

# Tamás Lőrincz

## Are you a teacher or an educator?



Tamás Lőrincz has been an English Teacher since 1991. He has taught in a variety of educational settings in Hungary and abroad. He has been involved in materials writing, design and marketing. He is passionate about the English Language, teaching and professional development. He is interested in using technology and Web2.0 in teaching and professional development for teachers. His blog is available at <http://tamaslorincz.edublogs.org>. You can follow his tweets at: <http://twitter.com/tamaslorincz>.

### Introduction

I believe that being a teacher and/or an educator is not a qualitative distinction. A well-functioning education system needs professionals with a pragmatic orientation just as much as people who query, debate, challenge the values, philosophy and principles behind the system. I will argue that regardless of what we see ourselves as, one important quality for all of us involved in education is enthusiasm.

### A quick survey

I decided to start my enquiry (as I always do these days) by asking my Personal Learning Network (PLN) about their take on the question. The responses were incredible. The honesty, depth and wisdom of many of the answers was a humbling experience for me. I probably will not be able to do justice to them all.

Carla Beard (@webenglishteach) thought that educator is “inflationary language” used by people who are not content to be teachers, while Joahim Ziebs’s (@texjoachim) opinion is that the two words are synonymous. Osváth Erika (@erikaosvath) also implied that by being one you are ultimately the other, too.

Others came up with the following definitions and explanations of educator:

- mentors students, helps them to make their own discoveries (mbarry156)
- connects different disciplines (KDSL07, anonymous, Emma P. Ward)
- focuses on learning, including their own (NBCCSue, duvalgrr djainslie, Emma P Ward, @anacik, anonymous)
- inspires children to be their best (Mrsbjsmith, PSDIRECTOR, DanSeabra, @mattleading)
- provides you with life-long skills (Imorowski)

- teaches you how to lead a successful life (@OceanEyes729)
- develops a passion in students to become better people through exploration of their beliefs, interests and goals. (Swilson9419, Livia\_Farago)
- adequately prepares students for the 21st Century, recognizing their strengths, interests and talents. (Anonymous)



To **educate** is to ‘lead them out’ while to **teach** is to ‘show’ according to Ayto’s Dictionary of Word Origins. When you help people acquire the information, skills, personal characteristics necessary to leave a place (physical or mental), you do a bit more than demonstrate. The focus shifts from something *you* do to something *they* do.

### So, what is the difference?

Looking at the responses to the questionnaire, the following comparison started to take shape (see Figure 1):

It turns out that teachers are focused on their individual sets of expertise and interests. They are dedicated to providing students with the necessary knowledge in subject areas which prepare them to meet the expectations of an education system. They are down-to-earth professionals who work very hard to help students achieve success.

Teacher	Educator
reductionist	holistic
teaches	mentors
focus on discipline (subject)	focus on learner
helps pass exams	provides life-long skills
accumulates knowledge	shares knowledge
focuses on similarities	focuses on differences
sage	guide
isolation	connectivity
focuses on teaching	focuses on learning
imparts knowledge	raises self awareness
teaches the subject in isolation	inter and extra-disciplinary

Figure 1. Comparing *teacher* and *educator*

Educators on the other hand attribute less importance to the given subject area or the requirements of an education system, and focus on the individual characteristics of the learners. Educators are the ‘hedonists’ of the system in the sense that they prioritise their own values and principles over those of the system. They are the dreamers who inspire change and improvement in the system, and who help students ask important questions about themselves and the world around them.

### Does this mean that teachers are ‘bad’ and educators are ‘good’?

I think it’s very important to emphasise that the distinction is not qualitative. One is not better than the other. I would also argue that one’s teacher is another’s educator. I am not at all convinced that being a teacher or an educator is a choice and a fossilized state. Relationships between students and teachers are much more complicated and complex than that.

There are bad teachers and good teachers, just as there are bad educators and good educators. The quality of one’s work is not necessarily determined by the philosophy they adopt in their teaching.

Their choice is based on their personality, experiences and beliefs. The quality of their work is determined by how consistently they can live their philosophy.

Good teachers care about their student’s achievements, they believe in the system or even if they do not, they accept its inevitability and do their utmost to prepare students to meet the challenges (tests, exams, further studies).

Good teachers respect their students by being well-prepared for their classes, by knowing their subject well and being able to deliver it effectively.

Good teachers keep track of development in their own subject area and are involved in on-going professional development.

Good educators think that the system exists for the students and aim at reforming the system so that it better suits the needs, personality, and goals of the student.

Good educators engage in conversations about revising the systems so that they better serve the demands. They believe in the learner and that the system should provide for the learner, so they keep looking for solutions that make learning and education meaningful. For a good educator, professional development is more about understanding the systems and finding unique solutions, comparing experiences, and collaborating with other educators to find these alternatives.

From this short list it can be seen that I believe that good teachers are the ones who accept their restrictions and find the best possible ways to achieve the best results for their students, while educators look for solutions to the shortcomings of the system, and thus help improve education.

The two are in a complementary rather than a hierarchical relationship. A good system of education is one that caters for both groups. Where there are professional requirements, students have to fulfill them with the help of well-trained, enthusiastic teachers. At the same time, it allows educators to challenge and provide possible improvements to the system.

### Are great educators born out of great teachers?

I do think that there is a natural progression towards a more holistic attitude to education. Initially, one tries to provide the students with the best of their knowledge but as they understand more and more of the global issues hindering successful education, they become involved in issues related more to education than teaching.

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*‘One important quality for all of us involved in education is enthusiasm.’*

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However, there are many teachers who find it rewarding enough to enthuse, fascinate and engage themselves in their own subject areas and

they never seek to challenge the system; instead they concentrate their efforts on improving their knowledge base and methodological tool box.

### Do students prefer good teachers or good educators?

Students at every grade level have a very strong sense of justice, and know what it means to be a good teacher. In my experience, students like good teachers more than good educators while they are at school.

They enjoy being taught by someone who knows and is enthusiastic about their subject. In contrast, educators can make students a bit uncomfortable. They may create situations where students are encouraged to step out of their comfort zones, to take personal responsibility, to challenge ideas, debate, and question ‘sacred’ truths. In many cases students do not necessarily understand why it is important to question. Educators tend to be the teachers who meet their students a few years after graduation and the student tells them: ‘Now I see what you were trying to do back then’.

## Do administrators prefer great teachers or educators?

This is a much easier question to answer. Administrators love great teachers, who bring in the results, who go on doing their thing and accept the restrictions imposed on them by the 'system'. A real step forward is when an administrator recognizes the importance of involving educators in assessing the results, listening to their suggestions and observations. They are the ones who can pick up aspects of the system that can be improved to make it better for the students and the teachers.

### Conclusion

This article only scratches the surface of a very interesting and important question. Its aim has been to try to remove the qualitative labelling of "educator = good, teacher = bad" dichotomy. There is one characteristic feature that makes one a great teacher or educator. That feature is enthusiasm. What we want from our teachers is Dewey's triumvirate of: *responsibility*, *open-mindedness* and *whole-heartedness*, and the rest will take care of itself, whether you are a teacher or an educator. What we do have to get rid of are fear of change, blaming others, and laziness.

### Thanks

I would not have been able to write this paper without the help of the wonderful people in my personal learning network. My special thanks go to them.

Add your comments to the online form at <http://bit.ly/9QpofL>

### Challenge

Create your own personal learning network. Here are five things you can do today:

1. Join Twitter: <http://twitter.com> (follow one or all of these great people: @tomwhitby, @shellterrell, @erikaosvath, @Marisa\_C – and the rest will follow), spend 15-30 minutes on the site every day, and ... enjoy the learning.
2. Join Facebook: Find Larry Ferlazzo, and check out his great posts.
3. Join a community: The Educator's PLN is a great place to start: <http://edupln.ning.com/>.
4. Follow #edchat: a weekly chat on Twitter about issues related to education.
5. Read a blog. To start with, try: <http://www.freetech4teachers.com>.





# Chaz Pugliese

## Creative Teaching: an optional extra or an absolute must?

**Chaz Pugliese is a Teacher Trainer working out of Paris. He has 20 years experience teaching and training teachers in over 30 countries, in Europe and beyond. He has written widely for several ELT publications and has presented at all major international conferences (IATEFL, TESOL). His first book *Being Creative: The Challenge of Change in the Classroom* was published by DELTA in April 2010.**

**From 2002 to 2006, Chaz edited the *Activities for Busy Teachers* column in the IATEFL Newsletter. He considers himself a methodologist with a strong interest and expertise in the following areas: Motivation, Creativity, Multiple Intelligences Theory, Group Processes, and Materials Development.**

*Creativity is a tool in the hands of educators. It helps us to find the way, our own special way, to get through to our students.*

That creativity in teaching is indispensable is pretty obvious to me, for how else can I even dream of catering for the great diversity of my classes, design tasks to engage all my students, and teach in a variety of meaningful ways?

In this article I would like to tackle a few important questions such as: What is creativity? Why should I bother? How can I become more creative?

### What is creativity?

Just what are we talking about when we're talking about creativity? One thing is certain, there's more to creativity than just thinking outside the box (or divergent thinking as it is called by creativity researchers). In fact, there seems to be general consensus that rather than just a single trait, creativity is best thought of as a cluster of skills used to produce an idea that is novel and culturally appropriate or valued.

There's another definition I have always liked by professor Robert Sternberg, perhaps the world's leading researcher in the field. For him, creativity is a decision we take. Wanting to be more creative is the main drive, the rest is up to hard work.

### Why should I bother?

A few years ago a few hundred school kids in the UK were asked to name the qualities they thought a top teacher should have. What came first was 'originality', followed by 'fairness'. This is hardly shocking news: great teachers have known all along that you can't teach anyone anything if you haven't managed to get through to them.

And the best way to get our students' attention is through a surprise: yes, kids like to be surprised (but don't we all?), and anything that smacks of routine is bound to fail. So, a surprise gets us attention.

Interestingly, this seems in line with neurobiology research findings on the quality of attention: one of the four factors that has an impact on attention, and gets the students in a state of mental arousal is *novelty* (the three others are *a perceived need*, *meaning*, and *emotions*). Without creativity, we wouldn't be able to come up with any surprises.

Without creativity, we wouldn't be able to cater for the great diversity of our classrooms: mixed levels, mixed intelligences. And without creativity, we wouldn't be able to inject new life in the coursebook, either.

### How can I become (more) creative?

The idea that creativity is a gift bestowed upon a few select ones by the gods above is one of those myths that tend to stick around for a long time. Just like intelligence, creativity is not a fixed, unitary trait, is not genetic and can be in fact developed.

But creativity needs to be invited, welcome, embraced. There is a myth about the creative soul that if you don't feel inspired, you don't have it. I've been a musician for 30 years and if I had to depend on my inspiration every time I picked up my guitar, the guitar would stay mute. I've experienced every emotion imaginable when I play—from abject terror to sheer frustration, boredom, even and to feeling absolutely nothing—and through it all like a recalcitrant mule, I have plodded on.

There's no quick fix, no magic recipe, but below are just a few things that may get you going:

- Cherish the company of creative people around you. Engage them in conversation, ask questions, tease them.
- Seize the moment. Always keep a notepad and a pencil ready. When an idea strikes, don't EVER brush it aside thinking you'll remember it later. You won't. That's not the way our brain works, once that synopsis is gone, it's probably gone forever.



- Is there a time of the day that seems to be conducive to better thinking? If so, try to stick to it.
- Don't be disappointed if what had seemed a great insight doesn't lead to much. Put it on the back burner, you'll come back to it later. Sometimes an idea needs a good incubation period. Nurture it, take it apart, play around with it. Play, play and play.
- Take baby steps. You're not out there to blaze new trails, or revolutionize the ELT world. Just keep telling yourself that every little bit helps. Fail, but fail better each time, to quote Beckett.
- Value feedback, but believe in what you do and persevere. Charlie Parker was mercilessly booed off the stage for playing something new. Negative reaction didn't stop him from pressing ahead and become the greatest jazz musician who ever lived.
- Take sensible risks. Remember: learners like to be surprised, but they certainly don't like to be shocked.

In terms of creativity training, I have found four strategies extremely helpful, and these are: *simplicity*, *playfulness*, *risk-taking* and *association* (also called *combinational creativity*). In this article I will only talk about the first two.

### Strategy 1: Simplicity

Keeping things simple in the classroom implies that our teaching focuses on the learner, rather than on the materials to be 'covered'. Most importantly, to teach more simply is to teach more purposefully and with a minimum of needless distraction. If necessity is the mother of invention, then frugality definitely plays a big role in boosting our creativity. The simplicity strategy can be spectacularly applied in the language learning classroom – in activities that require little or no preparation time and can be designed to use the students as our primary resource.

What you need, to put this strategy into practice, is some knowledge of *who* your students are as people, *what* they like, and *how* they like to learn. The rest is down to some thinking, work and, to a lesser extent, inspiration.

### Strategy 2: Playfulness

Think, if you can, of a life deprived of play. You give up? I don't blame you. An ability to play is the capacity to have serious, purposeful fun. This is seen by many creativity researchers as an important step in the creative process. In the words of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, '*there's no question that a playful attitude is typical of creative individuals... but coupled with its antithesis, a quality of perseverance and endurance*'. As early as the 16th century, Erasmus and Montaigne both recommended games as mnemonic devices, and recently Guy Cook has explained how play has a cognitive function that supports and fosters creative thinking.

A playful attitude is important in the classroom because it helps the teacher create a stress-free environment, and is essential because it allows us to pay heed to the child in us that's still longing to be creative and play. We can approach our self-expression with a greater sense of balance and, in some cases, with renewed enthusiasm, making it easier for our creativity to flourish.

A word of caution just before finishing off this short article: not a single person I have met finds it easy to nurture and unleash their creativity. Human beings have to deal with all sorts of fears that may keep us from being creative. Teachers are no exception. Fear of change, fear of accepting failure, fear of rocking the boat, fear of sticking out, fear of disappointing, fear of uncertainty. Working in an environment that doesn't value creativity is another huge mountain to climb.

Having worked with hundreds of teachers on creativity courses, I know from experience that discovering that we can actually begin to create is the real trigger. There are no magic wands, no easy tricks, but please try the exercise below, it's easy and powerful, and it should get you started. Remember two things: that there is no such thing as right or wrong – and trust the process.

### The Music of Change

1. Take a few moments to relax, unwind, and 'gather attention'. Feel every muscle in your body relax and let your breathing become even and deep.
2. Now visualise a piece of music you like: anything – song, instrumental. For example:  
Play it in your head.  
Play it loud, as if someone were performing it in front of you.
3. Focus on the details. When the image is clear, change just one feature of the music. For example :  
Change the tempo from slow to fast.  
Change the tempo from fast to slow.
4. Now change another feature in your imagination. For example:  
Hear different instruments perform the music.  
Which ones?
5. Keep changing the music as ideas spring to mind until you hear a whole new different piece of music: something neither you nor anyone else has ever heard.
6. Be as daring or as subtle as you wish, but allow your mind room for something new each time.
7. What does the creative experience feel like? Take some time to think about this.
8. Make notes, share with a partner or discuss with your colleagues – according to the possibilities of the situation you are in.

To conclude, here's what I'd like to see happen in our field: creativity training in ALL Teacher Training programs, from the ones for the inexperienced all the way up to MA level.

#### References

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# Uwe Pohl

## - some images to make students think and talk

Uwe Pohl is a German-born teacher and teacher trainer at the Department of English Language Pedagogy at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. His professional interests include ELT methodology, intercultural communication, and trainer training. Over the last 10 years Uwe Pohl has also worked in a wide variety of adult and teacher education contexts doing in-service workshops, training courses and consultancies in Hungary, Britain, Ethiopia, the U.S., Austria and Turkey.

### What's in an image?

I have always been intrigued by the variety and richness of public images or signs in the U.K. They strike me as *cultural snapshots* of what British society holds dear, considers important, or would like to see changed at a given time and place. In fact, most public images can be found not just in a particular region but, with some local colouring, across the whole of Britain. This is why they provide a nice entry-point to comparing British and Hungarian culture and especially the lived values of either country. Many public signs are also language-rich in that they contain familiar words in unfamiliar contexts or use them with a creative twist. What is more, their density, format or non-literal use of language makes immediate interpretation difficult for non-native speakers. Having said that, I have found that Hungarian students with their liking for *szójáték* and *Sprachwitz* appreciate this very English feature and enjoy tasks related to it.

### Things I've noticed in Norwich

As Mark Andrews suggested in his article, ethnography and in particular fieldwork is a great way of turning a short visit abroad into a formative learning experience. Over the years, I have done my own 'fieldwork' and collected a wide range of interesting street signs or images as well as commercial and public ads. Most of the 15 photos you will find overleaf have been taken in Norwich, a town situated in Norfolk about two hours away from London. I have arranged the images in five sets of three, with each set representing a particular theme, i.e.

- traffic-related regulations
- areas designated for (non)smokers
- forms of recycling
- shop fronts
- neighbourhood care

#### A few teaching ideas

The four ideas listed below provide for rather short explorations into British and Hungarian culture. They may create *cultural moments*, as Alan Pulverness once called them, where language work and cultural insight are merged. I have used all of them one way or another with various groups of EFL students, most recently a group of 11<sup>th</sup> graders at Trefort Gimnázium in Budapest. The activities all use the images as a springboard to encourage oral student interaction, creative language use, and critical thinking.

#### 1. How many groups?

Present signs jumbled up. This can be done with an interactive whiteboard, a simple powerpoint projection or printed out versions (best laminated) of the images. Ask small groups of students to put related images into groups of 3. Invite discussion of any group they find interesting or puzzling. To stimulate activity, I usually also include a 'red herring' (such as the photo of the orange smoking area taken at Paris *Orly* airport) and ask students to find it.

#### 2. 'Monday morning wake-up' image:

I have found Monday mornings a particular challenge during my recent school teaching experience. To get everybody going, I sometimes used a surprising or provoking image in order to prompt students to make guesses about what it is they are seeing and to share their views (e.g. *Norwich Alcohol Free Zone* or *Paper Plastic and Cans are NOT Litter* at the University of East Anglia campus). The smoking shelter photo and related images, too, lend themselves nicely to speculating and to discussing the many restrictions smokers now face in public places across the UK as well as in Europe.

#### 3. What does THAT mean?

Write the words used in the traffic-related signs on the board. Tell students that these words actually appear in a different order to make up a 3 or 5 line instruction. Ask them to reconstruct the original sequence of words and compare with original.

WORKS TRAFFIC NO	ONLY NO PARKING HOLDERS PERMIT CHURCH	FOULING NO DOGS
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#### 4. Clever shop names

Show images of Norwich shop fronts and get students to guess what each shop sells. Invite individuals or pairs to create a clever shop name or logo of their own for a shop they like. Students share their logo ideas and talk about their favourite shops. Nice starter for any coursebook topic related to shopping or business.



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



I



J



K



L

**Notes:**

A indicates that no heavy vehicles, such as those used in road works, may use this street or lane.

D a smoking shelter now found in many UK universities

E smoking area outside Paris Orly terminal

H variety of 'green bags' for shopping at local Tesco Express

I recycling bank for used books and music

J shoe shop

