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Assessment for creative teaching and learning in disciplined improvisation

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Introduction

Creativity is of growing significance in educational reform worldwide. The Thinking School, Learning Nation policy of Singapore in 1997, the White Paper on Creative Education of Taiwan in 2003, the Learning to Learn educational reform of Hong Kong in 2001 and the report of National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education of England in 1999 all gave creativity a significant role in education (Craft, 2011; Hui & Lau, 2010). Nevertheless, creativity assessment in schools is always criticized as lagging behind the educational policies (Craft, 2011; Leong, et al., 2012).

A tension view of creativity and assessment is common (Cunliffe, 2008). “Does assessment weaken student creativity?” (Beghetto, 2005, p. 254) is a question on the minds of many educators. Yet, Craft (2011) suggested that creativity assessment is multi-faceted. Assessment is not necessarily a negative force, but its influences depend on what kinds of assessment are conducted (Beghetto, 2005). Assessment may even have a strong leverage effect on educational reform, especially in the Chinese context (Cheng, 2010a). Started from the classic study of Black & William (1998), “assessment for learning” is of growing significance in education field. Parallel reforms are widespread around the world (Burnard, 2011; Earl, 2013) and in Hong Kong (Mok, 2010). Assessment is not merely for measuring and grading student achievements. “Assessment is an integral part of learning, guiding the process and stimulating further learning” (Earl, 2013, p. 25). Following this direction, this study explores various assessment practices which may facilitate (or hinder) creative teaching and creative learning.

In the Routledge International Handbook of Creative Learning, Burnard (2011) had offered a review chapter titled “Constructing assessment for creative learning.” This article revisits this topic by using classroom improvisation as a lens to search for various forms or possibilities of creativity-conducive assessments.

In this chapter, creative teaching and learning generally refer to any kinds of learning or teaching which can facilitate the development of creativity of students in school contexts. In this regard, our meaning of creative teaching is near to “teaching for creativity” in Jeffrey and Craft (2004).
Improvisational teaching and learning

Enlightened by improvisation in music and drama, teaching and learning is conceived as a kind of classroom improvisation (Sawyer, 2004a). However, different from the former kind of improvisation, which may be in-the-moment spontaneity, classroom teaching and learning is a disciplined improvisation (Lobman, 2005; Sawyer, 2004a, 2004b). Disciplined improvisation is “a dynamic process involving a combination of planning and improvisation” (Sawyer, 2004a, p. 16). Teaching is further suggested to be an artful balance of structure (the fixed part of the curriculum or lesson plans) and classroom improvisation (the collaborative creative exploration of teachers and students) (Sawyer, 2011a). Similarly, Beghetto and Kaufman (2011) described teaching as a balance of fixed and fluid elements. In their theories, teaching to certain extend is still confined by the original structure—the planned curriculum. A number of empirical studies (Askew, 2012; Fournier, 2011; Jurow & Mcfadden, 2011; Kurtz, 2011; Martin & Towers, 2011) are found to support this perspective in various subjects, including mathematics, English language, science, and dance.

Why is this improvisation perspective important to creative teaching and assessment? Conceiving teaching as improvisation implies one has adopted the socio-constructive view of learning. This perspective highlights the emergent and transformative nature of learning in socio-cultural environment (Burnard, 2013; Kurtz, 2011). In parallel, creativity educators (Craft, 2005) strongly believe that creative learning is characterized by its co-constructive nature. Sawyer (2004a, 2004b) concluded from his study that constructivist teaching is fundamentally improvisational, because if the classroom is scripted and overly directed by the teacher, the students cannot co-construct their own knowledge. Beghetto and Kaufman (2011) and Tang (2008) further confirm that classroom improvisation is fundamental to creativity education. Beghetto (2013) comments that “a lived curriculum is full of creative micro-moments which emerge in everyday routines or planned experiences. . . . These micro-moments provide opportunities for teachers and students to explore, learn, and experience something new, unscripted, and unplanned” (p. 134). Teachers teaching for creativity need to expect the unexpected, search for the unexpected, feedback to the unexpected, and, in fact, plan for the unexpected in the classroom (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2011). At a more philosophical level, Tang (2008) argued that ethical leadership of teachers, resembling that found in jazz improvisation, is fundamental to creative learning.

At present, the education field does not lack methods for creative teaching (Beghetto, 2013). For example, Sternberg (2010) has suggested many simple and effective ways to design instructional or assessment tasks (e.g. creating an alternate ending to a story, inventing a dialogue between two persons, discovering a science principle, using terms such as: imagine if, suppose that, predict changes, etc.) What is problematic is that our teachers are so accustomed to the rigid, well-controlled direct-transmitting style of teaching, it is difficult for them to change (Cheng, 2004, 2010a, 2010b). The disciplined improvisation perspective highlights the dynamic, unpredictable, risk-taking and co-constructive nature of creative teaching and, at the same time, promotes a balanced view on creative learning, and integrates it with subject content in the standard curriculum. Given the significance of this improvisation approach in creativity education reform, educators need to further develop assessment practices which support it, instead of hindering it.

In this chapter, “classroom improvisation” refers to both improvisational teaching of teachers and improvisational learning of students, in an integrated sense.

Assessments that hinder classroom improvisation

Discussion on assessment is rarely found in literature on improvisational teaching. A brief review of a recent book on classroom improvisation (Sawyer, 2011b) indicates that there has
existed a strong tension view between assessment and improvisational teaching. Most authors in the book (e.g. Fournier, 2011; Kurtz, 2011; Martin & Towers, 2011) criticize the current emphasis on the rigid, standardized, high-stake summative assessments, which, they argue, have strong negative impacts on improvisational teaching. Though some scholars (Ronald, 2006; Lobman, 2011, 2007) have suggested that improvisational teaching methods can enhance academic achievements and deepen student understanding of the subject contents, however, teachers’ points of view may be different. As improvisation by nature is unplanned, risk-taking and explorative, its direction is obviously not in line with formal examinations which usually target at the evaluation of knowledge acquisition at a low level. Under the high pressure of these assessments and the limited time resources, teachers are pressed to finish the heavy syllabus and teach only what is included in the examination. Any discussion of unexpected ideas or deviations from planned curriculum would be considered as a waste of time (Cheng, 2010a, 2010b). Consequently, classroom discourse is “overwhelmingly monologic and characterized by lecture, memorization, and recitation” (Barker & Borko, 2011, p. 289). Furthermore, for achieving high accountability and classroom control, teachers may tend to impose pressing external motivators (e.g. using stringent criteria, stressful comparison, threatening evaluation measures and even negative reward) on student learning, which may be detrimental to student creative learning (Amabile, 1996; Beghetto & Kaufman, 2011).

The strong tension view between assessment and improvisational teaching is rooted in the narrow conception of assessment. In the prevailing positivistic view of education, teaching, learning and assessment are considered as a logical consequence of input–process–output. In this paradigm, outcome-based education (OBE) is commonly adopted in our local contexts and many other places. Teachers are required to set explicit behavioral objectives in lesson planning and evaluate these pre-determined learning outcomes quantitatively after teaching. OBE enforces a strong alignment of planning, teaching and assessments, and also assumes a linear rationalistic relationship among the three. If OBE practices go to an extreme, then there is no room for improvisation (or creativity) of which nature is unpredictable, unscripted and emergent on the spot (Fakier & Waghid, 2004; McKernan, 1993; Schwarz, 1994).

Apart from the summative assessments discussed above, formative assessment and feedback in the classroom may also hinder improvisational learning. In the initiation–response–evaluation (IRE) model (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2011; Sawyer, 2004a, 2004b), teachers may ask a question with a single correct answer, and students are confined to respond accordingly, and then by evaluating correctness of the answers, teachers judge whether students have learnt effectively. This kind of classroom interaction has placed student learning in strong control. IRE remains very popular in many places (especially in Hong Kong) as it serves the function of keeping the curriculum and teacher’s preplanned lesson on track. However, in social constructivist perspective, such discourse is not suitable for creative learning, because students are not given the opportunity to collectively explore and create their own knowledge (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2011; Sawyer 2004a, 2004b).

After looking at the creativity-hindering assessments, let’s turn our attention to other assessment approaches which may support or facilitate classroom improvisation. In discussion, these assessment practices are classified into four groups:

- micro-assessment in/for live teaching;
- contextual assessment in/for teaching planning;
- assessing the process of improvisational learning; and
- assessing student learning outcomes.
Micro-assessment in/for live teaching

Assessment may not be all planned, some is spontaneous in the classroom. Micro-assessment refers to the instant, on the spot, on-going assessment teachers made in the live classroom during improvisational teaching. This kind of micro-assessment is embedded in the teaching, an integral part of the pedagogy. It is an assessment for informing, guiding and stimulating creative teaching and learning.

Assessing student ideas. In improvisational teaching, teachers need to assess quickly whether certain student ideas are unexpected or outside the planned script, and yet valuable, that is, having the potential to bring about meaningful emergence if further pursued (Beghetto, 2009, 2013). In these assessments, teachers need to listen to each classroom speaker, and immediately assess the potential contribution of each speaking to the group in a continuing dialogue. This is an artful listening skill requiring simultaneous attention to both individual students and the class as a whole (Barker & Borko, 2011).

Assessing class flow. Teacher has a key role in maintaining the flow of classroom improvisation. Based on the assessment of each student’s idea, teachers make decisions on whether a certain idea should be attended to immediately, or attended to later, or integrated into the current dialogue, or should be explored further by re-directing the class flow. At the same time, the teacher observes what is happening in the class interactions, and recognizes the emergence of new structure. Based on these assessments, teachers modify their “hypothetical learning trajectory” (Dezutter, 2011), which implies changing the immediate learning goals and activities (Steele, 2009). Sometimes, teachers cannot just simply follow the natural flow of the class. Along the ongoing collaborative discussion, the teacher may need to use the out-of-frame meta-communication strategy (Sawyer, 2004b) to re-direct lesson flow. For example, the teacher needs to assess whether the class is straying too far from the topic, and needs to suspend the improvisational collaboration; or to assess whether the class discussion is too dominated by certain small groups of students, and needs to be re-directed deliberately to less responsive students. At a certain point, teachers should assess whether the learning flow needs a summary; if so teachers make explicit key points to highlight the new emerging theme. On many occasions, teachers also need to determine whether they should call class attention immediately to a new insight, or call attention to it at the end of the current discussion, so as not to disturb the original flow. Occasionally, when the class discussion seems to be stuck, teachers need to make a decision on whether to change the approach of the group. However, sometimes, teachers may overuse this meta-communication strategy in classroom control. If a group structure has emerged, it would be more effective when the group collectively feels or realizes the need to change (Sawyer, 2004b). Here comes a difficult question—How to make a good balance between control and natural emergence?

Giving feedback. Giving students constructive feedback or responses at the right moment in the right way is key to improvisational teaching. Based on their micro-assessments, teachers make immediate decisions on how to respond to students. Researchers (Barker & Borko, 2011; Lobman, 2006, 2007; Perone, 2011; Sawyer 2004b, 2006) have suggested a number of useful feedbacks and responses to support classroom improvisation. They include:

- **Giving and receiving of offers**—an offer is anything that anyone says or does in an improvising dialogue or scene. Teachers receive or accept student offers and build directly on what they are doing or saying.
- **No denial**—when a player does not accept an offer, it is called denying or negating it. The teacher may deny a student’s offer by ignoring, distracting or redirecting student ideas, or dominating a discussion/activity that students are already engaged in.
“Yes and”—in feedback (or revoicing), instead of evaluating whether students’ answers are right or wrong, teachers productively say “Yes and . . . ”, expressing their acceptance of students’ prior response and also stimulating students’ further elaboration or extension.

The above is only half of the story. Apart from supporting improvisation, teachers’ feedbacks need to support the planned learning simultaneously. Their instant feedbacks should encourage student creative expression and, at the same time, inform students how to improve learning in the current subject matter (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2011). In this regard, apart from directly saying “Yes and . . . ” the teacher may need to connect student response to more relevant materials and reformulate the response in more discipline-oriented language. Sawyer (2004b) suggested that effective revoicing should elaborate student ideas in a way that scaffolds student’s academic understanding, so as to take the journey of disciplined improvisation further. Again, the key principle is a “just right” balance of the two kinds of learning and their full integration.

**Teacher and student development.** Another concern is how teachers develop all the above micro-assessment and feedback skills. Sawyer (2006) made a keen observation:

> Experienced teachers are more likely to develop a repertoire of useful routines, and they have the professional skill required to instantly assess the flow of the classroom improvisation and interject exactly the right routine to advance their pedagogical goals, while allowing the improvisational discussion to continue.

*(p. 45)*

Steele (2006) suggested that improvisational skills are developed from teacher experience, knowledge, imagination, observation and willingness to experiment (all of which are also attributes of teacher creativity). In fact, in the learning process, students are also conducting similar on-the-spot micro-assessments to evaluate their own ideas and the expectations of teachers. As Sawyer (2004a) commented, students are extremely sensitive even to subtle denial, and can easily get the impression that their contributions are not being valued. To a certain extent, these micro-assessments and their related responses are themselves fueled by the improvisational creativity of teachers and students.

**Contextual assessment in/for teaching planning**

**Assessing opportunities in subject matter.** Disciplined improvisation is not totally unplanned (Sawyer, 2004a, 2004b). Beghetto and Kaufman (2011) suggested “The improvisational component of our concept also refers to . . . planned openings in the particular lessons that can provide opportunities for unexpected and original interpretations and expressions of academic subject matter learning” (p. 96). Martin and Towers (2011) called for occasions of deep and powerful understandings of mathematical concepts, by giving students opportunities to construct their own knowledge through a creative process of inquiry. Sassi (2011) suggested that the teacher frequently moves between script and open-ended dialogue, tapping into the improvisational potential of predesigned key guiding questions of the lesson. The above suggestions vary in their degree and method of inducing disciplined improvisation. To decide to what extent and in what way classroom improvisation takes place, teachers may need to exploit the subject matter to design planned openings for original expressions, occasional creative inquiry or key questions which also allow open dialogue. Due to limited resources, teachers need to assess the values of each of these teaching designs and their potential contribution to both creative and subject matter
learning, before implementing them. This ability of creating and evaluating opportunities for improvisation in subject matter may also be considered as a kind of teacher creativity.

**Assessing student backgrounds.** For improvisational teaching, another aspect which teachers need to assess is students’ expectation, understanding and competence on improvisational learning. Students’ prior learning habits are strongly influential to their present creative learning and getting free from these habits is always difficult (Cheng, 2010a, 2011). On the other hand, students are also assessing what is going on in the classroom, considering how they should respond, and can be easily discouraged by any denials (Sawyer, 2004a). If not aware of these student factors, teachers may not understand why their effort in improvising sometimes does not receive positive responses.

**Assessing constraints.** In disciplined improvisation, school teachers inevitably need to face a question – how the lesson finally converges back to the original curriculum, after deviating away from it. Both the divergent and convergent journeys in the teaching flow consume resources and are demanding to both students and teachers. In this regard, teachers also need to evaluate their existing constraints, which include the loading of the existing curriculum, their available resources like time and energy, and teacher and student competence in doing quick responses and accurate judgments, in order not to bring their class into chaos (Cheng 2010a, 2011). Enlightened by Whitcomb’s (2013) progressive improvisation development in music, this study also recommends a progressive way of development in improvisational teaching. This suggestion is especially significant to Asian places where teachers and students are so used to a highly controlled classroom environment (Cheng, 2004, 2010a).

**Assessing the process of improvisational learning**

Having discussed assessments before and during teaching, let’s study two kinds of assessments conducted after teaching. The first assessment focus is the improvisational process, which includes the interactive dialogues among students and teachers, and the learning flow of the classroom improvisation. The second kind explores the assessment of various student learning outcomes.

**Assessing classroom interactions.** Lobman (2006) assessed classroom interactions in kindergartens through the lens of improvisation. In his method, the teacher–student interactions are video-taped and analyzed quite objectively according to the core principles of improvisation (i.e. giving and receiving offer, don’t negate and “Yes and . . .”). Here are two examples quoted by Lobman (Mariel and Larry are the students, while Rebecca is the teacher in a kindergarten):

Mariel: (Comes over with a blanket and leans on Rebecca)
Rebecca: Oh another baby ready to take a nap. Look Larry, Mariel is going to go to sleep too.

This is an example of the giving and receiving of offers and “Yes and” Mariel, makes an “offer” when she brings the blanket over to Rebecca, and Rebecca “accepts the offer” and adds onto it, . . . by naming Mariel as “another baby” who is “ready to take a nap.” . . . [The next is a negative example] Larry has started swinging a broom around like a baton . . .

Rebecca: Well you do know what we use it [the broom] for? For the floor. Do you want to clean the floor?
Larry: Uh uh.
Rebecca: Okay. I’ll show you how.
This is an example of a negation. The teacher asks Larry if he wants to use the broom to sweep the floor and he answers, “Uh uh” and continues to swing the broom. Instead of accepting that he has said “No”, the teacher continues to talk to him as if he had said that he wanted to sweep the floor.

(Lobman, 2006, p. 460)

In Lobman’s study (2006), teacher–student interactions are classified as “responsive” if the teacher acknowledged, enhanced or elaborated on what the students were doing/saying, and as “less responsive” if the teacher ignored, distracted or redirected students to other topics. Lobman’s method is very useful in assessing the improvisation part of teaching; however, how to assess its integration with structure? Can educators generate other assessment criteria for this integrated process? Apart from objective discourse analysis, can the overall quality of the disciplined improvisation be assessed holistically by subjective judgments of experts (or teachers and students) after observing the lessons? All these are unanswered questions.

Assessing teaching and learning flow. In a study on dance improvisation (Petersen, 2008), “flow” is defined as an indicator of perceived smoothness or abruptness. This flow can be assessed by evaluating the continuity, phrasing and control in the improvisation performance. Similarly, the rubric for defining a good “flow” is “playing many harmonically appropriate notes within the changes” (in opposition to “playing many notes outside the change of tune”) in a study of musical improvisation (Feldman, 2011, p. 113). Enlightened by these studies, one may ask: can educators use the criteria of continuity, phrasing, control and making responses harmonically with the change of tune to assess the smoothness or abruptness of flow of improvisational teaching?

On a closer look at teaching examples in the literature, several characteristics of learning flow can be identified. First of all, for class learning that strictly follows a lesson plan with no creative learning in the whole lesson/course (Kurtz, 2011), one may think its learning flow looks like a straight line with no deviation or divergence. In a study of open mathematical problem solving (Martin & Towers, 2011, p. 262), students first developed different methods to solve a given problem (at this moment, the learning flow is assumed to diverge). Later, the teacher found one of the student solutions aligned more with his expected method, and brought the class to have further discussion on it (at this instance, learning flow is considered to converge to one focus, but it seems not a smooth flow to most students). In a study of open science inquiry (Jurow & Mcfadden, 2011, pp. 242–243), the teacher felt puzzled on hearing a student making a wrong and unexpected claim, and the teacher had not followed up the idea immediately (though the teacher recognized its high value for discussion later). In this case, the response of this teacher might bring about an abrupt flow in that student’s learning. Fournier (2011, p. 185) described a model for teaching dance composition. Members are asked to brainstorm various ways to express themselves around a given topic, and the choreographer synthesizes all ideas into one single dance movement. In this teaching design, the learning flow seems to have gone through a divergent-then-convergent cycle, in quite a smooth way. Though we cannot conclude what kind of improvisational flow is good, these examples at least reveal that the dimensions of divergence–convergence and smoothness–abruptness are useful criteria for assessing improvisational flow in classroom.

Teacher and student development. What are the values of assessing classroom improvisational process? Lobman (2006) highlighted that through engaging in the analysis of classroom interactions, one may “see” classroom listening and teacher–student interactions in a new way. Teachers and students engaging in this kind of analysis may better understand their classroom improvisation, enabling them to find ways to improve it. On the other hand, Petersen (2008) suggested that analyzing the learning flows may enrich student (and teacher) knowledge in the...
flow, and, as a result, enhance student self-evaluation and acquisition of the improvisational skills. Lobman’s (2005, 2007) and Beghetto’s (2013) studies had successfully used improvisational theatre workshops and classroom discourse analysis as professional development tools, developing the improvisational skills of teachers.

Assessing student learning outcomes

Ronald (2006) highlighted that finding evidence to show any measurable growth is the present challenge of an improvisational approach to teaching. Whether it is for improving teaching practices or for accountability and justification of adopting this approach, we may need some mechanisms to evaluate its special outcomes. Though we are discussing the outcomes, one also needs to note that, the relationship between process and product of improvisation is rather fluid (Duby, 2011). The assessment of process and product is always inseparable.

Assessing classroom co-constructed products. Some improvisational teaching may have co-constructed products. They may be musical or drama performance, or they can also be a new conceptual understanding, a problem-solving method, a science discovery or a critical issue analysis (Askew, 2012; Lobman & Lundquist, 2007; Sawyer, 2011b), which students and teachers collaboratively develop in the classroom. Consensual assessment technique (CAT) is a popular method used to assess improvised music (Barbot & Lubart, 2012; Eisenberg & Thompson, 2003) and creative works of other school subjects (Burnard, 2011; Cheng, 2008). For example, Eisenberg and Thompson (2003) used 10 expert judges to rate 16 pieces of improvised music on their complexity, creativity and technical goodness, and obtained moderate to high levels of inter-rater agreements. The CAT method is theory-based and research-based, but seems very resource-demanding in real-life school contexts. Further studies are required to evaluate how the CAT method can be adapted or simplified for assessing improvisational products in the classroom—can schools use fewer judges or non-expert judges (i.e. the teachers or students) (Kaufman & Baer, 2012)? As highlighted by Eisenberg and Thompson (2003), the value of CAT goes beyond evaluative purpose. Engaging students and teachers as judges in CAT may provide them opportunities to have exchanges, make their conception of creativity explicit, reflect on it, and, in the long run, strengthen their conception of creativity (Cheng, 2008).

Assessing student improvisational learning skills. Not all classroom improvisation brings about observable co-constructed products. Another valuable outcome of improvisational teaching may be the improvisational learning style or skills which students develop. Lobman and Lundquist (2007) highlighted the value of assessing the fundamentals (i.e. the basic knowledge and skills) of improvisation and the transfer of them. To assess these transferable skills and habits, teachers are suggested to evaluate how well and often students used the language of improvisation and demonstrate the improvisational behaviors in regular lessons and other contexts. Lobman and Lundquist (2007) suggested us to consider these questions:

How are students doing at making use of “offers” and avoiding negation in their academic and informal conversation in the classroom? Are they using the language of improvisation in other contexts?

Are students listening to one another and to you in order to hear and build with offers?

Do students respond during classroom discussion or other learning times in ways that are mindful of an obligation not just to get the right answer but to contribute to the group’s learning as a whole?

(Lobman & Lundquist, 2007, p. 23)
Here come several questions—Can students self-evaluate their own development in improvisational learning? Can teachers observe and assess this student development during their regular teaching? Or should they take video-tapes for post-lesson analysis and reflection, after implementing improvisation teaching for a certain period of time? Empirical study on assessing improvisational learning skills is absent and is called for in this chapter.

Assessing student creativity within structure. Apart from co-constructed products and improvisational skills, another significant outcome of classroom improvisation is the creativity development of students. In our present school curriculum, assessment of creativity needs to be integrated within the subject content. Beghetto and Kaufman (2011) elaborate the integration with an example:

In students’ creative learning of Hiku poetry, ... teacher would not simply require students to replicate a model poem nor to request students to write a widely unique poem with no alignment with the convention of Hiku. Rather, teacher would develop a lesson (and assessment task) that is fluid enough for students to express their own unique contribution, while staying within the fixed conventions of Hiku form. ... In this way, the judgment of whether a student’s poem was creative would based on whether the content provided was original yet still adhered to the fixed form of Hiku poetry.

The reason for integration goes beyond curriculum convenience. Brookhart (2010) further emphasized that creativity in student’s work is grounded in deep understanding of the discipline. The creative aspects of her work are an integral part of her understanding. Therefore assessing creativity should include discipline accuracy and goodness. Both creativity-related criteria and conventional criteria for real-life work in the discipline should also be involved. Echoed with Sawyer (2011a), it seems that assessment is also an artful balance (and integration) of subject knowledge and creativity!

Using improvisational activities to assess improvisational learning. Forrester (2000), Lobman and Lundquist (2007) and Lobman (2007) suggested using role-playing and drama improvisation as an assessment tool. Lobman and Lundquist (2007) described an example—a theater improvisation activity called “History Bus.” In it, students discussed in groups on a common issue playing the role of different historical persons (e.g. Jesus Christ or Martin Luther), then the representatives of the groups meet in a “bus” and argue around the issue from different perspectives. This activity engages students with the history content and simultaneously requires students to create in improvisation. Apart from assessing and facilitating creative development, this activity also assesses and reinforces the history content knowledge of students (Lobman, 2007). Lobman and Lundquist (2007) further proposed that the student improvisational skills best assessed in ongoing performance-based activity designed by students. The performance is evaluated through debriefing and conversations among the observers and the performers. In sum, these improvisational activities are effective in assessing improvisational skills, understanding of subject matter and creativity of students, in an integrative way.

Use of authentic assessments. Authentic assessments, like learning logs, portfolios, projects, inquiry-based and problem-based works, are commonly found in literature for assessing creative learning (Elton, 2010; Fournier, 2011, Lindstrom, 2012; Lobman & Lundquist, 2007; McLaren, 2012; Ronald, 2006; Silveira, 2013; Snyder, 2013). In many ways, these authentic assessment works possess the characteristics of improvisational learning. Fournier (2011) directly commented that these authentic assessments can also involve student improvisations. These authentic tasks require students to apply their new skills and knowledge in a real-world context, with many unknowns.
and uncertainties. As a result, these assessment activities facilitate the synthesis of multi-discipline knowledge (Fournier, 2011) and the transfer of learning to real-life (Barnett & Ceci, 2005). In terms of openness and flexibility, individual students may learn different things at different paces in constructive learning. These assessment formats are less restrictive, and they are open enough to scaffold various kinds of learning and student outcomes (Cree, 2000). Elton (2010) commented that the best way to do assessment without predetermined outcomes is in the form of portfolio or project work. In most of the above assessment methods, not only final creative products (if any) are assessed, their creative processes are also documented and evaluated (Mclaren, 2012). This integration of process and products allow teachers to induce formative purposes into summative assessments. Furthermore, this open authentic approach offers chances for students to have self-directed learning (Mok, 2010) and self-assessment (Silveira, 2013). Like improvisational learning, Elton (2010) and Craft (2005) commented that students should take part in the decision on how they are assessed and what they are assessed on, and teachers’ evaluation should be balanced by student interpretations (Belluigi, 2011). Furthermore, these authentic assessments encourage students to focus on self-improvement and personal goals, and also allow students to choose tasks of their personal interest and meanings (Beghetto, 2005; Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010; Brookhart, 2010).

Assessing unexpected learning outcomes. In creative learning, the outcomes are sometimes difficult to define or to predict (Elton, 2010). Earl (2013) advised educators to expect the unexpected in the process of assessment. Yet, assessments measures focused at assessing unexpected learning outcomes are seldom found in literature. In reviewing design education, Giloi and du Toit (2013) found that, forcing lecturers to use the common assessment methodologies to assess creative works always met with resistance. In order to encourage creativity, lecturers prefer to leave learning outcomes open ended, so as to accommodate the unexpected and unique solutions. On the same lines, Cheng (2010c) showed that searching for unexpected outcomes in summative assessments may be possible and valuable. In marking the course final assignments of a teaching method course for prospective teachers, Cheng (2010c) deliberately searched for learning outcomes that were not included in the course objectives. Surprisingly, quite a number of valuable unintended learning outcomes were identified and cross-validated by her co-teaching partner. However, as restricted by the pre-designed assessment criteria and rubric, these unintended outcomes had not received the credits they deserved to have.

Conclusion

This chapter explores various approaches of assessment for creative teaching and learning, in relation to classroom improvisation. In result, this chapter informs the field that, though there exists a strong tension view between assessment and improvisational teaching, not all assessments are harmful. There are quite a number of assessment approaches and practices which may have high potential and value in supporting improvisational teaching and learning. They cover four areas—micro-assessment in/for live teaching, contextual-assessment in/for teaching planning, assessing improvisational learning processes, and assessing student learning outcomes. If teaching is a balance of structure and improvisation, then how about its assessment in these curriculum dualities? This study revealed that:

- To foster this balance in teaching, educators need to conduct both planned and instant assessment, in which they assess student thinking, student ideas, class flow, student learning habits, opportunities in subject content, classroom resources and constraints, and also need to give constructive balanced feedback to students.
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- To facilitate creative learning in subject content, educators need to seek balance in assessing student learning—between process and product of learning, authentic tasks and standard tests, teacher and student-assessment, subject knowledge and creativity, immediate and transferable skills, expected and unexpected outcomes.

A “balance” perspective on assessment is emerging in this study. Earl (2013) suggested the right balance of assessment of, for and as learning is in a pyramid shape, with assessment of learning the least and at the tip, assessment as learning the most and at the bottom, and assessment for learning in the middle. However, what is the right balance between structure and improvisation? What is the right balance in the above assessment dualities? How to assess these balances? The pursuit of balancing is always difficult but fundamental to life and education. In future, local educators may try to explore whether the traditional yin-yang wisdom of Chinese culture can enlighten the study of balancing.

This chapter targets at widening the conception of creativity assessment from merely measuring creativity of students to many other aspects. The assessments described in this chapter facilitate creative or improvisational teaching and learning in various ways. Some of these assessment processes are themselves meaningful learning which can be integrated into the improvisational pedagogies. As Earl (2013) suggested, this is a kind of “assessment for learning” or, in more specific terms, “assessment as learning.” If these assessment methods can be better developed and implemented in a proper way, they may have a substantial leverage effect on our creativity educational reform. Educators should find ways to strengthen the creativity-conducive assessments and reduce the harm of the hindering ones.

This chapter reveals that disciplined improvisation is a valuable perspective in studying creativity assessment. Improvisation highlights the dynamic, unpredictable, ongoing co-constructing nature of creative teaching, and also serves to remind educators of this nature in considering school assessment. Researching and training on improvisational teaching (and its assessment) is not popular in Hong Kong or elsewhere. Most of the assessment topics discussed in this chapter are still under-developed. Based on the admittedly limited amount of available research on this topic, part of this chapter is speculative. More studies (especially empirical studies) on assessments for creative teaching and learning are required to fill up this knowledge gap.

The prevailing positivistic and outcome-based education approach brings fundamental conflict between assessment and improvisational teaching. In future, educational assessment should go beyond this paradigm to re-conceptualize a more diverse perspective of assessment. Conceiving knowledge as an emergence of collaborative interaction, school assessment should be a continuous reciprocal process of observing, judging, reflecting, communicating, adjusting, creating and improvising (in integration with the conventional planning, teaching and learning). In the process of improvisational teaching and learning, teachers and students are conducting numerous planned and unplanned assessments, assessing themselves, assessing each other and assessing their environments. Their creativities are called for, not only for creative teaching and learning (Jeffrey & Craft, 2004), but also for their assessments. Shifting from the positivistic view to the socio-constructive view of teaching and learning, the study of assessment is of greater diversity, complexity and significance.

References

Assessment for creative teaching and learning


