

ELTAS Event Review

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JAZZING IT UP: THE CREATIVE CLASSROOM WITH CHAZ PUGLIESE
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I have always tried to be a creative trainer, so when Chaz revealed that in his experience, most teachers are conservative and don't like risk, he got my attention.

Chaz has travelled all over the world giving workshops to trainers and teachers and he also has an in-depth knowledge of research into learning theory. Another powerful quote which he confronted us with was: "We've sacrificed creativity at the altar of method". And, it's true that we hear a lot about methods but not so much about how to adapt and be creative in the classroom.

Chaz explained that, in teaching, creativity often doesn't have a good press. It's also not the same as being weird or whacky. The truth is we have to be creative in class because we are dealing with different intelligence and motivational levels as well as varying backgrounds and expectations. We have to reach out to different kinds of people. This is impossible to do, according to Chaz, by just following a single coursebook.

As far as motivation goes, there

is a lot of research showing that creativity is important for learner motivation, but as far as teacher motivation is concerned, little research has been done. However, if we really think about it, we can see that, for most of us, being able to develop our creativity was

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Van Gogh or Leonardo da Vinci and think, quite rightly, that this kind of creativity is unattainable. However, the truth is that all of us can be creative in our own way. Also, the cliché that some are born creative and some are not is nonsense. However, creativity does need to be embraced.

Chaz went on to list three prerequisites for creativity as follows:

- 1) Motivation – this is often the reason why we are creative as it keeps us motivated
- 2) An open mind-set – someone who embraces risk
- 3) Strategies – ways of developing creativity

Creativity is not just being novel but must also include some added value for the learners; otherwise it is just whacky (reciting the alphabet backwards on one leg, for example). There has to be some value for the students in our creativity.

Chaz then showed us three strategies for creativity in the classroom,

When we think of creativity, many people are put off because they think of some geniuses such as

STRATEGY 1 – SIMPLICITY

This involves making use of the learners as a resource. Do more with less; students are our primary resource here and fewer materials are required. This way, we come away from focusing on materials

and more language emerges from the students themselves. One example Chaz gave us was an activity called: "I'm someone who..."

A: Who are you?

B: I'm someone who lives in Stuttgart.

A: Who are you?

B: I'm someone who works a 50 hour week, etc., etc.

There's a lot of potential here for creativity coming from the students and I have since tried this in an upper intermediate-level class and it worked very well.

This activity can be used for other structures such as 'I used to' or 'I've never' with a corresponding question. Here, the role of the teacher is to take a back seat and let the class dynamics develop. Generally, students will keep asking each other questions and group bonding will develop.

Another activity which Chaz showed us was to think of three things (as students) that we are interested in or do well and then dictate a list of pre-prepared questions about these activities (e.g. How do you know you do it so well? What can stop you from doing this? What special skills are required? What advice would you give to a beginner?).

Chaz also made the claim that there is really no such thing as multitasking. The consequence of that is that either our students will be concentrating on the task we give them or they will be thinking about something else. If they are not ready and attentive, there is no point in starting an exercise with them.

STRATEGY 2 –

COMBINATIONAL/ ASSOCIATED

This strategy involves exploiting some form of material, e.g. poems, song lyrics or texts. In the workshop we were given picture cards and told to describe them to each other but describe it using opposite prepositions and nouns to what you actually see. The idea being that it would be more challenging for the students. So, 'left' becomes 'right', 'up' becomes 'down' etc. In my picture, angels became demons and Jesus became the Devil! In my opinion a very challenging exercise. I would prefer to have students just describe a picture as it is but if that's too boring for you, it's one which you could try.

STRATEGY 3 – STORYTELLING

Chaz told us a true story which happened to him in Paris. As he was recounting it, the tension and interest started to build. He told us just a few lines of the story and then asked us to ask Yes/No questions to find out what happened next. Immediately and without thinking too much about structure, questions were formulated. Then, a little more information was given. Following that, the focus was put, for example, on one of the char-

As students write down the questions, they will already be thinking about the answers and this gives them the preparation time they need before asking each other the questions.

Another unrelated but important and much-neglected point connected with learning in general is the importance of movement. Chaz explained that the researcher John Raley tested two identical groups of students, one group was told to just start the test in a conventional way and the other group was told to jog on the spot beforehand for two minutes before starting the test. The results from the group which was given the chance to exercise were 27 – 33% higher. This result was repeated in multiple tests.

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acters and his motivation for doing what he did. Finally, some more facts were revealed. Now a teacher has the students' attention and they can ask questions in a natural way because they want to know more and not because we tell them to ask a question. Chaz did assure us that his story was true. But a made-up story could also serve the same purpose.

Chaz's conclusion:
Creativity is not an option. It's a must, a philosophy, a vision. And a good time was had by all!



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OUP – ELTAS EVENT: ENGLISH 24/7 17TH OCTOBER 2015, HELD AT EBC HOCHSCHULE, STUTTGART

Michelle Hunter and Jennie Wright faced a formidable task on Saturday, 17th October 2015, and they mastered it brilliantly. The English course book series *Navigate* had just been published by the sponsor of the event, Oxford University Press, and we were expecting Heather Buchanan, co-author of the series, as our main speaker of the day to talk about learner autonomy. However, after her flight was cancelled, Michelle and Jennie rose to the challenge making sure that nobody left the room disappointed. Both of them picked up on the topic of the originally planned session. Michelle inspired us to think together about the importance, the possible resources and the strategies of learner autonomy. After a break, Jennie demonstrated how she furthers learner autonomy in her teaching.

Michelle introduced us to the powerful online classroom tool www.socrative.com, and we all logged in on mobile devices to her teacher's account to try out this resource. The application allowed her to see our answers to her questions in real time and to respond to them on the spot. Most of us thought that the application makes the interaction between learners and trainers more flexible, varied and relevant to any given situation. Michelle summed up the ideal function of learner autonomy,

arguing that trainers only need to give a structure to a desire to learn which is already present in every student. She chose Galileo Galilei's words as the motto of her part of the afternoon: "You cannot teach a man anything, you can only help him find it within himself".

After the break, Jennie turned us into her students and taught us listening and reading strategies that we normally employ in our native tongue, but that are often not operational in the target language. She showed us how to tempt learners to do more for themselves by presenting them with 'appetizers', enticing bits of exercises, and let them continue working on these on their own. She instructed us to "tell learners explicitly which skill you are practicing with them and encourage them to continue using it when they work on their own". Finally, she showed us how we can easily select appropriate reading materials for groups with a specific interest and share the texts with them on www.flipboard.com.

Markus Dauber from Oxford University Press rounded off the afternoon. He called our attention to the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries website and the uses of The Oxford 3000tm application that contains the most important English words to learn. The luckiest among us

won valuable prizes from OUP in a draw at the end of the day. ■



I received my Master's Degree in English and my Bachelor's in German

at ELTE Budapest University in 1999. I earned my Ph.D. in English at the University of Kansas, U.S.A., in 2014. Currently I'm teaching English, German, and Hungarian in Stuttgart.