

insights

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Who Is Creative? Are You Creative?

Sometimes, the very qualities that characterize someone as creatively gifted also may hinder them. For example, the childhood stories of Nikola Tesla read like something from *Calvin and Hobbes*. When he was young, Nikola jumped off of the roof of a barn clutching an umbrella in an attempt to fly. On other misadventures spurred by his creative thinking he started an avalanche, was locked in a remote mountain chapel, nearly drowned in a vat of hot milk, and was chased by a flock of crows. Nikola later invented the rotating magnetic field principle, wireless communication, radio, fluorescent lights, and patented more than 700 other ideas. The high energy and experimentation of his youth propelled him into the inventive successes of adulthood. Similarly, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Virginia Woolf were restless and talked constantly in school. Can you imagine a teacher's reaction to their behavior? Later in life they became famous writers.

Creatively gifted individuals are misunderstood frequently. Research shows that highly creative adolescents are often estranged from their teachers and peers. Dr. E. Paul Torrance, the foremost researcher in creativity, found that teachers rated children with low creativity as more desirable, more understandable, more ambitious, and more studious than children with high creativity.

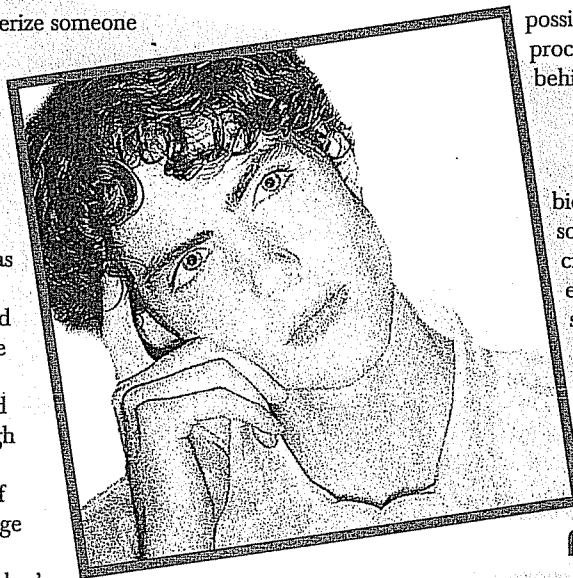
What Are Creative People Like?

Three types of characteristics are associated with creativity: cognitive abilities, biographical traits, and personality. Through learning about these characteristics, you can purposefully find fulfillment, rather than leaving success to chance.

Cognitive Traits

Cognitive (mental) abilities for creativity are different from those measured by standard IQ tests. They include divergent, or "out of the box" thinking, which involves the ability to come up with unique solutions. This problem-solving aspect requires an awareness of problems and an ability to change understandings and envision unique solutions.

Dr. Torrance believed that these cognitive traits can be expanded through teaching and experiences such as through the Future Problem Solving Program (www.fpsp.org). Taking time to imagine and explore



possibilities are important parts of the creative process that can nurture the thought and vision behind creativity.

Biographical Traits

Not all students have control over their biographical traits or life circumstances. Even so, learning which life experiences are good for creative development can give you a chance to explore your interests further and build upon strengths. Creative people have a background of creative interests, are well-traveled, have friends older and younger than their peers, find mentors, have an imaginary childhood playmate, and a somewhat unsettled family background or have experienced a childhood trauma.

Personality Characteristics

Many of the struggles with people who misunderstand the abilities of creative people may stem from the creative personality itself. Creative people tend to be curious, to be attracted to complexity and novelty, and to take risks. Dr. Torrance stated that risk-taking is important in order to learn skills and knowledge. However, many people devalue curiosity by teaching "curiosity killed the cat." Thus, children with unusual questions or new ideas run the risk of being ridiculed by classmates and teachers. However, the most essential personality traits for creativity are to be open-minded and curious enough to seek a variety of experiences and explore possibilities, even though they may include risks.

Since creative people are often misunderstood by their teachers, parents, and peers, they seek fantasy, imagination, and daydreaming. A boy named Robert daydreamed so much that he was kicked out of school, and Frank went into such trance-like states that people had to shout to bring him back. Later, Robert would be known to the world as Robert Frost, the famous poet. Frank Lloyd Wright would bring revolutionary thoughts regarding home and building design to the world of architecture.

Eminent creators are often more emotional, sensitive, and expressive than other people. Famous creators who exhibited these traits include Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, Emile Zola, Emily Dickinson, Ernest Hemingway, Henry James, Leo Tolstoy, Lord Byron, Michelangelo, Robert Burns, Tennessee Williams, T.S. Eliot, Victor Hugo, Vincent Van Gogh, and Virginia Woolf.

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Who Is Creative? Are You Creative? (continued)

How Can You Measure Your Creativity?

Dr. Torrance is best known for developing the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT). The TTCT has been translated into over 35 languages, is highly recommended in the educational field, and is even used in the corporate world. The most extensive use of the TTCT is for identification of children for gifted programs. The TTCT is helpful because most measures for gifted identification are heavily driven by verbal and quantitative content.

A typical example from the TTCT is to think about interesting and unusual uses for tin cans. If you have the most ideas, the most ideas from different categories, the most unique ideas, and the most detailed ideas among your friends, then, you are showing creative strengths. Each person demonstrates creativity in a different way, so it is more important to try to understand and develop your own creativity than to try to get a high score.

How Can You Develop Your Creativity?

Beginning in 1958, Dr. Torrance conducted longitudinal studies, which followed students for 7 years, 12 years, 22 years, and 40 years. He found that creativity scores predicted the children's later creative achievement better than IQ scores. Based on these studies, Dr. Torrance developed principles for children to follow:

- 1. Don't be afraid to fall in love with something and pursue it with intensity.** People who achieved creative accomplishment found their passion, whether earlier or late in life, and pursued it vigorously.
- 2. Know, understand, practice, exploit, take pride in, and enjoy your greatest strengths.** Unfortunately, many inventive people do not know their strengths or are not comfortable using them, because these gifts make them different from the majority. Understanding and nurturing your creative strengths is essential for a creatively productive life.
- 3. Learn to free yourself from the expectations of others and to walk away from the games they impose on you. Free yourself to play your own game.** Often, family, peers,

and teachers who mean well expect you to follow their expectations without considering your uniqueness. Peer pressures and conformist expectations often limit potential. Knowing your gifts enough to make decisions about when to listen to advice, when to follow another's agenda, and when to pursue your dreams regardless of others' expectations is essential for a creatively fulfilled life.

- 4. Find a great teacher or mentor who will help you.** The most successful creative individuals found a mentor who could help them. Breaking new ground is challenging, and students who can find a mentor to help them explore their passion are much more likely to find meaningful and creative life's work.
- 5. Don't waste energy trying to be good at everything.** Most well-known creators were focused only on their own field. They did not spend their time and energy on becoming experts in everything.
- 6. Do what you love and can do well. Pay attention to your talents and interests.** If you are doing what you love, you will work harder with greater endurance and be more successful.
- 7. Learn the skills of interdependence.** Working with others is important, especially if major life tasks seem difficult or impossible. Drawing on the strengths of others and sharing your creativity is a powerful tool for moving beyond personal limits into boundless potential.

Understanding yourself and nurturing those traits that make you special is a challenge that everyone faces. This struggle can be even more difficult, and more important, for those who think differently from the majority. When so few people understand the needs of creative thinkers, self-acceptance or self-rejection can make all the difference. Walking the road less traveled can be difficult, but *less* traveled does not mean *un*-traveled. Seeking a mentor, a breadth of friends, and new experiences are important steps down that less-traveled road of discovery.

—Dr. Kyung Hee Kim

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Duke University Talent Identification Program Celebrates 25 Years

Duke TIP was founded in 1980 with its first program—the 7th Grade Talent Search. In 25 years, Duke TIP has helped over one million students through one or more of its unique academic services, resources, or programs.

Moments in TIP History

- 1980** – Dr. Robert Sawyer named executive director.
- 1981** – Pre-calculus, Mathematics, Expository Writing, American History, and German were offered in the first summer program.
- 1982** – Student newsletter launched—*The Talent Tabloid*. The name was changed to *Insights* in 1986.
- 1985** – Marine Lab established as the first satellite program.
- 1987** – Jonas Salk, who invented the polio vaccine, spoke at the Grand Recognition Ceremony.
- 1991** – Dr. David Goldstein becomes second executive director.
- 1998** – Dr. Steven Pfeiffer assumes the role of executive director.
- 2000** – *Duke Gifted Letter* launched.
- 2004** – Duke TIP offices in the historic Coca-Cola Bottling Plant dedicated in honor of Dr. William Bevan.
- 2004** – The fourth executive director, Martha Putallaz, is named.
- 2005** – TIP in Texas—Office and campus programs to be announced!

Item	Then	Now
Full-time employees	4	43
Part-time employees	3	577 summer staff
States in TIP region	13	16 (3 states added in 1982)
Participants enrolled in 7th Grade TS	8,708	87,071 students
Schools participating in 7th Grade TS	76	6,086
Programs listed in the <i>Educational Opportunity Guide</i>	49	333
Students at summer campus programs	151	2,065
Recognition ceremonies	4	36
Financial aid awarded	\$49,850 (first 2 years)	\$1,565,000 (2004)
Students given financial aid*	~185	~17,500

* Funds awarded included fee waivers for the talent searches and assistance for tuition.