Genius

A state of intellectual or creative giftedness.

There are differences in intellectual attainment among people. Some people make strides in learning and creativity that are well beyond what would normally be expected and are called geniuses. Although definitions of genius, or giftedness, are inevitably culture-bound and subjective, psychologists are trying to determine what factors might contribute to its emergence.

In a 1981 study, William Fowler surveyed decades of scientific inquiry into the making of genius. He found that in one important study, 87% of the gifted children studied had been given substantial, intensive training by their parents at home, focusing on speech, reading, and mathematics—all highly structured avenues. The parents of these gifted children had ambitious and sometimes very specific plans for their children. The parents were nearly all from the professional class, allowing them the time and the money to de-
vote such resources to the intellectual development of their children.

Psychologists have examined various home-tutoring techniques and have found that there appears to be no single kind of stimulation that might turn a normal child into a gifted child. All methods seem to work, provided they center on language or math. It has even been suggested that the method matters little because the child is responding to the quantity of attention rather than to the content of what is being taught.

When a person reaches school age, it becomes possible to measure his or her intelligence more reliably. Intelligence tests are the subject of intense debate among psychologists, educators, and the general public. Most standardized tests measure logical-mathematical, linguistic, and spatial intelligence. However, the idea of multiple intelligences was formulated by psychologist Howard Gardner, who defined six components of intelligence: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, and personal. Today, many people regard intelligence as comprising different types of skills and talents. Most school systems, however, continue to measure intelligence, and giftedness, according to test results measuring logical-mathematical, linguistic, and spatial intelligence. Gifted people are often identified by their unusually high scores on traditional intelligence tests.

Further Reading

Arnold Gesell
1880-1961
American psychologist and pediatrician whose principal area of study was the mental and physical development of normal individuals from birth through adolescence.

Arnold Gesell was born in Alma, Wisconsin, and received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin. In 1906, he earned his Ph.D. from Clark University, where he was motivated to specialize in child development by studying with the prominent American psychologist G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924). Gesell received his M.D. from Yale University in 1915. After briefly holding a position at the Los Angeles State Normal School, he was appointed an assistant professor of at Yale University, where he established the Clinic of Child Development and served as its director from 1911 to 1948. He was later a consultant with the Gesell Institute of Child Development. Gesell’s early work involved the study of mental retardation in children, but he soon became convinced that an understanding of normal development is necessary for the understanding of abnormal development.

Gesell was among the first to implement a quantitative study of human development from birth through adolescence, focusing his research on the extensive study of a small number of children. He began with preschool children and later extended his work to ages 5 to 10 and 10 to 16. From his findings, Gesell concluded that mental and physical development in infants, children, and adolescents are comparable and parallel orderly processes. In his clinic, he trained researchers to collect data and produced reports that had a widespread influence on both parents and educators. The results of his research were utilized in creating the Gesell Development Schedules, which can be used with children between four weeks and six years of age. The test measures responses to standardized materials and situations both qualitatively and quantitatively. Areas emphasized in-