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What Makes Giftedness? Reexamining a Definition

by Joseph S. Renzulli

Structured Summary

The article reviews historical and contemporary definitions of giftedness, proposes an operational definition based on three interlocking trait clusters—general ability, task commitment, and creativity—and discusses implications for identification and educational practice.

Key Findings

- Definitions of giftedness lie on a conservative-to-liberal continuum, with trade-offs between objective test scores and subjective judgment.
- The USOE's six-category definition expands ability domains but omits non-intellective (motivational) factors and mixes processes with performance areas, leading to misapplication.
- Empirical work consistently identifies three equally important trait clusters in gifted individuals: above-average general ability, task commitment, and creativity.
- Traditional academic test scores have limited predictive validity for later creative or professional success; many high-achieving adults were not top-percentile test takers.
- Task commitment is as essential as raw ability for gifted performance.

Objectives

The purpose is to identify the non-intellectual traits that distinguish highly successful gifted individuals and to propose an operational definition of giftedness that integrates ability, task commitment, and creativity.

Methods

A narrative literature review was conducted, examining historical documents, policy definitions (e.g., USOE), and empirical research on intelligence, achievement, and creative accomplishment to synthesize common trait clusters.

Longitudinal follow-up, comparative group analysis (most vs. least successful), intensive case studies of eminent professionals, and literature reviews of trait clusters were employed; personality traits were measured via questionnaires and expert ratings, while intelligence was assessed with standard IQ tests.

Methodological details are not provided in the citation list; the titles imply use of psychometric testing, longitudinal prediction studies, and literature reviews.

Results

The synthesis leads to a proposed operational definition: giftedness is the interaction of (a) general intellectual ability, (b) sustained task commitment, and (c) creative or productive thinking, manifested in any socially valuable domain and requiring differentiated educational services.

Intelligence alone did not predict achievement; the most successful gifted individuals showed higher persistence, goal integration, self-confidence, and lower inferiority feelings. Across studies, task commitment consistently emerged as a strong predictor of creative/productive accomplishment, while academic ability showed limited correlation.

Concrete results are not presented in the excerpt; the references indicate outcomes such as the establishment of criteria for scientific competence and assessments of creativity across various domains.

Conclusions

An effective definition of giftedness must balance objective measures with subjective judgments, incorporate motivational traits, and avoid rigid cut-offs that exclude many potentially high-performing individuals. Educators should use a multi-criteria identification system that reflects the three-cluster model rather than relying solely on intelligence or achievement tests.

Giftedness should be defined as the interaction of three trait clusters: above-average general abilities, high task commitment, and high creativity; identification systems that ignore any cluster are incomplete and risk overlooking truly gifted individuals.

No explicit conclusions are included in the provided text; the collection of references suggests a consensus that creativity can be systematically studied and that its measurement has implications for education and professional fields.

Limitations

The article relies on existing literature and does not present new empirical data; the proposed definition may still be challenged by cultural variations in what constitutes “socially useful” performance, and the balance between objective and subjective criteria remains unresolved.

Current research relies heavily on IQ tests and self-selected elite samples, and creativity assessments (e.g., divergent-thinking tests) have limited predictive validity and high subjectivity, constraining the generalizability of findings.

The excerpt does not discuss limitations; however, the inclusion of a critique titled “Creativity Tests: A Boor or Boondoggle for Education?” hints at concerns regarding the validity and utility of existing creativity assessments.

Future Work

Further research should (1) develop reliable, culturally sensitive instruments for assessing task commitment and creativity; (2) test the three-cluster definition in diverse educational settings; and (3) explore how motivational factors interact with intelligence to predict long-term achievement.

Develop validated instruments for measuring task commitment and creativity, expand longitudinal studies to diverse populations, and create identification protocols that operationalize the three-cluster model across varied performance domains.

Future research directions are not specified, but the breadth of topics—from childhood genius to architectural creativity—implies ongoing investigation into diverse expressions of creative potential.

Practical Applications

Schools can design identification protocols that combine standardized test scores with teacher/peer nominations, portfolio reviews, and measures of sustained engagement.

Program developers should create differentiated curricula that nurture creativity and task commitment alongside intellectual development.

Policy makers may revise state definitions to reflect the three-cluster model, reducing over-reliance on percentile cut-offs.

Educational programs should broaden gifted-student selection criteria beyond test scores to include assessments of persistence, goal orientation, and creative output; curricula should foster sustained effort and creative problem-solving, and schools should provide differentiated services for children exhibiting the full trait constellation.

The bibliography references works that address educational prediction, test development, and the application of creativity research to academic and professional settings, suggesting practical relevance for educators, psychologists, and policymakers.

Study Subjects

26 states ndw define children

Wallach has concluded that: Above intermediate score levels, academic skills assessments are found to States Define Giftedness. **Twenty-six states ndw define children who are exceptional by virtue of giftedness either in statutes or in state**

department of education regulations.*. Pennsylvania, Idaho, Florida, and North Carolina require the same formal IEP

Statistics and Tests

Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale

At the conservative end of the continuum is Lewis Terman's definition of giftedness, ''the top 1% level in general intellectual ability, as measured by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale or a comparable instrument''?