



GIFTED CHILDREN
AT RISK,
ACADEMICALLY AND
INTELLECTUALLY



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.



GIFTED CHILDREN AT RISK, ACADEMICALLY AND INTELLECTUALLY

The California Association for the Gifted believes that current educational provisions and practices are placing many populations of gifted children at risk of losing their intellectual heritage by inhibiting their unique personal growth. Among those populations are children who are gifted and within the culture of poverty; gifted and physically or learning disabled; highly and profoundly gifted; and gifted learners in the regular classroom. In the past several decades, neuroscientists, cognitive psychologists, and educational researchers have extensively documented the essentials for optimal human intellectual development. Every individual is born with unique genetic patterns and the potential for intellectual growth. Research has verified that each child must have appropriate and continuous stimulation, enriched environments, and quality educational opportunities to be able to develop the unique intellectual abilities of the human brain to high levels and prevent the regression of abilities already evident. There is a misguided belief that gifted learners can maintain their abilities even when classroom instruction is restricted to the use of grade level concepts and materials. When no modification is made to meet learning needs, many parents, teachers, administrators, and educational decision makers, are placing vast numbers of children at risk. While no two individuals are alike, nearly all have the potential for developing high levels of ability and, for many; there is the promise of intellectual giftedness. Providing for that growth and realizing that promise is the mission of educators at home and at school.

Among those at risk academically and intellectually are the children living in the culture of poverty, a culture in which a child often lacks the resources and opportunities needed for optimal intellectual growth. Children living in poverty are not typically offered trips to museums, aquariums, or concerts. They seldom are given special art classes, private music lessons, or other opportunities that are out of the family's economic reach. The possible gifts and talents of such children may not be realized. Once inhibited, such abilities will not become evident regardless of the type of testing or assessment used to find them. At home and at school, early intervention, stimulating environments, and enriched educational experiences are essential and provide our best hope. The lack of such provisions cause such populations of children to be underrepresented in the programs designed for high achievers and gifted learners. Within this population are large numbers of potentially gifted children that continue to be at risk.



Other gifted children at risk are those who have physical or learning disabilities. Too often, the attention of the family and the educational community is narrowly focused on enabling these children to cope with their disabilities rather than also recognizing and developing their intellectual gifts. Unfortunately, without continuous challenge at the level of their intellectual development, such abilities cannot grow optimally. Again, progression or regression becomes the issue and the children with disabilities are at risk of losing their promise of giftedness. If more parents, teachers, and educational planners were aware of the vast loss of gifts and talents in this population of children, programs for gifted disabled children would be broadened to include enhancing the highest level of intellectual strength while also remediating physical or learning weaknesses.

Highly and profoundly gifted children comprise another population that is unnecessarily at risk. To provide the continuous intellectual challenge needed for such children to grow and progress intellectually, the educational experience must be greatly modified to keep pace with the individual child's rapidly growing levels of ability. Too often, these children are expected to learn at the same educational level, with the same pacing and materials, as are children of their chronological age. More appropriate provisions may be considered inequitable even though their classmates have no need for or understanding of the concepts and ideas that challenge these far more advanced learners. These children, while fewer in number in the school population, are more vulnerable to the progression or regression principle of brain development. The higher the intellectual ability, the more difficult it will be to find educational challenges. Even when an excellent program for gifted learners is available, care must be taken to provide for these unique learners. The loss of intellectual gifts and talents among this population both for themselves and for society is incalculable.

The largest population of gifted children at risk is made up of the children found in the regular classroom. Too many educators, legislators, and otherwise thoughtful members of society still believe that gifted children can get by on their own, that intelligence is inherited and therefore does not change, that a good teacher using age appropriate curriculum can teach any child, and that all children of the same age learning the same material, at the same time, in the same way is egalitarian and therefore best represents our democratic society. The flexibility, choice, differentiation, and modification of curriculum needed for all children to experience continuous growth and intellectual progress are frequently seen as too difficult, unnecessary, and of questionable value. These ideas and beliefs combine to create circumstances that put the majority of gifted children in our educational system at high levels of risk of squandering their most valuable abilities and inhibiting them from natural intellectual growth and development.



Therefore, CAG is committed to the position that continuous and appropriately stimulating opportunities to learn must be offered to all children at their level of intellectual development. CAG strongly urges parents, teachers, administrators, legislators, and other educational decision makers to become involved in changing the current educational and societal beliefs and practices so that the intellectual and academic potential of every child is achieved.

References:

Smutny, J. (Ed.) (2002). *Underserved gifted population*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.