



Responding to the Needs of Young Gifted Learners, Ages 3-8

*A Position Statement of the
Minnesota Educators of the Gifted and Talented (MEGT)*

Purpose

Developmentally precocious young learners are found within all cultures as well as all socioeconomic, racial and ethnic groups. These children have accelerated developmental rates and corresponding needs which must be recognized and addressed if they are to be provided with appropriate and equitable services. To help young gifted learners reach their full potential, teachers, parents and caregivers must respond to children's cognitive and affective differences. Schools, in particular, need to provide curricular interventions and program services that nurture the development of precocious young learners.

The purpose of this position statement is to acknowledge the unique needs of young gifted learners. The goal is to encourage those who interact with them to provide developmentally appropriate challenges, interventions and services on a consistent basis.

Characteristics

Teachers and learners need help recognizing potential and the factors that distinguish precocious development which places children out of sync with expected developmental stages. Young gifted learners may demonstrate some or all of the following behaviors earlier and to a higher degree when compared to their chronological age peers. Researchers most frequently cite the following traits as indicative of precocity:

- ❧ Early language acquisition
- ❧ Wide knowledge base
- ❧ Exceptional curiosity and a heightened sense of wonder
- ❧ Provocative and penetrating questioning behavior
- ❧ Intrigue with big ideas
- ❧ Tenacity and passion for specific areas of interest
- ❧ Heightened sense of empathy and social justice
- ❧ Intuitive thinking
- ❧ Subtle or sophisticated sense of humor
- ❧ Tolerance for ambiguity
- ❧ Heightened response to the sensory input
- ❧ Capacity to think creatively and to problem solve effectively
- ❧ Preference for complexity and novelty

Recommendations

The following research-based guidelines are intended to help adults nurture the gifts and talents of young learners.

We recommend that:


❧ **Young gifted learners be provided with a developmentally appropriate and an intellectually challenging curriculum.**

This recommendation can be met through the use of a variety of strategies, including curricular or grade acceleration, individual learning plans, early entrance to kindergarten, and grouping practices. The curriculum should stimulate, inspire and challenge children's thinking.



 **Young gifted learners be provided with creative and playful, exploratory experiences that allow for problem-based, creative and critical thinking opportunities.**

These include meaningful, intriguing and interest-based curricular experiences and activities that move from the concrete to the abstract.

 **Young gifted learners be provided with an enriching and student-centered learning environment.**

A student-centered environment includes a curriculum that incorporates the Arts, a vast array of materials and experiences that touch on students' interests and passions, as well as an environment that honors culture and language differences.

 **Young gifted learners be provided with an environment that supports students' emotional and social needs.**

This includes opportunities for young gifted learners to spend time with intellectual peers for support and affirmation of their uniqueness and strengths as well as opportunities to interact with adults who help them develop social skills and coping strategies.

 **The adults who serve young gifted learners be provided with professional development that addresses the needs of this unique population.**

The professional development experiences should include information about the wide range of developmental abilities and interests of this population and also focus on how to address students' individual needs rather than base their decisions on simply students' chronological age.

References

Bredenkamp, S. & Capple, C. (Eds.). (1997). Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs (Rev. ed.). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Duckworth, E. (1996). The having of wonderful ideas (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Feinburg, S.G. & Mindess, M. (1994). Eliciting children's full potential: Designing and evaluating developmentally based programs for young children. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.

Hertzog, N.B., Klein, M.M., & Katz, L.G. (1999). Hypothesizing and theorizing: Challenge in an early childhood curriculum. Gifted and Talented International, 14, 38-49.

Morelock, M.J. & Morrison, K. (1999). Differentiating 'developmentally appropriate': The multidimensional curriculum model for young gifted children. Roeper Review, 21, 195-200.

For Additional Information See:

Smutny, F.J., Walker, S. Y., & Meckstroth, E.A. (1997). Teaching young gifted children in the regular classroom: Identifying, nurturing and challenging ages 4-9. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

This book was written for educators and parents who are interested in recognizing and nurturing giftedness in young children. A number of practical strategies are discussed, including techniques for encouraging the discovery process within various subject areas, cluster grouping, and curriculum compacting.

Council for Exceptional Children (1996). Curriculum for nurturing giftedness in young children (video, stock no. M5156). Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

This video is a product of the National Training Program for Gifted Children funded by the Jacob K. Javits Program. Information on identifying characteristics of young gifted children and ways to enrich their curriculum are presented in this 30 minute program.

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