

# Beghetto's Beautiful Risks

BY: MEGAN SWEENEY

Beghetto, R. A. (2018). *Beautiful Risks: Having the Courage to Teach and Learn Creatively*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Over the past few months, I have set out to uncover how risk-taking enhances creativity in the classroom and how exactly teachers can support this kind of risk-taking in their students. Ronald Beghetto's name dominated much of the research I came across on this particular topic. Scholarly journals, studies, videos, and even TED Talks by Beghetto explore the importance of intellectual risk-taking in the classroom and how it is essential for creativity. Much of what Beghetto has studied, written about, or co-written comes together in his 2018 book *Beautiful Risks: Having the Courage to Teach and Learn Creatively*.

The book is non-fiction and definitely geared towards teachers. It is a lighter read with only 128 pages and eight chapters. And although it may be small, it is mighty in content. Beghetto delves into the concept of beautiful risks in education to encourage educators to create and capitalize on learning opportunities generated by their and students' unique perspectives and experiences. Beghetto does this by helping identify the risks worth taking, anticipating and navigating potential hazards associated with those risks, and maximizing the potential benefits.

He provides insights, strategies, and examples to encourage risk-taking and creativity in the classroom. Each chapter addresses different aspects of *Beautiful Risks*:

**Chapter 1:** Differentiating between bad, good, and beautiful risks is essential. "Beautiful risks refer to having the courage to think and act in ways that go beyond oneself."

**Interesting Nugget:** Instead of creating a trusting environment, with the hope of building a willingness in students to take risks, require students to take risks together to build trust.

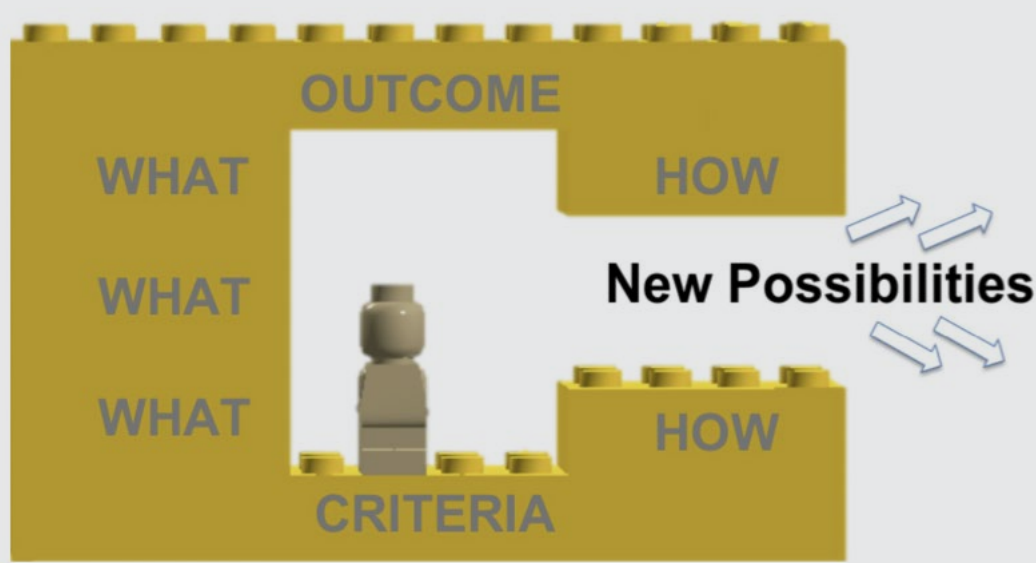
**Chapter 2:** Understanding what creativity means for your classroom is the first step toward taking a beautiful risk. Balance must be established between original thoughts/actions and meeting the guidelines/goals of a particular assignment (aka situational awareness). Creativity in the classroom is more than the arts, a magical technique, or a product.

**Chapter 3:** The teacher and the students "need to have courage and confidence to respond creatively to uncertainty." To do this, one must differentiate between good and bad types of uncertainty. A supportive and structured learning environment should be established.

**Chapter 4:** Have the courage and confidence to decide when it is a good idea to go off script and when it is not when encountering unexpected moments.

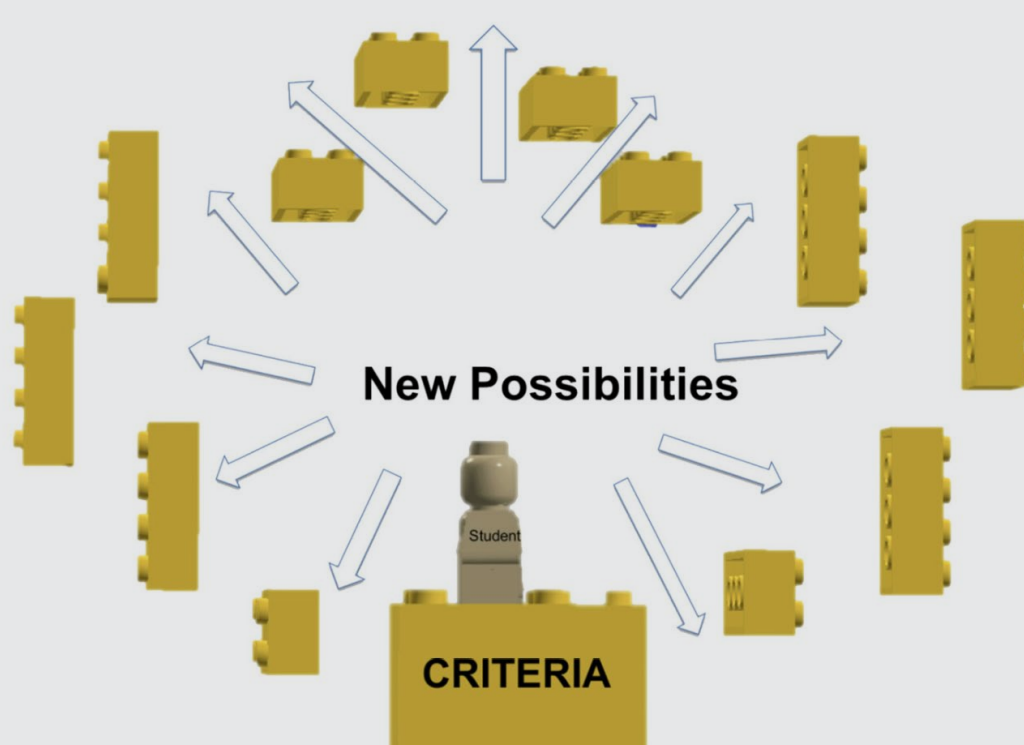
**Interesting Nugget:** "Unexpected moments serve as defining moments" as they tell our students "whether they can actually trust us with their emerging ideas, perspective, and questions—or not."

**Chapter 5:** Plan for uncertainty and creative openings by design. Start with "small openings" for new possibilities by doing some "lesson unplanning," which means removing one or more predetermined factors from a lesson to allow for creative expression.



**Figure 5.2. Small Openings for New Possibilities**

Then, work on "pushing out the walls and raising the ceiling." In other words, design lessons in which students establish what they do, how they do it, and the outcomes. Well-defined criteria, instructions, and support set by the teacher are essential for this to work.



**Figure 5.3. Pushing Out the Walls and Raising the Ceilings**

These learning experiences should be designed to contribute creatively to the school and/or surrounding community.

**Chapter 6:** The classroom environment should encourage creative expression instead of inadvertently suppressing it by helping students develop creative confidence, assisting students to recognize the value of their creative expression, and shifting perspective so that understanding how students are experiencing the classroom environment is possible.

**Chapter 7:** Assessment for creativity requires feedback that is honest, helpful, specific, supportive, and improvement-focused. Teachers also must model being open to receiving feedback and acting on it.

**Chapter 8:** There is no magic "instant creativity" tool. Instead of focusing on what technology or device is being used, more attention should be placed on how that tool is used. The ultimate goal should be less about finding something radically novel and more about opening up the existing curriculum for more creative expression.

What I appreciate about Beghetto is how actionable his writing is. His writing is accessible and engaging for a non-research-focused group. Or, in other words, he writes like an average person (who also happens to be mildly entertaining). Moreover, Beghetto's work provides a balanced approach, encouraging educators to foster creativity while meeting content standards obligations. The changes he is challenging educators to make are realistic. He includes tools and strategies with specific examples that can be introduced to students slowly so both the teacher and the student can get comfortable taking good and beautiful risks in the classroom. The checklists and visuals can be easily adapted to fit into many classrooms and projects. A complaint I frequently hear from teachers is that their curriculum leaves no room for creativity. Beghetto offers a solution that does not overhaul the existing curriculum but pokes holes into it to allow creativity to enter the classroom.

I recommend this book to any teacher who wants to unlock their true potential as educators and help their students realize, harness, and practice their creative thinking skills. It is a wonderful book to read and work from for professional development credit. It can be used by teachers in all content areas. Beghetto stresses the importance of not limiting creativity to the arts. He even discourages educators from further perpetuating this idea in how they speak about creativity. He uses many examples of math, science, and social studies demonstrate how uncertainty and beautiful risk-taking for creativity can and should be applied within ALL subjects. I also believe that teachers at all levels – elementary, middle school, high school, and even continuing education – could benefit from implementing some of the tools provided in *Beautiful Risks*.

This book is a treasure trove of information readily available and organized for my usage for the Big Question Paper required for this class (CRS 625) and to take from and implement in my classroom.