



CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED CHILDREN



A POSITION PAPER

The California Association for the Gifted (CAG) periodically publishes position papers that deal with issues, policies, and practices that have an impact on the education of gifted and talented students. All position papers approved by the CAG Board of Directors are consistent with the organization's philosophy and mission, and the current research in the field.

The position papers support the organization's belief in the value and uniqueness of all individuals, its respect for diversity present in our society, and its commitment to honoring the similarities and differences among all students. CAG encourages the provision of educational opportunities that are appropriate to challenge and nurture the growth of each child's potential. The organization is especially mindful of the need for advocacy for individuals who have developed or show the promise of developing intellectual abilities and talents at high levels.



CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED LEARNERS

To provide appropriate education for gifted children, it is important to understand the characteristics of giftedness. Decades of research has provided a body of evidence regarding these characteristics that shows gifted individuals exhibit high levels of functioning in the cognitive, affective, physical, and intuitive areas. Intellectual processing integrates all of these, but individuals vary in the degree to which they are exhibited; no one child will have all of these characteristics.

The cognitive area is the logical, rational thought processing characterized by:

- an extraordinary quantity of information
- an unusual capacity for processing information at an accelerated pace
- persistent, goal-directed behavior
- high levels of abstract thought
- flexibility of thought
- rapid acquisition of a new language

The affective area is the social/emotional interaction expressed by:

- unusual sensitivity to the environment
- empathy and high levels of awareness of the expectations and feelings of others
- early development of idealism and a sense of justice
- emotional intensity
- high expectations of self and others

The physical/sensory area is characterized by:

- heightened sensitivity to light, sound, touch, smell, and taste
- asynchrony, the unusual discrepancy between physical and intellectual development



- high energy, alertness, and eagerness that might be misdiagnosed as a hyperactivity disorder
- a tendency to avoid physical activity in favor of intellectual pursuits

The intuitive area is expressed through non-linear reasoning characterized by:

- creative approaches and inventiveness in any area of endeavor
- insightfulness leading to leaps in understanding
- curiosity
- sensitivity to aesthetic qualities
- interest in the future
- ability to predict

Some gifted students have characteristics that can act as a barrier to the identification process. Some adults may believe that these same characteristics are incompatible with giftedness.

- lack of organization
- extensive daydreaming
- failure to complete work
- argumentativeness
- challenge to authority
- challenge to assignments that seem pointless to the learner
- keen sense of humor that may not be understood
- perfectionism (e.g. fear of failure)
- inability to prioritize interests that can result in mediocrity
- emotional intensity
- experience of different reality



The California Association for the Gifted believes that achievement tends to be higher, and self-efficacy and self-esteem more healthy when parents and educators understand these characteristics and provide appropriate environments for gifted students. Parents and educators should facilitate opportunities for learning that are appropriate to the cognitive, affective, physical, and intuitive functions of gifted learners. This practice nurtures positive characteristics, avoids some of the negative manifestations associated with giftedness, and encourages optimal development of the student's potential.

References:

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- Karnes, F.A., & Bean, S.M. (2001). *Methods and Materials for Teaching the Gifted*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.