

The broadening of the concept of creativity in English as a Second Language creative writing classes

O aprofundamento do conceito de criatividade em aulas de Escrita Criativa em Inglês como Segunda Língua

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ABSTRACT: Creative Writing in English (CWE) has not been extensively researched in Brazil. There are few courses on CWE in Brazilian Languages and Literature universities, and even fewer available publications on this area as well (MYERS, 2006; MORLEY, 2007; BLYTHE and SWEET, 2008; HEALEY, 2009; OBERHOLZER, 2014). For these reasons, the main objective of this research was to investigate the development (VYGOTSKY, 2004; 2007; JOHN-STEINER, CONNERY & MARJANOVIC-SHAN, 2015) of undergraduate students' concepts about creativity. To achieve that, the researcher investigated the participating students' initial and final concepts about creativity in a creative writing course in English. This course had 12 Brazilian undergraduate students. The initial results indicated that they all shared a very strict view upon creativity, however, their concepts were all broadened extensively by the end of the course due to the development of the creative writing course as well as the teacher's pedagogical interventions.

Keywords: Creativity; Creative Writing; Broadening

RESUMO: A escrita criativa em inglês (ECI) não vem sendo amplamente pesquisada no Brasil. Existem poucos cursos sobre ECI nas universidades brasileiras de Línguas e Literatura, e ainda menos publicações disponíveis nesta área (MYERS, 2006; MORLEY, 2007; BLYTHE and SWEET, 2008; HEALEY, 2009; OBERHOLZER, 2014). Por estas razões, o objetivo principal desta pesquisa foi o de investigar o desenvolvimento (VYGOTSKY, 2004; 2007; JOHN-STEINER, CONNERY & MARJANOVIC-SHAN, 2015) dos conceitos de criatividade. Para conseguir isso, o pesquisador investigou os conceitos iniciais e finais dos alunos participantes sobre criatividade em um curso de escrita criativa em inglês. Este curso contava com 12 estudantes de graduação pública brasileira. Os resultados indicaram que todos eles compartilhavam uma visão muito rígida sobre a criatividade. No entanto, seus conceitos foram ampliados extensivamente até o final do curso, devido ao desenvolvimento das aulas do curso de escrita criativa, bem como das intervenções pedagógicas do professor.

Palavras-chave: Criatividade; Escrita Criativa; Aprofundamento

Introduction

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Creative Writing in English (CWE) has not been extensively researched in Brazil. There are few courses on CWE in Brazilian Languages and Literature universities, and even fewer available publications on this area as well (MYERS, 2006; MORLEY, 2007; BLYTHE and SWEET, 2008; HEALEY, 2009; OBERHOLZER, 2014). According to Brazilian Educational Bases and Guideline Law, creativity should be comprehended as one of the main foundations of the Brazilian education, from the primary schooling to the tertiary level.

For higher education, this law establishes the importance of stimulating cultural creation, broadening creative thinking, honing creative skills as well as developing writing creatively. Nevertheless, very few Brazilian universities have provided their Languages and Literature undergraduate students with CWE disciplines and/or extracurricular courses focusing on the development of their students' creative writing

Therefore, the main aim of this research was to identify the undergraduate students' concepts about creativity. As there are not many courses of English as a second language (ESL) creative courses in Brazil, it is essential that pre-service, in-service and practitioners of English to know what are the students' concept about creativity in order to organize and teach ESL creative writing courses in the future.

The methodology of this research involved the organization and teaching of the extracurricular Fanfictional Creative Writing course in English. To achieve that, the extracurricular course was based on the Vygotskian sociocultural theory, mainly in relation to the key concepts of Meaning Making (VYGOTSKY, 2004, 2007), Creativity (VYGOTSKY, 2004, 2007; GLAVEANU, 2011; JOHN-STEINER, CONNERY & MARJANOVIC-SHAN, 2015) and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (VYGOTSKY, 2004, 2007; JOHN-STEINER, CONNERY & MARJANOVIC-SHAN, 2015).

The I-paradigm approach to creativity

The I-paradigm has gained strength through several psychological studies (SEFERTZI, 2000; CRAFT, 2002; BILTON, 2007; THOMPSON, 2008; CARSON, 2011; BRIDGES, 2013) since mid-1950s. According to the British psychologist, Chris Bilton (2007), the main characteristics of the He-paradigm (androcentrism, exclusiveness and disconnectedness) were easily discharged by the I-paradigm researchers, because they proposed a more inclusive approach to better understanding the concept of creativity.

One of the main proposals of the I-paradigm researchers is to comprehend creativity as a characteristic present in every person (self-centeredness). Everybody is born creative; thus, their creative skills can be improved. Bilton (2007) denominated this idea the democratization of creativity. In contrast to the idea of the He-paradigm's exclusiveness, he (2007, p. 27) advocated in favor of understanding creativity as a "(...) *deliberately managed process*" which is person as well as collective-oriented.

Bilton (2007) summated that creativity may be a collective process as long as the individual does not lose its individuality. If everybody is creative, why some people create more culturally valued (material and symbolic) artifacts than others? And why do some people become Shakespeare and Einstein and others do not?

To answer these questions, some of the I-paradigm researchers (THOMPSON, 2008; CARSON, 2011; BRIDGES, 2013) advocated a differentiation between more skilled (Big C) and less skilled (little c) human beings (also named by creators). For them, Big C creators produce undisputedly eminent, unique creative artifacts. Artifacts that last generations after generations. These creators may be nationally and internationally recognized scientists, artists, entrepreneurs, doctors, and so on. They might even receive distinctive awards and several types of decorations to highlight their contribution to society. On the other hand, the little C creators reach more ordinary accomplishments. Their creativity is usually related to everyday activities. In general, their creations do not require extensive expertise.

Moreover, Glăveanu (2011) highlighted another characteristic of the I-paradigm approach to creativity. He stated that it is also cognition-oriented. In his own words, Glăveanu (2011, p. 05) ascertained that this approach "(...) generated partial theoretical models which have extensively explored (and even exploited) the individual cognition and personality in a social vacuum and conceptualized creativity as a quality of the lone individual". Therefore, for Glăveanu (2011), one of the main goals of the I-paradigm researchers has been to investigate people's diverse cognitive capacities, without disregarding every person's individuality. The individual overlaps the social.

In the same vein, Carson (2011) believed that by identifying correctly the strongest cognitive skills of a person, he may have more chances of becoming a Big C creator. Because of that, she proposed 7 distinct types of essential creative skills. These essential skills are: connect, reason, envision, absorb, transform, evaluate, and stream. She implied that to better understand a person's creative skills, we must previously measure his skillfulness.

The attempts of measuring properly a person's creative potentials is a recurrent procedure among the I-paradigm researchers. They have all promulgated that creativity is within the human psychology, i.e., it is cognitive-oriented. For this reason (and others already mentioned), most of them have tried to elaborate an ultimate measuring technique to assess a person' creativity and then promote their development. By large, these techniques are commonly known as psychometric tests. In conclusion, a Glăveanu (2011) illustrative summary of the I-paradigm approach to creativity can be visualized below:

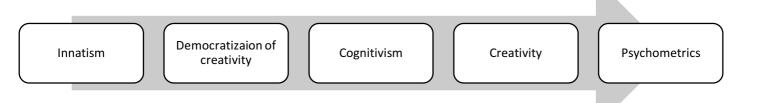


Figura 01 - Vlad Glăveanu (2011)'s I-paradigm conceptualization. Source: Prepared by the author (2017)

The We-paradigm approach to creativity

According to Glăveanu (2011), the social aspect was clearly neglected by the two previous approaches. For this reason, he urged future researchers to investigate more attentively societal relationships between the person (also named the self) and his environment (also named the social). Having done that, these budding researchers should then analyze how these 'ever-existed' relationships have influenced dialectically the development of people's creativity. His propositions are mainly based on sociocultural theory (SCT).

Vygotsky (2004, p.06) stated that the reproductive activity is "(...) very closely linked to memory; essentially it consists of a person's reproducing or repeating previously developed and mastered behavioral patterns or resurrecting traces of earlier impressions". Thus, this statement also involves two other cognitive skills: memorization and plasticity. For Vygotsky (2004; 2007), memorization is an important characteristic of the reproductive activity insofar as we normally do not create anything new. We usually reproduce other people's inventions, because they help us develop ourselves or because we need them for sociocultural adaptations.

The invention of the wheel is a very good example of that. Its first appearance is a product of creative activities, but its recurrent use to various aspects of our lives belong to the

reproductive activity realm. This occurs, because if we had to invent the wheel every time we were going to use it, we would waste a lot of time and energy to do it. We would still make progress, however, a very slow one. By retaining the information of the wheel and how can we simply reproduce it, which gives us the chance of moving forward faster and losing much less energy in the process.

Although we tend to simply reproduce what other people have already invented, we can also adapt these inventions to the changes of our society. Nothing remains the same for so long. We change as well as the artifacts of and knowledge about our world change too. For this reason, plasticity is another important feature of the reproductive activity. According to Vygotsky (2004, p.08), plasticity "(...) is a term denoting the property of a substance that allows it to change and retain the traces of that change". In other words, we change previous artifacts to adapt them and ourselves to new sociocultural environments.

The invention of the computer is another good example. The first computers were very small (abacuses) and created to make complex calculations easier and faster. After that, it was used to facilitate the creation of other artifacts and even wage wars. At first, they were enormous and monofunctional. Later, the computer became smaller and multifunctional. It has been applied to accelerate people's work at (and outside) the office and studies at (and outside) school. Nowadays, the computer fits our hands (smartphones) and it is also used for entertaining and bringing people together.

For Vygotsky (2004; 2007), creativity is also a process developed by the constant interaction between the self and the other, and between the self and the world (the environment) which surrounds all of us. Hence, this means that imagination and creativity should be apprehended as mundane characteristics, i.e., they belong to people's everyday lives. We may (and must) practice our imagination and creativity anytime and anywhere, depending on our objectives, desires and necessities. Nevertheless, I also believe that artifacts may directly influence the way we practice our imagination and then, consequently, develop our creativity.

I concur with Vygotsky (2004), creativity is an internal and external process which is in line with the sociocultural tenets present in the Glăveanu (2011)'s We-paradigm's approach. However, this characteristic is also influenced by the people's objectives, desires, necessities and artifacts. This implies that imagination and creativity are constrained to the limitations of people's surroundings.

Everybody may indeed be creative, but not everybody may have the possibilities of developing their imagination and creativity. This may occur, because they may be hindered,

constrained by a various set of external factors such as poverty, lack of education, lack of employment, and so on. Having shared that, I now indicate the illustrative summary based on Glăveanu (2011)'s We-paradigm approach to the concept of creativity:

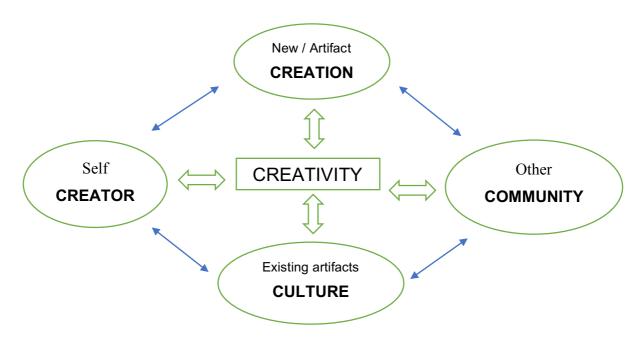


Figura 02 - Vlad Glăveanu (2011)'s We-paradigm conceptualization. Source: Prepared by the author (2017)

Undergraduate students' initial concepts about creativity

The Fanfictional Creative Writing course in English had 12 undergraduate students all from USP. Initially, their concepts about creativity tended more to the I-paradigm than to the We-paradigm approach to creativity (GlAVEANU, 2011). Their answers were mainly generated in 2 different research tools: 1) the initial questionnaire and 2) the classroom transcriptions. In the beginning of class 1, students received the initial questionnaire. Their most relevant excerpts, collected from this questionnaire, are illustrated as follows:

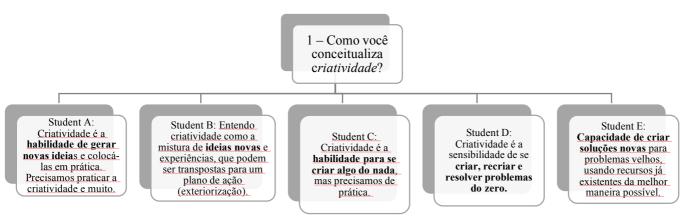


Figura 03 - Students' excerpts taken from the initial questionnaire Source: Prepared by the author (2017)

In relation to their initial questionnaire answers, students A, B and E claimed that creativity is an ability, capacity which requires practice to be improved. This is one of the main characteristics presented in the I-paradigm approach. According to Glăveanu (2011), some of the I-paradigm theorists (CARSON, 2011; BRIDGES, 2013) believe that creativity is an ability which needs practice: "(...) creativity is marked by the ability to create, bring into existence, to invent into a new form, to produce through imaginative skill, to make to bring into existence something new" (BRIDGES, 2013, p. 14).

Carson (2011, p. 18) went even further. She ascertained that creativity is an essential ability which should be extensively used "(...) to originate something completely new, from the scratch, in some way original". This characteristic was present in both student C's answer ("habilidade para se criar algo do nada") and student D's answer ("criar, recriar e resolver problemas do zero"). Another relevant factor which reinforced the students' tendency to the I-paradigm approach refers to the presence of the adjective *new*, which appeared in 4 (80%) of the students' opinions.

According to Glăveanu (2011), the adjective new is a basic constitutive characteristic of the I-paradigm approach to creativity. He attested that this adjective is one of the most recurrent definitions connected with creativity, appearing in most of the I-paradigm theorists. Nevertheless, for him, the adjective new does not only entail the "(...) creation of something out of nothing", but it also involves transformation "(...) by combining, changing, or reapplying existing ideas" (GLAVEANU, 2011, p. 07). Vygotsky (2004, p. 7) also acknowledged novelty as a characteristic of creativity: "(...) any human act that gives rise to something new is.... a creative act".

After answering the initial questionnaire, students were asked to discuss in groups the first set of key questions. In relation to the first question (What is creativity?), only students B, D and E answered. Their answers are in the following table:

Table 01: Questions about creativity

Students	Students' classroom transcriptions
В	We think creativity has something to do with fulfilling. We write to fulfil something. We cannot say that everything we write is to fulfill something. Sometimes we just write. We want to be like, we want to happen. We want to express in some ways, many ways. But we write to fulfill ourselves, a wish we have.
D	We also make something like originality. Because we cannot recreate something if it wasn't created before. Originality would be more like uniqueness. It's not something you come up out of the blue. It's something you can only live in your own way. It belongs to you. It's a complete part of who you are in this world.
E	I think extraordinary is the closest definition for creativity. Because this is what we feel more close to writing. We create something that it wasn't created before. It's is an extraordinary process, actually. If you see it.

Source: Prepared by the author (2017)

Student D suggested that uniqueness is a synonym for original. According to Glăveanu (2011, p. 09), creative people possess a "(...) need for uniqueness, which reflects their desire to be unique. By uniqueness, he meant people's contemporary ever-lasting desire to be a different person from the others, to be singular, special, one of a kind. For Glăveanu (2011), the innatist characteristic has been embraced by the I-paradigm theorists unanimously. Vygotsky (2004, p. 33) also believes that all human beings are creative: "(...) there is a widespread opinion that creativity is the province of a select few. This is not true, (...) creation is the province of everyone to one degree or another".

Carson (2011) proposed that people's creativity requires awakening. However, she recognized that the awakening of creativity may sometimes happen suddenly, out of the blue: "(...) creative ideas often come at a time when the person appears to be thinking about something else, or not really thinking at all" (CARSON, 2011, p. 35). To support her claims, she cited several writers such as Marcel Prost and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In relation to Marcel Proust, she attested that "(...) he was engaged in the most trivial of pursuits – eating a cake – when he was overcome by the recollections which led him to write his great novel" (CARSON, 2011, p. 25).

Carson (2011) also inferred that creativity may be developed without much practice. However, she clearly highlighted that creativity without practice (or apparent efforts) are less often and more difficult to be concretized: "(...) it is true that some brains are naturally more inclined toward creative ideation than others. However, this is a skill that must be practiced and learned constantly. Although it may not make an Einstein out of everyone, practice and exercise can definitely make any brain more creative" (Carson, 2011, p. 23).

Another recurrent characteristic related to the I-paradigm approach to creativity is originality (GLAVEANU, 2011). Interestingly to notice, this word was used twice by student D in her attempt to conceptualize creativity. However, they seem to have different connotations. In her first answer, she apparently used it to refer to something new, novel. According to Sternberg and Bridges (2013, p. 35), original as a synonym of new is a quite common I-paradigm characteristic, because creativity can be apprehended as an "(...) ability to produce ideas that are both novel (i.e., original) and appropriate (i.e., useful)".

On the other hand, in student D's second answer, she used originality as a synonym of uniqueness, singularity. As a matter of fact, she compared originality with uniqueness (Originality would be more like uniqueness). In the same vein, Thompson (2008, p. 226) also attested that uniqueness is a constitutive characteristic of originality: "(...) originality entails uniqueness which involves thinking 'without boundaries,' or 'outside the box'". In turn, he acknowledged that originality is also a fundamental characteristic of creativity.

One more adjective that is constantly linked with the I-paradigm approach to creativity is extraordinary (GLAVEANU, 2011). Conforming to Craft (2002, p. 114), "Extraordinary creativity involves, then, the production of new knowledge which has a major impact on an existing area of knowledge, the boundaries of which are monitored by experts within that field". In addition, she advocated that an ordinary person can indeed produce an extraordinary piece of work, because the concept of extraordinary is quite volatile. Still for Craft (2002), something

(or someone) which (who) was not previously considered extraordinary by its (their) community may become extraordinary if it (they) receive experts' validation.

According to another I-paradigm theorist, Sefertzi (2000), creativity is not an ability belonging to few people (or the geniuses), but it can be found in every human being. Nevertheless, a person to be considered creative must improve his creativity. Therefore, creativity can be learned and honed. Still for Sefertzi (2000, p. 03), the best way to achieve that is by using specific (proven) techniques: "(...) which, enhancing and stimulating the creative abilities, ideas and creative results, help people to move out of their normal problem-solving mode, to enable them to consider a wide range of alternatives and to improve productivity and quality of work".

Glăveanu (2011, p. 05) also denounced the self-centeredness (which he named the "lone individual") overvalorization by ordinary people and the I-paradigm theorists: "Driven by an attributional error commonly described in psychology, both laypeople and researchers generally attribute creativity to creators' internal dispositions ignoring nondispositional influences" (GLAVEANU, 2011, p. 05). He then concluded that this approach to creativity is not only limited, but exclusivist, because it does not provide space for people to reflect upon sociocultural and constraintive factors. As a result, he proposed to contemporary theorists of creativity to "reject atomistic and positivistic standpoints and adopt more holistic and systemic ways" (GLAVEANU, 2011, p. 06).

Undergraduate students' broadened concepts about creativity

By the end of the Fanfictional Creative Writing course in English, students exhibited having broadened extensively their concepts about creativity. To exemplify their broadening, I chose to share here the 2 most important classes (Class 1, 3 and 8). These classes were relevant, because they were tipping moments in students' reflection and analysis about the concepts of creativity which led them to broaden their own concepts eventually.

To promote students' reflection and analysis upon the concepts of creativity, the teacher in charge decided to begin his first class with an oral task which took place in the classroom and was aimed at the whole class. All students had the chance of answering it, one at a time. This task was directly formulated based on Kathleen Cotton (2003)'s classroom questioning which are sets of key questions applied in the classroom to motivate students' reflection upon a specific concept or definition. The set 1 of key questions is indicated as follows:

Table 02 - Questions about creativity

Set 1 key of questions

• What is creativity?

•Is everybody creative? Why? Why not?

• Why do we need to be creative?

Source: Prepared by the author (2017)

Subsequently, students were invited to read the first part of the theoretical text by Vlad P. Glăveanu (2011)'s *Paradigms in the study of creativity: introducing the perspective of cultural psychology*. This text is divided into three parts (the He-paradigm, the I-paradigm and the We-paradigm). As it is a quite extensive text, the teacher asked them to read only the first part (the He-paradigm) in the classroom. He intended to broaden their concepts about creativity with this reading by promoting classroom debates which worked. All the students claimed they did not know about other concepts about creativity. Student A: "I believed there was only one concept. The one we always hear about" and student D: "This is the first time I hear such thing. I know about the muses and stuff, but I didn't know about this idea. And I saw in the full text, there is more".

After the reading, the teacher asked the students to summarize Glăveanu (2011)'s text so they could better understand his main tenets. For Rick Wormeli (2005, p. 11), "(...) a summary will help you understand the major direction, the main points, and the overall shape of the more detailed original. It restates the essence of the original in as few words as possible, but not necessarily in different words. The teacher also asked them to create this summary, because for Williams and Burden (1997, p. 26), the sociocultural theory promulgates that education should be concerned "not just with theories of instruction, but with learning to learn, developing skills and strategies to continue to learn".

The main goal of the third class to broaden the students' concepts about creativity in creative writing courses. To achieve that, the teacher presented the students with the set 3 of key questions. This task was also formulated based on Kathleen Cotton (2003)'s classroom questioning and is indicated as follows:

Table 03 - Questions about creativity

Set 3 key questions

- •In your opinion, what is a creative writing course?
- What is the role of creativity in a creative writing course?

Source: Prepared by the author (2017)

All the students claimed they had never thought about these questions previously. Student B said: "I knew creativity was important and existed everywhere, but I never thought of it directly about something". Student A and B agreed on the importance of creativity, but they both recognized not knowing about differences, especially in specific areas. Student E added that it was important to think of creativity specifically and proposed: "We should think more about this topic. I do not understand why we never talk straightforwardly about this in the Languages and Literature courses, here at USP". By the end of the third class, all students agreed that we should discuss more about creativity and think of it in specific scenarios such as literature and creative writing classes.

To continue broadening students' concepts about creativity. the teacher asked the students to read the third part of the theoretical text by Glăveanu (2011)'s *Paradigms in the study of creativity: introducing the perspective of cultural psychology* which focuses on the We-paradigm. After the reading, he asked them to summarize (WORMELI, 2005) Glăveanu (2011)'s We-paradigm approach to creativity text. This reading was important so they could reflect upon this approach and better understand Glăveanu (2011)'s concepts about creativity.

The main goal of the eighth class was to promote students' self-assessment on their broadening of the concepts about creativity (VYGOTSKY, 2004, 2007). This self-assessment occurred through the format of a final questionnaire. The researcher opted for this type of questionnaire, because according to Silva and Swank (2009), there are many benefits in applying them in ESL classes.

At first, the researcher distributed the final questionnaire and encouraged the students to complete it individually and anonymously. Although the respondents did not use their real names in the questionnaire, they could be identified as student A, B, C, D and E later. By and

large, all the students claimed they had broadened their concepts about creativity, however, two main questions (7 and 8) were fundamental to identify more adequately their broadening:

Table 04 - Question 7 – Why do we need to develop creativity today?

Students	Students' classroom transcriptions
A	Creativity is more important than I thought. Actually, there are many concepts, definitions. I can choose one, maybe two. I know now I need to be creative in different areas of my life, not only creative writing classes.
С	I know more about creativity today. I can be creative to solve problems and write creatively. We need creativity for everything. But for me the most important was to know that there are many types of creativity.
D	We need to be creative everyday. I mean, I try to be creative always. Now I know there are different aspects I have to consider in the creative process. I don't need to stay with only one.

Source: Prepared by the author (2017)

In relation to the seventh question, we can notice that the students have broadened their opinions about the concept of creativity. In the initial questionnaire, they had shown a tendency to believe more in the I-paradigm approach (GLAVEANU, 2011), i.e., their concepts were more self-centered and did not encompass sociocultural aspects which may be related to the construction of the meaning (VYGOTSKY, 2004; 2007) of creativity. Nevertheless, in the final questionnaire, they have exhibited knowledge that creativity is not only constituted one-dimensionally, but multi-dimensionally (Student A: "Creativity is more important than I thought" and Student C: "I know more about creativity today"). Another relevant aspect to consider here is that the students believe they have the right to choose among the options presented (Student A: "I can choose one, maybe two" and Student D: "I don't need to stay with only one") as insofar there is more than one signification for being creative.

Table 05 - Question 8 – Which creativity paradigm (He-paradigm, I-paradigm or We-paradigm) do you identify with? Justify your answer.

Students	Students' classroom transcriptions
В	Before I was the I-paradigm, now I think I am more like the We-paradigm. I will take into account other aspects I haven't like the social and cultural aspects.
D	I thought more about that. Actually, I have been thinking more about the We-paradigm, because this is the first time I actually think about this. You know? The social aspects are important. I need to reflect more about that.
E	Creativity is not only something about me and myself. Sociocultural aspects are also relevant. We-paradigm, right? I never thought about them, but I will certainly do from now on.

Source: Prepared by the author (2017)

In relation to the eighth question, we can also notice that the students have broadened their opinions about the concept of creativity. The first aspect to consider here is that, in the initial questionnaire, they did not know what Glăveanu (2011)'s paradigms to creativity were. Although the students did not know how to conceptualize each of his paradigms, they described their concepts as close as to Glăveanu (2011)'s I-paradigm approach to creativity. The second aspect is that, by the end of the Fanfictional Creative Writing course in English, they all knew how to conceptualize each of his approaches.

In addition, they affirmed they were thinking more about the concepts related to creativity (Student B: "I will take into account other aspects", Student D: "The social aspects are important. I need to reflect more about that" and Student E: "I never thought about them, but I will certainly do from now on"). The third relevant aspect to consider is linked with their change of heart, because most of the students indicated to believe now more in the We-paradigm (Glăveanu, 2011) rather than in the I-paradigm. This can be explained, since they have more knowledge about creativity than they had before starting this course.

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