One means of developing teachers’ creativity is to target the relevant knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes in teacher training programmes.
this might consist of trainees taking the risk to adopt the guise of creative writers (Dymoke, 2011), Fitzgerald, Smith, and Monk (2012) affirm that "by participating in a creative writing experience, teachers not only open up new perspectives for their student-learners, but also for themselves" (p. 61). Encouraging prospective teachers to engage in such creative activities 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.

Enabling teachers to become creative practitioners might involve re-evaluating the learning objectives of current training programmes and supporting teacher trainers to design and develop creative curricula so that their students would be able to reap the benefits (Donnelly, 2004). For Cliff Hodges (2005), “teacher education…has a major role to play in engendering creativity in the classroom so it is necessary to examine the extent to which trainees are offered opportunities to participate in creative approaches when learning to teach” (p. 58). In fact, Stafford (2010) claims that “encouraging and facilitating critical and creative thinking by our student teachers defies ‘quick fix’ solutions, and indeed requires tutors to engage in some creative and collaborative thinking of their own” (p. 41). It is clear that just expecting teachers to teach English creatively by, for example, engaging their students in poetry writing is not sufficient unless the training programmes that roll them out are themselves an embodiment of creative teaching methods.

**Teacher training and positioning**

Teachers’ attitudes towards poetry writing can affect the frequency of such an activity in class and the level of engagement expected of students. A US study by Blythe and Sweet (2005) shows that “while expected to teach creative writing, English teachers are not formally trained in how to do so. This lack of training partly accounts for students’ writing remaining at novice level. It also accounts for “feelings of inadequacy” (Simmerman et al., 2012, p. 300) on the part of teachers. This is why Hennessy and Mannix McNamara (2012) note that “facilitating the development of an empowering teacher agency at pre-service level can, in no small part, encourage teachers to provide the space required for pupils to engage critically and creatively with poetry” (p. 391). In order to cultivate such creative spaces in the classroom, training at both pre-service and in-service levels needs to not only equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to teach poetry writing but also to supply them with opportunities to develop their own stance as poets.

The way teachers position themselves in the poetry classroom can have an impact on students’ attitude towards poetry writing. For Burkhardt (2006), those “teachers who share their own poetry with students, both early drafts and polished verses, provide powerful coaching” (p. 73). Teachers who do this kind of thing probably see creative writing as “an educational process that permits deeper engagement with the already written” (Knights & Thurgar-Dawson, 2006, p. 19). When teachers position themselves as poets, they are provided with deep insights into their students’ sentiments and lived experiences (Issitt & Issitt, 2010). Moreover, those teachers “who assume the identity of ‘writer’ and write alongside their students are likely to facilitate writing improvement in their students in terms of motivation and performance” (Locke, Whitehead, Dix, & Cawkwell, 2011, p. 277). Even when poetry writing is not part of the curriculum, teachers who choose to write poetry with students manage to boost their sense of engagement (Xerri, 2011). The need to ensure such outcomes underscores the significance of positioning oneself as a poet.

However, if teachers fail to recontextualise their role vis-à-vis poetry, then poetry writing will remain at the periphery of what happens in class. Green (2009) argues that refraining from writing creatively “is likely to increase teachers’ sense of uncertainty and personal discomfort in teaching creative writing in a meaningful way” (p. 188). If poetry writing is perceived as a specialization that does not fall within the scope of English teachers’ interests and duties, then this activity is not going to have a chance of thriving in class. In the UK, for example, creative writing is most often associated with writers who visit schools to do workshops with students. Such residencies are not open to English teachers, nor do they provide the impact they would have if teachers were allowed to develop their own latent creativity and thus assume the stance of poets.

**Conclusion**

In order to motivate students to recurrently engage in poetry writing in the English lesson, teachers need to cultivate their own creative practices by stepping into the shoes of a poet rather than sending students to workshops run by established poets. This kind of positioning does not happen automatically and teachers require plenty of support in order for them to develop their beliefs and practices as well as build the necessary level of confidence. According to Hennessy and Mannix McNamara (2011), “the promotion of creativity and innovation within initial teacher education courses may be a significant first step” (p. 219). However, continued support throughout teachers’ careers is equally essential and this entails innovative forms of CPD that tap their creativity and foster a positive attitude towards the place of poetry writing in the classroom. By being spurred to position themselves as poets, teachers will be able to democratize poetry writing and allow as many students as possible to reap its benefits in the process of learning English.

Author’s note: Parts of this article appeared in Xerri (2013b; 2013c).

References


Creative writing and drama as ‘difference’ in the second language classroom

DAVID SANDBROOK

Using a short play, Star Taxi, to teach English, David Sandbrook argues for the richness of drama as a source of language input and as an engaging tool for guided speaking practice in an EFL classroom.

Introduction

This paper reports on a short drama, Star Taxi (Steckler & Franklyn, 2003), crafted especially for pre-intermediate level Japanese EFL learners as a rich source of language input and as an engaging tool for guided speaking practice in the EFL classroom. Drama, in this context, means “a way of infusing excitement into classroom exercises by combining dialogue and action” (Burke & O’Sullivan, 2002, p. xiv). First, I will situate drama as a viable tool for second language learning, before presenting three arguments that support Star Taxi as a creative and dynamic example of creative writing to use in the second language classroom, namely: 1) Star Taxi interests learners; 2) it is also an example of ‘creative writing’ that learners can understand and use meaningfully; and 3) it is easy to teach.

Drama in second language teaching and learning

Tying with even the most basic of drama activities like ice-breakers and warm-up games can immediately bring ‘difference’ to any language classroom. Winston (2012) reminds us that one of the most significant advantages of drama activities is that they recognize that the body is central to the learning process. He goes on to say,

“Classrooms on the whole are still places founded on the Cartesian idea that the brain and the body are two distinct entities; that the brain is the site of learning and that the body gets in the way of this by being prone to fidgeting, doodling, getting tired, and wanting to go to the toilet. Drama, on the other hand, seeks to channel and liberate the body’s energies through playful, physical activity – particularly significant for second language learning – it foregrounds the communicative potential of bodies through their use of non-verbal, or ‘paralinguistic’ signs” (p. 4).

There is also general agreement amongst language teachers and researchers (Burke & O’Sullivan, 2002; Kao & O’Neill, 1998; Maley & Duff, 2005; Wagner, 1998) that drama helps learners by:

• contextualising language in purposeful and meaningful ways
• developing social interactions and group cohesion
• creating and encouraging a safe and generally positive classroom dynamic
• fostering motivation, self-awareness, confidence, and enthusiasm
• encouraging them to take more risks with language and flirt with fluency, which are considered vital to successful second language learning
• altering teacher-student relationships and interaction patterns in productive ways.

Such benefits underscore the value of drama activities in helping students achieve some of their communicative goals. Scholars, however, caution that drama in the second language classroom is not the language teaching approach, the ‘magic formula’ for language teaching and learning but, rather, that it should blend into and complement a broader, integrated approach to language teaching

About the Author

Daniel Xerri teaches English language and literature at the University of Malta Junior College. A prolific researcher, he is the author of a number of academic publications, mostly on literature in language education and teachers’ professional development in ELT. In 2014, he was awarded a Research Mobility Programme Award by the World Universities Network to conduct research at the University of Sydney on creativity in English. Some of his talks and publications can be found at www.danielxerri.com