

EXPLORING AND EXPLOITING CREATIVITY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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*All language
systems are
creative*
(Chomsky, 1975)

*How every fool can play
upon the word*
(William Shakespeare,
The Merchant of Venice,
III, v)

“Learners as *perfinkers*: they perceive, feel and think all at once
Bruner (1986)

THINKING AS BACKGROUND FRAMEWORK

Different types of thinking:

- positive, critical, wishful, lateral, creative
- thinking out loud
- thinking for yourself

Good thinkers make good language learners

Tessa Woodward, Thinking in the EFL Class

THE CONCEPT OF CREATIVITY THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

- Definitions
- Keywords
- Approaches

It is originality that provides effective surprise. To do the same things in the same way is not to be creative, to do things differently adds variation to mere habit, but when we do or think things we have not done before, and they are effective, we are being original and fully creative.

Jerome Bruner, 1962

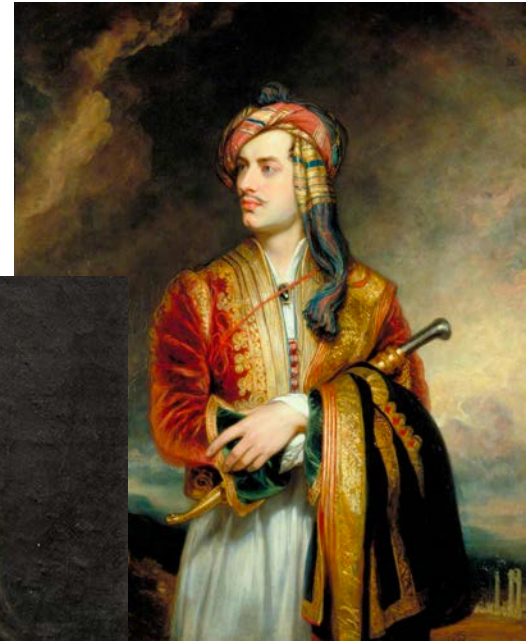
Creativity is a puzzle, some say a mystery. Inventors, scientists and artists rarely know how their ideas arise. They mention intuition, but cannot say how it works. Creativity is the ability to come up with ideas or artefacts that are new, surprising and valuable.

Margaret Boden, 1994

Inspiration and the genius!

Creativity and divinity

The Romantic and
post-Romantic notion
of creative artist



The creative person was seen as an empty vessel that a divine being would fill with inspiration. The individual would then pour out the inspired ideas, forming an otherworldly product.

Gardner's approach to creative minds

One of the notable characteristics that Gardner emphasizes in this new study is the special amalgam of the childlike and the adult: creative personalities often display features such as innocence and freshness, as well as selfishness and retaliation.

He questions whether creative minds of the caliber of Freud's or Einstein's will ever come to dominate the 21st century. These earlier geniuses made their mark by challenging the well-established thinking of the day.

Howard Gardner,
*Creating Minds: An Anatomy of
creativity as Seen through the
Lives of Freud, Einstein,
Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot,
Graham and Gandhi*



The Rite of Spring

Le Sacre du Printemps

First Part
ADORATION OF THE EARTH
Première Partie
L'ADORATION DE LA TERRE

INTRODUCTION

Lento \downarrow , so tempo rubato

Clarinetto 1 in La *colla parte*

Clarinetto basso 2 in Sib *colla parte*

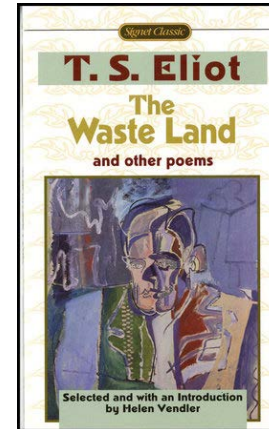
Fagotto 1 *Solo ad lib.*

Corno 2 in Fa *colla parte*

IGOR STRAVINSKY
Revised 1947
New edition 1987

Stravinsky experimented with rhythms and dissonances

Picasso succeeded in wedding the new language to the most powerful human themes



Eliot introduced themes and patterns of verse that sounded odd to the English ear and gave voice to the feelings of an alienated generation

The three creators: Picasso, Stravinsky and Eliot have been linked together for their avant-garde work:

- they came from bourgeois family that valued forms of art
- each gravitated at an early age to the centre of artistry (innovative groups)
- they ranged in degrees of intellectuality
- they were different in religious matters and on political grounds

Creativity in time and space

In time

- Time bound
- Beyond its time: universal

In space

- In different contexts
- Socio-culturally relative: valued by specific groups and human communities

Key words related to creativity

ORDINARY

Ordinary creativity in slogans, advertising, wordplay, shop fronts, puns and jokes

*What is black and white and read all over?
A newspaper.*

Patient: *Doctor. Doctor, when I close my eyes I can see spots.*
Doctor: *Well, keep your eyes open.*

Airport announcements

*British Airways flight 218 departing Gate no. 10 at 13.35
Aer Lingus Flight 931 departing when the little hand is on number
four and the big hand is on two*

Health food shops

*Nature's Way, Mother Nature, Open Sesame, In a Nutshell,
Naturally Yours, Grain of Truth, Fuit and Nut Case, etc.*

Key words related to creativity

ART
INVENTION
ORIGINALITY
INDIVIDUALITY

Genius is the crucial middle term developed mainly in the eighteenth century, in the millennial transition from theories which view the source of poetic originality and creation as external – i.e. concepts of divine inspiration and poetic madness – to theories which posit them as internal i.e. as processes of imagination or of the subconscious.

Preminger and Brogan, 1993: 455-6)

A shift in the notion of creativity

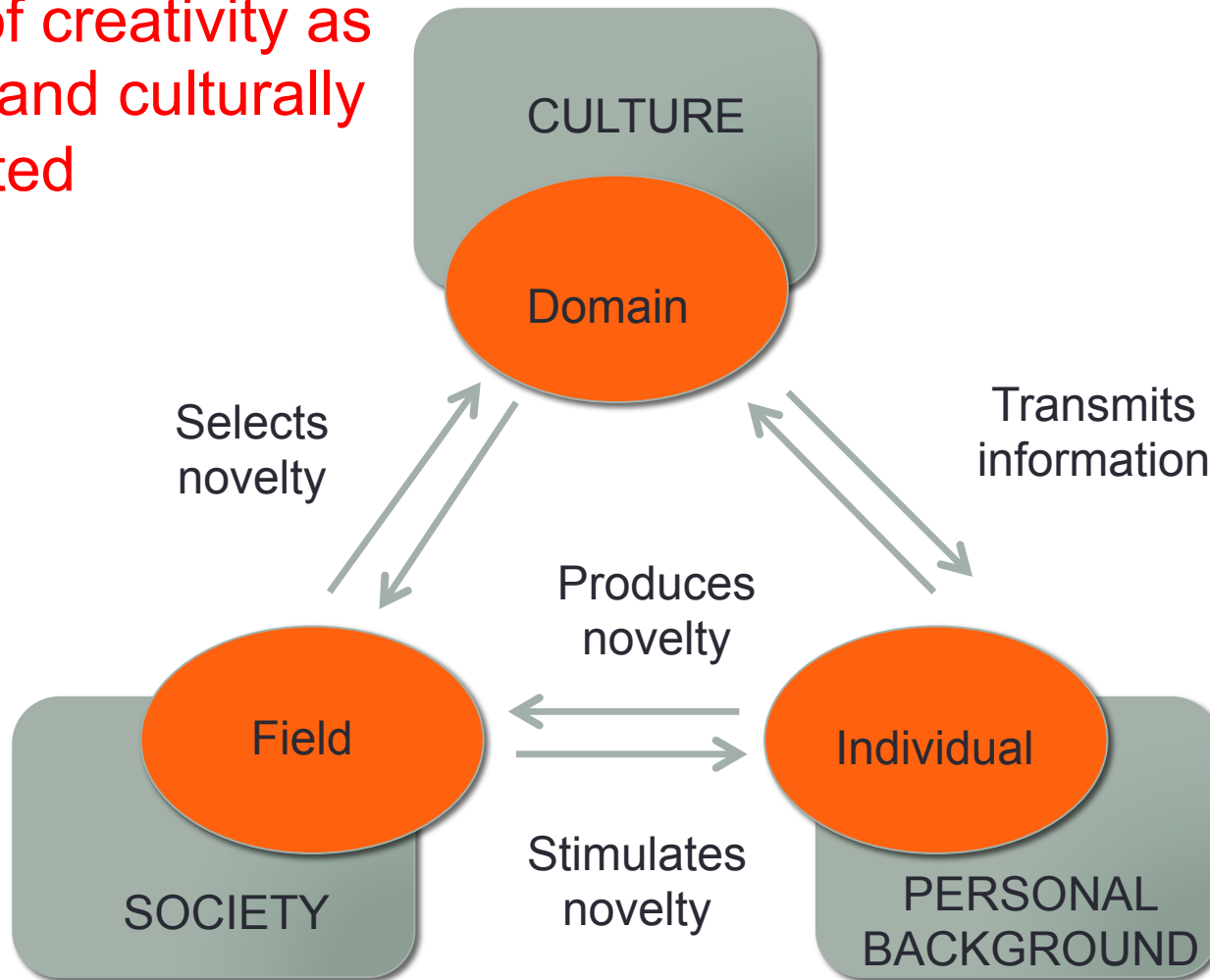
Creativity is now considered not a capacity of special people, but a special capacity of all people. It is located not just in the products of the solitary genius (the Mozarts and Newtons of the world) but also in the everyday actions of the everyday person

Ron Carter, 2004

Approaches to creativity

- ❑ **Psychological** (characteristic cast of mind and the properties of the brain associated with creative acts, identities)
- ❑ **Biographical** (qualitative/quantitative analysis of childhood experiences, life events, personal relationships and personality traits)
- ❑ **Socio-cultural** (changes affected in the domain and accepted by others, culturally variable)
- ❑ **Literary-linguistic** (process of language acquisition and development)

A view of creativity as socially and culturally constituted



A systems view of creativity (reproduced from Sternberg, 1999: 316)

From Carter, *Language and Creativity*, p. 39

INDIVIDUAL
(as a child and as a
master)

OTHER PERSONS
(*Childhood*: family peers)
(*Mature years*: rivals, judges,
supporters in the field)

THE WORK
(relevant symbol
systems in domain/
discipline)

From *The Introduction* in Gardner, *Creating Minds: An Anatomy
of Creativity as Seen through the Lives of Freud, Einstein,
Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham and Gandhi*

LANGUAGE AND CREATIVITY

- Divergent vs Convergent Thinking
- Affordances of language

Two basic questions

What are the characteristics of natural languages that make them particularly powerful tools for the exercise of creativity?

In what ways does the successful use of language require creativity?

Answering these two questions require that we define what we mean by creativity: is it an *outcome* of language uses or a quality of language *users*?

Thinking “outside or inside the box”?

Divergent or Convergent

- The ability to produce a large number of ideas (i.e. creative fluency)
 - The ability to produce a variety of ideas (i.e. flexibility)
 - The ability to produce unusual ideas (i.e. originality)
 - The ability to extend and support ideas (i.e. creativity as elaboration)
- Language as a “rule-based system”
 - It is necessary to “follow the rules” of the target language
 - Mastering the rules is a *precondition* of being able to use language creatively

Affordances of language and Effective Abilities

Affordances

- Language is rule governed
- Language is ambiguous
- Language is situated
- Language is dialogic

Effective Abilities

- *Thinking “inside the box”*
- *“Reading between the lines”*
- *Adaptability*
- *Response-ability*

Language is rule governed

Language deals with a lot of “set phrases”, i.e.

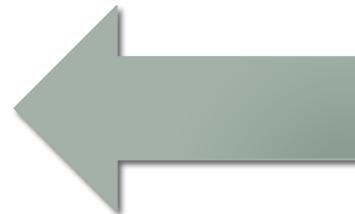
- **lexicogrammar**: “where in the world”, “neither here nor there”;
- **discourse exchanges**: “How are you?”, “Fine and you?”

Creativity emerges not from the entirely original but from a balance between the unique and the predictable

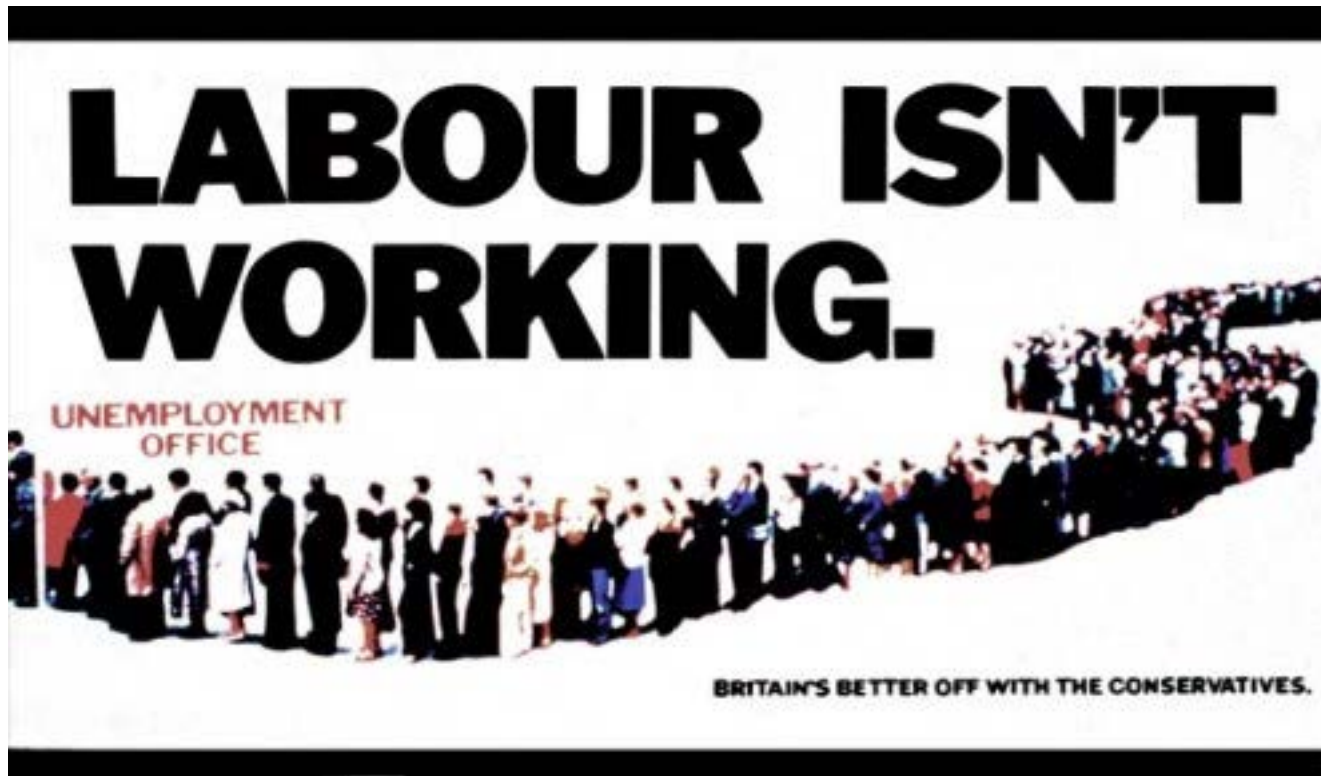


The inventive manipulation, i.e. Text messaging:

- **acronyms** (*omg* = oh my God; *ttyl* = talk to you later),
- **non conventional spelling** (*sum/some*; *thanx/thanks*),
- **omitted apostrophes** = *cant*
- **onomatopoeic spellings**: *haha*; *zzzz*



Language is ambiguous



1978 British Conservative Party campaign

The ambiguity of language is at the heart of much surface-level linguistic creativity (punning and jokes)

Language is situated

Meaning (and doing things with words) does not depend entirely on the words but also on the way words interact with where, when, and to whom they are uttered



Framing according to Deborah Tannen

Talking the Dog (2004)

How family members mediate interpersonal interaction by speaking as, to, or about pet dogs who are present in the interaction. Dogs become resources by which speakers effect a frame shift to a humorous key, buffer criticism, deliver praise, teach values to a child, resolve potential conflict with a spouse, and create a family identity that includes the dogs as family members

Language is dialogic

Response-ability: to respond to and build upon the utterances of others, even when (especially when) they are unpredictable



Response-Ability

In order to nurture **response-ability** the best way is to expose learners to utterances, people and problems that are worth responding to, creating conditions for them to engage in conversations that are true-to-life and have some kind of consequence

Three levels of creativity

1. **The manipulation of the components of language:** “intrinsically creative” as in principle an infinite number of different sentences could be produced
2. **The utilization of the cultural context** of the target language on an interpersonal and contextually accurate level, taking into account tone, stress, eye contact, register and genre
3. **The use of the target language** to produce original work that represents thought and feeling

Some conclusion

- Creativity is not an optional ingredient that we can bring in to “spice up” language teaching
- It is an intrinsic aspect of language use
- It is at the heart of all successful communication
- Looking for a balance between creativity and conformity

PREPARATION, INCUBATION, ILLUMINATION, VERIFICATION

Different phases and processes

A four-stage process

1. **PREPARATION** (given a “problem” or “puzzle” or “conceptual space”, the creative mind first prepares itself by soaking up all the information available)
2. **INCUBATION** (the conscious mind stops thinking about the problem, leaving the unconscious to take over)
3. **ILLUMINATION** (a solution suddenly presents itself, if you’re lucky!)
4. **VERIFICATION** (the conscious mind needs to check, clarify, elaborate on and present the insights gained)

From Wallas, *The Art of Thought*

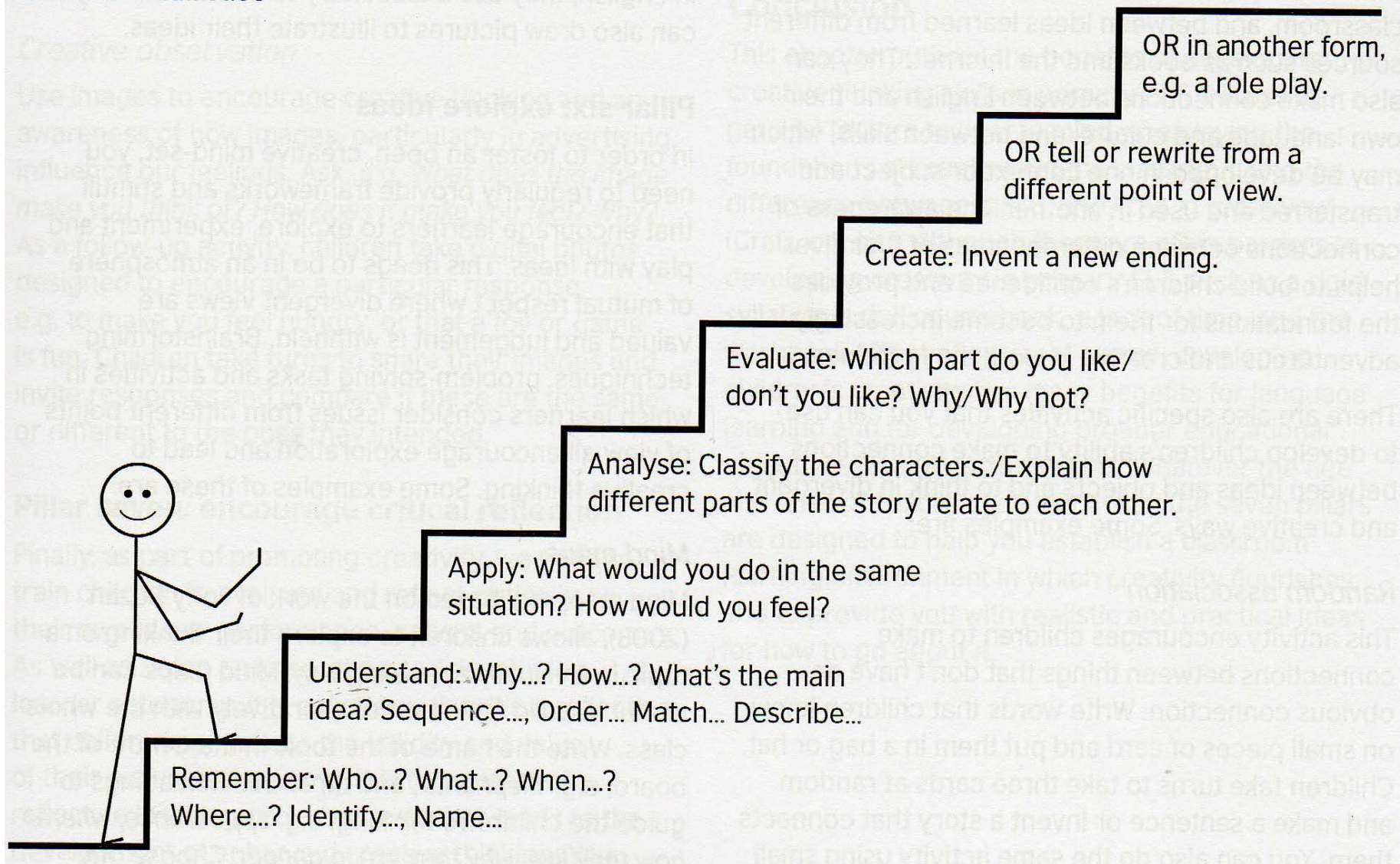
Big C and little c

- It refers to learning outcomes, which are new and original for pupils/students in terms of their current age
- It refers to the process of pupils/students constructing and communicating in the everyday interactional context of the classroom using the foreign language repertoire that they currently have available

Seven pillars of creativity

1. Build up positive self-esteem (*fan and circle time*)
2. Model creativity yourself (*classroom management*)
3. Offer children choice (*friendship groupings, lesson menu, format freedom, behaviour choice*)
4. Using questions effectively (*questions which open up, probe and extend their thinking, question staircase*)
5. Make connections (*comparative moments*)
6. Explore ideas (*mind maps, imagine that...*)
7. Encourage critical reflection (*reflective continuum, self-assessment dictation: yes/no/so and so*)

Question staircase



VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

Personal creativity and language learning

The relationship between personal creativity and language learning is potentially two way:

More creative people make better language learners, but also language learning may foster creativity in people

Tests to measure creativity

- The improbable situations task (*what would happen if...?*)
- The unusual uses task (*ways in which common objects could be used*)
- The common problems task (*list a number of problems which might occur in everyday life: i.e making a sandwich*)
- The categories task (*list as many things as possible belonging to a given category: i.e. things which are flat*)
- The semantic association task (*i.e. provided two words- mirror and rain - supply a third word related to them*)

From a study made by Otto in 1998 on low-intermediate secondary students in Hungary, who were exposed to a communicative language teaching methodology and showed different levels of proficiency

Language play

Book in the bin.

You book in the bin.

My book in the bin.

You in the bin.

You bin... in the bin, all right?

You writing in the bin.

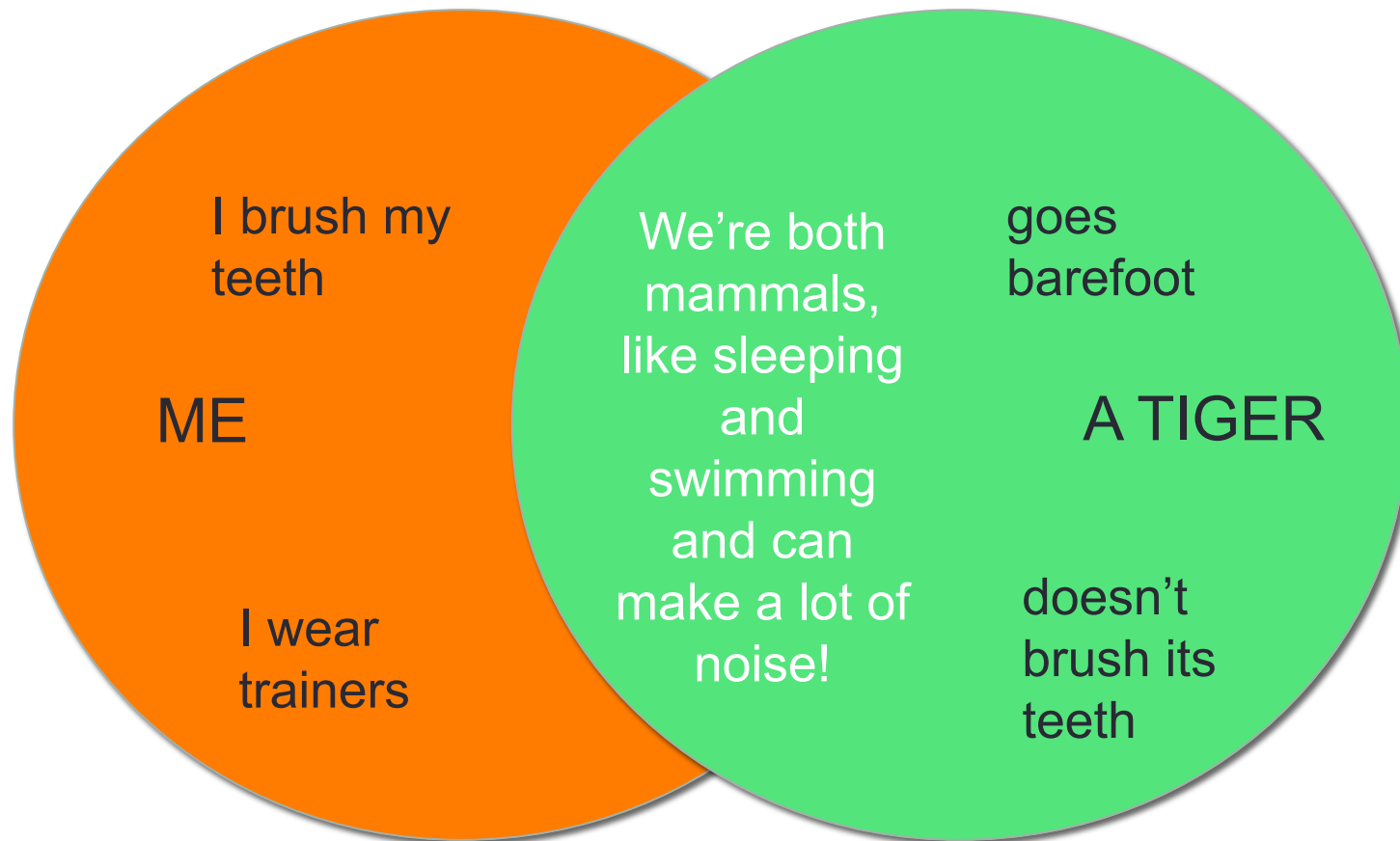
From Ellis, *Classroom Second Language Development*

Language play: creative construction of L2 systems

Experimentation with chunks:

- Deletion
- Substitution
- Addition
- Rearremgement
- Making unusual connections and combinations

Ask students to come up with the similarities and differences between themselves and something they are interested in, such as a tiger, a dinosaur, a skateboard or a tablet. The comparison can be expressed in the form of a Venn diagram:



From Woodward, *Thinking in the EFL Class*

Language play: objectives

- It can lower affective barriers
- It can increase/enhance memorizability
- It can help learners develop the ability to speak in other “voices”
- It may promote destabilization and restructuring
- It allows learners to commit face-threatening acts in an acceptable manner
- It provides an opportunity for extended multiparty interaction in which there is a focus on linguistic form
- It serves as a resource for organizing and engaging in social interaction

Activity	Target language	Genre	Constraint	Imaginative trigger	Audience
Mystery object	Place prepositions	Place description	Pattern poem	Picture stimulus	Read and guess
My day so far	Simple past	Narrative	Listing	Object stimulus Brainstorming Making the familiar strange	Read and identify
Platform 17	Present continuous	Description of a scene	Pattern poem	Picture stimulus Brainstorming	Read and identify
How it's done	Imperatives	Instructions	Listing	Idea collision Brainstorming	Read and match
Emotive objects	Adjective order	Object description	Pattern poem	Visualisation Brainstorming	Read and give an explanation Chain writing
Maternal advice	Constructions with gerund and infinitive	Advice/rules	Listing	Text stimulus Idea collision Brainstorming	Read and guess
Overheard in a café	Reported speech	Dialogue	Listing	Picture stimulus Making the familiar strange	Chain writing Read and identify

From *Creativity in the English Language Classroom*

SPEAKING



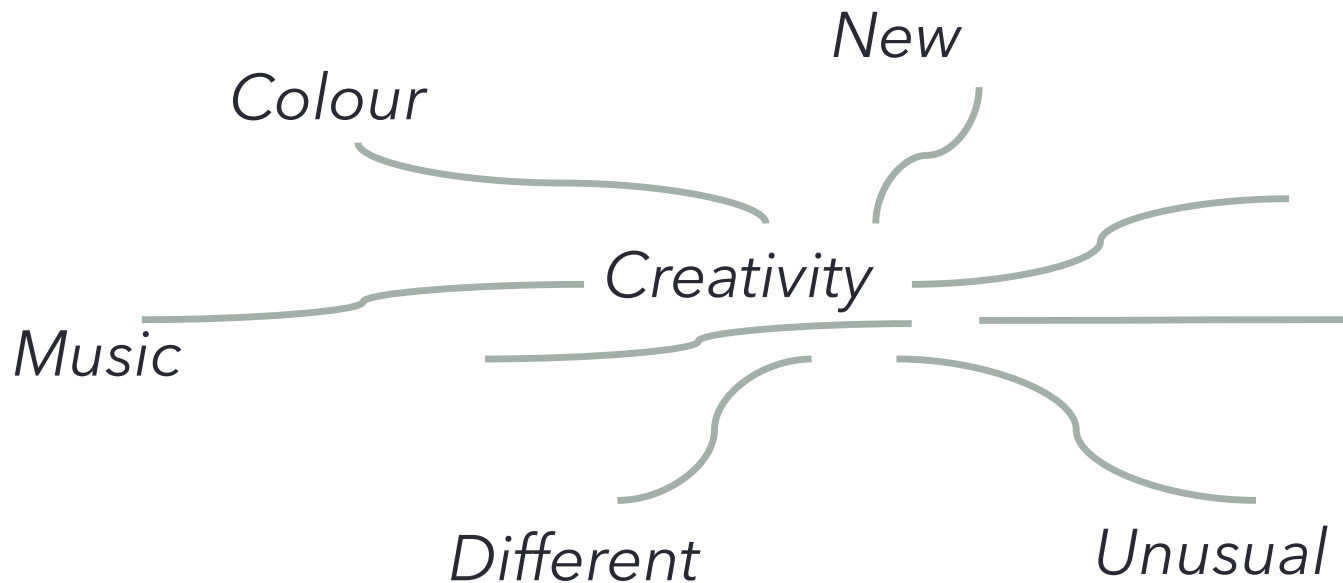
Desert Island Type activities

List of Items

- a box of flash cards
- a box of coloured board markers
- a world atlas
- a cassette player
- a box of old glossy magazines in English
- a laptop
- a box of transparencies
- 20 overhead transparencies
- a box of coloured markers
- a notebook
- 20 metres of white metre paper
- a box of coloured chalk
- a box of toys
- 10 student books of the same level
- a set of colour crayons
- a book of photocopiable communication games
- a grammar book
- a dictionary
- a box of blank cassettes
- a set of class readers
- a box of blue ball point pens
- a video camera
- a television set
- a video player

Creativity brainstorm

- Focusing on what students mean by *creativity*
- Collecting suggestions and key words
- Pinning the poster up on the classroom wall or posting it on a blog or on your school website
- Referring to it for the following activities and results...



From Woodward, *Thinking in the EFL Class*

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER AND OF THE STUDENTS

Teachers as role models

The classroom and the school

Teacher

What do you do?

I'm a teacher.

What do you teach?

People.

What do you teach them?

English.

You mean grammar, verbs, nouns, pronunciation, conjugation, articles and particles, negatives and interrogatives ...?

That too.

What do you mean, 'that too'?

Well, I also try to teach them how to think, and feel – show them inspiration, aspiration, cooperation, participation, consolation, innovation,

... help them think about globalization, exploitation, confrontation, incarceration, discrimination, degradation, subjugation,

...how inequality brings poverty, how intolerance brings violence, how need is denied by greed, how –isms become prisons, how thinking and feeling can bring about healing.

**Well I don't know about that.
Maybe you should stick to language,
forget about anguish.
You can't change the world.**

But if I did that, I'd be a cheater, not a teacher.

Alan Maley

- Teachers of English have been at the forefront of educational change in many parts of the world
- Language aims are integrated with educational aims

From

Integrating global issues in the creative English language classroom: with reference to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Global goals: names and aims

The publication by the British Council presents various tasks which involve learners in creating a photo gallery, inventing a slogan for a piece of street art, engaging in a simulated UN discussion, designing sustainable homes and cities, etc..

Goal 1: No poverty	To ensure that countries and organisations work together to achieve the goals
Goal 2: No hunger	To ensure that everyone has enough money to live
Goal 3: Good health	To ensure that everyone has enough food to eat
Goal 4: Quality education	To ensure that everyone has the right to medical care
Goal 5: Gender equality	To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to go to school
Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation	To ensure that girls and women have the same rights and opportunities as boys and men
Goal 7: Renewable energy	To ensure that everyone has safe water and healthy hygiene
Goal 8: Good jobs and economic growth	To ensure that everyone has access to reliable, sustainable energy
Goal 9: Innovation and infrastructure	To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to work
Goal 10: Reduced inequalities	To ensure that industry is responsible in protecting people and the environment
Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities	To ensure that countries have laws and societies that protect everyone equally
Goal 12: Responsible consumption	To ensure that cities, towns and villages have water and electricity, and are clean and safe
Goal 13: Climate action	To ensure the reduction of waste, for example by recycling paper or glass
Goal 14: Life below water	To ensure action to slow down the impact of global warming
Goal 15: Life on land	To ensure action to protect oceans and seas
Goal 16: Peace and justice	To ensure action to protect the environment and endangered animals
Goal 17: Partnerships for sustainable development	To ensure the goal of justice and work and give everyone

Teachers as role models
(singing, acting, miming,
etc.), that is engaging in the
same activities as students



Encouraging an
**environment of
trust, a relaxed
non-judgemental
atmosphere**



Developing a
**creative attitude
of mind** which
permeates
everything

*We should judge
creativity in the
classroom by what the
teacher makes it
possible for the student
to do, not just by what
the teacher does.*
Stevick, *A Way and Ways*



Curbing one's
own impulse as
a teacher to
**intervene and
over-correct**



The language teacher as a resource

- **Teacher's nature and personality** (new ideas and a fresh way of doing things!)
- **Voice** – stress and pitch (more value to the characteristics of the voice as a rich medium rather than a mere articulating device for words)
- **Body** (posture, gestures, movements, etc.)
- **Life experiences** (sharing stories from personal life)

Teacher's principled eclecticism

“Principled eclecticism” is teacher’s approach: making use of a wide range of teaching strategies and techniques, drawing on academic and pedagogic knowledge, using activities that have creative dimensions

Productive language learning tasks:

- **challenge** (problem solving, overcoming obstacles, discovering...)
- **interesting content** (close to students’ wishes and likes)
- **the personal element** (connections to the learner’s life)
- **the novelty element** (new, different, totally unexpected)
- **the intriguing element** (ambiguous, problematic, paradoxical)
- **individual choice** (choosing topics and activities)
- **tasks that encourage risk taking** (no worry about making mistakes)
- **tasks that encourage original thought** (individual response)
- **the fantasy element** (using imagination)

Characteristics of creative teachers



Some principles for developing creativity

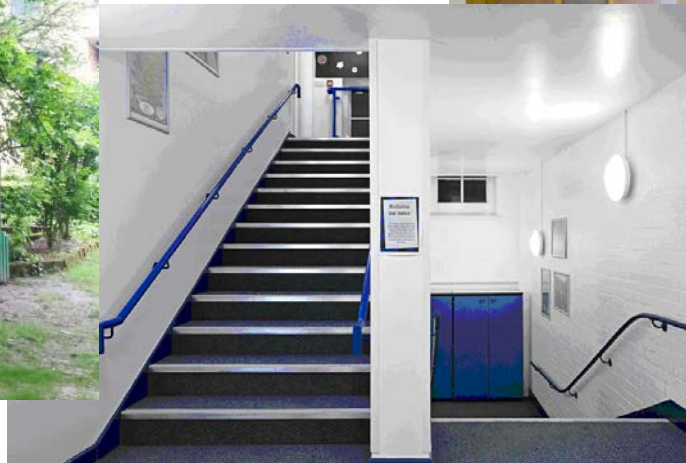
- **Use the constraints principle** (limit the number of words students have to write or manage, limit the amount of time to complete a task, limit the amount of materials)
- **Use the random principle** (bisociation: putting two or more things that do not belong together and find connections)
- **Use the association principle** (objects, characters, sounds, etc.)
- **Use the withholding information principle** (only offering part of the information needed: i.e. jigsaw listening/reading)

The students as protagonists

- Thinking and sharing ideas
- Having different roles in pair and group work
- Gaining self-confidence
- Working with feelings/emotions
- Developing their inventiveness

The classroom and the school

- Noises...
- Walls ...
- Through the windows...
- Corridors ...
- Stairs...
- Outside space, garden ...



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