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# JOURNAL OF APPLIED EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL RESEARCH

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# IDENTIFYING THE NEEDS AND PROBLEMS OF THE GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN

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## Abstract

*In this study, it has been stressed that just like other children, the gifted children have certain basic needs as well. This includes needs for security, love, belongingness and the need to be accepted as an individual. The gifted children were seen to have some other specific needs on account of their exceptionality and speciality. Such needs include: the need for the knowledge and understanding, the need for creativity and ingenuity, development of their exceptional ability or abilities, self-actualization or self-expression and the need to feel comfortable with themselves and with the differences that simultaneously open possibilities and create difficulty. In this study, different problems encountered by the gifted and talented children were also discussed. Examples of such problems are: problems arising through the strengths of one's giftedness, problems arising on account of the misdiagnosis and problems arising out of the dual-exceptionality. Effort was also made to highlight the need to nurture the gifts and talents of children. Finally, ways to help the perfectionistic child and to nurture giftedness in a child were extensively enumerated.*

*Keywords:* Needs, Gifted children, Talented children.

## Introduction

The term giftedness has a quite comprehensive and wide meaning instead of merely confining it to the measurement of intelligent quotient (IQ) or achievement in academic subjects. Giftedness involves the notion of being cognitively superior to the majority of members of a particular group. The gifted are believed to have a lot of gifts and talents which other children of their age do not possess. The gifted and talented could



be defined as children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided in the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata and in all areas of human endeavour (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 3).

Like other children, the gifted children have certain basic needs, for security, for love, for belongingness and the need to be accepted as an individual. In addition to these basic needs, the gifted children may have certain additional specific needs on account of their exceptionality or speciality with regard to the possession of their giftedness or talent. These specific needs may be of the following nature:

- The need for knowledge and understanding.
- The need for creativity and ingenuity.
- The need for development of their exceptional ability or abilities.
- The need for self-actualization or self-expression.
- The need to feel comfortable with themselves and with the differences that simultaneously open possibilities and create difficulty.

In this way, a gifted child does not only strive for the satisfaction of his basic needs but also needs the opportunity as well as facilities for the realization of the above mentioned specific needs. In case when he feels difficulty in the accomplishment of these needs, he becomes disturbed mentally as well as emotionally. This brings a sort of maladjustment and he is turned into a problem child.

Gifted child needs a proper environment for 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. Thereby, he is in the habit of asking the truth searching questions. The parents as well as the teachers, who do not understand the necessity of his urges, usually snub him. Sometimes, he wants



appreciation for his ingenuity in scientific field or creativity in arts, but he does not get it. Consequently, he feels insecure and rejected. A sort of mishandling or carelessness on the part of teachers or parents, further aggravates the situation and he is turned into a nuisance.

The needs and problems of the gifted children could be better examined through the following topics which would be discussed one after the other:

### **Problems Arising through the Strengths of One's Giftedness**

Gifted children are known for their many distinguished features and characteristics. As a general notion, they are supposed to help themselves in establishing superiority over their peers and winning appreciation from the elders. However, many times depending upon the situational circumstances and the reactions involved, these very characteristics may put them into great problems (Clark, 2002; Seagore, 2007; Swassing, 2009). As a result, they may be misunderstood and their activities may be misinterpreted much in the following negative sense:

- Their inquisitive attitude and higher level of curiosity may appear embarrassing to the teachers and elders portraying them trouble maker, aggressive or snoop as they pursue anything that comes to their attention.
- Their original and stimulating contributions to discussion may appear as a deliberate part of disturbance on their part for leading discussions off the track.
- Their competency of requiring little drill for the acquisition of facts and skills may get them engaged in "off-the-task" behaviours, causing disciplinary problems.
- Their strong sense of humour may not be understood or appreciated by their classmates and teachers resulting into their nicknaming as "classclown" who act such for gaining attention or creating problems in the class.
- Their creativity, inventiveness and likeness for new ways of doing things may disrupt the leadership efforts of the teachers and seniors. The conventional method of teaching and facts presentation



becomes difficult for being adopted in the presence of gifted therefore, the teacher may treat them as the trouble maker.

- Inability to acquire and retain information quickly may make them impatient with others and the normal speed of classroom learning. It may make them bored and impatient and their inattention, then may be taken as problematic behavior.
- Their sensitivity to the feelings and rights of others may be considered as nosy by others.
- Their high energy level, alertness and eagerness coupled with periods of intensive efforts on their part may appear to others as symptoms of hyperactivity and over-smartness for influencing others.

### Problems Arising on Account of the Misdiagnosis

Many of the gifted children may suffer serious problems on account of wrong diagnosis. The most common misdiagnoses are: Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Mood Disorders, Depression and Bipolar Disorders (Webb, *et al.*, 2004).

The reason for such misdiagnosis or misidentification generally lies in the fact that many of the gifted children's strengths or typical characteristics (described earlier) may be mistakenly identified in one or the other situations, as the very symptoms of ADHD, ODD, OCD or other negative behaviours and disorders. It may be seen as follows:

- The behavior involving restlessness, inattention, impulsivity, high activity level, daydreaming often demonstrated by gifted children in their earlier years may be mistakenly assumed for being these children affected with ADHD disorders.
- Similarly, power struggling with parents and teachers, intensive questioning, trying to do things always in a different way on the part of the gifted children may make them mistakenly diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder.
- Gifted children may also go through extreme mood swings. They are quite happy and delighted at the time of their performances related to their giftedness but may also pass through the periods of



depression caused through the disappointment faced on account of their idealism and feelings of aloneness and alienation on account of their social maladjustment and rejection by peers. Their such state of affairs then may be mistakenly diagnosed as bipolar and other mood disorder.

- Gifted children are found to be quite rigid in their set principles, orderly organization, and structured framework. They are also idealistic, perfectionist and intolerant for mistakes. Their such pattern of behavior may be mistakenly diagnosed as obsessive compulsive disorder.

The misidentification and diagnosis of the gifted children in such a way, may cause a great harm to the well-being of these children. Their giftedness thus turned into disabilities and deficiencies may alter their way of living throughout their lives.

#### **Problems Arising out of the Dual Exceptionality**

Many of the gifted children may also be found to possess dual exceptionality – deviation in terms of positive as well as negative dimensions or attributes of their personality. Accordingly, in spite of their gain or superiority in terms of intellectual ability, academic soundness, or talent related to one or the other worthwhile field of life, they may show significant deficiency or deficits in one or the other areas on account of their disabled conditions. The gifted children in this way may be seen to be affected with impairments and disabilities like sensory impairment, motor or orthopedic impairment, autism, ADHD, personality disorders, emotional disturbance and delinquency. Once diagnosed with such deficiencies, the gifted children are then mostly cared for their disabilities or deficiencies without paying minimal or no attention towards the fruits of their giftedness. Sometimes, it also becomes difficult to find out that particular behavior of a child is due to his giftedness or the accompanying disorder. In this way, the poor child is caught between the two opposite phenomena, the favour gained in terms of giftedness and loss suffered on account of his disability. This dual exceptionality thus, may prove quite costly in terms of his welfare and the cautious attention to be paid for serving his dual interests.



In this way, the very existence of different specific needs and problems of varying nature essentially require much attention on the part of parents and teachers from the very beginning. The gifted children, on account of sheer ignorance about the needs, problems, characters of these children may have many chances of being misunderstood and mishandled by the parents and teachers. They also stand chances of misidentified and misdiagnosed even by the professionals as suffering from some or the other disorders. It is therefore essential that earnest efforts should be made to have their proper identification and diagnosis for their giftedness and talents including the possibilities of dual exceptionality for taking further steps in helping them in their needed growth and adjustment.

### **What Gifted Students Need**

To make forward progress from what they know to what they don't yet know, gifted students need compacting and differentiation. Compacting means condensing a semester or year's worth of learning into a shorter time period. Differentiation means providing gifted students with different tasks and activities than their age peers – tasks that lead to real learning for them.

There are five elements of differentiation: content, process, product, environment and assessment.

**Content:** You are responsible for making sure that all kids learn the content they are expected to know. You are not responsible for teaching that content to all kids. Students who demonstrate that they already know some content, or who can learn required content in much less time than their age peers, are candidates for differentiation.

Content is differentiated through the use of more advanced, complex texts and resource materials, interdisciplinary learning, accelerated pacing, learning centres, and working with mentors. Content is sometimes changed to center around futuristic problems and challenges. The focus of differentiated content should be on understanding more than just the information. The focus should be on how a body of information is organized, the important questions and



issues that are raised, and the way in which research in a particular field of study is carried out, sometimes referred to as depth and complexity.

**Process:** This defines the methods students used to make sense of concepts, generalizations, and/or the required standards. It encompasses learning style considerations, creative and productive thinking and conceptualizing focus on open-ended and problem-solving tasks, opportunities for meaningful research, and the skills to share what they have learned.

Gifted students should spend most of their learning time on tasks that are more complex and abstract than those their age peers could handle. They should gather information and data as though they were actually professionals in the field, assuming an attitude of inquiry rather than pursuing a goal of finding information. They should be expected to support their findings with evidence.

Process is differentiated through flexible grouping, using a learning styles or multiple intelligences approach, opportunities for learning at more complex levels, and sophisticated research. Flexible time limits are essential.

**Product:** This describes the ways in which students choose to illustrate and demonstrate their understanding of the content and process.

Many gifted students resist assignments that require a written product, since their brain usually move so much faster than their hands can write or type. They are often more willing to produce an actual product – an exhibition, independent study, or performance. Gifted students should be guided to produce what Dr. Joseph Renzulli calls “real-life products for appropriate audiences.” These go beyond the typical research paper or report to alternatives that develop individual students’ teachers and curiosities.

Product is differentiated by steering kids to exciting and unusual resources, and to people who can help locate those resources and demonstrate ways to use them.

**Environment:** This describes the actual physical setting where learning takes place, as well as the conditions under which a student is working. Gifted students typically spend more time in independent



study than their classmates, and they often work outside the classroom or school as part of their differentiated work. They thrive in a challenging atmosphere in which individual differences are valued and nurtured.

Learning environment is differentiated by changing the actual place where students work, altering the teacher's expectations, allowing flexible time limits, providing opportunities for in-depth research, and letting students work with mentors.

**Assessment:** This describes the method used to document mastery of curriculum. Gifted learners should experience consistent opportunities to demonstrate previous mastery before a particular unit of work is taught. They should also be encouraged to develop their own rubrics and other methods to assess their independent study projects.

### Why we should nurture the gifts and talents of children?

If provisions are not made for these children there will be losses for the children themselves, for science, and for society at large (Robinson, 2004). Here are some reasons why we should care:

- First, like other children, gifted children deserve a happy childhood full of vigor, joy, optimism, and growth. Gifted individuals of all ages thrive best in learning environments that are a good fit for the level and pace of their development, with the joys and strengths that come from mastering challenges as well as companions who share their interests, curiosity, depth of understanding, and sense of humour (Neihart, Reis, Robinson and Moon, 2002).
- Second, children who are under-challenged and regularly asked to repeat activities that have long-ago been mastered, risk not only the stultifying effects of incessant boredom but are likely to turn off their learning and not make appropriate progress. They may also try their best to be 'just like everyone else' and we may lose them at a very early age.
- Third, retrospective studies have shown that many eminent achievers showed curiosity and interest in their chosen field at a very early age. Gifts and talents of children need to be nurtured from the start.



- Finally, as a society we have much to lose if we do not support the optimal development of gifted and talented children. From them will come many of our social and political leaders of tomorrow, our scientists, our artists and other professionals who have the potential for creating a better life for all of us.

Many gifted children are perfectionists just as Renzulli also believes that a gifted person is someone who is creative, has high ability and high task commitment. In view of this, effort will now be made to examine ways to help the perfectionistic child and as well nurture giftedness in a child with the belief that as we embark upon this, we are also examining how to help a gifted child.

### **Ways to help the Perfectionistic Child**

The most important job of teachers of gifted students is to help them understand that it is perfectly all right to struggle to learn, and the world will not think less of them because that struggle is apparent. A teacher needs to ensure that all his students, including those who are gifted, are always working on tasks that require real effort. In order to do that, the teacher must be willing to assess and give full credit for previous mastery each time an instructional unit begins. Once he discovers that some students have already mastered what he is about to teach, their class time should be spent on alternative activities that help them stretch toward the belief that hardwork is necessary and desirable for all students, even the most capable.

- Help perfectionists learn that success with long-term goals is merely an accumulation of successes with short-term goals. Once students form the habit of taking pride in their ability to set and reach a goal during today's work period, they can worry less about whether the final product, due two weeks later, will be perfect.
- Teach them how to use creative problem-solving (CPS). In CPS, sometimes the best or most useful ideas come later in the brainstorming process. This relieves kids of some of the pressure to get the "right answer" quickly.
- Avoid the phrase "always do your best." When you want to encourage your students to work their hardest, say "put forth your best effort." This shifts the emphasis from the product to the learning process.



### Ways to Nurture Giftedness in a Child

- Encourage children to observe and explore their environment and universe from many perspectives.
- Encourage children's natural curiosity and accompanying needs to ask Zillions of questions. Remember that you are not expected to know all the answers. Help the children predict their own answers and/or locate resources where they might find the answers themselves.
- Provide numerous open-ended learning experiences – those without a single right answer, solution, or method of exploration.
- Provide many opportunities for children to engage in meaningful decision making.
- Provide regular opportunities for day dreaming or reflection. In the creative thinking process, this is called incubation – the time when great ideas synthesize and emerge.
- Group creatively gifted children together with others like themselves on projects and other activities. This experience validates their sense of self-worth and gives them courage to continue in their talent and interest areas.
- Help gifted children find outlets and audiences for their creative products. For example: pair them with adult mentors who can help them explore their creative interests.

### Conclusion

Identifying the needs and problems of the gifted and talented children as well as helping them to find lasting solutions to such problems is a responsibility that parents and teachers must share. Everyone needs to work together to make sure that appropriate educational opportunities are in place at school as well as home. It is unrealistic for parents to expect the school to do the entire job, and it is impossible for teachers to provide optimum results without full cooperation from parents. In actual fact, bulk of the work rest on parents' shoulders because the children spend most of their time with parents.

Parenting is quite possibly the most difficult job around. When the child is an exceptionally capable learner, it can be even more challenging. Many of these children seem to be born ready for work in a courtroom. They love to argue and to bamboozle adults with their highly effective logic. They are tireless, often resurfacing after an



apparent defeat, fresh from new battle with their frazzled Mum and/or Dad. Rest assured that these children need parenting, even though they sound as though they are ready to parent themselves! Being smart is no excuse for inappropriate behavior.

The parenting style that seems most effective with gifted children is non-authoritarian, while still setting and enforcing reasonable limits. Gifted children respond best to adults who are fair, reasonable, respectful, and sensitive to the special needs that arise when a child's mental age exceeds his chronological age by several years.

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