Collaborative Wríting and Creativity

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“Ideas are not set in stone. When exposed to thoughtful people, they morph and adapt into their most potent form.”

Ken Robinson

**TEACHING TO MULTI-LEVEL CLASSES**

When I started my worklife as an English teacher, I found out pretty quickly that writing was the trickiest part of the Curriculum to teach. In fact, half of the students coming from Secondary Compulsory have little autonomy concerning developing ideas, turning them into words and linking them logically. The other half know how to write, more or less, but it is because they are attending extra-curricular English classes. Therefore, teaching all the writing process from the beginning until our final goal, which is the University Entry Exam, and reducing at the gap between both level is mandatory.

**THE UNIVERSITY ENTRY EXAM**

A kind of composition which is asked in this kind of exam is the For and Against Essay. More precisely, in June 2010, the question given: 'Do you agree that teenagers are too immature and unprepared for grown-up life?' In fact, the question arises: how do I face the blank paper? But we must keep in mind that there are no difficult thing, only sums of simple ones. If we have a closer look at this dilemma, we will be able to find society, historical and family matters. Our students are teenager, so this the moment to have their say: how different they are from their parents when they were their age? How society look at them? What does 'grown-up life mean? As a matter of fact, this topic fits perfectly at the starting point of our 6th Form Curriculum in order to know our learners much better.

**DISCUSS TO ENHANCE CREATIVITY**

Before starting all the writing procedure, some warming-up will be needed. In my case, this activity was planned after studying a Didactic Unit dealing with teenagers and their relationship with new technologies and consumerism. Anyway, we must start with some discussing to attract our students attention. ‘How would you describe teenagers nowadays by only using three adjectives? What does being an adult mean to you? How different do you feel to the past generations?’ Depending on the answer, the development of the debate will lead to one way or another, don’t be afraid to improvise because you’ll see that learner will surprise with different things every time you’ll do the collaborative writing, they feel empowered to act as a team. During the intervention, the Teacher Talking Time (TTT) will be reduced to questions and positive feedback to promote the intervention and the debate. You may need two sessions to finish the Collaborative Writing but they will be entirely aware of all the writing process.
ACT AS A TEAM LEADER

It’s time to come back to the question. What are they expected to write? A letter, a dialogue, an argumentative essay? The first step is the identification and this issue is a For and Against Essay. They must remember its structure according to that we write a draft in a very schematic way. An essay is like cooking, we need some ingredients to prepare the dish. Which are they?

For a 150 words essay, the ideal is to use six to eight connectors (contrast: however, nevertheless, but; addition: moreover, furthermore; distribution: on one hand, on the other hand; conclusion: to sum up, finally); three or four phrasal verbs; a couple of collocations, one idiom at least. Concerning grammar, I recommend to use sentences with a further grade of difficulty like relative clauses, use of modals or conditional construction.

Write on a board the elements needed in a list on the left or right part of the board. Then ask a student to be your secretary (I recommend to change him or her after writing each paragraph in order to enhance dynamism) and to write what we all agree about.

Feel like you an orchestra director and your students your musicians, guide them, ask them question about what they feel about the matter, question them about the world they live in and encourage them to improve the way to express themselves. Use the trial and error method, explain how good is to make mistakes and to learn from them.

PROCEDURE

1. Challenge generally acknowledge ideas

When your lesson revolves around debates, ask your students to challenge the given ideas, the society, the common sense. Rather than blindly accepting models, creative students analyze the text, examining possible loopholes and contributing their own opinions. Teach students that even widely accepted theories can have flaws. For example, at one point, people thought the world was flat, before someone challenged the popular belief.

2. Draw Connections

Encourage your students to make connections between lessons. For example, you can promote creativity in literature class by asking your students to compare and contrast the external and internal conflicts of characters in the stories. When possible, ask students to connect the fictional stories with real-world issues. Economics, History, Philosophy, Arts are excellent subjects to relate your writing to.
3. Open-Ended Questions

Instead of asking questions that require one-word answers, present open-ended questions. For example, explore alternative possibilities with "What-if" questions. These questions can lead to thoughtful classroom discussions.

4. Discussions and Feedback

During classroom discussions, praise students who offer creative responses, even if their answers are incorrect. Engage wrong answers and explain the logical flaws. Don’t provide the right answer immediately. Nudge your students towards the correct answer until they grasp the subject. Similarly, when grading papers, offer feedback to your students. Explain what they did wrong, but don’t provide an answer before giving them a chance to try again.

5. Set an Example

Be a creative teacher; some students learn by example. Compare classical literary characters to modern-day television show characters. Use visuals to illustrate scientific and mathematical principles. Create amusing mnemonic devices to help your students memorize items and steps in a process. Inventive teaching methods will make your class more interesting.

CONCLUSION

Too many students believe that all questions have a right answer and a wrong answer, and that there is only one way to find that answer. Many classrooms encourage this way of thinking, since standardized tests, the typical grading system, and many instructional methods seem to stifle creativity and encourage standardized thinking. As a teacher, you can encourage creativity in your classroom, thereby giving your students the skills they will need to be creative outside of the classroom as well. Find your students’ “island of competence,” or the area in which they are able to succeed the most. This can vary from painting to gardening, and from singing to working with young children. Making them feel competent by building on this skill can help them to feel safe enough to express their creativity. Don’t answer your own thought-provoking question too quickly. Ask the question and then give students plenty of time to think about it and communicate their answers before giving your own input.

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