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## CREATIVITY IN AN EFL CLASSROOM, MEXICO A SELF-REFLECTION

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## INTRODUCTION

In the teaching-learning process of a foreign language there are factors such as learning styles, motivation, educational environments, techniques and strategies, among others, which are correlated. Therefore, it is important that teachers take responsibility as co-participants in this process and optimize all these factors to achieve meaningful learning. Sometimes the creativity component seems to be overcome by multiple causes such as the use of new technologies, or the need to cover the study program on time. However, it is pertinent to consider creativity as a valuable element that must be activated or reactivated within the teaching of a foreign language, since it stimulates attention, motivates and satisfies the students' learning needs. Furthermore, creativity tends to improve self-esteem, confidence and autonomy; creating a pleasant and memorable environment. Creativity is: "thinking outside the box, creating diverse, fresh, and original ideas, new solutions to problems, or finding different perceptions of a situation." (Read, 2015). Likewise, Maley (2015) states that creativity helps us face challenges in a world of constant change and gives us the solutions we need. Therefore, the main objective of this work is to contribute to the daily reflection of the practice of the foreign language teacher, with the aim of becoming a creative teacher regardless of the age of the students, the environment or modality in the teaching. let it work.

For many years, language teachers have strived to improve classes and teaching methods in order to transmit to students of a language not only syntactic and/or grammatical knowledge; but also cultural and situational of it. Being able to ensure that language students have an emotional

connection, such that they love learning other languages and even more so, that they love enjoying a foreign language, is undoubtedly one of the concerns of language teachers today.

When seeking educational quality, language teachers have to face different factors to which immediate attention must be paid. A language teacher cannot expect the solution to come from outside, but must find original and intelligent solutions to the context in which it is developed, this is what some authors define as creativity.

According to Bono (2000) it is the talent or ability that each individual has to transform their environment. While Saturnino de la Torre (2006) assures the following: "Creativity is a social good, a decision and a challenge for the future. Therefore, training in creativity is betting on a future of progress, justice, tolerance and coexistence". In the same way, Montes de Oca, A (2008) adds: "And to achieve this goal it is necessary to ask about the characteristics of the pedagogical model that can support and guide this training process, allowing it to be materialized in contextualized teaching practices. Education is at the same time a product and a tool of the historical-evolutionary process of humanity, and in this order of ideas it requires constant reflection and theorization, allowing at the same time its return and transformative effect on the human being... It is in our hands to ensure that education is not instrumentalized by objectives foreign to it and its recipients."

On the other hand, the Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (2017) defines creativity as: "power to create, capacity for creation." Therefore, this work seeks the reflection of the teacher of a foreign language in relation to his creativity, since it is not about innovating for the sake of transcending, although certainly something of that exists within every human being and

does not exclude teachers who have dedicated their time to such noble work. The desire is to find a way to capitalize time, money, and effort to achieve a class that motivates, inspires, that is unforgettable. So the language teacher modifies its environment: he personalizes it, makes it unique and unrepeatable with each group.

Through this reflection, the attention of every language teacher must be called to develop the skills and competencies of creativity, which allow them to:

- a) Innovate within your learning environment by having your teacher as a model and a co-participant in the teaching-learning process that involves both the teacher and the student.
- b) Recognize technology as a resource and the lack of it as an opportunity.
- c) Seek change and promote it with control, so that it is evaluable, and achieve said change in an orderly and respectful manner.

During the search for a foreign language teaching methodology for Mexico, the Approach to Creativity has been found. This approach mentions some points and clarifications that must be shared throughout this work. The possibility of applying this approach in foreign language schools in Mexico will be very useful to all teachers who wish to improve their teaching practice by incorporating creativity not only as an activity or dynamic but as an approach in language acquisition. Foreigners.

## **THE CREATIVITY APPROACH**

### **THE ROLE**

The search for teaching methods and techniques that guarantee, not only the learning of language students but also the capitalization of time, money, and material, is

undoubtedly the concern of language teachers around the world. For a long time, the words talent and creativity appear as synonyms on different occasions. Nevertheless; it is appropriate to recognize that talent is given at birth, or even before, affirms the science of neurology. On the other hand, creativity is acquired, and is presented in moments, diverse situations, in specific environments.

Within the educational field, it seems that the changes or transformations have been little by little compared to other areas of knowledge. Furthermore, it seems that creativity within the classroom has focused more on the pedagogical nature of the discipline and lately on the massive inclusion of technology in foreign language classes. (Ballerster, 2002) points out: "open learning situations, based on personal experiences and emotions, with the stimulation of divergent thinking in which students project their ideas, enhance individual difference and originality and become key and decisive facts." for active and creative teaching.

So, it has been decided to begin this journey with some considerations in this regard. The first will be the role of the teacher in the classroom. Considering not only the importance of linguistic production, its theoretical, pedagogical or technological knowledge of the subject. Therefore, this work is not about a terminological analysis but about emphasizing the skills that the language teacher must possess.

Regarding the role of the language teacher within the classroom, we must keep in mind that before teaching a skill we must acquire it ourselves. So if you want the students to sing or dance, the language teacher must achieve these skills first. For this it is sometimes necessary to abandon the teaching role to be part of the group. "We should therefore judge creativity in the classroom by what the teacher gets the students to do and not by what the

teacher does.” (Stevick, 1980). That is, a creative teacher is not one who makes his students laugh, run and/or jump into the classroom because he arrived in a costume, or tells jokes non-stop. A creative teacher is someone who makes students want to participate in class, share their knowledge with their classmates, their learning experiences, or get them involved in different projects: social, cultural, research, etc. all of them related to linguistic acquisition and its professional integration.

Sometimes we will see the efforts of some teachers who constantly seek creativity in the classroom through themselves, or in the inclusion of games and dynamics to “entertain” the students. Unfortunately, these games or activities are not an indicator of the students’ linguistic competence, and sometimes when comparing the group scores of said dynamic teachers to the scores of non-dynamic teachers, the results are not very different. Furthermore, sometimes the results are discouraging; therefore, at different times, teachers prefer to avoid these dynamics to take advantage of the time in other types of activities, which, although less fun, allow students to better understand the topic. So rethinking the role of the language teacher for The Creative Approach is necessary and we could even assume the need for a new role for the language teacher.

“Being autonomous means governing ourselves, being responsible for our actions and feelings, getting rid of stereotypical patterns that enslave us because man is born free and has the right to be so, he has the right to autonomy that his own parents take away from him when the comments: “we must pay attention to older people” (Franca, 2016). “A truly autonomous person is one who demonstrates the liberation or recovery of three capacities: knowledge, spontaneity and intimacy” (James, 2016). It seems that new educational trends give the student the

leading role and even the “only” role from whom autonomy is expected.

However, in a teaching-learning process it is not possible to leave students solely responsible. In this process, both: student and teacher share the same responsibility, being both authors and actors, that is, both build with unique experiences elements that promote the construction of knowledge and at the same time allow the socialization of said acquired knowledge, both being co-workers. -participate in educational growth and enrichment equally.

Therefore, in this reflection we must focus on the teaching role and its importance.

Controller	Advisor	Organizer
Promoter	Negotiator	Motivator
Evaluator	Researcher	Facilitator
Collaborator	Accompanying	Exhibitor
Mediator	Observer	Investigator
Change	Agent Guide	Resource

A pertinent observation at this time is that over time the roles of the language teacher have been changing due to educational trends and perhaps without being noticed, along with the inclusion of new technologies. So it seems that less and less time is required from the teacher with the student, that is; the time of accompaniment in learning is less and the socialization of the acquired knowledge is less. Apparently you can see with a certain frown of melancholy or nostalgia the teacher who was the source of knowledge of yesteryear, the tutor, the collaborator, guide and companion today summarized as a teacher-resource. Where: “...the teacher must always be ready to offer his help if necessary. After all, he has the language and knowledge that students may need, especially in writing tasks. However, the teacher should not be available as a resource for certain activities, such as communication games or role plays...” “The different roles of the teacher and students in the foreign

language classroom” (Juan and García 2012).

It is no longer possible to continue considering the language teacher as a resource, since the resources could not evaluate, analyze, propose, create, much less be responsible for a learning process. The dehumanization of professions around the world seems to be the easiest answer to the realization of mechanized processes. It also seems to be the goal of some for-profit corporations, but the teacher’s work cannot be mechanized, lucrative, or reduced to a resource.

For this reason, we must propose a new role for language teachers: the role of “participant”. This role places the language teacher in a unique position whose advantages can be innumerable. From that position the teacher will be able to see the teaching process from where it had never been considered before, since he or she is immersed in the teaching-learning process without being the sole person responsible for said process.

## **THE ENVIRONMENT**

Creating an adequate environment to generate, promote and motivate students to acquire a new language is not an easy task, which is why some teachers have focused their efforts on creating adequate environments for the teaching-learning process to take place. Optimally, and have concentrated creativity in the classroom. Therefore, the second topic of reflection will be creativity in new language learning environments.

Now, if it is true that language teachers must achieve the optimal environment, they cannot forget the process, the needs, the learning methods or techniques, the learning dynamics, autonomy and the importance of decision-making. This Creativity Approach allows language teachers not only to identify and know the methods and techniques of their daily work that have the desired creative potential, but also to identify the educational

procedures that are carried out and enrich them with touches of creativity. (Maley and Paechey, 2015)

The generation of creative learning environments, creative technologies, creative methods, creative tasks, and having a creative role in the language teaching-learning process depends a lot on a creative attitude. The idea of innovating seems to belong to human beings since it is a skill of survival, of non-conformity, of the constant search for changes that can be controlled and that we want to control. That is why we must now delve deeper into each of the aspects of creativity. At the same time, indicate some ideas that Alan Maley and Nik Peachey (2015) mention in their book “Creativity in the English language classroom” along with some personal considerations.

## **THE ATTITUDE**

Language as an instrument of creativity is undoubtedly one of the elements that a language teacher has, and it is precisely this element that offers the language teacher a range of possibilities that he must present to his students.

One of the aspects that this Creative Approach emphasizes is the carrying out of activities that involve different scenarios; activities inside and outside the classroom, online, in classes, activities where opinions are presented, decisions are made, solutions are sought, reflected, and responses are responded to the reactions of the different actors in the teaching-learning process. This approach also presents students as generators of resources, not only as recipients of knowledge. In addition, it breaks with the teachers’ routine of being the ones in charge of providing material for the students and their classes.

It offers students the possibility of being the providers of teaching resources and even more of being a teaching resource themselves. Libor Stepanek (2011) offers some principles

<b>The creative attitude must:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not overload the class of activities.</li> <li>• Be constant.</li> <li>• Take advantage of student teaching.</li> <li>• Generate traditions and break them.</li> <li>• Always apply heuristic knowledge.</li> </ul>	<b>Role</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modeler</li> <li>• Competitor</li> <li>• Motivating</li> </ul>		
	<b>The learning environment must:</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish an optimal environment.</li> <li>• Establish an environment where everything can be improved and criticism is well received (request that criticism be done with respect)</li> <li>• Re-evaluate the learning environment of each student or group.</li> <li>• Modify the furniture</li> <li>• Create a creative space</li> </ul>		
	<b>The teaching environment must:</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish an organized environment.</li> <li>• Set a custom time (give feedback)</li> <li>• Take advantage of technology.</li> </ul>		
	The process	EVERYONE IS A TEACHER	
		<b>The activities must be:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• with limits.</li> <li>• contrast.</li> <li>• observational.</li> <li>• collection</li> <li>• information and reporting.</li> <li>• in different constant direction.</li> <li>• Enhancers of individual talents.</li> <li>• multidisciplinary.</li> </ul>
<b>The strategies should be:</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• motivation (all work must be published).</li> <li>• of relaxing.</li> <li>• to pose problems that they can solve and analyze.</li> <li>• role reversal (video)</li> <li>• to invent things together.</li> </ul>	

that language teachers could ask students to improve their reading skills:

- Explore their fields of interest online and find texts that they consider to be relevant information.
- Send examples of said texts to the group.
- Read these texts before the next class.

At this moment, the teacher must select the texts and, according to the group and the class topic, create the activities that he considers both for production and even evaluation of the course.

- Compare two texts that they have selected and consider the differences or similarities.
- Select a text or paragraph to write about it in your own words.

- Identify the main ideas, supporting ideas, sentences, and the main argument of the text.
- Identify dates, data, facts, opinions, etc.
- Comment on reading, search, research, learning, and vocabulary strategies.
- Vote for the most interesting, funniest text.

In this way, many activities could be carried out that relate different skills, for example, poems, songs, videos, biographies, grammar points, information capsules, tutorials, etc.

Another issue that should not be overlooked is using the vocabulary that students already use, as well as their prior knowledge.

# THE PILLARS OF CREATIVITY

## ACCORDING TO READ (2015) THERE ARE SEVEN PILLARS OF CREATIVITY, SUCH AS

1. Creativity does not occur in vaccines, the author mentions, a creativity trigger is necessary, something that helps us ignite the spark of thought or stimulate the contribution of ideas. This trigger element can be: an idea, a photo, a text, a story, an object, a question or problem, or a combination of some or more of these elements.

2. "Creative thinking arises when students become emotionally involved in an activity," explains Read. So the emotional factor is determining for creativity. Generally, we see different teachers involved with the tastes and interests of their students, searching, whether they know it or not, this emotional element that can help them carry out classes that are not only meaningful, comprehensive but also unforgettable.

3. Students need a framework where they can develop creative thinking skills and generally a model to follow, an example, must be presented to them. This allows the student to define the work, task or activity to be carried out, while allowing them to concentrate on their own ideas. This model provides the necessary linguistic support. Furthermore, this "framework" provides them with security, self-confidence and control.

4. Creativity provides the opportunity to generate ideas in a free and spontaneous way, at the same time granting discipline of thought, curiosity, attention to details and effort.

5. Creativity is best adopted in the development of the mind (Dweck, 2006) as children are encouraged to believe that they can improve their presentation and achieve better results through self-effort, perseverance and hard work.

### PILLAR ONE. THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is characterized by five components: the feeling of security, identity, belonging, purpose and personal competence. This pillar is fundamental, it is perhaps the reason why Read (2015) has put it in first place. The main reason for guiding students within an educational experience is to make said experience something positive, pleasant, and of course productive in learning.

### PILLAR TWO: A MODEL OF CREATIVITY

An essential rule to develop any skill or quality in other people is to acquire that skill for yourself first. The ability to achieve creativity Life cannot come from a non-creative source. So the first model of creativity must be the teacher himself. The responsibility for creativity on the part of the language teacher, on the other hand, should not require a change in the teacher's personality. Of course, each teacher must find their own range of creativity and this can be based on very specific aspects, traits or characteristics that allow us to be unique and that must be maximized to achieve creativity.

### PILLAR THREE: ALLOW STUDENTS TO MAKE DECISIONS

By allowing students to make decisions they learn to be responsible for them, develop autonomy and learn to take control of their learning. This leads to a sense of self-ownership and leadership that enables them to go the extra mile which leads to

the production of creative work. Exercising decision making helps students make learning more memorable and personalized.

Offering students opportunities to make decisions can be a powerful tool in management skills. Decisions can be small or large, from the person they work with, the colors they use, the material, the time or delivery date of a project, as well as big and important decisions such as the topics in which they have to participate, the project to which they have to contribute, etc.

#### PILLAR FOUR: USE OF EFFECTIVE QUESTIONS

The way we use questions to engage our students and lead them to think creatively is essential. Furthermore, the search for strategies that allow students to formulate questions, these techniques or strategies help them, motivate the generation of questions mechanically, could bring students closer to systematized questioning and later to meditation, self-reflection and even introspection.

#### PILLAR FIVE: MAKE CONNECTIONS

Making connections and looking for relationships between things generates ideas and increases the creative spark of thought. It is useful for motivating students to make connections between home and school, as well as between one subject and another. Later, students will make connections between present events and past experiences inside and outside the classroom, between ideas learned from other sources such as books and the Internet. Being alert to connections in different areas of your lives will help you build confidence and provide the foundation that will increase creativity in your daily work.

#### PILLAR SIX: EXPLORE IDEAS

An atmosphere of mutual respect is required where different points of view are valued and judgments are welcomed. So, brainstorming techniques, problem solving and activities where students express points of view, feelings, etc. They can lead to the exploration of creative thinking that allows students to explore, experiment and play with different ideas.

#### PILLAR SEVEN: MOTIVATE CRITICAL REFLECTION

Finally, as part of promoting creativity, it is necessary to train students to evaluate and reflect on their own ideas, presentations, activities and achievements. Likewise, the comprehensive development of the student will allow them to achieve autonomy with validity and value in their creative work. All of this is part of reflective learning and leads to creative thinking. Constant reflection on the part of the teacher is also required, not only focusing on the satisfaction of a class that involves decision-making, reflection, autonomy and respect for otherness; but also a critical, constructive reflection on attitude, behavior, respect, empathy and human sensitivity in each class.

Even though it seems that after all the methods, techniques, strategies and technology available for language teaching, and the sincere search for the quality of teaching work, it is no longer possible to add or include anything new to the teaching-learning process. ; It can be recognized, revived, and one can also reflect and/or rethink the role of the language teacher and the benefits that come with the possibility of developing creative thinking in his students and in himself. The possibility of improving the expectations of a class based only on the textbook, of leaving the rigidity of the program, the possibility of improving the effectiveness of class time, of considering



the affectivity of the teacher's accompaniment time within the classroom, etc

The benefits of a creative approach must greatly increase the possibility of including in classes and in each activity educational objectives with a defined purpose, teaching with values, and the promotion of positive attitudes, a flexible and orderly academic environment, together with a mixture of academic professionalism and curiosity and interest not only on the part of the teacher but also the student. This approach is not based on the typical idea that it is the teacher who dominates the knowledge, time and educational experience generating creativity so that the student has no idea what the class will be about the next day. This approach completely goes beyond that type of work; and opens the possibility of dialogue.

So that the methods and techniques can be considered not only from the academic point of view, but from the point of view of the participants, taking care of the self-esteem of both, the motivation, thus transforming the learning experience into a memorable experience. Hence, a class can be guided by the teacher, or it can be guided by the students, but the moment of learning together will make this experience something unique and memorable. The values, the sense of brotherhood, respect and trust, will ultimately be supportive in the class.

The constant search for new ideas, methods and academic activities sometimes fail to find an echo in existing methodological approaches. Language teachers in Mexico have to face a countless number of students in class, many of them with different ideas, due to an endless number of reasons ranging from their culture, geographical location, political, social, religious, age, level of English, learning style, values among others. Besides; they must find within each educational experience respect, professionalism, commitment and the search

for creativity that allows them to acquire and/or reinforce their identity, values and their commitment to learning another language, which will allow them to learn about other languages. Cultures, ideology and people with whom you can interact respectfully.

The importance of working with this approach is the opportunity to include everything that has already been used in class and still feel the opportunity to innovate. This approach includes teaching by projects, values, problems, and even collaborative teaching. It is not an exclusive approach but an inclusive one, an application proposal based on the knowledge and experience of each language teacher, modulated by the needs and prior knowledge of the group, which enhances the skills of each student and the reflection of the teaching-learning process.

As language teachers, we are aware of the need that our country (Mexico) has to incorporate methods, techniques and dynamics into education that, together with study habits, class preparation, evaluation and constant support from the teacher and classmates class, can generate in students security, commitment, a positive attitude towards change, and the constant search to improve, to enhance the skills obtained and produce, through continuous reflection, the habits and values necessary to live with others.

Therefore, it is important that, when seeking innovation, creativity and quality in teaching work, the different results can be shared with other language teachers in Mexico or in different parts of the world. In addition, being able to present the work carried out by language students, which must satisfy the demands of society and respond to its different needs. This society demands increasingly more prepared teachers, a society that has given language teachers the opportunity to share educational experiences with high expectations of quality and professionalism.

Furthermore, a society that seems to delegate the total responsibility of generations of students, lacking values, respect, time, and desire to get ahead, commitment to study, and even vision and identity, to teachers. Therefore, there is a need for an approach that can return to everything previously stated, which can generate the habit of questioning, thinking, reflecting, reporting, investigating,

promoting, managing, listening and respecting so that our country has more qualified teachers who seek quality not in luxury facilities but in projects, daily activities, in learning, in the autonomy and individual commitment of the agents of the teaching-learning process, in respect between said agents and generation of new opportunities for study, work and life of this society in which we live.

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