



What is

Giftedness

This is the first of a 10-part series on giftedness, contributed by NIAS, IISc Campus, Bangalore.

Throughout history, we have recognised extraordinary individuals. While there's no consensual definition of giftedness, researchers do agree on certain criteria:

- a) High potential as compared to others of the same age.
- b) The product of dynamic, ongoing interactions between inherited characteristics and environmental factors.
- c) Potential which may be developed into performance or achievement. A gift is a potential; with support and nurturance a gift may develop into a talent, i.e. demonstrable performance or achievement.
- d) Statistically rare. Giftedness can be defined as anywhere between the top 1% and 20% of a given age-group. Most commonly, cutoffs are between 3-5%, i.e. the top 3% of nine-year-olds could be called gifted.

A useful working definition of giftedness is "the ability to benefit from advanced learning material." In any classroom, there may be children who need remedial material to perform satisfactorily (children with learning disorders, mentally retarded children, and children with disabilities). Similarly, there may also be children who need advanced material, i.e. gifted children. Gifted children need advanced material in the same way that special children need remedial material.

What makes a child gifted?

Gifted children are a varied population; there is no 'typical' gifted child. But gifted children do share some things in common. One of the most widely accepted and useful models of giftedness is Joseph Renzulli's (1978) model, which describes giftedness as the interaction of three components:

1: Well-above-averageability(intelligence)

Extraordinary achievement needs high intelligence. However, depending on the domain of giftedness, intelligence need not be exceptional. This is because intelligence has two components:

a: General intelligence: The intelligence researcher Charles Spearman (1904) described 'g', a general mental ability that underlies performance across domains. 'g' is a set of cognitive processes including processing speed, short-term memory, working memory, verbal comprehension, and quantitative reasoning. Numerous research studies have found support for the idea that general intelligence accounts for much of the variance in individuals' performance and achievement across different areas. 'g' explains why a child who excels in one area also tends to do well in other areas.

b: Specific intelligence: The specific or 's', intelligences enable the acquisition of knowledge and skills in that particular domain. 's' is the reason why, though gifted children are well-above-average in general intelligence, they may not be exceptional. A gifted cricketer would rely on cricket-specific 's' intelligences – e.g. bodily-kinesthetic ability, visual-spatial ability for his performance. He would also rely on general mental ability – remember that 'g' intelligence consists of abilities that are useful in all areas. But a cricketer would rely less on 'g' intelligence than, say, a scientist

or a mathematician. We will discuss the issue of 'g' and 's' in the next article when we discuss assessment methods.

2: Creativity

Creativity is the ability to use existing knowledge and skills to produce novel yet appropriate solutions to culturally valued problems. Gifted individuals do not merely reproduce existing knowledge; they make original contributions to their field. Creativity requires divergent thinking and synthetic thinking and depends on every other cognitive ability including reasoning, judgment, and problem-solving. For this reason, many researchers view creative thinking as the pinnacle of cognition.

Intelligence is necessary for creativity, but is not the only factor involved. Research suggests a moderate correlation between intelligence and creativity. A large knowledge base is a prerequisite for creativity. Personal characteristics correlated with creativity include risk-taking, nonconformity, curiosity, and playfulness.

3: Task Commitment

Task Commitment is the term Renzulli used to describe the intense, single-minded, often obsessive involvement of gifted individuals with their particular field. Task Commitment is the motivational component of giftedness. Developing expertise and making an original contribution in any area takes an estimated 10,000 hours of practice over 10 or more years. Characteristics of individuals high in task commitment include physical and mental energy, persistence, vision, sense of personal destiny, optimism, and courage. Gifted children often display a dedication to a particular topic or subject far in advance of their years. They deliberately seek out books, puzzles, subject-matter experts, and challenges in that area and display a large and well-organised store of knowledge (as opposed to mere rote memory of facts).

Levels of Giftedness

When we hear the word 'gifted,' many of us think 'prodigy.' This is an unfortunate conception. **Prodigies form only a tiny proportion of gifted children; they**

represent the extreme end of this

high-potential population. François Gagné (1985) describes levels of giftedness according to their statistical rarity: from mildly gifted (1 in 40) to profoundly gifted (1 in 1 million). Recall that most gifted children excel as compared to age peers. Prodigies excel as compared to adults. Prodigies are extremely rare and are atypical even within the gifted population. Most tools developed for gifted identification are targeted at the larger gifted population – from the mildly to the exceptionally gifted.

What does it mean if my child is identified as gifted?

In the next article, we will fully discuss gifted identification – the methods, how to assess them, and what the test-results mean. Before we go ahead, it's important to keep one thing in mind: being identified as gifted is not a guarantee of success.

Recall the distinction between a gift and a talent. Giftedness is high potential as compared to others of the same age at that point in time. As children grow, their abilities, personalities, and environments change. A child who shows promise today may not always continue to perform at a high level. Providing the child with appropriate support, encouragement, and the space to explore his/her options will facilitate the expression of his gift, but there is still no guarantee that he/she will be an exceptional achiever. Being identified as gifted should not become a burden to the child!

The remainder of this ten-part series will discuss the concerns of gifted children and their parents: educational options, problems at school, socioemotional problems, parenting and family dynamics, and gifted children.



Contributed by:

Contributed by Prof. Anitha Kurup and Ms. Amita Basu, Gifted Education Team, NIAS, IISc Campus, Bangalore.

For more details visit

<http://www.prodigy.net.in>



Giftedness requires well-above-average general intelligence as well as high specific intelligence in one or more areas.