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CREATIVE WRITING: CREATING SELF-CONFIDENCE

ESCRITURA CREATIVA: PARA CREAR AUTOCONFIANZA

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ABSTRACT

Developing teenage students' self-confidence could be difficult. Their age, likes, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions are constant obstacles to learning a new language, even more, if they do not feel comfortable in their classroom. This article reflects on the implementation of creative writing and how other aspects as critical thinking, development of language skills, motivation, among others, can be improved while focusing on writing in a "funny way" based

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on the information gathered through different researches and personal teaching experience.

KEYWORDS: creative writing, attitude, classroom environment

RESUMEN

El desarrollo de la autoconfianza en estudiantes adolescentes puede resultar difícil. Su edad, gustos, creencias, actitudes y percepciones son obstáculos constantes para aprender un nuevo idioma, más aún, si no se sienten cómodos en su salón de clases. Este artículo reflexiona sobre la implementación de la escritura creativa y cómo se pueden mejorar otros aspectos como el pensamiento crítico, el desarrollo de las habilidades lingüísticas, la motivación, entre otros, mientras se enfoca en escribir de manera "divertida" tomando como base información recopilada a través de diferentes investigaciones y la experiencia personal en el ámbito de la enseñanza.

PALABRAS CLAVE: escritura creativa, actitud, ambiente de la clase

INTRODUCTION

Fear, anxiety, embarrassment, shame, and even anger, are the most common feelings among teenage students of EFL. The pressure of the people around them and the desire of being “good enough” make them feel insecure when they have to share an answer of any activity. Some of them are brave and apologize, explaining the reason behind their silence, but most students feel afraid and prefer to sit quietly, letting their thoughts fly around and, in the worst cases, allowing them to be true.

In their research, Xia & Xu found that “students tended to experience negative emotions including anxiety, boredom, guilty and helplessness when they were in a negative CE (classroom environment) characterized by perceived negative teacher feedback, unsatisfied autonomy, tense competitiveness, poor teacher-student relationships, low textbook quality, high teacher expectation, and ill-structured teaching design” (as cited in Li, Huang, & Li, 2020). This scenario is common in different schools, it does not change if they are private or public, or even from another country; there are always these feelings that start to look more like obstacles than any other thing.

Henter (2014) explains that when a student starts to develop a negative attitude towards their language learning, it will make it harder than it should be because the student sees some barriers that him/she created. Therefore, the teacher’s responsibility is to help our students break them without teaching the lessons needed.

This article addresses three main parts. The first one talks about the students’ attitude towards EFL in terms of beliefs and perceptions. The second part relies on the benefits of creative

writing from a broader perspective that goes beyond the teaching of English. Finally, the third part shows how having a friendly environment will help the students feel more comfortable and develop their language skills.

These three ideas reflect the importance of how students need to be listened to and how creative writing could help them express themselves. Also, this paper will show other aspects that need to be considered in any class, referencing personal teaching experience and additional research designed about the areas of concern. In the end, it will give some recommendations about the classroom environment and creative writing that could be applied in the classroom to make them more enjoyable and comfortable.

WHERE IS THE MISTAKE?

Secondary graders demonstrate fear, shyness, anxiety, shame, or anger when completing or participating in English classes. Some of them have had the encouragement or the trust to say that they have had “bad teachers,” as they call them, who treated them in a wrong way, or who did not have enough patience with them.

Being empathic with students is essential, “putting pressure on students can only discourage them, especially when a teacher must develop students’ speaking abilities” (Henter, 2014). Sometimes in a rush to see students with an advanced level, it is forgotten that not all feel comfortable sharing their progress in public. Not necessarily because they are shy, but because they are introverted or prefer to see their partners’ work to understand if their work is well done or any other possible situations.

In this way, teachers need to find the balance to avoid students feeling pressured instead of helping them improve, pushing them to stop their learning. Oroujlou & Vahedi (2011) suggest that although brilliant students are not correctly

encouraged, their results will not be as good as expected. However, it is vital to consider that it is not always the teacher's fault. In other cases, students have said they feel judged by their partners just because they have a "better English level," even when they have never laughed or said something inappropriate.

For these reasons, Lennartsoon (as cited in Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011) talks about the importance of the students' beliefs because these could motivate them to work harder or stop their learning process. "Creating a safe and comfortable environment where everyone feels like a part of the whole is one of the most significant factors in encouraging motivation and good attitude" (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). It is necessary to be careful with the classroom environment; factors such as the relationship with the students and teaching will affect how students feel and believe. Changing those thoughts later will be complicated.

In other cases, students feel more comfortable when the activities are written rather than spoken. After all, they have the opportunity to share their feelings and thoughts more freely because they do not need to read them aloud. Harmer (as cited in Tütüniş & Küçükali, 2014) affirms that creative writing allows students to express better than oral activities, they feel most comfortable. In addition, they have the opportunity to develop their ideas better. Therefore, considering these conditions, integrating creative writing activities in the classes helps them feel comfortable, showing a better attitude.

It is essential to look for writing exercises that elicit students' attention, especially those focused on the content rather than the grammar or spelling. Hence "Those activities that are good for language acquisition are usually perceived by acquirers as pleasant, while those activities that are not good for language acquisition are not consistently perceived as pleasant, and are

often perceived as painful.", (Krashen, 1994). Activities such as start a story from a sentence, change the final of any story, write the exact text from the perspective of any other of the characters of the story, or create a character or object based on a name, will help students to change their attitude towards the English language.

On the one hand, they do not see it as a monster whose purpose is to make them suffer. On the other hand, students have started to see it as something more valuable than just learning grammar. Even though it is essential, it is necessary to change the belief that students will be English teachers. They need to know English for communication purposes; keeping this in mind, they will realize it is functional. Therefore, they will feel more motivated to learn it. According to Kırkgöz (as cited in Fithriani, 2021), creative writing develops different areas in terms of language such as fluency, grammar, vocabulary, discourse, and creativity while the right side of their brains is working out. Therefore, there are different advantages to teaching English writing differently.

Once those students find another kind of external motivation beyond a grade, it is necessary to look over the stories they will share. Writing is not just for developing a skill, but to express and communicate with others and compare ideas or opinions that students sometimes keep for themselves because they consider them "not important" or "not useful."

THE WORLD INSIDE THEIR HEADS

Teachers need to keep the reminder that students are more than just students. They have their own lives outside the school, and sometimes it is forgotten. They have to carry their problems related to their social groups or even with themselves. Some are talkative and

share their thoughts, but sometimes, they need to analyze them.

Oral (as cited in Tok & Kandemir, 2014) said, “directly associated with creativity, creating writing means one’s putting his or her ideas and feelings about a particular topic on paper by using his or her imagination freely.” When students can write, letting them be free of making mistakes, they start to feel confident and creative; they do not have to worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. They have to put into words the fantastic worlds that they constantly are creating based on their lives, their interactions, the things that they think, their experiences. In the same way, children do with their monologues, as Piaget (1964) concludes when they play with their toys and recreate different situations or stories that they listen to from others. They analyze the problem that could have had during the day and find a solution for it. Students, as human beings, need to examine their life: concerns, dreams, goals, and any other situation that happens inside, and as well, sometimes they are not able to share it with someone else, in this way, through writing it is possible to understand themselves better.

As follows, creative writing allows the student to explore the world that they have inside their head. Let them recognize themselves, their abilities, their insecurities, and in the same way, work with them, improving not only in their English skills but also in their lives: “by writing on that page, we are creating another version of time; we are playing out a new version of existence, of life even.” (Morley, 2007). Besides, it allows to know them better, as teachers often ignore the students’ lives and forget that they have different interactions outside the classroom. Those interactions change and affect them, not only as people but also as the students that come every day to the school.

Bearing in mind the different interactions developed in the classroom, focusing on teaching grammar in English classes needs to change, not because it is not essential. However, it makes lose the students’ interest. They need to communicate with others. They imagine themselves talking as native speakers, admired for those who do not speak the language, and grammar does not allow that.

The research developed by Kulamikhina, Birova, Alipichev, Vasbieva, & Kalugina (2018), applied to Russian and Slovakian students learning English and French, demonstrated that they felt more motivated and interested during the period where the research took time. Furthermore, the series of creative writing activities applied to develop their communication and critical thinking, showing other benefits of creative writing, such as allowing students to go beyond explicit writing.

A study conducted in a Colombian private English-teaching institute by Ávila (2015) showed that his 11 students could face the English language in another way. He applied action research and used nine different creative activities to develop student’s oral and written production. Thus, creative writing promotes a great variety of activities that allow the student to be in contact with the language, realizing that it has more functions than those usually taught in a classroom.

In 2014, Tok & Kandemir made an experimental study in the city center of Denizli, Turkey, to determine the effects of creative writing on the development of writing skills. They applied a pre-test and post-test to 31 seventh graders, while during four weeks, they did a series of creative writing activities. The results showed an increase in the student’s achievement in English and a positive effect on their disposition to writing. This research shows that giving our students some freedom while learning the language helps them

feel more interested in the class, boosting their skills.

One of the studies made by Amado (2009) showed his interest in developing their students' writing skills because of their problems with writing, such as vocabulary, grammar, idiomatic expressions, among others. Therefore, he decided to use action research to help them through creative writing to facilitate expression. At the end of the investigation, he realized that his students had an "enrichment of fluency when students wrote their texts," "improve the comprehension skill in their texts," and that "it was a powerful means of expressing themselves" (Amado, 2009). A similar study was made in Turkey by Tütüniş & Küçükali in 2014, they worked on creative writing activities integrated into the current curriculum, and they found out, as well, that creative writing improves their students' writing skills.

These studies show that creative writing not only helps students to have a voice but also to develop their English skills, "writing has an important contribution to the development of other skills and also becomes a tool to express person's feelings, thoughts and information" (Tok & Kandemir, 2014), and feel more interested in their learning. Developing sensitiveness is something that teaching experience gathered teaches as well as asking what happens beyond the school. Sometimes students are lovely and participative, but other times they show their silent and absent sides, looking like a completely different class, but this is because teachers cannot see what happens once they leave aside their role of student and enter into a different position. As many of them work as a group, the feeling is sharing for all of them.

Days after, one of them could reach the teacher and explain the situation, but as teenagers, they are not always willing to share their problems, and one way of knowing a little more is giving them other forms of expression. With the

implementation of creative writing, students develop their creativity, language skills, critical thinking, a better attitude towards English in terms of motivation and interest, a better classroom environment, closer relationships with their classmates and teacher, and better management of their emotions.

Also, creative writing allows teachers to know their students' worlds. However, something important to highlight in the research of Ávila (2015) is that students did not feel comfortable participating at the beginning of his implementation. However, after some classes, they started to be more open with their classmates and teachers until they finally enjoyed the activities and realized their progress. Bearing this in mind, teachers should not forget that letting students work at their own pace, taking little steps with the groups, will bring them further than pushing them all at once.

MIXING NEEDS

Teenager students need empathy and space; they need to feel understood, treated with patience, and they need to be supported. Sometimes it is forgotten their internal processes, their development, and the changes they are facing.

In this stage of their lives, they are trying to understand the world again differently. Teachers need to be careful with expressing themselves because their words and gestures could help them feel confident or insecure. Depending on their perception about them, their classmates, the classroom will affect how they learn. Even though an attitude towards anything can be unlearned because it develops along with our lives and experiences (Smith, as cited in Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011), different studies recommend developing a positive attitude in our classes. Changing a negative attitude can become an impossible task, while creating a positive one will benefit the students and the teacher because they will feel comfortable and willing to put all

their effort to improve (Henter, 2014 and Tok & Kandemir, 2014). An environment where their partners help them improve, practice, and correct will increase their confidence towards the class, and it will happen if the situation is the opposite. Dai (as cited in Tok & Kandemir, 2014) says that “creative writing course allowed students the freedom to explore different aspects of their lives; their language proficiency improved. It has not only changed students’ attitudes towards writing but also helped them grow and know each other better”. Creative writing is not only practical to make the classes “funnier,” but it also allows the students to develop their skills, self-confidence and, establish a better relationship with their classmates.

Now, teachers’ needs are a bit different. They are related to their professional path and personal beliefs, which are constantly faced and make them question whether they should follow their knowledge or heart. “A good teacher, then, must tap into the sources of intrinsic motivation and find ways to connect with external motivational factors that can be brought to a classroom setting. This is especially significant when English is not seen as important to the student’s immediate needs, other than to pass exams.” (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). It is not a secret that most of the students see the English language as a subject to make them “suffer,” instead of something that they will need in a future for travel, study or professional purposes. This perception makes teachers confront themselves, how can their students genuinely learn if most of them think in their grade instead of the expressive possibilities of the language?

Finding an equal distribution between these needs is vital; developing creative writing activities makes it possible to create a space where students feel engaged in the environment. In addition, the complex decision-making could be less elicited by giving them opportunities

where teachers’ thoughts and actions will not be confronted.

PROPOSAL FOR TEACHERS

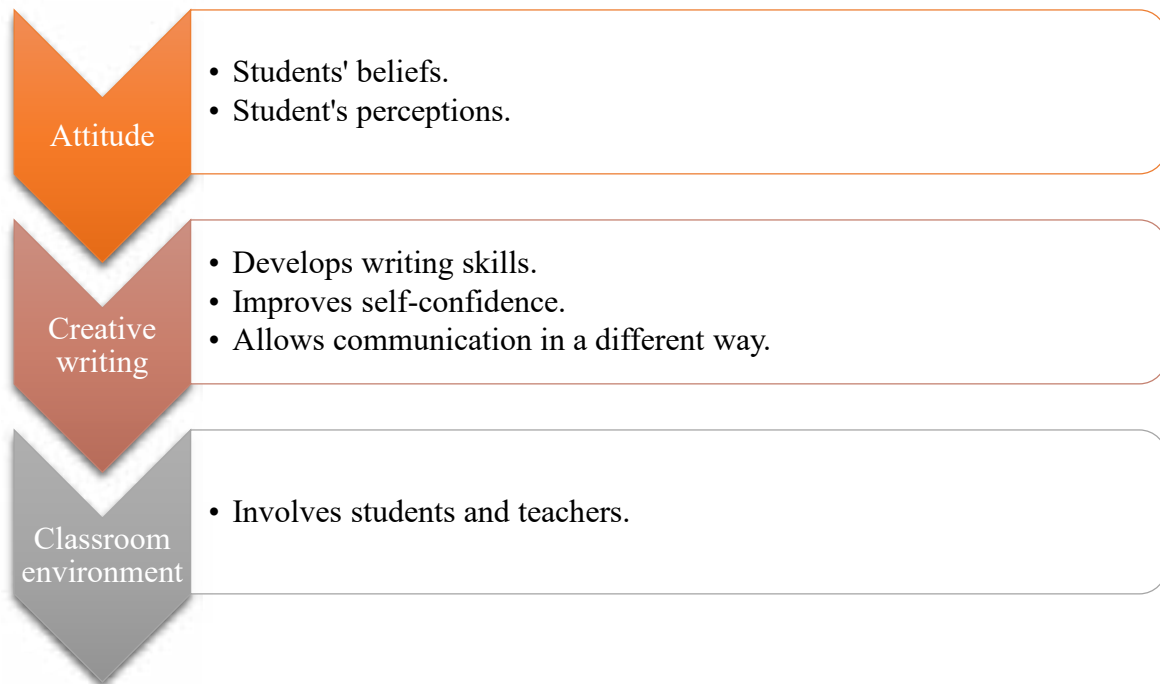
First of all, “language learners are not only communicators and problem-solvers, but whole persons with hearts, feelings, beliefs, identities” (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). It is crucial to consider students as human beings, do not forget that they are constantly growing up, and it makes them sensitive, and how to help them deal with their changes will affect the development of the classes. Li, Huang, & Li (2020) found out in their research that students’ perceptions of the classroom environment are based on how their partners and teacher support, engage and cooperate. So, bear in mind that to develop a comfortable and engaging environment, students and teachers share the same space, and both parts must take care of it.

Secondly, developing creative writing activities will help our students focus on language differently beyond grammar rules. “Students writers need to be given opportunity to write based on their expressive needs which allow the authentic, meaningful, personal expression to be a the center of literacy instruction” (Fithriani, 2021). Thus, creative writing is a boost to engage them and develop those skills that worry teachers all the time while they teach. However, please consider that it does not rely only on writing or creative activities; academic writing and developing the other skills are essential too, so keep a balance between them.

Finally, a comfortable environment mixed with creative writing activities will help teachers develop self-confidence in the students. It does not necessarily have to be shown because they reach an advanced level; instead, they start to take risks that before they could not do. Simple things like participating, completing activities by themselves, asking questions, admitting their

doubts, working with their classmates, and considering evident factors are significant steps that need to be celebrated. The following graphic briefly shows the main aspects to consider inside an EFL class to boost self-confidence.

Figure 1. How to create self-confidence



CONCLUSION

Teachers need to know how to keep the balance between the student's needs and their own needs: develop the language, with its skills, should be as necessary as taking care of their worlds because, in the end, they are willing to find a guide that makes them feel confident enough about themselves, not only as students but also as human beings. Even though this role is usually built inside the family, sometimes it is missing, so giving them a helping hand "just in case" could make the difference.

Teenage students are human beings before developing any other role. They have emotions, make mistakes, and are constantly growing up, which makes them vulnerable and doubt

themselves, so making their classroom enjoyable and comfortable becomes a need for them.

Creative writing allows students to express their internal worlds, develop their language skills and improve their confidence and imagination. It also lets the teachers get additional information about the classroom that sometimes is ignored or taken for granted; it helps the teachers work jointly with their knowledge and heart. It lets them achieve a curriculum and get into contact with their students. The best of all, get a collection of fantastic stories that all the world should read one day.

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