Embracing Communicative Activities on the Way to Becoming Creative Thinkers

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Abstract

This interactive session aims to address the importance of communicative activities in promoting creative thinking in the classroom and beyond with an understanding that these two are profoundly intertwined. In essence, creative thinking and communication skills are symbolic - they support one another to achieve maximum influence. While creative thinking produces ideas, communication skills enable individuals to share and cultivate those ideas efficiently, hence transforming creativity into tangible outcomes and promoting meaningful connections with others. A cognitive neuroscientist, Roger Beaty (2020), offers insights into the mechanisms highlighting that brain activation patterns differ depending on communicative actions. Beaty's work signifies a growing understanding among neuroscientists of how the brain supports creative thinking, paving the way for potential breakthroughs in enhancing creative abilities. Thus, in our session a connection will be made between current research findings and the need for the implementation of a variety of communicative activities such as role plays, discussions, drama, collaborative projects, creative writing activities and others. Overall, this workshop will share the various ways in which we, a team of instructors, help undergraduate students of a private Armenian university enhance their communication skills through the application of creative thinking. In the spirit of the workshop, attendees will be provided with a brief overview and demonstration of the tools referenced above and will have an opportunity to participate in group activities, design their own, and share opinions by suggesting how the addressed activities would promote creative thinking and problem-solving skills among learners.

Keywords: Creative Thinking, Communication Skills, Language Teaching

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Introduction

The importance of the implementation of communicative activities in the classroom has long been a central topic among those teachers who have embraced the truth that language is a communication tool, and as such it should be used directly for communication. To do that successfully in the classroom, learners need to be engaged in real-life, authentic activities (Nunan, 1988), which, interestingly, show a very strong relationship between communicative activities and creative thinking. In this article, we see this symbiotic relationship as a connection that can help students enhance their learning and their knowledge in all language skills.

A brief discussion on recent findings on how challenging communicative tasks can enhance creative thinking will be followed with suggestions of activities suitable for the purpose mentioned above.

The Relationship Between Communicative Activities and Creative Thinking

Creativity is present in every aspect of human life, from the reasons that an eight-year-old brings to their mother to play a computer game to groundbreaking discoveries and scientific breakthroughs, such as nanotechnology or ChatGPT. While creativity per se remains a mystery yet to be discovered, neuroscience offers insights into the understanding of the mechanisms that lie behind creative thinking. Through a discussion of experiments involving brain imaging and observations of behavior in different contexts, Beaty (2020), a cognitive neuroscientist, claims that creativity demands a cognitive effort - in part, to conquer the distraction and 'stickiness of prior knowledge.' According to him, creative thinking can be explained by the relationship between the brain's memory, which encompasses knowledge and background, and control systems, which help the brain to look for new implementations for the existing knowledge, thus searching for new possibilities.

Most interestingly, through brain imaging and a number of experiments, Beaty and his colleagues have come to the conclusion that the process of creative thinking helps brain networks, which would usually work in a separate manner, to function in unison. In other words, Beaty (2020) explains that two processes, idea generation and idea evaluation are involved in the process of creativity.

Idea generation can be defined as a 'free thinking' process. Have you ever caught yourself on the idea that you have been thinking about nothing and everything, reaching from the teapot in your kitchen to tea plantations and astronauts? Astronauts? Maybe you were thinking about how they drink tea in zero gravity!!! According to Beaty (2020) and other scientists, this is the stage when ideas are generated. In our activities we call it brainstorming!

The next process is idea evaluation, and in this case other parts of the brain - those that are responsible for cognitive processes - are active. And this is the stage when generated ideas get filtered. Interestingly, when the idea generation process is active, the idea evaluation process is dormant, and vice versa. However, as it has been mentioned above, the experiment conducted by Beaty (2020) and his colleagues comes to prove that both processes worked actively together among those participants of the experiment that showed higher results in creativity. This comes to confirm the findings of a study conducted earlier by Egorova et al (2015) which stated that several cortical areas of the brain both in the right and left

hemispheres get activated. What does this mean to us as teachers and facilitators? Perhaps, it is worth going through creative processes and then discussing them together.

Following the advice of a well-known Hungarian-American psychologist, Csikszentmihalyi (1990), who noted that the motivation to do something because it is deeply fulfilling and personally daunting drives the highest levels of creativity, the authors tried to investigate how communicative activities can lead to creative thinking.

Bringing Communicative Activities Into Language Classroom

For a concise summary, the article provides a comprehensive overview of the activities and methodologies showcased during the workshop that offer teachers implementable insights to apply in their own teaching practices. The activities presented below address the purpose each one serves and step-by step descriptions.

Candy Talk

Purpose

The activity is intended to serve as an excellent warm-up at the start of a course or class. It aims to enhance students' communication skills, namely through speaking.

Description

Four different types of candies are offered to students. They are asked to choose a candy and enjoy it. Then, they get into groups and depending on the type of the candy chosen, students answer one of the questions below:

   Candy 1 - The origin of your name
   Candy 2 - An interesting fact about you that most people do not know and that you
      would like to share now
   Candy 3 - An unusual hobby you would like to take up
   Candy 4 - FREE CHOICE

The current activity can be tailored to suit the course, its objectives and other factors such as students' level, interest, age and so on. It can also lead to another creative activity, that of designing an advertisement for candies.

Candy Advertisement

Purpose

This task is crafted to cultivate students' argumentation and persuasion skills as well as foster creative thinking.

Description

Students are asked to come up with a new design for the candy at hand and a tagline that would tempt others to try it. Further, students present their newly created designs and taglines to the entire group. This can be done by displaying their work on the board, enabling everyone to view and discuss their creative ideas shared. Creating advertisements means

bringing a communicative authentic activity into the classroom the importance of which has been addressed by Buendgens-Kosten (2014). Taking this into close consideration, another related activity is suggested below.

Creative Advertisements

Purpose

This specific activity aims at developing summarizing skills through writing slogans, boosting creativity and exercising collaboration skills.

Description

Students are given photos of strange inventions, such as a hug-me pillow, baby mop, umbrella hat, hair rollers, and others. In groups of three to four, they are tasked with designing a creative advertisement with a compelling slogan. After completing their advertisements, each group will present their work to the entire audience. The instructor has flexibility to modify the task based on a variety of factors, including the students' proficiency level, the specific objectives of the lesson, the subject matter being covered and more. Interestingly, the more challenging the activities are, the more engaged the students are. Following this premise and guided by PBL (Project-Based Learning), an intensive four-week group project is described below.

Creating Parody or Pastiche

Purpose

This project serves a dual purpose - to enable students to analyze a genre and determine its key components as well as standard conventions. It is also a good exercise to express creativity.

Description

As a group, students select a specific genre that they would like to pastiche or parody in this assignment. They might ask what the difference is between a parody and a pastiche. Parodies are more mocking, making fun of the genre's dumbest clichés, while pastiche imitates various sources in a more respectful way, borrowing some of a genre's conventions and clichés without making fun of them (Hudson, 2017). As they make this selection, they have the freedom to work in many modes (e.g. producing a magazine cover, website, news article, mini-movie, television commercial and so on). Students collaborate in groups to create a parody or pastiche of the chosen genre. To do this, they should pay attention to small details, especially those involving the genre's characteristic lexicon, language structures and rhetorical patterns as well as audio, video, and/or visual composition. The projects are showcased to the whole class through detailed presentations lasting around fifteen minutes.

Take-Away Alphabet Rap

Purpose

The current activity seeks to enhance creativity, in addition to linguistic and critical thinking skills. It also fosters confidence and collaboration as students create their own alphabet rap and perform the song for an audience.

Description

Students listen to a fun and challenging tongue-twisting alphabet rap performed by Daniel Radcliffe. This serves as inspiration and a warp-up to compose their own unique alphabet song, incorporating 5-6 consecutive letters of the alphabet and crafting lines with 4-5 segments/words for each. Once the songs are complete, students present their songs to their peers in a rap battle.

Conclusion

This brief overview provides a hands-on toolkit of communicative activities for teachers and facilitators who aim at promoting creative thinking in their classrooms. It is undeniable that communicative activities help to connect information in new and meaningful ways. If we come back to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) claim that personally challenging ideas inspire the highest level of creativity, we will probably agree that communicative activities give this opportunity and should be extensively implemented in the classroom.

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