Creativity and EFL Learning
An empirical study in a Swedish upper-secondary school

Degree project in English studies
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Advanced Level
Spring 2014
Abstract

The aim of this study was to see if a deliberately creative approach in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) class would have any impact on the students’ EFL learning in terms of more varied vocabulary use, more original written texts, more implementation of story elements (such as a story goal, obstacle, character motive) and increased motivation leading to enhanced activity and attention.

An empirical method was adopted in connection in which two Swedish upper-secondary school classes of a vocational program participated. One class was exposed to a regular teaching method (RTM) while the other class was exposed to a creative study design (CSD). During a four week period the students were assigned to write a short story and received instructions on different story elements (story goal, obstacle and character motivation). The RTM was based on how the class’s ordinary teacher would have taught. The CSD was uniquely created for this study and included several techniques and recommendations from scholars in the field of creativity.

The results showed that the students exposed to the CSD implemented the story elements to a somewhat higher degree, used a slightly more varied vocabulary, wrote more creative stories, and showed more attention and activity than the students exposed to the RTM. However, more extensive studies would be needed to confirm these results and allow generalizations about the possible benefits the CSD has as opposed to the RTM when it comes to EFL learning.

Keywords: EFL (English as a Foreign Language), creativity, motivation, originality, creative writing, vocabulary, story elements, upper-secondary school, Sweden.
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1. Introduction

After more than two decades spent in the education system, mostly as a student but also as a teacher, I have noticed how often people solve problems in conventional and predictable ways, and how tedious their learning experience seems to be. Lately, I have been startled by how many students of my own seem to have difficulties thinking outside the box.

I remember having a group of 8th-grade students that were so uninterested in my teaching that I decided to have them lie on mattresses in my attempt to do as I thought they were doing anyway – sleep through class. Indeed, their inactivity and their highly imitative ways of tackling problems were a huge concern of mine. I have, unfortunately, experienced this passivity in a majority of my and other teachers’ classes.

The problem with inactive and imitative students is that the learning potential is lost. For instance, brain researcher Dispenza (2007) says that passiveness arises when the frontal lobe is disconnected. This is unfortunate, since the frontal lobe is where the students’ ability to perform higher thinking skills such as thinking critically and to create a new understanding are located (Dispenza, 2007). Since learning is about building and connecting new circuits in the brain, the potential for learning decreases substantially if the student is not active. “Merely to learn intellectual information is not enough; we must apply what we learn to create a different experience” (Dispenza, 2007, pp. 169-170). Specifically, many scholars emphasize that the act of creativity demands an active production of something (cf. e.g. Amabile & Fisher, 2009) and therefore creativity and passivity are incompatible. Since creativity also involves original valuable solutions (Amabile 2001) (cf. 3.2) this is incongruent with imitative or random behavior. So, when we do not let the students develop their creative capacities, they might lose learning opportunities.

The ability to be creative is said to be the most crucial skill today’s children will need in order to cope in a highly unpredictable world (cf. e.g. Noddings, 2013). The problem is that, according to Robinson (2009), creativity is the one skill education not only stifles but systematically drains out of the students.

Even so, the curriculum for Swedish upper-secondary school states, as an overall goal for education, that “[t]he school should stimulate students’ creativity” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011, pp. 5, my translation), but there is no definition of the concept, nor is it exemplified what this might mean to a practitioner in the classroom. According to Turner (2013), this reinforces the different myths related to the term since many teachers seem to have an inadequate notion of what being creative within their specific discipline might
involve. For instance, the myth that creativity should have to do more with disciplines like the arts than EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning is a common perception. It is reflected in the way creativity is explicitly mentioned within the curriculum of the arts, but only implicitly in that of languages. Also, the idea that creativity is something a person either has or has not is, according to Robinson (2011, 2009), a myth. On the contrary, he argues that we can teach children to be creative, just as we can teach them how to read and write.

As a future EFL teacher, I saw the opportunity to learn what creativity within EFL studies might involve and what the consequences of a deliberate creative approach might be. Does it contribute to solving the problem of inactivity and imitative behavior in my students? Could I thereby increase their learning in the subject of EFL?

2. Aims and scope

The study’s aim is to explore the field of creativity, what it might involve for the EFL teacher, not only with respect to motivation and active participation in general, but also, more specifically, whether a deliberately creative teaching approach has any benefits regarding language proficiency compared with a more traditional approach. The results of the study would be of interest to teachers in general and EFL teachers in particular since it highlights possible benefits when working with creativity in the classroom. Hopefully, this study can contribute to a clarification of what creativity is and how a teacher can work with the concept in class. Thereby, a teacher can work towards the overall goal of creativity which is stated in the curriculum of Sweden.

2.1 Research questions

This project investigates the following questions:

- Does a Creative Study Design (CSD) cause the upper-secondary students in this study to implement plot elements (such as story goal, obstacle, and character motive) in their narrative writings to a higher degree than those who were exposed to a Regular Teaching Method (RTM) in EFL.
- Does the CSD lead to a higher degree of original solutions regarding story content than the RTM?
- Is there any difference regarding vocabulary use between students who are exposed to the CSD and the RTM?
- Is there any difference regarding motivation in EFL between students who are exposed to the CSD compared to the RTM?

3. Background

This section will provide previous research in the area of creativity and education.

3.1 The education system and creativity

According to Robinson (2011) almost every education system in the world is in the midst of reformation due to a decrease of school results in the form of low grades, school drop-outs and ultimately a growing unemployment rate among young people. Creative employees are urgently sought for in practically all organizations today and hence, to not be creative can lead to unemployment (Robinson 2011). Sweden is no exception; the unemployment rate, especially among young people is very high in comparison to other groups in society (Arnell Gustavsson, 2003), and at the same time, the Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) concludes that the condition of the Swedish school system is, indeed, troublesome with dropping results. Because creativity contains important components such as the ability to think critically, be flexible, to synthesize, be imaginative, and produce novel solutions that are appropriate (Amabile & Fisher, 2009; Robinson, 2011, 2009; Runco, 2007; Torrance in Tin et al., 2010), it is crucial to be creative in order to live and cope in a highly unpredictable and ever-changing world (Robinson, 2011; Runco, 2007). Indeed, it is widely understood among different scholars in different fields that creativity is the skill inhabitants of the 21st century will crucially need – now more than ever (Garner, 2013; Noddings, 2013; Mumford et al. 2010; Pink, 2013; Robinson, 2009; Yamin, 2010). As Mumford et al. (2010) put it: “Few scholars…would dispute the fact that creativity…is critical to organizational performance in the economy in the 21st century” (pp. 59).

The Swedish school’s overall task is to prepare children for living as active participants in society (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011), and when unemployment rates are up among young people as suggested by Arnell Gustafsson (2003), one could conclude that the school system has not fulfilled this goal. According to Robinson (2009) and Garner (2013) high unemployment rates might be correlated to schools’ inability to develop the students’ creative capacities, such as the ability to be flexible, find possible solutions, be critical etc. In fact, instead of being enthused, students undergo the process of being “turned off” (Robinson, 2009, pp. 76) or what Dispenza (2007) would describe as being disconnected from the frontal
lobe - the crucial part of the brain where higher thinking skills are located physically, such as those involved in creativity. Actually, Goodwin and Miller (2013) suggest that many schools do not encourage creative activities: “teachers might turn a problem that could be creatively challenging…into a procedural chore” (pp. 81). The current education system not only stifles creativity, it “drains the creativity out of our children” (Robinson, 2009, pp. 16). In other words, in schools’ pursuit of creating active members of society they seem to do the opposite, making them passive and disengaged. Therefore, they become ill-equipped for a life in society.

According to Robinson (2011) there is a need to change the very foundations upon which education is built, that is transforming the education system. However, policymakers try to solve the problem by emphasizing “the need to get back to basics and focus on the core business, to face up to overseas competition and to raise standards, improve efficiency, return on investment and cost-effectiveness” (pp. 58). In other words, reforming the education system.

Teachers and principals adopt traditional practices, pressured to deliver a certain result, which “is not contingent on being creative” (Nicholl & McLellan in Turner, 2013, pp. 26) - all in order to avoid penalties in the form of economic suspension (Raiber, Duke et al. 2010; Robinson, 2009), even though studies confirm that teachers want to offer more creative activities (Turner, 2013). According to Runco (2007), the resistance to encourage creative efforts in students is due to the unpredictable nature of creativity: what the outcome might be, is not foreseeable. In fact, the essence of creative behavior involves risk taking in which one, normally, does not know what the result is going to be (Hayes, 2004; Pollard, 2012). As Runco puts it: “the curriculum must have a clear payoff. Creativity does not” (pp. 179).

However, there are several examples in both the USA and the UK which confirm that when schools decide to tackle the issue of negative school results by adopting a deliberate and large-scale creative approach, it does not only lead to higher achievement scores on standardized tests among the students (Birkmaier, 1971), but also provides them with meaning and satisfaction (Robinson, 2009). These changes produced positive school results and, possibly because of this, led to more active, engaged children (Robinson, 2009). These schools incorporated creativity from top to bottom in the school system in a deliberate way and, the teachers started to provide numerous opportunities for their students to develop creatively – every day in every subject (Jackson & Raiber, 2010).
3.2 Creativity

Many scholars in various fields define creativity in terms of production, originality and appropriateness/value (Amabile, 2001; Newton & Newton, 2010; Groenendijk et al., 2013; Mumford et al., 2010; NACCCE, 1999; Robinson, 2011, 2009; Amabile & Fisher, 2009).

That being creative involves the component of production – the making of something (a story, a dance, a thought and so on), which is not surprising since “[t]he root of the word creativity means `to bring into being´” (Hayes, 2004, pp. 281).

Second, creativity involves originality, that is, what is produced must be new. Of course this criterion is complicating matters since what is original to one person, is not original to another (Turner, 2013). However, in the context of education, the originality-criterion, should be measured by the students’ own standards and not by those of experts (Robinson, 2011). For example, to a student a certain expression can actually be original and therefore should be seen as fulfilling the criterion of originality even if the product is considered imitative by an expert in the field.

Third, it is not enough to produce original utterances, poems or stories. These original productions also need to be of value or appropriate. This is stressed by Mumford et al. (2010) who say that “knowledge must be turned into something useful if creativity is to be observed” (pp. 59). Likewise, Amabile and Fisher (2012) emphasize the fact that “ideas cannot be merely new to be considered creative; they must be somehow appropriate to the problem or task at hand” (pp. 4). So, even though being original (for instance, making unusual connections by bringing together two unrelated things) is part of being creative, it is not sufficient; the result must have a value (Amabile, 2012). Pollard (2012) says that agreement on a product’s value is related to the cultural context, so what constitutes a fulfillment of the value-criterion, as with the originality-criterion, should be seen in relation to whether the students themselves find the product appropriate or not.

3.3 Motivation

Highly creative performances seem to be accomplished by intrinsically motivated persons (Amabile, 2012; Hayes, 2004; Yamin, 2010; Pink, 2013; Robinson, 2011; Torrance, 1972, 1995). To be motivated is to find an activity “interesting, enjoyable, satisfying, or positively challenging” (Amabile in Amabile & Pillemer, 2012, pp. 7). In fact, the quality of creative production is dependent on a person’s motivation for solving the problem or task at hand (Amabile 2012; Yamin, 2010; Hayes 2004; Pink 2013). Intrinsic motivation seems,
specifically, to affect the idea-generating stages and the problem definition as well as the “depth of involvement in the task” (Amabile & Fisher, 2009, pp. 7). Torrance in Shaughnessy (1998) even claim that “[i]f you don’t have motivation, you don’t have creativity” (pp. 445).

According to Brookhart (2013), Garner (2013), Runco (2007), Torrance (1993) e.g., one way to spur the students’ motivation for using their creative abilities is to give them encouragement. Another way, suggested by Noddings (2013), is to let the students “create their own learning objectives” (pp. 212). That is, a teacher offers varied topics and materials for the students to work with, making it possible for them to choose whatever interests them, hence, what intrinsically motivates them. In fact, even though there are clear learning objectives stated in the curriculum, they are nevertheless often formulated in general terms, which gives the teacher and the students a generous margin for interpretation (Eek-Karlsson, 2012). Moreover, letting the students work creatively and develop their creative capacities can in itself spur intrinsic motivation (NACCCE, 1999). Thus, the concepts of motivation and creativity go hand in hand.

A recommended tool for teachers in their aim to develop students’ creativity is Torrance’s Incubation Model of Creative Teaching and Learning (henceforth abbreviated as TIM), developed during the late 70’s by Torrance - a “giant in the field [of creativity]” (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012, pp. 3). The first stage of the model involves motivating the students: obtaining their attention, arousing their curiosity, creating their desire to know, stimulating their imagination and giving purpose (Torrance, 1993). The second stage is about “searching questions, looking at taboo topics, confronting the unimaginable or unthinkable […] becoming absorbed in things around you” (Torrance, 1993, pp. 12). Finally, the third stage is about extending the learning process – continuing wanting to learn. This particular model of teaching has been used successfully according to Murdock and Keller-Mathers (2008) and Shaughnessy (1998). Teachers who have tried it testify that both their students and they themselves find the creative approach exciting and enjoyable (Birkmaier, 1971; Torrance, 1993; Turner, 2013). Thus, the lessons motivate not only the students, but also their teachers. However, even though studies suggest that students and their teachers enjoy creative exercises and approaches, some students might find creative work difficult, especially “if they are used to simply memorizing or following instructions” (Fautley & Savage in Turner, 2013, pp. 26). Also, teachers who are not used to working in this way might find it problematic (Turner, 2013).
3.4 Teaching

Some make a distinction between teaching creatively and teaching for creativity, whereas others argue that the two concepts are highly intertwined (Hayes, 2004). Nonetheless, if a distinction should be made, teaching creatively is about the teachers themselves using their own creative capacities in their approach “to make learning more interesting, exciting and effective” (NACCCE, 1999, pp. 102-103). Teaching for creativity, on the other hand, means “forms of teaching that are intended to develop young people’s own creative thinking or behavior” (NACCCE, 1999 pp. 103), for example, by giving them knowledge about what creativity is and encouraging originality in their work. With regard to the latter, it is important to encourage students to experiment, explore and take risks (Amabile & Fisher 2009; Birkmaier 1971; Brookhart 2013; Garner 2013).

The importance of being creative oneself as a teacher is stressed by several scholars (e.g. Amabile & Pillemer, 2012; Goodwin & Miller, 2013; Runco, 2007). “The teacher is, after all, a model for students” (Runco, 2007, pp. 189). Noddings (2013) suggests that creativity first must be encouraged in the teachers if they can be able to enhance the creative potentials of their students. Hence, the importance of support from school leaders is crucial “for any substantial impact to be achieved” (Turner, 2013, pp. 35).

There are some fundamental competences which can help students to become more creative and which can be taught the same way as reading or writing (Robinson in Azzam, 2009). For instance, divergent thinking (being flexible and coming up with less than obvious ideas/connections), the use of metaphors, analogies, and mental visualization (e.g. Goodwin & Miller, 2013; Runco, 2007; Kozhevnikov et al., 2013).

One effective way to foster divergent thinking is to provide open-ended questions (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012), that is, questions for which there are several possible answers (Tomberg, 2009). Open-ended questions activate students’ capacity for thinking creatively around a topic, especially “what if”- questions (Dispensa, 2007; NACCCE, 1999; Goodwin & Miller, 2013). Rather than asking a student, “In what year did Columbus discover America?” a teacher could ask, “What if Columbus had landed in California, how would our lives be different?” The latter question requires students to draw on creative thinking skills such as “imagining, experimenting, discovering, elaborating, testing solutions, and communicating discoveries” (Goodwin & Miller, 2013, pp. 81).

Mental visualization, has been emphasized not only by authors like Stephen King, who recommend using this technique “to bring your story to life” (n.p.) but also by numerous
scholars. For example, Shaw and Belmore in Kozhevnikov et al. (2013) present studies suggesting that the more creative a student is, the more successfully he/she uses mental visualization, and Barbot et al. (2012) refer to several studies confirming that students producing written texts also become more creative when working with this technique. To actually promote mental visualization, Garner (2013) recommends letting the students close their eyes, asking them to picture e.g. a setting or a character come alive, and then ask them to tell what they saw or experienced.

3.5 Foreign language learning

Even though, according to Robinson (2011), creativity has similar features in every subject, creativity also seems to be discipline-specific (Baer & Kaufman in Turner, 2013; Newton & Newton, 2010; Yamin, 2010). In other words, being creative in EFL learning is different from being creative in mathematics or music, as “the balance between novelty, plausibility or appropriateness, elegance, ethical considerations, and wisdom varies from field to field” (Newton & Newton, 2010, pp. 119). However, language teachers do not seem to consider their subject as essentially characterized by creativity (Giauque, 1985). The latter is congruent with studies that confirm that teachers, and people in general, associate creativity with the arts, not “theoretical” subjects like languages (Newton & Newton, 2010). Yet a study by István (1998) suggests that creativity and success in language learning are highly interconnected; the better grade a student had in the discipline, the higher scores he/she showed on a creativity test.

In the communicative approach, which refers to an emphasis on meaning and fluency rather than correctness and accuracy (Lightbown & Spada, 2013), is adopted in today’s EFL teaching. In the communicative approach, interactivity is an important component which includes for example the ability to be flexible (Tornberg, 2009) which is considered to be one crucial element of creativity (Torrance in Tin et al. 2010). To use language strategies, that is, to overcome language problems in order to make the message intelligible (van Ek in Malmberg, 2001) and to adjust one’s language to different situations and purposes is included as one of the five overall goals in EFL for upper-secondary school in Sweden (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011). Being flexible can thus be said to be implicitly mentioned within EFL studies, for instance the goal that says that the student should have “[t]he ability to use language strategies in different contexts” (pp.54, my translation), and “[t]he ability to adjust the language to different purposes, addressees, and situations” (pp. 54,
my translation). Better communicative flexibility might lead to better strategic competence and ultimately higher language proficiency, as suggested by István (1998).

With the definition on creativity (cf. 3.2), meaningful, authentic communication in any language could technically be considered a creative act since one is producing a valuable original utterance. Therefore, discussing or writing something which matters to those involved could be considered a creative act.

However, even though the students’ product could be appropriate and original, the level of creativity might not be especially high (Brookhart, 2013), and if a teacher wishes to develop their creative abilities in the subject, it is not sufficient to have them do activities which could be considered conducive to creativity (Brookhart, 2013; Giauque, 1985; Robinson, 2011). “Simply asking people to be creative is not enough” (Robinson, 2011, pp. 159). To provide feedback, not only on their language proficiency but also their level of creativity, is crucial if a creative use of the language is to be achieved (Brookhart, 2013). If the teacher only gives credit for imitative but “correct” replicas on assignments, the students might fail to see the subject’s or the language’s creative possibilities (Brookhart, 2013; Robinson 2011) and thereby be “turned off” (Birkmaier, 1971, pp. 345). As Pollard (2012) puts it: “[...]what’s missing in many classrooms is deliberately noticing and naming opportunities for creativity when they occur, giving feedback on the creative process, and teaching students that creativity is a valued quality” (pp. 30). Thus, feedback is necessary to give them the message that their creative abilities are cherished in the classroom. This, however, requires knowledge of what the concept generally, and specifically, means within the EFL class, for instance (Brookhart 2013).

4. Method and material

In order to explore if a creative approach had any effects on students’ EFL skills in terms of variation in vocabulary and implementation of teaching material (story goal, obstacles and character motivation) I used an empirical research technique. I used two similar groups of participants – one control group and one experiment group. During four weeks, both groups were expected to write a story during their regular English lessons either by hand or on the computer. These stories were handed in by the end of the fourth week. Both groups were exposed to the same objectives in form of lesson content: story elements in narrative writing such as story goals, obstacles and conflicts, and character motivation. The obstacles/conflicts refer to the story’s goal, what the protagonist wants; the obstacles refer to an antagonist.
who/which stands in the way of the protagonist attaining his or her goal; and, character motivation refers to the protagonist’s underlying reason for wanting to achieve this goal.

The main difference between these groups was largely the teaching method I used. The control group was exposed to a method closely related to the way they were normally taught, which I call the Regular Teaching Method (cf. 4.5) whereas the treatment group was exposed to a Creative Study Design (cf. 4.6). I spoke only English during the lessons.

4.1 Participants and location
The participants were first-year upper-secondary students on a vocational program in which English as a foreign language is a compulsory subject. The school was located in a medium sized town in the middle of Sweden. I only included students which had an attendance rate of 75% or more in this study. In this way I wanted to ensure validity; to make sure that the possible conclusions to be drawn about the materials could in fact be referred to the respective method. In this study, the total sum for each group, coincidently, resulted were 10. Therefore I could make straightforward comparisons on sums rather than averages in my analysis.

4.2 Time and access
The study was conducted during a four-week period in the students’ regular time-scheduled English class, which consisted of 1.5 hours a week and a total lesson time of 6 hours per group. The school in question was chosen because of my pre-established contact with one of the English teachers at the school, who kindly helped me get access to these two classes. At the end of the four weeks I collected the stories, either electronically (by mail) or on paper.

4.3 Ethical aspects
I asked the students for permission to conduct the research by letting them sign a contract where the investigation was explained and which stated that the collected essays would be handled anonymously as suggested by Denscombe (2009) and Vetenskapsrådet (2011). Essays were therefore given a number. The students were informed that they could withdraw from the experiment at any time. Also, I carefully considered any possible disadvantages for the control group since a creative approach might have led to a more “exciting” learning experience. However, I estimated that the consequences were both minimal and justifiable due to the short amount of time given to the study.
4.4 Analysis of the material
The material was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods, which are described below.

4.4.1 Quantitative analyses
I used quantitative analyses since they are useful when one wants to ensure validity and accuracy in a study (Denscombe, 2009).

4.4.1.1 Word count
At this level of English in question ("course 5" in an upper-secondary vocational program), it is reasonable to assume that the more a student writes, the higher motivation the student has for the task. Therefore, the words were counted. Contractions such as didn’t were counted as two words did and not.

4.4.1.2 Vocabulary
In line with the original-criterion of creativity (cf. 3.2), it is reasonable to assume that the more creative a student is, the more varied and advanced the vocabulary will be that she/he uses. Variation was measured specifically in terms of how many words outside the New General Service List (NGSL) (Bauman & Culligan, 1995) a student used. The NGSL is the latest version (2013) of the General Service List (GSL), which was compiled as a general service for English language learners. The NGSL consists of 2818 words that are most frequently used in the English language (Browne, 2013). The vocabulary used by each group of informants was compared to the list. Since the NSGL usually lists infinitives and nominatives, I only counted the stems of the words, i.e. not suffixes, prefixes, past tense etc. A higher number of words not included in the NGSL was thus taken as a sign of a more varied language.

4.4.2 Qualitative analyses
Analyzing the material qualitatively, which includes subjective interpretations (Denscombe, 2009), was necessary since the students’ stories, naturally, were very different from each other. Thus, I could analyze their stories in depth, and with this, ensure validity.
4.4.2.1 Implementation of story elements

In my analyses of the implementation of the elements of *story goal, obstacle* and *character motivation*, I assessed whether or not these elements could be found in the students’ stories. If a story contained a story goal but not an obstacle nor a motive, the student’s story was included in the chart diagram of *story goal*, but not for the other two parameters etc.

Also, in a separate diagram, I counted every obstacle for the protagonist achieving his or her goal, e.g. the police arresting the protagonist, the protagonist’s family dying, or the protagonist being poor.

4.4.2.2 Originality

It was important to see whether or not the CSD had any impact on the students’ level of originality, that is, if they offered more original solutions. To do that, I noted unusual, that is, less stereotypical, connections between the story elements used. I put each student’s different story elements next to each other and wrote down every unusual connection, e.g. an obstacle to a bank robbery such as a being arrested was seen as stereotypical, whereas an obstacle such as falling in love was seen as creative. This aspect of the analysis was by necessity quite subjective.

4.4.2.3 Class reactions

In order to answer the research question regarding motivation, it was appropriate to observe the classes’ reactions to the different methods. Specifically, I noticed reactions regarding the students’ attention, active participation and language use. After every lesson, I sat down and wrote down what I had noticed and my notes are the basis for this part of the analysis.

4.5 Regular Teaching Method (RTM)

The RTM was based on an interview with the class’s English teacher where I asked her how she would have taught the elements I was going to cover. Her answers became the essence of the RTM. The purpose was to provide a known teaching method in order to have as reliable material as possible to compare the experiment group with. I am also aware of the fact that my way of teaching could never completely imitate their ordinary teacher’s way of teaching. However, it was a conscious decision to teach the class myself since this was a way to have control over the study. In fact, I wanted to ensure validity by eliminating the problem of the groups being taught by different teachers.
The teacher’s answers corresponded well to what studies (Brookhart, 2013; Newton & Newton, 2010) conclude about how unsystematically and unconsciously creativity is addressed in many teachers’ teaching practice. Hence, the RTM was not deliberately creative even though some elements could be considered creative according to the definition I adopted in this study. For example, the task to write a story was in itself conducive to creativity but I did not explain to the students or help them understand what the creative writing process might involve. Specifically, the RTM included: instructions, collaboration and feedback.

4.5.1 Instructions
The instructions were teacher-centered, that is, I gave the students minimal room to make comments or ask questions. For example, I explained the terms and the conclusions myself and if I invited them to talk it was in the form of closed question (cf. 3.4). Thus, I asked them to fill in whatever specific answer I was looking for in my conversations or the written questions. The oral instructions were also complemented with certain handouts where the content of what I was talking about could be read.

During the instructions, no deliberate creative approach was adopted. Topics and assignments were traditional, text based and orally told.

I handed out papers with suggestions on what the story goal, obstacles and the character’s motivations were (only using texts) and with detailed questions such as “What hair color does your character have?” For example, the students were asked to fill in the blank spaces in a sheet for which to develop a character. A student who did not know how to begin his/her story was asked to work with this sheet and to have a closer look at the specific questions there. I also specified the questions even more by asking for example “Does he have black hair?” etc.

4.5.2 Collaboration and feedback
I did not deliberately encourage group work, but if the students collaborated voluntarily, I did not stop it. I let the students hand in texts to me for feedback, which were then returned the following lesson. The feedback consisted of questions regarding content and language problems. They were not given specific feedback on creative solutions regarding the content.

4.6 The Creative Study Design (CSD)
I created a creative teaching model which I called the Creative Study Design (CSD) and in which I incorporated several important factors that characterize creative teaching and
teaching for creativity – all in accordance with different influential scholars in the field such as Amabile and Fisher (2009), Runco (2007) and Torrance (1993). I deliberately implemented a creative approach as suggested by Hayes (2004), Mumford et al. (2010), Pollard (2012) and Torrance (1972). In doing this, I adopted Amabile’s (2012) definition of creativity: “the process by which novel, appropriate ideas are produced” (p. 10), and based the teaching on TIM (cf. 3.3). So, even if the activity of writing short stories in itself was conducive to creativity (creative writing), students were made aware of both their own level of creativity – by getting feedback for creative solutions. They were also made aware of how, and what, a creative writing process might involve – all in order to improve their creative capacity, as suggested by Brookhart (2013) and NACCCE (1999). The CSD included: instructions, modeling, making unusual connections, mental visualization, collaboration and feedback.

4.6.1 Instructions

In my instructions, I typically asked open-ended questions, in which every answer could be considered “correct” (Dysthe 1996; Tornberg 2009). I could, for example, ask individual students in their idea-generation-stage: “What if your character actually was innocent?” “What if he/she happened to kill someone who he/she should not have killed?” Thereby I tried to encourage the students to come up with more original solutions as suggested by Dispenza (2007), NACCCE (1999) and Torrance in Goodwin and Miller (2013). Moreover, in more formal instructions I could ask them, while teaching the dramatic curve (a theory that most stories follow a certain sequence of tension in order to capture a reader’s interest), how much tension or conflict they thought different scenarios in a certain video-clip contained. They were encouraged to come up with suggestions regarding their own curve and draw the conclusions about what kind of pattern they could see. Thus, the majority of the instructions took the form of an ongoing dialog with the students.

In my instructions, I also tried to use familiar references and taboo topics when I went through a concept – all in accordance with the second stage of TIM. For instance, as I explained the importance of the character having a goal or the importance of a story having obstacles, I talked about kebab, sex and Call of Duty (a computer game) in order to raise their motivation and curiosity in the activity. From experience, I knew these topics could interest students of this age.

In raising the students’ awareness of the creative writing process, as suggested by Brookhart (2013) and Tin et al. (2010), I showed them my own personal notes on my various more or less successful drafts in a personal writing process of mine. The notes contained
several cancellations and imperfect hand written attempts. With this approach, I emphasized the fact that most creative activity, is a process that elaboration and dead ends are part of. Moreover, I talked about the criterion of originality in creative processes: that providing elements which are unexpected (making unusual connections etc.) is more original than picking the conventional ideas. I made them practice this by letting them come up with as many unconventional ideas as possible on how to develop their stories. I urged them to think of solutions they did not think any other classmate had considered.

4.6.2 Modeling and being original

I used my own creative capacities in my attempts to function as a model to the students, since that is important when teaching creativity (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012; Groenendijk et al. 2013; Goodwin & Miller, 2013; Runco, 2007). For example, I created my own metaphors and analogies to make my points; I tried to deliberately break conventional rules that their normal teaching followed and my own habitual ways of teaching; I constantly tried out different ways to work with texts and pictures to find, novel solutions – all in accordance with the definition of creativity (see below). Since the essence of a creative process cannot be predicted in advance (Robinson 2011; Runco, 2007), I did not know what the outcome of my own creative teachings would be. In retrospect, I conclude that my teaching had been creative because it contained mental visualization (described below), the use of pictures, the provision of teen literature with book covers featuring pictures (e.g. of motorcycles, cemeteries, or a man in a coma), dialogues and written statements, which I made myself, reading “Don’t do it!” and “He had a split personality” etc., and covering the walls of the classroom.

Also, in accordance with Barbot et al. (2012), Garner (2013), Pollard (2012), Tin et al. (2010) and others, I made unusual connections in my own teaching. For instance, in order to encourage creativity, I provided an analogy between the craft of storytelling and the craft of carpentry. In preparation, I planned this instruction very carefully and initiated a collaboration with the construction teachers. In the environment where the students usually have their construction lessons, both the construction teacher and I built a stool in which we, consciously, aimed at providing different results. The stool he built was solid enough for a student to actually sit on it whereas my stool was intended to fall apart if they sat on it. Encouraging the students to sit on these stools, our different results were confirmed; his stool stood solid whereas mine instantly fell apart. The students were asked to discuss these results with each other and were encouraged to come up with ideas on how this activity was related to storytelling. They concluded that in order for a story to fulfill its purpose to entertain a
reader, one needs to consider the main components in storytelling such as characterization, including a character’s motive, story goal(s) and obstacle(s) – the activity was an analogy to carpentry. Also, the technique required to do this (writing a story or building a stool) might be important for the sustainability of the product, the value-criterion of creativity (does a reader enjoy the story, can a person sit on the stool?). In sum, building a stool during the EFL class was certainly an unusual connection on my behalf; it was novel (I had never done it before) and the activity was of value if one considers the way the students’ addressed the problem and came up with appropriate solutions, even being anxious to hear what I had in mind with this task.

Furthermore, I let the students make unusual connections in their own writing processes. For example, after letting them choose one picture of a character they wanted to use in their story, I wanted them to connect two unconventional ideas: this character committed a murder, not with the conventional pistol or knife, but with the help of a plastic coffee cup, a computer chord, a pair of scissors, a stapler or a hammer. I forced them to think outside the box, thereby working with the original-criterion of creativity. In accordance with TIM, I let each group pick one murder weapon from a box without looking, in order to raise their expectation and curiosity - the start of the writing process.

4.6.3 Mental visualization
I used mental visualization (cf. 4.6.3) and especially adopted Garner’s (2013) suggestion in the matter, but instead of urging the students to close their eyes, I asked them to wear blindfolds since that would reinforce the fact that I wanted them to go into their own worlds and not be distracted by their peers. Hence, I carefully checked that everyone was unable to see. Thereafter, I wanted them to picture their character (which they had been given a picture of before) coming through the classroom door. I asked them how he/she behaved, he/she would say, what opinions he/she had, etc. They were then asked to write down what they had pictured and/or experienced.

4.6.4 Collaboration and feedback
Since creative work often thrives on collaborative processes (Pollard, 2012; Robinson, 2011, 2009), from the start, I divided the students into groups in which they were urged to give each other feedback on their writing throughout the experiment period.
I also deliberately provided feedback on original solutions. For example, I gave extra credit for unconventional ideas about how the murderer executed his crime.

5. Results and discussions

The results and the discussions are presented together.

5.1 Word count

Overall, the CSD group provided a higher number of words (3824) compared to the RTM group (3145) (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RTM students</th>
<th>145</th>
<th>199</th>
<th>217</th>
<th>241</th>
<th>261</th>
<th>263</th>
<th>269</th>
<th>369</th>
<th>403</th>
<th>435</th>
<th>612</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSD students</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>891</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Number of words for each student in the RTM group and the CSD group.

Creating longer texts could be an indication of finding the activity “interesting, enjoyable” or “positively challenging” as suggested by Amabile and Fisher (2009, pp. 7). The CSD group, which produced longer texts, can therefore be assumed to have been more involved in the activity and more motivated to complete the task than the RTM group.

5.2 Vocabulary

Figure 1: Number of words which were not included in the NGSL.
Stories produced by the CSD group had a higher count of words (125 words) not included in the New General Service List (NGSL) than the RTM group (108 words; cf. Fig. 1).

The fact that the CSD group used more words outside the NSGL than the RTM group might indicate that the CSD made the students use more non-frequent words and thereby use a more varied and larger vocabulary. However, the difference between the CSD and the RTM was relatively small and it corresponds more or less to the difference in the number of words written by the two groups.

5.3 Implementation of story elements

The results in Figure 2 show that the implementation of story goals was high. Almost every student, regardless of group, provided a relatively clear story goal, for example a protagonist saving his family.

In the RTM group, seven out of ten students implemented obstacles and conflicts in their stories whereas every student in the CSD group implemented this element in their stories.

There was no difference between the RTM and the CSD regarding the implementation of a character’s motivation.

![Figure 2. Students implementing different story elements in their stories.](image-url)
Letting the reader know a character’s motivation for attaining his/her goal seemed to be hard regardless of teaching method whereas providing a story goal was easy. It is interesting to see how every participant in the CSD group provided at least one clear obstacle in their stories which was not the case in the RTM group. A possible explanation is that the instructions in the CSD group, in which students were more actively involved, led to a higher understanding of what an obstacle might be and what it means to a story. Hence, a creative approach can make it more probable that the students implement obstacles in their own stories. Since the instructions involved “taboo topics” such as Call of duty and sex, in line with TIM, this might have motivated the students to listen to the instructions more carefully and therefore become more motivated, as suggested by Amabile & Pillemer (2012). It is also possibly related to a heightened brain activity in the frontal lobe, as proposed by Dispenza (2007). The latter would make the students more active in their learning process.

The experiment group included more obstacles in their stories than the control group (Fig. 3). Again, this might indicate that the creative approach provided a better understanding of the importance of including obstacles in the stories, and possibly because of this, the CSD students did not only provide one obstacle but several. This could be a sign that the experiment group showed a “depth of involvement in the task” as Amabile and Fisher (2009, pp. 7) put it, and thereby attained a higher motivation towards the activity than the control group.

Figure 3: The number of obstacles used by the stories in the RTM group and the CSD group.
5.4 Originality

The stories of the CSD group were judged to be original more often (five out of ten) than those of the RTM group (two out of ten) as Figure 4 shows. For instance, a student in the RTM group had a protagonist whose goal was to become rich by “killing and robbing people”, motivated by “a bad childhood”, and the obstacle was that he was arrested and put in jail. This was not considered original. In the CSD group, a student had a protagonist whose goal was to be left alone “drinking a cold beer”, motivated by the fact that he had “a hard drinking problem”, with the obstacle being “a naked man” who took his beer, which was considered more original.

I was not surprised that the CSD group offered more original solutions since the group had practiced it in class. Thus, the CSD made the stories’ content more creative than the RTM. This can confirm Brookhart’s (2013) and Pollard’s (2012) suggestions, that one can develop students’ creativity by noticing and giving feedback on creative solutions. Nonetheless, I would have expected a higher number in the CSD than the RTM since the students in the CSD group had been encouraged to make unusual connections. This can indicate Turner’s (2013) claim: students might find creative work problematic, especially if they are not used to it. As e.g. Robinson in Azzam (2009) says: creativity can be developed in students the way reading and writing is – suggesting that creativity takes time to develop.
5.5 Class reactions
The results for each group will first be presented separately, but will then be analyzed and compared in section 5.6.3.

5.5.1 The CSD
In connection with the open-ended questions I asked in class (cf. 4.6.1), I noticed that the students in the experiment group were acting alert and attentive which was shown in the way they eagerly answered/commented my questions/statements. On two occasions, I saw how a couple of students even became physically jumpy, asking questions such as “What did you say?” and “What?”, especially when I mentioned subjects such as sex and kebab in my teaching of story elements, but also in immediate connection to my analogies (building a stool etc.). Also, students came up to me asking about the pictures and the books I provided in class. Overall, there were many students in the experiment group who wanted to talk, make comments and have my attention, particularly during the instructions. Otherwise they were relatively self-sufficient, that is, they worked in their groups discussing and writing.

In the conversations between me and the students I spoke English whereas they talked Swedish. This meant that the CSD students were exposed to more authentic conversations even though it was in a Swedish-English structure.

Moreover, the CSD demanded more preparatory work from me and thus, was more time-consuming and required more effort, and it was sometimes hard to give the students credit for what I thought they would consider to be original and appropriate and not compare it to what I thought was original and appropriate. Yet, working with the CSD made me, as a teacher, more alert and I experienced a closer contact with the students, which was highly satisfactory for me.

5.5.2 The RTM
During the instructions in the RTM group, some students laid their heads on the benches (one student even buried his head in his sleeve), another one yawned, a couple of students talked (while looking at something on their cell phones), two students teased each other and some students repeatedly asked when the lesson ended. Only a couple of students in the RTM group seemed read the hand-outs and paid attention to my instructions regarding the story elements. It was mostly the same few students who answered my closed questions in class. Also, as in the CSD, I spoke English while they talked Swedish.
Furthermore, the planning in the RTM was not especially demanding for me as a teacher. Of course, it took some time to collect the material I was using, but once I had the material, I did not put any further effort into using it more creatively and could thereby save time. Yet, it was very frustrating to see the students focusing on something else than my instructions during the lessons.

5.5.3 The CDS and the RTM
Since I only talked in English, they needed to understand what I was saying and therefore these occasions provided, what Tornberg (2009) would call, authentic conversations in English – the appropriateness-criterion could thereby be fulfilled in their way of interacting with me. The conversations in the CSD group resulted in students being motivated to create a conversation. This could indicate that, even though the conversations consisted of a Swedish-English structure, the CSD created more opportunities and a higher willingness to talk about the assigned material than in the RTM group (see below). Consequently, I made the assessment that the students in the CSD group were exposed to more spoken English in a conscious way since the students were highly motivated to know my answers or comments. This is in contrast to the indifferent and “turned off”-manner (Robinson 2011) the RTM group showed when I spoke English.

The excitement in the CSD group confirms Birkmaier’s (1971) and Turner’s (2013) conclusion that creative activities can be experienced as highly enjoyable. Being alert and attentive, as I observed in the experiment group, can also be a sign of having an inner motivation vis-à-vis the task at hand, in accordance with how Amabile and Pillemer (2012) describe intrinsically motivated persons’ active approach towards a task.

The RTM- instructions seemed to inactivate the students, and the disengagement from the material resulted in them activating themselves (talking, teasing, resting etc.). Based on this small example, it can be suggested that the students have a natural urge to be creative – they are being creative, for example, in the way they make valuable, in their perspective, utterances (teasing and talking to each other) instead of listening to me. Thus, even though the students in the RTM group could be said to be active, they were not active with respect to EFL learning, which might help explain why the CSD group had a higher rate of implementation of the story elements than the RTM group. In other words, being attentive, which the CSD might have contributed to, seems to be important when processing the material a teacher wants his/her students to learn.
The results were not surprising. First of all, the CSD group seemed to have a higher task-related motivation than the RTM group. This confirmed Birkmaier’s (1971) and Jackson and Raiber’s (2010) conclusions on how working with a deliberately creative approach might lead to more active students. The results also confirm how traditional practices in EFL teaching actually inactivate the students and thereby “turn them off”, as Birkmaier (1971) and Robinson (2011) suggest.

Also, it was not unexpected that it took more effort to actually make the teaching more creative, especially since I am not used to working in this way. This confirms Turner’s (2013) conclusions that teachers who are not accustomed to bringing out their own creative capacities might find it difficult. Yet, the effort paid off in terms of a more active and closer relationship with the students in the CSD-group than with those in the RTM-group.

6. Conclusion

Even though the curriculum for upper-secondary school in Sweden states that the overall goal is developing students’ creative capacities, it does not provide any explanations or guidelines on how to actually achieve this, nor how creativity should be defined. In fact, the lack of clear definitions and implications might contribute to the mythologized conceptualization of the term creativity (Turner, 2013), which means that the opportunities to encourage and stimulate students’ creativity are lost (Brookhart 2013).

Indeed, the myth that creativity has more to do with the arts than the language subjects are confirmed in many ways, e.g. in the way creativity is explicitly mentioned in the Swedish curriculum for music but only implicitly for EFL studies, which might keep EFL teachers unaware of the concept and what it means to their work, and accordingly stop them from helping their students to develop their creative capacities.

Even though it is not possible to draw any general conclusions from this small study, it confirms several positive results when it comes to working deliberately with creativity in the EFL teaching. This ought to be of great interest to foreign language teachers. The CSD seems to offer the students a chance to see the creative possibilities in the foreign language subject and thereby increase their level of task-involvement, as suggested by Amabile (2012) among others. In other words, the CSD, compared to the RTM, seemed to increase motivation, and thereby creativity was gained in the form of longer texts, more words outside the NGSL, more implementation of the teaching objectives (story goals, obstacles, character motivations), more original story plots, and more focused and active students. These results ought to be kept
in mind when teaching a foreign language, especially if one considers Dispenza’s (2007) claim that active participation and motivation is required for the frontal lobe to be used – the part of the brain that is crucial in learning. As the students actively create within the subject, they will become more motivated, and with an increased motivation, he/she wants to extend the learning process. Accordingly, he/she will, possibly, become better in mastering the language, in line with István (1998) and Tornberg (2009). Moreover, motivation and focus seem to be enhanced, both among students and teacher, when working deliberately, rather than haphazardly and in an disengaged manner, which confirms Brookhart’s (2013), Giauque’s (1985), NACCCE’s (1999) Pollard’s (2012), Raiber, Duke et al.’s (2010), Robinson’s (2011) and Torrance’s (1972) arguments.

Also, since it was confirmed that it was only in their EFL class the students were faced with a deliberately creative approach, it might not have had such a great impact as might otherwise have been the case. If all the other teachers were to work deliberately with the concept as well, as recommended by Amabile and Pillemer (2012), Brookhart (2013), Raiber Duke et al. (2010), Robinson (2009) and others, overall creativity would increase. As the results show, if only one teacher actively works on developing the students’ creativity, she or he might find the work overwhelming.

In fact, it might be fruitful to conduct interdisciplinary studies in which EFL is a part of a bigger context and see whether or not deliberate efforts towards increased overall creativity has any impact not only on students’ school results, but also on their future lives in the form of e.g. job-prospects and well-being. In general, it would be interesting and relevant to conduct further studies in the field of creativity and EFL with more participants and during a longer period of time.
Reference list


