

Expanding Our IQ

By Sasha Clayton

Intelligence Quotient or IQ tests are a common assessment for measuring intelligence over what appears to be a universal standard. Of course, all assessments are skewed by those who wrote them, and there is some evidence to indicate that some of the IQ test measures are unintentionally designed to favor white middle-class people because of the use of words, analogies, and concepts that are more likely to be known by this subset of the population. For more information, please read, Richard Nisbett's December 9, 2007 article in the New York Times, "All Brains Are the Same Color."

That being said, if we disregard the differences between subgroups and examine the recent gains made within a subgroup of the population, we can explore the meaning of the test results without the inherent bias.

To this end, James Flynn, a researcher and philosopher, noted that the IQ of the United States went up by 18 points from 1947 to 2002. More specifically, an average Dutch 14-year-old in 1982 scored 20 points higher than an average Dutch 14-year-old in 1952. These gains are not just the evolutionary wheel spinning—the increases are too large and too fast. Therefore, there must be some environmental factors at play. What are we doing that is increasing the IQ of people so quickly and significantly? According to Sam Wang and Sandra Aamodt's March 10, 2009 article in the New York Times, "Can We Increase Our Intelligence?" the answer is working memory.

Working memory is the ability to retain information about one concept while applying it to another. When we ask students to remember facts in history and then ask them to explain how they relate to the current topic, students are using working memory. When we teach students about grammar rules and then ask them to apply them to their Young Author's Projects, they are utilizing their working memories. In fact, it may be our focus on abstract and critical thinking which helps to develop this working memory in our students, thus increasing their intelligence! Most adults train their working memories every day while multi-tasking at work. Furthermore, adults may be increasing their intelligences every day simply by the mere fact that we lead busier, more complicated lives which require us to retain and apply more information across a multitude of spectrums.

Hilldale is already preparing our students for their fast-paced futures juggling multiple email accounts, their blackberries, work meetings, volunteering, being a spouse, raising a family, and managing their many schedules, all while leading the field in their careers, simply by asking them to retain and apply information in increasingly complex ways. We'll continue to do our part to challenge their memories through application and analysis. You can help too! Encourage your upper school children to use their Word of the Day in their every day conversations; encourage your child to figure out the tip needed at the restaurant; encourage your lower school child to sound out new words that he/she sees on signs and in stores.

While working memory isn't the only factor that will increase intelligence as measured by IQ tests, developing it is an effective tool for giving our children more opportunities now and in the future.