Chapter 95
Investigating Creativity in Online K–12 World Language Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines creativity in the world language classroom through the results of a mixed-methods study during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there has been a growing interest in creativity within education, little has been researched related to creative and uncreative factors in the language classroom, specifically in an online teaching context. For this reason, this research study explores creativity in the online world language K-12 classroom by examining teaching artifacts self-selected by K-12 language teachers, as well as interviews with interested participants. Findings suggest that creativity is multi-dimensional with creative factors overlapping within artifacts. Additionally, teachers have persisted throughout the pandemic to integrate creativity in order to engage students with the content in various ways, harness student attention, and give students choice. In addition, teachers have used various technologies to provide opportunities for students to work asynchronously and synchronously.

INTRODUCTION

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and its effect on education is one of those challenges and problems that is beyond our control. In these types of situations, there is thought to be a connection between creativity and adaptability, the ability to adjust and cope. The value of creative adaptations is

thought to resonate at the societal and individual levels. At a societal level, Boorstin (1992) reported that throughout history one of the constant influences on creativity has been conflict and turbulent situations. Through the turbulence, opportunities are generated that prompt creative production (Runco, 2014). Similarly, at the individual level, people often respond to challenges and conflict by being creative (Flach, 1990; Runco, 1998, 2014). In a sense, teaching during this unique time offers both challenge and potential for creativity in the classroom.

During the COVID-19 crisis, rapid changes to instructional delivery due to the pandemic forced teachers to shift to online teaching contexts (The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2020a), disrupting education but also creating opportunities. MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer (2020) note that "for many language teachers, this has required switching to teaching under unfamiliar and difficult circumstances with little warning and preparation, and barely, if any, training" (p. 2). With this in mind, this study seeks to analyze creativity in the world language online classroom and the novel ideas, approaches, and solutions teachers used to adapt to a new teaching context. Referring to the beginning of the pandemic, Moser, Wei, and Brenner (2021) note that "it is unknown how language educators enacted emergency remote language teaching as required in spring 2020" (p. 2). Over a year later, there is understandably little research to date on how teachers enacted instruction since the beginning of the pandemic, and much less on creativity within online language teaching. For these reasons, the following research questions guide this study: How do K-12 world language teachers describe creative and uncreative artifacts in the online classroom? How do these creative and uncreative artifacts compare?

BACKGROUND

What is Creativity?

Creativity, a distinctively human capacity, reveals itself in how novel ideas, approaches, and solutions are generated (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). In general, creativity researchers agree on two key definitional criteria for creativity: novelty and appropriateness (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Simonton, 2012). Within the classroom, creativity is defined as "a blend between originality and meaningfully meeting task criteria" (Beghetto, 2020, p. 26). That is, creativity must encompass something novel or original that may be new to an individual or the world but also must be appropriate for the task at hand. On the other hand, uncreative ideas are those that involve routine problem solving, dogmatic thinking, or ready-made solutions (Beghetto, 2016; Lubart, 2000-2001). Lubart (2000-2001) argues that creative and uncreative processes are on a continuum where specific influencing factors have the potential to yield creative or uncreative degrees of creative results. For example, time dedicated to a project, time to think and incubate ideas, or the ability to link seemingly unrelated connections may impact the creative process, resulting in varying degrees of creative outcomes.

Creativity is regarded as one of the best ways, albeit an often neglected way, to prepare learners for an uncertain future (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Guilford, 1950). Typically, an emphasis on creativity centers on teaching students to be skillful in solving new problems and preparing them for a world of challenge and change (Fisher, 2005). In addition to, there are numerous educational initiatives that define it as a fundamental skill needed in the twenty-first century (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2019; Scottish Executive Education Department, 2006).

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