

Creativity through Literature

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Abstract

Creativity should be central for language teachers as creative communication is both needed and crucial in today's world. The use of literature is an effective way of encouraging creativity in language classes. However, sometimes it is difficult to get students interested in it. Including creative projects in lessons generates an environment of possibilities which offers choices and encourages students to play with ideas and words. The results can be refreshing, motivating and rewarding for all.

My aim in this presentation was not to define creativity. It was to share some thoughts on how to promote creative thinking, to get out of the box and generate ideas by literary projects. To do so, I started by proposing some questions and sharing my views.

Why should we be creative, get out of the box?

Inside the box, we feel safe and we agree with everyone. However, due to the globalisation and internet connectivity, nowadays everyone has and shares the same information. So, to think creatively is not a luxury, it is 'a necessity to our human dignity', according to Sir Ken Robinson.

Which box are we talking about?

Some people think the box is our minds, but I do not believe it is. I believe it is the boundary between what we know and what we do not know yet.

Our mind is an emergent phenomenon out of the complex mechanism which is the brain. We start with our initial conditions, our genetic heritage, our family; then there is the environment we live in; we add our indirect experiences – years and years at school and university to learn what other people have thought, what other people have discovered, what other people have created; and finally, we add our own direct experiences, i.e., our successes and failures. All this makes what we are and builds the box we live in. Whatever we think inside, we are and feel safe; whatever is

outside, it is invisible to us, we do not know. That is why it is so risky. So, we have something that is necessary to our dignity, but it is actually very hard to do.

How to get out of the box?

Reality is out there for us to perceive it. But because we have the same information, we perceive reality more or less the same way. We have ideas of how things should be according to the requirements, specifications, standards we have received. To go out of the box, however, we need to do something more, something that crosses the borders of our minds, from what we know to what we do not know yet. Below are the steps I use in my classes to encourage students to go out of the box and be creative.

I use the “Pyramid of Creativity” adapted from the “Hierarchy of Imagination” by John Maeda as the basis of all the literary activities in my classes. John Maeda is an artist, a designer, a computer scientist and an author who talks about creative leadership and why people are afraid of taking risks. The “Pyramid of Creativity” has four parts: a) Reflex response (instinctive and immediate reaction to external stimulus): when I propose an activity, and observe the students’ reactions; b) Imagination (completely unconstrained): when I let students think freely about the activity; c) Creativity (applied imagination): when I set a task with clear guidelines; and d) Problem-solving (execution – creativity constrained by reality): when students accomplish the task. Here are two activities of mine following the “Pyramid of Creativity” described above:

1. Writing your Drawing: Ideas for a Lesson

Fully described and available at: <http://www.hltmag.co.uk/aug17/less02.htm>

2. Writing Poetry about places

Fully described and available at: <http://malusciamarelliblog.weebly.com/creative-writing/diary-of-a-creative-writing-teacher-8>

To follow up these writing exercises, I went on to reading poetry with my students, choosing William Wordsworth’s poems. I chose Wordsworth to illustrate my writing exercises because as a romantic poet, Wordsworth took interest in the world around him and our engagement with it. He celebrated the power of mind to internalise the natural world and be strengthened by it. His poetry asserts the power of a subjective, individual response to the world and this is part of my focus of bringing literature into the English language classroom: Literature for personal enrichment (in addition to literature as the basis for language learning). We read the following poems: *The Tables Turned*, *The Old Man Travelling*, *Michael*, *Home at Grasmere*, and *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*.

I believe literature is a useful tool for encouraging students to draw on their own personal experiences, feelings, and opinions. I believe it helps them to become more actively involved both intellectually and emotionally in learning English, and hence aids acquisition and creativity.

Where do we go from here?

Once we are out of the box, the first feeling is to go back, because it is safe. However, this is a temptation we have to resist; we need to teach our students to look for alternatives and possibilities, not just the correct answers. Because if you are thinking creatively, there is no single correct answer, there are many possible alternatives. This way of thinking will help them much more than being inside that limiting box.

References

- Maeda, J. (2011). *Redesigning Leadership (Simplicity: Design, Technology, Business, Life)*.
Massachusetts: MIT Press.
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<https://www.poemhunter.com/william-wordsworth/poems/>