



The Transition from Knowledge Acquisition to Competency Development: Creativity as 21st Century Skill within the Educational Framework

Hiba BENSALAH^{1*}, Liliana MĂȚĂ^{2*}

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Abstract

This paper draws on the need to switch from conventional methods of teaching and learning to competency development as a response to the global trend in education and the demands of the 21st century. The educational framework places creativity as a critical competency or skill to support students in thinking creatively, coping with the challenges of the twenty-first century, and preparing learners to be able to function as efficient citizens of modern society. Teachers should therefore give EFL students the knowledge and abilities they need in their subject area and provide them with adequate opportunities to use that knowledge in creative ways. The current study aims at exploring teachers' conceptions about the general concepts of creativity and its impact on students' creativity and successful language learning. Moreover, the study attempts to investigate teachers' challenges about creativity incorporation in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

Key words: Creativity; 21 st century; Educational framework

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¹ Assistant Prof. PhD, Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Languages, Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, Algeria, E-mail: hiba.bensalah@univ-tiaret.dz

² Assoc. Prof. PhD, Teacher Training Department, Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacau, Romania, E-mail: liliana.mata@ub.ro

* Corresponding author

1. Introduction

Given the speed of change in all aspects of life, including education, 21st century university students should develop different skills that enable them to get involved in a rapidly evolving world and skills-oriented workplace. Creativity is one of the essential skills of the learner in the 21st century and also the key to effective learning in the academic environment (Egan et al., 2017). It is the century of innovations, flexibility, and creativity. Creativity is one of the essential skills for the 21st century, due to its importance in promoting human potential through positive effects on individual development (Nakano & Wechsler, 2018). Creativity becomes the modern man's hope to find himself, to adapt to multiple changes, to be authentic, to express himself as a complex personality, but above all, it becomes an imperative for the progress of current and future society. Creative learning is a requirement imposed by the evolution of society that needs well-trained people in all fields, and the inclusion of the individual in the contemporary world must be conscious, responsible and creative. As far as foreign language teaching is concerned, there appears to be a need to change the current foreign language teaching pedagogies, which focus excessively on the accumulation of knowledge rather than the development of students' mental skills, including creative thinking. Fostering students' creativity will not only develop their language skills but will also help them be successful in their upcoming lives. Livingston (2010, p. 59) believed that creativity is an essential skill because it is directly related to the development of "content knowledge and skills in a culture infused to new levels through inquiry, cooperation, connection, integration and synthesis".

Teachers play a fundamental role in the language learning process and the growth of students' language abilities, including creative thinking. To effectively incorporate creative practices in the EFL classroom, it is crucial to have a firm understanding of the knowledge and perception of creativity among teachers. Therefore, how teachers perceive creativity has a great impact on how they encourage it in their classes. It is crucial to look at teachers' real knowledge of creative thinking abilities as well as their challenges toward passing on these abilities to students.

2. Conceptual framework of creativity

According to a review of the literature, creativity is a complex term that has been studied from a variety of angles and by several academic fields, including psychology, education, sociology, philosophy, and history. Each discipline contributes unique tools and unique philosophical presumptions to the discussion of creativity. Some people view creativity as a personality quality, while others consider it a talent, a process, a final result, and more. There are

many different definitions for this concept because of how diverse the approaches are and how rich the concept is. Creativity "is not a switch to turn on and off; it's a way of seeing, staying engaged and responding to the world around you" (Judkins, 2015, p. 6). This review will highlight definitions currently being used by various theorists to demonstrate the diversity of the definitions and to aid in the clarification of the term "creativity."

The definition of creativity, according to Wikipedia, is "a phenomenon where something new and valuable is made" (such as an idea, a joke, a literary work, a painting or musical composition, a solution, an invention, etc.). Furthermore, it adds, "creativity is typically seen to be associated with knowledge and intelligence." According to Boden (2001, p. 95), creativity is the capacity to generate novel ideas that are "surprising yet understandable and also helpful in some way". As an extension to this point of view, Beghetto and Kaufman (2007, p. 73) provide an inclusive definition of creativity as "the ability to develop work that is unique, high in quality, and acceptable". To demonstrate original ideas is a more radical definition of creativity (Robinson & Aronica, 2015). Additionally, the author states that creativity is the application of imagination at work and that innovation is creativity at work. It is abundantly obvious from all of these definitions that creativity is primarily characterized by a number of qualities, including imagination, divergence, intellectuality, originality, and adaptability.

From an educational perspective, creativity is associated with the production of something new, and this product is to be useful. Moreover, it is the interaction of aptitude, process, and environment that results in the creation of an idea, act, or product that is perceived as novel, valuable, or meaningful within a specific sociocultural context via a specific medium.

2.1. The four Ps of creativity

The Four Ps provide a critical tool for navigating the various facets of creativity. They were first put forth by American academic Mel Rhodes (1961). The acronyms for these terms are process, product, person (or personality), and press (or place). These 4Ps represent the nature of creative people, the processes they use, the outcomes of their efforts, and the environment that supports or inhibits creativity.

By examining each of the aforementioned clusters of creativity, we can consider the person's potentials, such as intrinsic motivation, curiosity, autonomy, and resilience, while they are being creative. We can comprehend the internal process that a person goes through, particularly the mental mechanisms involved in creative thinking. Then, we can assess the creativity of the end product, and we can examine the interconnected environmental factors that have an impact on creative acts. Although there are various approaches to creativity, this

approach allows us to take a closer look at the concept of creativity, where it occurs, and how it occurs. In fact, teachers can foster more deliberate creativity in the classroom by having a firm understanding of the concept of creativity and assessing, recognizing, and changing their teaching situations. Nevertheless, when teachers are aware of the four Ps in the classroom, they can begin to recognize how students arrive at their own creative outcomes and better recognize their path to get there.

2.2. Models of creativity

The approach to creativity in Amabile's understanding derives from a clear and explicit theoretical model of creativity (Figure 1). The model comprises three key elements: domain skills, creative thought processes and intrinsic motivation. "People will be most creative when they feel motivated primarily by the interest, satisfaction, and challenge of the work itself—and not by external pressures" (Amabile, 1996, p. 79).

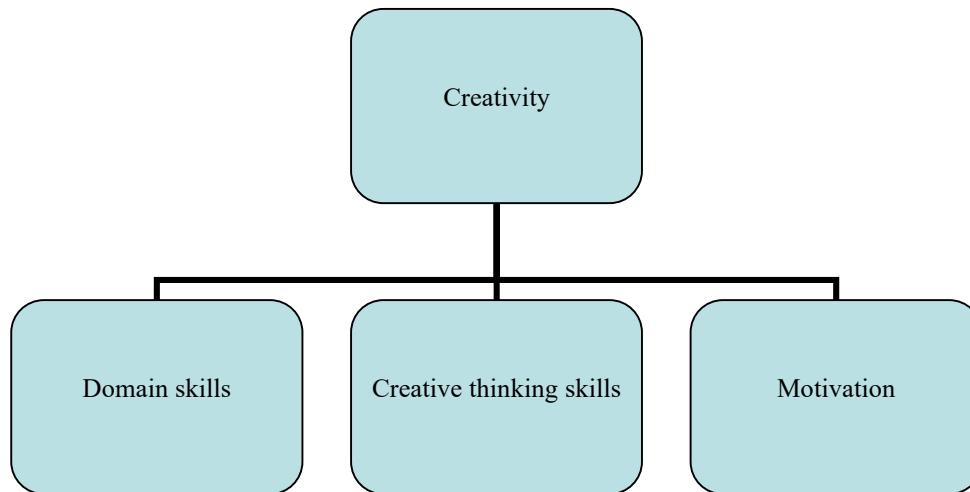


Figure 1. Amabile's model of creativity (adapted from Amabile, 1996)

Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) elaborated the four C model of creativity. At the mini-c level of creativity, what is created may not be revolutionary, but it may be new and meaningful. The small letter c level of creativity reflects a growth aspect with appropriate feedback that indicates progress is being made. What was created might be of value to others. At the pro-c level of creativity, one has the ability to be creative on a professional level. To reach this stage, it takes many years of practice and deliberate preparation. The Big-C level includes an assessment of the entire career and professional activities.

According to the systems model (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), creativity is a social construction formed as a result of the interaction between three different elements: a) the cultural matrix of information (domain); b) the unprecedented change at the field level created by people (the person); and c) acceptance or rejection of the novelty by the group (field).

2.3. Teachers' perceptions and attitude towards creativity

Researchers and teachers differ in their perception of what creativity is. In general, researchers attribute the concept of creativity as a physical or mental process affected by the social environment and the personal attributes of students and teachers, giving rise in relatively new or useful products or ideas to society (Mullet, Willerson, Lamb, & Kettler, 2016). However, teachers regard creativity as being a particular matter of experience. In this regard, teachers believe that the fact of reaching creativity is translated into productivity while applying original and innovative ideas. Although teachers understand that new products are part of the creative process, they frequently overlook usefulness as a feature of creative products. Even if some teachers recognize the significance of context and personal traits in the creative process. They find it difficult to convey how those factors contribute to creative outcomes. As an extension to this point, Odena and Welch (2012) reveals that teachers' approaches to teaching strategies, classroom attitudes, and evaluation of creative activities are all inspired by their own beliefs about what creative thinking is and how it tends to work. In other words, teachers' perspectives on creativity affect how they foster it in their classrooms.

In order to achieve innovative learning, M. T. Amabile emphasizes the role of the teacher's attitude, how the class is organized and the teaching strategies in the activity with the students. Regarding the teacher's attitude, the most significant way in which teachers can encourage creativity is to support intrinsic motivation. Those teachers who are aware of their own imperfections and who have a special respect for children best guide the class towards autonomy. From the point of view of class organization, the conducted research indicated the superiority of open classes over traditional ones in promoting creativity. The class will be as visually stimulating as possible, so that there will be around a multitude of products, materials created by the students. In daily teaching activities, the teacher can use a series of specific strategies that can amplify the level of creativity. A first way could be to assess student work, using constructive and meaningful feedback rather than vague and abstract assessment, involving students in evaluating their own work, and emphasizing what was learned rather than how it is learned. Another effective way is reward, by using new sources alongside grades, such as gold stars, awards, prizes and special privileges. Other forms of reward are intangible, such as a smile or a sign of approval, a pat on the shoulder, a word of encouragement, an opportunity to display and present the results

of the activity. Choice is a strategy through which teachers offer children the opportunity to choose whenever the opportunity arises. Strategies such as motivating the unmotivated, inculcating creative skills, creating special experiences (teacher for a day, excursions, guests, Friday entertainment) can also be applied.

The pursuit of the transition from knowledge competence to creativity requires a positive vision from all the components of the educational curriculum in general and teachers in particular. Therefore, teachers' perspectives, as well as activating creativity through classroom activities and their teaching practices, can promote creative productivity. There are a number of clues that demonstrate that creative thinking not only improves their teaching skills but also enable students to become better thinkers and active learners. They concurred that using creative thinking could improve learning outcomes and advance students' linguistic abilities.

3. The relevance of creativity in the EFL context

The literature provides strong evidence for the relevance of fostering students' creative thinking as an essential aspect of education in the 21st century. Stimulating creativity in the EFL context is a complex socio-educational approach that simultaneously includes phenomena of activation, training, cultivation and development of creative potential. Nowadays, the goal of an educational process is not only knowledge acquisition but also the development of competencies such as creativity, which is not always an easy task. In addition to the basic language skills, creativity development is fundamental to EFL instruction. EFL instructors are challenged more than ever to create innovative learning environments that do not focus exclusively on imparting knowledge but rather on activating students' creative thinking abilities. For Seelig (2012), improving learners' creative thinking skills allows them to assimilate information in different ways, apply their content knowledge in diverse manners, solve problems, overcome learning challenges, and improve their language competences.

The ultimate objective of an educational process goes beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge; it also revolves around meaningful and creative learning, which is in fact a demanding endeavor. In this regard, every one of us thinks since it is our nature to do so. However, much of our thought is distorted and still conceptual as well as partial. Yet, the quality of our lives is mainly based on our thoughts and what we produce as an outcome of the educational process. Therefore, ensuring a good quality of thinking that may lead to creativity is the primary concern of 21st-century education. In a world full of challenging circumstances and communication technology, there appears to be a need to know how to grow a creative individual and develop their talents. According to Piirto (2011), creative individuals establish a powerful

aspect of facing complex changes and challenges from different sources of competition. Furthermore, there are a number of claims pertaining to the significance of creativity in the educational context. Meanwhile, a variety of research findings reflect teachers' favorable attitudes toward the integration of creativity in the language classroom. However, in the context of application, the theoretical overview of creativity remains vague and partial. As a result, nurturing creative potential and harnessing an appropriate learning atmosphere might have positive effects on the learners' spirits and encourage them to be creative individuals.

3.1. Harnessing a creative atmosphere and motivational environment

Within an educational institution, the positive atmosphere and motivation are deemed to be the fuel that drives the learning process towards creativity as well as meaningful learning. In fact, the attempt to create a positive environment and motivate students is based on the responsibility of the teacher. The teacher has a great impact on the educational atmosphere and uses dynamic interactivity with students to inspire them towards learning. As cited in Dudová and Cba (2015), supplying students with appropriate knowledge, approaches, and skills that help them in the learning process is only part of their professional role. They also participate in tutoring and choose its format. They play the role of a motivator, whose function it is to maintain the students' focus, activity independence, and creativity. The teacher can also create a supportive social environment through words and actions that can implicitly affect students' creativity (Yang, Hong, Lee, & Lin, 2019).

Sternberg and Lubart (1991), in their study of creativity theory and its development, make it clear that the foundations of creative performance are based on intellectual processes, knowledge, intellectual style, personality, environmental context, and motivation. Among these resources, the environmental context is relevant for stimulating creativity in three ways:

- (a) "sparking" original thought;
- (a) promoting the continuation of innovative ideas;
- (c) assessing and praising innovative ideas.

The application of these methods is intended to create an exciting environment that stimulates learners' creative thinking. Therefore, both teachers and students are participants in creativity. As Renzulli (1992) reveals, educators can promote a disposition for creative productivity. Personal interest emerges as a main factor in nurturing a creative production disposition. In other words, interests are essential for learning and for producing high levels of creative output. Any cognitive action, from learning fundamental skills to reaching greater levels of creative productivity, is enhanced by the level of interest that is present throughout an act of

learning. One perspective is that reaching creative productivity is simply the application of content knowledge and thinking skills to solving problems.

3.2. Encouraging creativity in an EFL context

There is no denying that students' characteristics and potential for achievement vary from one another. Behind the existence of a category of students who are independent, curious, willing to overcome obstacles, and usually approach problems from different perspectives, there is a constantly changing educational context and pedagogical practices. Teachers' roles in preparing courses and tasks that stimulate students' capacities and translate them into effective performance are critical in this regard. As a result, teachers can begin to foster creativity by modeling creative behaviors (Runco, 2014). It is pointless to lecture students about creativity if we do not practice it ourselves. We must do so if we want them to write poems, stories, or draw and paint. In other words, teachers should be creative and aware of the various means available in order to inspire creativity in their students. In Csikszentmihalyi's (2013, p. 79) view, there are five steps to foster creativity:

Preparation: Arousing curiosity of a problematic situation.

Incubation: Ideas fly below the threshold of consciousness.

Insight: The moment when the puzzle starts to fall together.

Evaluation: Deciding if the insight is valuable and worth pursuing.

Elaboration: Translating the insight into its final work.

When teachers begin creating their pedagogical responsibilities, all these steps must be connected and integrated. The pinnacle of creativity requires educators to present something worthwhile and original that can be studied. It is important to note that teachers' creativity is essential to developing appropriate assignments that will motivate students and advance their academic achievement. Putting greater emphasis on exhibiting creative behaviors, teachers must acquire creative thinking abilities through specialized training, which is essential and would be highly advantageous in the context of education. The first step to guaranteeing meaningful learning in each activity is to encourage creative strategies in the classroom.

Conclusions

Many of the concepts of creativity mentioned above ought to be obvious to anyone, while trying to put them into practice in education is actually quite challenging. As far as teachers are concerned, they generally acknowledge the value of creativity as a concept but devote little patience for the attributes and periods that make it attainable. It is clear that in order to nurture student creativity we must first cultivate our own ideas of what creativity is and how to

incorporate creative instructions into our teaching to ensure maximum potential, with the probable outcome being manifest creative performance. In other words, educators need to bridge the gap between the "what" and the "how." Therefore, special training and orientations should be addressed for EFL teachers to familiarize them with creative skills first, then how they impart them to their learners. In this context, teachers are supposed to be instances of original and creative work. This perspective indicates that applying creativity is not all that challenging. After all, embracing creative thinking is not instantaneous; passion and patience are required.

From an educational point of view, there is an increasingly strong concern for the training of creative people through the development of problem-solving, adaptation to change, and innovation capacities. In this way, a support is ensured on which social creativity will be supported, as long as individual expression is an essential condition for the development of society. The final result will be embodied in the structuring of an autonomous, responsible personality, through which the person emerges from anonymity, frees himself and participates in a unique and unrepeatable way.

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