# NURTURING THE IMAGINATION: CREATIVITY PROCESSES AND INNOVATIVE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECTS

By

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*ABSTRACT*

*This article explores the creativity processes involved in designing and analyzing innovative qualitative research projects and evaluates examples of recent models and typologies that illustrate a variety of ways to approach qualitative inquiry. Using Gardner's Five Minds (2006) typology, Boyer's Model of Scholarship (1997) and Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956;1973) the authors will provide new ideas for ways to foster creative thinking within graduate programs designed to prepare educators. Visual thinking/writing activities (Grady, 2001;Deaver and McAuliffe,2009;Sanders-Bustle,2008), arts-based qualitative research ( Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis,1997;Leavy, 2009; Eisner, 2008; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, and Gouzouasis, 2008), as well as graduate-level pedagogies aimed at strengthening metacognition, all hold promise for evoking interdisciplinary understandings. These interdisciplinary understandings will hopefully lead graduate students to the kinds of multi-modal displays of knowledge needed for exemplary 21st century teaching and learning. The authors contend that describing and defining Creative Inquiry Practices (CIPs), that can be used for pedagogy and research, receive little attention in the already relatively small amount of literature dedicated to pedagogical practices for graduate students. Exploring the conditions and pedagogical prompts that help establish an environment for creativity and innovation will be discussed by two university faculty members engaged in preparing graduate student teacher-scholars at two different US institutions of higher education. The authors are interested in designing and describing innovative pedagogies aimed at helping graduate students build and use their Research Imagination(RI) as an essential part of the qualitative inquiry process.*

*Keywords: Creativity, Imagination, Qualitative Research, Innovative Pedagogies, Graduate Education.*

## INTRODUCTION

This article explores the creativity processes involved in designing and analyzing innovative qualitative research projects and evaluates examples of recent models and typologies that illustrate a variety of ways to approach qualitative inquiry. Using Gardner's Five Minds (2006) typology, Boyer's Model of Scholarship (1997) and Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956;1973) the authors will provide new ideas for ways to foster creative thinking within graduate programs designed to prepare educators. Visual thinking/writing activities (Grady, 2001;Deaver and McAuliffe,2009;Sanders-Bustle,2008), arts-based qualitative research (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis,1997;Leavy, 2009; Eisner, 2008; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, and Gouzouasis, 2008), as well as graduate-level pedagogies aimed at strengthening metacognition, all hold promise for evoking interdisciplinary understandings. These interdisciplinary understandings will hopefully lead graduate students to the kinds of multi-modal displays of knowledge needed for exemplary 21st century teaching and learning. The authors contend that describing and defining Creative Inquiry Practices (CIPs), that can be used for pedagogy and research, receive little attention in the already relatively small amount of literature dedicated to pedagogical practices for graduate students. Exploring the conditions and pedagogical prompts that help to establish an environment for creativity and innovation will be discussed by two university faculty members engaged in preparing graduate student teacher-scholars at two different US institutions of higher education. The authors are interested in designing and describing innovative pedagogies

aimed at helping graduate students build and use their Research Imagination(RI) as an essential part of the qualitative inquiry process.

### Building Creative Pedagogies

Creativity, in educational processes, is a concept that has been explored from different vantage points, such as the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959), the concept of flow as a psychological and intellectual state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; 2004), as a process qualitative researchers are engaged in when collecting and analyzing data (Janesick, 2001) to a process invoking the imagination (Robinson, 2011). In addition, creativity has been studied as an agent for social change via educational systems (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education,1999), and for understanding the relationship between the personal (implicit) theories held by educational researchers and the explicit theories that arrive in their research products and pedagogical actions (Maksic and Pavlovic, 2011). For the purposes of this article the authors are interested in providing further description and analysis related to the role creativity plays in preparing and nurturing graduate student teacher-scholars engaged in qualitative inquiry.

### Multi-modal, Interdisciplinary and Dynamic Qualities of Creative Qualitative Inquiry (CQI) for Graduate Students

The authors believe that Gardner (1983; 2006), Bloom (1956;1973) and Boyer (1997) offer a combination of useful theoretical vantage points from which to examine ways to create learning spaces that help students build their capacities for creative inquiry. Especially in our current digital media environment, where multi-modal knowledge-consumption and knowledge-production practices are embedded, educators need to develop new spaces and ways for learners to respond to the challenges and limitations of innovative technologies which have a pervasive influence on learning (Evans, Mulvihill and Brooks, 2008; Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2011). Gardner (1983) identified multiple ways people learn and referred to them as the eight intelligences namely, linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic. Gardner, and others, have used his theory of multiple intelligences to reinforce the need for multi-modal teaching and learning. More recently Gardner developed a typology he referred to as the five distinct minds (Gardner, 2006). The authors argue that these five minds can be interpreted for pedagogical purposes, as well as for the educational policy and democracy-building purposes Gardner originally designed them to address. These five minds, can be understood, broadly, as an articulation of the various ways humans encounter learning environments and tasks. Applied to graduate students gathered to explore qualitative inquiry practices, the five minds might be used to generate increased capacities for creativity. Next is a brief description of each domain.

### Garner's Five Minds Applied to Creative Qualitative Inquiry (CQI)

The disciplined mind is concerned with mastery of a body of disciplinary knowledge, and the commitment to continuous improvement related to knowledge acquisition and understanding as the discipline content evolves over time. The synthesizing mind focuses on making meaning through metacognition activities and develops effective communication strategies to be able to convey new understanding to others. The creating mind engages in the process of developing new questions and stretching the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge. "The disciplined mind represents depth of knowledge, the synthesizing mind represents breadth of knowledge, and the creating mind represents the stretch of knowledge. The final two minds—the respectful mind and the ethical mind—are not cognitive, in the traditional sense, but rather represent the way individuals relate to the human sphere." (Davis and Gardner, 2012, np). The respectful mind seeks to be in a state of empathy as it understands and engages with others even when differing points of view emerge. And finally, the ethical mind requires "cognitive maturation" and the ability to think in "abstract terms about the rights and responsibilities associated with one's roles" within a pluralistic democracy (Davis and Gardner, 2012, np).

In teaching qualitative inquiry, the authors have found it

useful to apply Gardner's work to different aspects of the qualitative research process and related scholarly writing. The analogy of the disciplined mind is used to help students understand the rigor that is required in locating a research problem or an issue worthy of further study. The synthesizing mind serves as a useful analogy for helping students conduct reviews of literature and the creating mind is useful for generating a research question. The creating mind analogy is also used to help students think in terms of the significance of the research they are undertaking. In what ways are they adding to existing knowledge or how are they reframing issues or problems in their field of study? The respectful mind teaches students to be mindful of fieldwork relations and to 'respect' participants in the research process. The respectful mind includes empathy, emotion and sensitivity in the inquiry process. Empathy is an important emotional tool for students of qualitative inquiry as it allows for a sensitive approach to the context of research and towards participants deemed 'vulnerable.' Being attentive to the emotions that researchers experience during the research process helps students to identify important moments that may result in themes for later analysis.

Sensitivity in inquiry leads a researcher to pay attention to non-verbal cues and communication. Additionally, sensitivity helps researchers see qualitative inquiry as a process of reciprocity. Reciprocity addresses issues of power in relationships between the researcher and researched. It involves a give and take in interactions; a judicious use of self-disclosure that allows an interview to change from an interrogation to a conversation. Traditional objectivist research methods with detached observers are increasingly critiqued in qualitative circles at the same time as newer requirements are put forward for research to serve the interests of the researched and take into account participants' views and analyses. Lincoln (1995) has referred to these demands as "emerging criteria of quality"(278). The relationship of reciprocity to trustworthiness is two-fold. First, reciprocity establishes the trustworthiness of the researcher and allows access into sites that typically have difficult entry points. Examples of such sites would be women's shelters or community groups negotiating local change. With reciprocity, the researcher is not conducting research "on subjects" but with participants. This changes the relationship of the researcher-researched from one of power to one with a more equitable footing. Second, reciprocity is examined continuously before entering the field, during fieldwork as well as post-fieldwork through reflexivity processes in order to question where and how the concept and practice of reciprocity allowed for doors of data to open or what types of limitations or blinds were drawn by participants in the process. In this sense, reciprocity serves as a rigorous tool for qualitative researchers (Harrison et al. 2001).

Finally, the ethical mind serves as a self-reflecting tool to help students understand and have conversations with themselves that pertain to whether and to what extent qualitative research is ethical and to locate the spaces where power and privilege reside. Gardner's theoretical framing of the five minds is conceptually congruent with his earlier work in developing a theory of multiple intelligences and both of these constructs have a symbiotic relationship to Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956;1973). Bloom's work is additionally useful in setting the stage for richer descriptions and understandings of the learning processes involved in building capacities for creativity. Combining Bloom's notions of the cognitive and affective domains in the goal and objective setting for graduate courses (specifically those designed to prepare creative thinking among educators) produces many useful permutations.

Bloom created a taxonomy (or typology) to help identify and describe three types of learning, the cognitive domain (focusing on knowledge construction), the affective domain (focusing on attitudes and dispositions) and the psychomotor domain (focusing on physical skills). The cognitive and affective domains will be explored here. The Cognitive Domain contains six categories of intellectual development ranging from simple to complex, namely knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Bloom, 1956). The Affective Domain, contains five categories of

emotional/attitudinal development namely receiving phenomena, responding to phenomena, valuing, organization, and internalizing values (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1973).

### Pedagogical Applications of Bloom's Work for Creative Qualitative Inquiry (CQI)

Utilizing Bloom's work, the authors of this article have found the taxonomy particularly useful in teaching qualitative writing. For example, the Cognitive Domain lends itself to the writing of qualitative reports particularly well. The process moves from simple to complex thinking, encourages application, and prompts the learner to thoroughly explore the new knowledge possibilities via analysis and synthesis processes. All of these activities are directly applicable to the writing of qualitative reports. Bloom's taxonomies not only serve as markers or as maps of where one is headed but also as developmental signposts in order to increasingly complicate our thinking. In practicing Creative Qualitative Inquiry (CQI) the authors of this article suggest that progressively complicated thinking serves to explicate nuances and makes visible the layers of interpretation in qualitative inquiry. Bloom's taxonomy, like Gardner's Frames and Minds, emphasizes the affective domain as much as the cognitive domain. The Affective Domain of Bloom's taxonomy reminds students of qualitative inquiry to document the subjective states of being rather than ignore them. Objectivity and subjectivity in qualitative inquiry are established procedurally through explicated data collection and data analysis techniques situated within a particular research design and do not refer to merely attitudinal states of mind in the process of inquiry.

### Pedagogy for Teaching Reflexivity via Creative Inquiry Practices (CIP) Leading to a Strong Research Imagination (RI)

Those teaching qualitative research methods to graduate students understand that a significant part of the pedagogy needed to shape Creative Inquiry Practices (CIPs) includes helping the students experience the inductive nature of the process including the realization that the researcher is the instrument of research, or in other words, the "medium for the discovery and interpretation of meanings" (Josselson, et. al., 2003, p. 4). This requires that the researcher make explicit that they are the 'instrument of research.' For example, Barrett explains that "viewing the graduate student in qualitative methods courses as an instrument of research shifts the instructional emphasis from knowing about the processes and traditions of qualitative research, to the development and refinement of the beginning qualitative researchers' concept of research and their engagement in it. This demands highly individualized instruction, guidance, and ongoing assessment." (Barrett, 2007, p. 418). This process, known as Reflexivity, is an essential dimension of all qualitative research projects (Watt, 2007; Breuer and Roth, 2003; Roulston, 2010). Therefore, CIPs can serve as a way to demonstrate the tools needed for high-quality reflexivity practices and the benefits that can be derived. Engaging in reflexivity at every point in the research process prompts the researcher to acknowledge the everyday decision making in the research process from patterns of reading the literature, to deciding what a 'do-able' research project might be, to noticing some issues more keenly over others in the field, etc. It is crucial for the researcher to document their diverse ways of seeing, feeling, valuing and responding to phenomena and their own positionality within a particular social context. In order to foster a climate of creativity and thoughtful reflection, the authors have asked students to go beyond the usual writing of memos and journals while analyzing and interpreting data. In order to 'crank up' the reflective muscles that they need for the writing process, the authors give a series of pedagogical prompts to their students to help them more fully engage in the process of reflexivity. These include multi-modal means of questioning, thinking and writing. Asking students to write blogs, take photos, create audio and visual journals (in addition to text-based research journals), write meta-cognitive memos in learning journals, painting connections between themes, create lists, summarize key themes in the form of a poem or a spoken-word-art video, creating word and image collages, creating digital stories, and writing imaginary letters to participants responding to their interview data

are just some of the ways the authors have prompted graduate students to help them practice the types of creativity needed to develop a strong Research Imagination (RI) through the process of reflexivity. Specific examples of the prompts used with graduate students to help them engage with CIPs can be found at QR Conversations (http://qrconversations.blogspot.com/) a pedagogical blog created by Swaminathan and Mulvihill. Additionally, Boyer's reconsideration of the forms and functions of scholarship (Boyer, 1997) helps to propel a new, more robust, discourse about learning processes that can assist educators designing learning experiences for graduate students as they build their capacity for a strong Research Imagination (RI).

### Boyer's Four Types of Scholarship Applied to Qualitative Inquiry Pedagogies

Boyer redefined the concept of scholarship into a new framework with four types of scholarship each with their own distinctive purpose, namely discovery, integration, application, and teaching. Discovery scholarship creates new knowledge through a more traditional set of research practices; Integration scholarship is designed to interpret the usefulness of the discovery scholarship; Application scholarship defines and frames societal problems in ways that discovery and integration scholarship can be used to address those problems; and teaching scholarship (or the scholarship of teaching) focuses on the teaching and learning theories and practices that are embedded in and propelling the other three forms of scholarship (Boyer, 1997). For the purposes of teaching qualitative inquiry, Boyer's schema is also useful. Discovery pertains to the systematic inquiry required for reviewing the literature or for systematic data collection, while integration scholarship pertains to the qualitative data analysis and application dimensions of qualitative research. Boyer's typology can be used to remind the scholar that it is important to frame the results through a theoretical lens. Boyer's inclusion of the scholarship of teaching lets faculty of such courses embed research into their pedagogical practices. The authors of this paper have thus far explained how three scholars' models or typologies can apply to the teaching of creative qualitative inquiry. In the following section, the authors explicate Creative Qualitative Inquiry by drawing on and integrating the three models/typologies previously highlighted.

The Creative Qualitative Inquiry Framework, combining aspects of the scholarship of Gardner, Bloom and Boyer, is specifically structured to support qualitative inquiry processes (tasks and evaluation of practice) (Figure 1). Frameworks like these can be starting points whereby Creative Inquiry Practices (CIPs) can be developed for pedagogical and research purposes. Noble's (2004) work, for example, recognized the benefits of employing Gardner's multiple intelligences (1983) ideas with Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (1956; 1973) to capitalize on the benefits of curriculum differentiation. Another example can be found in recent extrapolations of Boyer's model where a vibrant sub-field, referred to as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has materialized, including the 2004 establishment of The

| Combined Aspects of Boyer, Gardner & Bloom Models/Typologies | Relationship to Creative Qualitative Inquiry (CQI) Tasks | Evaluation of Creative Inquiry Practice (CIP) |
|---|---|---|
| Boyer's Discovery<br>Gardner's Disciplined Mind<br>Bloom's Cognitive Domain | Foundational Study: Learning to find a research issue.<br>Encounter: Encountering phenomena | The issue/problem is of social significance<br>The phenomenon is appropriate for the inquiry |
| Boyer's Integration<br>Gardner's Synthesizing mind<br>Bloom's Cognitive Domain (Analysis & Synthesis) | Interpretations: Developing "thick" interpretations<br>Representation (Whose voice is heard in the research? How are voices represented?) | Different types of representations are included.<br>The documentation is represented through various modes/means (Multi-modal means). |
| Boyer's Scholarship of Teaching & Scholarship of Application<br>Gardner's respectful mind & ethical mind<br>Bloom's Affective Domain | Dispositions or habits of mind<br>Reflexivity Empathy<br>Resemblances<br>Pedagogies of imagination | The researcher examined her/his own position with regard to the research.<br>The situations /contexts of this inquiry are discussed.<br>The discussion and implications arrive at meaningful insights and inspire/direct new actions. |

Figure 1. Creative Qualitative Inquiry Framework (CQIF)

International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (ISSOTL) and the Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (JOSOTL). These are important and useful sites for researchers and educators interested in continuous engagement with creative qualitative inquiry practices (CIPs). Creativity needs to be intentionally emphasized and can be nurtured through such CIPs. The aim of creative qualitative inquiry is to produce end products that help move analysis away from mere factors and statements toward more nuanced understandings of context where layers of meaning can be better understood. As Steele (2010) has pointed out, "scientific inquiries have choice points, places where the investigation has to decide what to do next without much formal guidance. Intuition and best guesses come into play" (p. 29). The Creative Qualitative Inquiry Framework (CQIF) is designed to assist students in formalizing and structuring intuition and choice-making during the process of research. The CQIF supports the stages of research with prompts and questions while allowing room for a 'whole picture' to emerge. Qualitative inquiry is an iterative process and the same questions may need to be asked and re-asked at different stages of the process. In this model, for example, "generalizability" (a contested term among qualitative researchers) of results is replaced with "resemblances." In qualitative inquiry it is far more useful to ask, what else does this resemble? How can these results be applied to similar contexts or spaces or places? This brings us closer to understanding the nature and purpose of subjectivity within qualitative inquiry.

In conclusion, drawing on the work of Boyer, Gardner and Bloom, the authors of this article contend that the Framework for Creative Qualitative Inquiry (i.e., Foundational Study, Encounter, Interpretation, Representation and Dispositions including Reflexivity), arranged as a summarizing guide, can help scholars build a creative qualitative inquiry process and stimulate the Research Imagination (RI) toward meaningful applications. Blending these, and other constructs that prize creativity, can often result in helping to produce dynamic educational spaces where the artificial boundaries between disciplines fade and new creative approaches to educational problems materialize.

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