

Connecting for high potential



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

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NAGC receives similar questions from teachers and parents; however, rarely is there an opportunity to explore how the “other side” might be facing the issue. Interestingly, both groups benefit from the same information even though they look at it from different perspectives and have different roles to play in helping gifted children reach their potential. Our ongoing goal is for teachers and parents to develop a broader understanding of children’s potential and thus create stimulating learning environments.

Topic for this issue: “Gifted Lingo: What Does It All Mean?”

A Teacher’s View

I’ve recently been offered the position of Gifted Resource Coordinator at my school, and while I am excited at the prospect of providing enriching educational experiences for students in grades four through eight, there is some apprehension on my part. I’ve been teaching for three years, and during that time have heard about the ups and downs the last coordinator faced. I’m worried that without any formal training in the area of Gifted and Talented education I’ll be spinning my wheels trying to make things work. I’m enrolled in a summer workshop for teachers focused on gifted and talented education, and I’d like to make the most of my time there. I’ve already come across so many new terms in my early research on the topic, and I’m quite confused.

To be honest, the word “gifted” conjures up memories of my days in school, when a select group of students (myself not included) visited Mrs. Thurston on Monday afternoons for “enrichment” time. The rest of us in the class just rolled our eyes. Where do I begin?

A Parent’s View

I thought things were difficult to understand when we were trying to figure out whether or not our daughter was gifted. Or is that gifted & talented? Or advanced? Or high potential? If we were confused at that point, it only became more intense once she underwent screening with “percentiles” reported out for ‘normal’ and ‘gifted’ populations on “criterion- and norm-referenced tests” and her IQ being so many “standard deviations away from the mean” in the bell curve.

When she was then found in need of program services, the terms increased exponentially with debates about the merits of “enrichment, acceleration and differentiation,” as well as “cluster and flexible grouping” options.

More terms continue to emerge as her services change over and new approaches are adopted. It is important for parents to be informed advocates, but the lingo really gives us a run for our money!

All disciplines have their own language; a set of terms associated with the materials and methods of the discipline. The field of gifted & talented education is no different. Currently, there is no federal mandate for individual states to adopt specific language or protocols as there is in the field of special education. There is not even consensus regarding the most appropriate name for a field that encompasses designations including advanced, creative, and high potential, as well as descriptors of the ubiquitous “gifted and talented” including profoundly, globally, etc.

As educators and parents, it is important to clearly understand these terms not only in their own right, but also within the context of supporting the needs of this population. What defines a gifted and talented student? Why is it important to assess the progress of advanced learners? What is a state or district using to drive instruction for gifted and talented learners? What are the implications for a child in a gifted & talented “program” whose district is considering a change to “enrichment?” Parents and educators currently have enormous power to help define what it all means in their schools, districts, and states.



Please copy and share this with other parents and teachers in your community who may find this useful.

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1. A Constant Search: Screening and Identification

AT SCHOOL

- When it comes to identification, the first and most important question educators should ask is, “What abilities do we wish to identify?” It is through this understanding that appropriate services can be constructed. If the services are already in place, are we identifying children for whom those services are appropriate?
- Identification through assessment can take place in a multitude of ways that are as varied as the personality differences displayed by students. Identification should not be limited to a simple test score; a closer look at multiple pieces of evidence (rating scales, checklists, performance, and interviews) is needed by anyone establishing an assessment system. Identification should be about acquiring the most accurate picture of the child. You can read more about identification in NAGC’s position statement, “The Role of Assessments in the Identification of Gifted Students” (www.nagc.org/positionpapers.aspx).
- There are several texts on the principles and practices of identification. Two are *Identifying Gifted Students: A Practical Guide* available through NAGC Online Bookstore (www.nagc.org/nagcstore.aspx) and *Identification: The Theory and Practice of Identifying Students for Gifted and Talented Education Services* available at Creative Learning Press (<http://bit.ly/GIQfK6>).

AT HOME

- The process for identification should include multiple criteria (use of more than one type of measure), rather than simply relying on Intelligence Quotient (IQ) (a score resulting from one of several different standardized tests). IQ may be a good starting point, but should not be the only factor considered.
- Other criteria may include how much a child knows about a subject, how the child’s score compares to others in her school/district/state, commonly referred to as norm-referenced measures, or rating scales that the child, parent, or educator fills out while observing gifted behaviors. Other tests could measure:
 - non-verbal ability: figures instead of words to reduce language & cultural bias;
 - creative thinking: writing or drawing in response to figures or prompts;
 - reasoning: assess aptitude through analogies, logic problems, etc.;
 - school-acquired knowledge: measure content knowledge in math, science, social studies, etc.
 - portfolio assessment: evaluate student work for potential and achievement.
- Whichever measures are used, they should be reliable (accurate in measurement) and valid (consistently accurate) and free from bias (fair regardless of gender, race, language, cultures, socio-economic status, etc.). Visit “The Role of Assessments in the Identification of Gifted Students” (www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=4022) and “IQ Tests and Your Child” (www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=960) for more information.

2. A Day in the Life: Options and Opportunities

AT SCHOOL

- Depending on what type of gifted and talented program is found in your district (pull-out enrichment, homogeneous or heterogeneous in-class grouping or enrichment, acceleration, advanced classes or coursework, or independent learning), options for programming will vary greatly. Recall that the services provided should match what has been identified in the student. *Best Practices in Gifted Education: An Evidence-Based Guide*, available at the NAGC Online Bookstore, provides a detailed look at the most common practices in the field. www.nagc.org
- In order to propose certain gifted education strategies or defend current ones, it is helpful to possess access to a research base for many of the most common strategies. Visit the “Gifted Education Works” page for the evidence you

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- Most programming options come under the heading of differentiation (content, process, or product that is changed according to students’ knowledge, ability, learning preferences, or interest). These may include enrichment (exploring the curriculum in further depth or breadth) or acceleration (moving through a subject or grade level at a faster pace).
- Students may be cluster grouped (several high-ability students placed within the same heterogeneous classroom) or flexibly grouped (different groups of students are formed within a class depending on their learning readiness or the method of delivery).

need. (www.nagc.org/giftededucationworks.aspx)

- Carol Ann Tomlinson's "What it Means to Teach Gifted Learners Well" helps clarify what is and is not quality gifted education. (www.nagc.org/teachgiftedlearnerswell.aspx)

- Students can demonstrate mastery by pre-testing out of an entire unit of instruction and might be eligible for curriculum compacting (documenting what a student knows and offering alternative instruction during regular class time).
- View NAGC Position Papers on Grouping, Acceleration, and Differentiation (www.nagc.org/positionpapers.aspx)

3. Social and Emotional Development: The Other Side of the Coin

Despite a comprehensive identification system and effective programming options, there are many other factors to consider when working with high potential or identified gifted and talented students. All too often, a variety of issues might overshadow initial identification or blur ongoing assessment.

- **Asynchronous (Uneven) Development** is the condition in which different aspects of development occur at different rates. A child might be advanced academically, but at age level or delayed in social-emotional competencies. (www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=1211)
- While the term **perfectionism** may sound like attention to doing one's very best work, it actually is a condition that affects a student's achievement or social-emotional well being by hindering appropriate task persistence and emotional resiliency. (www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=1214)
- Psychiatrist and psychologist, Kazimierz Dabrowsky theorized that there are five **over-excitabilities** or areas of high intensity (psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional) that may affect a child's physical or emotional balance. (www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=4022)
- Students with **dual-exceptionalities** are gifted learners who also have a physical or learning disability. The disabilities may even mask the child's giftedness. (www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=5094)
- NAGC has two wonderful texts dealing with social and emotional issues. The first, *The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children: What Do We Know* is a guide for both educators and parents. The companion book, *Social-Emotional Curriculum with Gifted Students* is a great tool for educators and gifted coordinators looking to strengthen their programs. Both are available at the NAGC Online Bookstore. (www.nagc.org)

There are wide differences across the nation in the definition of gifted and talented learners, how best to identify their needs, and what successful programming should consist of. As advocates, educators and parents must share a common message and language in order to effectively promote understanding and acceptance for our nation's most highly-able students and what they need in order to receive an appropriate education. Begin by learning the meaning of terms we all agree upon and that will make it easier to talk about terms and concepts about which we don't yet have consensus.

"SHOULD all kids do it? COULD all kids do it? WOULD all kids want to?"

If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes,' then it isn't differentiated."

- Harry Passow

This issue of *Connecting for High Potential* was compiled by Jeff Danielian, NAGC Teacher Resource Specialist, and Susan Dulong Langley, Parent Representative to the NAGC Board of Directors.



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