

Very, Very, Very Smart Children vs. Creative Ones

Exercise 1: Read the article

¹ Two-year-old Braxton Moral was watching a school volleyball game with his mother. One team had 15 points and the other 6 points. Amazingly, Braxton looked at his mother and told her that one team had 9 points more than the other. His mother knew then that this two-year old was an exceptionally smart child.

² Children like Braxton are called prodigies. When he was 16, he graduated from both high school and Harvard University; he had been taking Harvard courses online while attending high school. Some prodigies have learned to read when they were two years old. Some are able to play Bach at four and others can easily do calculus at six.

³ Many of us imagine that it would be wonderful to be so smart. Life would be easier, and people would admire us. And the dream for many parents is to produce super smart children. However, very, very smart children may not improve other people's lives as much as different kinds of children: creative ones.

⁴ When child prodigies grow up, they rarely become geniuses who discover original ideas that change the world. At an early age, they learn how to play a Mozart composition magnificently, but they rarely create original scores. They are good at learning existing scientific information but not at producing new insights. They tend to work very hard to win the approval of their parents and to be admired by their teachers. For prodigies, because they value achievement so much, they are often afraid of failure. Thus, they don't aim for doing something unusual and original.

⁵ In contrast to the prodigy children, there are the creative ones. Creative people will think of unique ideas that will eventually make things better for others. Researchers have found that many creative children with their unusual ideas are non-conformists who like to make their own rules. As a result, they are often their teachers' least favorite students. For example, none of Albert Einstein's college instructors would write a letter of recommendation for him because they thought his ideas and behavior were too different from theirs, so he was unable to find a job for two years after graduating.

⁶ Another creative, non-conformist, Steven Jobs, the founder of Apple, often wore no shoes in his 20s,

except when it snowed. Then he wore sandals. For a while, he didn't have a license plate on his car and parked in handicap spaces. He had average grades in high school, was able to get into college but dropped out after six months because he wanted to study subjects that were interesting to him, not ones that he was forced to study.

⁷ Researchers have found some interesting difference between how parents of creative and less creative children raise them. One study found that parents of ordinary children had *six* rules, for example, what time the children had to do their homework and go to bed. Parents of highly creative children had an average of only *one* rule.

⁸ As a result, these creative children learn to think for themselves. They tend to figure out on their own what they should or shouldn't do. Their parents encourage them to be successful, but they also try to help them find enjoyment in work. Thus, they are able to discover what they are truly interested in, and this makes it possible for them to become creative adults.

⁹ There is another important difference between prodigies and creative children. Prodigies are very focused on and passionate about their main subject of study. Even when they are relaxing, many of them don't spend time on other pastimes, like hobbies and sports, but instead, continue to think about their primary interest. That focus is what makes them so advanced in their subject.

¹⁰ Creative children, on the other hand, are curious about a lot of different things. This broad knowledge and experience is important for the creative process and is what helps them when they are older. For example, researchers wanted to know why some scientists were just average but others were so exceptional that they won the Nobel Prize. They found that the Nobel Prize winners were much more likely to perform as actors or dancer, or to write poetry, plays or novel, or to play instruments or compose music.

¹¹ According to Adam Grant, author of the book, *Originals*, if parents want their children to give the world original ideas, they need to let their children do what they, feel most passionate about rather than what the parents feel passion for.

Pre-discussion Exercise 1

Answer True (T) or False (F) according to information in the article.

- ___ 1) Most 2-year-old children cannot do math like Braxton could.
- ___ 2) Prodigies are good at understanding complex ideas but not at creating original ones.
- ___ 3) Most teachers probably prefer to have the non-conformist, creative students in their classes than ones who conform to the rules.
- ___ 4) Prodigies want their parents and teachers to like what they are doing.
- ___ 5) Steven jobs is an example of someone who followed societies' rules in order get the approval of teachers and adults.
- ___ 6) If parents give children only one rule, then children probably won't depend on their parents to make all the decisions in their lives.
- ___ 7) Prodigies tend to have an interest in many different things.
- ___ 8) Many Nobel Prize winners in science weren't focused on just their specialty area.
- ___ 9) If parents want creative children, they should encourage the children to study what the parents have a passion for.
- ___ 10) A prodigy is more likely than a creative child to produce something that will improve the lives of many people in the world.

Pre-discussion Exercise 2

Think about these discussion questions. You don't have to write anything.

1. Do you know anyone who was a prodigy or have you heard about any in your country?
2. When you were very young, were you especially good at something, for example, math or playing music or reading?
3. When you were a child, did you work hard to win the approval of your parents and teachers?
4. These days, is it important to that your parents and teachers approve of you?
5. What is one non-conformist thing that you have done in your life?
6. Did you have many rules to follow when you were a child? Give some examples.
7. When you were a child, did you have many different interests or were you focused mainly on thing?
8. About your relatives, is there anyone who is very focused on mainly one thing?
9. What are some things that you are curious about these days?
10. What are your parents passionate about?
11. Are your passions similar to your parents' passions?
12. Was there anything in this article that surprised you or that you don't agree with or that you found very interesting?

Small-group Discussion for: *Very, Very, Very Smart Children vs. Creative Ones* Student A

Directions: Read these questions to your partners and respond to theirs.

1. **This is a discussion question. We should all answer this and ask follow-up questions.** Do you know anyone who was a prodigy or have you heard about any in your country?
4. In the article, it says that prodigies “tend to work very hard to win the approval of their parents and to be admired by their teachers.” Can you explain why this characteristic is important for us to know?
7. **Don’t look at the article when you answer this question.** Why couldn’t Albert Einstein find a job after graduating?
10. **Don’t look at the article when you answer this question.** How many rules do parents give ordinary and creative children?
13. **Don’t look at the article when you answer this question.** The article said, “Prodigies are very focused on and passionate about their main subject of study.” Why is this important information?
16. **Don’t look at the article when you answer this question.** Why does the author talk about the Nobel Prize winners?
19. **This is a discussion question.** Are your passions similar to your parents’ passions?

Post-Discussion Discussion

While you wait for other groups to finish, you can talk about one of these:

- a) Was there anything in this article that surprised you or that you don’t agree with or that you found very interesting?
- b) Talk about *intelligence* and *creativity*. What subject would you like to be very very good at? What creative activity would you like to be very good at, for example, art, music, acting, dance, building things,
- c) Think of a different topic and discuss it.

Small-group Discussion for: Very, Very, Very Smart Children vs. Creative Ones

Student B

Directions: Read these questions to your partners and respond to theirs.

2. This is a discussion question. We should all answer this and ask follow-up questions.

When you were very young, were you especially good at something, for example, math or playing music or reading?

5. This is a discussion question. We should all answer this and ask follow-up questions.

When you were a child, did you work hard to win the approval of your parents and teachers?

8. Don't look at the article when you answer this question. What are three non-conformist things that Steven Jobs did?

11. Why is that information about childhood rules important to know?

14. This is a discussion question. When you were a child, did you have many different interests or were you focused mainly on thing?

17. This is a discussion question. What are some things that you are curious about these days?

20. This is a discussion question. Think about your family and friends. Who is the most creative person you know?

Post-Discussion Discussion

While you wait for other groups to finish, you can talk about one of these:

a) Was there anything in this article that surprised you or that you don't agree with or that you found very interesting?

b) Talk about *intelligence* and *creativity*. What subject would you like to be very very good at? What creative activity would you like to be very good at, for example, art, music, acting, dance, building things,

c) Think of a different topic and discuss it.

Small-group Discussion for: Very, Very, Very Smart Children vs. Creative Ones
Student C

Directions: Read these questions to your partners and respond to theirs.

3. About the article, how was Braxton able to graduate from high school and Harvard at the same time?
- 6. This is a discussion question. We should all answer this and ask follow-up questions.**
These days, is it important to that your parents and teachers approve of you?
- 9. This is a discussion question.** What is one non-conformist thing that you have done in your life?
- 12. This is a discussion question.** Did you have many rules to follow when you were a child?
Give some examples.
- 15. This is a discussion question.** About your relatives, is there anyone who is very focused on mainly one thing?
- 18. This is a discussion question.** What are your parents passionate about?
21. Let's check our True False answers in Pre-Discussion Exercise 2.

Post-Discussion Discussion

While you wait for other groups to finish, you can talk about one of these:

- a) Was there anything in this article that surprised you or that you don't agree with or that you found very interesting?
- b) Talk about *intelligence* and *creativity*. What subject would you like to be very very good at? What creative activity would you like to be very good at, for example, art, music, acting, dance, building things,
- c) Think of a different topic and discuss it.