

ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

The action research titled "Encouraging creativity in English language teaching" was a professional and emotional challenge. Professional because I believe that studying creativity is a very important stage in the process of professional development of teachers, emotional because I have studied the nature of learning and the types of teaching that have led not only to knowledge but also to the feelings of satisfaction among students and in me. To make the students creative, they must develop their own ideas and interests and must be motivated. However, in order to develop such skills in a student, we need to learn how to develop it. Teacher creativity is a prerequisite for developing pupil creativity and is a trait that can be acquired and developed (Bognar & Zovko, 2008). As a parent, as a teacher, and as a critical friend I often had the opportunity to see that achieving creativity for a very easy step is a minimum effort, while others are a real effort. Everyone is capable of creative work in the right environment and if they are motivated enough, but they differ in the degree and scope of creativity. I have been working in primary school for 20 years and I have been teaching students in the age of 11 to 14 years. I conducted an action research with fifth grade students, eleven boys and eleven girls. From the beginning of the research I had great support of my English language advisor. Her idea was introduced to twenty - five leaders of the County Council of Experts with Action Investigation. She divided us in groups and I was assigned to a group led by Dr. Smith along with four other leaders. Being in the group of Dr. Smith was my honor and opportunity for learning and advancement in professional development. All the participants of the group later renounced, so I continued to cooperate with many from the team. Most have become my critical friends. During the process, action research became apparent to me as a collaboration between my researcher, my critical friends and moderator Dr. Smith. She gave structure, systematics and discipline to the whole research. She has been constructively criticizing my steps in the process, reading my research diaries, writing feedback and advising and recommending literature. She encouraged me and at the same time encouraged me to think, read, write and come to my own ideas and conclusions. All these people were very important to me during the research and they represented the social context of action research.



The question that initially was problematic to me referred to the understanding of grammatical time in the fifth grade. Children understand time one at a time, problems make them distinguish between the two present times. Children start to mix auxiliary verbs and sequins, as well as their use. Simple past as a third time, even more complicates the distinction. So my focus was on trying to teach grammar time in a more efficient and creative way. It was not easy to conduct research as I thought and needed constant collaboration with the moderator and critical friends. Dr. Smith helped me with the strategy of creative approach, she and the group helped me step by step. Not once, but several times Dr. Smith warned me to stay focused on the main challenge of my research: however, it is interesting that you have left out the question again about the possibilities of encouraging student creativity. I remind you that this is the problem you started from, and everything else is an important addition, but not the essence of your research (from the research journal, April 8, 2010). Creative approach did not work right away; it took some time for me to change my practice, to understand what the creativity in teaching means - not to decide about the activity, but the students. Creativity had much greater scope than I thought and applied in class. I knew I had to bring more creativity and realized that it was a source of creativity in children, that my job was creating the conditions for the release of creativity. I had to learn how to organize the teaching process that gives students the fifth grade enough time, space, and freedom to have the imagination and originality. I had to learn and then show that there is not just one correct one. The answer is that there are many possible solutions that every idea is good and valuable, and especially at this stage it is not important if they make a mistake. During the correspondence with Dr. Smith, at one point realized that I should not have problems with recognizing and creating conditions for the development of creativity in children. I recognized them as a parent. My son is very creative, sets thoughtful questions, and I encourage him to respond. As a child he used to play Lego dice for hours, never working according to the paintings, rather than creating their own imaginative creations. I was planning to conduct a survey from January 2009 to May 2010 one school lesson a week. Soon I realized that 45 minutes (the length of one school time) is not enough. We needed a block hour.

My research was reflexive and systematic. However, I was quite flexible and therefore spontaneous and creative. Spontaneity and creativity have provided me with new insights and ideas during the process. At first I was aware of only three stages of my research and I did not have a firm plan on how to integrate grammar into creative activities.



I was expecting problems and questions and decided to lead my reflection-in-action (or "on-the-go" class) and a lot of reflection-on-action. The research process was not a "one way street", it was a process of three mutually interwoven, successive steps, each of which developed and opened new questions and views. They were: Present Continuous, Present Simple, and Past Simple Phases. I started with a creative approach somewhere in the half of the Present Continuous design and rounded off the first phase of The Napping House. I have used the stimulus technique of Substitution, whereby the teacher asks the question, "What other words can I use instead of the given words?" Then I did not yet know that SCAMPER (Eberle, 2008, p. 3) was acronym for a list of words that could be used as stimuli in creative Thinking about the problem: Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put, Eliminate, and Reverse. In addition to this technique I used the technique of storm of ideas (Osborne, 2008, p. 269). The purpose of these techniques is to stimulate divergent thinking and consist of the ability of adults and children to make as many ideas (fluency), as many different ideas (flexibility), more unusual ideas (originality) and more ways to overcome existing ideas (elaborativity). During the incubation, we used the storm of ideas most, or, as Starko calls it, the "popcorn" roast. I asked students about "What other ideas can you recall?", "How many different ideas?" "So far your ideas have referred to the house, try to figure out something that no one else ever has." "What can we still do?" is to write a new cumulative story and instead of The Napping House we had the great The Mummy House, The Haunted Museum and others in PowerPoint presentations. Each member of the group had the task of writing a presentation, preparing a presentation, reading the presentation and preparing questions for other groups. All the preparations were made at school, groups that wanted to add sound or pictures could do it at home. In the preparatory stage I was a teacher advisor, during the incubation and presentation I was the teacher observer. I was trying to achieve a new way of teaching: not so much a traditional teacher or at least not the whole time.

The first problem involved group formation. I decided that at this stage I would have to form heterogeneous groups of four students. The groups could decide on the role of each student within the group. Starko states that most of the literature on collaborative learning emphasizes the importance of group heterogeneity: Students in such groups learn to help each other, to agree with those who differ from oneself, and to understand the value of diversity. If heterogeneous groups should provide motivation, the challenge, the interdependence of all students, then the collaborative tasks had to be carefully planned.



Fortunately, there are many factors that characterize effective tasks in heterogeneous groups associated with creativity (Starko, 2005, p. 395). Before we started the task, I was thinking about options to encourage groups to listen to presentations from other groups. I chose competition among the groups. One of the students in each group had the task to ask questions that related to the presentation of his / her group to other groups. I am an experienced teacher and I have never applied competition within a group, only between groups. Dr. Smith commented on a group competition: Some research suggests a negative impact of competition on creativity. It is less negative to use competition between groups, rather than within a group (more on "Creativity in the Classroom"). (Personal Communication, 3 February 2010).

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