

Creative Pedagogy: Exploring Current Trends of Creativity in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Creativity in English Language teaching has grown to be a very essential part of the learning process. However, in contention with critical pedagogy, creativity as a component of English Language education has not been given its rightful space. Creativity, nonetheless, has been carried out by English Language teachers at the individual level to encourage a more enthusiastic learning space that increases the interests of learners, hence allowing for a more productive outcome. This paper accounts for the various trends of creativity that English teachers are following in their respective classrooms. Further, the aim of this research is to elevate the importance of creativity in the education sector for a greater, more positive consequence of learning.

Keywords: Creativity, pedagogy, English, language, teaching

One of major reasons for the spread of English as a worldwide language is the growing demand at almost all levels of education, both public and private sectors, for good English teachers. Schools and colleges want teachers who are dedicated, well-qualified and have a strong command over the English language, who work well with their counterparts and can maintain the interest and motivation of the learners. The notion of what it means to be a good English teacher is a multifaceted one, since good teaching for a teacher can be attributed to many qualities that teachers bring to class. These may include reflections, understanding of the subject, implementing unconventional ideas and so on. In this paper, we will explore one quality among the many that exemplify effective English language teachers – the ability to bring a creative disposition to teaching.

Language teaching, in comparison to the teaching of other disciplines, involves constant modifications in the approaches used. The traditions surrounding English language teaching have endured tremendous alterations and additions, especially in the twentieth century. To engage a student thus, begs the requirement of certain degrees of creativity – enough to not reduce the quality of teaching:

All teaching involves creativity and teachers are often required to think creatively or “out of the box”. Both while planning their teaching and during the teaching process itself, teachers draw on specialized kinds of thinking of which creativity is a core dimension. They draw on cognitive skills that enable them to choose relevant goals and teaching resources. (Richards, Cotterall 97)

The teaching of the English language in the chronology of education does not have ancient roots. In fact the teaching of the English language is quite recent. Throughout the 17th and 18th Century, the most prominent languages were Latin and Greek, Latin being widely

used in commerce and business. Although English was spoken amongst a considerable number of the European population, it was not advocated in formal settings and its education was not adopted until it gained larger grounds in late 18th Century. Grammatical rules and syntactic structures were regurgitated, writing was practiced persistently and passages were translated from the second language to the first language and vice versa. The teaching of language evolved, then, with approaches that prevailed and approaches that faded away. Before creativity was incorporated into language teaching, the teaching-learning process in a language classroom was highly mechanical, with not very enthusiastic measures taken and monotony being the regiment carried forward for a long time. However, there have been a few methods that have emerged successful in the realm of language teaching. Before this paper delves into creative pedagogy and creativity in language teaching, we shall examine a few of the methods that have been adopted thus far in teaching language, specifically the English language.

The first approach that we shall look into is the task-based method. Task-based Language Teaching or TBLT is an approach that provides learners with material that they have to actively work with in abiding by instructions, in order to achieve a goal or complete a task. Similar to everyday tasks such as cooking a meal, or writing an essay or interacting with someone on a phone call, TBLT seeks to cultivate interlanguage amongst students through tasks that require language to solve it. Another approach that has been explored in English language teaching is the theory of Multiple Intelligences developed by American psychologist, Howard Gardner which can go some way towards explaining different learner styles. (Gardner, Hatch 4) According to Gardner there are eight different types of intelligences:

Each intelligence displays a characteristic set of psychological processes, and it is important that these processes be assessed in an “intelligence-fair” manner. In contrast to tradition paper-and-pencils test, with their inherent bias towards linguistic and logical skills, intelligence-fair measures seek to respect the different modes of thinking and performance that distinguish each intelligence. (Gardner, Hatch 6)

The next existing approach that has been explored is higher-order thinking skills. In fact, one of the main 21st century components that teachers want their students to use are higher-order thinking skills. To put it simply, this approach encourages students to use complex ways to think about what they are learning.

Higher-order thinking in English language learning elevates the act of thinking to another level. Learners using this approach understand higher levels rather than just a mere memory of concepts. They understand concepts and try to create a connection with other concepts. The development of higher-order thinking skills or higher-order cognitive skills is prominent in order to facilitate the transition of students' knowledge and skills into responsible action regardless of their particular future role in society. (Miri, David 354)

Higher-order thinking encourages students to truly understand a concept and not just the memorization of it. It asks students to elucidate their answers and speak about what they are learning. Students decipher if the response can be found in a text or anywhere else, or if they must rely on their own prior knowledge to answer it. This strategy has been found to be very effective for higher-order thinking. Through this, students become more aware of the relationship between information in a text and their prior knowledge, which enables them to decipher the kind of strategy they need to seek for an answer.

The next existing approach in English language teaching is content-based teaching. Content-based teaching focuses on the learning of anything that interests the learners from a serious science subject to their favourite pop star or even a topical news story or film. They learn about this subject using the language they are trying to learn, rather than their native language, as a tool for developing knowledge and so they develop their linguistic ability in the target language. This is thought to be a more natural way of developing language ability and one that corresponds more to the way we originally learn our first language:

CBLT is the integration of particular content with language teaching aims. More specifically, it refers to the concurrent study of language and subject matter, with a form and a sequence of language presentation dictated by content material. Thus, basic to CBLT is the belief that language proficiency is achieved at best through learning a subject matter instead of through language per se. (Shin, Kim 169)

An example of content-based lesson can be finding suitable aspects of subject and assigning learner groups with small research tasks and then asking them to share what they have found using the English language. There should then be some product as the end result of this sharing of information which could take the form of a group report or presentation of some kind.

Creativity is a component of English Language education that we wish to explore in this research. Language, in its very nature, is creative. It can be expressed in many ways with ideas that provoke various reactions. Every sentence or phrase we utter or write, is created in a unique moment of communication and can be recreated or reformulated or summarised according to the different desires of the speaker or writer. Language teachers can, therefore, build their lessons on topics related to almost anything. This allows for creativity to grow and be practiced more extensively. English language classes can easily engage learners in creative situations.

Many scholars who have attempted to weigh in and draw a definite outline around creativity as a concept are of the opinion that creativity cannot be defined objectively. Jones and Richards in their article "Creativity and Language Teaching" state that although many scholars differ in their explanation of creativity in language teaching, they agree on a few terms: Creativity is not an 'optional' component in language teaching or something that we just resort to anytime to simply make lessons more interesting, it is not a kind of 'luxury' that is meant for the talented and the artistic. Instead, creativity is seen as central to successful teaching and learning. (Jones, Richards 5)

The relationship between the creativity of a learner and his learning of a language goes hand in hand. That is to say, creative people make better language learners but at the same time, language learning may nurture creativity in people. However, person creativity is essential when learners have the opportunity to communicate more independently than when their linguistic behaviour is restricted by regulated protocols. It is also right to note down the fact that a common opinion of language teachers is that learning a new language nurtures creativity.

Creativity in learner language is marked in two different ways. Learners use the linguistic assets at their disposal to translate utterances in order to engage in communication. As their linguistic resources are often limited, the learner language that results is creative in the sense that the learner frequently does not conform to the patterns and rules of the target

language. When this happens, however, learners are not intentionally trying to be creative; rather, their creative acts are simply the product of their need to communicate.

Creativity in the English Language classroom, in this research, was sought after through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was circulated through social media and e-mail, especially reaching out to English teachers from various levels of education – secondary, higher secondary and university or college level. The questions permit the teacher to exercise their liberty in giving their own understanding of creativity. There is no introductory passage to the questionnaire that describes or pre-determines an understanding of creativity. This is a deliberate measure taken so as to avoid the obvious influence that the researcher's definition of creativity can have on the subject's understanding of it.

A glance at the responses received illustrates the spectrum that the outline of what creativity is, stretches. Understandably, creativity is a highly subjective concept and hence, it is slightly problematic to explore it as definitive element of English language. However, as mentioned earlier, creativity is usually described as being able to solve problems in original and valuable ways that are relevant to goals, seeing new meanings and relationship in things and making connections, having original and imaginative thoughts and ideas about something, and using the imagination and past experience to create new learning possibilities. This analysis therefore will be taken forward in terms of how solution-oriented the approaches are, while also seeing that the 'original and imaginative thoughts' are enhanced through these measures.

The questionnaire is a set of nine questions that were compiled into a Google form. English teachers from various schools, colleges and other institutes sent in their responses along with their names, institutions they teach at and areas of interest. We shall structure this analysis in the order of the questions.

What is your understanding of creativity or being creative as an English Language teacher?

In answering the first question of this survey, many subjects agreed that creativity or being creative as an English Language teacher requires enabling the classroom to be an enthusiastic one, wherein the learning environment facilitates the learner to be more engaged and mentally present in the classroom. This also means that the learner shows progress in terms of learning the language through classroom interactions and participation. 'Interest' is one of the main keywords that the responses share, which implies that the most important goal that creativity in English language teaching aims at, is igniting interest. A further implication here is that there is a lack of interest that the teachers observe in the learner, which they believe can be countered through creative approaches.

Learner interest is important and most often, English language teachers find it difficult to sustain that interest. Creative approaches enable this. What this survey finds is that interest is sustained through keeping the learner engaged and what keeps the learner engaged is the teacher's creativity. "Creativity means simplicity and easy application of language taught", says one teacher who believes that creativity and ultimately keeping the learner's interest sustained, is simplifying lessons and making these lessons applicable in real life situations. Another major point of agreement in the responses is the introduction of unconventional and innovative ideas within the teaching space. These ideas that imply being 'outside the box' differ from teacher to teacher, which means that creativity is a highly personal expression.

How do you think a teacher can be creative in an English Language classroom?

In an age of technology, many English language teachers believe that their creativity can be heightened through the use of audio-visual facilities. Further, English language teachers have found that the learners respond better to activities in learning lessons rather than just a lecture with examples on the board. Learners enjoy a certain degree of challenge in the activities that stimulate their intellect.

One of the teacher participants in this survey notes a few ways through which she is creative in her English language classroom – mind mapping, movie screenings, music, abstract thinking, word games and so on. Another English language teacher notes that crosswords, quizzes, presentations and enjoyable worksheets allow for a more creative teaching and learning process. Maintaining a playful environment is very important, says one response, this encourages the learner to feel more at ease with their questions and discussion and do not shy away from faltering. When the teacher makes the learner comfortable, the teacher's creativity itself is in a better position of being successfully carried out.

Having a clear-cut plan of the creative activities before a lesson, is a salient component in teacher creativity. This form of planning is important because every activity will have its advantages and disadvantages and often times, if the creative process is implemented spontaneously, a chaotic classroom situation is created, making the teaching process less productive than intended. (Graves 167) As opposed to the common understanding that creativity is driven by the spur-of-the-moment, an English language teacher's creativity works in the creation process of activities and approaches, or in other words, the teacher's creativity is required at the time of conception of the structure of the activity rather than when the activity is being carried forward. This makes the creative process as important for the facilitator as it is for the student and for the creative process to be successfully accomplished in the classroom, both ends of the line – that is the teacher and student must actively participate. While the learner's participation can depend of the moment, the teacher's must be planned, structured and executed beforehand.

Would you consider your approach as creative teaching or teaching for creativity? Why?

Teaching creatively or creative teaching is more restrictive to the teacher's domain, wherein the aim of the creative approach is to make the classroom interesting and imaginative with the intention of yielding good results for language learners and yet, with no intention of nurturing creativity in the learner. Teaching for creativity aims at nurturing the creativity in the learner which is believed to be beneficial in learning English language and ultimately putting the language to use. Most of the responses in the survey state that they resort to both creative teaching and teaching for creativity. Many say that both are equally important for a balanced and wholesome learning experience.

An aspiring English language teacher and scholar states that she teaches for creativity because "when an individual's opinion is enabled to be expressed and taken into account in a classroom setting, he/she will gain confidence and could produce better results in the future". A freelance English language teacher participant, on the other hand, resorts to creative teaching or teaching creatively, because "paying attention to individual creative capacities is difficult". This brings us to the understanding that teachers will have their own familiarity with a class and will hence choose to act on that, choosing either to teach creatively or teach for creativity.

How do you incorporate creativity (of your understanding) in your English language classroom?

In this question the researcher tries to find out how each teacher individually carries out their creativity in actuality. As opposed to the above questions wherein they are asked generally about creativity in the English language classroom, regardless of whether or not they practice such creativity. A high school English language teacher states that nurturing the love for the subject paves the way for the incorporation of creativity in the English language classroom – “I try to develop a love for the subject which is challenging especially when they are from vernacular school backgrounds. Then gradually after the children realise that they have the potential in them I try to encourage them to achieve to the best in reading, listening, speaking and writing.”

A higher secondary English language teacher states that he utilizes the help of YouTube – “I use a lot of YouTube videos, that aren't necessarily lecture videos but mostly to show different accents and use of languages colloquially in different cultures.” A B. Ed. scholar specialising in English gives a list of activities of how she incorporates creativity in the English language classroom. A few of these are poster-making, crossword games, scrabble, charades, imaginative thinking, grammar quizzes, memes, reflective thinking and so on.

What is found from an examination of the responses to this question is that every teacher has a unique way of being creative in teaching the English language. We see an array of approaches. While some believe in creating an environment conducive to creativity, others are more practical by stating the activities.

What nature does the creative aspect of your English Language teaching hold?

Creativity in the English language classroom can be of a certain nature. Some teachers may be creative through humorous speech or visuals, some may be witty through speech and others may be activity-oriented. In this question, the responses mostly display a playfulness that seems to dominate much of what we see as creative in the English language classroom.

What is found from the responses to this question is that English language classrooms are spaces where both learners and facilitators can be watchfully informal with how they learn and teach respectively. The nature of teaching when humorous and relaxed allows for a comfortable learning space that encourages the learner to be more interested in the lesson. In this way, the learner feels connected to the learning process wherein he or she is not restricted from faltering and learning through mistakes. (Richards, Cotterall 104) As opposed to a traditional learning of the English language where the learner is perhaps forced or put under stringent surveillance by the teacher, this humorous, witty and entertaining nature of creativity proves healthier.

Do you believe you are able to bring in creativity with your English Language teaching in every class? What are the drawbacks that hinder you from being creative all the time?

The responses to this question appear to fall under a similar category, wherein teachers agree that they cannot be creative all the time. However, it is the drawbacks that each teacher faces that are unique. Following up with these teachers, we have found that lessons that are more technical or involve stringent language rules such as Tenses are more restrictive towards creativity. Other teachers believe that creativity and its components

require a good amount of time as opposed to the usual time set for one period by an institution. Learner receptiveness is another drawback that does not allow for English language teachers to be creative all the time. (Hafner 197) A teacher may come to class with a set idea for creative activity but it also depends on how well the learners respond to it. Another drawback is technical unavailability, which makes it extremely difficult for English teachers who are technologically inclined and feel that their creativity can be amplified with technology, to fully implement their ideas.

What is the typical response you receive from your students when you employ creative ideas in English language teaching and when you do not?

The responses to this question shows how students, motivated, respond better towards creative approaches as opposed to traditional approaches that do not stimulate them mentally. 'Disinterest' is a keyword that dominates these survey responses with regard to when teachers do not incorporate creative ideas. On the contrary, learners are essentially more enthusiastic when the more entertaining approaches are brought into class like games and activities. Learner receptiveness also involves a lot of co-operation. The responses to this question tell us that many of the teachers find that students are more co-operative in creative classes, as opposed to classes when there is no kind of creative activity involved.

One particular response to this question states that learners do not express their disinterest in a very blatant manner or voice out their heedlessness verbally – their body language tells the teacher that they are losing interest. A disinterested learner will perhaps fall asleep during the session, or be more engaged in talking to his peers. Creative pedagogy seeks to counter just this – disinterest which comes from learning lessons with educational constraints controlled by ministerial authorities. (Ollerhead, Burns 228) Hence, through the responses to this question, we observe that creative approaches in English language teaching are operative in making the learner more involved and ultimately learning the language effectively.

Do you believe that creative measures are necessary in English language teaching? Why?

While we have already extensively spoken about learner interest which is a prominent component of the responses to this question as well, we shall look into nature of learning environment, interrupting monotony, better interaction and individual growth as the main reasons that make creative measures important and necessary in the English language classroom. As implied by some of the responses, creative measures and approaches create a better learning environment which makes for a healthier relationship between the learner and his learning of the English language, hence making the lessons taught creatively more productive than others that are not. Creative approaches are almost always different from one session to the other, this interrupts anything monotonous, thus making the learner constantly engaged. Traditional approaches often seem to sustain the same mood throughout the entire program which really takes away the learner's interest.

Dialogue is an important aspect of learning. In English language teaching too, where the sole purpose is to a help a learner speak and use the language proficiently, having space for dialogue is essential. (Chappell 130) Creative approaches function as effective mediums for dialogue and better interaction. Learners are given liberty to interact in all ways possible when creativity is involved. The games and beyond the comfort zone activities allow them interact more as opposed to only focusing on the theoretical aspects of learning the English

language. Creative measures also foster individual growth for the learner, although this may not be on a large-scale level. Individual growth stems out of the creative activities stimulating the learner intellectually, and enhancing their cognitive abilities through problem solving and critical thinking.

What creative techniques of English language teaching do you believe should be introduced for better results in English language learning?

The responses to this question are suggestive in nature as desired by this research. English teachers believe that creative approaches can be carried forward through audio-visual facilities which have become one of the most important mediums in education today. Since young learners are very familiar and acquainted with technology as are the teachers, using technology can undoubtedly make lessons more interesting as these facilities allow for much more than what a mere board or worksheet can offer. Another suggestion from one of the teachers who participated in this survey is to give the learner a certain degree of autonomy. Enabling the learner to work creatively after he has been taught creatively through his own understanding creates for a better creative environment. Further, many English language teachers who have participated in this survey are of the belief that integrated learning is important – bringing together music, theatre, role play, field trips, internet trends and so on under one curriculum can enable for a highly effective and successful venture of English language teaching.

When we speak of creative pedagogy in the English language classroom, up until recent times, there is very little that we can think of. In other words, there has not been enough study done on this domain of English language education. The English language has, for a very long time, been perceived as a subject that does not involve creativity because of its grammar aspects that give the subject a very objective appearance. But in recent times with creative pedagogy gaining greater grounds, many educators have realised the possibility of bringing in creativity in the English language classroom with varying activities suitable for different levels of English language education. However, with the introduction of something new or unconventional, there is a requirement for acceptance from the people who are directly acquainted with the change. Concerns come from an unwillingness to deviate from the set ideals of education that have been established to be beneficial for a time that is now long and gone. These concerns are because of the trust that people have in the old systems of education that proves to be a great hindrance for creativity to be fully accepted within the education sector, particularly in English language education.

This research, conversely, has helped bring to light the possibilities of creativity in English language education and prove how creativity is beneficial to both learners and teachers as opposed to the notion of being unacademic and redundant. Apparent in this research, creativity is increasingly adopted by English language teachers which implies that it is recognized by planners and policy makers, school and program administrators, curriculum developers, teachers and learners themselves, as an essential element in language education. Graves speaks of curriculum as a conceptual space for creativity. To be creative within a conceptual space requires exploration, experimentation with different aspects of the space, bringing about change within the space and possibly transforming the space. (Graves 165)

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