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The Powerful Fours of Creative Thinking

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I was in high school when I first came across the writings of the man who would become my lifetime hero. There isn't another individual who has affected my thinking and my career direction in life as much as he has. Dr. E. Paul Torrance (1915 – 2003) is called *The Father of Creativity* among educators. He dedicated his life's work to increasing the recognition, acceptance, and development of the creative personality in education. He did his research at various universities, including [The University of Georgia](#).

Astonished by Students

Torrance's interest in creativity grew from his struggles as a teacher working with difficult or failing students. He observed the astonishing fact that many of the least successful students went on to become highly successful in business, the arts, science, education, politics, and more. Torrance determined to discover the *other* forces, outside of traditional education, that power people toward achievement. He discovered creative thinking!

When I read that Torrance had identified creativity as an intelligence it bolstered my self-esteem and gave me confidence in myself. I had known that I could generate original ideas better and faster than most others, but I didn't know it mattered, and I didn't know that being creative had anything to do with intelligence. Suddenly I felt special, empowered, and meaningful in the world.

Challenging A Theory

Torrance invented the "Torrance Tests for Creative Thinking." These tests shattered the theory that IQ tests alone were the gauge of intelligence and predictors of success. His tests supported groundbreaking concepts: that creative thinking was a significant aspect of success, that creative levels could be measured, and that creative thinking skills could be increased through practice.

Early in my career as an entrepreneur and new product developer, I needed to design specific new concepts for mugs. It took me an entire summer to generate twelve good ideas. Today I could do it in a morning! All of my hours of practice have strengthened my inherent creativity, and to date I have created thousands of new products in the marketplace.

How To Evaluate Creative Thinking

Dr. E. Paul Torrance identified four components of creativity*. He established them as criteria to be used for measuring creative thinking and for evaluating the quality of creative output. Teachers can use these criteria as a guide for evaluating creative thinking in student work.

Components Of Creativity

- **Fluency** – the ability to generate quantities of ideas
- **Flexibility** – the ability to create different categories of ideas, and to perceive an idea from different points of view
- **Originality** – the ability to generate new, different, and unique ideas that others are not likely to generate
- **Elaboration** – the ability to expand on an idea by embellishing it with details or the ability to create an intricate plan

These four components of creative thinking work in harmony with each other, and rarely occur as isolated thought processes. However, any of the four may dominate during creative thought.

I Get It!

In the spirit of putting words into practice, I'm offering some freebies to kickstart some creative thinking practice. First is a free lesson plan to demonstrate and exercise fluency, one of the four components of creative thinking.

With **"Fluency Flurry"** time is of the essence as students race to think up as many things as possible in a given category. Points are awarded for quantities of ideas generated within a time limit. This lesson plan contains detailed examples and is appropriate for any grade or learning level. It's great for parents, too, who want extra enrichment for their kids.

Think Outside The Tests

I'm also offering four free activities excerpted from our iPhone app, **Creative Genius On-the-Go!** Each selection was designed to exercise one of the components of creative thinking. These are quick and fun to use in the classroom, at home, or when you're out and about with the kids.

- **Hello Yellow** (1 or more players) This activity emphasizes *fluency*. Name everything you can think of that is yellow such as lemons, chicks, and the sun. Have a contest with a friend to see who can come up with the most items. For added fun, think of things that have stripes or polka dots. If you have a box of crayons handy, try closing your eyes and picking a crayon from the box. Let that be your color challenge.
- **Wheel-eez** (1 or more players) Try your hand at *flexibility* and name all the things you can think of that have wheels. Try to think of things that are not vehicles, as well. For added fun, name things that would work better or be more fun if they had wheels.
- **Ticket to Laugh** (1 or more players) Make up *original* and outrageous tickets and fines such as a 15-jelly bean fine for sneezing in a no-sneezing zone, a \$15,000,000 fine for not wearing plaid on Plaid Day, a 3- knock-knock jokes fine for stepping on a crack, etc. For added fun, sketch tickets on scraps of paper and issue them to violators. Don't forget to collect the fines!
- **What if... you discovered a mysterious ancient world under your house?** What would you do? Would you tell anyone? What would this strange world be like? For added fun, draw a picture of your discovery. This activity prompts *elaboration* by the participant.

May the Fours Be With You

Finally, my free poster download **"The Four Components Of Creative Thinking"** illustrates fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration and displays a short definition of each. Use it to remind yourself and your students of the special thought processes all creative geniuses need to practice. It's 8 1/2 in. x 14 in. size and can be enlarged to classroom size on any large format printer.

All of these and more are listed on our [Freebies](#) page. I'd love to hear how you put these to use in your classroom or home. Or, just leave a comment about how you're "raising a creative genius."

* In recent years some educators have included additional components to Torrance's original four. I'll discuss these in future blog posts.

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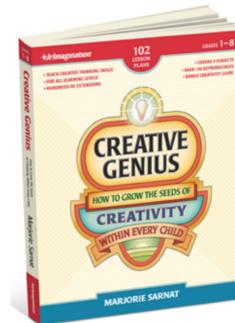
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