

Creativity in the classroom



Centre of
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Fostering Creativity

- 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.
- Most language teachers still rely on course books to provide the activities they will use in the classroom and most course books do not typically provide activities which foster creativity.
- It is important that teachers make use of their course book as a resource rather than follow it as a script and that they develop the confidence, awareness and creativity to adapt course book activities in ways which can foster creativity.
- One way of adapting course books 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 course book 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 course book published in 2018 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.'

Ways of opening up closed activities



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 course book.
- 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.'"

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 course book they are going to be asked to read. 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 course book. They modify, come before or replace the closed testing or teaching activities in the course book.

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

modifications of course book

● 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 course book of a robbery in a mall in New York into a scene from a film set in their town.
- One creative teacher I observed got her 12-year-old students to decide which activities they wanted to use with texts from their course book.
- 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 course book activities

- The teacher acts out a text from the course book. 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 course book 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.
- 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.’

- **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).

- **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) 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) 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

Pillar one: build up positive self esteem

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 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:
- 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! Y
- 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

Pillars of creativity

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.

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.

Pillars of Creativity

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
 - 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.
 - 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' and creative thinking. Here is an example of how you can use Bloom's revised taxonomy to plan questions and scaffold thinking skills based on a story.

Thinking skills based on short story:

- **Remember:** Who...? What...? When...? Where...? Identify..., Name...
- **Understand:** Why...? How...? What's the main idea? Sequence..., Order... Match... Describe...
- **Apply:** What would you do in the same situation? How would you feel?
- **Analyse:** Classify the characters./Explain how different parts of the story relate to each other
- **Evaluate:** Which part do you like/ don't you like? Why/Why not?
- **Create:** Invent a new ending.
- OR tell or rewrite from a different point of view.
- OR in another form, e.g. a role play.

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.

Lessons as preparation for writing a short story

Split lines

- 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.
- I do not use the answer key and leave the question open as to what lines originally belonged together
- 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.

Working with photographs of people

- 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.

Pillars of Creativity

Possessions

- 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!)
- 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

Circle Faces

- Come up with a creative story about a fictional character based on a drawing created co-operatively.
- 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.

Creating a story with music and images

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.