NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

POSITION PAPER

COOPERATIVE LEARNING FOR GIFTED STUDENTS

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

Cooperative Learning (CL) encompasses a variety of classroom practices which include the following attributes: group interdependence built around common goals, a focus on social skills or group dynamics, and individual accountability for material learned. Cooperative learning experiences can provide valuable opportunities to share ideas, practice critical thinking, and gain social skills.

When heterogeneous CL groups are the primary strategy in the classroom, gifted students' needs may not be met. Cooperative learning advocates often stress forming CL groups with students intentionally clustered by mixed abilities. When gifted students are included in these CL groups, special care must be taken to differentiate the tasks appropriately. Cooperative learning is more likely to be effective for gifted learners when group tasks and goals:

- take into account differences in students' readiness levels, interests, and learning modes;
- focus on high level tasks that require students to manipulate, apply, and extend meaningful ideas;
- ensure appropriate and balanced work responsibilities for all participants;
- ensure balanced opportunities for learners to work with peers of similar as well as mixed readiness levels; and
- are balanced with opportunities for students to work independently and with the class as a whole.

When differentiation does not happen, gifted students may feel overburdened and responsible for the entire "workload."

Teachers who use CL with heterogeneous groups need additional support and preparation in how to structure the learning tasks to ensure that the instructional activities meet the cognitive and social needs of the most able students in the group. NAGC believes that cooperative learning should be viewed within a range of instructional strategies that may enhance some learning objectives for some gifted students some of the time but should not be used as a panacea to replace differentiated services addressing the educational needs of gifted students. When used in conjunction with an array of services to differentiate the education of gifted students, CL can be an appropriate strategy.

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