



EARLY LEARNING, K-3



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.



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The standards for Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) programs in California require that schools and teachers provide structures and practices for the continuous progress of students from kindergarten through all grades, even when formal assessment and identification for giftedness does not occur until some years later. There are many children who show advanced knowledge and skills at an early age and who need to have learning experiences that provide appropriate challenge and stimulation at their level of development so that they may continue to grow and flourish. Giftedness must be recognized, either formally or informally, at the beginning of the child's school experience so that abilities can be supported and talents will not be lost. The responsiveness of the learning systems of young children make it essential that they be given the opportunity to progress at their level of development or they will regress, making their school experience limiting, non-productive, and frustrating.

To ensure appropriate growth, classrooms for K-3 learners need to provide a flexible structure and safe environment that is responsive to each child's needs and level of development. To encourage growth in all areas of ability, the learning setting must offer a range of materials in all disciplines including the arts. Experiences are needed that support different levels of depth, complexity, and rigor, allowing for acceleration of content and skill. Abstract reasoning, high-level thinking skills, and rich language experiences must be available. Imagination and fantasy need to be encouraged, sometimes with the child alone and sometimes with other children, with attention paid to creative solutions and unusual ideas and interests.

It is not uncommon for children to exhibit a wide range of knowledge and skill at very young ages; assessment and observation are needed as part of the K-3 program. To assume that all children beginning formal schooling need the same learning experiences is to cause some children to waste talent and ability.

Social as well as cognitive abilities need to be a part of the planning, especially in these early years. Children with advanced development often show high levels of energy that can be misinterpreted. It is important to help these children channel their high energy in ways that show regard for others and still allow for fast-paced, quality learning. Issues that concern the advanced child may be more mature in scope and depth and need to have serious consideration and guidance. Socialization must be planned so that time can be spent with intellectual peers, regardless of age, and with developing an understanding of self, feelings of difference, and strategies to gain acceptance.



There must be opportunities to fail, problem solve, and then try again with the understanding of the concept of failing as an important guide to learning. Teachers must understand perfectionism, emotional and intellectual asynchrony, and internal motivation as each characteristic is commonly found in gifted children and affects their learning and how learning experiences must be structured.

The outcomes of ignoring the needs of advanced students in these early years may include boredom and rejection of school experiences, rebellion and acting out, and the possibility of regression of the child to average development, underachievement, and failure to maximize talent and high levels of ability. To ensure growth and development, appropriate classroom structure and content, characterized by flexibility and challenge, must be in place. Differentiation appropriate for gifted children must include depth, complexity, novelty, and acceleration.

The California Association for the Gifted strongly supports the recognition of giftedness in kindergarten and throughout the child's early school experience even though formal identification may occur only at a later grade level. In the interest of appropriate education for all children, the early nurture of ability and talent is essential.

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