

Creative curriculum and pedagogies for creative learning in languages education

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The New Core Curriculum for Norway (2017) is underpinned by a set of six aspirational and interrelated values, which together provide a clear and coherent vision for education. One of these values is *The joy of creating, engagement and the urge to explore* (Section 1.4). Inspired by this, my article will first briefly consider the concept of creativity in education, before moving on to an exploration of creative pedagogies. I will argue that spaces for creativity are fostered by creating spaces for learner autonomy and that these can enhance motivation and engagement and develop through collaborative learning. The article will then move on to examples of creative learning through the use of technology and will finally connect with another of the six values, *Identity and cultural diversity* (1.3).

What do we mean by 'creativity' in education?

The idea that 'creativity' implies an exclusive attribute of highly gifted individuals, 'creative geniuses' who produce inspirational artistic work, has its roots in the Renaissance (Banaji, Burn & Buckingham, 2010: 15). It has, however, given way to a more democratic understanding of creativity, which is not limited to the arts, but rather an attribute that can be fostered and that is essential for 21st century learners (e.g. NEA 2015). In classrooms, teachers have taken on board the need to enable learners to become increasingly creative. In *The Rhetorics of Creativity* (Banaji, Burn & Buckingham, 2010), the authors describe the creative classroom as promoting "forms of learning that are generally held to improve the experience of children in education -

holistic learning, active learning, expanded notions of intelligence, attention to social and cultural contexts, social learning and ethical human development" (ibid.: 66). In order to achieve this, they argue that making connections across subject boundaries can act as a stimulus for all forms of creativity.

Considered in this way, creativity is not simply an add-on to our regular classroom activities, but an intrinsic part of our pedagogical approaches that are concerned with learner-centredness, collaborative learning, and inclusion of diverse students, and human development.

2 Creative pedagogies

In Norway's New Core Curriculum, the "joy of creativity" sits alongside "engagement"

and “the urge to explore”. For me these have strong connections to the idea of learner autonomy, which entails supporting learners to take increasing responsibility for or control over aspects of their learning, to find out, to engage (e.g. Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira 2017). In the language of the Core Curriculum, I see many allusions to learner autonomy, such as “seeing opportunities and transforming ideas into practical actions”, “ability to [...] explore and experiment” and “[...] to express themselves in different ways, and to solve problems and ask new questions”. In order for our learners to be creative, then, we need to create spaces for them to be autonomous, scaffolding their learning to enable them to be able to develop their own creative ideas. What kinds of pedagogical activities lend themselves to this?

Authentic creative tasks

One approach to creativity is to develop opportunities for learners to undertake authentic tasks, which have an intended audience and a genuine purpose – one to which the learners can relate. As can be seen in the following quote by Jimmy, a 14 year-old in his third year of learning German in a Northern English city, providing a real context for learners stimulates their motivation to be as creative as possible.

Once I felt I was really using it [German] when, we were doing this thing for the University and we had to do either a cartoon strip, or a letter. We had this Star Trek type cartoon strip that got put in the University, so I felt that I was really using it. It had to be good so people could

understand it. So that was the first time I ever thought I was really using it - not just doing something for the sake of it.

As can be seen, the creative production of a cartoon strip coupled with an authentic audience was a great motivator for Jimmy and he even went along to the university (where I had organized a multilingual festival) with his parents to have a look at it.

Thinking about authentic tasks reminded me of a Learning How to Learn workshop I did for secondary school teachers in Malaysia, where I suggested that they could ask their classes to design learning resources, such as worksheets, for other classes. When I returned several months later for a follow-up workshop, the teachers had been impressed by the quality and creativity of their students' work, even saying that the resources had provided them with a bank of creative materials that would save them considerable time in the future.

Collaborative learning

My work on learner autonomy demonstrates that it does not necessarily imply working individually, but is rather a psychological capacity and willingness to take charge of learning, employing self-management skills (planning, making choices, evaluating etc) as well as other cognitive and metacognitive strategies and processes. Such a capacity is also necessary when working on a project as part of a group, as this involves activities such as discussing, negotiating and planning in order to achieve the goal of the collaborative activity.

For example, in her work in London with two Turkish supplementary schools (voluntary schools organized by community groups), Vally Lytra (2011) observed how children creatively and collaboratively transformed an authentic Turkish children's song, incorporating into their performances a range of techniques, such as changing the rhythm, clapping, humming, and whistling. Also in London, Anderson and Chung (2014) found that creativity in various forms can help to meet not only the learning but also the emotional needs of children. In their ethnographic study of heritage language learning in four schools, activities, including dance, song, drama and puppetry as well as the creation of artworks, films and scrapbooks, were developed by teachers and young learners together, building on practices already found in their Arabic, Chinese, Punjabi and Tamil classes. The benefits for the children of such activities were found to include deep intercultural understanding (including symbolic, spiritual and moral dimensions), multiliteracy development, cognitive challenge, teamwork and collaboration, and enhanced motivation and capacity for learner autonomy. Significantly, children were offered a space in which they were “given the opportunity to interact with these works in their own terms, to reinvent and reinterpret them for themselves” (Anderson & Chung 2014: 289).

Creativity and Technology

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was thought that creativity was under threat as classrooms moved online. In fact, the constraints also stimulated new ideas



Novice range	Students rework a familiar story, such as Goldilocks and the Three Bears so that it takes place in a target language culture and incorporates elements of the target culture. Students then retell the story with visuals using narrated presentation or other software. Students share and discuss stories with e-pals.
Intermediate range	Student Created Museum: After deciding upon a topic of significant cultural and/or historical interest, students propose research questions, divide themselves into teams to conduct research, and locate representations of artifacts. Then they compile the research and artifacts into a series of museum exhibits for which they serve as the docents. Members of the target language community serve as consultants on the project during its development. The student docents prepare a virtual tour of the museum with their peers both within the school community and in the target language country.

on creative approaches to learning through the use of technology. Being particularly interested in the informal learning that takes place in supplementary schools, last year I conducted a search on Twitter and Facebook and identified many creative online activities that cross disciplines to facilitate engagement with language and culture (Lamb 2020). Traditional songs and music featured heavily, as did food. For example, in one activity children learned how fruit and vegetables grow, drawing

details of the process and even growing some at home, as a way of also engaging them physically and cognitively with the science behind plant growth. Games, such as Language Bingo and Hangman, and online quizzes were also used to facilitate learning. Some activities did not require them to spend much time online; for example, finding old photographs and paintings and re-creating them themselves with their family members, taking photographs, then uploading the old and

new versions together with a written description in their home language, as well as researching and briefly writing about the artists' lives. It should be mentioned that such schools have very few resources and the teachers are often volunteer parents or alumni of the schools, so their commitment to finding ways of maintaining motivational and creative learning is inspirational.



If used effectively, technologies, including digital, multimedia technologies, can therefore lead to enhanced autonomy and creativity. Many examples can be found in the ACTFL 21st Century Skills Map (<https://www.actfl.org/resources/resources-2020>), published in 2011 by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in collaboration with the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21). Here are two examples of activities, which can be found in the section on Creativity and Innovation and which involve technology for students at different levels.

3 Diversity and creativity

In Norway's Core Curriculum (section 1.4: *The joy of creating, engagement and the urge to explore*), a number of phrases identify diverse cultural expressions as a catalyst for creativity and identity development. A connection is thus made with another core value in the curriculum, section 1.2: *Identity and cultural diversity*, which states that "school shall [...] help each pupil to preserve and develop her or his identity in an inclusive and diverse environment". My interpretation of this, based on my research and practice, is that creative development is highly stimulated by the inclusion of the diverse cultural expressions found in our own multicultural and multilingual classrooms. I also argue that this is crucial not only as a way of valorising children's own languages and cultures and enhancing their sense of belonging, but also for creating essential learning opportunities for everyone, regardless of their cultural and linguistic background (e.g. Benson and Lamb 2021).

My research in this area was in fact stimulated by a succession of experiences in multilingual schools in London, initially in the 1980s. In one large 11-18 school in North London where I was Head of the Languages Faculty and where over 40 languages were spoken, we decided to develop ways of bringing this multilingualism into the curriculum, firstly as a way of being more linguistically inclusive, and secondly to nurture motivation for language learning particularly amongst the monolingual English speakers who tended not to be motivated to learn other languages. The first decision was to stop placing children randomly into French or German classes when they arrived in the school, but instead to give them tasters not only of French and German, but also Greek and Turkish (the two languages with the largest number of speakers in the school population). Following this they were allowed to choose which to continue as their first foreign language.

The outcome was surprising for us. Many learners chose to continue with Greek or Turkish; however, these included not just children who spoke those languages at home, but also monolingual English speakers. A short survey of the learners revealed that Greek and Turkish had been chosen for a number of reasons, in particular that they could hear and see those languages every day in the neighbourhood, could practise with their friends, and, amusingly, could understand what their friends were saying about them. Even more remarkable was that when there was later an option to take an additional foreign language

(which only very few learners tended to take up), a significant number of these learners chose French or German. The opportunity to learn a language that they could use immediately had enabled them to understand the purpose of language learning, so were keen to learn more.

The other innovation was to develop language awareness lessons as part of Personal and Social Education, a subject taught by teachers from a range of different disciplines (Lamb 2011). The teachers first had to enhance their own language awareness (see also <https://carap.ecml.at/> for examples of language awareness activities), but they found this fascinating and enjoyed facilitating active learning classes on topics such as the ten most widely spoken languages in London (and in the world), language families, sounds, scripts, and comparing languages and grammar systems, by means of creative activities and resources, including recordings, that we developed with our learners. Learners and teachers enjoyed sharing their insights into their own different languages so much that creative ideas sprang up across the curriculum. For example, the mathematics teachers organized a Multilingual Maths week, with an exhibition on the history of and connections between different numbering systems and even ways of telling the time in different languages, which varies considerably across continents.

Much later I began to develop festivals of languages in universities and even Sheffield city centre. The *Why Languages Matter!* interactive exhibition, which I

organised in Sheffield city centre several times demonstrated how much learning can occur not only for children, but also for parents and the general public, when combining creativity, languages, and cultures with conversations in public spaces.

More recently, the Critical Connections Project (<https://goldsmithsmdst.com/>), led by researchers at Goldsmiths, University of London, has further embraced collaborative and creative learning opportunities to enable young people across the primary and secondary/high school age range to create and share multilingual digital stories. According to the website, it is inspired by the idea that “communication is enhanced when plurilingual and digital resources are drawn upon purposefully and creatively”. The cross-curricular project brings together learners and teachers of foreign languages, heritage languages and the language of schooling in the UK, Algeria, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Palestine, Taiwan and the USA. Together they have produced a rich bank of digital stories in bilingual versions, including a range of genres, such as documentary, science fiction, fantasy and traditional tales. They vary in levels of sophistication, with some consisting of photos and voice over and others using still and moving images, stop animation, green screen etc., involving children with varying levels of language competence. The digital stories are freely accessible on the website and I would recommend beginning with *Abandonnée!*. This inspirational film was made by a class of 11 year olds in a bilingual school in Oxfordshire, England, who worked together

to create a film about war and migration. Using photos, film, music, drawing, painting, green screens and stop motion programming, they explore themes of unfairness and friendship through the story of two girls - one French, one Syrian - who meet on a journey to France.

Conclusions

The final example has drawn together the themes of this article: creativity, authenticity, autonomy, collaboration, technology and diversity. Our own learners are a valuable source of creativity, so we need to tap into that by partnering with them, by trusting them, listening to them, and learning from them. To quote the author, Arthur Koestler:

Creative activity could be described as a type of learning process where teacher and pupil are located in the same individual.

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