

Creativity in the English lesson. An Overview

by Ligia-Daniela Botiza, “Inochentie Micu” High School, Cluj-Napoca & “Constantin Brâncoveanu” Secondary School, Baci, Cluj County, Romania

Keywords: creativity, originality, brainstorming, exploring imagination, creative writing, cooperative writing, scholar contests

Abstract

One of the teachers' roles is to develop the students' creativity. For that we need to have at our disposal a set of methods and techniques. The present study starts with a simple definition of creativity followed by means of measuring students' creativity, inhibiting factors of students' creativity and methods for developing students' creativity. Creativity can be defined through its elements: fluency of ideas, flexibility in thinking and originality. We can measure students' creativity through the following criteria: connections, originality and nonrationality. The methods that proved to be most effective in my teaching experience are: brainstorming, exploring imagination, creative writing, cooperative writing and involving students in school contests. The study presents all the above-mentioned methods together with examples from my own experience. The study ends with means of rewarding the students' creative behaviour and conclusions.

What is creativity?

Creativity is the feature of being creative, the creative power. From a teacher's point of view, a creative student is the one who solves problems in a logical way, without being helped, in an effective and unusual way. The defining elements of creativity include: fluency in the production of ideas, flexibility in thinking and originality (Guilford, 1967).

The fluency of ideas is connected to the ability of generating a lot of answers to a problem in a limited or unlimited period of time. The production of ideas implies: naming simple or complex words for the title of a painting or a story; a succession of words, expressions or short sentences which can be generated starting from a theme;

building meaningful sentences starting from two or more words; playing with words, which implies finding many pairs of words that rhyme, words that have a given ending or beginning. Another type of fluency is the associative one. This implies surprising some relations between the elements of a category. For example, we can ask students to list the words which have the opposite meaning to a given word. Associative thinking is about getting some ideas and solutions through combining different representations, elements, random words. In this case we frequently use analogies. Associations can be of two types: linguistic and imagistic. The linguistic associations are, for example, when we imagine a writer who works on a text which has the sea as a theme. We can produce a series of associated words starting from the word spray. These words will generate other associations. We will have a chain of associations like, for example: spray-shower-umbrella-rain-waves. associations through images are applied to groups that work simultaneously. Each group has to make an abstract drawing of the succession of ideas during a brainstorming session. At the end of the discussions the groups present their drawing without explaining and motivating. Each of the groups' members will give a title to the drawing (Jurcău, 2000). The titles can be abstract descriptions full of fantasy. We can ask students some questions to generate new ideas and solutions: What can we add? What can we let out? What materials can be replaced?

Flexibility is the capacity of restructuring thinking when it is required, the ability to pass from a category to another. Flexibility also implies the capacity of modifying, quickly restructuring ideas to find new uses of mechanisms, products etc. There are two types of flexibility: spontaneous, which is realised from subject's initiative and adaptative, when it is guided. Adaptative flexibility requires abandoning conventional methods of solving problems in the favour of finding original solutions. For example, we can ask the students to find as many solutions to a given problem or to arrange a series of three or more drawings so that they build different stories. We can also ask students to come up with many different endings to unfinished stories.

Originality is the aptitude of a person to give unusual answers. We can estimate our students' originality through: testing the students' ability to improve a product, testing the students' ability to come up with unusual uses of an object or testing the students' ability to anticipate consequences: What would happen if ...

How do we measure students' creativity?

There are three criteria for measuring students` creativity: connections, originality and nonrationality.

Connections

The essence of human creativity is relation. Most researchers of creativity agree that a main element of the creative process is combination. This is more about similitude than about differentiation, more precisely, it`s about using the existing elements in a distinctive relation. Some combination methods are: finding new relations, new meanings and new configurations; seeing things in a new perspective, combining previous experience in a new pattern; discovering new and unexpected connections between things. It is all about the capacity of seeing life in a metaphorical way and producing new effects.

Originality

The main characteristics of originality are: novelty, unpredictability, unicity and surprise. Novelty implies: a process of fusion of the existent perceptions in a new combination, the capacity of spotting new connections and the emergence of new relations. Unpredictability is about the relation between a created object and other situations in the real world. The main assertion is that creativity extracts objects from their usual causal relations. In this way we have an incompatibility between originality and the causality theory. Creativity produces a qualitative step forward which is characterised through products (objects, relations, meanings, behaviours, images) which didn`t exist before and could not be anticipated on the basis of the evolution of events.

Nonrationality

This criterion of creativity describes the unconscious mental processes responsible for the metaphorical functioning through which the images fuse in a new creation. Metaphors confer plasticity in language, thinking and perception.

Inhibiting factors of the students` creativity

Among the inhibiting factors of students` creativity we may encounter: characteristics of the students, characteristics of the teachers and the system`s factors. Characteristics of the students that inhibit their creativity are: intolerance to the colleagues` ideas, low self-esteem, fear of ridiculous, conformism. Characteristics of

the teachers that inhibit the students' creativity are: the accent on reproducing ideas, no appreciation of originality. Factors of the system that inhibit students' creativity are: curriculum overloading, too dense textbooks that give the students the impression that man has discovered everything. Although there are a lot of inhibiting factors of the students' creativity, we can still help our students to overcome their limits.

How can we develop our students' creativity?

We can use some methods and techniques for stimulating creativity in a group: brainstorming, exploring imagination, creative writing, cooperative writing and involving students in contests.

Brainstorming is an intentional separation of imagination from critical and rational thinking (Jurcău, 2000). Brainstorming starts from two basic principles: any individual is capable of producing ideas and quantity develops quality.

Exploring imagination is recommended for writing sketches. The students have to learn to slow down the rhythm of their thoughts to stay away from distractive thoughts and to let their imagination free. The next step is creating a draft. Then, the students have to make the necessary corrections and read their work from the author's chair.

Creative writing is about imaginative tasks such as writing poems, stories and plays. These activities have a number of features which recommend them. Their result is a kind of accomplishment and most people feel proud of their work and want it to be read. For stimulating the proud of the final product which all students might feel when they wrote creatively, they need to have an appropriate audience (Ur, 1996). This might be the teacher and the class. We can add the students' work on the class walls or we can include it in a class magazine.

Writing can be a cooperative activity. Cooperative writing works well in most cases. If the writing focuses on the process, checking and evaluation are enhanced having more than one person to work on the text and generating ideas is much more alive when more students write than when someone writes individually. In cooperative writing based on genre it is very probable that more students together work better on texts that are specific to a certain type of genre (Harmer, 2007). We can see examples of students' cooperative writing in Image 1 and Image 2.



Image 1



Image 2

A good example of creative and cooperative writing are group projects. No matter what the theme is, the students get more involved when they work in group projects than when they work individually. Image 3 and Image 4 show examples of students' group projects about volunteering.



Image 3



Image 4

School contests are a good way for stimulating students to get more involved, to be competitive, to overcome their limits and to develop their skills. The students can be very creative when they want to. When they see that their colleagues participate too, many students decide to participate. This proves the importance of competition in developing students' creativity. Once they have decided to participate, the students become very involved and creative. Image 5 and Image 6 show examples of students' work when they participated in the contest "The Magic of Winter Holidays".



Image 5

Image 6

How do we reward the students` creativity?

We must respect unusual questions, imagination and unusual ideas. Nothing is more rewarding for a student who asks questions than the answers he/she gets and the fact that the adults answer his/her questions. We need to teach our students how to: ask a question, play with it, turn it on all faces, reformulate and assume the role of investigator.

Creative students can notice many relations and meanings. Using the students` ideas enhances their interest, creates enthusiasm and stimulates effort. We must show our students that their ideas are valuable. We can do this by writing the students` ideas and asking them to write down the ideas too and we can offer opportunities for experimenting without an immediate evaluation.

Conclusions

Creativity can be defined through fluency of ideas, flexibility in thinking and originality. As we saw above, brainstorming, exploring imagination, creative writing, cooperative writing and involving students in contests are very good methods for developing the students` creativity. It is very important to use effective methods for developing our students` creativity and to reward their creative behaviour.

Bibliography

1. Guilford, J.P., (1967), *Creativity: Yesterday, today and tomorrow*. The Journal of Creative Behaviour, 1(1), 3-14
2. Harmer, J., (2007), *The Practice of English Language Teaching, Fourth Edition*, Ed. Pearson Longman
3. Jurcău, N, (2000), *Psihologie Educațională*, Ed. U.T.Press
4. Ur, P., (1996), *A Course in Language Teaching, Practice and Theory*, Cambridge Teacher Training and Development, Series Editors: Marion Williams and Tony Wright

Biodata

Ligia-Daniela Botiza has been teaching English in public schools for 13 years. She is currently working with primary, secondary and high school students and she is

passionate about teaching English through songs and games, bringing reading to life, developing the students' creativity and role playing in the English lessons. She has participated in courses, seminars and conferences in Cluj-Napoca, Bucharest, Iași and Timișoara. She has been involved in POSDRU projects: "Skills for Jobs", POSDRU/160/2.1/s/141384 and "Împreună vom reuși", POSDRU91/2.2/S/64054. She has published articles: 'Importanța evaluării inițiale: Metode și tehnici' in "Evaluarea În Învățământul Preuniversitar" School Magazine, No.5, November 2017, ISSN 2537-4893, p. 435-436 and "Promovarea Imaginii Școlii" in "Esențial în Educație" Newspaper, ISSN2458-0511, No.4207, 02.02.2018, „Dezvoltarea creativității la elevi”, in „Demersuri Creative” School Magazine, No.31/November-December 2018, p. 19-20, ISSN 2501-0921