

The Benefits of Creative and Critical Thinking in Language Classroom

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Rezumat

Articolul abordează beneficiile gândirii critice pentru studenții ce învață o limbă străină. Pentru a vorbi fluent o limbă străină, nu e suficient să cunoști sensul cuvintelor sau gramatica acestei limbi. E nevoie de a gândi critic și creativ, de a pune întrebări și a răspunde la ele, de a ne expune punctele de vedere într-un mod critic, logic, detaliat și creativ.

Language learners become proficient by using the language and not just by learning about the language. However, using the language and knowing the meaning is not enough. To become proficient, learners need to use creative and critical thinking through the target language.

The communicative approach to language teaching began to overshadow the systematic approach in the 1950s. The latter outlined that if learners are to be proficient in the language, they must master the mechanism by which the language works, and learn the language system. On the contrary, the communicative approach emphasized that learners become proficient by using the language, and not just merely learning about the language. Besides using the language and knowing the meaning, the learners should display creative and critical thinking through the language. This implies that the learners must be creative in their production of ideas, and critically support them with logical explanation, details and examples. Nevertheless, creative and critical skills should not be taught separately as an isolated entity, but embedded in the subject matter and “woven into the curriculum.” [1, p.12].

The creative language learners should be able to combine responses or ideas in novel ways and to use elaborate, intricate, and complex stimuli and thinking patterns. As for the critical language learners, they must be able to identify and cite good reasons for their opinions and answers, correct themselves and others' methods and procedures, and adapt to uniformities, irregular circumstances, special limitations, constraints and over-generalizations.

Attitude towards students

There are teachers who regard learners as empty vessels, which need to be filled with knowledge. The teachers tend to assume that the learners do not have any, or little prior knowledge and experiences regarding the subject matter that is going to be taught in classrooms. These teachers ignore, knowingly or unknowingly, the individuality of students. They fail to understand and appreciate the learners' own unique experiences, and concepts, notions and views of the world. Teachers who do not acknowledge each learner's individuality will often lead a boring and unimaginative language classroom because of the minimal participation and involvement of learners. The learners will feel left out and assume their opinions and beliefs as not relevant and important enough to be heard in the classroom. Eventually, this will pave the way to a molding process of passive language learners, and be a cause to the detriment of creative and critical thinking [3, p. 10].

Teachers could gain much by listening to the learners' opinions and beliefs. The obvious one being the enrichment of experience, ideas and thoughts in the discussion of an issue. In this way, teachers will develop a mutual relationship with their learners. This means that teachers need to consider learners as individuals who are equals in a situation of genuine two-way communication. Besides that, it must also involve respect and characterizes the communication in a manner which is humble, open and focused on collaborative learning.

Attitude towards Pedagogy

Producing critical and creative language learners is by no means an easy task, but it can be

achieved by engaging the Pedagogy of Question, which was proposed by Freire P. (1970-1973). This pedagogy requires posing questions to learners and listening to learners' questions. This is a practice which forces and challenges the learners to think creatively and critically, and to adopt a critical attitude towards the world.

Freire added that teachers tend to adopt the pedagogy of answers because they are sometimes afraid of questions to which they are unsure of answers, and also because maybe the questions do not correspond to the answers they already have. Thus, this is extremely vital that teachers have positive beliefs and attitudes towards questions. They should also be prepared to ask questions in different ways in order to enhance the cognitive development of learners.

If the teachers think that their primary roles are to teach and provide answers and information, then the learners are exposed to the culture of "spoon-feeding". Eventually, the learners' ability to look for answers and solutions, and to inquire, to decide, to question, to reject and to accept ideas will greatly diminish [1, p.72].

Teachers need to believe that their major roles are to think, to guide, to initiate, to facilitate and to encourage the learners. This will put them in a right frame of mind and lead the learners into becoming a community of collaborative inquirers.

How it is achieved

Freire's methodology is based on learners' life situations and realities. It concentrates on showing learners that they have the right to ask questions. The process of problem-solving begins when the teacher listens to learners' issues. Next, the teacher selects and brings familiar situations to students in a pictorial form. Then, the teacher asks a series of inductive questions regarding the discussion of the situation. In that discussion, the learners should experience five steps of problem-posing methodology (Nixon-Ponder, 1995):

1. Describe the content of the discussion.
2. Define the problem.
3. Personalize the problem.
4. Discuss the problem.
5. Discuss the alternatives of the problem.

In this method, the aspects of posing critical questions is very important. These questions will induce their creative thinking skills because the learners are challenged to produce their reasons, and they have to imagine that they are at a particular place. In addition, they could and most probably, would use their own experiences to describe and interpret the situation.

Besides that, decision-making processes could also be used to sow the seeds of creative and critical thinking into language learners [4, p.33].

The fundamental issue which most teachers tend to ignore is the capabilities of their learners. If the teachers continue to disregard learners' views and opinions, or suppress them without ever giving the learners the chance to express themselves, then the learners would not be able to train and use their thinking skills. Teachers should facilitate and encourage creative and critical thinking skills by viewing their learners differently from what they have presumed. They also need to change their pedagogical views and adopt a more flexible attitude towards their teaching and not be too concentrated and dependent on textbooks, which are usually exam-oriented. Also needed is the change of teachers' views of themselves. They are not providers but thinkers who constantly think of what could be done to encourage creative and critical thinking in their learners.

Bibliography

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