A CREATIVE APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING. A WAY TO RECOGNISE, ENCOURAGE AND APPRECIATE STUDENTS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Abstract: *This article explores the Creative Approach to Language Teaching (CALT), a methodology developed and successfully implemented at Masaryk University Language Centre. The approach recognizes students' existing knowledge and diverse skills, encouraging their active contributions to language learning. By emphasizing creativity as an innate skill, it engages learners in real-life communication scenarios, fostering problem-solving, collaboration, and self-expression. The article also discusses the advantages of student-generated sources, highlighting how students can select learning materials, improve autonomy, and enhance critical thinking skills. This approach redefines the teacher's role as a facilitator rather than a provider of knowledge, creating a dynamic and interactive learning environment.*

Key Words:*Creative Approach to Language Teaching (CALT), student-generated materials, problem-solving in language learning, creativity in ELT, collaborative learning, real-life communication, autonomous learning.*

In this extract, Libor Stepanek presents 'The creative approach to language teaching', which has been developed, tested and successfully implemented at Masaryk University Language Centre.
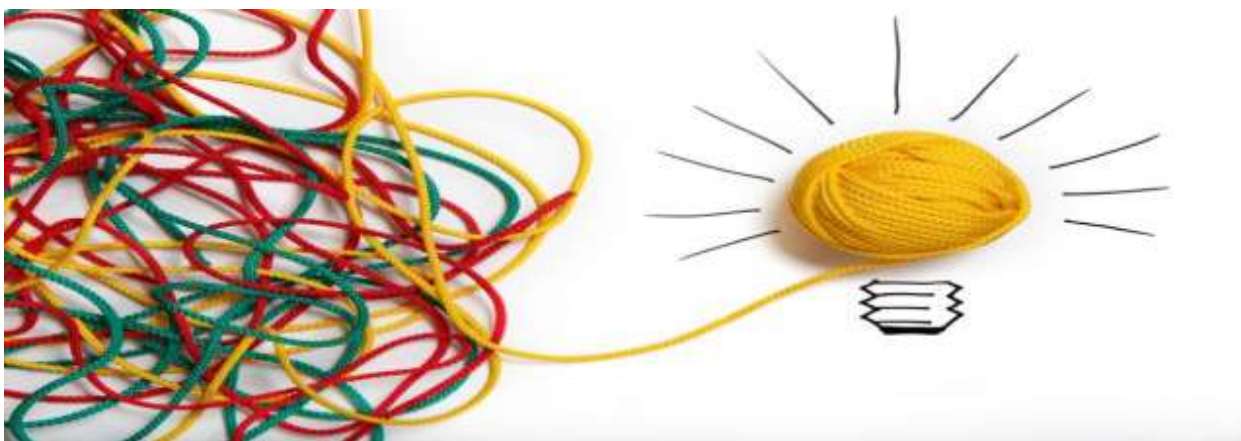
Here is the fourth extract from the latest British Council publication *'Creativity in the English Language classroom'* edited by Alan Maley and Nik Peachey. In this chapter, Libor Stepanek presents an approach which has been developed, tested and successfully implemented at Masaryk University Language Centre.

'The approach is primarily used by university teachers but it could also be used by teachers and teacher trainers in all types of schools for all levels of language learners. Its main aim is to invite teachers to recognise and value the existing knowledge and the diverse skills language learners bring with them, and to encourage learners' contributions to language classes.

Theoretical background

Creativity is a complex field studied and discussed from many different perspectives. This is one of the reasons why there is no generally accepted definition and we always have to be aware of the point of view we take in defining creativity. The Creative Approach to Language Teaching is an approach that presents creativity as one of our many innate skills, a talent that every person, and every language learner has. This approach focuses on the idea that we all can enjoy the potential to be creative under certain conditions; that we all abound with many different forms and levels of creativity and that it is the teacher's task to stimulate the creative potential in students.

Language teachers have three advantages that can help stimulate creativity in students.

First, language is creative in its very nature. We can express or communicate one idea in many different ways. Furthermore, every expressed or communicated idea can provoke many different reactions. Every single sentence, phrase or word we say or write is created in a unique moment of communication and can be re-created, re-formulated, paraphrased or changed according to the goals of the speaker or writer.

Second, language classes are not limited by any specialised subject or knowledge. Language teachers can, therefore, build their lessons on topics related to sport, management, law or philosophy and still focus on language. This is why a community-of-practice setting, where students and teachers share their individual types of expertise and knowledge, can be more easily established.

And third, language classes can easily engage students in creative situations. By creative situations we mean close-to-reality situations in which students do not use well-known and practised steps that can be applied almost automatically in order to achieve one correct solution to a problem. In creative situations, students have to produce one or more answers to a series of inter-connected problems. They do not know what steps can be used to solve a problem, they may not be sure if the problem has one solution, a wide range of possible solutions or if it has any solution at all. Students simply do not encounter clear-cut situations that can result only in "succeed-fail" or "correct-incorrect" solutions, rather they face unclear situations with unclear and tentative solutions. Sometimes, even the setting of a situation or instructions can require a certain level of interpretation. Since language usage represents a form of communication that can be used in almost every situation, authenticity or reality-close situations can be created more easily than in classes of chemistry or history, for example.

To sum up, the Creative Approach to Language Teaching, which is based on the idea that any student can be creative when they are engaged in creative situations, shows students the complexity of a language by exposing them to close-to-real-life situations in a safe, flexible and dynamic environment by means of a class of learners constituted as a community of practice. …

Student-generated sources

Teachers often believe it is their duty to choose texts and activities for students and are sometimes surprised when students are not satisfied with their choice. In order to minimise the danger of spending too much time on preparing materials our students do not find engaging, we can use strategies of the negotiated syllabus method and ask them to find useful materials and decide which activities they would like to try on their own. This activity can improve students' autonomy and cater for individual learning styles.

We can show the principles through the example of reading skills. We can ask students to:

- Explore their fields of interest and find texts they consider both interesting and of high quality.

- Send samples of such texts to the course online space.

- Read the text samples before the following session.

At this point, we can choose to take control and decide what activities we are going to do, based on the collected texts. In other words, we have saved our time when looking for texts that could be interesting for the group, and our task then is to find the appropriate sections of the collected samples that can suit our teaching purposes best. Alternatively, we can ask students to identify problematic issues or

issues 'of interest' and follow their particular needs. In order to help them identify issues, we may proceed in different ways and ask them to:

- Compare their own texts with those of their classmates and see what differences or similarities they find.

- Choose one text and paraphrase it in their own words.

- Identify the main ideas in each text.

- Identify the author's position.

- Discuss their Internet search strategies.

- Vote for the most interesting text, the least understandable text, a text with the highest level of past tense use, with widest range of vocabulary, or any other feature the class would like to focus on.

This style of work offers several advantages for both teachers and students. Teachers do not have to look for the 'best' material that would suit a particular group. Instead they obtain a database of texts from their students. Teachers can also move away from their traditional positions of providers of 'one ultimate truth' and can become facilitators of complex processes that form part of language learning. Students, on the other hand, are more actively engaged in the search for the texts; they have to create their own criteria for quality, and they practise reading and critical thinking individually and intensively outside of the class. Each student also works in their own area of interest, so they can develop both their language and non-language related skills at the same time. What is more, students are engaged in situations with unclear solutions: they do not know whether they can find a suitable text; they have to form their opinions, make decisions, present their results to classmates and be ready to respond to their reactions.'

ЛУЧШИЕ ИНТЕЛЛЕКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

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