FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND CREATIVITY

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Abstract: The author deals with a topic quite often discussed by not only pedagogy and psychology. Creativity is present everywhere and the author suggests it should be a part of University education preparing pre-service teachers. Even though there are researches proving that creativity can be learnt and developed (to certain extent) it is still missing at our schools. The article brings the idea how technology can be used to support motivation and challenge creativity in the groups of young learners.

Key words: Creativity, reading, writing, technology.

1 Introduction

Young people spend much time at schools. Some of them spend even more than a quarter of a day at school. We should try to use that time effectively to help them to become socially and mentally mature individuals ready to think creatively, logically, look for solutions with the ability to anticipate problems and predict consequences. Teachers report that their students are more motivated and reflective, cooperative; enjoy learning more; they are more confident and understand and remember what they are learning better than before (see Starbuck, 2006) when creative teaching applied.
2 Creativity

The aim of this article is not to define creativity or to discuss different theories about creativity, still we feel it is necessary to provide some theoretical background. There is not a single definition of creativity they all mention novelty. Hillman (1972, In: Bleakley (2004, p. 464) “describes six notions of creativity: differentiation, novelty, ferment, instrumental problem-solving, eminence and renewal.” Bleakley (ibid, p. 465) also quotes Sternberg and Lubart (1999, p. 3) who define creativity as “the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e., original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful, adaptive concerning task constraints).” One of the most frequently mentioned categorization or typology of creativity is the Taylor’s typology (Taylor, 1959 in Baker, Rudd, Pomeroy (2001, p. 175) who identified 5 typologies for creativity: expressive, productive, inventive, innovative, and emergenative.

Sternberg and Lubart (1993, pp. 229 – 230) describe their approach to creativity and name 6 resources, namely intelligence, knowledge, thinking skills, personality, motivation and environment.

Baker, Rudd, Pomeroy (2001) bring a brief survey of several research conducted in the field of creativity along with, sometimes, contradictory the results. Their research found out that critical and creative thinking are not closely connected.

We have already mentioned that the term creativity is frequently connected with novelty and innovation. It has also been reported that there were no many researchers conducted to measure creativity as such. The term novelty might be ambiguous and thus the interpretation, or perception what is understood as creative might differ from person to person. Ali Taha and Tej (2012, p. 18) warn that there are a lot of researchers who mistakenly understand the terms creativity and novelty as synonyms. Gáborová (2003, p. 32) highlights that there are two significant features in creativity definition. The thing that should be creative should be at the same time useful, in simple creativity can be defines as a production of new and useful ideas, solutions, products. What is essential is the fact both are present simultaneously.

2.1 Creativity in the Classroom

In their study Horng, Hong, ChanLin, Chang and Chu (2005, p. 352) present the results of the research aimed at finding the factors that influence creative teaching. Their findings showed that these are namely: “(a) personality traits: persistence, willingness to develop, acceptance of new experiences, self-confidence, sense of humour, curiosity, depth of ideas, imagination, etc.; (b) family factors: open and tolerant ways of teaching children, creative
performance of parents, etc.; (c) experiences of growth and education: self-created games and stories, brainstorming between classmates, etc.; (d) beliefs in teaching, hard work, motivation and (e) the administrative side of school organization.” Those, in fact, correspond to those characteristics that are used when describing “a good teacher”. What is important, is that prior experience with creativity, experiencing creative approach seem to be a good predisposition to become a creative teacher. In other words, we can say, that the creative environment – family, teachers, friends develop to certain extend the creativity of a person.

Torrance et al. (1990, In: Baker, Rudd, Pomeroy, 2001) enumerates the following creative attributes: fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration, abstractness of the title, resistance to closure, emotional expressiveness, articulateness, movement or action, expressiveness, synthesis or combination, unusual visualization, internal visualization, extending or breaking the boundaries, humor, richness of imagery, colorfulness of imagery, and fantasy.

2.2 Creative Teacher and Creative Student

Csikszentmihalyi (1996, pp. 58 – 73) defines the characteristics of the creative personality as follows:

1. Creative individuals have a great deal of energy, but they are also often quiet and at rest.
2. Creative individuals tend to be smart, yet also naive at the same time.
3. Creative individuals have a combination of playfulness and discipline, or responsibility and irresponsibility.
4. Creative individuals alternate between imagination and fantasy and one end, and rooted sense of reality at the other.
5. Creative people seem to harbor opposite tendencies on the continuum between extroversion and introversion.
6. Creative individuals are also remarkable humble and proud at the same time.
7. Creative individuals to a certain extent escape rigid gender role stereotyping and have a tendency toward androgyne.
8. Generally, creative people are thought to be rebellious and independent.
9. Most creative persons are very passionate about their work, yet they can be extremely objective about it as well.
10. The openness and sensitivity of creative individuals often exposes them to suffering pain yet also a great deal of enjoyment.
Horng, et al (2005, p. 355) states that “Only when teachers are willing to create, will students feel unrestrained and encouraged to be creative in class.” Similarly Sternberg and Williams (1996, p. 7) claim that “The most powerful way to develop creativity in your students is to be a role model. Children develop creativity not when they are told to, but when you show them”.

Creative learners need creative teachers. Rinkevich (2011, p. 220) highlights that “increasing creativity in teaching begins with teacher education.“ It is a necessity to introduce courses of creativity at teacher training programmes that would focus also on how to develop a creative student and student-centered teaching rather than teacher centered teaching. Makel (2009, In: Rinkevich, 2011, p. 220) termed „discrepancy between the perceived value of creativity and its absence in schools the “creativity gap,” and research indicates many reasons as to why this is a common occurrence.”

Livingstone (2010) claims that “Human beings are inherently creative.” On the other hand Esquivel raised a question and partly answers it: ‘Can creativity be learned?’ Everyone bears the potential for creativity.” (In: Horng, at al, 2005, p. 355). Livingstone (ibid) states „They come to school with a life history of creativity, whether it is manifested in the use of the Internet, various extracurricular pursuits, or even, occasionally, the classroom. Hence, we need not fret over how to encourage creative behavior in our schools. However, we do have an obligation to explore the means by which we may anchor creativity in the mission of our educational institutions.” (Livingstone, 2010)

Fisher (2006) suggests few ideas how to develop creative thinking in young learners and claims that “children who are encouraged to think creatively show increased levels of motivation and self-esteem.” He suggests including opportunities for creativity in the lessons one teaches: using imagination; generating questions, ideas and outcomes; experimenting with alternatives; being original; expanding on what they know or say; exercising their judgment.

“Lack of teacher training in creativity has also been identified in the research as a reason why more teachers do not employ creative activities in the classroom (Fleith 2000; Kim 2008). Authors stress the need for more creativity training in teacher preparation programs, which serves as a likely starting point for creative teaching.” (Rinkevich, 2011, p. 220).

2.3 Creativity in Foreign Language Teaching
Sternberg and Williams (1996, p. 20 – 24) introduce teaching tips for challenging creative thinking. They mention:

- allowing time for creative thinking
- instructing and assessing creatively
- rewarding creative ideas and products

Teaching foreign languages gives us a freedom to choose the tools, techniques and approaches we apply in our classes. Even though we try to “suppress” the role of a teacher in a class, to have more learner-centered classes it will not be true that the position of a teacher as such is marginal. Vice versa, his position is significantly important but his role is shifted from the controller to facilitator, organizer, prompter etc.

It is very important that teacher understands that giving freedom to students does not automatically mean that they are autonomous learners ready to progress. We need to create such safe environment, atmosphere that would challenge them to be creative. Enabling students to decide how to carry out the task we encourage intrinsic motivation what means we enable learners to be creative. The student’s creativity depends on how creative teacher is, how creative task is and mainly how much creativity does the teacher allows/accepts. Concerning teaching English as a foreign language there are numerous authors providing ideas how to make one’s lessons creative.

Puchta and Williams (2012) enumerate the following “13 categories of activity that help with both the development of the learners’ thinking skills and their language”: making comparisons, categorising, sequencing, focusing attention, memorising, exploring space, exploring time, exploring numbers, creating associations, analysing cause and effect, making decisions, solving problems, creative thinking.

We can also mention Thammineni (2012) who enumerates several innovative activities that can be practiced in English classroom: task-based activities; contests; language games; video or movie sharing; media literacy; translation; computer assisted language learning (call) programs.

Teaching should be challenged by different positive stimuli as e.g. a variety of visual stimuli, such as pictures, use of interactive whiteboard, different information and communication technologies, open ended questions, and activities that support ideas and suggestions generations, namely problem solving task, project work, task based learning, creating stories, etc.
Puchta and Williamson (2012) developed a model of thinking skills work that considers the specific needs of the foreign language class. This approach integrates two significant advantages. „First, activities that are meaningful and at the same time intellectually challenging are more likely to achieve a higher level of cognitive engagement from learners than those ELT activities that can be somewhat over-simple from a cognitive point of view. Secondly, the tasks” … “have a real-world purpose; examples include problem solving, decision making, thinking about the consequences of one’s own or other people’s actions, and so on.” (Puchta, 2012a)

In 1950s the Bloom’s taxonomy and it was revised by his former student Lorin Anderson (in 1990s).

Taxonomy reflects the forms of thinking. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) characterized the level Create as follows: “Put elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganize elements into a new pattern or structure” and they mention 3 cognitive processes in this category, namely, generating, planning and producing.

Cremin (2009, p.157) suggests to promote creativity through planning, and highlights that QCA (Qualification and Curriculum Authority) also recognise the significance of building in opportunities to enhance children’s involvement and autonomy, suggesting teachers need to: stimulate imaginations making significant connections; be clear about freedom and constraints; use a range of learning styles; give clear purpose – relevance to the work; provide opportunities for pupils to work together; build in autonomy.
3 Sample activity

We would like to present one sample activity that might be used in foreign language teaching in groups of young learners. Children at that age like writing, drawing are enthusiastic and willing to cooperate. They are born digital natives and they are skilled in using technologies (even though it is not surprising they can use internet to play games and share their experience at social networks yet they are not able to formulate key words when using search engines). It is very important they build their reading habits. The experiments dealing with reading programmes (using graded readers) proved positive effects on pupils’ language skills (see e.g. Straková 2008; Straková 2012; Straková, Cimermanová, 2012).

Content language integrated learning is currently frequently discussed topic in Slovakia and especially at the elementary schools (see e.g. Sepešiová, 2011). The sample activity we would like to briefly describe can apply the knowledge and skills from English language, ICT, arts and e.g. science depending on the formulation of the task and teacher’s creativity.

We mentioned graded readers earlier that start at the word level and gradually the language is enriched. What is important that pupil reads and has a positive feedback that he reads and understands books in English. This can be used as a bridge to creating own books, children like to create their own paper books with their own drawings (and especially their own name as an author on a cover). In our case we used application Storybook Maker for iPad (many schools nowadays are equipped with iPads). The software is intuitive and its advantage is it has sets of pictures that can be used to save time or for those less skilled at the beginning. The advantage is that books can be published and shared and thus children can read their own books as well as their classmates books. Viki (a child in the picture below) is 9 years old learning English for two years (her class has ICT lessons as well) immediately after mastering the basic skills needed for using the programme started to look for further possibilities and created her own photos to write a book about the toys and record her text to add the sound.
4 Conclusion

Similarly to Starbuck and many other author our respondents confirmed effect of creative teaching, task and class on positive atmosphere in a class as well as self-confidence of teacher, positive motivation of learners. In our previous research we also found out there might be a relationship between the approaches applied at the University and teachers’ performance in service. It seems the Universities do not pay appropriate attention to pre-service preparation in the context of critical thinking development and creativity development. We suggest Creativity and creativity development should be a compulsory subject in teacher training study programmes.

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