

Reference

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2.2 Promoting creativity through teacher training

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Introduction

There seems to be a tacit agreement among many English language teachers that nurturing learners' creativity in the classroom is fundamental because, in so doing, their language learning experience will be more rewarding. Such teachers seem to believe that a learner-centred classroom environment necessarily involves the cultivation of creative practices. This means that the development of creativity should not be seen as a distraction from exam-oriented classroom activities but as a counterbalancing force that probably has an even bigger potential to stimulate learner achievement. However, the attainment of creativity in the classroom is dependent on teachers' own creative practices. These could be cultivated by means of teacher training programmes aimed at promoting teachers' creativity via the adoption of a number of creative roles.

Teachers' creative roles

Through pre- and in-service training, teachers can develop the knowledge, skills and beliefs needed to position themselves in a variety of creative roles in the classroom and in their professional lives. Some of these roles are: bridge builders, multimodal communicators, creative practitioners and improvisers.

Teachers who act as bridge builders are capable of engaging in what Koestler (1964) calls bisociative thinking, which is the formation of a new matrix of meaning through the act of combining elements from previously unconnected matrices of thought. By means of bisociative thinking they build bridges in their lessons, establishing connections between subjects, topics and perspectives. They build bridges in the minds of their learners, enabling them to foster latent abilities and exploit these not only for language learning but for lifelong education, too. They build bridges between the past, present and future because creative language teaching transforms learners' experiences, thoughts and emotions and makes them inquisitive human beings who are themselves willing to engage in bridge building.

Teachers who act as multimodal communicators are able to engage in 'the crafted integration of two or more ways, or modes, of communication, so that their combined meaning as a whole is greater than either mode separately or their simple combination' (Dressman 2010: 71). A teacher's ability to bring a text to life by the careful combination of print, audio, video and hyperlinks can make it highly engaging for language learners. In order for teachers to foster creativity in the learning environment they need to be equipped with the capacity to think creatively and generate innovation. Knowing how to employ a multimodal approach is one means by which teachers can achieve this form of creativity.

Teachers who identify themselves as creative practitioners are able to engage in creative activities in the classroom together with their learners. For example, teachers who encourage learners to practise creative writing join in the activity and write creatively together with the learners. The benefits of this attitude are underscored by research: ‘when teachers embrace the professional identity of writer, their practices as teachers of writing undergo a transformation that enhances the experience of and performance in the writing of their students’ (Locke *et al.* 2011: 273).

Teachers who act as improvisers are capable of creatively dealing with the unpredictability and spontaneity of the classroom by thinking on the spot and improvising a course of action. In the context of teacher training, improvisation is somewhat frowned upon given that detailed lesson planning is considered fundamental. Nonetheless, teaching is a form of performance and the ability to improvise is crucial in order to respond to situations that one would not have anticipated, as well as to better cater for learners’ needs. Not everything can be pre-empted in the planning phase: in order to maximise learning, it is sometimes necessary to engage in improvisation. Some people argue that the ability to improvise is acquired through experience. While that is true to some extent, actor training shows us that it is also possible to prepare inexperienced performers for improvisation.

Conclusion

It is high time that teacher training transcended the idea that practitioners need only be provided with practical tips for the classroom. Teachers’ pedagogical understanding should be complemented by the knowledge, skills and beliefs needed to engage in creative teaching. Teacher training has the potential to foster true creativity in the learning environment by equipping teachers with the means to empower learners to think for themselves and produce their own innovations. Encouraging teachers to adopt different creative roles as part of their training might help them to discover their own latent creativity and thus assume the stance of teachers who are willing to teach English in a creative fashion.

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References

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