

Review: Kaufman, S.B. (2007). **Genius**. In C.R. Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, E. (Eds). *Encyclopedia of Special Education* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Wiley.

## GENIUS

The original conception of genius was of a deity that would reside within an individual and have a profound influence on the development of his or her mental powers and spiritual growth. Recently the concept of genius has been subsumed within psychology and philosophy. Galton (1869) developed a quantitative concept of genius as an innate or inherited ability, and Lombroso (1891) conceived of genius as a manifestation of abnormal psychology – as akin to madness. Hirsch (1931) even proposed that the genius should be viewed as a separate psychological species.

Historically, the term genius has been used synonymously with the term giftedness as measured by standardized tests of intelligence. In the early stages of Terman's research, Terman equated the giftedness with high IQ, and expressed the view on many occasions that from high-IQ children "and no where else, our geniuses in every line are recruited" (Terman, 1924). Also, in approaching his monumental longitudinal study of gifted children, Terman (1925) used the term gifted, but he nevertheless titled the entire series of books that resulted *Genetic Studies of Genius*.

Today, researchers note the differences observed between giftedness and genius, and thus make a conceptual distinction between the two constructs (e.g., Jensen, 1996; Simonton, 2000). Also, the term genius is used less frequently than it was. When it is used, it often references extremely high levels of adult creativity and accomplishment. Contemporary giftedness researchers incorporate the distinction between childhood giftedness and real world genius into their theories. Renzulli (2005) distinguishes between "schoolhouse giftedness" (which is most important during the grade school years) and "creative-productive giftedness" (which is most important for high levels of adult, real world achievement). Tannenbaum (1996) notes the distinction between those who are consumers of knowledge and the producers of knowledge. Gagné (2005) makes the distinction between giftedness (which can be conceptualized as childhood potential) and talent (which may be conceptualized as adulthood achievement). Contemporary giftedness researchers are interested in determining the factors that link gifted potential to adult eminence.

Research on the origins and nurturance of genius has often taken the form of studies of eminent people or very high achievers, an approach pioneered by Galton (1869). In Volume II of *Genetic Studies of Genius* (1926), Catherine Cox and others (including Lewis Terman) studied the early mental traits of 300 geniuses, and estimated their IQs.

The biographical method continues today, with detailed analyses of unambiguously defined geniuses who are no longer living. There has been an increasing recognition amongst biographical researchers as to the importance of family, schooling, hard work, and other variables in determining giftedness. Howe (1999a) provides case studies suggesting the important influence of a stimulating and intellectual background in the development of genius. Gardner's (1993) analysis of seven eminent creators demonstrates that creators put enormous amounts of time and energy into their work. Taking a more quantitative approach, Simonton (1994)

has attempted to identify environmental and personal trends that have affected the quality and quantity of a large number of famous creators.

Research by Bloom (1985), however, focused on living subjects who have achieved world recognition. The research by Bloom and his predecessors agree in the finding that genius, giftedness, special talent, and high ability often appear as precocious behaviour; for instance, accomplishments in youth that far exceed normal achievements. However, Howe (1999b) notes case studies of individuals who were not particularly precocious while younger, but nonetheless grew up to be highly eminent creators. The reasons why childhood and adulthood are not always linked is an ongoing topic of interest amongst scholars.

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