

What Does It Mean to Be Smart?

Three of history's most consequential innovators have a surprising answer — and it changes what we should be teaching our children.

For most of the last century, the answer seemed obvious. Smart meant high test scores. It meant STEM mastery, technical precision, the ability to solve hard problems quickly. We built our schools around that definition. We steered our kids toward it. We told ourselves it was the surest path to a secure future.

AI is dismantling that assumption in real time.

Jensen Huang, founder and CEO of NVIDIA — the company whose chips power the AI revolution — has thought about this more directly than almost anyone. His observation is striking: the first skill that AI came for wasn't manual labor. It was software programming. The very profession we've held up as the gold standard of modern intelligence is now the one being most rapidly automated.

So what does smart actually mean, if not that?

Huang's answer is worth sitting with. The people he considers truly intelligent aren't necessarily the ones who score highest. They're the ones who can read a room, sense what isn't being said, and synthesize data, experience, and instinct into foresight that can't be replicated. "People who are able to see around corners are truly, truly smart," he says. "That vibe — that I think is gonna be the future definition of smart."¹

This isn't a new idea. It's a rediscovered one. Albert Einstein — whose name has become synonymous with intellectual genius — held a view that would surprise many people: "Imagination is more important than knowledge."² Not instead of knowledge. More important than it. He understood that the rarest human capacity isn't computation. It's the ability to see beyond what the data shows.

Steve Jobs understood this too, from a different vantage point. He built one of the most consequential technology companies in history not by out-engineering his competitors, but by out-humanizing them. His conviction: "Intuition is a very powerful thing, more powerful than intellect."³ And on what produces genuine creativity: "Creativity is just connecting things... they were able to connect experiences they'd had and synthesize new things."⁴

These aren't soft ideas. They're the observations of people who operated at the highest levels of human achievement and looked back to identify what actually explained it.

At Westside Waldorf, this is the kind of intelligence we set out to cultivate. Not instead of academic rigor — but as its deeper expression. We believe that the child who learns to listen carefully, to work with their hands, to sit with a hard problem before reaching for an answer, to navigate complex social and emotional terrain — that child is developing exactly the capacities that Huang, Einstein, and Jobs are describing. The ones AI can't replicate. The ones that will matter most.

The definition of smart is changing. We think it's worth preparing children for the version that's coming — not the one that's leaving.



Notes

- 1 Jensen Huang, interview, 2024.
- 2 Albert Einstein, interview with George Sylvester Viereck, *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 26, 1929.
- 3 Steve Jobs, cited in Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (Simon & Schuster, 2011).
- 4 Steve Jobs, *Wired*, February 1996.