

Getting creative in the languages classroom

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Creative Multilingualism



A Manifesto

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7. Getting Creative in the Languages Classroom

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Language learning opens your mind

The following principles are central to the work of 'Linguistic Creativity in Language Learning', a research strand of Creative Multilingualism:

We create language every day.

Language diversity facilitates creative diversity.

Linguistic diversity nurtures diverse expression of feelings, thoughts and identities, and diverse ways of knowing and seeing the world.

In this chapter we outline how they might be considered in relation to classroom language learning.

One of the authors of this chapter recently gave a talk in a school in England to fourteen-year-olds about the benefits of carrying on with language study when they were older. Something that seemed to raise the learners' curiosity in particular was reference to English-speaking celebrities working in a range of music or entertainment fields who had learnt different languages, either at university or independently. In other words, they represented examples of 'Language Lives' these young learners could relate to. And, besides language study, what all the following people have in common is being highly creative:

*Languages Lives***Can You Guess Which Languages
These People Have Learnt?**

Chris Martin — singer and songwriter from the band Coldplay

J. K. Rowling — *Harry Potter* author

Natalie Portman — actor

Mark Zuckerberg — Facebook founder¹

When we learn or teach a foreign language at school, we may not automatically think about how it relates to creativity. For example, when one of us asked young learners what they disliked about learning French, one of them replied ‘the endless repetition of it all’, referring to lessons covering similar content and to the drills used to help the memorization of vocabulary. In other words, for that learner, language lessons seemed to be the very opposite of ‘creative’. Indeed, language syllabuses in schools are often criticized for focusing on what might be seen as the mundane and trivial (such as the language needed to buy a train ticket, to describe what one’s bedroom looks like, or even the contents of one’s pencil case). In fact, as we hope to show in this chapter, language learning has the potential to develop what one might call *general creativity*, which, for the moment, we will define as the ability to come up with novel, yet appropriate solutions to a given problem, often diverging from conventional thought patterns (Kharkhurin 2009: 60). Additionally, we discuss ways in which the languages classroom can incorporate activities that encourage learners’ *linguistic creativity*, namely their ability to use language that goes beyond the production and understanding of a narrow range of pre-fabricated phrases, as well as commanding a range of vocabulary (lexical breadth and diversity) that can be used in different combinations to express their own thoughts rather than just reproducing the perspectives of others.

1 Chris Martin learnt Ancient Greek and Latin; J. K. Rowling learnt French, German, Portuguese, Ancient Greek and Latin; Natalie Portman learnt French, Japanese, German and Spanish; Mark Zuckerberg learnt French, Hebrew, Ancient Greek and Latin.

In the final sections, we draw on a study we conducted with nearly 600 adolescent learners of French and German in England during the course of an academic year. We give full details later, but in brief, learners worked with two different types of text — poems, or factual, news-type texts — and experienced two different teaching approaches. The first drew their attention to the personal and emotional aspects of each text type and asked them to respond creatively, personally and emotionally to what they had read. The second, by contrast, focused on the grammar and vocabulary of the text, as well as on a factual understanding of it. We were interested in how learners' general creativity developed in each of these conditions, as well as the impact that might follow on their attitudes towards language learning, their vocabulary breadth and diversity, and on their ability to read and write French or German.

General Creativity and Language Learning

Above, we gave a provisional definition of general creativity, as the ability to come up with novel, yet appropriate solutions to a given problem, and the tendency to diverge from conventional thought patterns. Additional definitions include 'the act of making something new and different from what others are making' (Leikin 2013: 433). Being able to speak more than one language has been found in some studies to enhance that kind of creative ability, arguably because bilingualism improves mental flexibility and agility. For example, Mark Leikin (2013) presented children with a problem to which they needed to suggest a solution (in the problem scenario, a cat is trying to reach a hat on a high shelf. A chair, a stool, a bedside table and a stick are presented as items that could help). Bilingual children attending a bilingual kindergarten were found to offer more creative solutions (for example, 'throw a bag at it, and the cap will fall down' (p. 440)) than monolingual children.

But creativity is hard to 'measure'. For example, if we take as our definition of creativity the ability to generate solutions which are (1) **Original and novel**, and (2) **Functional and appropriate**, how would you rate the objects in Box 1 for their creativity?

Box 1 How ‘Creative’ Are These Objects?
Rate them on a 1–5 scale for the following criteria:
1) originality; and 2) functionality



Fig. 1 Photograph by Mykl Roventine (2009), Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8277883>



Fig. 2 Photograph by owner of Pet Rock Net (2003), Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7549364#/media/File:Pet_rock.jpg



Fig. 3 Photograph by Sherwin Ilagan Solina (2011), Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17836500>



Fig. 4 Photograph by Camlacaze (2013), CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=42135378>

While there are no right or wrong answers, arguably Figures 3 and 4 are more ‘creative’ in that as well as being ‘original’, they also have functionality as a pool table and a lorry respectively. The other two images do not really go beyond originality.

A frequently used tool to assess general creativity is the Abbreviated Torrance Test for Adults (ATTA) (Goff and Torrance 2002; see also Scholastic Testing Service, Inc. 2020), which assesses divergent thinking and both the verbal and figurative expression of creative thinking. Those taking the test are asked to carry out three tasks: (1) A verbal, problem identification task, listing all the problems a person would encounter if they could fly, without being in an airplane or similar vehicle; (2) a picture completion task, taking three wiggly lines and combining them to make as many new images as possible; and (3) a picture construction task, turning a row of triangles into different images. Tasks are scored along the following lines, using the verbal, problem identification task as an illustration:-

1. **Fluency:** number of responses that are relevant, i.e. **functional**;
2. **Originality:** number of responses that are **novel**, i.e. not in the ATTA scoring manual list of the ‘common responses’ recorded when the ATTA was pilot-tested;
3. **Additional criteria** (max. 2 points awardable): colourfulness of imagery — do the descriptions evoke concrete and vivid images?; expression of emotional reactions to the question; future orientation, thinking bigger/taking into consideration

societal problems in the future; humour, conceptual incongruity; provocative questions, raising issues that are original.

Let's look at a response a learner recently gave us to the first task (*list the problems encountered if one could fly*).

Box 2 A Learner Lists the Problems Encountered If One Could Fly

- 1) the sky could get very crowded, 2) there would be less space for animals such as birds to fly, 3) the ground could become overgrown with plants, 4) buildings could be destroyed, 5) a new world could build up in the sky, 6) the ground would become unused and forgotten about, 7) new technology to make things more accessible from the sky could arise.

Using the criteria above, how many points for creativity would you give this response to the ATTA verbal creativity task, and why? (See Appendix 1).

The ATTA was used in two studies that explored whether learning a foreign language in school — in other words, **learning** to be bilingual or multilingual in a formal educational setting — would also enhance general creativity. Findings suggest that for primary school learners and young adolescents, classroom language learning does indeed contribute to the development of general creativity (Landry 1973; Lasagabaster 2000). It may be, of course, that only certain types of language teaching encourage the development of general creativity. For example, a focus on learning through repetition and memorization within a narrow range of topics, and tasks that rarely go beyond known and predictable language, seems unlikely to foster creative growth. We will return to this argument later.

It is worth emphasizing at this point that the definitions of creativity underpinning the ATTA are not the only ones that are used in academic research. Definitions may, furthermore, be culturally dependent. For example, while Western cultures tend to see creativity in terms of a product or in terms of problem-solving, Eastern cultures may lay more value on emotional and personal aspects of creativity and on further exploration of the self and personal meanings (Lubart 1999). Similarly,

others such as Mark Runco (2007) discuss the ‘creative personality’, focusing on personal attributes and emotional dispositions rather than cognitive abilities. Runco summarizes research findings which suggest that such attributes include: autonomy, flexibility, preference for complexity, openness to a range of experiences and emotions, sensitivity, playfulness, wide interest and curiosity, as well as tolerance of ambiguity. Similarly, other researchers, such as Stephen Dollinger et al. (2007), have explored the values which are more likely to be held by creative individuals, finding that the two dimensions of values that most strongly predicted creativity were ‘openness’ and ‘self-transcendence’. The former includes self-direction, curiosity, openness to change and stimulation; the latter, benevolence, appreciation of natural beauty, broad-mindedness, tolerance and concern with protecting the welfare of all people and the environment. They make the important point that, unlike personality traits, values are not innate, but can be developed. The implication we draw from this is that by developing the values of openness and self-transcendence, we can also develop general creativity. We argue below that the languages classroom has huge potential for fostering these values.

Linguistic Creativity

So far, we have suggested that the simple fact of being able to speak another language might enhance an individual’s general creativity, given the right circumstances. We would also hope that during the course of formal language study, learners would develop the ability to use the target language itself creatively, as well as the ability to understand metaphorical and other figurative expressions in the target language (the language being learnt). On the one hand, this means being able to use and understand language in novel linguistic combinations, rather than simply producing or responding to pre-learnt phrases. Using a relatively wide range of vocabulary (lexical diversity) would also be considered to be a feature of linguistic creativity. On the other hand, it also implies being able to carry out the types of activity in the target language that would be considered ‘creative’ if carried out in a mother tongue. Such activities might include the creative use of language to convey a story with an exciting plot or atmospheric narrative, or the

use of language to express emotions and personal views; the ability to appreciate the aesthetic and emotional aspects of language heard or read; and the ability to use language to respond to unfamiliar/unexpected contexts and events.

In England, the context for our own study, learners are expected to be able to do many of these things by the time they reach 16. In the public examination they sit at that age, they are judged on their ability to 'make independent, creative and more complex use of the language' (Department for Education 2015: 7), at least in writing, which includes 'using language to create an effect; using language to express thoughts, ideas, feelings and emotions' (Edexcel 2016: 24).

We will consider some ways in which linguistic creativity might be developed later. But let us turn first to developing general creativity.

Developing General Creativity — a Role for Poetry?

As outlined above, general creativity has been shown to include the following characteristics: original and flexible thinking, openness and tolerance (to ambiguity, to a range of experiences, emotions, perspectives), curiosity, imagination and a liking for stimulation and independent thinking. What sort of activities and materials might allow learners and teachers to develop and exercise these attributes?

For us, first and foremost, the creative languages classroom should allow learners to express a range of opinions and perspectives and offer a learning environment where experimentation and imagination rather than just linguistic accuracy are valued. The creative languages classroom would also provide stimulation, encourage learners to experience a range of emotions, and give them opportunities to consider and empathize with the experiences and perspectives of others as a form of imaginative understanding.

A recent British Council publication (Maley and Peachey 2015) provides a useful overview of ideas for creative approaches to language teaching, including the use of scenario-based tasks, drama, art and open-ended activities. The suggested approaches often introduce an element of unexpectedness and unpredictability, or 'surprise'. Unpredictability can lead to greater stimulation for learners, and hence opportunities for creativity. Unpredictability also leads to learners experiencing emotions

and stimulation, with benefits for learners' levels of engagement in the languages classroom. Jean-Marc Dewaele et al. (2017) found a direct relationship between the levels of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) expressed by adolescent language learners in England and the extent to which the teacher/teaching was 'unpredictable', in the sense of varying activities, not always following the same routines and not always expecting the same responses. While this kind of unpredictability might be thought to potentially lead to greater foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), Dewaele et al. (2017) found that it did not, and that learners still enjoyed lessons even if they experienced some anxiety. Although this might be surprising, it suggests that experiencing some kind of emotion may be better than feeling nothing at all. They thus suggest that 'teachers should strive to boost FLE rather than worry too much about students' FLCA' (p. 676).

Unpredictability and associated emotions are, however, often missing from the languages classroom, as Dewaele (2015: 13) argues persuasively:

One of the main problems of foreign language (FL) teaching is that the emotional component is too often ignored, resulting in relatively emotion-free (and therefore often boring) classroom sessions [...] that require little emotional investment and therefore little potential for unpredictability, outbursts, surprise, risk-taking, embarrassment, anxiety [...] and enjoyment.

One way of increasing 'emotional investment', 'potential for unpredictability' and, we would argue, creativity as a result, is through the use of literature in the languages classroom. Literature is often ambiguous, and thus can be read and discussed from a number of perspectives, it is open to a number of possible interpretations, appeals to the imagination and emotions, and therefore offers possibilities for the development and exercising of creativity (Duff and Malley 1990; Malley 1989). Poetry in particular offers these opportunities, tending to be more ambiguous than prose, to employ novel and unusual linguistic combinations and images, and to focus on the emotions. The philosopher John Stuart Mill, in an essay entitled 'What is Poetry?' (1833: 106), argues that such a focus on emotions, 'the delineation of the deeper and more secret workings of the human heart', is one of poetry's key characteristics. Poetry can also arouse emotions in the reader and speak

to those who thus recall 'what they have felt, or whose imagination it stirs up to conceive what they could feel, or what they might have been able to feel, had their outward circumstances been different'. Poets, like other creative individuals, 'experience the world in novel and original ways' (Csikszentmihalyi 1997: 25). Such divergent thinking is then often manifested through imagery and unusual juxtapositions of words, allowing the reader to similarly experience the world in novel and original ways.

Our list of characteristics associated with creativity also included openness and tolerance (to ambiguity, to a range of experiences and perspectives). We might additionally include 'empathy' here, which has links to imagination (and hence to creativity) insofar as both involve the ability to conceive of, see, feel, experience something outside one's immediate self. Again, poetry can be used to foster this openness to other perspectives, as illustrated in an interesting study by Virgina M. Scott and Julie A. Huntington (2002). They worked with university students studying French who were learning about a French-speaking country in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). One group of students read and discussed a fact sheet about the country, which presented information about its economy, religion and so forth in French. Another group studied the poem '*Raconte-moi*' by Véronique Tadjo, which the authors describe as follows:

the poem mourns the gradual loss of the cultural heritage and traditions of the people of Côte d'Ivoire. Composed in free verse, '*Raconte-moi*' evokes a series of symbolic images: 'the griot who sings the Africa of times immemorial', 'the beauty of the ancestors with faded smiles', and 'my past returned from the depths of my memory like a totem snake bound to my ankles'... (Scott and Huntingdon 2002: 625)

After studying the texts and writing about what they now knew about Côte d'Ivoire, both groups were asked to respond to the question: 'If you met a student from Côte d'Ivoire, what would you ask him or her?'. The responses of the group that had studied the poem were not only more varied and showed greater originality, but also displayed what the authors call 'cognitive flexibility', the 'acknowledgment of multiple views, tolerance of ambiguity' (p. 623), which, as we have discussed earlier, can be considered as important aspects of creativity. As Scott and Huntingdon explain, using literature in a specific way can help

learners grasp that ‘there is no single understanding or “truth”’. This requires a teaching approach that encourages learners to think ‘How do I feel about this issue? Why? How might someone else feel about this?’ (p. 624).

Nevertheless, some authors, such as Willis Edmondson (1997), are critical of the use of literary texts in general for language teaching, claiming that they encourage a teacher-centred approach and can be highly demotivating for some learners. Indeed, it is important to emphasize that using poetry (or other forms of literature) with language learners will not automatically lead to improved creativity. Nor will using poetry automatically lead to improved enjoyment of language study, a more positive attitude towards language study, or improved linguistic proficiency. As Amos Paran (2008: 42) argues, ‘what may well be a determining factor is the way in which the learners are exposed to literature’. Paran’s hesitancy here comes from the relatively small body of research that has been conducted on the impact of using literature on language learners, particularly in terms of establishing what are the teaching methods that might predict positive outcomes. The few studies he reviews that have looked at this issue suggest, albeit tentatively, that if learners are asked to give personal responses to literary texts, to engage with them on an emotional level, and give some kind of creative response to them of their own, then better outcomes (linguistic and non-linguistic) will be achieved than if they are just asked comprehension questions on the factual meaning of the text, or asked to identify any grammatical features it exemplifies.

Developing Linguistic Creativity through Poetry

Scott and Huntington did not assess whether learners in the factual text group also differed from learners in the poem group in terms of how many words they retained from those they encountered in the texts. This is an interesting question because the fact that poetry is emotionally as well as cognitively engaging may also have implications for vocabulary learning, according to certain theories of second language vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary learning through reading is considered to be more effective if learners have a deeper sense of ‘involvement’ and process the language more deeply (Laufer and Hulstjin 2001). Engagement

with figurative language, for example metaphorical language within poetry may increase learners' chance of retaining new vocabulary and structures encountered in texts, although again, few studies have tested this empirically. As we argued earlier, poetry is creative in part because it uses novel combinations of words. This too, from a theoretical perspective, suggests possibilities for vocabulary learning through poems. There is evidence from studies of reading in the mother tongue to suggest that presenting new words in novel contexts leads to better learning (Johns, Dye and Jones 2016), precisely because learners have to work harder to understand a word in a passage that is different from the kind they are used to reading (Nation 2017) and they thus process it more deeply. For example, speakers of English as a first language might have only ever encountered the word *benign* in a medical context (*benign tumour*), but it can also appear in a number of diverse, less familiar contexts (*benign weather*, *benign economy* or *benign ruler*). Similarly, beginner learners of French might only ever meet words such as *frère* (brother) in the context of talking about their family, or the verb *ouvrir* (to open) in the context of classroom commands ('Open your books!'). Students' learning of these words may be enhanced by encountering them in contexts such as the poem 'L'homme qui te ressemble' ('The man like you') by René Philombé, where *frère* is used in the sense of 'fellow human', and *ouvrir* in the sense of opening the door to someone, to welcome and accept them, as in the following line:

Ouvre-moi mon frère ('Open the door to me, my brother')

Thus in addition to prompting learners to reflect on the importance of tolerance and common humanity underlying any surface differences, the poem's figurative juxtaposition of 'ouvrir' and 'mon frère' may lead to better vocabulary development. This chimes with a study conducted by the Creative Multilingualism research strand 'The Creative Power of Metaphor' (see Kohl et al. 2020), which found that language learners at both intermediate and advanced level tended to show weaknesses in understanding metaphorical meanings of verbs, suggesting that more attention should be given to these in language teaching (see Chapter 1 in this volume).

In addition, if we consider linguistic creativity to include being able to use and understand language in novel linguistic combinations,

rather than simply producing or responding to pre-learnt phrases, then classroom activities that stimulate learners to express opinions and feelings, and to imagine the perspective of others, provide opportunities for what Merrill Swain (1985) calls 'pushed output'. This means that learners' productive skills improve because as they are forced to express their meanings, they try out a wider range of novel linguistic combinations, and restructure the language they have previously learnt and used as pre-fabricated chunks. Studying how adults responded to literature, Myonghee Kim (2004) found that encouraging personal responses (such as creating dramatic representations of the text) led to greater interaction in the classroom, which we would expect to lead to enhanced language development.

Linguistic Creativity in Language Learning — Our Study

We now turn to how we have explored the impact of using poems in the languages classroom. Our study was motivated by a number of considerations. First, the context in which we work, England, has recently seen a much greater emphasis on literature in language syllabuses. Older learners (sixteen years plus), are required, from 2018, to appreciate literary works for their artistic merit, as well as for their meaning or topical interest. These developments are mirrored in the curriculum for younger learners: learners aged seven to eleven are expected to 'appreciate stories, songs, poems and rhymes in the language'; for learners aged eleven to fourteen, the curriculum states that they should 'read literary texts in the language' which will in turn 'stimulate ideas, develop creative expression' and help learners 'write prose using an increasingly wide range of grammar and vocabulary and write creatively to express their own ideas and opinions' (Department for Education 2013). Finally, at age sixteen, when learners take the school-leaving certificate, the GCSE, they are required not only to respond to extracts from literary texts but, as we outlined earlier, to also demonstrate their ability 'to make independent, creative and more complex use of the language' (Department for Education 2015: 7) in the exam paper that tests writing skills. It is thus implied that exposing learners to literary texts will develop their ability to use language

'creatively'. While this assumption seems intuitive and plausible, there is in fact little empirical evidence about whether literary texts rather than non-literary, factual texts are more effective with teenage language learners, because research to date has paid little if any attention to this issue (Paran 2008). Previous research has not only concentrated on the use of literature with adult learners but has rarely directly compared the use of literary and non-literary texts. Nor has it considered to any great extent the impact of *how* each kind of text is used. To understand what impact the use of literature might have, we needed to compare it to using non-literary texts, with mode of use, or teaching approach, as another moderating variable.

We chose poems as our literary text form. As we have already discussed, we see poems as offering the greatest potential for developing creativity because of their tendency to use novel and unusual combinations of language and imagery, their ambiguity and their frequent focus on emotions. In addition, to evaluate the impact on learners of using literature, we needed to compare its impact with using factual texts. We thus wanted a clear contrast between the literary and non-literary texts we used. We felt that poems offered a greater contrast with non-literary texts than literary prose did.

In terms of teaching approaches, two contrasting ways of using texts emerged from a review of the research literature that we conducted (see Bobkina and Dominguez 2014, for a summary of teaching approaches). The first of these we have already outlined: learners engage primarily with the text on the level of personal, emotional and imaginative response. We called this the 'creative' approach, because, as discussed, we see creativity as being fostered through activities whose goals are the development of original and flexible thinking, curiosity, imagination, stimulation and independent thinking, as well as openness and tolerance (to ambiguity, to a range of experiences, emotions and perspectives). The second approach we term 'functional'. Here the focus is primarily on the text as a vehicle for teaching language, vocabulary and grammar, and for developing the skill of identifying key information in a text on a factual level.

With two teaching approaches and two text types, we needed a study design which combined both elements. In other words, we needed to assess the impact on learners of (1) poems taught 'creatively'; (2) poems

taught 'functionally'; (3) factual texts taught 'creatively'; and (4) factual texts taught 'functionally'. The fifteen participant schools with which we worked were therefore grouped initially by text type: one group of students (173 French, 107 German) studied only poems throughout the study, the other group (187 French, 110 German) only factual texts. Each group studied six texts and for three they experienced a creative teaching approach, and for the other three, a functional teaching approach. All teaching was conducted by the learners' usual French or German teacher. On the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), learners' proficiency level would be judged as being around A1.

In order to make more valid comparisons between the two text types, it was important that we kept the linguistic content as equal as possible. We began by selecting six poems (in consultation with teachers) on topics that we felt would be accessible and interesting to fourteen-year-olds but which also addressed certain more difficult and controversial issues (such as grief, migration, animal captivity), as we consider that stimulation, unpredictability and the experience of emotions and curiosity are important elements of fostering creativity. We then selected and adapted **authentic factual texts** so that the vocabulary and grammatical structures they used overlapped with what was in the poems. Both text types were matched in terms of difficulty level, word length, sentence complexity and so forth. An outline of the kinds of activities we developed can be found in Appendix 2.

We have assessed the impact of each text type and teaching approach on learners' general creativity, using the ATTA already outlined. A questionnaire has assessed impact on learners' attitudes towards, and motivation for language learning, while a range of tests have been used to assess impact on vocabulary size, reading skills, general creativity and linguistic creativity in writing. Further details can be found in Julia Hofweber and Suzanne Graham (2018). Space does not permit the reporting of detailed results from the study. We can, however, summarize the most important ones. First, the most positive impact from working with the texts occurred among the learners of French. Over the year their vocabulary size increased significantly, by about 300 words. The largest increase occurred under the the creative approach across both text types, which learners also found more helpful and enjoyable. General creativity also increased significantly, but only for

learners of French experiencing the poems under a creative approach. The French poems led to significant increases in the grammatical complexity of learners' writing, across both approaches. By contrast, for the German group, vocabulary and creativity gains were not statistically significant, and they also stated a preference for the functional-type activities. Interestingly, across both languages, learners whose writing improved under the creative approach, improved far less under the functional approach and vice versa. Overall, these mixed results suggest that learners are individuals with varying needs and preferences, which teaching needs to take account of. For the French group however there was encouraging evidence of the greatest benefits coming from the creative approach, which also emerged from interviews conducted at the end of the study. Learners told us that studying literary texts 'was really fun, cos you get like to learn new stuff, learn how to express your feelings' and that they 'quite liked finding the emotions [...] through the text'. Teachers liked that the materials of both kinds allowed them to engage with bigger issues, and they enjoyed seeing a different side to their pupils. One teacher commented that the poems 'allowed [learners] to open their minds and express themselves in different ways, dipping into their emotions. Taking part in the project has given me the courage to try out more ambitious things in my classroom in the future'.

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, we have presented different dimensions of general creativity, emphasizing its links with original and flexible thinking, and openness to a range of experiences, emotions and perspectives. We have argued for classroom activities that give opportunities for these experiences, introduce an element of unexpectedness and unpredictability and stimulate imagination and its related characteristic, empathy. We have outlined the potential benefits for linguistic creativity that might then flow from this focus on general creativity.

As part of the questionnaire we gave learners, we asked them to complete the sentence 'If French/German were food, it would be...' as a way of gaining insights into more subconscious aspects of their feelings about language learning. Some of their responses showed a resigned attitude towards the more mundane aspects of their language classes

they typically experience, as something to be tolerated. Thus for one learner, if German was a food it would be ‘a bowl of cereal’, ‘boring but important-ish’. By overlooking creativity in language learning, we may risk making it very much like the breakfast cereal this learner refers to. We hope that some of the ideas we have presented in this chapter will inspire others to use them, to help learners become aware that language is not only functional, but can be beautiful, moving and, above all, creative.

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Find Out More

Cushen, Patrick. J., and Jennifer Wiley. 2011. 'Aha! Voilà! Eureka! Bilingualism and Insightful Problem Solving', *Learning and Individual Differences*, 21(4): 458–62, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2011.02.007>

Cushen and Wiley shed light on how bilingualism relates to creativity, in a study which reports that bilinguals can show advantages on creative problem-solving tasks and on those involving cognitive flexibility.

Fisher, Linda. 2013. 'Discerning Change in Young Students' Beliefs about Their Language Learning through the Use of Metaphor Elicitation in the Classroom', *Research Papers in Education*, 28(3): 373–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2011.648654>

This article presents insights into how students perceive language learning, in a study that asked 12–13 year olds to express their views in the form of metaphors that described what language learning was like from their perspective.

Graham, Suzanne, Linda Fisher, Julia Hofweber and Heike Krüsemann. 2020. 'Linguistic Creativity in Language Learning', Research Strand 7 of Creative Multilingualism, <https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/research/>

Research project on language teaching and learning conducted as part of the Creative Multilingualism programme between 2016 and 2020. This chapter draws on that research.

Hanauer, David. I. 2001. 'The Task of Poetry Reading and Second Language Learning', *Applied Linguistics*, 22(3): 295–23, <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/22.3.295>

This study suggests ways in which poetry can draw students' attention to important aspects of the language and so benefit their learning. It also explores how poetry reading can enhance students' cultural awareness.

Müller, Lisa-Maria, et al. 2018. 'Language Learning Motivation at the Transition from Primary to Secondary School', OASIS Summary of **Graham, Suzanne, et al.** (2016), *British Educational Research Journal*, <https://oasis-database.org/concern/summaries/0g354f20t?locale=en>

Summary of a study of how motivation for language learning changes as students move from primary to secondary school, reporting that young students value learning activities related to culture, communication and creativity.

Owen, Stephen, and Robert Woore. 2019. 'Teaching Reading to Beginner Learners of French in Secondary School', OASIS Summary of **Woore, Robert., et al.** 2018, <https://oasis-database.org/concern/summaries/nc580m68d?locale=en>

Summary of a study that used semi-authentic texts with beginner learners of French, showing that learners enjoyed them, responded well to more challenging, culturally-rooted material and increased their French vocabulary as a result.

Appendix 1: Scores for the ATTA Verbal Creativity Task Response Given in Box 2

The verbal, problem identification task is one of three tasks used in the Abbreviated Torrance Test for Adults (ATT) to assess creativity. The score for this task is added to scores for the other two parts of the test to give a ‘creativity score’ which is relative rather than absolute.

Creativity is defined as the generation of solutions that are both **novel**/out-of-the-box and **functional**, so both aspects need to be considered when scoring responses. The Abbreviated Torrance Test uses a range of criteria to score creativity. The ATTA is a ‘standardized’ test, meaning that its authors have tested it with a large number of participants to create a scoring manual with detailed normed criteria.

Verbal creativity task 1 (*Imagine you could fly without the help of an aeroplane — list as many problems as you can think of*):

Example answer:

1) *the sky could get very crowded*, 2) *there would be less space for animals such as birds to fly*, 3) *the ground could become overgrown with plants*, 4) *buildings could be destroyed*, 5) *a new world could build up in the sky*, 6) *the ground would become unused and forgotten about*, 7) *new technology to make things more accessible from the sky could arise*.

A) Core criteria (count each point)

- **Fluency:** number of responses that are relevant, i.e. **functional**.

Score: the seven problems listed can be considered as sufficiently relevant and different from each other to be counted as **7 points**.

- **Originality:** number of responses that are **novel**. The ATTA manual provides an ‘originality’ exclusion list of common responses, i.e. problems frequently listed when the ATTA was pilot-tested. Responses only receive points for originality if they are not already on this list.

Score: the example response listed three issues that are not on the originality exclusion list (*less space for birds to fly*, *ground unused* and

overgrown, new world and technology). **3 points** are therefore given for originality.

B) Additional criteria (max. 2 points for each category)

- **Richness:** Points of colourfulness of imagery — do the descriptions evoke concrete and vivid images?

Score: the example answer contains at least two instances with detailed descriptions of problem (*less space for birds, ground overgrown with plants*). **2 points** are therefore given for richness.

- **Expression of emotions:** points for expressing emotional reactions to the problems.

Score: In the example answer there is no evidence of emotional reactions. **0 points** are therefore given for expression of emotions.

- **Future orientation:** points for considering societal problems in the future

Score: The example answer scores highly on this criterion (*new world, ground forgotten, sky crowded*). **2 points** are therefore given for future orientation.

- **Humour:** points for conceptual incongruity

Score: In the example answer there is no evidence of humour. **0 points** are therefore given for humour.

- **Provocative questions:** points for raising issues that are original

Score: In the example answer there is no evidence of provocative questions. **0 points** are therefore given for provocative questions.

TOTAL POINTS: 14

Appendix 2: Creative Activities in the Classroom — Practical Ideas

Here we give details of how we have used poems and also factual texts to achieve some of the goals we outlined earlier, namely providing opportunities for original, independent and flexible thinking, openness and tolerance (to ambiguity, to a range of experiences, emotions, perspectives), curiosity, imagination and stimulation. We use the example of the French poem '*'Demain, dès l'aube'*' ('Tomorrow, at dawn') by Victor Hugo (1847). It was written after the tragic death of the poet's nineteen-year-old daughter, Léopoldine, in a boating accident. The poem depicts a journey through the countryside, suggesting that the protagonist (the poet) is on his way to meet a loved one. The destination is ambiguous at the start, and it is not clear who the two protagonists are, nor what their relationship is. It is only at the very end that the reader realizes that the narrator is journeying towards the grave of the loved one, on which he places a sprig of green holly and flowering heather.

The factual text that was used as a match to this poem presented the plight of people from the French-speaking island Saint-Martin, who had lost loved ones in Hurricane Irma. As a parallel to the metaphorical journey depicted in the Hugo poem, the factual text outlined the five stages of grief experienced by the mourners. The activities used with both the poem and the factual text were more or less identical, so, for brevity, we outline only those used with the poem (see Graham and Fisher 2020b).

In '*'Demain, dès l'aube'*', the poet's journey is both a literal one through space, but also a metaphorical journey through different stages of grief: from despair, indifference to everything except reaching the journey's end point, and finally to hope and belief in the immortality of the loved one. The poet's determination to reach his destination is conveyed by the repetition of verbs of movement in the future tense. Indeed, it is the future tense, and a factual comprehension of where the poet goes and what he does, that tend to be emphasized in most other teaching resources that feature the poem, but usually without much consideration of how they contribute to the poem's mood, meaning or symbolism.

What might an alternative approach look like, using the same text? Openness to the poet's perspective, a readiness to engage with the ambiguities of the poem and its symbolism, need to be built up to gradually. As a first step, the activities we used were aimed at helping learners to understand something about the person who wrote the poem and why they wrote it, in order to facilitate comprehension on both a literal and figurative level. Our opening activity gave learners some basic facts about Hugo, outlining briefly the tragic event that prompted him to write the poem. Then, to encourage initial empathy, learners were asked to look at three pictures, one of which depicted Hugo. In order to identify which of the images might be him, learners needed to appreciate that he would be grieving, serious and so forth, thus exercising imaginative understanding of his mental state.

The next stage then offered further possibilities for imagination and potentially divergent thinking. Learners were presented with visual images linked to the boating accident, and then anticipated or predicted what the poem might be about, what its tone and atmosphere might be like, how it might make them feel. Both this and the previous activity could be conducted in the learners' mother tongue, but equally, as demonstrated in the resources for the poem (Graham and Fisher 2020b), they could take place in French, the target language, with support from example words and phrases that learners could use to help them articulate such predictions.

In other words, there is preparation work to be done to help learners be ready to engage emotionally and deeply with the poem and thus stimulate their creativity. This is then followed by the initial presentation of the poem itself. We used music and images to enhance the impact on learners — for example, a reading of the poem from YouTube which combines evocative music by Bruno Garbay with an expressive reading by Gilles-Claude Thériault (2013). Employing a range of media (music, images, the spoken and written word), we would argue, not only heightens learners' engagement with the poem, but also aids their understanding of its theme and mood, stimulating their imagination and potentially leading to deeper processing of the poem's language.

Similarly, rather than focusing on the use of the future tense in the poem from a grammatical perspective, we asked learners to identify lines from the text that convey stages in the poet's 'journey' through his grief,

from despair to some sort of acceptance. In the final part of this activity, learners selected what they saw as the most important lines of the poem. Arguably the most important are the last lines, in which the placing of the holly and the heather on the grave symbolizes the poet's sense of immortality and that his daughter will live on; learners however were free to make their own choice, with reasons, in an effort to encourage divergent thinking. A final writing activity (given as homework) focused learners on the metaphorical aspects of the poem, asking them to think of images (either expressed through words or drawings) to convey the different aspects of the poet's journey through grief. Offering them the choice of presentation format we considered important for the development of the autonomy that is central to creativity.