

Characteristics of Historically Eminent Men and Women, High School Artists and Scientists

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When it comes to identifying the common traits of eminent men or women, most of us will love to have a list of suggested traits and behaviours that might help early or premature planning for finding the gifted and developing the talented or the able. As Callahan put it: “We must also be cognizant of the many myths and stereotypes surrounding the characteristics of the gifted (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2018, p. 153). Some recent observation and findings might offer us more multi-dimensional views on the development of MI children.

Rimm, Siegle, and Davis (2018) cited the following traits summed up in a study of 771 high school students. Three groups were identified: (1) students who won competitive awards in science, (2) students who won awards in the arts, and (3) average classmates. The scientists and artist groups showed a number of traits in common. According to self-reports, students in these groups:

- Visited libraries for non-school reading, had greater numbers of books at home, and found books more interesting than people.
- Had early strong interests in mechanical and scientific objects, as well as the arts.
- Were interested in work with fine details.
- Liked school, studied hard, and completed their work faster than classmates.
- Felt more creative, curious, and expressive than others and believed it is important to be creative.
- Selected creativity, rather than wealth and power, as the “best characteristic to develop in life.”
- Indicated that they were brighter and quicker to understand than their friends.
- Attached great importance to money, expected to earn higher salaries than the averages, and expected to earn graduate degrees. (Rimm et al, 2018 p. 31)

To what extent do you see your students or children possess the traits listed above? To what extent do the list or the list-to-be help you as parent or teacher predict, nurture, and expect higher from your child? Will the traits add any burdens or create any biases to your education “experiments” or mislead your “talent investment”?

According to Rimm, Siegle, and Davis (2018), the following traits are common to almost all of these gifted and visibly productive men and women: versatility, concentration, perseverance, superior communication skills, at least moderately high intelligence. This kind of “productive men and women” were also rated “ethical, sensitive, optimistic, magnetic, and popular” (p. 31).

How valid are these yardsticks? Will this kind of doubt, hesitation, or even uncertainty build a good buffer to the subjective or narrow perception imposed by the list of restrictive labels? Will parents, teachers, and policy-makers allow more compromising or negative terms in the truth-seeking process?

Maybe it is time we practiced more what we believed. As Jill Harrison Berg (2020) has it in his article about educators in collaboration and discussion: “where educators collaborate, outcomes can be greater for students”(“Deepening Faculty Dialogue,” p. 84). Maybe, by asking more questions, thinking together, and leaving more space for dialogue, we can be more “cognizant” about the impacts of labels; and we may want more space for the known and the unknown, the vague and the concrete, as well as the general and the specific.

References

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