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## Creative Learning

†GRANT WIGGINS

**ABSTRACT** This article consists of short quotations from the author's chapter 'Creative Learning' written for the *Routledge International Handbook of Creative Learning*. It argues that, when assessing creativity, we should look for fitness to purpose as well as inventiveness, and that creativity can be assessed and recognised in a wide range of activities and curriculum areas. This is followed by extracts from the author's generic rubric for assessing creativity (2012) in order to illustrate the kind of guidelines which teachers might find helpful.

*The late Grant Wiggins was one of the most original and thoughtful contributors to curriculum development and assessment, and particularly with regard to creativity. We include here short quotations from his stimulating chapter in the Routledge International Handbook of Creative Learning (2012). These are followed by two grading exemplars from the generic rubric for assessment creativity (Wiggins, 2012) which he designed to show that this can be done in educationally meaningful ways.*

What is know-how in mathematics? The ability to solve problems – not merely routine problems but problems requiring some degree of independence, judgment, originality, creativity. (Polya, 1957, p. xi)

Todd Lubart reminds us that various researchers on creativity have defined it as 'the ability to produce work that is novel and appropriate'. That gets it just right, I think: being merely imaginative, offbeat or inquisitive may be delightful but as educators we should not regard it as sufficient... There has to be an 'appropriate' impact – whether in joke telling, fine art, philosophy, engineering or athletics.

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As video games so clearly illustrate, creative learning demands very little 'teaching' as long as there are clear challenges, good feedback, and choices for the learner to make.

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We are only truly learning when we try to apply (and make sense of that using) what was taught. In this way, academic work is really no different from guitar or hockey: We haven't begun learning unless we *play*.

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The point is generalizable. Socratic Seminar, working with primary source texts/artifacts in history, playing football well as a team or developing a jazz guitar solo elicits creative learning because thoughtfulness is demanded by the task. And that is of course why law, medicine, engineering and business have moved to problem-based learning as a key design approach.

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Did the performance work? Was the purpose achieved – even if in an unorthodox or unexpected manner? Creativity can only be evoked and developed if we assess for such impact... The point of performance assessment is not to have students merely emulate the form and content of past performances and performers, but to emulate the best effects, eg the ability to persuade an audience, satisfy a client request, or solve a problem...

Unless we highlight 'impact' criteria the student in fact has no genuine performance goal other than to please the teacher or mimic orthodox approaches. 'Is this what you want, Mr Smith?' is a vital sign of the failure to teach students that performance criteria are not about custom or teacher preferences but about what actually tends to be novel and appropriate – i.e. what really works.

What is the implication for curriculum? The content must include study of many diverse models of excellence and non-excellence at meeting performance goals creatively...

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Truly helpful feedback attends to the end, the ultimate desired outcome, and gives you information about how you did against that bottom-line goal. We hit the tennis ball and see where it lands, we give a speech and hear (as well as witness) audience reaction as we speak, we design an experiment and check the results for error... Feedback is merely the answer to the question: What happened?

Consider: People laughed at the first joke but not at the second and third joke. Why? What can I learn from the feedback about how to make them laugh at all three...

Feedback is not praise or blame... 'Good job!' and 'Try harder!' are not feedback... Praise and advice can certainly be useful; but valid descriptive feedback is always useful, empowering – the source of all creative learning... How would the public speaker become skilled and poised if there were never a real audience and experts merely wrote back with letter grades a few weeks later?

### A generic rubric for assessing creativity (Extracts)

6) The work is unusually creative. The ideas/materials/methods used are novel, striking, and highly effective. Important ideas/feelings are illuminated or highlighted in sophisticated ways. The creation shows great imagination, insight, style, and daring. The work has an elegant power that derives from clarity about aims and control over intended effects. The creator takes risks in form, style, and/or content.

- The problem has been imaginatively re-framed to enable a compelling and powerful solution
- Methods/approaches/techniques are used to great effect, without overkill
- 'Less is more' here: there is an elegant simplicity of emphasis and coherence
- Rules or conventions may have been broken to create a powerful new statement
- Common materials/ideas have been combined in revealing and clever ways
- The audience is highly responsive to (perhaps disturbed by) the work
- The work is vivid through careful attention to telling details and deft engaging touches
- There is an exquisite blend of the explicit and implicit

4) The work is creative. The ideas/materials/methods used are effective. A voice and style are present.

- Novel approaches/moves/directions/ideas/perspectives were used to good effect
- There are imaginative and personal touches scattered throughout the work
- The work keeps the audience mostly engaged
- There is a discernible and interesting effect/focus/message/style, with lapses in execution
- The work takes some risks in methods/style/content

2) The work is not very creative. The approach is trite and the ideas clichéd, leading to a flat and predictable performance. There is little sense of the creator's touch, voice or style here.

- The work offers little in the way of new approaches/methods/ideas.
- There is little sign of personal voice, touch or style.
- The work suggests that the creator confuses 'creative' and 'risk-taking' with 'shocking in a juvenile way'
- There is excessive and incoherent use of different materials, techniques, ideas
- The creator may have confused great care and precision with creativity – the work is more polished than imaginative or revealing.

### References

Polya, G. (1957) *Mathematical Discovery*, vol. 1. New York: Wiley.

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Wiggins, G. (2012) Creative.

<https://grantwiggins.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/creative.pdf> (accessed 28 July 2017).

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The late Dr **GRANT WIGGINS** developed the notion of understanding by design, a curriculum development approach which linked meaningful assessment practice with relevant and deep curriculum knowledges and skills via backward planning. (See: [http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching\\_now/2015/05/grant-wiggins-understanding-by-design-author-dies.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2015/05/grant-wiggins-understanding-by-design-author-dies.html)). Grant Wiggins' books include *Educative Assessment* (1998) and *Assessing Student Performance* (1999). His blog can be accessed at <https://grantwiggins.wordpress.com/>