

Rediscovering Curiosity, Imagination, and Humor in Learning

BY JENNIFER UHLER

A salient feature of good language teaching is its ability to pique good-spirited curiosity and support imaginative discovery. The language classroom uniquely offers learners a plethora of possibilities to explore, ask, play, invent, and imagine—and to practice language skills on topics as diverse as space exploration and pop culture. Teachers who promote creative learning environments pull learners into the language and motivate them to cultivate positive learning attitudes. This spirit of curiosity and creativity has long been evident to English teaching practitioners and has reappeared in numerous forms in *English Teaching Forum* over the last five decades. The three selections from previous issues that are reprinted here showcase exciting language adventures for learner and teacher alike.

The first selection, “Curiosity and Comprehension,” was originally published in 1977. However, John Montagu Butler’s discovery-based story approach continues to be relevant today. He highlights for us the importance of working with texts and designing activities that allow students to interact meaningfully with a text, using curiosity as a guide to discovery and comprehension. The article serves as a useful reminder that reading is an imaginative and reactive exercise meant to invigorate and involve students.

In “Using Story Jokes for Real Communication” (1996), William DeFelice builds on the notion of using humor as a way to teach communication. Capitalizing on humor, learners go beyond for-

mulaic speech patterns and incorporate spontaneous interaction by telling funny stories. Through rehearsing and retelling jokes, students learn narrative patterns and explore cultural humor. The end result is a fun and enriching language activity.

Finally, Cuenca and Carmona apply both curiosity and humor to the skill of writing. “An Imaginative Approach to Teaching Writing” (1986) outlines practical and easy ways to encourage creative language practice. In addition to motivating reluctant writers, this approach reinforces relationships between language and concepts and livens up the classroom with exercises such as “creative errors.” Such an error might lead to this: Question: What is *natim-ageion*? Answer: Image-in-nation. Imagination!

Truly, learning a language can feel frustrating, isolating, or even threatening at times. As teachers, we need to select methods and activities that allow thoughtful and stimulating interaction with texts while we reassure our students that learning is a shared creative process that allows for humorous interpretation and inventive reactions. These three articles attest not only to the resourceful ways teachers address such classroom issues but also to the common thread of creativity and innovation we have seen and continue to see in *Forum*.

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