

INCREASING THE POWER OF HUMOR AND CREATIVITY IN ELT CLASSES

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ABSTRACT: *Teachers or professors who teach English as a second or as a foreign language use many different teaching techniques and approaches in their classes. Students who learn English as a second or as a foreign language enjoy learning English with the positive power of humor and creativity. In this study, the role of humor and creativity in ESL or in EFL classes will be handled. The definitions of humor and creativity will be given. Sample classroom activities which have been applied in my own teaching classes will be told. Useful books and websites will be suggested.*

KEYWORDS: humor; creativity; ESL classes; EFL classes; sample classroom activities

INTRODUCTION

Students in ESL or in EFL classes always enjoy learning English with the help of the positive power of humor and creativity. Classroom exercises should be prepared according to the language levels and socio-cultural backgrounds of our students. When they smile they feel themselves happier. Classroom exercises which are related with the sense of humor and creativity will make them active and talkative learners during the class hours.

This study was prepared for the question of making students happier and creative thinkers. I tried to find solutions how my students could be more talkative and happier during the class hours. Different books and materials helped my students to become more active and talkative. When they became talkative they became happier during the class hours. Readers of this study will freshen up their knowledge on using humor and creativity in their own teaching classes. They will also freshen up their knowledge on the definitions of the words of ‘humor’ and ‘creativity’. Why creativity and teaching are related with each other deeply will also be handled in this study.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

What is Humor?

The word ‘humor’ is defined on the online Cambridge Dictionary as:
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/humour>

the ability to find things funny, the way in which people see that some things are funny, or the quality of being funny:

He's got a great sense of humour (= he is very able to see things as funny).

I must say I find his schoolboy (= childish) humour rather tiresome.

According to the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, humor is denoted that;

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/humor/>

“Most definitions of humor are essentialist in that they try to list the necessary and sufficient conditions something must meet in order to be counted as humor. Some theories isolate a common element supposedly found in all humor, but hold back from making claims about the sufficient conditions. Many theorists seem to confuse offering the necessary conditions for a response to count as humor with explaining why we find one thing funny rather than another. This second question, what would be sufficient for an object to be found funny, is the Holy Grail of humor studies, and must be kept distinct from the goals of a definition of the humor response. The Holy Grail is often confused with a question regarding the sufficient conditions for our response to count as humorous amusement, but a crucial distinction needs to be made: identifying the conditions of a response is different from the isolating the features something must possess in order to provoke such a response. The first task is much different from suggesting what features are sufficient to provoke a response of humorous amusement. What amounts to a humor response is different from what makes something humorous. The noun (humor) and adjectival (humorous) senses of the term are difficult to keep distinct due to the imprecision of our language in this area. Much of the dissatisfaction with traditional humor theories can be traced back to an equivocation between these two senses of the term.”

What is Creativity?

The word ‘creativity’ is defined on the online Cambridge Dictionary as: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/creativity>

“the ability to produce original and unusual ideas, or to make something new or imaginative”

It has been stated by Allen (2015: 11-12) that;

“Research into creativity has developed from early in the 20th century, with a range of interests and agendas represented, and seems to be experiencing a major resurgence in the fields of education, technology and business. As creativity is frequently promoted in higher education as a ‘graduate attribute’ or ‘capability’ the question arises- ‘whose creativity, and for whom?’ From the late 20th century creativity has been co-opted by commercial and political interests, and it is this view of creativity as an economic commodity that permeates ideas around graduate skills. But an alternative view of creativity sees it as a dimension of personal development and social emancipation that is potentially subversive of political and economic hegemonies. Ideas about the nature of creativity and the means of creative production are also being significantly impacted by the emergence of what are termed creative and collaborative technologies.”

Creative Teaching

Teachers must become more aware of the importance of being creative. Publiese (2013:19) suggests that the following considerations should always be beared in mind:

- Creativity is a dynamic concept. Much like intelligence it is not unique to certain, gifted individuals, and it is not genetically learned.
- The creative potential teachers can be developed through deliberate work done in their area.

- *Creative teaching is desirable. Firstly, because it enhances learning. Secondly, because it is a powerful motivator for teachers. Thirdly, because creative contributions help advance the field.*
- *Teaching deprived of creativity boils down to routine, may result in the teacher's and the students' demotivation and is likely to be ineffectual.*
- *Teachers should be encouraged to be creative: teacher education programmes ought to recognise the importance of teaching creatively and teach creativity-actively.*
- *Teaching creatively is about wanting change, wanting to change. And what is change if not the essence of (teacher) development?*

From these explanations, it can be said that creative teaching is inevitable in education and it has a great role in motivation. If teachers are encouraged to be creative, their students will be creative, too. Students and teachers will be creative thinkers and they will develop themselves at the same time. In order to be creative thinkers and educators, teachers should always remember the advantages and the outcomes of being creative.

Creativity and Teaching

It has been stated by Pugliese (2010:13) that;

“Creativity is highly valued by students and teachers alike. In a recent survey carried out in the UK, for example, high-school students ranked creativity second among the top qualities or behaviours of effective teachers. This is hardly surprising, as every teacher knows that the students want to be surprised, want to understand content, want to engage in meaningful tasks. In brief, they want to be taught by teachers who are original and innovative. When we think of motivation and enthusiasm in education, our concern is usually the students' motivation and enthusiasm, as hundreds of studies attest.

However, the teacher's enthusiasm and motivation are ever more critical, in my opinion. The degree of involvement and enthusiasm that the teacher communicates to the students helps to engage them in the learning process, which often leads to better academic performance. This, in turn, will enhance the students' motivation and, ipso facto, the teacher's.”

Here, it is understood that the motivation has a great role in creativity and teaching. Students motivate teachers and teachers become more enthusiastic and more dynamic when they are motivated by their students. And when teachers motivate students students become more enthusiastic and they become creative learners and thinkers.

METHOD

Participants

The participants consisted of 80 (eighty) university students in the English Preparatory Classes Department at Dokuz Eylul University in the city of Izmir in Turkey. Their ages ranged from 18-23.

Teaching Procedure:

The participants were asked to reply to the following questions during 1st and the 2nd week of their class hours:

- 1- What are your hobbies and pet-peeves?
- 2- Do you like listening to music? If yes, what kind?

- 3- Where is your hometown?
- 4- What is the name of your department at Dokuz Eylul University?
- 5- What are your weekend activities?

Sample Classroom Activities

- 1- Using pictures and photos
- 2- Using dialogues and role plays
- 3- Using speaking activities
- 4- Using short films
- 5- Using newspapers and magazines
- 6- Using jokes
- 7- Using quotes

Sample Classroom Activity

Many different photos and pictures were used to ask students how different kinds of people were having fun with each other or alone. Some of them were found from the beautiful free photo pages on the internet and some of them were from their coursebooks.

These pictures were used to make communicative practices in my own teaching class hours. They were also used to make sentences in Present Continuous Tense and Past Continuous Tense. Photocopiable and free pictures for classroom activities can be found from the following web pages:

Beautiful Free Stock Photos: Retrieved from: <https://stocksnap.io/>

Free Digital Photos: Retrieved from: <http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/>

Sample Classroom Activity

Fun with words (Pugliese, 2010: 77)

This classroom activity has been suggested by Pugliese (2010:77):

The students experiment with words and definitions, while working on their writing.

Be prepared

Invent some new words and have them ready to show the students.

Be creative

- Put up on the board a few nonsensical words, such as **overstand, laney, inlandish**
- Tell the students that they are to take these words and write 'plausible' dictionary entries for each of them on large sheets of paper, and put them up on the wall. (One of my students came up with the following definition for overstand: 'when one understands more than one should'.)
- Now have the class walk around the room and exchange opinions about their work.
- Give them the following task-they should decide whose entry was:
 - **The funniest**
 - **The most interesting**
 - **The craziest**
 - **The most convincing**
 - **The least convincing**

Sample Classroom Activity

The following classroom activity has been suggested by Ersöz on the INGED website: http://www.inged.org.tr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49&Itemid=56#content

Level: Intermediate

The aim of this classroom activity is to help students guess vocabulary using contextual clues; to display the authentic use of language; to improve vocabulary.

Materials: Photocopies of the handout.

Preparation before the lesson: Photocopy the following material.

Overall procedure in class:

Distribute the handout. Give the instruction and time the activity (suggested timing: 1 minute).

When students are done, check the answers.

ANSWERS:

A. They are all nouns (countable) used to describe people.

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| B. 1- Airhead | f. Stupid person |
| 2- Hunk | a. handsome man |
| 3- Brain | e- very intelligent person |
| 4- Drip | b- boring person |
| 5- Wacko | d- crazy person |

C. Answers will vary. Some suggestions are:

1. a brain: Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, Atatürk
2. an airhead: George W. Bush, Britney Spears
3. a wacko: Michael Jackson, Mel Gibson
4. a drip: Hillary Clinton, Al Gore
5. a hunk: Brad Pitt, Johnny Depp

A. Read the following dialogue. What do the underlined words have in common?

Ginny: Who are you going to the party with?

Sue: I don't know. Tony asked me to go with him. Well ... he is kind of an airhead, you know.

Ginny: Huh, huh! He is definitely not a brain.

Sue: Oh, don't tell me.

Ginny: How about Joe?

Sue: That drip?! Oh, no, no way! He'll bore me to death.

Ginny: But, he is a hunk.

Sue: He is. He is like a movie star. But I can't have fun with him.

Ginny: Hey, you're so picky. Then who are you going to the party with?

Sue: Peter, I guess. He is a wacko, I know, but we can have lots of fun together.

Ginny: You know what! You are crazy yourself.

B. Read the dialog again. Try to match the words and definitions. There is one extra definition.

- | | |
|------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Airhead | a. handsome man |
| 2. Hunk | b. boring person |
| 3. Brain | c. busy person |
| 4. Drip | d. crazy person |
| 5. Wacko | e. very intelligent person |
| | f. stupid person |

C. Give one example for each.

1. a brain: Einstein
2. an airhead:
3. a wacko:
4. a drip:
5. a hunk:

Sample Classroom Activity

The following jokes were used as a warm-up activity at the beginning of a lesson:
<http://iteslj.org/c/jokes-short.html>

A: Hey, man! Please call me a taxi.

B: Yes, sir. You are a taxi.

Submitted by Cláudia Almeida

A teenage girl had been talking on the phone for about half an hour, and then she hung up.

"Wow!," said her father, "That was short. You usually talk for two hours. What happened?"

"Wrong number," replied the girl.

Sample Classroom Activity

The following quotes were used to make students more talkative and and they were asked to talk about these quotes for 2 or 3 minutes:

"Put your future in good hands-your own." –Author Unknown. (Hughes, 2012: 52)

"The road to success is always under construction". - Lily Tomlin (Hughes, 2012: 65).

"If you build it, he will come." Field of dreams-1989(Hughes, 2012: 75).

Sample Classroom Activity

Ostrowska (2014:115) suggests the following classroom activity which I applied in my classes:

CRITICAL THINKING

You are going to do the speaking task below.

The university health club asked you to create an advertisement for an alternative treatment. Discuss and present your ideas.

1- Look at two extracts from the advertisements in Listening 2. Answer the questions below.

Imagine the World of scents. The scent of sandalwood during your yoga classes, the scent of fresh jasmine as you relax at the seaside.

Aloe vera is the natural choice for your whole family. Our aloe vera products will make you look and feel better.

1- What images and ideas come to your mind when you read each advertisement?

2- Which advertisement do you prefer? Why?

2- You have been asked to create an advertising campaign for a health product. Choose two of the products from the images below.

3- Make a list of images and ideas that come to your mind when you think about the two products.

4- Work with a partner. Tell each other about your ideas. Which would be more effective in an advertisement?

Objectives

- 1- To give students the chance to practice as much as possible
- 2- To make students more active and talkative with the help of jokes and games
- 3- To create happier class hours
- 4- To motivate students to help them feel themselves happy or happier learners

FINDINGS

Data Analysis

According to the results of the classroom activities and the questions which were asked during the 2016-2017 academic year, the following results were found:

90 students indicated that using pictures and photos made them more talkative and active

90 students indicated that telling funny stories or jokes during the class hours made them happy learners during the class hours

85 students indicated that talking about quotes made them more talkative and cheerful during the class hours

90 students indicated that speaking activities on critical thinking made them more talkative during the class hours

Students' Attitudes:

Classroom applications in this study were conducted in five different classes in the English Preparatory Classes Department at Dokuz Eylul University in the city of Izmir in Turkey during the 2016-2017 academic year. In each of these classes, there were university students from different faculties at Dokuz Eylul University in the city of Izmir in Turkey. Students in these classes accepted learning English with the help of enjoyable classroom activities and games such as using pictures, photos, jokes, quotes, dialogues, speaking activities made them more talkative and active during the class hours. Their English language level improved day by day. They realised that the classroom activities which were applied during their class hours made them more creative thinkers and they became more happier with the help of these classroom activities. The same classroom activities were tried to be used in my two different classes, but students in those classes did not want to attend these activities. Therefore, they were not forced to attend these classroom activities and the classes who attended my classroom activities were considered for this study.

CONCLUSION

Up to here, definitions of humor and creativity have been given. The role of humor and creativity in English language education has been handled. Classroom activities which can help to increase the creativity and happiness in our classes have been suggested.

Students can learn English as a foreign language more happily and cheerfully, if they speak or talk about the things they enjoy listening to. Therefore, the power of humor and creativity in teaching English as a second or as a foreign language is inevitable.

Students can attend courses heartily and happily, if they laugh and smile in their class hours. Different materials from different sources will make them enthusiastic and surprised. It is hoped that this study will help colleagues to prepare more enjoyable courses to make their students more creative and happier.

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APPENDIX

Links for Further Reading

The role and function of humour in the EFL class: Retrieved 28 November 2017 from: <http://eltchat.org/wordpress/transcripts/the-role-and-function-of-humour-in-the-efl-class-from-ha-ha-to-aha-eltchat-summary-26012011/>

Humor in the Classroom: Retrieved 28 November 2017 from: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/humour-classroom>

Appropriate Use of Humor in English Language Teaching: A Case Study of KSUT: Retrieved 28 November 2017 from: <http://www.aupc.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/V8I1-10.pdf>

Sense of Humor: Retrieved 28 November 2017 from: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/sense-humour>
An Evaluation of the Use of Humor in ELT Coursebooks: http://ijll-net.com/journals/ijll/Vol_2_No_2_June_2014/11.pdf

Humor in EFL Classrooms: Mater's Thesis: Retrieved 29 November 2017 from: <https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/43104/URN:NBN:fi:jyu-201403251397.pdf?sequence=1>

5 Simple Ways to Enhance Your Sense of Humor: Retrieved 29 November 2017 from: <http://www.rd.com/funny-stuff/sense-of-humor/>

Laugh and Learn: Humor and Learning a Second Language: Retrieved 29 November 2017 from: http://www.openaccesslibrary.org/images/Rima_Aboudan.pdf

Use and Non-use of Humor in Academic ESL Classrooms: Retrieved 29 November 2017 from: <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/elt/article/view/11881>

Students' Perception on the Use of Humor in the Teaching of English as a Second Language in Nigeria: Retrieved 30 November 2017 from: <http://www.todayscience.org/IER/article/ier.v1i2p65.pdf>

Laughing Matters: Retrieved 30 November 2017 from: <https://www.amazon.com/Laughing-Matters-Classroom-Cambridge-Handbooks/dp/0521799600>

Best Teaching Practices: Humor in the Classroom: Retrieved 30 November 2017 from: <http://web.plattsburgh.edu/offices/centers/cte/humorintheclassroom.php>