Two kinds of smart

What do children need for them to succeed: knowledge, or intelligence? And what's the difference? **Dalene van der Westhuizen** explores the dual meaning of 'smart'

We've all done this before and every time, it's accompanied by an overwhelming feeling of pride: we've called our kids 'smart' for achieving an extraordinary academic result. The 'extraordinary' is reflected by what you expect and what your kid is capable of.

For a child struggling with academic concepts like learning, reading and/or maths, however, being told that they, too, are smart can be a rare or completely absent phenomenon.

For many parents (and educators), the traditional and most common definition of smart is to be good at learning and remembering things, resulting in academic achievements. When children do well at school and get good grades, we usually call them smart. But – and there's always a 'but' – in real life, things are a little more complicated.

Being smart goes beyond schoolwork and/or academic performance, or simply getting good grades. In fact, people can be smart in different ways.

Just because a child can remember maths formulae or the timeline of World War II doesn't necessarily mean they're smart. Likewise a child who struggles with a specific aspect of learning isn't necessarily *not* smart.

There are actually two parts to smart – *knowledge* and *intelligence* – and we need both of them.

Knowledge is the collection of skills and information a person has acquired through studies and related experience.

Intelligence, on the other hand, is the ability to *apply* knowledge. Just because someone lacks knowledge of a particular subject doesn't mean they can't apply their intelligence to help solve a problem.

The stakes are high

If we look at the World Economic

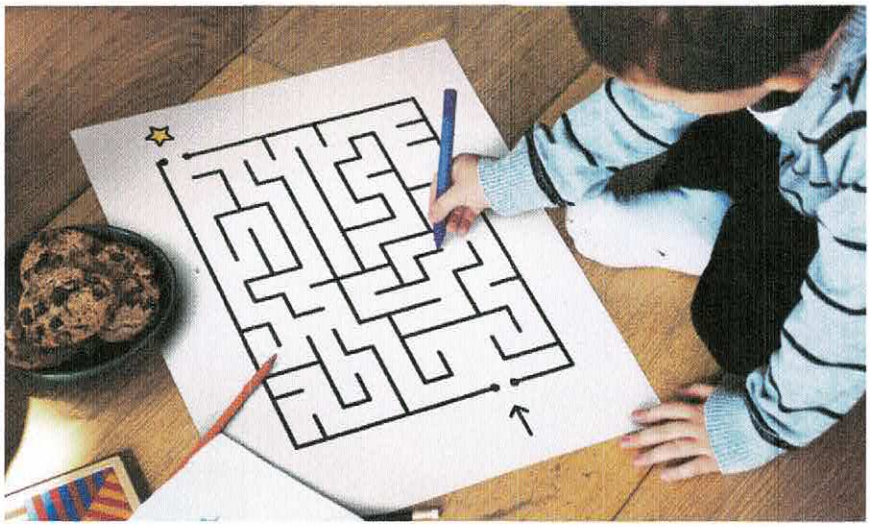
Forum's list of critical skills for the future, it's clear that our kids need more than good grades. They'll need to be more than just 'book-smart'. They'll need to be able to apply the knowledge they have.

Book-smart children can list facts and data, but don't necessarily have a deeper comprehension/ understanding of the topic. They may have a lot of general knowledge and do well in quizzes or tests, but they might struggle with more complex applications. On the other hand, intelligence – or our ability to process information – helps us acquire knowledge and skills, and apply the two as a combined effort.

Intelligence includes the capacity for understanding things, self-awareness, applying logic, reasoning, problem-solving, creativity, planning, etc.

According to the World Economic Forum:

- Critical thinking and problem-solving top the list of skills



employers believe will grow in prominence in the coming years across the globe.

- Newly emerging this year are skills in self-management such as active learning, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility.

So what does that imply for our children and their futures?

Simply getting good grades, without understanding or being able to apply that knowledge component, is meaningless. Similarly, the way your brain processes, stores and uses information can be strengthened and developed to make learning (including attention, reading, maths, etc) easier.

Tomorrow depends on what you know and do today

We know that homeschools and traditional schools are responsible for the transfer of knowledge within a curriculum framework. However, who is responsible for intelligence?

Intervention through appropriate skills testing and training can open up a whole new world of possibilities – ones never dreamed of.

Through ongoing international research and a constantly increasing global focus on improving brain skills, we have the science, research and know-how to improve and develop areas such as processing speed, memory, attention, visual and auditory processing, as well as logic and reasoning.

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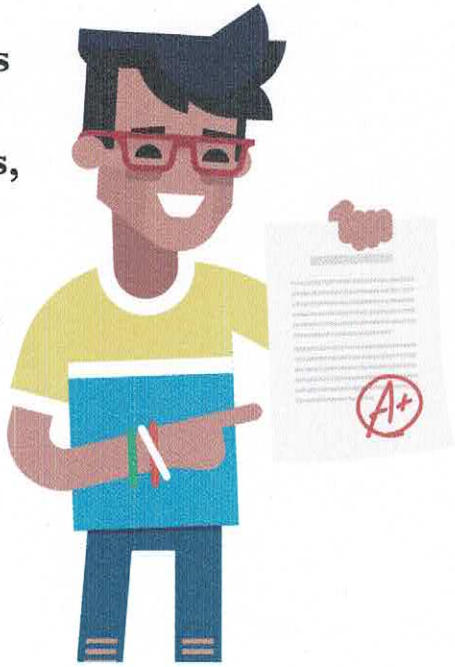
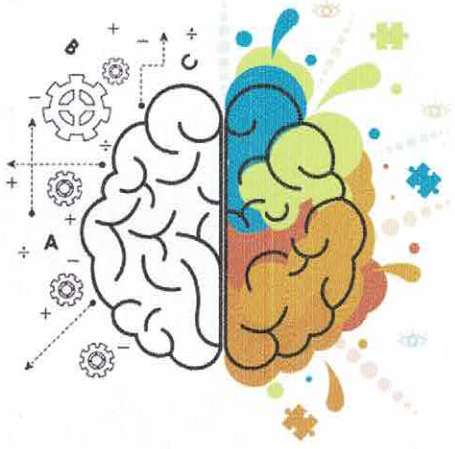


Changes in these cognitive areas positively impact intelligence.

A growing body of research suggests that stimulating the mind with intensive, research-based mental exercise will cause brain cells, called neurons, to branch



widely. This branching effect causes millions of additional connections, or synapses, between brain cells.

Arnold Scheibel, the former Director of UCLA's Brain Research Institute, once said: 'We can think of it as upgrading a computer with a bigger memory board that allows you to do more things more quickly.'

The question is therefore no longer 'Can intelligence be changed?' The clear answer to this is 'Yes!' 'Yes' in the support of struggling students, but also 'yes' in the support of average and exceptional students. This could benefit all students at all levels of performance.

A new focus

As parents and educators, let's consciously decide to move away from only focusing on our children's grades and rather ensure that they're able to understand and apply the knowledge they work so hard to acquire.

Let's help and enable them with a strong combined 'smart' advantage of both knowledge and intelligence. This is a skill for life.

In the next issue of *SAH*, we'll unpack **executive functions,** the impact they have on learning and daily life, and what parents can do at home to strengthen those skills.

Until then, happy reading!