

EDUCATIONAL PROVOCATIONS IN TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: A "SPARK CHAMBER" PROMOTING STUDENTS' CREATIVE LINGUISTIC THINKING

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Abstract

The current concept of creativity is characterized by its multifaceted nature. Creativity may be defined as a set of processes, a creative product (Cropley, 2020), and a competence (Supena, Darmuki, & Hariyadi, 2021; Kolesnikova, Bekk, & Taybe, 2022) closely interrelated with the development of communicative skills and abilities (Jones, 2020). One of them is creative linguistic thinking. Creative linguistic thinking is the ability to use language (not only native, but also foreign) in an original, flexible, and innovative way to create new meanings and communicative forms, both in written and spoken form. Language functions not only as a system of rules, but also as a means to express new ideas and generate meanings, and is integrated into the general concept of creative thinking (Jones, 2020; O. Gafour & W. Gafour, 2020). This insight presupposes the relevance of foreign language teaching practices, which would not only concentrate on the foreign language proficiency, but also emancipate the learner's creative powers. One of such ways is educational provocations (Brown, 2020). Educational provocation can be defined as a purposefully constructed context using various visual aids and written prompts, the purpose of which is to provoke possible thoughts, actions, and verbal activities of the students, motivating them to explore, think (Brown, 2020) and discuss. The research aims to reveal the relations between the educational provocation method and the development of students' creative linguistic thinking. The main research strategy is participatory action research. The research data were collected while examining the observation protocols and researcher's diaries as well as analyzing the materials gained from pupils' oral reflections. The data were analyzed while using the content analysis. The received results allow to state that the educational method of creative provocation is directly related to the development of students' creative linguistic thinking. Moreover, the educational method of creative provocation increased pupils' curiosity and motivation to perform creative tasks and to use a foreign language actively during the lessons as there were created conditions for the students' self-expression, which revealed in the student's way of expressing their original ideas, and different use of materials.

Keywords: *Educational method of creative provocations, creativity, teaching a foreign language (TFL), creative linguistic thinking.*

1. Introduction

Various definitions of creativity can be identified in academic literature. Creativity can be described as a system of abilities and knowledge that encompasses elements such as finding non-standard solutions and entrepreneurship (Kolesnikova, Bekk, & Taybe, 2022). In the context of 4C, creativity competence is revealed as a skill for implementing a new way of solving a problem, in other words, a completely new and original action. In addition, creativity can also be discussed from three different perspectives. First, creativity can be understood as a set of processes, such as creative thinking; as a set of personal characteristics; and, finally, as a creative product (Cropley, 2020). It should be noted that in general education programs, the following competence components are highlighted in the structure of creativity competence: research, generation, creation, evaluation and reflection.

Another competence that is inseparable from the modern world is the ability to communicate in a foreign language. As Jones (2020) states, most language education researchers recognize that language education should be associated with creativity, whether this is understood as the application of creative didactic practices, the integration of creative texts into the teaching process, or the promotion of students' creative language use. From the point of view of creative thinking theories, creative linguistic expression is inseparable from the ability to generate original ideas, flexibly combine existing linguistic knowledge

and apply them in new communicative contexts (Jones, 2020). According to Kits and Meristo (2025), in language education practice, students often experience difficulties in expressing orally their thoughts creatively. According to Kurtz (2015), Leeming (2017), Milt (2025) these challenges may arise due to linguistic limitations, insufficient self-confidence in using a foreign language, an educational environment focused on such educational goals as the acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary, for which reasons the development of originality of ideas and spontaneous linguistic improvisation remains secondary (Kits & Meristo, 2025). Standardized achievement evaluation model. (Stenberg, in Zhao, 2022) can hinder creativity, because creative thinking is unlikely to improve results in these tests. So, teachers, in order to avoid failure in tests, devote more time and attention to their preparation. For these reasons, students may face difficulties in spontaneously expressing their thoughts, choosing instead mechanical memorization or literal translation (Kits & Meristo, 2025).

The development of creativity, as well as creative linguistic thinking, is important, especially in the context of a foreign language, but teachers still lack accessible and practical information on how to develop and promote creativity in a foreign language classroom (Scott-Barrett, Johnston, Denton-Calabrese, McGrane, & Hopfenbeck, 2023). One of the methods to address issues in creative linguistic development is through educational provocations. Educational provocation can be defined as a purposefully constructed context using various visual aids and written prompts, the purpose of which is to provoke possible thoughts and actions of the student and motivate them to explore, think about new ideas (Vecchi, 2013 cited in Porres, 2020; Brown, 2020), and communicate. However, there is relatively little data on the educational application of the educational provocation method the development of students' creative linguistic thinking. Thus, the research aims to reveal the relations between the educational provocation method and the development of students' creative linguistic thinking. The research question is: how is the educational method of creative provocations related to the development of students' 'linguistic creative thinking'? The object of the study is the connection between students' creative linguistic thinking and educational methods. Research objectives are: to define the concepts of creative linguistic thinking; to substantiate the suitability of the educational provocation method for the development of creative linguistic thinking; to determine the connection between students' creative linguistic thinking and educational provocations; to assess the effectiveness of the educational provocation method in promoting students' creative linguistic thinking. The main research strategy is participatory action research. The purpose of this action research was to improve foreign language teaching practices, in which with the help of educational provocations, each child had a possibility for the development of creative linguistic thinking. The research data were collected while examining the observation protocols and researcher's diaries as well as analyzing the materials gained from pupils' oral reflections. The data were analyzed while using the content analysis.

2. Theoretical reasoning on the interrelation of a creative provocation and the development of students' linguistic creative thinking

Creativity is regarded as one of the core competencies individuals need in the 21st century (González-Salamanca, Agudelo, & Salinas, 2020; Supena, Darmuki, & Hariyadi, 2021), as it is closely related to the concept of "21st century skills" (Lucas, 2016). The Reggio Emilia education system, which can be used to develop children's creativity, is widely described in academic literature. This system is based on the theory of "One Hundred Languages" (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012; The Wonder of Learning, 2017). This theory states that there are many ways to know, feel, create, and express oneself, and that contexts that awaken children's exploration, activity, and creativity, as well as teacher-created provocations, are also important. The aspects of materiality, variability and interaction are important for provocations, which demonstrate the importance of visual and physical arrangement in the educational space and reflect modern trends in optimality and multisensory design for the creation of a learning environment. According to the prevailing approach in the Reggio Emilia education system, the child is at the very center of education and all other supporting tools, such as community, environment, educators, family, art are like helpers, ensuring both the quality of learning and opportunities to develop creativity (Lindsay, 2015). Therefore, this education system is interactive, which is important for developing students' creativity and language learning (Giorgdze & Dgebuadze, 2017). In addition, the Reggio Emilia system is not overly focused on academic achievement or standardization, which allows teachers and students to think flexibly, creatively, and critically. Creating a psychologically safe environment where children are allowed to explore, experiment, communicate and make mistakes (especially using a foreign language) encourages creativity, while an environment that places great emphasis on academic achievement can cause anxiety, pressure, and stifle creativity. In the Reggio Emilia educational system, provocations are crucial for promoting the learning process without error; these activities are understood as a means of stimulating children's creativity, imagination, exploration, free communication (Vecchi, 2013 in Porres, 2020) thus touching upon the opportunities to develop linguistic creative thinking while learning a foreign language.

Linguistic creative thinking is the ability to use language creatively: to generate original ideas, unexpectedly combine words, create meanings, metaphors, stories or new linguistic forms. It includes not only the correct use of language, but also flexible, imaginative thinking in the linguistic medium. This type of thinking manifests itself when a student creates original texts or stories, juggles, plays with words, metaphors, associations, is able to find unexpected linguistic solutions, interprets and conveys thoughts in various styles, creates new constructions, humor or symbolic meanings. An example of a student's speech: instead of the usual sentence "It is raining," the student said: "The sky is quietly melting its gray memories today." This demonstrates students' ability to use language not only to convey information, but also to create emotions, imagery or new meaning. It testifies that it was the environment created by educational provocations which emancipated students' usage of new expressions for their emotions.

3. Methodology

Research methods. The research problem emerged from observations that students were reluctant to complete creative tasks and lacked interesting ideas. Those observations prompted the conducting of action research, during which the educational provocations were practically applied, refine the educational process. The purpose of action research was to improve combined creativity and linguistic creative thinking practices in which each child would feel safe and unique personal ideas without fear of making a language mistake (Clark, Porath, Thiele, & Jobe, 2020). The research data were collected and analyzed using qualitative research methodology.

Data analysis. The guiding questions, stimulating students' reflections were about their changing attitudes towards foreign language classes, how they felt during the prevocational activities, and about the feelings concerning the received results. Their reflections were recorded. Collected data were transcribed and analyzed using inductive qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014). The analysis involved repeated reading of interview transcripts, coding meaningful units, developing subcategories and categories. *Research participants* were chosen according to the convenient sampling model and involved the 12 students of the 4th-grade at one of Kaunas X schools in 2025. *Research ethics.* After a cycle of lessons using the provocations and analysis of observations and research reflections, students were suggested on voluntary basis to answer reflexive questions orally. Their reflections were coded from S1 to S10 to provide anonymity.

4. Research results and discussion

In Table 1, categories and subcategories are presented, identified through analysis of the students' reflections after the cycle of the lessons with the practical application of educational provocations.

Table 1. Categories and subcategories from the students' reflections.

No.	Categories	Subcategory	Supporting sentences
1.	Change in attitude towards foreign language classes	<i>Starting to understand that English is more than learning poems by heart,</i>	<i>"We sang the same songs and learnt the same poems as students in 4B, but during the "sparkle class" we tried to create poems by ourselves. It was funny" (S1)</i>
		<i>English lessons became more interesting.</i>	<i>"I wait for the English "sparkle class" as we do something extraordinary, for e.g. created sayings about colors" (S2)</i>
2.	The role of educational creative provocation in foreign language lessons	<i>Maintaining interest in lessons</i>	<i>"We noticed that we are doing something different: making videos for Mother's Day as we considered postcards to be stale. We made interesting texts. My mom liked it" (S3)</i>
		<i>Arousing curiosity</i>	<i>"We waited, who would enter the classroom" (S4)</i>
3.	The significance of the choice of tools/materials for the creative process,	<i>Providing an opportunity for self-expression</i>	<i>"I was happy, when my friends liked my created song" (S5)</i>
		<i>Giving a possibility to 'do what I want'</i>	<i>"It was very nice when we did some art in English classes, explained about things happening in English. In short, we could choose what to master and how to explain everything to others" (S6).</i>

The categories presented in Table 1 were identified by analyzing the reflections of 12 students. The category – "Change in attitude towards English lessons", with two subcategories – demonstrates new understanding that language learning is not a monotonous process. Analysis of data collected during students' reflections revealed that some students did not like English lessons very much in the past. Students

got used to routine activities and found them uninteresting. As Vincent-Lancrin et al. (2019) state, to develop students' creativity, it is important to leave room for surprises in lessons. It was the educational method of creative provocations that managed to create surprises, so the students saw that English lessons can be more interesting for them: Also, one of the reasons why the lessons became more attractive for students was the unusual materials: '<...> I was interested in creating songs with special programs <...>.' (S7)

The following category is "The role of educational creative provocation in English lessons", with two subcategories: maintaining interest in lessons and arousing curiosity. From this category, it can be seen that the method of educational provocations helped maintain students' interest throughout the entire lesson cycle, as S8 stated: '<...> and I liked it so much that I had to keep myself interested.' Interest was maintained because each time the students were waiting for something unexpected. It was incredibly interesting for me, every day some kind of surprise, like from a calendar.' (S9). It is important to note that the same aspects were observed in both the analysis of observation data and that of students' reflections: increased student interest and aroused curiosity. It was directly linked to motivation to complete a task (Amabile, 1988, in Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2021), and the latter is extremely important in the development of creativity (Beloyianni & Zbainos, 2021) curiosity and creative linguistic thinking (Schutte & Malouff, 2020).

During the analysis of students' reflections, another category was identified – "The significance of the choice of tools/materials for the creative process" with two subcategories: providing an opportunity for self-expression and giving a possibility to 'do what I want'. According to the subjects, the freedom to choose the tools, materials and activities provided an opportunity for their personal self-expression by showing what they liked: '<...>, and now it was very good for me, because I could just choose and show what I liked.' (S10). The students also had the opportunity to show their talents. Their presentations had to reflect the goal of the lesson, so they could not exactly do what they wanted, but the ability to choose created a sense of freedom, which is important in the development of creativity and creative linguistic thinking (Guilford, 1950, cited in Taylor, 2023).

Moreover, a change in students' perceptions of creativity English lessons was observed. It is relevant to note that all twelve students, during reflection, named what they learned or understood after the cycle of lessons when the creative provocations method was applied. The first aspect that emerged concerned maintaining originality. The second was related to trying new things. This aspect is important because creativity is related to new, original, non-standard solutions (Forster, 2015). Literature analysis showed that in the Reggio Emilia education system, provocations are significant in stimulating imagination (Vecchi, 2013, in Porres, 2020) and that creativity is directly linked to imagination (Lucas, 2016; Collardo, 2012, in Mazeh, 2020). It is no less important that some students understand that English lessons can be different and interesting. A change in attitude towards their abilities was also detected. This shows that the creative provocations approach influenced students' knowledge of creativity, art, literature, technology, public speaking during English classes. Aspects such as maintaining originality, vivid imagination, and the ability to arouse interest are directly related to the development of creativity.

5. Conclusion

The scientific literature presents multiple concepts and models that reveal different aspects of creativity and creative linguistic thinking. There is no unified definition of the concepts, but it is possible to identify certain aspects inseparable from them. Creativity can and should be developed. In addition, creativity is associated with non-standard, exceptional thinking, an idea that has practical expression and benefits for the environment or the creator. Educational provocations are one of the interactive methods that can foster students' creativity. This method aims to provoke, motivate students, and create room for surprises. This method is also characterized by a variety of tools and activities, which give students the opportunity to choose and experiment not only with familiar materials or texts, but also with unusual, non-routine things. It is important to note that the aesthetic arrangement of tools and linguistic expression is important. When used correctly, educational provocations can develop students' creativity and give them freedom to express themselves by demonstrating their interactive powers.

During the analysis of the action research data, it also became clear that the educational provocations are directly related to the development of students' creativity and linguistic creative thinking as this method piques students' curiosity and interest, which are directly related to the development of creativity and communication. When applying the educational provocations, conditions are created for different students' self-expression, giving them a sense of freedom to be creative personalities.

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