

# NSWAGATC Position Statement

## Giftedness in Early Childhood

This position statement aims to inform and guide parents and teachers of young gifted children. Position statements on our website are based on the latest information available to gifted experts within and outside the Association, and will be updated from time to time as new evidence becomes available.

It is generally agreed that giftedness is a result of a complex interplay between genetic heritability and environmental opportunity. Giftedness may become evident at any time during the life cycle.

### Signs in early childhood

In early childhood, the signs of giftedness can be many and quite varied, however it is generally agreed that developmental milestones are reached significantly earlier by young gifted children than by other children (Harrison, 1995). As gifted children are not a homogenous group, their characteristics do vary, however some of the most commonly observed characteristics may include

- early and complex language with a precocious vocabulary
- early ability to read, usually self taught
- a fascination with a particular subject matter
- unquenchable curiosity
- unusual and complex drawings, construction
- unlimited amounts of energy
- Sensitivity
- Excellent memory

### Supporting giftedness in young children

Young gifted children have an insatiable thirst for knowledge, often in the area of their fascination and interest (Winner, 2000). The most natural and simple way to provide for a gifted child is to acknowledge and cater to their interests and strengths. As an example, if a child is fascinated with dinosaurs, a trip to the library to borrow books about dinosaurs will be supportive to this interest, as will a visit to a museum with dinosaur bones, watching movies about dinosaurs and using dinosaur stencils or providing miniature toy dinosaurs as a prop for the child's play.

### Play and the young gifted child

Young children learn in many ways, and they learn particularly well through experimentation and play. In the case of young gifted children, 'play' may not have the same meaning as it does in relation to other young children. For example, a young gifted child may prefer to experiment with numbers or may find learning to read increasingly fascinating, or may prefer to pour over books to playing with other children, dressing up, playing at mothers and fathers or riding a tricycle.

### Social Adjustment

Young gifted children may prefer their own company or the company of adults or older children to the company of chronologically same aged children. This is often misunderstood as a lack in social skills, although it is more likely that young gifted children have less in common with their same-age peers due to the gap in their mental ages. As mentioned, gifted children have a thirst for knowledge, and this is much better catered for by adults or older children than by their chronologically same-aged peers. Other children may also find the language of the gifted child somewhat strange or fail to laugh at their particular brand of precocious humour, or refuse to play a game with a gifted child who may wish to change the rules of a game based on his or her particular rational ideas, which may be incomprehensible to other young children.

## **Behaviour Management**

The behaviour of young gifted children can be difficult to manage for the following reasons:

- many can use logic to out-argue most adults
- their heightened sensitivity can result in highly emotional episodes

As with all children, adults should endeavor to be consistent, calm and predictable, and to ensure as far as possible that their own behaviour can be a model for the gifted child. It is important to always acknowledge the child's concerns and feelings, attempt to help resolve any problems, but not be dictated by them. Rules are important, although a gifted child will be very sensitive to whether these rules are based on rational ideas. Rules should be few in number, involve safety and concern for others, be agreed to by all family members as reasonable, and consequences for breaking rules for the child should be predictable and consistent.

## **Early Entry**

There is very little provision for young gifted children in the first few years of school. This is why early entry may prevent later problems of boredom (Wellisch, 2004). The NSW Department of Education policy makes it possible for gifted preschoolers to gain early entry to school provided the Principal of the school is agreeable to this arrangement (for more information, see the link: <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/policies/gats/faqs/faqresponses.htm>). The school will usually require proof of intellectual giftedness in the form of an IQ test, obtainable from psychologists specializing in psychometric testing.

The greatest worry for parents facing the decision of early entry is the question of readiness. However, the age of a child has little to do with school readiness. Readiness is about a child being keen to start school, about adequate self help skills, and about social and emotional maturity (Watson, J., 2003). Although there is a long-standing urban myth that holding children back is beneficial for later achievement, recent research has demonstrated the opposite to be true (Elder & Lubotsky, 2009).

**The NSW Association for Gifted and Talented Children** believe that it is important to support the parents and teachers of young gifted children, and to advocate for the rights for these children. We provide telephone and email support as well as parent and early childhood teacher events and training on the subject of young gifted children, and endeavour to ensure that the subject is debated regularly at early childhood gifted conferences.