

# Who is Creative? Identifying Children's Creative Abilities

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*Some schools use measures of creative abilities in addition to measures of intellectual and academic abilities to identify children of varied talents. The question remains, to what extent can we identify children with high potential to be creatively productive when they have not yet demonstrated creative talent? Can we have confidence in such decisions? This article compares strengths and weaknesses of methods of assessing creativity and lists more than 60 standardized measures used to assess children's creativity. Procedures for using formal and informal measures in the decision-making process are also discussed.*

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This article examines assessment instruments, measurement considerations, and factors that impact understanding of a child's demonstrated and potential creativity. Its purpose is to examine the major categories of standardized measures and also alternative measures that may be used to assess children's creativity, and discuss issues of assessing such complex behaviors. In addition, the authors list a variety of commonly used and promising methods of assessment and discuss appropriate practices to incorporate data from multiple measures in order to make eligibility decisions.

## Applying a Definition of Creativity to Youth

It is important for researchers and educators to first clarify their theoretical position or understanding of creativity prior to selecting assessment instruments. Otherwise, they might select assessments that are inconsistent with their own implicit (Runco, 1993a) idea of creativity or inconsistent with needed adjustments to the students' curriculum (Hunsaker & Callahan, 1995). For example, an educator who implicitly views creativity as talent in the visual arts may plan a program in which children with budding literary or musical talent are overlooked. Likewise, a researcher's theoretical perspective and definition of creativity influences the behaviors and subjects selected for study as well as methods of data analysis.

Definitions of creativity reflect a host of diverse characteristics of creative adults and creative children. Many definitions recognize the complexity of creativity (e.g., Davis, 1997; Isaksen, 1987; Treffinger, 1987). Isaksen (1987) noted that creativity occurs in many people, in differing degrees and manners, and should be viewed as "a multi-faceted phenomenon rather than as a single unitary construct capable of precise definition" (p. 8).

MacKinnon (1961) proposed that clarity may be achieved when a researcher develops an operational definition of creative behavior from one or more of four perspectives: **personality, process, press (situation), or product**. Rhodes (1961/1987) indicated that it was only in the intertwining and unity of the strands of the four P's of creativity that the com-

plexity of creative behavior occurred. More recently, Murdock and Puccio (1993) recommended that researchers might enhance the generalizability of their findings by studying creative behavior in the combinations or interactions of the four P's. That is, they would reframe their questions to ask how at least one of the four P's would interact meaningfully with at least one other P. "For instance, when considering how person overlaps with press, a researcher can examine the ways in which motivation, abilities, or personality characteristics interact with physical environment, psychological atmosphere, or task demands" (p. 265). Other recent multidimensional models (e.g., Magyari-Beck, 1993; Hong & Milgram, 1996) and conceptualizations of creativity support its multi-faceted nature, apply to various disciplines, and allow multiple measurements of creative phenomena (Magyari-Beck, 1993; Murdock & Puccio, 1993; Rogers, 1998).

Creative behavior may be viewed as a process resulting in a product unique to the individual who produced it; this product also may be unique and valuable to society (Parnes, 1972). However, when the primary interest is to identify children with the potential to demonstrate significant adult creativity, we must examine evidence of less obviously identifiable creative acts. Fishkin (1998) has proposed the phrase, **germinal creativity**<sup>1</sup>, as useful to describe children's budding creative potential. For example, a young child's possibly poorly skilled rendition of a creative idea may show promise of later full-flowered creativity. The child, however, may not yet have the skill to adequately express or fully communicate the unique idea. In addition, children who show such germinal creativity are likely to display creative behavior only on tasks in which they are interested.

In order to identify children with germinal creativity, those with the potential to be creatively productive adults, it is important to consider information derived from multiple sources. There are unsolved difficulties in determining a child's likelihood to be a creative producer during the developmental years, and greater uncertainty in predicting potential for future creative productivity. Broad parameters must be used to identify children's creativity, because creativity is a complex construct. Children's emerging creativity may not clearly correspond with creative behavior in mature, creatively productive adults. Most important, the degree to which children may exhibit their creativity can vary markedly depending upon numerous factors such as their developing skills, the response requirements of a task, and their interest in the task at a given time. Therefore, it is critical to deliberately examine a variety of methods to assess a child's creativity, and to use a combination of measures to make decisions.

## Methods of Assessing Creativity

Methods of assessing creativity may be grouped into categories representing the four P's: process, personality, product, and press or situation (MacKinnon, 1961). We developed Table 1 to categorize the variety of instruments used to assess

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<sup>1</sup>This use of the term "germinal" differs from Besemer and O'Quin's (1987) term used to describe one of nine dimensions of a creative product.

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