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ABSTRACT

Several definitions of the concept of "creativity" are examined in the introductory remarks of this article concerning foreign language instruction. Selected examples of innovational approaches to "creative" foreign language teaching are presented and underscore the belief that creative instruction resides in the ability of the instructor to produce or bring about an atmosphere where students have unlimited opportunity to create "real" language. The article concludes with a plea to teachers to personalize their instruction and thereby move toward a more creative and meaningful learning situation. (RL)

Creativity in the Foreign Language Classroom

Robert C. Lafayette

Keynote Address - West Virginia Foreign Language Conference
March 30, 1973

Not long after I was asked to deliver this address on the topic of creativity, I attempted to outline the major points of my presentation. I initially decided that a proper approach would be to go back a few years in my teaching career, list the many creative things I had done in the classroom and relate a few of them to you. And so I began to think, and I thought and thought and thought some more, until finally I realized that either I was not creative or was somewhat puzzled by the word "creativity." Being human and at the same time somewhat vain I dismissed the first hypothesis and concluded that I needed to clarify the meaning of the term "creativity."

Webster's New World Dictionary informs us that "to create" means first of all "to originate" or "to cause to come into being." Its second definition means "to produce" or "bring about." At the 1971 Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Lorraine Strasheim said that "in truth, creativity can only be described ex post facto -- after the fact -- and only the FIRST one is a creative act; all the replicas and imitations which follow that first act are merely reasonable facsimiles."[1] Strasheim, went on to admonish us to be much more discriminating in our definition of "creative teaching." She said:

> "The truly creative teacher is one in a thousand -- if not a million. The capable and innovative teacher, however,

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[1] Strasheim, Lorraine, "Creativity Lies Trippingly on the Tongue," Modern Language Journal, Vol. LV, No. 6 (Oct. 1971), p. 343.

> is any flexible person willing to try that which he has not done before . . . "[2]

At that same conference, Emma Birkmaier looked at creativity from a much larger perspective. She maintained that everyone possesses to some degree the abilities involved in being creative. She enumerated the characteristics of creativity as follows:

> "Adventurous thinking or imaginativeness, an insatiable curiosity, getting away from the main track, being open to experience, permitting one thing to lead to another, discovering, innovating, inventing -- these are the components of the creative process."[3]

If we are honest with each other and with ourselves, we will agree with Strasheim that only very few among us are creative in the real sense of the word. On the other hand, we will also agree with Birkmaier because down deep we do not view creativity as a first act but rather in light of the characteristics enumerated above. In essence, we see "being creative" as "being different," having the courage to attempt innovative ideas in the classroom.

In the end it matters little the degree to which the teacher is creative. The important fact is whether or not the students have the ability to create utterances which express their needs and desires. A teacher may creatively lead drills for a major portion of a class period. That creativity, however, will only bear fruit when the students are able to use the material in real or vicariously meaningful situations. Therein lies the real creation, and it is that ability to provide students with opportunities to create real utterances which most often distinguishes

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[2] Ibid., p. 343.

[3] Birkmaier, Emma, "The Meaning of Creativity in Foreign Language Teaching," Modern Language Journal, Vol. LV, No. 6, (Oct. 1971). p. 345.

the good teacher from the mediocre one. Therefore, for our purposes today, let us abide by Webster's second definition and consider creativity as the ability to produce or bring about an atmosphere where students have countless opportunities to create real language.

The first step in establishing this atmosphere is to make students feel from the very first encounter that the target language is indeed a communicative device and not merely something which exists in a textbook. Teachers should give all simple commands in the target language and students should be required to ask most information questions in the foreign language. There is no reason for students to say "how do you say 'bread' in French?" or "what does 'pain' mean?" From the very beginning, they should be familiar with the expressions "que veut dire" and "comment dit-on."

This advice may sound simplistic and elementary to a group of experienced foreign language teachers, but I would venture to say that the number of times we have uttered such English expressions as "be quiet," "are you listening," "sit down," "pay attention" in our foreign language classes might indeed be revealing. It is during these moments of real communication that we should make the greatest effort to use the foreign language. Otherwise it continues to exist only within the confines of the text.

The second important point to consider in establishing an atmosphere which will foster creative language from students is when, how and how often the teacher corrects student mistakes. Real communication should not be interrupted by teacher interference. Teachers have enough opportunities to correct grammar and pronunciation without interrupting those few special moments of real language. This task also includes not always demanding that our students answer in complete sentences. Normal everyday

conversation includes numerous instances of totally meaningful but structurally incomplete sentences.

During a recent guest lecture at Indiana University, Gerhart Nickel, German linguist and co-editor of the International Review of Applied Linguistics, proposed that we might even consider simplified and telegraphic language as a first step in language teaching. Most important, he was convinced that we should permit students to make mistakes.

The third factor which plays an important role in setting an atmosphere for real communication is the presence or absence of emotion displayed by both teachers and students when using the foreign language. When participating in a dialog, a conversation stimulus drill, an oral reading, teachers should demand of themselves and their students all the emotional overtones usually accompanying the utterances. Imagine yourself having difficulty reaching a certain party via the telephone. You have dialed twice and gotten a wrong number. You dial a third time and upon learning that you still do not have the desired party you say: 'What? Wrong number? Not again!" Can you conceive of that utterance without its emotional overtones? In essence the use of emotion when speaking the foreign language is but one more indication to our students that the language is something real and alive, something more than what is in the textbook.

Probably the greatest deterrent to creativity in the foreign language classroom is the attachment which teachers have to textbooks. Somehow we have the feeling and convey the same feeling to our students that whatever is not included in the text bears little importance. Granted there are now texts on the market which include built-in variety and opportunities for creative student response. Nevertheless, it is this author's opinion

that variety and creativity in the classroom can best be achieved by planned-periodic excursions away from the text. Too often the non-routine activities take place only if there is enough time, and this is true even when these activities are included in the text itself.

Probably the best example of the "can't-get-away-from-the-text" syndrone is the singing of songs. Songs are most often sung on the day before a vacation, on Friday afternoon, or whenever we find ourselves with five extra minutes. Only when the singing of songs and other non-textbook activities are looked upon as genuine learning activities having a vital role in the classrrom will it be possible to establish an atmosphere in which meaningful communication can occur.

I would like to take a few minutes to let us listen to two French songs which at the same time can establish a relaxed atmosphere, serve as a motivating force and most important be used as a teaching and learning device. The first song is from the French version of the Broadway play "Hair" and is entitled "C'est la Vie." The song has rhythm, may be familiar to many students and is an excellent source to teach or reinforce the vocabulary dealing with parts of the body. The song can be applied as well to German and Spanish classes since "Hair" has been translated in those languages.

The second song is entitled "Je Partirai" by Gilbert Becaud. It has a lovely melody and happens to contain numerous instances of the future tense. It could easily serve as a relaxing interlude while at the same time provide a kind of subliminal drill on the future tense. The important fact to realize is that both these songs should be used as planned activities to reinforce real language even though they may not be found in any textbook.

Drills no doubt were not meant to be instances of real language practice, but at times a certain amount of ingenuity can turn a drill into a meaningful and enjoyable exercise. I once observed a teacher transform a pattern drill on indirect discourse into a short play which was eventually presented to parents and fellow students. On one side of the class there was a prosecutor, an accused man and a judge; on the other there was a narrator. The latter would echo whatever the other three had said. When presented on stage, this echo turned out to be quite farcical besides providing information reinforcement to people in the audience.

Many drills, especially the verb-conjugation type, can be personalized and set in a real language atmosphere by using the verb to be drilled to ask meaningful questions of the students. For example, let us assume that we want to drill the verb "to go" in the past tense. We might proceed as follows:

Teacher: I went to the movies last night and saw Man From La Mancha. Peter, have you gone to the movies lately?
Peter: Yes, I went Sunday afternoon.
Teacher: Did you go by yourself?
Peter: No, I went with Jane.
Teacher: What about you, Mary, did you go to the movies last night?
Mary: No.
Teacher: Mary, did Rick go to the movies yesterday?
Mary: I don't know.
Teacher: Why don't you ask him?
Mary: Rick, did you go to the movies last night? etc.

Another suggestion which might lead to creative language on the part of students is the use of role playing in the classroom. The two following items were developed by Miss Terri Gamba of Purdue University for use in German conversation and composition classes. The first item consists of a picture-map showing the path of a young boy returning home from school and the following narrative usually presented in German:

Little Karl is a good boy, but, as it is with most good boys, he has a good and a bad side. The good side of Karl is that he goes to school every day honestly and loyally, that he does his homework, and that he helps his mother and follows her instructions. Little Karl is occupied with these various duties from morning to night.

On the bad side there is just one thing: little Karl is a dreamer. However, he is so busy that he has little chance to dream. For this reason the trip home from school is Karl's favorite time of the day. During this time he is his own man and he can dream what and as he wishes. If little Karl comes home an hour late, his mother is naturally very angry. But if he comes homes three hours late, she is so glad that he is home safe again that she usually forgets to be mad at him. It is part of Karl's bad side that he makes the most of this knowledge.

It is now your assignment to describe the bad side of little Karl more fully, for the bad side is more interesting than the good one. You have a map on which you can see Karl's homeward path. He has several opportunities for this or that little adventure. Choose one or more of these opportunities and describe Karl's adventure as he might tell it to his mother upon arriving home.

The second of Miss Gamba's examples involves middle-sized group role playing and deals with the solving of a murder mystery. The students see a drawing of the murder scene and are provided with the following information in German:

The Situation: Four guests are spending the weekend at Mr. Leich's estate. During the evening Mr. Leich goes into his den, asking that he not be disturbed because he has something important to do. The next morning the butler finds Mr. Leich dead on the floor, with a knife in his back. Mr. Kuhn searches the room and finds several things there. He talks with the other guests and then calls the inspector and explains to him who the murderer was, what the motives were, and how Mr. Leich was murdered.

The Characters:
- Mr. Leich - a distinguished soldier who suddenly became extremely rich.
- Ilsadora Tutti-Fruti - a Spanish ballet dancer with a shady past.
- Siegfried Kuhn - a private detective and a good friend of Mr. Leich. Leich had told him that he had something important to discuss with him.

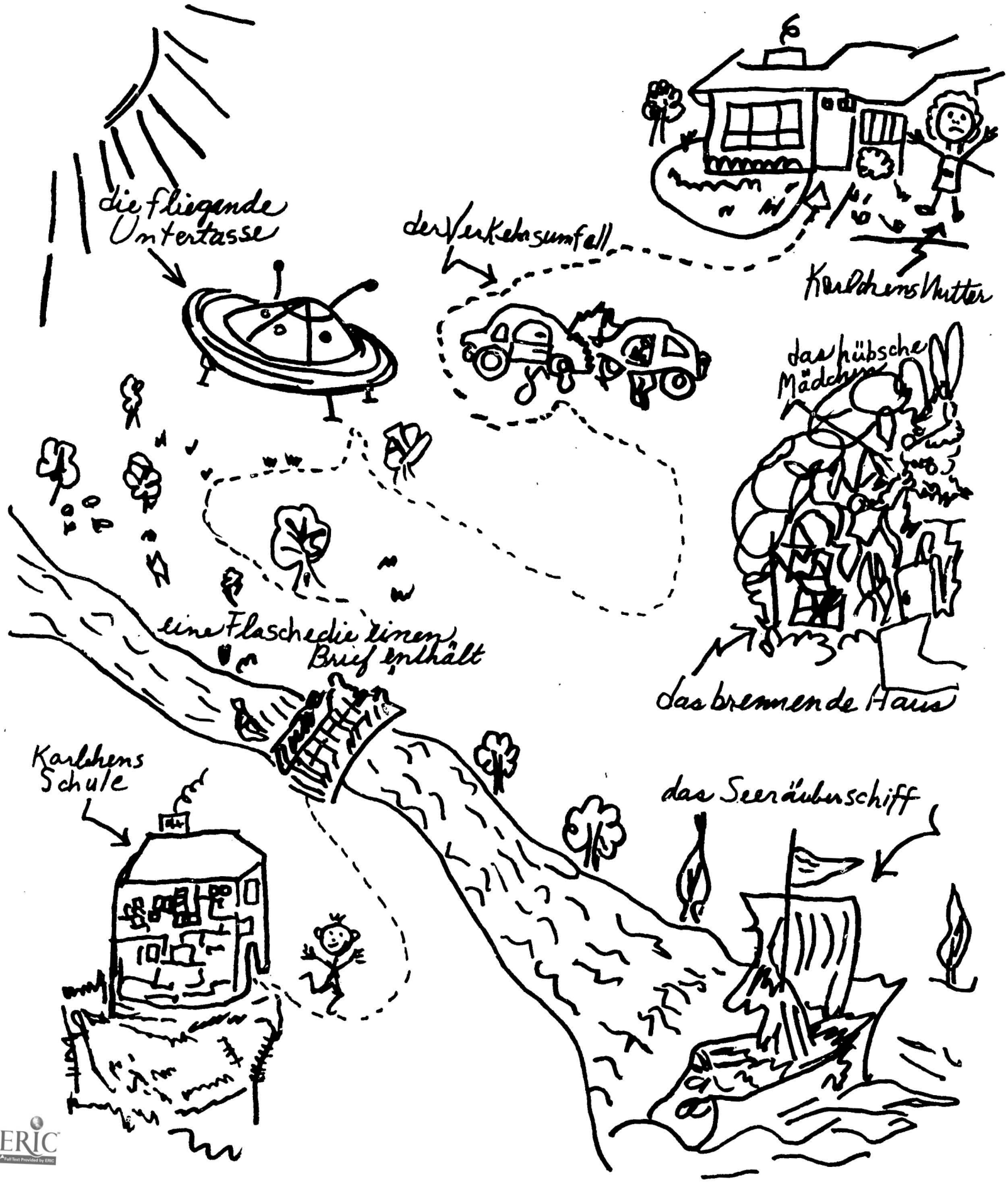
Heinrich Flatter - a young playboy from a good family who had financial reverses.
The Butler (or Maid)
Chief Inspector Plattfuss - the police investigator.
Kurt Kleinlich - an old pedantic friend of Leich who served with him in India.

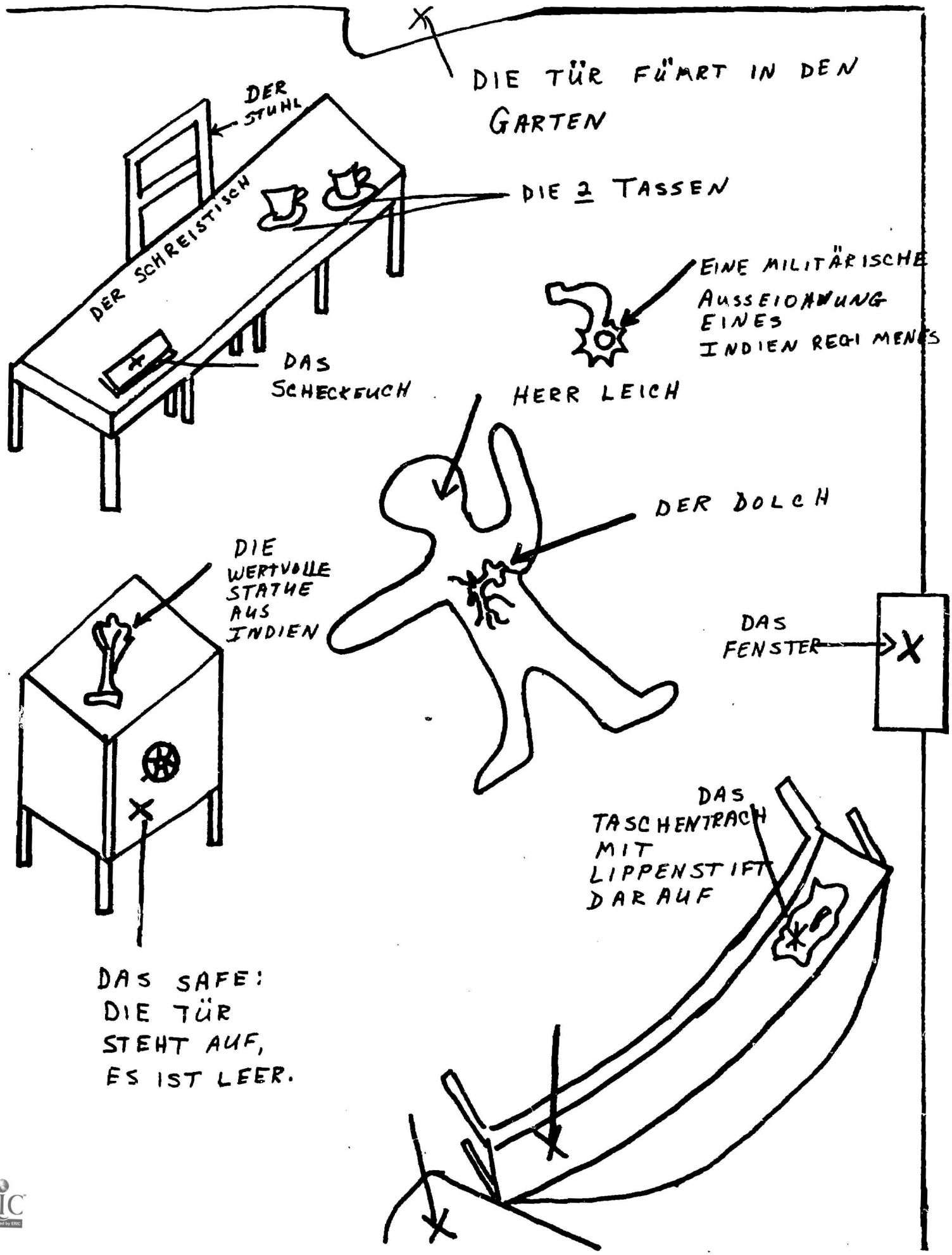
Having read the above information students may re-enact the murder scene, have Mr. Kuhn conduct an investigation by directing his questions to the various characters, or write a brief narrative or dialog describing the murder.

Anyone interested in receiving copies of these items should write to Lorraine A. Strasheim, 317A Memorial West, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47401. Please specify that you want either the English or German version of Terri Gamba's Murder Mystery or Little Karl's Trip Home.

During the past two years, Elkins, Kalivoda and Morain of the University of Georgia have provided us with some very useful classroom techniques for promoting student participation. In the May 1971 (Vol. 4, No. 4) issue of Foreign Language Annals, we read about "The Audio-Motor Unit: A Listening Comprehension Strategy That Works," and in the October 1972 (Vol. 6, No. 1) issue of the same journal we saw a cultural adaptation of the audio-motor unit in an article entitled "Teaching Culture Through the Audio-Motor Unit." If you have not read these two articles, I recommend them highly to you.

These same authors have recently published a third article which I would like to discuss at some length because it demands participation in all four language skills of every individual involved. The article is entitled "Fusion of the Four Skills: A Technique for Facilitating Communicative Exchange" and it appeared in the November 1972 (Vol. LVI, No. 7) issue of the Modern Language Journal. The technique is described as follows by


die fliegende Untertasse
der Verkehrsunfall
Karlchens Mutter
das hübsche Mädchen
eine Flasche die einen Brief enthält
das brennende Haus
Karlchens Schule
das Seeräuberschiff

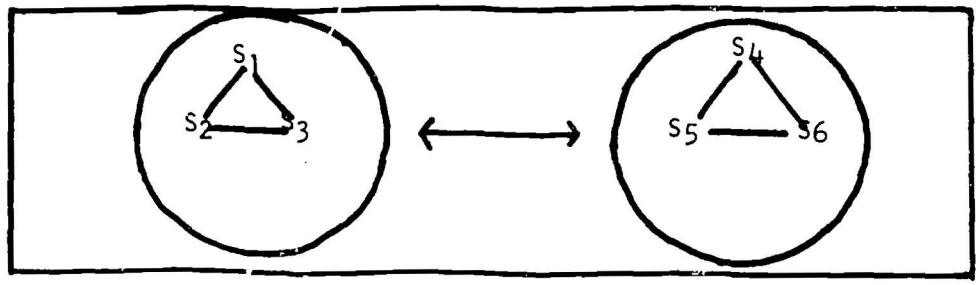

DIE TÜR FÜHRT IN DEN GARTEN
DER STUHL
DER SCHREIBTISCH
DIE 2 TASSEN
EINE MILITÄRISCHE AUSZEICHNUNG EINES INDIEN REGIMENTS
DAS SCHECKBUCH
HERR LEICH
DER DOLCH
DIE WERTVOLLE STATUE AUS INDIEN
DAS FENSTER
DAS TASCHENTUCH MIT LIPPENSTIFT DARAUF
DAS SAFE: DIE TÜR STEHT AUF, ES IST LEER.

Elkins, Kalivoda and Morain:

Structure

1. The teacher divides the class into groups of six students. Each group represents a miniature communications network.

2. Each group immediately divides into two sub-groups composed of three students each. One sub-group is made up of Students One, Two, and Three; the other sub-group includes Students Four, Five, and Six. The task of each sub-group involves communication within its own triad as well as across sub-group boundaries to members of the other triad. (Figure 1)



A GROUP

Figure 1

Procedure

1. The teacher gives the lead student in each sub-group (Student One and Student Four) a printed text. Student One receives Story A. Student Four receives Story B. The content of each is totally different, but the length and difficulty are equivalent.

2. The lead students read the stories silently. (3 minutes)

3. Student One tells Story A in his own words to the members of his sub-group. Student Four tells Story B to his sub-group. (4 minutes)

4. The two students in each sub-group who have listened to the story write it down in summary form. The lead students may answer questions to clarify. The students then exchange their written forms with the two students in the other sub-group. (5 minutes)

5. Students Two and Three now read the two versions of Story B which were passed to them. Students Five and Six read the two versions of Story A which they received. (4 minutes)

6. Students Two and Three cooperate to tell Story B to Student One. Students Five and Six cooperate to tell Story A to Student Four. (4 minutes)

7. The two leaders each paraphrase the story in writing. (4 minutes)

8. Student One exchanges his written version of Story B for Student Four's written version of Story A.

9. Students One and Four read aloud the versions they have received and each sub-group decides if the new version approximates the original form. (5 minutes)

10. All six members of the group share in discussing the successes and failures of the communications venture. (5 minutes)[4]

The final suggestion I would like to discuss is entitled the "culminating experience." This activity is applicable to all levels of foreign language teaching and can be correlated to any methodological approach. Its only pre-requisites are a modicum of creativity on the part of the teacher and a willingness to abandon the textbook for a limited amount of time. The "culminating experience" is the final activity of any unit of learning, and actually serves as a test of what has been learned in the classroom. Below is a list of activities which could serve as "culminating experiences" to many of the units covered in a foreign language class:

Material Covered	Culminating Experience
1. greetings	real or simulated meetings
2. travel expressions	real or simulated trip
3. foods	market experience
4. clothing	style show
5. home furnishings	model home show
6. magazine ads	sales pitch
7. occupations	career hour[5]

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[4]Elkins, Robert J., Theodore B. Kalivoda and Genelle Morain, "Fusion of the Four Skills: A Technique for Facilitating Communicative Exchange." The Modern Language Journal, Vol. LVI, No. 7, (November 1972), p. 427.

[5]Lafayette, Robert C., "Diversification: The Key to Student-Centered Programs." The Modern Language Journal, Vol, LVI, No. 6, (October 1972), p. 353.

A brief perusal of some of the popular beginning and intermediate French, German and Spanish texts on the market clearly shows that the above culminating experiences plus many others could easily be correlated to various chapters in these texts. Sample chapter titles include "A Choice of Profession," "On the Road," "Vacation Plans," "Sports and Recreation," "Our Car is Broken Down," "The Picnic," "The Party," "Having Lunch," and countless more. The key to the "culminating experience" is that these activities are taken from the book and transferred to the student in simulated or real life situations. No doubt this will mean additional class time and less material covered. But in the end it may be what convinces students that foreign languages are indeed more than what is found in a textbook. Almon G. Hoye reinforces the importance of such activities when he says:

> "A student can be trained to repeat patterns, phrases and words in a foreign language. He can be taught the structure and form of a language. But unless it all has personal meaning to him, he will not learn. Personal meaning is unique to each individual and is made up of involvement, experience, reflection, and discovery of the unknown. Personal meaning encourages learning that is intuitive, creative, flexible; it involves one in inquiry, activity, self-evaluation."[6]

In conclusion, let us face the fact that all of us are competent and professionally trained teachers. Not all of us may be creative individuals in the primary sense of the word, but, nevertheless, all of us have the training, ability, and potential to establish a classroom atmosphere where students have countless opportunities to engage in creative and meaningful communication. And in the end, that is all that matters.

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[6]Hoye, Almon G., "Flexibility--From Folly to Promise" in Foreign Language in a New Apprenticeship for Living, edited by Lorraine A. Strasheim (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Language Program, 1971), p. 33.