

CHAPTER IIICONCEPT OF SUPERIORITY

The very concept of a child's being superior creates in our minds certain vague notions. Though enumerating those vague notions would, at first sight, appear boring, we cannot help mentioning a few of them such as insatiable curiosity, keen power of observation, bubbling energy, unusual interest, strong will-power, perseverance, originality, good habits, large vocabulary, extensive information, power of retention, foresight and self-confidence.

Vague as the abovementioned notions are, yet they are mainly the characteristics of superior children. And still those notions may not suffice to give a correct definition of a superior child. Hence it would be well to examine a few definitions by eminent educationists and psychologists. To begin with, A. Paul Gossard defines,¹ " Superior children as individuals of

¹A. Paul Gossard: Superior and Backward Children in Public Schools. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Illinois, 1940).

high intelligence for whom regular school work is ill-fitted."

The above definition leads us to analyse the regular school work. The conventional analysis consists of accumulating knowledge, learning text books and getting good marks on tests. This clearly shows that regular work lacks in the application of knowledge to new situations. This does not mean no hazards in school achievement. If certain complex combination of factors exists, the individual may actually turn out to be an underachiever. It is a common experience that regular school work does not always afford enough chances to a superior child for critical thinking or creativity, in as much as it deprives the superior child of opportunities to show his talent or innate capacity because class teaching is planned keeping in view the average child.

Now intelligence comprises of divergent and convergent thinking and this notion supports the fact that conventional tests may account for as little as one quarter of the variance of measures like school achievement. Hence regular school work does not constitute the sole factor, reflecting intelligence. The routine school work constitutes reproduction of matter previously learned and this is independent of the intellectual mode. Hence mere ill-fitting to regular school work is not a factor for judging

superiority. The above argument supports the definition of A.Paul Gossard and also proves that mere academic success may not in all cases be sufficient to improve an individual's superiority.

Carroll² states : "A Superior Child is one who excels in creative thinking and abstract reasoning and has a wide scope of interests and produces a work of superior quality."

One who considers intelligence as vital to a superior child may be taken aback by the omission of the word, 'Intelligence.'

But if one probes deep into the creative thinking, one would at once realise that this process indicates a special aspect of intelligence. But in recent years it has frequently been proposed that conventional Intelligence Tests are highly saturated with 'convergent thinking' skills and take little account of 'divergent thinking', which involves the capacity to invent new responses and is usually labelled 'creativity.' It is sometimes held to be independent of the intellectual mode elicited by 'convergent' tests.

Various authors have argued that creativity is related to unique cognitive factors (Guilford,1950), Lowenfeld,1958) and that it is dependent upon certain

²Paul Witty (Edited by): The Gifted Child: American Association for Gifted Children; D.C. Heath and Company, Boston.

personality characteristics. However, writers differ about the degree of complexity of the processes covered by the term. However, despite the many studies dealing with creativity as either dependent or an independent variable, certain authors have questioned whether there is a separate dimension of creative ability at all. (Burt 1962,1964,McNemar 1964).

Moreover the production of work of superior quality results largely from the operation of 'General Ability' is advocated by Galton in 1883. Burt (1962, 1964) has supported this view arguing that underlying tests of both convergent and divergent thinking, there is a large general factor supplemented by small group factors which are distinct from each other but may occasionally overlap in tests of a mixed type. Thus opinions on this issue include two quite incompatible views: first that 'divergent' tests do not cluster separately from 'convergent' measures and secondly that they do.

Oburn and Rohan³ do not seem to differ from Carroll and A.Paul Gossard when they define the superior child as one having, " High mental capacity, extra-ordinary aptitude for school work and special talents for making superior contribution to society."

³Ibid.

On reading the above definition we are at once struck with the phrases 'extraordinary aptitudes' and 'special talents.' These two phrases are more or less synonymous in interpretation as they involve creativity and production of novelty. But we all know individuals of very high ability who do not live up to their promise and fail to accomplish much in the real life situation because other factors infringe upon them and keep the ability from manifesting itself. Some of these factors may be completely accidental, some centre in motivation, some in the emotional life and attitudes of the person and some relate to the opportunities within the particular society. We must be careful here not to confuse social conformity with intellectual confirmity. Irrespective of social confirmity some who score very high on tests are educationally very conforming and accepting, while others are questioning and search continually for new formulations.

One of the bulletins of the National Education Association defines⁴ giftedness as: 'A high order of ability to handle ideas to produce creativity and to demonstrate social leadership.'

The first two characteristics of giftedness referred to in this definition i.e. a high order of ability to handle ideas and to produce creativity have already been

⁴J.F.Magary and J.R.Eichorn(edited by):The Exceptional Child.(A Book of Readings); Holt Rinehart & Winston,New York.

dealt with in the foregoing pages. So the point that is to be discussed is how to demonstrate social leadership ?

The factors that constitute social leadership are :

(i) Acceptance of Social Values, (ii) Taking care of physical security, (iii) Solving problems, (iv) Possession of self-respect and self-confidence, (v) Effectiveness with others and (vi) Strong desire for personal goals and interests. All these qualities may not be found in a child possessing high order of ability to handle ideas; yet at times, this ability may help to solve problems and yet the solution thus obtained may not always produce creative work.

Dunn⁵ defines the gifted as those students whose potential intellectual powers are at such a high ideational level in both productive and evaluative thinking that it can reasonably be assumed they would be the future problem solvers, innovators and evaluators of the culture if adequate educational experiences are provided."

When one talks about potential intellectual powers, one has to take it for granted that one means the high score on intelligence tests; but some who score high in tests are not only satisfied with routines but show little tendency away from routine types of thinking or to manipulate

⁵ Dunn L.M: 'Exceptional Children In The Schools', Holt Rinehart & Winston Inc., New York, 1963, P.179.

ideas logically or creatively and if these tendencies grow into habits in life situations, they will seem to hinge on what the person does with his talents over time.

Giftedness may be defined as ⁶ " a superior general intellectual potential and ability (Approxi.I.Q. 120+); a high functional ability to achieve in various academic areas commensurate with general intellectual ability, a high order talent in such special areas as art, music, mechanical ability, foreign languages, science, mathematics, dramatics, social leadership and creative writing; and a creative ability to develop a novel event in the environment."

According to Guilford, intellectual activities are of two types - either divergent or convergent and both these stand in contrast to each other. The usual intelligence test items do not well sample out the ability required for divergent intellectual activities. And consequently the ability for divergent intellectual ability contributes but little to I.Q. scores. Hence children having high I.Q. are superior in convergent intellectual performance and children having high creativity are superior in divergent intellectual performance.

This definition does not give us any precision for deciding the criterion for identification. It includes a number of factors whose specifications, nature and extent

⁶ Walter S. Monroe (Edited by): Encyclopedia of Educational Research; (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952).

are difficult to be judged.

All the above definitions put us to such a wide meadow where it is, though not impossible, difficult to find the solution or conclusion for identification. Still the common elements of agreement in them is that of intelligence and creative production. To come to a firm ground let us now examine some signposts, suggested by different researchers, for identification of the gifted.

Victor⁷ limits the term 'superior child' to a child of high intelligence Quotient. Such a child may have at the same time some other special ability; this latter is not, however, prerequisite to classify him as superior, regardless of how talented a child may be, along a particular line, if he does not have a high I.Q., he is not considered 'superior' in the sense in which the term is used.

As we have seen above, intelligence itself is a controversial term and the measurement of the same is further debatable; so any individual exclusively selected on the basis of Intelligence will not satisfy the expectations.

Stenquist, Thorndike and Weigleim⁸ viewed intelligence tests as but one means of identifying Superior Children suggestedg teachers' judgment, achievement tests, school records, measures of special abilities and physical and social maturity data as desirable supplementary evidence.

⁷Walter S.Monroe (Edited by):Encyclopedia of Educational Research; (New York:The Macmillan Company,1952).

⁸Ibid.

This criterion of identification seems to have precision and objectivity. Hence it is a workable criterion with certain limitations. The limitations lie in the suggested supplementary evidences like Teachers' Judgment and Achievement Marks.

Human judgment is not always reliable; then to what extent is one justified in setting achievement expectations on the basis of intelligence test scores and then attributing the discrepancies to non-intellective factors? Does a child's performance on one sample of intellective behaviour, such as represented by I.Q. or mental age automatically foretell what his performance should be on other samples of intellective functioning such as achievement tests or teachers' ratings? But at the same time there are researches which show that achievement marks and teachers' ratings have a very high correlation. Hence we should accept these elements as cut off points.

Now if we glance through the various definitions and the concepts of superior children we find some common elements such as high intelligence, high achievement and adequate social adjustment. These elements can be tested by standardised intelligence tests, examination marks and teachers' ratings.

Hence to select superior children for this study the following three criteria were adopted:

1. High Intelligence Quotient :

Pupils securing I.Qs. 130 or above were included in the group.

2. High Achievement Marks at S.S.C.Examination:

Pupils who secured 70% ^{or more} of marks at above examination were included in this group along with the first criterion.

3. Teachers' Ratings on Specific Aspects:

Pupils were rated by their teachers on the basis of the aspects, suggested to them, and those who secured high ratings alongwith the first two criteria were selected for the study.

Thus the group of superior pupils was selected on the basis of the criteria shown above.
