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LEARNING THROUGH LAUGHTER: ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH FUN CLASSROOM PROJECTS

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Abstract: This article explores how creativity and humor can enhance students' engagement and critical thinking through project-based learning. It describes two classroom projects conducted with Grade 5 and Grade 7 students at a Presidential school, both designed to encourage collaboration, imagination, and authentic language use. The Grade 5 project, "The Things My Parents Told Me", focused on recalling and illustrating funny or memorable phrases parents often say, while the Grade 7 project, "Crazy Calls", invited students to invent humorous emergency calls inspired by real-life examples from the Cambridge THINK 3 course book. Both projects successfully fostered the 4Cs—creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration—while promoting joyful learning and meaningful reflection. The findings suggest that laughter and creativity can play a vital role in motivating students and strengthening classroom relationships.

Introduction. In today's educational environment, where developing 21st-century skills has become a top priority, teachers are continuously looking for ways to make learning more engaging, meaningful, and enjoyable. Modern classrooms are no longer just places where

students memorize facts; they are spaces where learners think critically, communicate effectively, collaborate confidently, and express their creativity (Pawar, Kulkarni, & Patil, 2020). As an English teacher, I have always believed that laughter and imagination can be powerful tools to support these goals. When students are emotionally connected to what they are learning, they become more motivated, more confident, and more willing to participate (Askildson, 2005; Bell & Pomerantz, 2016).

Last academic year, I implemented two creative projects with my Grade 5 and Grade 7 students that demonstrated how humor and teamwork can turn ordinary lessons into joyful learning experiences. The projects, titled "The Things My Parents Told Me" and "Crazy Calls", were designed to integrate language learning with creative expression and critical thinking. Both activities encouraged students to use English in real-life contexts, explore familiar topics from a fun perspective, and develop a stronger sense of ownership over their learning.

The Grade 5 project focused on collecting and illustrating funny or memorable things their parents often said, while the Grade 7 project involved inventing imaginative "crazy calls" to emergency services, inspired by a unit from the Cambridge THINK 3 course book. Although the topics were different, both projects shared the same educational purpose—to foster the 4Cs of learning: creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration.

Methodology. The projects were carried out over a two-week period during the previous academic year with two different grade levels at our school. The aim was to integrate creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration into regular English lessons while encouraging students to use language for authentic communication. Each class had four English lessons per week, and all project activities were completed during class time.

Participants

The first group consisted of Grade 5 Green students (12 learners), while the second group included Grade 7 Green and Blue students (a total of 24 learners). Both classes were known for their enthusiasm and curiosity, which made them ideal participants for project-based work. Students were divided into small groups of four to six members to ensure active participation, peer learning, and equal responsibility in completing their tasks.

Procedure

The implementation of the projects followed the main principles of Project-Based Learning (PBL), where students explore topics through creative tasks, problem-solving, and collaboration.

Project 1: "The Things My Parents Told Me"

The first project was conducted with Grade 5 students. The goal was to help them recall and share meaningful or humorous phrases that their parents often said, and to express these ideas through writing and drawing. In the first stage, students brainstormed individually, trying to remember as many phrases as possible from their parents. This stage was full of laughter and energy, as they eagerly shared their memories.

After collecting a variety of sayings, students discussed their ideas in groups and selected the most interesting or funny ones. They then wrote these phrases on large sheets of paper and decorated them with drawings that represented each situation. For example, some wrote quotes such as "If you lie, your nose will get longer," or "If you play Minecraft too much, your head will be square." The artistic part of the activity encouraged visual creativity and allowed students to express their sense of humour through images.

Project 2: "Crazy Calls"

The second project was inspired by a reading passage in the Cambridge THINK 3 course book about "Crazy Calls" — real examples of unnecessary or humorous emergency phone calls made to 911 in England. This topic immediately captured the interest of Grade 7 students, as it combined humour with a meaningful social message.

After discussing the importance of responsible communication and the potential consequences of prank calls, students were asked to create their own imaginary "crazy calls." They worked in groups, brainstormed ideas, and wrote short dialogues representing funny or ridiculous situations. Examples included: "Please come to my house now! My neighbour bought a new car!" and "I ordered a double-sausage hot dog, but it's only single—arrest the chef!"

Once their scripts were ready, students designed posters and added colourful illustrations to bring their ideas to life. In the final stage, they presented their work to the class, explaining their creative process and performing some of the dialogues for extra humour.

Teacher's Role

Throughout both projects, my role as the teacher was to facilitate, guide, and encourage rather than to control. I provided language support when needed, asked guiding questions to deepen their thinking, and gave constructive feedback during each stage. The lessons also focused on fostering the 4C approach, such as Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication, and Collaboration, as students analysed, discussed, and improved their work collectively.

By the end of the two weeks, each group had completed a colourful, original poster and delivered a confident oral presentation. The process was not only enjoyable but also academically enriching, helping students connect language learning with personal experience and humour in a meaningful way.

Results

The outcomes of both projects were highly positive, demonstrating significant growth in students' creativity, communication skills, and teamwork. Beyond academic achievement, the activities created an atmosphere of joy and confidence in the classroom, where students were motivated to express themselves freely in English and connect their learning with real-life experiences.

Grade 5 Project: "The Things My Parents Told Me"

The younger learners approached their project with great enthusiasm. During brainstorming sessions, they laughed together while recalling phrases their parents often said at home—some full of wisdom, others hilariously exaggerated. After gathering many ideas, they selected the most meaningful and funny ones to include on their posters.

Some of the memorable examples included:

- "Mom: Get up, my son, it's already ten o'clock!" (when it was only seven).
- "If you play phone games while charging, it will explode."
- "If you touch a frog, you will get a rash."
- "If you lie, your nose will get longer."
- "If you play too much Minecraft, your head will be square."
- "Where is my dad?" — "He's in my pocket."

Students decorated their posters with colourful and imaginative drawings that perfectly matched the humour of their quotes. One group illustrated a frog with a "warning sign" next to it, while another drew a boy with a square-shaped head, which caused everyone to burst into laughter.

The project not only gave students the opportunity to use English naturally but also helped them build emotional connections to learning. They reminisced about their family moments and found joy in sharing these experiences with classmates. Even the shyest students participated actively, proving that humor can help reduce anxiety and increase confidence in language learning.

Grade 7 Project: "Crazy Calls"

The Grade 7 students also showed outstanding creativity and imagination. Their project, "Crazy Calls", produced many humorous and original ideas inspired by real-life examples of unnecessary emergency calls. Working in groups encouraged students to exchange opinions, evaluate each other's suggestions, and select the most entertaining ones for their posters.

Examples of their imagined "crazy calls" included:

"Please come to my house right now! My neighbour bought a new car!"

"I'm at a restaurant. I ordered a double-sausage hot dog, but it's only single—arrest the chef!"

"My bath isn't running. You have plenty of water, right? Please come and fill it!"

"I'm thirsty in the morning. Can you bring me a glass of water?"

"Hello, 911! I put the body in the box, but there's no space for his head—can you help?"

The students presented their posters confidently, explaining the reasons behind their ideas and even performing short dramatizations of their "calls." Their performances generated laughter across the classroom, yet they also demonstrated an important moral understanding—that prank or meaningless calls could prevent real emergencies from being handled properly.

The creative process helped students use higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. They practiced writing dialogues, improved pronunciation while rehearsing their short plays, and developed strong visual and verbal presentation skills.

Discussion. The results of both projects clearly demonstrate that when learning is infused with creativity, humor, and collaboration, students become more active and emotionally connected participants in the classroom. These projects not only helped learners improve their English skills but also nurtured their social and emotional development. Through shared laughter and teamwork, students built stronger relationships with one another and with their teachers, creating a classroom culture based on respect, curiosity, and joy.

The experience confirmed that project-based learning (PBL) is a powerful approach to developing both language competence and life skills. Instead of focusing solely on grammar or vocabulary, students were encouraged to use English as a tool for expression, imagination, and problem-solving. As a result, they learned the language in a natural and meaningful way, without the fear of making mistakes. This sense of freedom allowed even less confident learners to take risks, share ideas, and contribute to group discussions.

Enhancing the 4Cs through Joyful Learning

Throughout both projects, the 4C approach—Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Collaboration—was consistently visible.

Creativity was expressed in the design of posters, the invention of dialogues, and the humorous drawings that illustrated each situation. Students learned to see everyday experiences as inspiration for creative expression.

Critical Thinking appeared when students selected appropriate and meaningful examples from their brainstorming lists. They evaluated which ideas were clear, suitable, and engaging for their audience.

Communication developed naturally as students worked together in English, explaining, questioning, and presenting their ideas.

Collaboration was perhaps the most rewarding skill of all. Students supported one another, listened actively, and divided responsibilities fairly within their teams.

By integrating these four elements, the projects offered students the chance to think independently while also appreciating the value of teamwork (Zuhri & Afriani, 2022). They discovered that language is not just a school subject—it is a bridge that connects people and ideas.

The Power of Humour in Education. Another important finding was the power of humour as a learning tool. Both younger and older students responded enthusiastically to activities that made them laugh and think at the same time. Humour made the classroom a safe space, where mistakes were seen as part of learning rather than something to be afraid of. The shared laughter built trust and motivation, helping students to remember and apply what they learned more effectively.

Research in education also supports this observation: humour increases attention, reduces anxiety, and improves memory retention. In these projects, laughter was not a distraction—it was a catalyst for engagement. Students remembered their lessons not because they were told to, but because they truly enjoyed the experience.

Teacher's Reflection. From a teacher's perspective, these projects served as a valuable reminder that meaningful learning often happens when students are emotionally involved. Planning the activities required flexibility, patience, and careful guidance, but the outcomes were worth every moment. Observing students laughing, discussing, and helping one another was one of the most rewarding experiences of the school year.

The projects also encouraged me to continue using creative and student-centred methods in my teaching. They highlighted the importance of balancing academic goals with emotional well-being—because when students feel happy, confident, and supported, learning happens naturally.

Building Lifelong Learning Habits. Finally, both projects encouraged students to view learning as an enjoyable and lifelong journey. They developed habits of reflection, creativity, and cooperation that go beyond the classroom walls. These qualities, such as curiosity, empathy, and open-mindedness, are essential for their future success not only as learners but also as responsible global citizens.

Conclusion. Incorporating creativity and humour into project-based learning can transform classroom experiences into moments of genuine engagement and joy (Karyawati &

Ashadi, 2018). Both projects, "The Things My Parents Told Me" and "Crazy Calls", proved that when students are encouraged to think imaginatively, collaborate actively, and express themselves freely, they learn more effectively. These activities not only enhanced their language skills but also nurtured confidence, teamwork, and critical thinking. Overall, joyful learning experiences help students see education not as a task, but as an inspiring and enjoyable journey.

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