

***Creativity in Language Teaching: Perspectives From Research and Practice.* Rodney H. Jones and Jack C. Richards (Eds.). New York, NY: Routledge, 2016. x + 264 pp.**

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According to the Oxford Dictionaries (n.d.), creativity is the “use of imagination or original ideas to create something; inventiveness.” Creatively enough, a slew of other dictionaries all express the same essential meaning, albeit in different ways. Alas, this is the subjective and hard-to-define nature of creativity, a notion that many teachers have also struggled with. Thankfully, 20 professionals address many of the practical and conceptual issues in *Creativity in Language Teaching: Perspectives from Research and Practice*. The editors examine creativity through four main dimensions: linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and pedagogic. The book is structured with four main sections titled: “Theoretical Perspectives,” “Creativity in the Classroom,” “Creativity in the Curriculum,” and “Creativity in Teacher Development.” A theoretical foundation is a sound point to begin any discussion and the authors do not err in doing so.

The essential role of creativity in language teaching is central to Section I. Jones, in Chapter 2, notes that creativity is not necessarily about writing poetry or imagining fantastical scenarios, but rather it is the simple act of supporting student development of their ability to use language in creative actions in their daily lives. How can creativity be used to enrich? When does it become a burden? What is demanded of language teachers is balance. The importance of balance is highlighted with an examination of *creativity* versus *conformity* in language learning, between “the permissive and the conformist” (p. 45), and the essential element of promoting creative and natural language use is contrasted with rule-based, target-language norms. These discussions are followed with suggestions that teachers examine themselves and their audience when implementing creativity, especially when considering cultural differences—something surely pertinent for teachers here in Japan.

Section II, “Creativity in the Classroom,” contains four chapters dealing with the praxis of creativity. The examples cover qualitative and quantitative aspects, from teacher self-reflection to the use of multilingual texts in the

classroom. This section seems to be the weakest in the book. Although it is peppered with useful observations and examples, many cases are neither unique nor groundbreaking. For example, Richards and Sara Cotterall state that “creative teachers develop custom-made lessons that match their students’ needs and interests or adapt and customize the book to match their students’ interests” (p. 106). Yes, indeed! Although a rather elementary observation, this may prove to be a useful reminder for a teacher just starting his or her career. Such a comment may also open creative avenues for those working within a set curriculum and who may too often be focused on only teaching what is on the page of the assigned textbook.

After examining examples in the classroom, the editors take a look at “Creativity in the Curriculum.” In Chapter 11, at the beginning of Section III, Kathleen Graves provides a useful definition of creativity as a “generative system within a domain of thinking” and one that is also the “ability to come up with ideas that are new, surprising, and valuable” (p. 166). This is valuable in regards to considering curriculum design and its five dimensions: conceptual (overall purpose), contextual (for whom and where will it be used), constructional (what materials are available and how the curriculum would be put together), interactional (how it will be used in the classroom), and assessment (what the learning outcomes are). Graves then provides four examples that illustrate the key to having sustained adoption and use: that is, to ensure that all five dimensions are aligned through the involvement of all teachers involved in the implementation of the curriculum. Importantly, a teacher at any level is encouraged to identify and experiment with curriculum constraints and gaps, discover new possibilities, and transform the curriculum. The next chapter deals with the use of creativity and technology. The highlight from this chapter is that the use of technology does not automatically ensure a creative product. Teachers have to make sure that language use creatively empowers their students at each stage. Christoph A. Hafner, in the final chapter in the section, deals with injecting creativity into Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) curricula. The main challenge is to design tasks that focus on “small-c creativity” and require only a certain amount of innovation (p. 202). In this respect, language transformation tasks are essential, for example, transforming a spoken genre to a written one or a specialized one to a more popular one. An example is a science podcast for a general audience transformed into a report for a specialist audience. Creativity is thus not always large scale but can be modest, albeit still useful, in its application.

The purpose of the three chapters making up Section IV is to examine the notion and use of “Creativity in Teacher Development.” The section is composed mostly of examples and is easy to digest. For example, a conversation between an MA candidate and her supervisor is the mode of creative expression in Chapter 14. The reader discovers that one of the key techniques for creative use is to link abstract and new ideas with concrete and familiar concepts. Chapter 15 introduces the idea of creativity as resistance, as a form for teachers to effectively adapt away from top-down, prescribed, and stagnant policies. A case study from Australia is used to illustrate this. Finally, the use of “narrative inquiry” is examined in the final chapter of the book. As the name suggests, the methodology concerns the use of stories and story making to understand and reflect on experiences. Self-reflection, discussion, and engagement with colleagues’ narratives may facilitate “multiple interpretations, stimulate imaginative and creative responses, and prove meaningful and pleasurable” (p. 252).

One of the standout features of this book is the Questions for Discussion and Suggestions for Further Research sections at the end of each chapter. The vast majority of the questions are relevant, thought provoking, and immediately useful in theoretical and practical realms. The only criticism of the book is its structure. At times, a reader could be left wondering exactly what section they are in, as was the reviewer. Multiple chapters from Sections II, III, and IV could be justifiably interchanged. Perhaps this just reflects the diverse, challenging, and all-encompassing nature of creativity and its incorporation into the integrated classroom, curriculum, and teaching and development. This book is definitely one for the teacher’s bookshelf.

Reference

Creativity. (n.d.). In *Oxford Dictionaries Online*. Retrieved from <<http://www.oxford-dictionaries.com/definition/english/creativity>>