THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERACTIVE STRATEGIES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract

The developed countries in recent decades have shifted from the traditional approaches to learning and teaching by a meticulous educational system. A great number of researches have shown that traditional approaches to learning are no more working for the current time. The goal of this paper does not suggest a specific method, for using some strategies in teaching and learning in schools but emphasizes the benefits of interaction and interactive teaching and learning strategies in meeting the educational needs and gaining better educational objectives in schools. Teaching creatively and using interactive strategies does not mean short-changing the teaching of the essential knowledge, skills and understanding of the subject; rather it involves teaching skills and developing knowledge in creative contexts that explicitly invite learners to engage imaginatively and which stretch their generative and evaluative capacities.

Creative teachers work to extend children’s abilities as readers, writers, speakers and listeners and help them to express themselves effectively, to create as well as critically evaluate their own work. The paper proposed recognizes the importance of creativity and highlights the role of teachers in fostering student’s curiosity, capacity to make connections, take risks and innovate through the use of modern interactive strategies. Creativity emerges as students become absorbed in, actively exploring ideas, initiating their own learning, and making choices and decisions about how to express themselves, using different media and language modes. In responding to what they read, view, hear and experience, students make use of their skills and transform their knowledge and understanding.

Keywords: innovation, interactive teaching, creativity

The art and craft of teaching English

The developed countries in recent decades have shifted from the traditional approaches to learning and teaching by a meticulous educational system, the extent numbers of researches conducted have shown that traditional approaches to learning are no more working for the current time. The goal of this paper does not suggest a specific method, for using some strategies in teaching and learning in schools but emphasizes the benefits of interaction and interactive teaching and learning strategies in meeting the educational needs and gaining better educational objectives in schools. We live in a world where change is the key. Humankind’s experience proved that change is better in most cases. There is no wonder that the current methodology has undergone major developments. We now witness a battle between old and new, between tradition and innovation. Teachers draw itineraries of the best way to follow, analyzing and keeping what is labelled as ‘good’ and getting rid of the old-fashioned, useless methods.

There are many factors involved in education. These factors may vary, based on time, place and context. Teachers are also facing many challenges. In the 21st century Gass (2003) asserts that education should have the following features:

- Education in schools should focus on critical thinking, creative thinking, active in-group learning, and teacher learner interaction.
- Education in schools should not be teacher-centered, learner-centered, knowledge-centered, or society-centered. Rather, it must include all these factors and should look at the issue from a holistic point of view.

Teachers might think that interactive strategies are a small part of the classroom teaching along with the other activities, and interactive teaching requires some extra time which is a wrong conception.

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Interactive teaching is not limiting the control of the teachers and gives more power to students.

The student in the classroom lacks many of the incentives which might sustain his motivation-stimuli. Developing an attitude of enthusiasm, interest, confidence and mutual support, which the students need to study the language, is not an easy task. It is both time and energy consuming, involving failures and successes. The teacher must be willing for learning to become a creative. He has to encourage the students to think for themselves and make their own ideas essential to the lesson. There is also a clear need for language teaching materials to relate to the learner’s own interests and needs, to involve him. Materials which are empty of such involvement should be avoided.

Teachers must be skilled at listening to their students as well as explaining things clearly. Teachers need clarity of thought to present the material. They must be able to break down complex ideas into simpler parts and smaller steps to teach their students. They must be able to adapt their methods of communication to all students regardless of ability or learning styles. Teaching is an art form. It demands not only knowledge and understanding of the core areas of learning, but also the ability to teach these creatively and effectively and foster learner creativity in the process. Teaching and learning is, at its richest, an energizing, purposeful and imaginatively vital experience for all involved, developing students’ competence, confidence and creativity as well as building positive attitudes to learning.

Part of the teacher’s art is to create, or stimulate student creation in the types of situations in which creativity natural blossoms and in which students can use for actual communication what they have been learning in a more formal fashion. In this way, they are already engaging in the central activity for which language is used in human relations. Why is interaction so important in learning situations? As teachers, we frequently overlook how much students learn from their peers. Students can use all they possess of the language – all they have learned or casually absorbed in real life exchanges where expressing their real meaning is important to them. They thus, have experience in creating messages from what they hear, since comprehension is a process of creation, and in creating discourse that conveys their intentions. Even at an elementary stage they learn, in this way, to exploit the elasticity of language, to make the little they know go a long way. The brain is dynamic, constantly interrelating what we have learned with what we are learning, and the give-and-take of message exchanges enables students to retrieve and interrelate a great deal of what they have encountered. How creativity is achieved in formal situations is a matter of technique or of classroom approach, in less formal situations it involves imaginative planning with student input. In either case, the teacher has a number of options drawn from the experiences of predecessors and contemporaries. Developing creativity is not an easy option and poses future challenges. It has been compared to a muscle that needs the constant constraining discipline of exercise to strengthen individuals’ innovative thinking and problem-solving. How can teachers select judiciously from this great variety of proposed approaches and techniques? What kinds of guidelines can they follow? First, in all teaching, comes the student. The teacher needs to consider the age of the students, their scholastic background, their culturally absorbed ways of learning, and their objectives in studying the language (to communicate orally, for instance; to read specialized texts, to learn about other peoples and cultures, or to prepare for study abroad) without ignoring the political and social pressures, including career opportunities that are largely determining their motivation. Only after such matters have been taking into account and decisions made about the kind of course that will meet the students’ needs in their particular situation will teachers begin to reflect on appropriate ways of selecting and presenting material, so that the objectives of the students may be achieved. At this point, approach, design, and procedure become of interest.

Behaviourism is a learning theory which still influences the acquisition and learning. It emphasizes the learning of the four basic language skills by breaking them into sub-skills or small units. Behaviourist teaching methods tend to rely on so-called “skill and drill” exercises to provide the consistent repetition and imitation necessary for effective reinforcement of response patterns. The great advantage of this technique is the accuracy and confidence the students develop. In terms of fixing structures in memory, drilling worked great in the very short term. “Skill and drill” is about habit formation, knowledge activation by means of application. The great advantage of this method is that students that learn slower can work at their pace. In order to drill efficiently, the practice should not be

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long, monotonous, and meaningless or reduced to rote memorization. Nowadays, rote memorization is maligned and considered useless with so much technology around us. The modern educator is expected to create a positive motivating environment, where students and teacher work together to promote safety, security, success, challenge and understanding. Motivation is the most important factor for quality education. Motivation is at the heart of all learning, it involves goal-directed activity being instigated and sustained. Every teacher wants their students to be motivated, and many mistakenly believe that the content they are teaching will provide motivation the students without any amount of stimulation. While some students are naturally driven learners, others require inspiration from their teachers and peers, students who are internally driven to learn, more often will work to improve their skills. Some students will be self-determined, and possess an internal motivation to act and control their environment, many students with this kind of internal motivation are consciously aware of their academic progress. There are many ways to encourage motivation within the classroom, along with giving rewards to those who show motivation and encourage others. Some ways to encourage students include visual methods such as creating models and presentations, increasing the attention span of students. Other methods to increase motivation include, praising students in big and small ways, spreading enthusiasm, creating real-world tasks to raise interest in the subject and involving the students in classroom activities. An open and positive atmosphere is one that all educators should desire to create; this means a democratic and communicative approach to learning. A teacher should call upon students in groups as well as individually and create lesson plans that differ from one another. One can also call upon methods such as incentive theory, in which a reward is presented for a positive action.

Another useful method of motivating and empowering students is to hand over a certain extent of responsibility, many primary schools have systems that permit older students to pass knowledge onto new and younger students. This system is useful for two factors; the younger student gains knowledge from a peer, rather than a teacher, this makes the student feel comfortable, simultaneously the older student is entrusted with a duty of care and responsibility toward the younger student, this can greatly increase motivation and pride in one's own skills.

It is critical to view your students as customers receiving a service, and a certain level of service is expected. As with any service provided, it is important to keep one’s customers interested and returning, the social construct of a classroom can be easily related to this. Another thing to emerge from these is the need for teachers to develop a creative attitude of mind which permeates everything they do, not regarding creativity as something reserved for special occasions. This also requires from teachers an unusual degree of awareness of what is happening both on and under the surface, and an ability to respond instantly to the unpredictability as the action unfolds. A playful attitude and atmosphere seem to be a key ingredient for creativity. The notion of varied outputs reminds us that creativity encourages and facilitates divergent and creative thinking, and frees us of the idea that questions always have a single, right answer.

Creative learning

Psychologists have studied human creativity since the beginning of the twentieth century and defined it as the capacity to produce original, functional and adaptive ideas. Adaptive creativity is linked to problem-solving abilities, which, are characterized by usefulness, while innovative creativity involves creating something new. Creativity is an extremely complex phenomenon, a multi-dimensional phenomenon as it comprises motivation, imagination, critical thinking, knowledge, curiosity, confidence, intelligence and many other personality traits. Creativity should be considered a critical tool for success in a constantly changing society which has to come out with a continuous flow of original ideas. Creativity can be defined on a variety of levels: cognitively, intellectually, socially, economically, spiritually, and from the perspective of different disciplines such as arts, sciences, and humanities. All students can develop their creative capacities if they have access to rich learning opportunities in environments that nurture and support their creative development. Creativity involves two processes: thinking, then producing. Innovation is the production or implementation of an idea. If you have ideas, but don’t act on them, you are imaginative but not creative. Some ways for a teacher to foster creativity

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in students are:
• provide resources for a creative expression (constructive learning environment in the classroom, varied teaching materials);
• give students freedom to make connections and explore their ideas;
• encourage students to read extensively;
• give students opportunities to express divergent thoughts;
• let students take the lead and also provide prompts and support when needed;
• be a part of the learning process while modelling creative thinking and behaviour.

Creative Learning is about meaning making as long as teaching and learning processes has at center the student, not the teacher. Creative learning involves innovation, control, relevance and ownership, which are too, characteristics of creative teaching. Creative learning involves investigating, discovering, inventing and cooperating. At least one of these will be present in creative learning experiences; ideally, it will be all four. 7 They are important for an effective teaching – learning process. Every teacher should know the low and high limits of a student ability to learn, to pay attention, to be motivated and creative. Education needs to back away from teaching to standardized testing and re-emerge as the world leader in teaching our students to create, to imagine and to invent.

All the techniques, strategies and the teaching aids used by the teacher have the advantage of helping students to understand and remember concepts more easily. They also make the class more dynamic and fun and they motivate students to achieve the goals of the lessons. teachers should use the teaching aids, he/she chooses, effectively to make the process of teaching and learning easy and enjoyable. The teacher’s instructive-educative activity takes place according to certain aims, being put into practice through a system of approaches an techniques, while its results are verified and evaluated through specified strategies. The school Curriculum succeeds in integrating all these elements, having as central the use of the approaches and techniques for achieving the educational objectives. Research is broadly described as a systematic inquiry designed to collect, analyze, interpret and use data. Pedagogical research is an observation and investigation-based activity by means of which we know, improve and innovate the educational phenomenon. Educational practice is, for the researcher, a source of knowledge, a means of experimentation, verification of assumptions and generalization of positive experience. As a teacher, I have asked myself many times, how I can motivate children to become interested in studying the English language so that their creativity, attention, critical thinking could be stimulated through a series of modern approaches. Although the list of the approaches and techniques available in teaching English is long, the choice of the most appropriate one depends on the teacher’s skill to understand the students ‘need, interests and age characteristics. Therefore, teachers should be engaged in perfecting their knowledge about the English language as well as pedagogical competence.

Teaching English to high school students can be seen as a difficult task for both students and teacher if it is not relaxing and enjoyable. The teacher has the important role of knowing what students want and like in order to adapt English classes to their level of knowledge and background. The important role that English plays in human society has determined teachers to devise new ways of teaching it, so that their results match the students’ needs. The continuous change of our society requires active, intelligent, imaginative, innovative and enthusiastic people, so we should train our students to meet these demands. The teacher’s instructive-educative activity is a complex one and it is a set of interdependent actions, all subordinated to reach certain aims. Every teacher starts teaching with an initial theory of language teaching and learning, based on personal experiences as a language learner, reading or training. The teacher applies this theory in classroom practice, observes and reflects on the results, and adapts the theory according to his/her students’ needs. The classroom becomes a kind of laboratory where the teacher can relate teaching theory to teaching practice in order to reach his educational objectives. Although there is a wide range of approaches and techniques available in teaching English, the choice of the most appropriate one is teacher’s responsibility and skill to understand the students’ needs, interests, linguistic proficiency and age. Learning strategies instruction shows students their success or lack of it in the language classroom and they should be always trained to use strategies more effectively; when they do so, they become more self - confident and prepared to

7 Hodder, Education (2014), Promote creativity and creative learning in young children: Unit CYPOP 7
https://www.hoddereducation.co.uk/getmedia/17883c9c-3cf8-4c1a-9a58-8de37f5ed2a1/CHAPTER-22.aspx(19.04.2020)
learn independently. They begin to take more responsibility for their own learning, and their motivation increases because they have increased confidence in their learning ability and specific techniques for successful language learning.

**Interactive strategies for teaching and learning**

As a teacher, I have always tried to motivate students to become more interested in studying English, to stimulate their creativity, attention, critical and independent thinking through a series of modern approaches. Therefore, I have continuously trained myself, improved my knowledge, made decisions, experimented and researched. By research, I mean, a systematic inquiry designed to collect, analyze, interpret and use data. I really think that teachers should always be actively engaged in improving their knowledge about the English language as well as their pedagogical competence. During all these years of teaching I have found out that language learning is a process of discovery, students develop their ability to use the language for specific communication purposes and teacher models language use and encourage students’ development of language skills. I have also noticed that students seem to be more attracted to what is *new and innovative* and react better to *modern techniques*.

The most important thing in trying to raise students’ self-awareness is stirring their imagination about a given topic, clearing perception of their personality, motivating them and allowing them to feel free when expressing their views. No answer is a bad answer; every answer represents an important step in building awareness. Students should be determined to understand other people as they perceive them, or as they themselves are perceived by others, strengthening their attitude and responses towards life, in general. If they developed self-awareness, they would be able to make changes in the thoughts and interpretations, changing them if they felt the need. It became the first step in creating what they wanted, focusing their attention, reactions, personality and behaviour towards self-control and helping them become better. The purpose of using these *interactive techniques* is to create a student-centred environment where the learners have the opportunity to develop a clear expressive meaningful communication and also explore and make learning interesting. These activities have the great advantage of building a positive and friendly atmosphere in the classroom where students feel encouraged to talk, express ideas, opinions, share personal experiences and feelings. Even if, at the beginning, some students were still reluctant in voicing their ideas the enthusiasm of their classmates and the fact that we learned new things in a less formal atmosphere made them get involved in the activities. Furthermore, by developing interactive skills absolutely necessary for life these activities make students more active while learning which becomes more meaningful and fun for them.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate *the efficiency of interactive activities* and the use of modern techniques and strategies that could motivate and respond to students’ needs, interests and difficulties in learning English. I started from the assumption that a traditional teaching is no longer appropriate to meet the demands of the modern society which requires people to interact more, solve problems, be creative and demonstrate critical thinking. Teachers must identify and control students’ personality characteristics (self-confidence, anxiety, different positive or negative attitudes) in order to create a perfect educational environment proper for significant learning achievements.

Modern techniques and strategies provide opportunities for students to acquire information in an active learning process. The role of the teacher is not reduced because he/she is the engine which generates all this entire teaching-learning process; the teacher is at the same time the informant, diagnose, motivator, organizer and communicator of knowledge. Although traditional lessons are easier, comfortable and less noisy for the teacher, they do not bring as much satisfaction as the modern ones neither to students or teachers. Regarding the use of technology in class, it is absolutely necessary to understand our students’ pleasure of having modern devices around them. Modern technology provides students essential knowledge and skills which they need in life and if they are combined with learning a foreign language, the result will be even better for their future.

While using modern approaches and techniques in teaching and learning English language, I noticed the following aspects:

- Students learned new material/information better and easier without being afraid of making mistakes or failing.
- Students became more independent in the process of understanding and decoding the topic and developed better learning behaviours.
• Students developed their critical thinking skills, being able to think clearly and rationally and understanding the logical connection between ideas.
• Students became aware of the fact that learning can be fun if it is in a relaxing and friendly environment.
• The activities integrated in the English classes promoted interaction, lively communication, self-confidence and high self-esteem.

On a broader scale, we need to:
• engage teenagers by creating language awareness activities which foster an understanding of, and an interest in, how languages function.
• encourage students to become precise critical thinkers and to link their language study to other areas of their education.
• promote group work and collaborative learning through class projects.

Conclusions

Teaching creatively and using interactive strategies does not mean short-changing the teaching of the essential knowledge, skills and understanding of the subject; rather it involves teaching skills and developing knowledge in creative contexts that explicitly invite learners to engage imaginatively and which stretch their generative and evaluative capacities. Creative teachers work to extend children’s abilities as readers, writers, speakers and listeners and help them to express themselves effectively, to create as well as critically evaluate their own work.

The present paper recognizes the importance of creativity and highlights the role of teachers in fostering student’s curiosity, capacity to make connections, take risks and innovate through the use of modern interactive strategies. Creativity emerges as students become absorbed in actively exploring ideas, initiating their own learning and making choices and decisions about how to express themselves using different media and language modes. In responding to what they read, view, hear and experience, students make use of their skills and transform their knowledge and understanding in the process.

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