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In Search Of Creative EFL Teachers: A Perspective from Best Classroom Practices

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is to create environment for students to learn. However, there are classrooms in which the students only sit and listen to the teacher. They require to memorize words and grammar rules and the learners become reluctant and not motivated to learn. Therefore, creative teachers with certain qualities are needed to cope with this problem. This paper discusses a few important aspects of creative EFL teaching, delivers examples of classroom practices, and shares personal views related with the topic, notably the idea of creativity in ELT, in light of the authors's own teaching experience, research career and teacher training, as well as workshop-tours. It gives purposeful teaching techniques, ideas of how to create interesting classroom activities and how to use authentic material and resources, also how to optimize effective teaching aids /media.

Keywords: Creative, teachers, EFL, techniques, best practice

INTRODUCTION

To start with, let us refresh our insights into the nature of teaching. As mentioned by Brown (2006:19), teaching is guiding and facilitating learning, enabling the learners to learn, setting the conditions for learning. With all their efforts and roles – as a classroom manager, source person, counselor, facilitator, orchestrator, researcher, model – teachers should be able to create opportunities for learning to take place. The work of teaching, according to Ball (2009: 497) includes broad cultural competence, relational sensitivity, communication skills and the combination of rigor and imagination fundamental to effective practice. Teachers also have to find ways, whatever it takes, to make learners feel comfort, excited, curious, so that at the end of the day they are able to absorb the material.

Some teachers are totally aware of this position and, therefore, committed to the job. This sort of teachers finds it easy to make the classes vivid and dynamic and the pupils enjoy learning, accordingly. This sort of teachers also is those who are successful in inspiring and making learners excited and highly motivated to

learn more and more, and can't wait the next day to school to see and study with their teachers.

Unfortunately, there are classrooms in which the students only sit and listen to the teacher. They are required to memorize words and grammar rules. As mentioned by Brown (2006: 26) that language "was taught by means of what has been called the Classical Method: Locus on grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary and of various declensions and conjugations, translation of texts, doing written exercises" and so. This kind of teaching before the twentieth century, Brown said, has been practiced in language classroom worldwide, even up to the present time. As the condition of Indonesia, Bjork (2013: 53) emphasizes, "I was surprised by what I saw. Teachers tended to lecture from a stationary position at the front of the room, or to transcribe large sections from textbooks onto the blackboard".

The authors noticed that most of participants in his teacher training and workshops had very limited insights into ELT methodology, classroom activity, media, and resources. For example, a talk about the use of games in English classes often provoked an argument. Some trainees strongly disagreed with the use of games in English classes because it was time-consuming. Later discussion and feedback opened their eyes to the relevance of games in a classroom situation. It seemed that their attitude had been generally rooted in ignorance due to low motivation in nurturing professional development. Their attitude had also rooted in their belief about English learning and teaching. In peer teaching sessions of inservice teacher training, the activities the trainees brought to the class predominantly involved merely listening to the teacher. Most pre-service teacher training students who had had teaching practice at schools voiced issues consistent with this upon returning to campus. The condition like this is also explained by Biork who continued his opinion specifically about teacher training in Indonesia, that "Lacking models of effective practice and challenged by large class sizes, they tended to spend most of their time lecturing, and expected pupils to take responsibilities for mastering the curriculum" (2013: 56).

As we might know already, English serves as a foreign language in Indonesia. As a foreign language, English is neither easy to learn nor to teach. To most Indonesian learners of English, it is a "monster" – a language complicated to learn and too hard to master. Learning English is even a "mission" impossible to some. Mattarima (2011: 290) states that "In Indonesia, most of English learners have bad motivation and have negative effects to the teachers' instructions in teaching because of misguided assumptions on the nature of English. Those assumptions are English is the most difficult language in the world, and the non native speakers speech organs and ears might not match English". In the part of teachers, as frontlines working directly with pupils, they need to be creative in an effort deal with the problems (if not challenges). Creative EFL teaching is generated only by creative EFL teachers.

Creative teachers are in some ways similar. A creative teacher, Fatima says "is the one who encourages reasonable risks and unpredictable situations, while reinforcing creative activities" (2011: 331). Furthermore she states that "a close relationship with the students and a motivating class environment should also be both in harmony with a good scientific background of the teacher and with her/his ability to be challenging at the cognitive level" (2011: 331). Richards (2005)

mentions that creative teachers possess the following qualities: (1) creative teachers are knowledgeable; (2) creativity in teachers requires their possessing confidence; (3) creative teachers are committed to helping their learners succeed; (4) creative teachers are non-conformists; (5) creative teachers are familiar with a variety of strategies and techniques; (6) creative teachers are risk-takers; (7) creative teachers seek to achieve learner-centered lessons; (8) creative teachers are reflective.

How do teachers come to be creative with creativity? Richards (2013: 21) describes creativity as having numbers of different dimensions as the ability to solve problems in original and valuable ways that are relevant to goals, seeing new meanings and relationships in things and making connections, having original and imaginative thoughts and ideas about something, and using the imagination and past experience to create new learning possibilities.

With regard to those qualities mentioned above, here are the authors' brief personal opinions. Creative teachers learn a lot from a variety of sources. With all their knowledge and efforts, they tend to enjoy *trying out* ideas in the class to help their students learn better. They do not feel worried about being different from what other teachers think or do, or – borrowing the term used in a classic work of Postman and Weingartner—"teaching as a subversive activity". They enjoy looking back at their own teaching practice, such as from teaching journals, students' feedback (usually by getting them to scribble on a piece of paper, or questionnaires), video recording, peer-observation and/or action research.

In the classroom setting, what things characterize a creative EFL teaching as opposed to an "ordinary EFL classroom? This paper discussed a few important aspect of creative EFL teaching, delivers examples of classroom practices, and shares personal views related with the topic, notably the idea of creativity in ELT, in light of the authors own teaching experience, research career, and teacher training, as well as workshop-tours. Creativity in ELT can find itself expressed with regards to these aspects of methodology, classroom activities, materials/resources, and aids/media. However, they might partially overlap one another.

METHOD

This work is a result of literature study on English language teaching, supported with professional teaching experience and research career of the authors. Therefore in this paper the authors delivered and analysed his best practices in teaching English. There were some steps the authors had done. The first thing the authors did was compiling and studying the theories of the keywords in this paper namely, creative teachers and creativity, EFL teaching important aspects. In this session, the authors presented the definition of both creative teachers and creative EFL. The authors also connected it with the present real condition of teachers in Indonesia.

At the second step, the authors delivered examples of classroom practices and shared personal views related with the topic, notably the idea of creativity in ELT, in light of the authors' own teaching experience, research career and teacher training, as well as workshop-tours. Finally the authors drawed appropriate conclusions from the information in order to arrive at appropriate solutions.

DISCUSSION

Purposeful teaching techniques

In this paper the term technique is preferred instead of method. Technique has the idea of in-action and is directly associated with actual practice in the classroom.

Wow! My Voice Sounds Professional

An example of purposeful, meaningful technique is the use of dubbing to help students learn English sounds. Teaching pronunciation using drills so far has not been fruitful. As Sheerin mentions, "listening comprehension lessons are all too often a series of listening tests in which tapes are played, comprehension exercises are attempted by the learners, and feedback is given in the form of the 'right' answer." (1987: 126), Therefore, the authors considered using film dubbing, similar in form to karaoke in music, as a way of indirectly getting students to develop phonic skills.

With dubbing the individual was required to memorize and concentrate on the verbal and non-verbal behavior of the film artist whose voice he/she was dubbing. The process required a degree of reflection in that the dabber tried to produce "professional" voice – one sounding like that of the original speaker. The technique was once experimented. Within the dubbing group, during the teaching and learning process student involvement was apparent. They learned in fun, resulting in better pronunciation skill. Unfortunately, the effect was not statistically significant enough (compared to that of the conventional drill). It was a matter of sample size. A larger sample size might solve the problem.

Hurry, Let Me Repeat What You're Saying

On a smaller scale, there is another example that reflects the teacher's creativity in ELT. To raise students' interest in learning pronunciation, the authors has once in a while used a game illustrated as follows:

- 1. First, two groups of five to seven students are asked to stand in line (usually through classroom aisles).
- 2. The two "head" students are asked to listen (using the headset) to the speaker on the recording at the front.
- 3. The two groups compete by trying hard to whisper the word heard by the head student across the members to the tail student.
- 4. Finally, the group winner of this competition is chosen based on the fastest and the most accurate pronunciation

It has always been exciting and challenging. Quite often the authors should wait a minute before proceeding with the next step.

Comprehension is Simply A, B, C, D.

The next example of creativity in ELT is based genuinely on the authors' ideas and experiences as a teacher, and partly on his survey. An example of common poor ELT practice is a reading comprehension class in which the teacher gets the students to produce oral or written answers to a series of 'Wh' questions

that follow a reading passage. It is too demanding, as reading comprehension is receptive, so students should not respond far beyond comprehension. It is enough for them to show a choice among options provided. When the choice is right then it is assumed that the students comprehend the text. In a classroom teaching and learning context, this even could be simplified by modifying the options-based test item in such away that students find it appealing.

Many language learning activities, mainly those related to receptive language skills and knowledge, can be presented using options-based techniques. Generally speaking, with options students have choice. With choice they feel secure. The first type of modified options-based task is the multiple-choice technique. With this technique, the teacher helps students get the right answer (e.g. search for meaning of new words in authentic materials) by providing the students with options that include both key and distracters they are already familiar with. By doing so, the teacher helps the students attend to meaning without telling them directly. This somehow supports inquiry learning.

Other modifications of objective test items for classroom ELT are possible. While, normally, matching test items are presented complete with distracters (B list is longer than A list) in tests, for classroom teaching and learning purpose the matching test item is intentionally presented without distracters(A list is the same in length as B list) to attract students to complete tasks. With this matching technique, the students spontaneously draw lines connecting entries within both lists. Included in this technique are completion exercise in which options are provided in the box, identifying pictures while listening, and sticking labels under pictures. What might be matched might include synonymous words, antonyms, words and definitions, words and pictures, etc.

Interesting classroom activities

Metaphorically speaking, teaching is like to serve meals to kids. If the menu is not appetizing, then they will never eat them up! Creative EFL teachers always try to bring to classrooms exciting activities so that the students enjoy and become engaged in the activities.

Suprasegmental Pronunciation: Watch, and Say as They Say

Suprasegmental, such as stress and connected speech, are worthier of attention mainly because these features contribute heavily to intelligibility in spoken English and convey better impression of the speaker (O'Neal, 2010). Apart from the significance of these features, several problems emerged during the authors' pronunciation teaching: uninteresting lesson, lack of listening-to-model activity prior to production practice, greater portion of teacher's talk, and too much drill.

In an effort to solve the problems, reflective learning activity with video as a reflective tool incorporated into oral communicative language activities was adopted. Reflective learning with video was hoped to enable the students to self-monitor and self-evaluate their own speech performance. They were able to modify their behavior accordingly, either in isolation or with support of teacher and/or peers. Facial expressions and gestures that often accompany accented utterances were of special interest to students. Students' pronunciation class

activity during the lesson covered rehearsing monolog or dialog, video recording, replaying, and revising. In this way, the students could be motivated to learn by internal rewards, such as increased self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment.

Above all, the method could be done autonomously by the students outside the classroom. An outside class pair-work conversation recording made by two very weak students on one occasion, for example, contained mostly accented and connected utterances of English. On another occasion, another couple of students even managed to use intonation, stress, and connected speech almost perfectly through their outside class conversation video clips. With this improved use of intonation, stress, and connected speech, most students' pronunciation of English was to some extent no longer strong in Indonesian or Javanese accent. Their utterances in monotones were ameliorated; meanwhile, melodies of varying kinds became more often heard, with rising and falling intonation. In other words, the students' pronunciation to some degree sounded "more English"/foreign-accented.

Learning How to Write: Learning by Doing

Some writers argue that writing cannot be taught. It can only be learned. Others argue that a good writer is one who is a good reader. In fact, the experience of teaching academic writing is felt to be the most challenging and energy-consuming work by the authors. Initially, the academic writing class had begun with a presentation of patterns and dictions/terms/phrases most commonly used in academic writing. When writing activity began students showed no positive response to it. When given chance to ask questions, they tended to keep quiet. When they were being monitored or their writing product was evaluated, almost nothing or very little was written. They just found it hard to get started, let alone to write properly.

To solve the problem above, an academic writing class that offered relevant activities, minimized teacher's domination, provided students with greater opportunity to write, and encouraged them to get involved in writing activity was required. As UNESCO (2001) writes, "People learn best when they are directly involved in all aspects of their learning". In line with that, Dryden and Vos (1999) makes the point that most complex knowledge can be best absorbed and memorized by learners if they learn with full involvement.

The authors this time tried out a teaching that gives an emphasis on problem-solving and an open climate of discussion. Students are provided with an opportunity of making use of most possible sources in/outside schools. In the context of ELT, this type of teaching is expected to help students inquire about or search for facts about academic writing, including its corresponding linguistic dimensions, and then communicate the results of the inquiry within the classroom. There came an idea to give students a project-based and library work assignment. The students, in pairs, were asked to write an article based on their mini-project and writing task as if they had been an authors and a co-authors. They were invited to make a presentation and receive feedback from peers and teacher.

Through such a teaching and learning process, writing lesson was no longer tiring and time-consuming to either students or teacher, at least in the classroom. One clear, powerful impact of this social inquiry teaching model on the academic writing teaching course was that the students seemed to get involved in the class activity.

Authentic material and resources

And I...will Always Love You....: Learning the Connected Speech

The authors once employed songs to help students learn the English connected speech. Connected speech is an important aspect in the pronunciation of English. Mastering this aspect will not only improve the speaker's fluency and give positive impression of him/her to the listener, but also help comprehend the overall language better.

In relation with the English connected speech, the authors considered that songs could be quite helpful. One argument is that some songs, different from films, are so slow that recognizing how the words flow becomes easier. Beat in songs and music in general makes it possible for speech to be easier to apprehend in spite of the speed of the speech. Initially inspired by this part "And I..." of a song entitled will always Love You, as a teacher the authors selected some song materials for this purpose.

Learning Grammar? Let's Sing a Song

Another example was shown in the following collaborative work. An English teacher of a private vocational school in a district in central Purwokerto came by to consult her students' motivational problems when following English 'structure' lessons. She complained that her students were passive, while structure was predominantly taught in the school subject.

With regard to student poor participation, the authors suggested the use of songs as alternative teaching material to promote the students' participation in the class. The use of authentic material can develop student learning interest and motivation. With adequate learning interest it can be expected that student participation is not just class attendance. The students will have enough energy to avoid giving negative response to classroom activities. Songs have rhythm and authenticity. These features in songs present fun to the listeners. When students feel excited to learn, their learning participation develops.

As authentic material, songs motivate the listeners to repeat the lyrics either wholly or partly. Furthermore, song lyrics contain samples of language in use, including sentence patterns. Saricoban (2000) mentions that the use of songs in language classrooms provides many advantages. They entertain and relax the learners while they are learning or practicing a structure, and they often eliminate the students negative attitude towards learning. Let us consider, for example, the expressions 'I don't wanna see you crying', or 'I'll never let you go'. Within its context such expression can be brought into the classroom when a teacher intends to introduce the sentence patterns that use verbs of senses and special verbs like let, make, etc. Sari (2009) points out the power of songs for teaching the grammar of a language. The collaborative work done by the authors (2014) has indicated a positive effect of the intervention implemented in the lesson. Based on the data analysis, there was a trend of improvement in both student learning participation as well as achievement.

Effective teaching aids/media

Nowadays, with the rapid advancement in technology, teachers are challenged to make use of aids and media for teaching. English teaching and learning has become more practical, exciting, efficient, and effective with technology, as explained by Pun (2014: 30), "with the rapid growth of science and technology, the use of multimedia technology in language teaching has created a favorable context for reforming and exploring English language teaching models in the new age. This trend features the use of audio, visual and animation effects in the English language teaching classrooms". However, It is not a matter of how expensive and sophisticated the media are. Rather, it is a matter of creativity.

Draw What You're Reading, Then Your Picture Speaks

A quite simple use of aids in ELT is as follows. When introducing descriptive texts, once in a while the class was challenged to go through a cooperative learning. Tools/aids, namely several pieces of large drawing papers, color markers, and copies of text had been prepared. The class was split into groups of 3 – 5 students. Each group was given a copy of text, a paper, and markers with different colors. It was timed. They drew a picture after or while reading the text. On completion of the task, the picture was stuck on the wall near their joined seats. Usually, a little noise and laughter broke down at this point. Two or three members of each group with notes should leave to visit "neighbors" for information sharing. Quite often, they were involved in debate and managed to settle it when referring to the text. Reading comprehension and speaking were supposed to develop well and excitingly this way. All domains in individuals were supposed to be activated!

Video: Single Tool Multiple Functions

Rather long ago, video was made use for teaching integrated skills. A recent large scale survey by Canning-Wilson (2000) as cited by Cakir (2006: 67) reveals that "the students like learning language through the use of video, which is often uss to mean quite different things in language teaching" It was not so cool as its today's progress. All variations in its use were far from being monotonous. With Silent Viewing (Picture Only = without sound) mode the students were motivated to speak up even though they had limited communicative competence. The power of this mode (picture only) is students are stimulated to make guesses as to what is said by speakers in the motion picture. Students were eager to hear the actual expressions due to information gap and they enjoyed checking their guesses. Undoubtedly, Canning-Wilson (2000) points out that "video, at the most basic level of instruction, is a form of communication and it can be achieved without the help of language"

With Sound Only it was very good for training students' ears and developing discussion. The students had time checking their comprehension to what actually happened when the motion picture was displayed. It is considered the strength of video over audio device.

With a little additional step of splitting the class into, let us say, 2 groups, the students seemed quite involved. One group sat facing the screen with Picture + Sound; the other group sat opposing with Sound Only in such a way that they could only hear. Information gap between those groups encouraged the members

to communicate very actively. Some other modes were also tried out, including Prediction (Speculation) mode, Dubbing, and Observation of Behavior. All of great success!

From the discussion above it could be inferred that pre-service English teacher programs alone are not enough to generate creative English teachers. According to Brewster (2007) a few problems in initial English teacher education include: 1) an insufficiency of suitable training materials; 2) an inappropriate theory-practice balance; 3) trainers who are not sufficiently experienced in ELT; 4) insufficient demonstration, too much lecturing, too little participation; and curricula which are outdated and out-of-touch with current world developments.

In addition to in-service teacher training, within their teaching career participants are also expected to continue with professional development, such as by actively taking part in workshops and conferences, extensively reading professional journals and proceedings in the field, and seriously participating in the events held by professional organizations. As far as the authors is concerned, the teachers of English are weak in this matter, especially in their use of resources and participation in professional forums. The majority of them do not enjoy reading books and lack familiarity with journals and proceedings. Neither are they encouraged to attend professional development training forums and workshops. Often teachers attend forums merely for the sake of obtaining a certificate!

Teachers' common excuse relates to the unavailability of text-books in the first year of the current curriculum implementation in this country; a situation conditioned by a lack of resources and access to information rich media. However, jjournals and proceedings are superior to textbooks. Recent research findings and creative and innovative ideas are shared in journals, proceedings, as well as professional forums. Updated information contained in them could be very valuable and inspirational to teachers of English. Only creative teachers could have survived within such a scenario, as they could perform equally well with or without standardized material. Again, as Richards (2013) says, creative teachers have numbers of different dimensions as the ability to solve problems in original and valuable ways that are relevant to goals. Such kinds of problems will never be excuses for them to be able to move forward.

Like journals, conferences and symposiums are very valuable resources or accesses to the development and sharpening of teachers' creativity. For example, a university teacher of English shared her research finding. In her collaborative work with a colleague she conducted a team teaching and learning in her English class. She was very happy with her students' response to the team teaching and learning. Eighty-five per cent of the students stated that they preferred a class taught by a team having two members who were always present in the class instead of a team whose members come in turn. She was also excited to see the fact that with team teaching that adopted the Oral Presentation Approach both students and teachers were encouraged to collaborate amongst themselves, especially within their own groups cognitively - in getting knowledge by discussing the assigned readings, affectively - in developing empathy and friendships, and psychometrically – in preparing power points and operating the computer and LCD during the oral presentation. The teachers could share ideas and experiences, especially during the discussion after the students' presentations – which is actually the essence of team teaching.

Conferences and symposiums often include workshops given by some of the delegates. The practical experiences shared in these events are valuable and could be inspiring to other teachers of English. For example, one teacher shared an experience of innovative and effective strategies for teaching English. The teacher explained how to create a classroom climate in which students were eager to take risks and practice a new language. Or, a workshop given by another teacher who explained how to select/design/adapt/ materials and interactive activities to make students better motivated through imaginative, creative, and innovative teaching techniques suitable for productive learning.

CONCLUSION

Generating creative EFL teachers is a crucial issue in the Indonesia context. As frontlines working directly with pupils, they need to be creative in an effort deal with the problems (if not challenges) because there is no doubt that creative EFL teaching is generated only by creative EFL teachers. There are at least four aspects that, any one of them, will characterize the EFL teachers as being creative: purposeful techniques, interesting classroom activities, authentic material and resources, and effective aids/media. Practical experiences have been shared in this paper. These could be inspiring and are, of course, subject to adjustment.

Some suggestions of ideas for becoming creative EFL teachers are that EFL teachers should be curious, knowledgeable, confident, imaginative, openminded, as well as enjoy experimenting and problem-solving. Then, EFL teachers should develop and sharpen their teaching creativity by nurturing their professional development. and last but not least, EFL teachers should familiarize themselves with journals or periodicals and read them a lot to explore information or insights into and development of recent ideas and research findings.

EFL teachers should actively take part in conferences, symposium, seminars, trainings, and workshops. Such activities open the opportunity for or access to direct and intense communication with better experienced colleagues as to obtain practical ideas and experiences.

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