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FORMATION OF CREATIVE THINKING ABILITY OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NATIVE LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Abstract
This article examines the unique and essential function of native language instruction as the primary pedagogical vehicle for the formation of creative thinking abilities in elementary school students. It argues that language, as the fundamental medium of cognitive construction, provides the ideal platform for cultivating divergent, flexible, and original thought. This discussion synthesizes Vygotskian frameworks of thought-language interdependence with practical, inquiry-based pedagogical strategies. It posits that by prioritizing literary exploration, semantic flexibility, and process-oriented creative composition over rote grammatical drills, educators can effectively develop the foundational creative competencies essential for 21st-century problem-solving and lifelong learning.

Keywords: Creative thinking, elementary education, native language instruction, pedagogical strategies, divergent thinking, cognitive flexibility, literacy, Vygotsky, 21st-century skills, children's literature, creative writing.

Introduction

In the contemporary educational landscape, the mandate for 21st-century skills has repositioned **creative thinking** from a peripheral, artistic concern to a central cognitive competency required for critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and complex problem-solving. This shift presents a profound challenge and opportunity for elementary education, the foundational stage where cognitive habits and intellectual dispositions are first codified. While creativity is a competency that should be fostered across the entire curriculum, the native language class serves as its most critical and fertile ground. It is within this specific pedagogical domain—where the very tools of thought, meaning-making, and communication are honed—that the abstract potential for creativity can be systematically nurtured into a tangible, transferable ability. The formation of creative thinking in elementary

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students is not an act of magic, but a deliberate pedagogical process, one that requires moving the language arts classroom away from a paradigm of rigid rule-following and recall, toward one of dynamic exploration, cognitive flexibility, and imaginative risk-taking.

The theoretical justification for centering this work in the language class is robust, most notably articulated in the work of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky's foundational insight that thought is not merely expressed in words but comes into existence through them establishes an inextricable link between linguistic competence and cognitive capacity. For the elementary school child, the native language class is the environment where this interdependence is most intensively mediated. Creativity, in this context, is not simply originality, but includes the full spectrum of divergent thinking abilities identified by theorists like Guilford and Torrance: **fluency** (generating many ideas), **flexibility** (generating different *types* of ideas), **originality** (generating unique ideas), and **elaboration** (expanding upon an idea). A traditional language curriculum focused on grammatical correctness and reading comprehension often prioritizes convergent thinking—finding the single right answer. In contrast, a creativity-oriented curriculum uses language as a medium for exploration. This aligns with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), suggesting that a child's creative potential is activated through skilled social mediation—that is, through interaction with a teacher and peers who model and scaffold creative linguistic behaviors, asking "what if?" rather than just "what is?"

The development of creative thinking begins with its most fundamental building blocks: words. A robust and nuanced vocabulary is the raw material from which novel ideas are constructed. However, the pedagogical approach must transcend the simple memorization of definitions. In the creative language classroom, vocabulary acquisition is a process of exploration. Students are encouraged to investigate the *texture* of words—their connotations, their sounds (phonetics), and their emotional weight (semantics). Teachers can foster this by designing activities that promote semantic flexibility. For instance, rather than just learning synonyms, students can be asked to rank them by intensity (e.g., *walk, stroll, saunter, march*) or to explore how changing one word in a sentence alters its entire emotional landscape. This practice directly builds cognitive flexibility, the ability to see multiple perspectives and shift conceptual categories. Metaphor and simile, often relegated to a small unit on poetry, should be central tools. When a child is

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prompted to describe the sound of rain *without* using the word "rainy," or to connect two seemingly unrelated objects (like "a pencil" and "a river"), they are forced to forge new neural pathways, engaging in the core act of creative association. This linguistic "play" (ludic pedagogy) is not trivial; it is a sophisticated cognitive exercise that teaches children to manipulate their primary tool of thought with precision and imagination.

Children's literature serves as the principal catalyst for this entire process, acting as a repository of creative thought and a model for linguistic innovation. Stories and poems are not merely vessels for moral lessons or comprehension quizzes; they are demonstrations of how language can be bent, broken, and rebuilt to create new worlds and perspectives. A pedagogical approach focused on creativity uses literature as a "springboard" for divergent thinking. After reading a story, the teacher's primary questions should be open-ended and speculative. Instead of "What did the main character do?" the question becomes, "What are ten *other* things the character *could* have done?" or "How would this story be different if it were told from the villain's point of view?" This practice, central to the work of educators like Cremin and Wyse (2017), reframes reading as an active, co-creative process. Poetry, in particular, is invaluable. Its inherent use of imagery, rhythm, and compression demonstrates that language can prioritize feeling and sound over literal meaning. By analyzing *why* a poet chose a specific line break or a strange metaphor, children learn that language rules are not immutable laws but conscious choices made by an author. They are then empowered to make those same conscious, creative choices in their own work.

This empowerment finds its ultimate expression in the act of creative composition. Writing is the primary modality where all the components of creative thinking—fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration—are synthesized and put into practice. However, if the classroom environment is dominated by fear of the "red pen" and a rigid adherence to formulaic structures, originality will be suffocated. A classroom that fosters creativity must, as scholars like Beghetto (2010) argue, establish a climate of psychological safety where intellectual risk-taking is encouraged and "failure" is reframed as a necessary step in the iterative process. This means shifting the focus from the final *product* to the creative *process*. Brainstorming activities, such as collaborative "story-chain" writing or using abstract visual prompts, are designed to generate a high *fluency* of ideas. Peer-

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editing workshops that focus on "what is working" and "what could be explored further" promote elaboration. The teacher's role in composition is not as a judge of correctness but as a facilitator of voice, constantly prompting the student to make their writing more specific, more sensory, and more authentic to their own perspective. This process-oriented approach validates the student's internal world and gives them the confidence to experiment with language, a trait that is essential for developing a truly creative mind.

To achieve this, the educator must reconceptualize their role within the native language classroom. The teacher must be more than an instructor of rules; they must be a "facilitator of curiosity" and a "model of creative thinking." This pedagogical stance is defined by the quality of questions asked. Closed questions ("What is a noun?") seek recall and promote convergent thinking. Open-ended, Socratic questions ("Why do you think the author used that specific noun instead of another?") invite speculation, analysis, and divergent thinking. As Sawyer (2004) conceptualizes it, creative teaching is akin to "disciplined improvisation," where the teacher guides a discussion while remaining open to the unexpected, emergent ideas of the students. This approach requires a classroom culture where listening is as valued as speaking, and where diverse interpretations are celebrated as evidence of flexible thinking. This environment, where play is seen as learning and questioning is seen as the primary mode of inquiry, is the necessary container for the development of creative thought. When students feel safe to be "wrong" in their interpretations of a poem or "silly" in their word choices, they are actually practicing the high-level cognitive skills of hypothesis-testing and intellectual courage.

In conclusion, the formation of creative thinking in elementary students is a complex but achievable goal that is uniquely situated within the domain of native language instruction. It is not an "add-on" activity for Fridays but a fundamental reorientation of pedagogical practice. By viewing language as the substance of thought itself, educators can leverage vocabulary, literature, and composition as daily exercises in cognitive flexibility, divergent problem-solving, and originality. This approach moves beyond the mere acquisition of literacy skills and transforms the language class into a crucible where the creative, analytical, and empathetic minds of future citizens are forged. The student who is taught to play with language, to question a narrative, and to construct new meanings is not only becoming a better

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reader and writer; they are becoming a more adaptive, innovative, and effective thinker, prepared for the complex, ambiguous challenges of the world that awaits them. The decline in creative thinking scores, as noted by researchers like Kim (2011), is not inevitable; it is a curricular and pedagogical choice, and one that the native language classroom is most powerfully equipped to reverse.

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