



REVIEWER'S REPORT ON HABILITATION THESIS

Author of the habilitation thesis: PaedDr. Andrea PUSKÁS, PhD

Title: *Improving Creativity in the EFL Classroom*

Reviewer: Dr. habil. Irén Hegedűs, PhD

Field: Foreign languages and cultures

The habilitation thesis, submitted in the form of a published book (Brno: Tribun, 2020), combines theoretical and practical aspects of improving creativity in the classroom focusing on teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Teaching creatively has become a widely discussed topic not just in the area of foreign language teaching, and the literature pertaining to the topic is vast and multifarious because creativity is closely connected to cognitive processes. Educators, thus specialist in EFL as well, need to be conversant with the results of psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and even neurolinguistic studies if their goal is to provide learners with a creative context in the classroom. The Author of the thesis presented the topic in a well-balanced structure since equal proportion was allotted to theoretical versus practical aspects. The theoretical issues discussed in the first part of the thesis are supported by the ten detailed lesson plans, which demonstrate how the ideas described in the first part can be implemented.

Objectives claimed and met

The main goal of the thesis was defined by its author as “to provide a model of improving creativity in the English as a foreign language classroom” (p. 9). In order to reach this goal, the author briefly considered the most recent theories regarding creativity research. The Author of the thesis has managed to obtain the necessary theoretical background as well as EFL teaching experience to endeavour to provide a synthesis which is relevant both for teachers and would-be teachers intending to improve classroom activities and facilitate foreign language acquisition in a really entertaining way. The publication of the book submitted as habilitation thesis was preceded by the Author's studies published over the past couple of years on issues related to creativity and teaching creatively, so the habilitation thesis is the outcome of several years of research, as well as teaching activity by the Author. The work convincingly shows that the Author has successfully achieved her aim and formulated a model which can foster the learners' critical thinking and strengthen their motivation to participate in classroom activities.

Appropriateness of research methods

Research for the thesis included a questionnaire-based investigation with the goal of verifying the validity of four hypotheses (pp. 72-73) formulated for the evaluation of the efficacy of Drama Technique as a teaching method. The questionnaires were evaluated in a standard manner: the results were presented in an exact manner, summarized in pie-charts and diagrams

accompanied by the Author's comments. Applying the reflective model in English language teacher training (p. 67), the Author has carried out her research based on two undergraduate courses of *Drama techniques in teaching English* in the framework of the study programmes of her own department over a period of seven years (2012-2019). By doing so, she clearly has obtained an appropriate, strong background and experiential knowledge for carrying out her research plan.

I would suggest reconsidering the use of Shakespearean vocabulary as applied in the lesson plan "Supernatural families" (see Step 5, pp. 135-136). On the one hand, I find that it may not be an appropriate goal to familiarize learners with insult words at all. On the other hand, it is especially not too useful to integrate outdated lexical items in a lesson plan designed for pre-intermediate or intermediate level learners aged 14-18 because it increases a section of vocabulary that learners may not need at all. This task may prove useful (and perhaps even enjoyable) in a classroom of advanced (university) level learners who actually encounter Shakespeare's works during their studies.

As for future perspectives (briefly summarized on pp. 82-83), I would add following up on the issue of the use of drama techniques in EFL teaching. It would be useful to delve into the negative responses, i.e. discovering what kind of unpleasant experiences make teachers refrain from using drama technique, and then formulate strategies that would solve this problem.

Outcomes of the thesis research

The habilitation thesis is focused on the applied nature of foreign language education, specifically the methodology and content of teaching English as a foreign language, and thus it serves practical goals in the field of teaching foreign languages and cultures. The content successfully integrates cultural, literary information into the process of foreign language teaching, and the content – as demonstrated by the lesson plans – provides the grounds for various activities, which in turn serve as opportunities for the intellectual involvement of learners in classroom work.

The primary contribution of the thesis to the field of improving creativity in the EFL classroom is that it serves as a sample of what kind of techniques can be utilized for this purpose. The lesson plans are ready-to-use tools for practising teachers and are also adaptable depending on specific requirements of learner groups. The book will prove most useful in the EFL teacher training programmes and will support the work of in-service teachers as well, and thus, it has a relevance for a wide audience involved in EFL education in Slovakia and abroad.

Comments on the format

The language use of the thesis is clear and appropriate for academic style. The thesis also meets the formal criteria of citation etiquette. Some minor inconsistencies, however, remained in the format of the *Bibliography* (e.g., the year of publication is noted in a random manner (dominantly after the name of the author/s but sometimes at the end of the entry; ISBN and ISSN numbers - perhaps unnecessarily - occasionally appear, the title of books is not italicized in some cases).

More importantly, however, I would advise including publications indirectly referred to as secondary reference. E.g. the neuroscientist Uri Hasson's words are cited by Puskás (p. 43) not directly but from Johnson's (2015: ix) foreword to a book. Johnson, however, is incorrect in his own referencing because he mentions only Hasson's name,¹ who is only the first author (cf. the full reference in my footnote 1). In-text references need not include first and middle names of authors because this can complicate looking up the item in the bibliography, e.g. the reader may in vain look for Christina Vischer Bruns (p. 47) under "B" since she has a dual surname: Vischer Bruns, unlike Kimberley Hill Campbell (p. 50), who is indeed listed under 'C', as expected.

Readers would appreciate it if the *Figures* had a title. Figures 6 and 7 are somewhat difficult to read, perhaps landscape layout could have solved this problem.

Questions:

1. A crucial and arduous part of learning a foreign language is the acquisition of grammar. This generally entails repeated grammatical drills that may be dull and tedious for learners.
 - 1.a How would you resolve the paradox of creativity versus the monotony of conditioning grammar exercises?
 - 1.b What possible procedures do you think could lead to a more creative way of teaching grammar?
2. Using literature in EFL teaching appears to be the most popular approach to applying the approach to content-based foreign language education.
 - 2.a Considering the age specific mentality of the learners, what other contents (beyond literature and arts) would you suggest or consider feasible to be integrated into the foreign language curriculum?
 - 2.b Have you encountered such approaches in the literature?
3. There seems to be a slight contradiction concerning the courses that you used in your research. You state (on p. 69) that the DRA1 and DRA2 are both undergraduate courses, but then (on p. 70) you write that DRA2 is taught "in the fifth year of the trainees' studies, the second year of master's level". Will you, please, comment on this and clarify this point.

Final evaluation and recommendation

The habilitation thesis meets the requirements imposed on a habilitation thesis. Therefore, I recommend that the habilitation thesis *Improving Creativity in the EFL Classroom* by PaedDr. Andrea PUSKÁS, PhD be accepted for defence, and after the successful defence and delivery of the habilitation lecture I recommend that the candidate be awarded the university title Associate Professor in the field of Foreign languages and cultures.

Pécs, 27.11.2021.

Dr. habil. Irén Hegedűs



¹ Hasson, Uri, Asif A. Ghazanfar, Bruno Galantucci, Simon Garrod & Christian Keysers. (2012). Brain-to-brain coupling: a mechanism for creating and sharing a social world. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 16.2: 114-121. DOI.org/10.1016/j.tics.2011.12.007 (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1364661311002580>)