
STIMULATING THE STUDENTS' CREATIVITY IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS

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Abstract:

Throughout one's life time each individual is required to find solutions to different problems by carrying out new operations, by combining the data and knowledge available, or by joining together disparate pieces of information.

The students' creative potential must be formed through teaching techniques that stimulate their resourcefulness: the essay, the scientific paper, the research project and the portfolio, which can be used as useful complementary evaluation methods as well.

Keywords: *learning, analysis, synthesis, stimulating, potential*

Genuine creativity goes beyond the restraints of simply associating or putting together different items of knowledge and it involves finding out altogether new and more effective solutions to problems, which have not been employed before. The concept of creativity has been introduced in the vocabulary of psychology to denote something that goes beyond the limits imposed by the term 'talent'. What talent and creativity have in common is originality. Talent corresponds to a superior level of creativity. All individuals have, to a certain degree, creativity, but only those being endowed with superior creativity are talented. If talent is determined by one's hereditary dispositions, creativity is to a large extent the result of environmental and educational influences.

Creative personalities are characterized by adaptability, originality and fluidity in producing ideas. Flexibility in thinking refers to the capacity to easily change the point of view, to the way a situation is approached, the trajectory achieved by thinking when a procedure is not right and new requirements have to be faced. Originality is an expression of novelty, of innovation, manifesting itself in an individual's ability to provide rarely used, but at the same time useful ideas. Fluidity lies in an individual's ability to formulate as many answers to a problem as possible, even if not all of them

prove to be useful in solving a problem. Creativity is a key concept in psychology, which *“integrates in itself the individual’s whole personality and psychic activity and, in its turn, is subsumed and organically integrated into the personality structures, thus becoming one of the most complex dimensions of personality”*. [M. Zlate]

Thus, creativity is the result of the optimal functioning of the whole personality, namely a synthesis of factors pertaining to the intellect (intelligence, thinking, imagination, memory), of factors pertaining to personality (motivation, creative aspirations, desire to create something new, will, perseverance, consistency) and to society (socio-cultural psycho-social and socio-educational). So we can uphold that one’s creative potential does not necessarily lead to creativity. An individual’s creative potential must be formed through teaching techniques that stimulate his resourcefulness. The use of the essay, the scientific paper, the research project, as well as the portfolio leads to the development of an individual’s creativity. All of these teaching methods can be successfully employed as complementary assessment methods, thus meeting one of the requirements of updating education, that of integrating the learning process into the evaluation one. They represent an alternative to the traditional methods, especially, to the excessive cognitivism to be found in the conventional evaluation. They allow the assessment of the degree in which certain objectives have been fulfilled (esp. in the field of emotions) aiming at aptitudes, attitudes, behaviours, which are more difficult to assess through the classical means of evaluation.

1. The Essay

The term denotes commentary, reflexions, the expression of own attitudes with regard to a topic. Some of the general characteristics that are valid, irrespective of the domain to which they are applied, are: the open-endedness of the point of view expressed, which is not constrained by fixed rules, its meaningfulness and coherence.

As to the essay as it is used in school to stimulate the students’ creativity, and also as a means of assessing certain capabilities, it can be employed by the social sciences and the humanities, where it can be successfully applied to evaluate:

- the students’ ability to express original points of view, and to interpret information;
- the students’ capacity to use a personal way of expressing his point of view and to properly use the language;
- the students’ capacity to recognize and structure information creatively, but systematically organized at the same time.

Scoring the essays is not easy due to the difficulty of establishing general and accurate criteria for appreciating them adequately. However, they represent an important means of making up for the pitfalls of other means of evaluation, as they point not only to the students’ capacity of using already known information, but also to the degree of development of the process of analysis and synthesis.

In grading the essay, the following criteria are to be taken into account in the field of humanities:

- *the content of the essay*: how well the approached topic is known, clarity in reasoning, accuracy in providing arguments, originality in dealing with the topic;
- *the structure of the essay*: the lay out of the three parts (introduction, body, conclusion) and their proportion, the way ideas are ordered, the structuring of the paragraphs according to the main ideas and details;
- *the style*: conciseness and clarity in using the language, proper use of concepts specific to the subject matter and of set phrases and idioms;
- *correctness in writing*: spelling and punctuation rules must be obeyed.

Advantages of using the essay in evaluation:

- it allows the teacher to obtain a synthetic image of the students' intellectual abilities;
- it makes possible the assessment of the students' critical thinking, argumentative reasoning and originality, creativity in thinking;
- it allows individuation in evaluation by pointing out to the way in which each individual approaches a topic.

Disadvantages of using the essay in evaluation:

- the difficulty in establishing precise criteria of evaluation that would ensure objectivity;
- scoring and marking the essays is time-consuming and it requires experience and professionalism on the part of the teacher, who must provide some observations along with the score granted for each essay.

2. The scientific paper

Scientific papers represent original syntheses of themes imposed by the teacher or chosen by the student, based on processing the information found in the bibliography consulted. They must include: personal points of view, original restructurings and reformulations of knowledge and information and own suggestions. Due to the fact that writing a scientific paper needs making use of the capacity to interpret and synthesize, it is regarded as a higher form of intellectual independent work, one of the most active and creative forms used by the students in the process of learning.

Stages in writing a scientific paper:

- drawing up a plan of the paper;
- study of the bibliography, selection and systematization of information;
- giving ample, well documented answers to the problems raised by the topic, insisting on personal, original ideas and appreciation of the ideas found in the bibliography consulted;
- writing the paper.

In the first stage, the students must draw up a plan of the paper, which will include all the points to be covered in dealing with the topic. In the second stage, the students must search for and identify the bibliographic material, primary and secondary sources. If they are not used to doing it, they must be supplied with suggestions. In selecting the information which will be included in the paper, it is advisable for the students to make notes on the ideas, to summarize points of view, to write down quotations. In the third stage, the problems raised by the topic must be amply developed, insisting on personal appreciation of ideas expressed by others and on original suggestions.

The following criteria are to be taken into account in evaluating a scientific paper:

- *the integral treatment of the topic, with details of essential aspects;*
- *the way the information has been systematized;*
- *original ideas and convincing arguments;*
- *proper use of concepts specific to the subject matter;*
- *how well the structure of the paper has been followed: title, author, short plan of the main ideas, introduction – with the presentation of what has been achieved in the field so far, the development of own ideas, solutions, conclusions, and the bibliographic material;*
- *if the quotations have been inserted between quotation marks, indicating the source in brackets or as footnotes;*
- *correctness in spelling and punctuation.*

3. The research project

This is an active-participative method that involves transfer of knowledge skills and interdisciplinary approach [Cosmovici A., Iacob L.]. As Ioan Cerghit points out, the research project has become a research theme focused on a clearly-defined goal; fulfilling it implies not only scientific research, but also practical approach [Oțet F. (coord.)]. Therefore, this method is extremely useful when the theoretical aspect of learning is aimed at being correlated with the practical aspect.

The research project is a complex activity which starts in class by understanding and defining the task to be carried out and continues at home for days or weeks on end, being also completed in class through a debate and presentation of the obtained results, sometimes of the accomplished products. The choice of the theme of the project to be carried out is made either by the teacher or by the students. The teacher plays the role of adviser, permanent coordinator and also of evaluator when the project has been completed.

In assessing the research project, there are two kinds of criteria: the first is focused on the quality of the project, the second on the quality of the work carried out by the student.

The criteria that focus on the quality of the project are:

- *how valid the project is*: the extent to which it corresponds to the approached theme;
- *how complete it is*: whether it has been dealt with thoroughly by means of interdisciplinary approaches;
- *how it has been structured*: accuracy of scientific concepts, meaningfulness and coherence in presenting ideas and arguments;
- *how well the bibliographic material has been processed and analysed*;
- *how creative it is*.

The criteria that focus on the quality of the work carried out by the students are:

- the degree in which the contents of the project correspond to the established theme;
- how well it has been structured by joining together its main parts;
- the relevance of the bibliographical material identified by the student to the chosen topic;
- the way it is presented, in an analytical, empirical or evaluative manner;
- its originality;
- the degree in which the obtained results can be put into practice.

4. The portfolio

This term used as a complementary method of evaluation is relatively new in pedagogy, denoting the whole set of the students' papers, built up with a view to identifying the efforts put in by the students and the progress they made throughout a semester or a year, from a cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural point of view in the study of a certain subject matter.

The constituent parts of a portfolio bear the print of the particularities of the subject matter for which they were produced and are generally established by the teacher, but the students are allowed to contribute with whatever they consider relevant for their activity. Enjoying this freedom of choice, the portfolio stimulates the students' creative potential and involves them actively in the process of learning.

The constituent parts of the portfolio are assessed separately on completion thus meeting the requirements of continuous evaluation and eliminating the stress generated by the use of traditional evaluation methods. Assessment becomes motivating and stimulating, not stressful and painful. However, due to the fact that it is a synthesis of a student's achievement over a longer period of time (semester or year), the portfolio is an integral part of summative assessment as it mirrors the overall progress made by the student, not his accidental achievements.

By making use of these evaluation methods, the interactive dimension of the teaching-acquisition process is attained and the students' creativity is stimulated. Being allowed to put into practice their practical abilities, the students have the opportunity of displaying not only what they know, but also what they can do with this knowledge in various contexts. From the teacher's point of view, he will be able to holistically assess the students' progress, permanently receiving updated information on their skills. This

information will determine an increase in the objectivity of the judgements made by the teacher on the students' achievements.

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