



# INTELLECTUAL PEER INTERACTION



## 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.



## INTELLECTUAL PEER INTERACTION

Peer grouping is the practice of matching students by shared characteristics such as age, ability, need, and/or interest in order to make teaching and learning more effective. The majority of grouping practices in the educational system involves grouping by age in grade levels. When considering intellectual peers, however, age is not a criterion for grouping. To advance academically, students need to be challenged and stimulated to stretch their minds. To accomplish this, it is important for students to interact with others who engage them in a demanding, active learning process.

Gifted students need such opportunities with students at their intellectual level so that they can advance academically at a rate and pace commensurate with their abilities. Too often gifted students are placed in independent study, without teacher guidance and support, or required to wait patiently for others to catch up to them. Interaction with their intellectual peers gives them the challenge and support they deserve.

In addition, the social and emotional needs of gifted students demand that they interact with their intellectual peers. Because the thought processes of gifted students are significantly advanced, they often feel alienated and lonely at school. Their vocabulary, humor, issues, and concerns usually differ markedly from their age peers. This reinforces their feelings of being odd and different, which can lead them at an early age to doubt themselves, deny their talents, and even become depressed. The result may be underachievement, loss of potential, and an increase in conformist behavior, both socially and academically. Intellectual risk-taking, especially among gifted girls, dramatically declines during adolescence without the support of intellectual peers. For students who are highly or profoundly gifted, these effects are even more pronounced.

Academically and emotionally, every child needs:

- validation - personal acknowledgment
- affirmation - reinforcement from others
- affiliation - allying with others of similar interests, characteristics, and talents
- communion - commonality and exchange with an audience with whom they can

communicate at an equal level of complexity and subtle nuance.



It is therefore the position of the California Association for the Gifted that gifted students should be with their intellectual peers for significant parts of the school day to provide them opportunities to interact with others who have similar intellectual and emotional experiences and responses. CAG believes that such opportunities are needed to nurture them socially as well as ensure their highest academic and intellectual development.

References:

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