The centrality of creativity: A new perspective on English language teaching

Alan Maley & Tamas Kiss, *Creativity and English Language Teaching: From Inspiration to Implementation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan U.K., 2018. Pp. xx + 339. Hardback $119.99, ISBN 978-1-137-46728-7

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In a context in which creativity is central to language education (Jones & Richards, 2016), *Creativity and English Language Teaching: From Inspiration to Implementation* integrates the latest research results by Alan Maley and Tamas Kiss with refreshing insights into the key constructs of creativity and investigations into its application in the English Language Teaching (ELT) context. This book not only clarifies the essential nature of creativity but also interprets the frameworks, procedures and mechanisms favouring creativity in ELT in both a theoretical and an empirical schema. The authors of this review strongly recommend the book due to the inspiration it provides to ELT educators as well as to in-service and pre-service language teachers.

The book consists of an introductory Chapter 1, four substantial parts (Chapters 2–15) and a concluding Chapter 16. Chapter 1 aims to enable readers to grasp the core motivation of the book. Following that chapter, four parts address themes on the nature of creativity, the complexes of processes, the factors of positive and negative influences, and the applications of creativity in the language teaching context, respectively. The last chapter reconfirms the central significance of creativity in life in general and in the language education context.

Chapter 1 states that creativity is widely regarded as a necessity in almost every field, yet its meaning is often blurred due to the broad use of the term in various contexts. Within Chapter 1, convincing evidence is presented on the importance of creativity in language education. Brief introductions to the following Parts 1–4 are also provided in this opening chapter.

Part 1 (Chapters 2–6) reviews a wide range of existing studies on creativity, from conceptual theories to practical implementation and from a general scope that narrows to the field of education, the sphere of applied linguistics, and the methodology of language teaching resources. Chapter 2 selects 13 representative studies that review theories of creativity in general, starting from the 1960s. These studies examine the complex phenomenon of creativity, providing definitions and principles and discussing supportive or constraining factors in a variety of fields, including education, journalism, politics, and artificial intelligence. Narrowing this overview further to an educational context, Chapter 3 justifies the importance of creativity within education. In a critical review of institutional education as controlled education and free education as liberal education, the disadvantages of education in school are criticized, whereas education with freedom, aesthetics and creativity is endorsed. The chapter explains the reasons for the suppression of creativity and suggests that industrialization is mainly to blame. In addition, it discusses what teachers and educators should do to foster creativity and highlights major barriers to cultivating creativity. Chapter 4 turns to the sphere of creativity in applied linguistics, framing previous studies in two main ways: the first is the direct concern with the essential features of language and language learning that offer scope for creativity, and the second is the creative impact that helps to re-shape the domain of applied linguistics. With the increasing number of studies
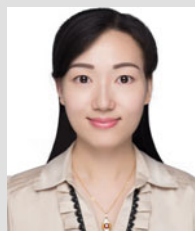
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on creativity, it is commonly accepted that language itself is creative and that everyone has the capacity to be creative in language usage (Carter, 2016). The next chapter, Chapter 5, provides a chronology of innovative methodologies in language teaching over the past 40 years, from which the authors conclude that methodological changes that are too creative are unlikely to induce enduring innovations. This, in turn, suggests that with regard to creativity, feasibility should also be taken into consideration. Furthermore, it is necessary to identify technological developments that foster creativity in innovative and feasible ways. Chapter 6 provides teachers with guidance on how to select teaching materials from a large number of creative resources. Teachers are encouraged to adapt creative approaches for language education through methodological changes.

Part 2 (Chapters 7–9) shifts the focus to teachers, discussing what qualities a creative teacher needs (Chapter 7) and how these qualities can be acquired by teachers, both as creative persons (Chapter 8) and as creative practitioners (Chapter 9). Chapter 7 investigates surveys on the attributes and characteristics of creative teachers and explains which qualities constitute essential prerequisites for creative language teachers, including resourcefulness, reflection, leadership and creativity itself. Chapter 8 offers a practical orientation on how to become a creative person by making changes in one's daily life. It is proposed that a teacher is unlikely to graft creativity unless she or he is trained to possess a creative mind-set. Indeed, the process of fostering creative learners requires creative teachers. In Chapter 9, the authors explore specific qualities to enhance teachers' creativity in their teaching. The book states that a creative teacher should have the ability to develop personal creativity, integrate creativity in her or his teaching, and acquire strategies to address unpredictability through improvisation and spontaneity.

Part 3 (Chapters 10–11) offers insights into learners' development of creativity in the classroom context and holds that learning a language in a classroom context is strongly associated with creativity. Chapter 10 proposes that teachers develop strategies to establish the foundations for a creative atmosphere in the classroom and discusses the basic prerequisites of a creative classroom. The authors offer 12 suggestions to achieve a creative climate in the classroom; for example, teachers should design relaxing, diversified but concise classroom activities and provide challenges that students can master with effort. Referring back to Chapter 6, Chapter 11 focuses on how to apply some of the frameworks derived from creativity principles to the design of teaching materials. It elaborately illustrates how to design

creative activities and employ materials creatively. These frameworks, principles and procedures further help to stimulate the creativity of students.

Part 4 (Chapters 12–15) mainly considers how language education research and inquiry might contribute to the greater application of creativity. Chapter 12 presents several quantitative, mixed and qualitative research methods for creativity measurements. Chapter 13 comprehensively reviews previous studies, and Chapter 14 investigates the connections among such studies by means of a network analysis. Through an analysis of individual, often intriguing, research results, the authors discover existing shortcomings in previous studies, several of which are influential, and indicate that more research could be conducted in the field of creative language learning and teaching. Finally, the last chapter, Chapter 16, concludes with a review of the book's aims, findings, expectations and constraints. It reiterates and re-emphasizes the central importance of creativity both in life and in education.

This book has the following merits. First, it contains novel and leading research in the field of ELT, arguing that creativity is a desirable but elusive concept that lies at the centre of education. Over the past years, very few books have focused on creativity in the context of ELT, which might be because of the complex nature of creativity. This book not only clearly illustrates the concept from a theoretical perspective but also integrates practical applications. Additionally, it is well organized. The four separate parts have their own clear foci and are logically connected. The chapters move from a broad scrutiny to narrower and more specific aspects. It is a reader-friendly book in that a number of figures and tables illustrate both the case studies and elusive concepts in a vivid and lucid way. The introductory and concluding chapters help readers to grasp the core ideas much more easily.

The book is an excellent and refreshing resource on creativity and ELT research. It is worthy of recommendation to both researchers and educators who wish to transform the notoriously traditional teacher-centred teaching pattern into a student-centred learning format to cultivate high-quality, creative students. This book is surely a great facilitator in this process.

References

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