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FOSTERING CREATIVE THINKING THROUGH PROVERBS AND RIDDLES IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

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Abstract. This conference paper explores the instructional potential of proverbs and riddles for fostering creative thinking. It presents a theoretical synthesis and proposes activities involving the interpretation of figurative meaning, comparison of possible answers, contextual application of proverbs, and the creation of original riddles. Proverbs provide material for examining alternative interpretations and connecting concise expressions with different situations, while riddles support the identification and recombination of meaningful clues. The proposed teaching sequence includes interpretation, idea generation, discussion, and reflection. Open-ended tasks and a supportive classroom environment are identified as important conditions for implementation. The paper offers practical directions for integrating oral folk traditions into learning activities without treating creative thinking as the production of a single predetermined answer.

Keywords: proverbs, riddles, creative thinking, oral folklore, figurative language, open-ended tasks, classroom discussion, reflection.

1. Introduction

Creative thinking involves developing ideas, examining alternatives, and improving responses in relation to a particular task. In educational practice, these processes require activities that allow students to move beyond recalling information. Language lessons offer opportunities for such work because meaning can be interpreted, contextualized, questioned, and expressed in different ways.

Proverbs and riddles provide concise material for organizing these activities. Proverbs communicate generalized observations through memorable expressions, frequently involving figurative meaning. Riddles describe an unnamed object or phenomenon through selected clues, requiring the learner to infer a possible referent.

Their educational value depends on how they are used. Asking students to memorize a proverb or reproduce the expected answer to a familiar riddle primarily assesses recall. Creative-thinking activities instead invite students to compare interpretations, consider alternative applications, construct explanations, and produce new expressions.

The OECD framework distinguishes generating diverse ideas, generating creative ideas, and evaluating and improving ideas. These categories provide a useful conceptual basis for designing tasks involving oral folklore, although classroom activities must be adapted to students' age and language proficiency (OECD, 2023).

The aim of this paper is to propose a methodological approach to using proverbs and riddles for creative-thinking activities. It examines their instructional functions, presents a teaching sequence, and identifies conditions for implementation and assessment.

2. Materials and Methods

The paper adopts a theoretical and methodological approach. It combines selected literature on creativity and classroom pedagogy with the linguistic analysis of illustrative proverbs and constructed riddle tasks.

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The conceptual framework draws on the distinction between originality and effectiveness discussed by Runco and Jaeger (2012), the creative-thinking processes outlined by the OECD (2023, 2024), and the classroom perspectives presented by Beghetto and Kaufman (2016).

The analysis considers four instructional operations: interpreting figurative meaning, generating alternatives, explaining relationships between clues and answers, and revising an initial response. These operations are organized into a proposed teaching sequence.

The examples serve an illustrative purpose. They are not participant responses or evidence from a classroom experiment. No intervention was conducted, and the paper does not report measured improvements in creativity.

Teachers applying the approach should identify the source and language of each proverb or traditional riddle. Translated expressions should be distinguished from their original forms, while newly created classroom riddles should be presented as constructed examples.

3. Results

3.1. Proverbs as Material for Contextual Interpretation

A proverb provides a compact statement that can be connected with different situations. Its interpretation therefore involves more than recognizing individual words.

For example, the English proverb “A stitch in time saves nine” can introduce discussion about timely action. Students may apply it to repairing an object, resolving a misunderstanding, or completing a task before a problem becomes more difficult.

The proposed activity asks students to develop several situations in which the proverb is relevant and explain the connection. This makes the reasoning behind an application visible.

A subsequent task can examine the limits of the proverb:

Describe a situation in which immediate action is useful and another in which gathering more information first is preferable.

This question encourages students to assess contextual suitability rather than accept a generalized statement as universally applicable.

3.2. Comparing Proverbs and Perspectives

Proverbs can express different responses to similar circumstances. Comparing “Look before you leap” with “He who hesitates is lost” illustrates a tension between caution and decisive action.

Students can identify circumstances in which each expression provides appropriate guidance. The task does not require choosing one proverb as permanently correct. Instead, students consider how risk, available information, and urgency affect a decision.

A classroom discussion may use three questions:

- What situation does each proverb help explain?
- What assumptions make its advice reasonable?
- When might following that advice produce an undesirable result?

Such analysis connects creative thinking with reasoned interpretation. Students generate possibilities and then evaluate their relevance.

3.3. Riddles as Tasks in Inference and Clue Analysis

Riddles require learners to relate clues to a possible answer. However, familiar riddles may be solved through memory. To examine reasoning, teachers should ask students to explain how each clue supports their answer.

A constructed classroom riddle might describe an object as follows:

I carry a voice, but I do not speak on my own. I connect people who are far apart. I need power to work.

A telephone is one possible answer, but the clues may also fit other communication devices. This ambiguity can become an object of analysis rather than an error to be ignored.

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Students can propose possible answers, test each against the clues, and identify which additional clue would narrow the solution. The activity distinguishes imaginative suggestion from justified inference.

Traditional riddles often have a conventional answer. Teachers can preserve that answer while examining whether the wording permits other interpretations. Alternative responses should be assessed against all relevant clues.

3.4. Creating and Revising Original Riddles

Riddle creation requires students to select features, transform descriptions, and consider how a reader will interpret them. The proposed procedure begins with a familiar object.

Students identify its characteristics, functions, and possible associations. They then choose clues that reveal enough information for interpretation without naming the object directly.

For example, a student writing about a book might consider pages, stored language, silent communication, and repeated reading. The teacher can ask the student to distinguish clues that are useful from clues that apply to too many objects.

Peer testing supports revision. If classmates cannot suggest a plausible answer, the clues may be insufficient. If several answers fit equally well, the writer can decide whether to retain the ambiguity or add a more specific clue.

The goal is not simply to make the riddle difficult. A successful task balances originality with interpretability.

3.5. A Four-Stage Teaching Sequence

The methodological synthesis produces a sequence consisting of interpretation, idea generation, discussion, and reflection.

Stage	Instructional purpose	Illustrative activity
Interpretation	Establish the expression's meaning and linguistic features	Explain a proverb or connect a riddle's clues with its conventional answer
Idea generation	Explore different applications or responses	Suggest contrasting situations, alternative answers, or new clues
Discussion	Evaluate relevance and justification	Compare interpretations and explain which clues support each answer
Reflection	Improve the response and examine the process	Revise a riddle or explain why an initial interpretation changed

The stages can be repeated. Discussion may reveal a misunderstanding that requires returning to interpretation, while reflection may generate a new idea.

3.6. Assessment Criteria

Assessment should distinguish creative reasoning from the ability to recall a familiar expression. The following criteria are proposed:

Originality: the response contributes an idea beyond straightforward repetition.

Flexibility: the student considers different contexts, interpretations, or possible solutions.

Justification: the response explains its relationship to the proverb or riddle.

Clarity: the student communicates an interpretation or constructs understandable clues.

Revision: the student improves the response after identifying a weakness.

These criteria form a proposed classroom rubric rather than a validated measurement instrument. They require age-appropriate descriptors and examples before implementation.

Language accuracy may be assessed separately. This is particularly important when students have ideas they cannot yet express fluently in the language of instruction.

4. Discussion

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4.1. Different Functions of Proverbs and Riddles

Proverbs and riddles offer related but distinct instructional possibilities. Proverb tasks emphasize contextual application and the evaluation of generalized statements. Riddle tasks emphasize clue selection, inference, and the construction of interpretable descriptions.

Combining these forms can broaden classroom activity. Students may first interpret an existing expression, then apply its meaning to a new situation, and finally construct a riddle connected with that situation.

Nevertheless, task variety alone does not establish creative development. Evidence must come from the student's alternatives, explanations, and revisions.

4.2. Pedagogical Conditions

A supportive classroom environment is necessary for students to present provisional ideas. Teachers should allow time for individual thinking before discussion and avoid evaluating every unusual response immediately.

Openness should be accompanied by clear requirements. When solving a riddle, students need to consider the clues. When applying a proverb, they need to explain its relevance. This prevents creative activity from becoming unrelated speculation.

Vocabulary support is also important. Unfamiliar figurative expressions can make a task inaccessible before creative reasoning begins. Teachers can explain essential vocabulary without supplying the complete interpretation.

Individual and collaborative activities should be balanced. Independent preparation gives each student an opportunity to develop an idea, while group discussion exposes learners to alternative reasoning.

4.3. Cultural and Linguistic Considerations

Proverbs and riddles are connected with language and cultural experience. Teachers should avoid assuming that an expression has an exact equivalent in every language or that its meaning is shared identically by all learners.

Comparing expressions across languages can reveal differences in imagery and contextual use. Students may explain a proverb from their own linguistic background and examine how its meaning could be communicated to someone unfamiliar with it.

The teacher should distinguish cultural interpretation from stereotyping. A proverb expresses a particular formulation of experience; it should not automatically be treated as a complete description of an entire community's values.

4.4. Limitations and Future Research

The proposed approach has not been tested experimentally. The paper therefore cannot establish that proverb and riddle activities improve creative thinking or outperform other language-learning tasks.

Future research could compare conventional recall-based instruction with activities involving interpretation, alternatives, and revision. Comparable tasks administered before and after instruction could examine changes in students' reasoning.

Assessment would require independent scoring and checks of agreement between raters. Researchers should also distinguish improvement in language proficiency from improvement in creative task performance.

5. Conclusion

Proverbs and riddles can provide material for creative-thinking activities when instruction extends beyond memorization and the reproduction of expected answers. Proverbs support the exploration of contextual meaning, while riddles offer opportunities to analyse clues, consider alternatives, and construct new descriptions.

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The proposed sequence connects interpretation, idea generation, discussion, and reflection. Its implementation requires clear task constraints, linguistic support, opportunities for independent thinking, and feedback directed towards improvement.

Creative responses should be evaluated for originality, flexibility, justification, clarity, and revision. The approach constitutes a methodological proposal whose effectiveness requires empirical evaluation. Its practical contribution is a structured way to connect oral folklore with observable processes of creative reasoning.

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