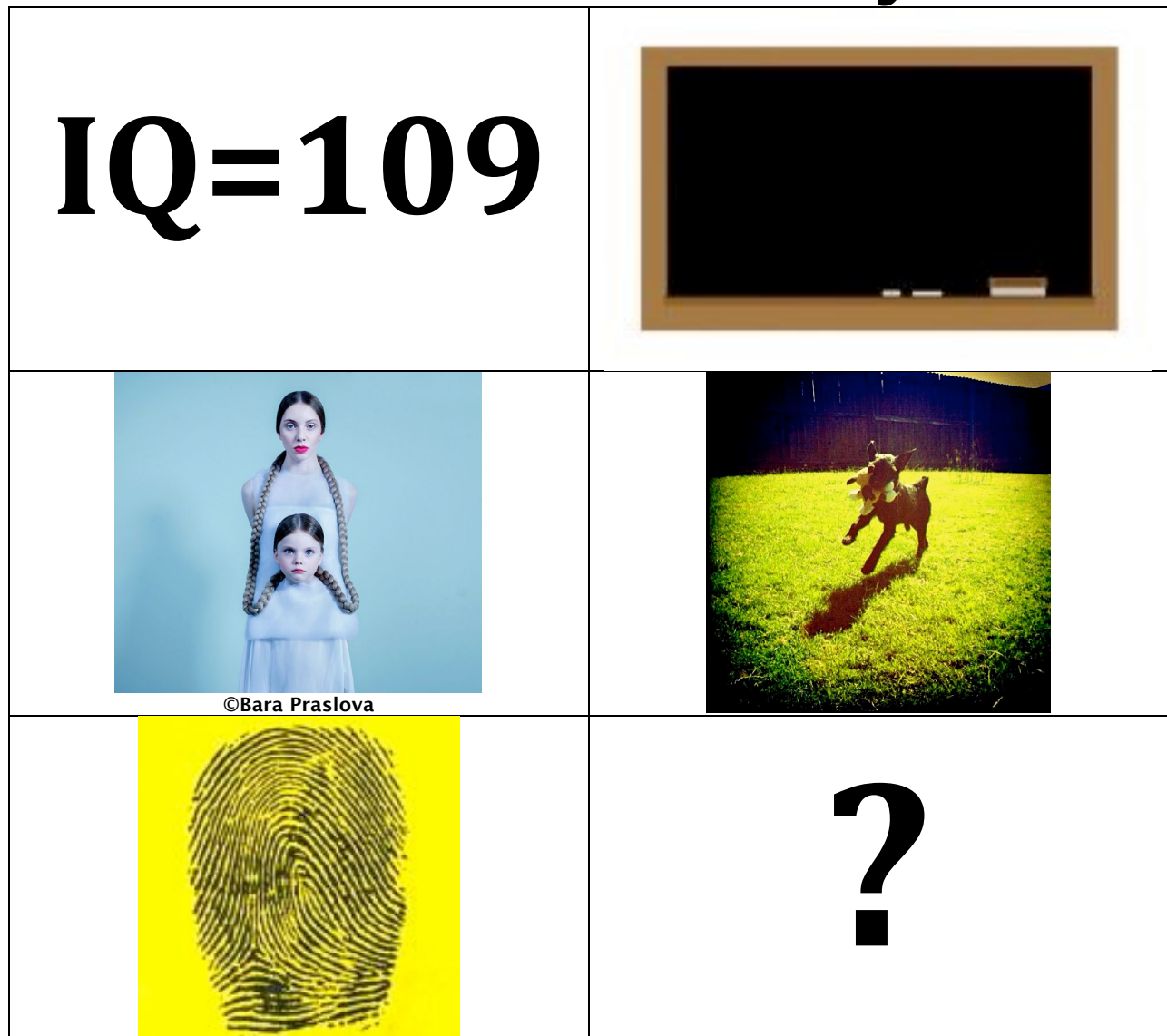


What is a child to you?



Metaphor Matters

This slide was developed for a PowerPoint presentation on educational theories. The focus is a question that asks, "What is a child to you?" Below the question are six different, separated images in a grid, which are possible metaphorical answers to the question.

- The first image, "IQ=109," is a score one might attain on an IQ test that is in the average range.
- The second image is a blank blackboard with chalk and eraser.
- The third image is one staged by a fashion photographer where the child and adult models seem blended into a single being. The child is in front of the adult and both face the camera. Both models are wearing dark eye makeup, bright lipstick, and have pale

faces. The long, blonde braids seem to belong to both and/or tie them together. Their white clothing is simple and is also ambiguous as to whose is whose.

- The fourth is a puppy romping in the yard with a chew toy.
- The fifth is a fingerprint.
- The final image is a question mark.

My thesis is that anyone who teaches a child has an implicit or explicit theory or point of view concerning what a child is and that this theory can be reflected in one or more metaphorical images. Furthermore, these theories are important because they drive a parent or teacher's choices of curriculum and instruction. The area I wish to investigate further is a related but larger issue: Some neuroscientists are proposing that metaphors build bridges between our sensory-motor experiences and the development of even complex and abstract concepts.

Possible interpretations of the images in the grid are the following:

IQ=109: A child is summarized as a standardized assessment score as seen in IQ testing, SAT results, high stakes achievement tests and so on. Scores are placed on a bell-shaped curve and most children are expected to score in the middle. A few children on the ends of the curve may be recommended for Special Education or Gifted and Talented programs. This view implies that not all children can be a genius and usually means that a child is either born smart or not. Everything about the child is ignored except for the grade or score they are able to attain at a particular point in time in a particular context. In addition, the score indicates how well a child is able to guess what the test-maker(s) intended. There is one and only one right answer—the test-maker(s)—and there is no leeway for individual imagination, cultural/economic differences or other factors.

Blackboard: In this behavioristic view, the child is a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) to be written upon by the adult. The child's unique endowments do not matter. A child can become anything the adult wants it to be and the adult can use rewards and punishments to shape the behavior.

Fashion photo: A child is seen as an extension, or no different, than the adult. In other words, a child is just a short adult. In this view, critical periods and developmental levels do not matter. A child can be taught anything at any age. Early childhood education, child labor laws and other special concessions are not necessary. Perhaps this view can be understood if a child lives in poverty and the child's work is seen as necessary for family survival, but it is less understandable when children are pushed like adults in athletics, school success or "Our Little Miss" fashion shows.

Dog playing: A child is seen as learning best through free play. In play, a child can try things they are not yet old enough to actually do. They can take on roles and explore relationships; they can investigate, discover and interact with the world around them. According to Vygotsky (1978), when a child plays, it is as if he were a head taller than himself. Imaginative play, according to him and others, is the most valuable and important way to learn as a child.

Fingerprint: Each fingerprint, even those of twins, is unique. Each child is unique. Neuroscience states this outright. (Caine, G. & Caine, R., 2014). Albert Einstein expresses the educational philosophy that accompanies this idea:

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid. In this view, it is incumbent upon the teacher or parent to seek out and nurture the special genius in each child.

Question mark: This symbol was not added to suggest that a child is unknowable, but rather to invite the viewers to make up their own minds in regard to the question, “What is a child to you?”

References:

All images are from my personal collection or from <http://www.publicdomainpictures.net> except for the one image copyrighted by Bara Prasilova. <http://www.baraprasilova.com>

For more on the Einstein quote: <http://www.quora.com/What-did-Albert-Einstein-mean-when-he-said-Everybody-is-a-genius-But-if-you-judge-a-fish-by-its-ability-to-climb-a-tree-it-will-live-its-whole-life-believing-that-it-is-stupid>

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