

DIFFERENTIATION OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

While educators of gifted students often say that the key to their instruction is “differentiation” from the regular curriculum, it is not often clear precisely what differentiation means in any given circumstance. Differentiated curriculum is necessary in order to meet the widely differing academic needs of individual students. In the case of gifted students, differentiation is essential in order to adjust course content for students’ prior knowledge of the standard curriculum and to provide a challenging learning experience. This position statement explains what is meant by differentiated education, and what does not constitute differentiation when adjusting curriculum for gifted students

NAGC Position Statement

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The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) periodically issues policy statements dealing with issues, policies, and practices that have an impact on the education of gifted and talented students. Policy statements represent the official convictions of the organization.

All policy statements approved by the NAGC Board of Directors are consistent with the organization's belief that education in a democracy must respect the uniqueness of all individuals, the broad range of cultural diversity present in our society, and the similarities and differences in learning characteristics that can be found within any group of students. NAGC is fully committed to national goals that advocate both excellence and equity for all students, and we believe that the best way to achieve these goals is through differentiated educational opportunities, resources, and encouragement for all students.

NAGC supports the provision of appropriate quality educational experiences for all students across the spectrum of ability, background, and achievement. The learning needs of gifted students often differ from those of other students and should be addressed through differentiation, a modification of curriculum and instruction based on the assessed achievement and interests of individual students.

To provide appropriate and challenging educational experiences for gifted students, differentiation may include:

- acceleration of instruction;
- in-depth study;
- a high degree of complexity;
- advanced content; and/or
- variety in content and form

Problems occur when teachers attempt to meet the needs of gifted students by limiting learning experiences to:

- offering more of the same level of material or the same kind of problem;
- providing either enrichment or acceleration alone;
- focusing only on cognitive growth in isolation from affective, physical, or intuitive growth;
- teaching higher thinking skills (e.g. research or criticism) in isolation from academic content;
- presenting additional work that is just different from the core curriculum; and/or
- grouping with intellectual peers without differentiating content and instruction.

Differentiation for gifted students consists of carefully planned, coordinated learning experiences that extend beyond the core curriculum to meet the specific learning needs evidenced by the student. It combines the curricular strategies of enrichment and acceleration and provides flexibility and diversity. Appropriate differentiation allows for increasing levels of advanced, abstract, and complex curriculum that are substantive and that respond to the learner's needs. NAGC believes that the use of such differentiation is essential to maximize the educational experience for gifted and talented students. NAGC further believes that appropriate educational experiences for these students are more effective when differentiated materials and activities are planned in advance and easily accessible.

Differentiation of Curriculum and Instruction. Retrieved September 11, 2007, from National Association for gifted Children Web site: <http://www.nagc.org/CMS400Min/index.aspx?id=387>