

From Creativity To Creative Writing: Defining, Assessing, And Cultivating.

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Abstract

*Despite its importance for innovation, problem-solving, and knowledge production, creativity remains difficult to define and assess due to its multidimensional nature. This paper reviews major definitions of creativity and creative writing found in scientific literature, highlighting similarities among them. The study also presents tools used to assess creativity, including process-based, personality-based, and product-based approaches, such as the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking and the Creative Product Semantic Scale. Finally, it explores pedagogical practices that encourage imagination and experimentation, with special attention to Gianni Rodari's *The Grammar of Fantasy*—particularly the fantastic hypothesis and the fantastic binomial—as a framework for cultivating creativity in writing classrooms.*

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The role of creativity has increasingly been recognized as a critical competence in contemporary education and within the scientific community (OECD, 2024). For instance, the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has incorporated creative thinking into its assessments. Similarly, recent research underscores the growing relevance of creativity in educational policies and teaching practices across various countries (Lucas et al., 2013). In the scientific community, creativity is also acknowledged as a fundamental component of innovation and discovery (Weisberg, 2020).

Despite its acknowledged importance, defining and measuring creativity remains a complex challenge in both educational and scientific contexts. Creativity is often described as a multifaceted construct, viewed either as an innate talent or "gift" (Simonton, 2000; Runco, 2004) or as a competence that can be cultivated through educational practices (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). This tension is particularly relevant in educational settings, where traditional approaches to teaching—emphasizing rote learning over open-ended exploration—may hinder the development of creativity.

Although creative writing courses, workshops, and undergraduate degrees have become popular in Brazil, the country's low ranking in the OECD's recent creativity assessment (44th out of 56 countries) highlights the urgency of developing evidence-based strategies to enhance creativity as a competence in educational settings. The first step toward developing strategies to promote creativity in educational contexts is to understand the concept of creativity itself and to map approaches that are likely to enhance it.

Bearing that in mind, the goals of this paper are to present and discuss definitions of creativity available in scientific literature, tools to measure and appreciate creativity in writing, and pedagogical approaches that create space for it to emerge. The studies investigated for this paper include articles from the *Journal of Creative Research* published during the last five years, as well as other open-access seminal articles on creativity research.

I. Defining Creativity And Creative Writing

Creativity, as a multifaceted concept, has been defined and interpreted in various ways (Kampylis & Valtanen, 2010; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010). Several decades ago, Guilford stated that creativity involves generating ideas that deviate from the most typical or dominant responses in a population (Guilford, 1950). According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996), creativity occurs when a person produces a novel idea that deviates from established conventions and is recognized as meaningful within a domain. Similarly, Amabile (2013) claims that creativity is the production of a novel and appropriate answer, product, or solution to open-ended tasks. For Runco and Jaeger (2012), creativity can be understood as deviant thinking, that is, the generation of ideas that diverge from conventional patterns, established cognitive frameworks, or social expectations, while still preserving a certain level of value, relevance, or social acknowledgment. The idea of value deserves emphasis: creativity is

not only a matter of novelty, but also of appropriateness, usefulness, and recognition. In other words, creative ideas must also work for their intended purposes (Baer, 2024).

As can be seen from these definitions, some words frequently appear: deviant, deviate, divergent, and novel, which suggests a close relationship between creativity and divergent thinking. Early studies have correlated creativity with measures of intelligence, divergent thinking, and openness to experience (McCrae, 1987).

As for creative writing, it can be understood as a mode of written expression through which individuals create literary forms such as narratives, poems, or essays in order to interpret situations, investigate new ideas, and communicate personal experiences, meanings, and values to readers (Nettle, 2009; Piirto, 2018; Root & Steinberg, 2011). According to Leki (1998), what distinguishes creative writing from other forms of writing is its movement beyond purely technical or informational purposes. In creative writing, individuals combine a range of resources, such as observation, imagination, and associative thinking, to create a story (Barbot, 2021). Moreover, motivational factors, as well as linguistic and literary skills, also play an important role in producing creative stories (Barbot, Tan, Randi, Santa-Donato, & Grigorenko, 2012).

The process of creative writing involves more than a sequence of cognitive operations; it is also deeply shaped by affective experiences that writers seek to express through logical reflection, symbolism, and metaphor (Piirto, 2018). Creative writers are often distinguished not only by strong verbal abilities and keen observation, but also by emotional sensitivity and empathy (Barbot et al., 2012; Piirto, 2009).

Having defined creativity and creative writing, one question remains: how do we assess creativity?

II. Tools To Assess Creativity

Kanli (2020) reviewed several measures of creativity. According to this review, creativity has been assessed from different perspectives, which can be summarized according to the types of questions the tools attempt to answer: (a) What are the mental processes involved in creative thought? (b) Which personality traits are associated with creativity? (c) How can a product be judged as creative? and (d) What are the external forces that affect creativity?

Tests used to answer the first question focus on creative processes. These processes involve cognitive factors that lead to creative production, and most of them concern divergent thinking. In this category, the main tests are Guilford's Structure of Intellect Model (SOI) and the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT).

Guilford's test focused primarily on defining and examining the factors that make up intelligence, and he identified 24 distinct types of divergent thinking (DT). His model encompasses 180 intellectual abilities ($6 \times 5 \times 6$), structured across three dimensions: operations (evaluation, convergent production, divergent production, memory, and cognition), contents (visual, auditory, symbolic, semantic, and behavioral), and products (units, classes, relations, systems, transformations, and implications). Guilford's Structure of Intellect (SOI) battery also incorporated several tasks designed to assess divergent thinking. For example, in figural implications tasks, participants had to add lines to simple shapes to create a new figure, while in semantic unit tasks they were asked to list common consequences of an impossible event.

The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking are composed of two distinct assessments, the TTCT-Verbal and the TTCT-Figural, each with two parallel forms, making them suitable for use as pre- and post-tests in experimental contexts. The scores are based on four factors: fluency, originality, flexibility, and elaboration.

Tests used to answer the second question focus on the personality traits of creative individuals. In this group, we find instruments such as the Khatena-Torrance Creative Perception Inventory and the Creativity Achievement Questionnaire (CAQ).

The Khatena-Torrance Creative Perception Inventory includes two self-report scales, *What Kind of Person Are You?* (WKOPAY) and *Something About Myself* (SAM), developed to identify creative individuals aged 10 and older. Each inventory contains 50 forced-choice items, asking participants, for instance, whether they have the courage to stand up for their beliefs or whether statements such as "I have created a new dance or song" are true or false for them. The inventory demonstrated satisfactory reliability, while its validity was considered moderate.

The Creativity Achievement Questionnaire (CAQ) also uses self-reports of activities and accomplishments to assess creativity. It measures achievement across ten domains of creativity and consists of a 96-item self-report checklist organized into two main factors: Arts (including Drama, Writing, Humor, Music, Visual Arts, and Dance) and Science (including Invention, Science, and Culinary Arts). Respondents indicate the extent to which each statement reflects their own experiences or characteristics.

Tests used to answer the third question focus on how a product (such as a poem, an essay, or a painting) can be judged as creative. The main tool used to assess this criterion is the Creative Product Semantic Scale (CPSS). The CPSS is grounded in a theoretical model that defines three dimensions of product attributes: novelty (original, surprising, and generative qualities), resolution (value, logic, usefulness, and clarity), and elaboration and synthesis (organic, elegant, complex, and well-crafted features). The instrument assumes that even untrained judges can assess the creativity of a product when supported by a valid and reliable evaluation tool.

Following this line of reasoning, teachers could evaluate students' creativity in creative writing using a rating scale. Additionally, if students become familiar with the evaluation criteria of such a scale, they may be able to pursue creative writing more consciously to meet those criteria.

Finally, the last group of questions focuses on the external forces that can affect creativity. According to Kanli (2020), several environmental factors play an important role in shaping creative potential and can strongly influence its development. Elements such as parenting styles, trauma, birth order, culture, teaching methods, and group interactions may all have an impact on creativity.

Most tests dealing with external factors and assessing environmental effects on creativity are primarily related to organizational structures and aim to evaluate individuals' perceptions of creativity in their work environments (Amabile et al., 1996). The Classroom Activities Questionnaire (CAQ) focuses on the classroom and learning environment; however, it has not been widely applied in research and still lacks strong evidence of validity and reliability.

Based on Kanli's review, it seems reasonable to argue that although there are tools to assess creativity, the field of education still needs widely used and reliable instruments to evaluate learners' creative traits and processes.

III. Creative Writing: From Fantasy To Practice

Gianni Rodari (1920–1980) was an Italian writer, journalist, and educator widely recognized for his innovative contributions to children's literature and creative education. He began his professional career as a teacher and later worked as a journalist, experiences that deeply shaped his sensitivity to language, society, and everyday life. Rodari believed that imagination and creativity were essential not only for children, but also for democratic thinking and social transformation (Piras, 2023).

The Grammar of Fantasy (Grammatica della fantasia), written by Gianni Rodari, was first published in 1973 and explores imagination, creativity, and storytelling, particularly within early childhood education and the development of readers and writers.

Rodari's central idea is that creativity is not an exclusive talent possessed by only a few people, but rather a human ability that can be encouraged and cultivated in everyone, especially in children. The book serves as both a poetic and pedagogical guide for teachers, writers, and educators, offering strategies to foster narrative invention and creative thought. In his book, Rodari proposes more than thirty ways to stimulate creativity in the classroom. Two of these will be discussed here: the fantastic binomial and the fantastic hypothesis.

The fantastic binomial involves combining two unrelated words, such as "dog" and "wardrobe," to create an unusual situation from which a story can emerge through the tension between meanings. We believe that putting together words from different semantic fields is compatible with divergent thinking, a key concept present in most definitions of creativity reviewed in this paper. Putting together wardrobes and clothes is predictable, acceptable, and expected.

However, having wardrobes and dogs together seems much less predictable and therefore more unexpected, divergent, and novel. Asking learners to write about a messy teenager's wardrobe seems much more predictable than asking them to write about a dog who was jealous of a wardrobe and got into it every night to mess around with T-shirts and socks.

The fantastic hypothesis begins with the question "What if...?", such as "What if people were made of glass?" or "What if a city began to fly?", creating possibilities for imagination and narrative construction (Rodari, 2021). Creating a story that departs from a fantastic hypothesis is also aligned with divergent thinking and novelty. Relating to a wardrobe as a place to store clothes is common sense. However, if a wardrobe becomes a magical entrance to a fantasy world, then we have *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, in which the wardrobe is the magical entrance to Narnia.

Rodari maintains that playing with language, mistakes, absurdity, and fantasy helps develop not only creative writing skills, but also critical thinking and freedom of expression. In this sense, fantasy is not an escape from reality, but rather a way of interpreting and transforming it.

The scientific debate on whether creativity is an innate ability or can be fostered in educational environments remains open, with limited evidence from both sides. However, regarding education as a liberating tool and a means of promoting creativity, we believe that approaches such as Rodari's are promising and deserve further empirical investigation. Future research is needed to examine the impact of strategies such as the fantastic binomial and the fantastic hypothesis on the production of more creative writing. Moreover, more educationally grounded tools to assess creativity are needed—especially instruments that encompass both teachers and learners.

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