

# Educating Exceptional Children: A Study of Gifted and Mentally Retarded Children

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**Abstract:** *This paper is an attempt to provide the needs, problems, identification, level of gifted and mentally retarded children. The paper also explores the causes of such giftedness and mental retardation of the exceptional children. The paper at last aims to provide educational opportunities to the gifted and mentally retarded children.*

**Keywords:** Exceptional children, Gifted children, Mentally Retarded children, I.Q.

## 1. Introduction

The word exceptional is used here to mean rare or unusual. It represents a kind of significant deviation from the usual, natural or normal happenings. In this sense, a boy standing seven feet tall would be termed quite a typical, exceptional and above average in a population of Indian adolescents. Similar would be the case with a boy having height of 4 feet 0 inches, as he would be exceptional at the lower end of the height scale. Thus, people are termed exceptional if they deviated miserably in one attribute to the other from what is supposed to be normal or average for their group. One person may be exceptionally beautiful and other extremely ugly, one a genius with an I.Q. of 20. The other an idiot with an IQ of 20. Such wide variations and deviation \* are found nearly in all attributes and trails of personality and patterns of human behavior. Consequently, the term exceptional carries a very wide connotation as it covers the entire range and possibilities of the significant deviations in every shade of human activity and personality trait. The term exceptional here stands for a separate and in many ways distinct category or relay of children who have markedly above average or below average traits and characteristics which makes them fundamentally different from the general or average population of children. The term 'exceptional children' refer to those children who deviate from the normal in physical, mental, emotional, or social characteristics to such a degree that they require special social and educational services to develop their maximum capacity. These definitions highlight the following typical features or characteristics of the exceptional children. 1- Exceptional children are quite different and distinct from the so-called normal or average children. 2- Their deviation from the normal or average children is so great that they can be recognized and distinguished easily from average children. This deviation in terms of their acquired traits or development may vary in any behavioral or developmental dimension, physical, intellectual, emotional or social etc. The degree of deviation in any behavioral or developmental trait is so marked that children experience unusual or peculiar problems and require special arrangements in terms of care and education for their proper growth and upbringing to meet the special conditions necessary for the full development and nurturing of their capabilities. Thus defined, the following types of deviant or exceptional children in terms of different dimensions of human growth and development may be

termed as exceptional: The gifted backward and the creative children are the crippled, handicapped, the hard of hearing and the deaf, the partially sighted and the blind, the mentally retarded or handicapped etc. The emotionally handicapped ranging from those with minor personality maladjustments to those with serious problems neurotics. The socially handicapped such as juvenile delinquents. The learning disabled let us know in detail about some of these children in the following pages.

### Gifted Children

The term 'gifted child' has been defined by different scholars and psychologists in the following words:

#### Telford and Survey (1977):

The intellectually gifted can be defined in terms of test scores or demonstrated performance, eg. percent of the general population is measured by intelligence and of achievement test.

#### Havighurst (1958):

The talented or gifted child is one who shows consistently remarkable performance in Tannenbaum (1958):

The term giftedness denotes their potential for becoming critically acclaimed performers, exemplary producers of ideas in activity that enhance the moral, physical, emotional, intellectual, or aesthetic life of humanity. Analysis of the above definitions shows that various scholars and thinkers have adopted different approaches in defining the term giftedness. The first two definitions have tried to provide a statistical and operational definition by adopting scores on intelligence and achievement tests. Although the use of light I.Q. and achievement test score has the advantage of objectivity, it cannot be made a sole criterion for cascading giftedness. Moreover, there lies a difficulty in deciding the cut-off point i.e. the minimum score for labeling one as gifted as some may fix it as 140 (Terman, 1947) while may lower it to 110 (Bentley, 1937).

## 2. Needs and Problems of Gifted Children

Like other children, the gifted children have certain basic needs, the need for security, for love, for belonging and the need to be accepted as an individual in addition to these

basic needs the gifted children may have certain special needs line

- (a) needs for knowledge and,
- (b) creativity and ingenuity,
- (c) development of his exceptional ability or abilities, and
- (d) The need for self actualization or self-expression.

The gifted child thus strives for the satisfaction not only of the basic needs but also has to have the opportunity and he facilities for the realization of the above-mentioned specific need. In case he experiences difficulty in (he accomplishment of these needs he becomes disturbed mentally as well as emotionally. This leads to a sort of maladjustment and he becomes a problem child The gifted child needs I proper environment or his development. He wants to be understood carefully in response to his different needs and problems the gifted child is exceptionally curious and has a thirst for knowledge and is. Therefore, in the habit of asking search questions. The parents as well as the teachers, who do not understand his urges, usually snub him. Sometimes, he wants appreciation for his ingenuity in a scientific field or creativity in the, but does not get it. Consequently, he feels insecure and rejected and any sort of mishandling or carelessness on the pan teachers or patents further aggravates the situation and he becomes a nuisance. In case the gifted child gets undue attention and appreciation, he becomes conscious of his superiority and develops a boastful and supercilious attitude. He adjusts with his fellow students. He considers inferior and foolish and may even dislike them, while they, in turn become jealous of him. They do not accept his superiority and begin to reject him The gifted child, in this way does not get recognition from his peers and faces a sort of social rejection.

### 3. The Identification of Gifted Children

The first step in the direction of planning special education for gifted children is to identify or separate them from average children. In absence of identification and adequate provision many of the gifted children, like the flowers in the garden or diamonds in the earth, go unnoticed. For the proper identification of the gifted children, we must make a distinction between the intellectually gifted and children with special Talents who show superior in one area or the other. In the identification of intellectually gifted or academically talented children, intelligence more often used as a screening instrument. Psychologists have differences of opinion regarding demarcation between average and gifted children on the basis of I.Q. Some children with I.Q. of 125 or above are gifted while others raise limit to 15 or 14. The criterion is quite arbitrary and not universal. However, an I.Q. of 130 or above (us measured by an individual intelligence ) is usually accepted us the most agreed criterion for singling out the gifted children from the average population. The following list of identifying characteristics prepared by De Hanau and Kough (Dun, 1974. P.2U1) can be of great help in the identification of intellectually gifted or academically talented students.

1. Learns rapidly and easily.
2. Uses a great deal of common sense and practical knowledge.
3. Reasons things out. Thinks clearly, recognizes relationships, comprehends meanings.

4. Retains what he has heard or read without much role drill. Know about many things of which most students are unaware of i.e. a large vocabulary, which they use easily and accurately.
  5. Can read books that are one or two years in advance of the rest of the class.
  6. Performs difficult mental tasks.
  7. Ask a many questions, has a wide range of interest,
  8. Does some academic work one or two years in advance of the rest of the class.
  9. Is original in his thinking, uses good but unusual methods.
  10. Is alert, keenly observant and responds quickly
- As already mentioned, there are some gifted children who although do not possess superior general intelligence, exhibit special abilities or talents in one field or the other is not possible to identify such children by intelligence tests.

### 4. The Education of the Gifted Children

It is often suggested should be separate schools for gifted children and adequate facilities should be provided in these schools to help them in developing their specific abilities and potentialities. Such segregation is often criticized and labeled as undemocratic. The products of public schools, where there is provision for selective special education also justify our fears and doubts. The students educated in these schools develop a superior and conceited attitude and widen the gulf between the educated and the uneducated or the privileged and the unprivileged. Similarly, segregation of gifted children into a separate section within same school also involves the same danger. This plan is known as ability grouping. Here, a given grade is divided into different sections on the basis of ability, the range of ability within each section being relatively narrow. The non-feasibility of both these plans involving segregation is obvious in the Indian context. We can neither afford such segregation as it involves huge expenditure nor can it yield very fruitful results. The gifted child is gifted or talented in his area of giftedness only lie may or may not possess superior general intelligence and children who possess talents in a particular area may be as few as one or less per cent of the total population of their class. It is therefore, impractical to think of having a separate section consisting of these few children. What is more segregation on the basis of I.Q. is no guarantee to the maintenance of homogeneity in the grouping. Another concept in the education of gifted children is acceleration usually known as double promotion. According to his plan, the gifted child is allowed accelerated progress. He is either promoted to the next higher grade in mid session without completing the prescribed full term or is permitted to skip a grade or class at the end of the term. The plan, though quite feasible, suffers from a serious defect in that it creates a gulf between educational ability and experience. The children who get early promotion to the advanced grade usually find it hard to adjust among children who are senior to them in age. Though intellectually at par with them, they lag behind in emotional, social and physical spheres and thus fall victim adjustment problems. Another proposal for the education of gifted children is what is technically known as 'enrichment\*'. Basically, it involves the selection and organization of leaning experiences and activities appropriate to the child's adequate development. In this way the enrichment of education should be considered to be a need of all students.

But in the case of gifted children it will definitely meet an urgent need of giving them a greater variety of experience or tasks at a more advanced level. Thus, enrichment programs aim to provide additional educational opportunities to gifted children. For example, it may include, special assignment (within or outside the syllabus), work on independent projects, preparation of reports and participation in panel discussions, independent library reading, visits to the sites to obtain first hand information, construction of models, aid material and improvised apparatus etc. ,participation in the organization of co-curricular activities, and experimentation and independent research.

## 5. The Mentally Retarded Children

In the classification of exceptional children, the mentally retarded children belong to the lower end of the scale of intelligence and scholastic aptitude quite opposite and contrary to the gifted and who lie at the high end of scale. As a matter of terminology such children are known by so many names other than mentally retarded such as, 'feeble minded, mentally handicapped, 'mentally deficient', mentally subnormal' or 'mentally sub average\*', etc. By whatever name we recognize connotes the sub average mental functioning of a group of children which affects not only their behavior and future development but also creates serious problems for the people responsible for their welfare. Who are these children? What are their specific characteristics and requirements? What can be done for them especially in the sphere of education?

Mental retardation to a chronic condition present from birth or early childhood which is impaired intellectual functioning as measured by and impaired adaptation to the daily demands of individual's social environment.

### Detecting or Identifying the Mentally Retarded Children

What are mentally retarded children like? Do they have so different a personality make up from the normal as to be easily discernible? It is possible to some extent, that the physical appearance of the mentally retarded may give me to some doubt amid their normal intellectual functions. This, however, is not always sound in many cases the physical appearance gives no indication of mental retardation in fact, the similarities between the mental retardates and the intellectually normal people exceed the differences. Therefore, great care must be taken for the proper identification and detection of mental retardation among children. To correctly answer the question, what type of child should be labeled as mentally retarded, we have to consider the broader concept of the term 'mental retardation' or 'mental deficiency'. It is also clear in the light of our accepted AAMD definition, that a mere knowledge of a child's low I.Q would not suffice for identifying him as mentally retarded. In following considerations would also have to be taken into account for the identification of mental retardation among children. The detection or identification must be carried out during the development period, i.e. from the embryonic stage to the end of adolescence. Behavior should be closely and objectively observed for detecting deficiencies in adaptive behavior. In case adaptive behavior is judged to be indicative of possible mental retardation, it should be confirmed through intelligence testing or vice

versa. In all cases, the low I.Q. and deficient adaptive behavior both, should be used as criteria for detecting mental retardation.

## 6. Assessment of Intellectual Functioning

Intelligence test scores in terms of I. Q. are and not only for identifying or segregating individuals with subnormal intellectual capacities but also for clarifying the severity of their mental retardation into various categories such as moron, imbecile and idiot: or degrees like moderate, severe and profound. However, diagnosis of subnormal intellectual capacity cannot be under merely on the basis of a relatively low I.Q. Mentally subnormal children lack much in the power of observation, imagination, thinking and reasoning, and ability to generalize. They are abstract and can only think in terms of concrete objects and situations.

## 7. Level of Retardation

**Mild retardation.** A majority or approximately eighty five per cent of Out retarded are only mildly retarded. As grown ups. These individuals attain intellectual levels comparable to those of the average ten-year-old child. Their social adjustment may be compared with that of an adolescent. Here Usually they lack the innovative and vigorous nature of normal adolescents. They show signs of delayed development early in life and learn to walk, talk, feed and toilet themselves one year later than the average. They may be identified in schools as slow learners and are frequently required to repeat early grades. Speech disturbances are also common among them.

## 8. Causes of Mental Retardation

It is difficult to lay down the standard causes of mental retardation applicable in every such case. A number of factors are believed to cause mental retardation which may be divided into two broad categories:

### 1. Socio-psychological factors. 2. Organic or biological factors.

**(a) Genetic factors :** Mental deficiency may be established by genetic factors operative at the time of conception in two ways-either through transmission of some defective genes in the chromosomes of one or both parents, or on account of chromosomal aberrations. The transmission of defective genes gives rise to many disorders causing mental deficiency. Mental retardation or deficiency attributable to a dominant gene because the persons affected are generally incapable of reproduction. It is often the result of the pairing of two defective recessive genes. When defective recessive genes are paired, as in: The production of enzyme, necessary for an important metabolic process, is disturbed. This in turn, affects the development of the embryo and causes mental deficiency. But in some cases, like Tay-Sachs disease, mental deficiency may also result from the pairing of single recessive genes. Several chromosomal anomalies determine mental retardation at the time of conception. Down's syndrome or mongolism is one such disorder which is said to be caused by chromosomal aberrations. The majority of the Mongoloid children found to have 47 chromosomes instead of usual 46. The number of



chromosome increases as a result of tripling of chromosome 21 (during the fertilization of the egg the chromosome pair 21 become three instead of two).

**(b) Infections:** Mental retardation can also be the result of many infectious diseases like syphilis, rubella (German measles) toxoplasmosis. Encephalitis which can damage brain tissue and the nervous system resulting in severe mental deficiency or retardation. If mother suffers from one or the other of these infectious diseases she may transmit infection to the developing fetus.

**Intoxication :** Mental retardation may be caused by intoxication. A number of agents like carbon monoxide, mercury, lead and various immunological agents like tetanus serum or the use of smallpox, rabies and typhoid vaccine may result in brain damage during development after birth. Similarly, large doses of X-ray in radiotherapy in the abdominal region of the pregnant mother, drugs administered to the mother during pregnancy, incompatibility in blood types between mother and fetus and overdose of drugs administered to the infant also lead to toxicity and brain damage.

**(c) Trauma.** Mental retardation may be caused by physical damage to the brain in the form of injuries prior to birth at the time of delivery.

## 9. Educating Mentally Retarded Children

Often on account of the link between mental subnormal and psychological factors, psychological treatment in the form of individual or group psychotherapy is found to be useful in providing remedial measures for mental retardation. Children can be helped in solving problems of emotional and social maladjustment and resolving their conflicts through psychological measures. Parents can also help in the welfare, care as well as treatment of the mental retardates. For this purpose, there is a need for proper counseling services for them. Moreover, on account of their emotional involvement, the parents do not always realize the shortcomings and deficiency of their children and waste a lot of time and money in the hope that some magic cure will be found through which the deficiency will automatically disappear with time. The mentally retarded, as emphasized, are not all alike. After segregation from normal individuals they can be properly grouped into distinct categories. The accepted classification based on the I.Q., as well as adaptive behavior criteria, are the four levels of retardation: mild, moderate, severe and profound. The school's curricular as well as co-curricular activities should lay stronger emphasis on experience than on abstraction. In any case, in spite of these children should not be expected to attain the level of accomplishment of the same chronological age as normal children. Educational programs for the trainable mentally retarded can not be educated like the normal people. However, they can be trained to acquire certain basic skills so that they may lead their future dependent or semi-independent lives.

## 10. Conclusion

Exceptional children are exceptional in various terms. They should be properly educated according to their exceptionality. There is a need of social, cultural,

administrative, personal, infrastructural support from the society so that they can be educated effectively.

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Mr. **SK. Nazimuddin** received B.A., ( Hons) and M.A. in Geography from Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in 2002 and 2004 respectively, He completed B.Ed. ( Bachelor of Education) in 2011 from West Bengal 2011 from West Bengal State University. After that he received M.A. in Education with Educational Technology (ET) as a Special Paper from Indira Gandhi National Open University ( IGNOU) in 2013 . He also awarded Prestigious.(**Junior Research Fellowship) JRF/in Dec. 2005 by CSIR-UGC**. He qualified **UGC- NET ( 2005,2012) and WBSET ( 2013) in Geography. He also qualified CBSE-UGC NET (2014) and W.B.SET ( 2014) in Education**. He was also awarded post Graduate Merit Scholarship during the session 2002-04 from the Deptt. Of Geography, AMU. Aligarh, Indian. He participated various national and International Seminars, conferences, etc. He published three articles from IJSER, Vol 3. Issue 7, 2015. He did a project in Educational Methodology in 2013. He is also involved in various school based educational activities. Since 2006, he has been continuously serving as an Assistant Teacher ( Post Graduate Teacher) in West Bengal Govt. aided School, W.B. India.