

4.1 EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS – CONCEPT

“Exceptional Children” refer to children who are very different from the majority of children in the society. These children are classified into certain categories for the purpose of placement and educational care. An exceptional child is who deviates physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially from normal growth and development. He/ She cannot be benefited from a regular classroom programme and need special treatment in school. The disabled, disadvantaged, disturbed and the gifted children are exceptional children. **Recently such children are called Children with Special Needs (CWSN).**

DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM “EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN”

- **Crow and Crow (1973):** “The term ‘exceptional’ is applied to a traitor or a person possessing the trait, if the extent of deviation from normal possession of the trait is so great that because of it the individual warrants or receives special attention from his fellow beings and his behavior, responses and activities are thereby affected”.
- **Telford and Sawrey (1972):** “The term exceptional child refers 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”.
- **Kirk (1984):** “An exceptional child is he who deviates from the normal or average child in mental, physical and social characteristics to such an extent that he requires a modification of school practices or special educational services in order to develop to his maximum capacity or supplementary instruction”.

The above definitions highlight the following characteristics of the exceptional children:

- Exceptional children are quite different and distinct from the so-called normal or average children.
- Their deviation from the normal children can be recognized and distinguished easily.
- The deviation may fall in any of the behavioral or developmental dimension, physical, intellectual, emotional or social etc.
- These children experience unusual or peculiar problems and require special arrangements in terms of care and education for their proper growth and upbringing.

Classification of Exceptional Children

- Exceptional children are of the following kinds:

Intellectually Exceptional	Physically Exceptional	Emotionally Exceptional	Socially Exceptional	Multi Exceptional
a. The Gifted b. The Backward c. The Mentally Retarded d. The Creative e. The Underachiever f. The learning Disabled	a. The deaf and dumb b. The blind & near blind c. Orthopedically handicapped d. Children with speech defect	a. Delinquents	a. Underprivileged Children	a. Children with more than One Defect

A. EDUCATION OF THE GIFTED CHILDREN

The gifted are those children whose cognitive abilities place them in the upper three to five percent of the population. They have an IQ of 130 and above. They have superior cognitive ability, creativity in thinking and production. They possess high aspirations, high motivation, goal oriented behavior, analytical ability, perseverance, linguistic competence and physical abilities. Their problem solving ability is superior. They are fast learners and remember for longer time than average or normal children. If adequate educational experiences are provided they can be future problem solvers, innovators and evaluators.

Definitions of Gifted Children

Different psychologists and scholars have defined the term ‘gifted child’. Some of them are:

- **Witty (1940):** “The term gifted or talented stands for those whose performance is consistently remarkable in some potentially valuable activity”.
- **Marland report (1972):** “The gifted are those who possess outstanding abilities or potential in the area of general intellectual capacity, specific

academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual or performing arts and psycho-motor activity”.

The above definitions show that various scholars have adopted different approaches in defining the term giftedness. Some have provided a statistical and operational definition by adopting scores on intelligence and achievement tests. Some say that giftedness need not be necessarily associated with high performance in some general intelligence test. Clearly, these definitions state that in order to qualify as an indication of giftedness, a person’s performance must be consistent, outstanding, typical, remarkable and clearly above the average performance of others in the group.

Characteristics of the Gifted Child

❖ Verbal Ability

Gifted children often begin communicating verbally at an early age, and they use vocabulary far beyond their age. These children often choose their words carefully, but tend to use a lot of them.

❖ Information Processing

Gifted children often have an “unusual capacity for processing information” and are often able to process that information more quickly and accurately than their peers. These children typically master subjects like reading and math much more quickly than their peers, which can make it difficult to keep them challenged in a regular school setting.

High Curiosity Level

Gifted children often have a high curiosity level and dive into subjects with a passion not seen in most children their age.

Memory Retention

Gifted children are often able to retain information faster and for longer periods of time than average children of the same age. Their rapid learning ability allows them to process facts quickly and retain them for efficient recall later on.

Intensity and Persistence

Many gifted children are intense in the way they learn, which is often why they pick up large amounts of information so quickly. They can also be intense socially, with acute sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others.

Sense of Humour

Gifted children are enjoyable to be around because many exhibit a sense of humour that goes well beyond their years.

Sense of Justice

These children often become interested in justice and fairness at a very early age, which continues throughout their lives.

❖ Strong Imagination

Gifted children often exhibit a strong imagination, with an ability to spin tales that parents and teachers do not necessarily expect.

Keen Observation

Whether reading a book, watching a movie, gifted students often notice seemingly non essential pieces of information that others might miss.

Problem Solving Capabilities

These children, have an “advanced cognitive and affective capacity for conceptualizing societal problems” – the potential leaders of the future.

Needs of Gifted Children

The gifted children have certain basic needs as the need for security, for love, for belonging and the need to be accepted as an individual. In addition to these basic needs they may have certain special needs like (a) the need for knowledge and understanding, (b) creativity and resourcefulness, (c) the development of exceptional ability or abilities and (d) the need for self-actualization or self-expression.

Special Education of the Gifted Children

Different thinkers have put the following plans forward for the education of the gifted children:

- Separate schools
- Ability grouping or separate classes
- Acceleration or double promotion
- Enrichment programs.

Enrichment programs aim to provide additional educational opportunities to gifted children. For example, they include,

- Special assignment (within or outside the syllabus)
- Work on independent projects
- Preparation of reports and participation in panel discussions
- Construction of models, aid material and improvised apparatus etc.,
- Participation in the organization of co-curricular activities
- Experimentation and independent research.

B. EDUCATION FOR CREATIVE LEARNERS

Characteristics of Creative Learners

- 1) Have the ability to make unusual associations or connections between seemingly unrelated or remote ideas.
- 2) Have the ability to rearrange elements of thought to create new ideas or products.
- 3) Have a large number of ideas or solutions to problems.
- 4) Display intellectual playfulness, fantasize, imagine, and daydream.
- 5) Are often concerned with adapting, improving, or modifying existing ideas, thoughts or products or the ideas or products of others.
- 6) Have a keen or unusual sense of humour and see humour others do not see.
- 7) Do not fears being different, but may still be emotionally hurt by non-acceptance. Often the importance of an idea outweighs that of peer acceptance.
- 8) Ask many questions at an early age – this trend generally continues past early childhood into adulthood. These are the kids that surprise others with their wonderings.
- 9) Frequently challenge teachers, textbook authors, and those in authority or “experts”.
- 10) Sometimes come up with unexpected, futuristic, bizarre, even “silly” answers or solutions.
- 11) Are sometimes resented by peers because of crazy or unusual ideas and their forcefulness and passion in presenting them or for pushing their ideas on others. In the context of cooperative efforts or groupings, highly creative students may get along or work better with younger or older students, or with adults.
- 12) When completing special or unusual projects or assignments, often show a rare capacity for originality, intense concentration, commitment to completion, and persistence. In essence may be perceived as working hard to achieve personal goals.
- 13) Become obsessed with completing varied projects, or exhibit unusual persistence in completing tasks. It is this obsessive need to complete a task that

is so important in differentiating folks with good ideas from those who are truly creative.

Teaching Creatively and Teaching For Creativity

There is an obvious sense in which children cannot be ‘taught’ creativity in the way that they can be taught the times tables. Creative processes do draw from knowledge and practical skills. It is also the case that there are various techniques to facilitate creative thinking. But this does not mean that children are taught creatively by direct instruction. We define creative teaching in two ways: first, teaching creatively, and second, teaching *for* creativity. Many teachers see creative teaching in terms of the first. Our terms of reference imply a primary concern with the second. By teaching creatively we mean teachers using imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting, exciting and effective. Teachers can be highly creative in developing materials and approaches that fire children’s interests and motivate their learning. This is a necessary part of all good teaching.

By teaching *for* creativity we mean forms of teaching that are intended to develop young people’s own creative thinking or behaviour. Teaching for creativity involves teaching creatively. Young people’s creative abilities are more likely to be developed in an atmosphere in which the teacher’s creative abilities are properly engaged. To put it another way, teachers cannot develop the creative abilities of their pupils if their own creative abilities are suppressed. This too has implications for the curriculum – and in particular for the type and amount of national prescription of what is taught and how, and for teacher training. Teaching for creativity is a demanding process which cannot be made routine. However, it is possible to identify some general principles. There are three related tasks in teaching for creativity: *encouraging*, *identifying* and *fostering*. In teaching for creativity, teachers aim to:

- Allow for both broad and narrowly focused experimental activity, but always specifying and explaining the purpose of such activity. Those involved have to feel prepared and secure enough to be willing to take risks and make mistakes in a non threatening atmosphere that challenges but reassures. Such work has to be carefully tuned to the appropriate level of development;
- encourage an appropriate attitude towards imaginative activity – a sense of excitement, respect, hope and wonder at the potential for transformative power that is involved, accompanied by a sense of delayed scepticism and distance;
- assist in the understanding of the room that has to be given to generative thought, free from immediate criticism by the learner or others before ideas are subject to rigorous critical evaluation and further development;

- encourage self expression that is oriented towards a given task;
- convey an appreciation of the phases in creative activity and the importance of time – including the ways in which time away from a problem may facilitate its solution;
- assist in developing an awareness of the differing contexts in which ideas may occur and of the roles in intuition, unconscious mental processes and non-directed thought in creative thinking;
- encourage and stimulate learners in periods of free play with ideas and conjecture about possibilities, but compliment this with critical evaluation in testing out ideas;
- Emphasise the use of the imagination, originality, curiosity and questioning, the offer of choice, and the encouragement of the personal attributes that facilitate creativity.

Teaching for creativity aims at encouraging:

- **autonomy** on both sides: a feeling of ownership and control over the ideas that are being offered (Woods 1995:3);
- **authenticity** in initiatives and responses, deciding for oneself on the basis of one's own judgement;
- **openness** to new and unusual ideas, and to a variety of methods and approaches;
- **respect** for each other and for the ideas that emerge;
- **Fulfilment**: from each a feeling of anticipation, satisfaction, involvement and enjoyment of the creative relationship.

Above all there has to be a relationship of *trust*. Teaching for creativity aims to encourage self-confidence, independence of mind, and the capacity to think for oneself. Such teaching is compatible with a wide range of teaching methods and approaches in all areas of the school curriculum. The aim is to enable young people to be more effective in handling future problems and objectives; to deepen and broaden awareness of the self as well as the world; and to encourage openness and reflexivity as creative learners.

(C) UNDERACHIEVER

The term "underachiever" commonly refers to anyone, child or adult, who performs below his or her potential, psychologists typically use the term to refer to a student whose performance in academic studies falls significantly below his scores on standardized tests of aptitude or ability. A student may also be considered to be underachieving based on the educator's evaluation of her learning

potential in relation to the quality of the work she does on class assignments. An underachiever is a person who fails to achieve his or her potential or does not do as well as expected.

Characteristics of Underachievers

- **Low self-esteem:** low self-esteem that gifted students feel may come from the pressures of being gifted.
- **Poor self-Efficacy:** when gifted students fail at something, they blame their lack of ability; if they succeed at something, they attribute their success to luck. These students accept responsibility for failure, but not success. Dweck (2006) describes two types of mindsets in his book *Mindset*. A *fixed* mindset causes students to believe that their abilities are permanent and they can't do anything about them. A *growth* mindset, they understand that their efforts will develop their talents over time.
- **Avoidance Behaviours:** avoidance behaviours protect underachievers from admitting their feared lack of ability.
- **Rebellion:** rebellion against authority, particularly school authority provides another mechanism to protect the underachiever. Blaming the school helps the underachiever avoid the responsibility of achieving, by blaming the system.
- **Perfectionism:** because perfectionism is unachievable, it provides the student with ready excuses for poor performance.
- **Poor Functioning in Competition:** students avoid competitive activities in and out of the classroom, unless they perceive themselves as highly likely to win.

(D) SLOW LEARNER

A slow learner is a child of below average intelligence, whose thinking skills have developed significantly more slowly than the norm for his/her age. This child will go through the same basic developmental stages as other children, but will do so at a significantly slower rate. However, this development, while being slower, nevertheless is relatively even.

On the other hand, a child with specific learning disability is one of average or above average intelligence who has specific difficulties which can make learning very difficult. There may be deficits in any of the basic central nervous system functions, which have to do with the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities ie attention, memory, language, auditory and visual perception, motor coordination and

planning, spatial orientation, impulse control and sequencing. In short, if there is a discrepancy between the children's potential and actual achievement.

Characteristics

- 1. Developmental:** may have immature language patterns or speech problems
- 2. Social:** poor judgement, immature social behaviour, prefers company of younger children
- 3. Personal:** frustration, aggression, anxiety
- 4. Academic:** may show proficiency with particular tasks rather than a subject areas, poor memory, difficulties understanding several steps in a task
- 5. Learning:** needs to have new information linked to old, difficulties transferring information learned in one situation to other situations.

There are similarities between the two groups e.g. errors in number and letter production, reading errors, behavioural aspects, but the differences are what influence the type of instruction used.