Creativity in Foreign Language Teaching

Ivana Cimermanová
Institute of British and American Studies,
Faculty of Arts, University of Presov, Slovakia
ivana.cimermanova@unipo.sk

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. Students and pupils still claim that they are asked to memorize the facts rather than to discuss their own opinions and perception.
The study briefly presents part of the data gained in the research focused on using creativity at elementary and secondary schools. The interview with 22 teachers was done in 2 sessions (10 and 12 teachers to manage to administer the responses).

1. Introduction

Children and adolescents spend much time at schools. Some of them spend 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.

Starbuck (2006) summarises the teachers's reports about their pupils when creative teaching applied:

- much more adept at processing knowledge, taking the initiative and self-evaluating their learning performance
- more motivated, reflective and resourceful
- enjoying learning more than they did and their self-confidence has grown
- communicating and working with others better than before
- remembering and understanding what they are learning better than before

2. Creativity

Although the aim of this article is not to define creativity or to discuss different theories about creativity we feel it is important to pride some theoretical background. Many people understand creativity as „something connected to arts". 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.

Zelina and Buganová (1983) define the following characteristics of creativity:

- High level of hardwork, discovery, experimenting and knowledge acquiring,
- opportunity to express one's opinions , even though these are controversial; there is a space for discussion, polemics, tolerance and recognition,
- high level to learn to present and solve problems, both practical and theoretical,
- relationship between a student and teacher is characterised by a high level of democracy, teacher presents problems, he is a stimulator, organising the searching for and discovering answers and solutions, he is in a role of facilitator in problems overcoming,
- relaxed atmosphere, no fear,
- discipline based on collaborative work, cooperation based on the rules for answer searching and problem solving,
- less force, less authoritarian teaching, discipline is more relaxed compared to traditional class,
- teacher applying creative approach appreciates students; work rather than critique and warnings.

Gáborová (2003) stresses that "creative atmosphere is the basic presumption of the development of the highly creative people, who can be identified by:

- mental health and intellectual activity,
- desire for self-realization and self-presentation,
- positive self-image, self-confidence,
- psychological security,
- personal freedom, unaccepting the limits and restrictions,
- effort to reach a constructive improvement of environment,
- they have problems to follow the rules, limits, requirements

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.

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. The figural Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT) is appropriate at all levels, kindergarten through adult. It uses exercises to assess five mental characteristics (fluency, elaboration, originality, resistance to premature closure, abstractness of titles). The TTCT is an instrument that can be used to operationalize these creative attributes.

2.2 Creative Teacher and Creative Student

"Torrance indicated 'A teacher's attempts to create are more influential to students than his or her students.' Only when teachers are willing to create, will students feel unrestrained and encouraged to be creative in class." (Horng, at al, 2005, p. 355)

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." (Horng, at al, 2005, p. 355) „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 judgement.

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."

"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

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.

Generally we can say that many activities can be run creatively, or can evoke creativity and challenge it. Generally, the types of activities or practice can be divided into three main groups; namely controlled practice, guided practice and free practice. While controlled practice allows only partial freedom or creativity, the guided practice and free practice allows teacher to be creative and lead students to creativity. In fact, this is

very significant or even essential ability and skill that teachers should possess. Creative students who are allowed to present themselves and to suggest their own ideas are usually more motivated and thus their risk-taking is higher, similarly as their language ego and self-confidence is being built.

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..

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.

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).
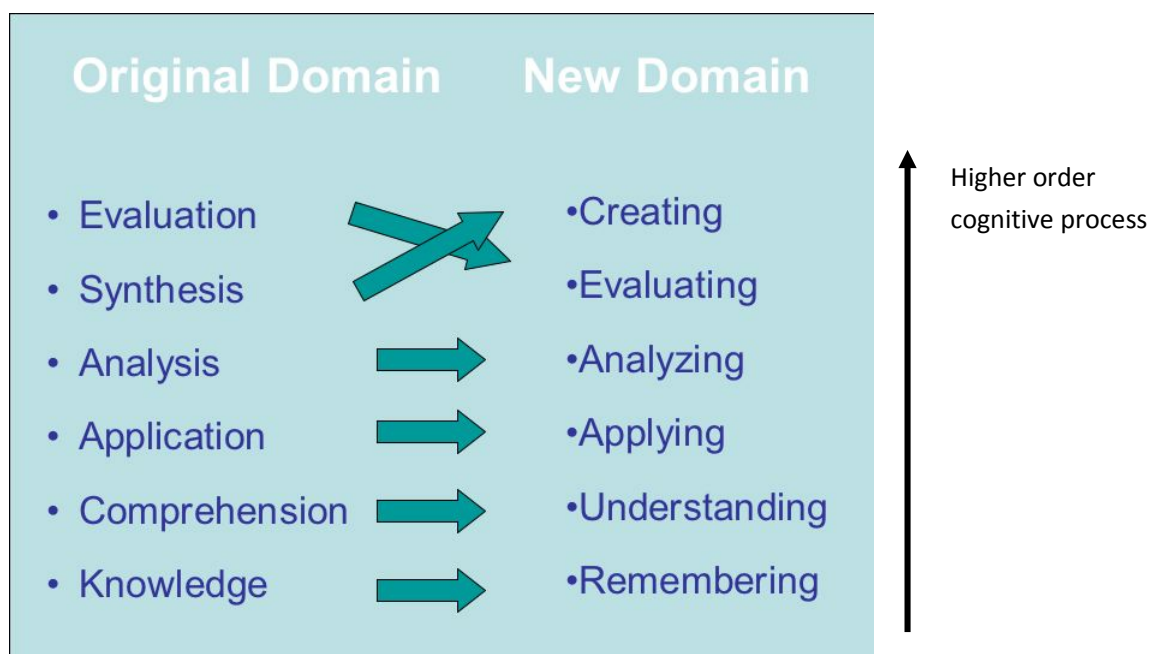
Fig.1 Revisited Bloom Taxonomy (Source: Clark, upd. 2013)

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. Creativity at Slovak Schools

The study focused on in-service teachers at the elementary school was realized in eastern Slovakia. To get data we decided to use interview (2 separate groups) to get relevant information about the experience. We used semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interview what offered us certain flexibility. Out of 22 respondents 15 teachers were females and 7 teachers were males.

Table 1 Sample distribution

	1-4 grades	5-9 grades	sec. Schools	**Total**	Percents
males	1	3	3	**7**	31,82
females	6	5	4	**15**	68,18
total	**7**	**8**	**7**	**22**	100,00
creative T	6	3	3	12	54,55
creative S	7	5	4	16	72,73
creativity at Uni	7	4	3	14	63,64

The qualitative data we collected were analysed and they brought some surprising results or information. Teachers generally had problem to define creativity *(something different)* and then they agreed *it is something new*. We discussed the issue how new is new (whether using material prepared by teacher is considered to be even after several years). It was surprising that even though 54,55% of respondents consider themselves to be creative, it is mostly a group of young children teachers who considers themselves to be creative (86% out of their category). We tried to find out why teacher do not consider themselves to be creative and why they think they are not creative. The responses were, we may say, expected – *it's time-demanding, I do not have time, after so many years of teaching practice I have the regular lessons I know that are effective, children at*

that age want to work with textbook... .On the other hand teachers of young learners agreed it is a must to be creative and to lead learners and allow them to be creative. This led us to a question (they were full qualified teachers) whether they as students were challenged and praised for being creative. The results might be surprising but suggesting that teacher beliefs and students experience is much reflected in their own teaching. All young learner teachers confirmed they had creative lessons leading them to critical thinking and developing creativity. Whatmore, they stated they had lessons on how to develop creativity, how to *force children to think differently.* On the other hand, 5-9 grades as well as secondary teachers expressed they missed this kind of approach (except for some subjects). Only half of the lower secondary and slightly less than half of upper secondary education teachers experienced creative classes in their University studies. It is sad, that even though they would like to have some classes on how to be creative they do not consider it to be their handicap and some of them claimed that there is no space for creativity in their subjects at all that *creativity is for small kids... older must learn.* It was English-History double major teacher and she was immediately opposed by more experienced teacher who mentioned several samples activities for inspiration – like students playing instruments the music of the period studied, students coming to school in the period costumes or reading the literature from or about the studied period. This was a nice confrontation presenting the possibilities. Almost 73% of teachers consider their students to be creative (what is cca 8% more than teachers considering themselves to be creative). We have already mentioned the reasons why teacher do not teach creatively (at they perceive their teaching as uncreative). The teachers who involve creativity stated that - *it makes ME happy that children learn and ENJOY and UNDERSTAND, they want to give me reward for "funny" lesson so they learn hard even at home, I try to involve all students, I intentionally create the tasks to involve all students, to create the tasks they will like…*

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. We also found out there might be a relationship (our sample was rather small and thus the data are not relevant for generalisation) 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.

Acknowledgement

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