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A Book Review by

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Creativity in Language Teaching: Perspectives from Research and Practice

Jennifer Brooke¹

Jones, R. H., & Richards, J. C. (Eds.). (2016). *Creativity in language teaching: Perspectives from research and practice*. New York: Routledge. \$49.95

Full of refreshing insight into the recent push towards *creativity* in language teaching, this edited volume offers insights into theories of creativity and explorations of creativity in the classroom, the curriculum, and teacher development. Designed to be especially useful for MA TESOL students, but also relevant to anyone with a stake in language learning, the book has four sections. Each is followed by discussion questions and suggestions for future research. No single theory of creativity pervades the book, but two notions pervade the chapters. First, creativity can be considered from the lens of personality trait, product, or process; this is most explicitly discussed in Ellis' chapter titled "Creativity and Language Learning" and Densky's chapter "Conceptualizing Creativity and Culture in Language Teaching." Second, creativity may include, but is certainly not limited to, texts traditionally perceived as creative, such as poetry or plays. With the exception of Spiro and Dymoke's chapter, "Translating Writing Worlds," a qualitative exploration of academic-poets' writing identities, little of the book is devoted to traditional notions of creative language teaching and learning as singing songs, playing games, or reading literature. In other words, *Creativity in Language Teaching and Learning: Perspectives from Research and Practice* breathes new life into traditional conceptualizations of classroom creativity.

The first section of the book, *Theoretical Perspectives*, introduces the idea that language itself, being rule-governed, ambiguous, situated, and dialogic, is inherently creative and a "tool for action" (Jones, 2016, p. 19). Gee's chapter, "The Vexed Nature of Teaching and Learning," follows up on this idea through a sociocultural lens by linking language with the mind and experience, arguing that good language teaching reflects this connection. The more practical sections that follow begin with chapters that address creativity in the classroom. Teachers' voices are heard loud and clear in this section. "Creativity in Language Teaching: Voices from the Classroom" by Coffey and Leung reports a qualitative study of five teachers' perceptions of creativity, demonstrating the interpretive variation that exists. Richards and Cotterall's chapter, "Exploring Creativity in Language Teaching," differentially focuses on a single teacher and elucidates the creative practices she implements in her classroom. Other chapters in this section discuss specific projects or conversational patterns that promote classroom creativity. One of

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the most interesting terms introduced in the book, *flow*, is defined in Chappell's "Creativity Through Inquiry Dialogue" as "a peak state in which people are free to concentrate on a goal-oriented task, and become fully absorbed in it, letting go of their immediate environment" (p. 134). This second section is rich with practical, low-risk applications and for teachers who want to foster creativity in their classrooms and create *flow* for their language learners.

The next section is composed of three chapters that take a broader view of creativity, likely of most interest to readers in administrative or curricular roles. In her chapter titled "Creativity in the Curriculum," Graves draws upon Barlex's (2004) model of curriculum to provide a framework in which stakeholders can consider how students will encounter the language. The other two chapters in this section seem less readily pertinent to creativity in the curriculum, but still represent important aspects of large-scale implementation of creativity. For example, Chik's "Creativity and Technology" discusses a specific movie-making project, while Hafner's "Creativity in Language Teaching in the Disciplines" uses the example of an economist who wrote a play to effectively communicate to his co-workers. As a focal point for discussing genre-specific creativity, these two chapters are more distanced from the language-learning classroom than others; however, they still include a wealth of assignment examples and ideas for language teachers who may teach in a different context.

Readers may find the final section, *Creativity in Teacher Development*, the most interesting of the four, especially the intended audience of MA TESOL students. "A Conversation about Creativity" by Bailey and Krishnan is composed of an interview transcript of a teacher trainer discussing how she addresses teaching puzzles or problems with creative techniques, such as using tangible objects or heightening suspense. Readers working in highly regulated contexts, or in contexts in which high-stakes testing dominates curricular choices, may also find inspiration from the case story of one creative teacher using "Creativity as Resistance" in an adult ESL class in Australia. Finally, teachers are encouraged to explore their own creativity through narratives in Nelson's chapter, the concluding work of the book.

Creativity in Language Teaching is unique in being the first edited volume of its kind to solely address the issue of creativity in the language classroom, which has become, in the editors' words, an "epidemic" (p. 3). As evidence of this, they point to 2009 being christened "The Year of Creativity" by the European Commission on Languages (2009). Readers should be aware, however, that though the subtitle of the book is *Perspectives from Research and Practice*, the research is primarily qualitative in nature, so those searching for quantitative studies of creativity should look elsewhere. In fact, as a whole, the book takes a sociocultural and socioaffective approach to the discussion, with terms such as *inquiry*, *agency*, *affordances*, and *translanguaging*, which paints a less cognitive and more conceptual view of creativity. Excluding quantitative research does have the benefit of making chapters more accessible for classroom teachers who may have varying comfort levels with interpreting quantitative research. In this sense, the book presents a strong front in terms of thematic unity, with only the three chapters in the "Creativity in the Curriculum" section seeming more weakly connected to the section topic. Despite this, nearly every chapter brims with practical examples and pedagogical techniques, providing the opportunity for immediate application for readers who are classroom teachers. I highly recommend it for language teachers interested in their own creativity as instructors, their students' creativity as language learners, and the ways in which curricula and institutions can foster this important aspect of language-learning.

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