, and the children had to describe them in a whole-class activity. The description followed the questions:

■ Where does Patience/Impatience live?
■ What does she look like? Her face? Her body?
■ What clothes does she wear?
■ What does she do?
■ What things does she like?
■ Does she have friends? Who are her friends?

The stories were written during the second lesson. Part of the discussion was conducted in Bulgarian to allow more variety and depth of exploration of the topic.

Conclusion

The more experienced readers of this chapter would be well aware of the virtuous circle where the investment of thought and energy on the part of the teacher increases students' motivation and involvement in the learning process, which in turn boosts teachers' devotion and commitment. In our case, the first steps were difficult as the children seemed to lack ideas, willingness to experiment, and confidence to tolerate ambiguities and take risks. The teachers had to spend time and effort to draw them out. Gradually, the students gained self-assurance and began to engage more enthusiastically and imaginatively in the activities. This was accompanied by more signs of appreciation of their English lessons and their teachers, who, in turn, were stimulated to introduce more creative activities in their teaching. They started adapting their coursebook to provide more open-ended activities for their students and were rewarded accordingly. It is with an instance of such a reward that I would like to conclude this project description:

> You, Mrs Bundova
>
> You are mango juice
>
> You are sunny
>
> You are flower
>
> You are bird
>
> You are happiness
>
> Love, Simeon (9 years)
>
> (Given to the teacher on 8 March, International Women's Day)

This project started as an attempt to create conditions for fostering primary students' creative thinking and expression and turned into a rewarding, joyful experience for everybody involved. It would be difficult to predict whether and how the teachers and students would be able to sustain their creative engagement in the teaching/learning process. It would be even more difficult to say if their experience would be transferred to other subjects, classes and schools. There are rays of optimism, though. The project attracted the attention of the foreign language experts in two regional inspectorates, and they, helped by the British Council in Sofia, organised teacher training seminars on creativity in ELT for some 120 teachers of English. No one can know how effective such training can be, and experience warns us to be modest in our expectations. Yet, I would like to believe that even small steps can sometimes have disproportionately larger effects.

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Acknowledgements

The focus of this book is on practical classroom activities which can help to nurture and develop our students' creativity. The activities will help you to explore the role of creativity in the classroom both in the sense of helping students to express their unique creative identity and also by helping them to think about and use language in a creative way. The activities are suitable for a broad range of students from young to old and from low to higher levels and can be used alongside your existing syllabus and course materials to enhance your students' experience of learning English.

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