



Eureka! The Science of Genius

Scientific American Editors

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How do we define genius? For the Mega Society, it means a one-in-a-million level score on an IQ test, which is why the society only has 27 members. Standardized testing to measure intelligence began in the first half of the 20th century, but a high IQ score is only one way to quantify genius. Another is by virtue of extraordinary achievement and expertise in science and the arts. The second is probably more useful, but these debates illustrate how little we know about the origins, development or processes of intelligence. In this eBook, *Eureka! The Science of Genius*, we review the latest research on the nature of intellectual and creative achievement, including traits that geniuses tend to share, how much of their ability is nature versus nurture, the cognitive processes involved during the stages of discovery and creativity, and, most importantly, what we can do to enhance intelligence. While genetics have a large role to play, even geniuses have to work to gain the necessary expertise – although they have to spend less time to acquire it than their less endowed counterparts – as Dean Keith Simonton points out in the eBook’s namesake article, “The Science of Genius.” Imaging research also indicates that there is no one “blueprint” for intelligence. In “What Does a Smart Brain Look Like?” Richard J. Haier explains how women and men with the same IQ scores show different patterns of gray and white matter, suggesting that the structural roots of intelligence may differ by gender. Many articles look at either nurturing intelligence in children or enhancing it in adults, and the good news is that intellectual abilities are not set in stone. In fact, one method is surprisingly simple – move. As Christopher Hertzog points out in “Fit Body, Fit Mind?” physical activity is linked to mental acuity and can help slow the cognitive decline that comes with aging. Research is also providing insight into what happens in the brain when we learn, leading to changes in educational practices. In “What Works, What Doesn’t,” psychology professors describe study techniques that accelerate learning—and reveal that the most popular methods are actually a waste of time, and in “Calisthenics for a Child’s Mind,” Ingrid Wickelgren reports on brain-training exercises that show promise in classrooms. Carol S. Dweck advocates the importance of a “growth mind-set” that focuses on effort and effective strategies rather than innate intelligence in her article “The Secret to Raising Smart Kids.” This approach emphasizes hard work and love of the challenge of learning, an approach that could benefit everyone, regardless of IQ score.

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