

Arts Education and Gifted and Talented Students

The arts are essential to a balanced education, with specific benefits for the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development of all students, with special benefits for gifted and talented learners. Yet frequently, when school resources are limited, arts education funding is reduced or eliminated. NAGC believes that arts education is fundamental to an appropriate education for gifted and talented learners and should be addressed through domain-specific opportunities and authentic integration across the curriculum.

The arts—music, visual arts, creative writing, theater, and dance—foster the development of skills that are critical for the development of innovation and design in emerging technologies (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010), cultural appreciation, and fine and gross motor skills (Catterall, 1998; National Assembly of State Art Associations, 2006); moreover, education in each arts discipline is important in its own right. Research links specific types of training in some arts fields, such as music and drama, to growth in specific cognitive skills; more importantly, however, the arts offer students a way of thinking that is not available in other disciplines (Hetland & Winner, 2001). Other research identifies benefits to the work of professionals in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and indicates that nationally and internationally eminent scientists often credit the arts with giving them additional insight into problem-solving strategies in their fields (Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 2004, 2013).

Early arts experiences, including subject-specific classes and other opportunities through school and community programs, are critical and should be provided for children. Such opportunities may allow parents and educators to uncover talent that otherwise may be missed, especially for low-income children who do not otherwise have access to outside-of-school arts programs that provide additional avenues where their talents might be noticed and developed.

Arts education that includes a meaningful integration of the arts across the curriculum is especially responsive to gifted children who benefit academically from interdisciplinary approaches that allow them to make meaningful connections across subject-area domains. Such integrated and interdisciplinary approaches also facilitate greater conceptual understanding and expression of complex ideas (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014).

Arts education and specialized training are necessary to nurture children with advanced abilities in one or more artistic domains. Such programs may be found in traditional, comprehensive, public schools or in schools specializing in the arts. Students may also need additional opportunities for talent development through such avenues as private lessons with experienced mentors, community-based outreach programs, participation in cultural events, and interest-driven extracurricular experiences (Peppler, 2013).

NAGC supports arts education as a vital aspect of the curriculum for all children, and the specific arts experiences should vary according to student needs: early arts experiences are needed to allow educators to identify and respond to artistically talented students, advanced opportunities are needed for students with exceptional talent in art domains to be properly nurtured, and an integrated approach across domains is needed to guide academically gifted children in acquiring creative and critical thinking skills and deeper conceptual understanding. A comprehensive arts program includes additional opportunities for performance and production but also instruction aimed at fostering the appreciation and understanding of the arts as disciplines. Arts education plays an essential role as schools prepare students to contribute to advancements in technology, science, and mathematics, to interact with diverse communities, and to participate in a changing world.

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The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) is an organization of parents, teachers, educators, other professionals, and community leaders who unite to address the unique needs of children and youth with demonstrated gifts and talents as well as those children who may be able to develop their talent potential with appropriate educational experiences.

All position papers are approved by the NAGC Board of Directors and remain consistent with the organization's position 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 Position Papers can be found at www.nagc.org.