DEFINING INTELLIGENCE

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Intelligence is a possession most of us value highly. It is an abstract concept that has been defined in various ways. Measuring intelligence is much the same as measuring sizes, though intelligence is much more abstract. We believe that children’s intelligence exists but we do not measure it directly for we cannot peel back a child’s scalp and observe her intellectual process in action. We can only study those intellectual processes indirectly, by evaluating the intelligent acts that children generate.

The three most commonly agreed-upon aspects of intelligence are the following: a) verbal ability b) problem-solving skills and c) ability to learn from and adapt to experiences of everyday life.

Verbal ability as reflected in the verbal skills of students in searching for library books. Problem-solving skills as the ability of people to reason logically and identify more solutions to problems. Social competence, the ability to show interest in others and interact effectively was viewed as indicating intelligence.

There are several factors that affect intelligence. Among the most controversial issues of intelligence are those related to hereditary-environmental determination, cultural and ethnic differences, and the use and misuse of intelligence tests.
• The heredity-environment controversy

Arthur Jensen (1969) stated his theory that intelligence is primarily inherited and that environment and culture play only a minimal role in intelligence. Most researchers today agree that genetics do not determine intelligence to the extent Jensen envisioned. Although genetics factors may always influence a person’s intellectual ability, the environmental influences and opportunities we provide children and adults make a great difference. Growing up with “All the Advantages” does not necessarily guarantee success in the same way, being “poor” or “disadvantaged” does not automatically equal “doomed”.

• Cultural and Ethnicity

People adapt to their environment and what’s appropriate in one environment may not be acceptable in another. Culture-fair tests are intelligent tests that attempt to reduce cultural bias.

• The use and misuse of intelligence tests

Intelligence tests are batteries of measures used to determine a person’s level of intelligence. Psychological tests are tools and like any other tool, their effectiveness depends on the knowledge, skill and integrity of the user. It can be used for positive purposes or they can be badly abused. These tests have proved to be beneficial in finding ways on how to deal with students who need special attention in school, in identifying and resolving cognitive difficulties and in helping students in pursuing educational and vocational choices.
The definition of intelligence that psychologists employ contains some of the same elements found in the layman’s conception. Psychologists view intelligence as the capacity to rationalize and understand the world and being able to use resources effectively when faced with life’s challenges.

References:

Understanding Psychology by Robert S. Feldman