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Meaning, Nature and Characteristics of Intelligence

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One of the most important single variables, which affect schooling, is intelligence. Intelligence is the ability to acquire and apply knowledge. Success in school and colleges and in one's own profession, social adjustment, possession of general information etc. are all associated with the concept of "intelligence". The word intelligence is derived from the Latin verb '*intellegere*' which means understanding.

According to Alfred Binet intelligence is the ability for judgement or common sense. Thorndike defines intelligence as "one's capacity to deal effectively with situations". For Jean Piaget, 'intelligence is the ability to adapt to one's surroundings'. In the words of Cyril Burt, "Intelligence is the capacity of flexible adjustment." According to David Wechsler (1977): 'The global capacity to think rationally, act purposefully, and deal effectively with the environment.'

Intelligence is defined as mental capability that involves the ability to reason, to plan, to solve problems, to think abstractly, to comprehend complex ideas, to learn quickly and to learn from experience. It is not merely book learning, a narrow academic skill, or test-taking smartness.

In simple words, intelligence is nothing but thinking skills and the ability to adapt to and to learn from life's everyday experiences.

Who's more intelligent? An engineer designing a bridge, a manager motivating his staff, a professor teaching a class, a violin player in a symphony, an author writing a story, an African Bushman finding water in the desert?

Nature and Characteristics of Intelligence and its Development:

Intelligence is not acquired after sustained labour. It is a gift from nature. Intelligence is not memory. An intelligent person may have poor memory. Intelligence is not a skill which a worker acquires after planned practice. Intelligence is not a guarantee of a good behaviour of the individual.

To understand the nature of intelligence we need to know the classification intelligence as given by E.L. Thorndike and Garret:

1. Concrete Intelligence – It is the ability of an individual to comprehend actual situations and to react to them adequately. The concrete intelligence is evident from various activities of daily life. This type of intelligence is applicable when the individual is handling concrete objects or medicines. Engineers, mechanics and architects have this type of intelligence.

2. Abstract Intelligence – It is the ability to respond to words, numbers and symbols. Abstract intelligence is required in the ordinary academic subjects in the school. This is acquired after an intensive study of books and literature. Good teachers, lawyers, doctors, philosophers etc. have this type of intelligence.

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Thus we see the nature of intelligence as the ability for adjustment to environment, ability to perceive relationship between various objects and methods, ability to solve problems, ability to think independently, ability to learn maximum in minimum period of time, ability to benefit from one's own experience and the experience of others.

Therefore, intelligence is an inborn ability of an individual, the distribution of intelligence is not equal among all human beings. There is wide individual difference that exists among individuals with regard to intelligence.

Characteristics of Intelligence:

The main features of Intelligence are the following:

1. Intelligence is an innate natural endowment of the child.
2. It helps the child in maximum learning in minimum period of time.
3. The child is able to foresee the future and plan accordingly.
4. The child is able to take advantage of his previous experiences.
5. The child faces the future with compliance.
6. He develops a sense of discrimination between right or wrong.
7. The developmental period of intelligence is from birth to adolescence.
8. There is a minor difference in the development of intelligence between boys and girls.
9. There are individual differences with regard to the intelligence between boys and girls.
10. Intelligence is mostly determined by heredity but a suitable environment necessary to improve it.

Development of Intelligence:

It is generally agreed upon by almost all psychologists that intelligence increases up to adolescence and declines in old age. According to Pinter, the development of intelligence takes place at a rapid space up to the age of 14 years, and then it stops at any stage in between the ages of 14 – 22 years.

In the opinion of Terman, students and adults reach the limit of their intelligence growth at the age of 16 years. According to Binet, this limit is reached at the age of 15 years.

According to Otis, intelligence grows up to the age of 18 years. The researchers of Thorndike reveal that the power to learn in a person develops up to the age of 22 years and this power continues to work up to the age of 45 years.

According to some psychologists, the intelligence of dull children grows only up to the age of 14 years and those of normal ones up to the age of 16 years.

In the case of children of genius category, it continues to grow up to the age of twenty years.

However, the definite age till when intelligence grows has not been determined. This problem remains even today as it was earlier.

Conclusion: It can be rightly said that intelligence is the ability to adjust, to think, to understand, to reason and to act in the best possible manner. We can also conclude that during early childhood, there is a period of relatively rapid growth of intelligence followed by a slower late during adolescence.

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**About John Parankimalil**

John Parankimalil, SDB, M.A. (English), M.Ed, Ph.D (Education), popularly known as P.D. Johny is a member of the Salesians of Don Bosco. He is presently the Rector and Principal of Don Bosco College, Tura, Meghalaya and Director of Don Bosco College of Teacher Education, Tura. He received the 1st Computer Literacy Excellence Award from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, the President of India in August 2002 and the Guruvar Best Teacher Award from Shri Kapil Sibal, HRD Union Minister in 2009. He was formerly Principal of St Anthony's Higher Secondary School, Shillong and National President of All India Association of Catholic Schools (AINACS), New Delhi and the Charter President of Rotary Club of Orchid City, Shillong. He has authored several books. He is an Educationist, Story-Teller and Leadership Trainer. He conducts seminars for Principals, Teachers, Students and Parents. His popular books include, He Can Who Thinks He Can (Macmillan), An Elocution Manual (Orient Longman), Progressive Parenting (Unicorn), Inspirational Stories for Purposeful Living (Babhani) The Way to Success and Happiness (Savio), How to Win Over Your Problems (Babhani), The Secrets of High Achievers (Babhani).

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November 25, 2015 at 4:57 PM

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**saly says:**

October 23, 2016 at 1:51 PM

Thank you for the note. A wide concept in a nut shell for better grasping. It is of great help

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November 3, 2016 at 2:23 PM

Thanks for conclusive information it's useful for me teach abstract of intelligence

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PRAMUKTA Tarafdar. *says:*

December 14, 2016 at 6:50 PM

Good notes Sir.thanks.Pramukta Tarafdar .

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