



THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

If you've ever felt as though you aren't clever enough, perhaps you need to change how you look at the definition of intelligence, rather than yourself

Have you ever had experiences at school that made you feel as though you weren't intelligent? Are there some subjects you just can't grasp, no matter how hard you try? Sometimes the idea that you aren't clever or able to do a certain subject can really get you down, but a more in-depth look at the concept of intelligence reveals that a simple label is not the best way to interpret it.

Intelligence is defined as 'the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills'. So while knowledge is the information you learn, intelligence is the ability to use that and other skills in a practical way. It's important to be aware of the difference – just because you don't know a fact about a subject, it doesn't mean you don't have the ability to learn it.

Change your perspective

Throughout history, there have been various tests to judge intelligence. For example, IQ tests measure 'intelligence quotient' and give a number to represent a person's reasoning ability relative to others. But there are problems with trying to quantify something like intelligence, as measuring ability to perform in a test environment may not reflect the ability to apply knowledge and skills in real life. It's also questionable how much a test result matters when it's different to most real-world scenarios.

An aptitude for dancing, cooking or art has traditionally not been as valued as sciences, for example, yet these

subjects are important to culture and people's wellbeing. And being good at the arts is often considered a talent rather than intelligence, but might there be something wrong with the way we categorise certain subjects?

For example, emotional intelligence – the 'ability to understand your emotions and those of others, as well as behaving appropriately in different situations' – wouldn't fall under the classic definition of intelligence. It's a useful life skill, however, and can sometimes help you get along with colleagues and make friends. Importantly with this one, though, it's vital to remember that no two brains are the same and people interpret behaviours differently.

Intelligence was once considered to be completely genetic but now modern researchers are aware that it's affected by other factors, including stress levels, a healthy diet and sleep (or lack of it). Just as a flower needs the right conditions to flourish, so do humans.

If you're struggling with a subject, it might not depend on your intelligence – it could be because you're tired, stressed or upset about an emotional difficulty in your life.

People also have different styles of learning. Some people learn visually, others do better aurally (by listening). Some prefer being in a group, others are happier alone. If a method of teaching isn't matching your learning style, this can affect your ability to take on knowledge.

Need proof that intelligence varies? Turn the page



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Think differently? You're in good company

Albert Einstein

Though one of the most influential and well-known scientists of our time, Einstein's teachers predicted that he 'would never amount to anything'. It's thought that if he had been alive today, he probably would have been diagnosed with dyslexia – a common learning difficulty that can cause problems with reading, writing and spelling. The German physicist had difficulties communicating at school but went on to develop the theory of relativity, consequently changing our culture's ideas about space and time.

Florence Welch

The lead singer of successful indie-rock band Florence + The Machine was diagnosed with dyslexia, as well as dyspraxia – a coordination disorder that can make people appear clumsy. Though she did well academically, Florence found school difficult, preferring instead to read books and climb trees, and constantly got into trouble for singing too loudly.

Thomas Edison

The inventor of the lightbulb, as well as early devices for recording sound and motion pictures, was described by his teacher as 'addled' in a letter to his mother (meaning unable to think clearly or confused).

Gillian Lynne

School was a struggle for the acclaimed dancer and choreographer and her teachers thought she had a learning disorder because she couldn't concentrate and was always fidgeting. Her mother took her to see a specialist and, while they talked privately, Gillian was left in a room with a radio. Upon returning, they found her dancing to the music. The specialist then declared there was nothing wrong with her and encouraged her mother to take her to dance school. The ballerina went on to have an illustrious career, including dancing with the Royal Ballet, founding her own production company and becoming a dame for her services to the arts.

Clare Balding

The writer, broadcaster and sports presenter left school without the right grades to study law at Christ's College at Cambridge University. But after taking two years out to study more and focus on her passion for riding, Clare retook her exams and ended up getting into Newnham College, Cambridge to study English, which she ended up

'Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid'

ALBERT EINSTEIN