



## Creativity understood within originality and appropriateness

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### **Résumé**

*Dans le contexte de l'enseignement de l'anglais comme langue étrangère (EFL), la créativité se définit comme la capacité à proposer des idées nouvelles et précieuses visant à améliorer le processus d'enseignement-apprentissage de l'EFL. Favoriser la créativité est important tant pour l'enseignant que pour l'apprenant, car cela leur permet de trouver des réponses à des questions complexes. Un examen de la littérature montre que les enseignants et les apprenants doivent rechercher un équilibre entre originalité et pertinence. À cet égard, les enseignants et les apprenants sont considérés comme créatifs dans la mesure où ils présentent des idées à la fois originales et pertinentes. Cette étude met en lumière l'importance de la créativité dans les contextes éducatifs. Elle examine également les traits de personnalité créative et les étapes du processus créatif. Ce faisant, elle clarifie le concept de créativité ainsi que les facteurs qui la favorisent. Elle propose aussi quelques recommandations susceptibles d'améliorer la mise en œuvre de la créativité en contexte de classe.*

**Mots-clés :** Créativité, Originalité, Pertinence, Créativité en tant que Processus, Créativité en tant que Produit.

**Abstract**

*In EFL teaching context, creativity is defined as the ability to come up with new and valuable ideas meant to enhance EFL teaching-learning operation. Fostering creativity is important for both the teacher and student as it enables them to find answers to complex questions. A skim through literature shows that teachers and students should seek some balance between originality and appropriateness. In this regard, teachers and students are considered creative as far as they present ideas that are original and appropriate at the same time. This study sheds light on the importance of creativity in educational settings. It also investigates creative personality traits and the steps of the creative process. In doing so, it sheds light on the concept of creativity and the factors that foster it. It also suggests some recommendations that would enhance the implementation of creativity in classroom context.*

**Keywords:** *Creativity, originality, appropriateness, creativity as process, creativity as product.*



## Introduction

In order to survive, the human kind has permanently sought creativity in different aspects of daily life. Development in fields like education, medicine, arts, technology, etc. would have never taken place if there has been no effort to improve life conditions. However, there exist cases where creativity has not served human beings. We can refer, for instance, to creating nuclear bombs and biological weapons. As such, it becomes important to consider another term to the equation which is that of appropriateness. In other words, creativity should find a balance between originality and appropriateness i.e., human beings should come out with original ideas that are appropriate too.

In the field of FL teaching, FL teachers and learners are encouraged to be creative. It is believed that creativity allows them to seek new teaching and learning strategies that would guarantee better results. Implementing a creative spirit in a classroom setting is especially the role of the teacher being the one who controls the teaching-learning operation. FL teachers should adopt new strategies that show originality and at the same time allow and encourage students to be creative themselves. These strategies should also consider other factors including: the course content, learners' educational and social background, time, evaluation modes and frequency, etc. It is a complete whole that necessitates taking into account different elements so as to look for an originality that is appropriate. As such, this paper seeks to answer a set of questions including:

- How are creativity and originality defined in FL classroom context?
- Is creativity an inherited or acquired property?
- How can teachers create a balance between originality and appropriateness?

This article is organized in four parts. The first part is devoted to explaining the concept of creativity. In this part, we define the concept of creativity in relation to two other ones: originality and appropriateness. Questions like whether creativity is innate or acquired and whether anyone can be creative are also answered. The second part tackles the five 'I's model which includes five main stages in the creative process. The third part sheds light on the importance of creativity in teaching as well as learning, and discusses a list of creative personality traits. The last part includes some recommendations which are meant to enhance the implementation of creativity in classroom context.

## **1. Definition of creativity**

Creativity is making or bringing into existence something new. It can also be defined as "the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others" (Franken, 1994, p. 396). Accordingly, creativity is important for three main reasons: Solving problems, communication and entertainment. As such, all fields are concerned with creativity which can refer to something intangible like an idea or a theory or physical like an invention, a product, a work of art, etc. (NACCCE, 1999). We can also refer to creativity as what distinguishes an amateur from a professional.



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## 2. Creativity as original and appropriate

Understanding creativity as something new can be misleading if there is no reference to a certain utility. In other words, an idea or a product are said to be creative if they are useful and appropriate according to a group of experts

Creating is not enough; creative process should propose an efficient solution that is deemed valid by a reference group. Creativity is socioculturally rooted and cannot be only designated by the subject having to create something but by the community or reference group who will evaluate the value and relevance of the solution in a certain context. (Romero, 2020, p. 45)

Accordingly, Romero traces a distinctive line between originality and creativity stating that “originality is a potential for creativity, it is not its only component. This originality must therefore be oriented toward an iterative and complex, rational process of reflection that requires the efforts of learners” (Romero, 2020, p. 45). So, it is not only about newness, creativity should also consider appropriateness.

## 3. Can anyone be creative?

For a long time, many people thought that not any one can be creative. Creativity was then considered a quality of artists and scientists (not ordinary people). Now, it is generally believed that creativity is a universal property and that any person can be creative regardless his cultural group, race, age, gender, etc. (Chaudhary, 2018). Chaudhary also explains that people show different creative potentials, “Every one of us possesses and is capable of demonstrating creativity to some degree” (2018, p. 45).

In NACCCE (1999), it is stated that discovering your creative potential is a matter of will and belief. It is also stressed that creativity is crucial in increasing self-esteem and different kinds of achievements. In this regard, it is claimed that all people “have creative abilities and we all have them differently. When individuals find their creative strengths, it can have an enormous impact on self-esteem and on overall achievement” (NACCCE, 1999, p. 6).

#### **4. Creativity: innate or acquired?**

One of the questions that are usually asked is whether creativity is an innate or an acquired potential. In fact, a strong assumption states that people are born with creative potentials. Yet, these latter develop later when found in an encouraging environment; “one’s creativity may be correctly said to be a function of natural endowment as well as its nurturing” (Chaudhary, 2018, p. 46). The NACCCE report explains that

Creativity is not simply a matter of letting go. Serious creative achievement relies on knowledge, control of materials and command of ideas. Creative education involves a balance between teaching knowledge and skills, and encouraging innovation. In these ways, creative development is directly related to cultural education. (1999, p. 6)

#### **5. Creativity as a product vs. creativity as a process**

A creative idea or product does not come out of the blue. It takes place after passing through a sequence of stages that include: decisions, choices, shifts, synthesis, deduction, equations, etc. It is obvious that the number as well as the nature of these stages differ from a field to another and from an individual to another. That is, creativity is not only



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understood as a final product, it is also understood as a process. As a product, the focus is on the final outcome; being an idea or a product. As a process, we refer to the different steps undertaken before arriving to the final product. There have been different models of creative process like the ones proposed by Graham Wallas (1926), Joseph Rossman (1931), etc. According to Green (2010), these models share main stages including: identifying the problem, the need to gather information, incubation, the idea being born, and the evaluation and the implementation of this idea.

## **6. The five 'T's model of the creative process**

Based on the aforementioned models, Green (2010) suggests a five 'T's model of the creative process that includes five stages: Information, Incubation, Illumination, Integration, and Illustration.

### **6.1 Information**

This is the initial step in the creative process. According to Green, there are two tasks to carry out in this stage, "one is gathering the relevant information to assist with the task in hand. The second is posing the right questions" (2010, p. 38). As stated, in relation to gathering the information, one should seek what is relevant to the task in hand. This can take place through discerning the thematic sphere of the task so as to focus on those elements that have a direct relation to topic. For the second stage which is asking questions, relevance is important too. The questions asked should be specific and appropriate i.e., seek an answer to the problem in hand.

## 6.2 Incubation

Incubation is the second stage within the creative process. It is claimed that before trying to find answers to some questions, one should have a break. It is a rest period in which the individual relaxes before passing to the next stage. According to Green, incubation

occurs when the individual sets the problem aside for a while and does something else that is unrelated to it... Knowing when to turn away from a problem and leave it for a while, for the incubation process to work, is an essential skill. It takes confidence, good planning, and a belief in your own abilities to let ideas saunter in at their own pace. (2010, p. 44)

## 6.3 Illumination

Spearman (1931) defines “creativity as the power of human mind to create new content by transforming relations and there by generating new correlates” (as cited in (Chaudhary, 2018, p. 45). Accordingly, creativity is first and foremost a matter of stating new relations. Green explains that illumination “consists of seeing two previously unrelated items and making a link between them for the task in hand” (2010, p. 46). Another important point is that of recording new ideas and thoughts and possible links so as not to lose them; “The act of writing or recording the illumination also impresses the idea more deeply in your mind for further incremental creativity to take place, and that process offers scope for further illumination” (Green, 2010, p. 46). As such, illumination is a recursive process.

## 6.4 Integration

Another step which is not less important than that of illumination is the ‘Integration’ stage. This stage refers to the



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ability of the brain to adjust the original idea or illumination by adding new elements. Green gives the example of a newspaper article where “once you start writing you are likely to start adding extra elements. For example, a key ‘trigger’ word may come to mind and will be added. You might then think of a useful alliteration, or metaphor, to be used in a quote, and so on” (2010, p. 49). In other words, the ‘Integration stage’ refers to a series of refinements and redrafting that is fundamental in the creative process.

### 6.5 Illustration

This stage enables the creative product or idea to spread. Green refers to this stage as selling and presenting the idea which “can be more important than the earlier stages of producing outstanding ideas” (2010, p. 50). He adds that some ideas have failed to be recognized because they were not effectively sold. He gave the example of the theory of evolution which is known as Charles Darwin’s theory. However, it was Patrick Matthew, a Scottish botanical writer, who actually put the theory 10 years before Darwin did. Green explains that “Matthew’s outstanding idea failed to get recognition as a result of his lowly position and because it also appeared at the end of a book on trees” (2010, p. 50). So, creating an idea or a product becomes insignificant if it is not well recognized.

## 7. Teaching creatively vs. teaching for creativity

So as to enhance EFL teaching/learning practices, it is important to foster different kinds of abilities at the top of which comes ‘creativity’. Creativity is one of the most important abilities that would not only improve learning

results but also reflect uniqueness and excellence. In a classroom context, teachers usually encourage their students to be creative while accomplishing different tasks. Creative students are usually praised and rewarded by their teachers with extra points, prizes, cards, etc. Yet, a creative learner needs a creative teacher too, not only to stand as a model for him, but also because his creative talent would receive recognition and find a good atmosphere to develop (Jeffrey & Woods, 1997). In sum, creativity is an important teaching and learning ability. In this regard, we can refer to two expressions: 'teaching creatively' and 'teaching creativity'.

## **7.1 Teaching creatively**

Teaching creatively refers to adopting creative teaching strategies and methods so as to enhance the learning results. According to the NACCCE report, this is defined as "using imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting and effective" (1999, p. 89). Woods (1990) also explains that creative teaching involves: Innovation, ownership, control, and relevance.

### **7.1.1 Innovation**

Innovation refers to the creation of something new i.e., to go beyond the boundaries of the conventional. It "can result from a new combination of known factors, or from the introduction of a new factor into a prevailing situation" (Woods, 1990, p. 32). This term can also be understood in relation to other ones including flexibility, adaptability, inventiveness, willingness to experiment and sometimes take risks (Woods, 1990).



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### **7.1.2 Ownership**

This quality refers to the ownership of various pedagogical and cultural forms of knowledge needed in the teaching operation. That is, teachers should have ownership of their ideas and practices.

### **7.1.3 Control**

A creative teacher should have the control over the different educational processes and practices. He should also have the ability to negotiate, change, plan, organize, etc. any teaching strategies and methods in order to reach his teaching aims.

### **7.1.4 Relevance**

A creative teacher is the one who chooses what is relevant i.e., effective to the learning situation (Jeffrey & Craft, 2010). In other words, all choices made by the teacher should respond to learners' needs. Coming up with something new or original that is irrelevant or does not serve the learning situation is useless as it does not lead to a required knowledge or skill. Relevance in this context should also be understood in terms of societal and cultural norms.

## **7.2 Teaching for creativity**

Teaching for creativity is defined as a teaching methodology that is meant to develop learners' creative skills. According to NACCCE report (1999), teaching for creativity is an activity that is based on three main tasks: Encouraging, identifying and fostering.

### 7.2.1 Encouraging

This refers to encouraging students to believe in their own creative potentials and have self-confidence to try and accept to fail. A teacher can stimulate creativity through increasing motivation, independence, willingness to take risks, persistence, and the ability to respond positively to failure and adversity.

### 7.2.2 Identifying

This refers to helping students discover their creative potentials usually via the recognition of their inclinations to a certain instrument, style, piece of writing, etc. that catches their attention.

### 7.2.3 Fostering

It is claimed that “Creativity draws from many ordinary abilities and skills rather than one special gift or talent. Thus the development of many common capacities and sensitivities can help to foster creativity” (NACCCE, 1999, p. 104). In this regard, the teacher should adopt teaching strategies and techniques that stimulate curiosity, train memory, enhance awareness and knowledge about what is involved in the creative process (NACCCE, 1999). The report also adds that teaching for creativity aims at fostering other qualities including:

- *Autonomy*: a feeling of ownership and control over the ideas.
- *Authenticity*: deciding for oneself and on the basis of one’s own opinion.
- *Openness*: to new and uncommon ideas.
- *Respect*: for each other’s ideas.



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- *Fulfillment*: sharing a feeling of anticipation, satisfaction, involvement and enjoyment of the creative relationship.

### 7.3 Creative personality traits

According to Daniels (2013), creative people have some creative personality traits that distinguish them from ordinary ones. As already mentioned creative potentials should be identified encouraged and fostered in order to achieve goals and produce something original and effective. These traits include:

#### *Awareness of creativity*

In order to be creative, individuals should be aware of their own creative potentials. This would help them work to develop and foster their creative skills. This would also increase self-esteem and encourage them to go forward to reach their aims. Creative awareness also helps them recognize others' creative talents and enable them to collaborate and work with other people.

#### *Imagination*

Creativity is linked to setting new relations between elements. This requires having an imaginative spirit. A teacher can imagine and introduce a new teaching technique to explain a difficult concept. Students for their part can also be encouraged write an original story, imagine another ending to a story, drawing a new design, proposing another way to deal with a problem, etc.

#### *Independence*

It is claimed that creative individuals "must be ready and willing to make waves, to go against the crowd, and at times to stand alone" (Daniels, 2013, p. 8). In other words, creativity

necessitates depending on oneself and expecting adversary and opposition from others. History has told us many stories about genius people who did not receive any support from people around them, yet they have been able to reach their goals as they were able to stand on their own.

#### *Risk taking*

A creative idea or product is sometimes the result of a risk-taking attitude. Before being shared or accepted by a given community, some creative ideas and products have been thought of as a kind of adventure or an impossible dream. It is only thanks to those who are able to take risks and bear the consequences of their rough decisions that ideas related to physical, intellectual, social, psychological, and emotional risks take place. Yet, risk-taking should be accepted within a certain limit. In a classroom setting, for instance, it is the role of the teacher to encourage his students to take risks, yet within the boundary of safety and well-being.

#### *High energy*

A creative person is not a lazy one. He is someone who does not give up as he feels committed to accomplishing certain tasks within a certain time schedule. A creative person is someone who is highly motivated and energetic. This energy helps him go forward and overcome the difficulties that he faces in his way towards imposing his original ideas.

#### *Curiosity*

Creativity is usually linked to curiosity. A creative person is someone who keeps asking questions about the surrounding phenomena and events. This person does not usually take things for granted like ordinary people. In short, a creative idea starts always with a question that an individual seeks to answer trying different options and possibilities. Sometimes, when options do not work, this



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person asks another question, then another one until he arrives to what he looks for.

#### *Sense of humour/ playfulness*

Pursuing creativity does not mean a total absence of some sense of humor. There are moments in life that requires us to take it easy. Humor is “associated with an ability to approach problems, and life in general, in a fresh, child, and playful manner” (Daniels, 2013, p. 9). Having a sense of humour helps us to relieve stress and tension that usually hinder our progress and success.

#### *Attracted to complexity*

Complexity is not something that ordinary people like to deal with. However, it is claimed that creative people are drawn to this latter. This might be explained by the fact that complexity stimulates a certain curiosity to decode and find solutions to intricate problems, equations, phenomena, etc. which is an essential personality trait for a creative person to have.

#### *Artistic and aesthetic perspectives*

Creative people assign a great importance to aesthetic values rather than making money and wealth. In other words, creative people do appreciative artistic aspects of life, art, science, etc., that other people may not pay attention to or consider.

#### *Open-mindedness*

A creative person shows great openness towards considering other possibilities and alternatives. This allows him to try different tracks until he gets what he wants. Yet, it is important to know that being open-minded does not mean being indecisive. Moving from one option to another is not a random decision but an explainable one.

### *Need for privacy and alone time*

As mentioned above, creativity is not an easy task to handle but a tough one that requires great effort and concentration. As such, creative people usually impose on themselves a certain isolation in order to analyze, consider choices, experiment, try and fail, etc.

### *Perceptive*

Creative people are sensitive towards different stimuli found in the environment. They also pay attention to recurring patterns, details, trivial differences, relations, etc. Exploiting their senses in this way enables them to speculate, question, understand, etc. different relations and phenomena.

## **8. Recommendations**

Relying on the aforementioned creative personality traits (Daniels, 2013), along with the precautions identified by Cramond et al. (2005), and the suggestions proposed by Nickerson (2010), we suggest the following recommendations that would enhance the implementation of creativity in classroom settings:

- The teacher should pay attention to signs of creativity. He should be aware of and nurture them within himself as well as within students.
- He should encourage imagination through assigning students tasks that require proposing an alternative and going out of the box.
- He should encourage independence through giving a chance to students to rely on themselves to find answers to difficult questions.
- The teacher should accept a certain level of risk-taking in and outside the classroom. This depends on different



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factors including: students' age, knowledge, the availability of safety procedures, etc.

- The teacher should foster tasks that require critical thinking and showing energy.
- He should stimulate curiosity and inquisitiveness, and assign students complex tasks. However, he should have and encourage students to have a sense of humour in order to relieve stress and tension associated with dealing with complexity.
- He should encourage art appreciation through adopting tasks about art, music, literature, etc. In this regard, he can rely on AI Art Tools that “can assist in problem-solving, stimulate creativity, [and] enable emotional and social interaction” (Chekirine & Sakri, 2024, p. 613).
- He should be open-minded and encourage students to be open-minded towards other views.
- The teacher should give students some privacy and enough time to accomplish creative tasks.
- He should stimulate students' senses and encourage them to exploit them.
- Students should feel psychologically safe as they may avoid proposing unusual ideas for fear of being criticized.
- They should not be afraid of dealing with challenges and difficulties for fear of failure. They should understand that failure is part of our life. It can be sometimes the reason behind our success.
- The teacher should stimulate and motivate students through taking into account their interests and preferences.
- The teacher should teach students that there are different ways to do any particular task.

- Part of teacher's creative attitude entails adapting lesson plans to allow some space for creativity.
- Students should understand that creativity requires noticing and making unusual relations between elements. These relations might even have been overlooked.
- The teacher should teach students that creativity is not an inherited ability that is not meant for everyone. Students should understand that anyone can be creative in his own way provided that he works hard and shows commitment.

## **Conclusion**

The ultimate aim of any teaching process is to ensure that students achieve meaningful and practical learning outcomes. For most teachers, witnessing their students reach a certain level of mastery is a source of deep satisfaction and pride, as it reflects the effectiveness of their teaching methods and techniques. Yet, there are moments when teachers, driven by a strong belief in their students' strong potentials, and a desire to exceed predictable expectations, refuse to satisfy themselves with ordinary results. Instead, they seek to push their students beyond regular limits, striving to reveal capacities that may at first seem unachievable. These instructors' main aim is to encourage their students to think critically and creatively as they believe that learning is not just about memorizing facts, but about boosting curiosity, flexibility, and imagination.

Yet, teachers cannot foster creativity in their students if their own teaching methods and techniques reflect a static and unimaginative methodology. When they, themselves,



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actively adopt creativity in their classroom discourse, they would embody the very skills they hope to cultivate in their students. A creativity-centred pedagogy paves the way towards a teaching-learning environment where curiosity flourishes, critical thinking is encouraged, and students feel safe taking intellectual risks. However, these risks should be appropriate rather than non-purposeful or random. In other words, true creativity balances originality with purpose, relevance, and effectiveness.

Fostering creative potentials within teachers and learners is what makes a teaching experience as well as a learning one a special journey rather than a routine task that does not differ from a school to another. Far from preparing the lesson to be clear and understood, the teacher should think how his teaching session would bring to his profession something original and effective. A part of this effectiveness entails telling someone “You are genius! Keep going”. In a nutshell, part of being a creative teacher is to be able to discover and foster creativity in another person being a policy-maker, a colleague, or a student as the final aim is a shared one: *appropriate creativity*.

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