What Do I Do With Highly Capable Young Learners?

Nancy B. Hertzog
University of Washington

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Know

- Early childhood is a special time period in a child’s life – Asynchronous Development!!

Understand

- There are many ways to address the needs of diverse young learners in your classrooms.
- The environment is critical to nurture talent development

Do – Make an Action Plan

- Plan a gifted program for young learners.
It’s not impossible --- It’s just complicated!!
What makes developing programs for highly capable students so complicated for young students preK – 3?
What is the Field of Early Childhood Gifted Education?

• Best Practices
Early Childhood Education

- Lays the foundation for all future endeavors of young children.

- For every dollar spent on preschool, between $4-$8 is saved in later social service costs to society.
What is special about early childhood gifted education?

- Classroom Management
- Challenging
- Belief Systems
- Developmentally Appropriate
- Required Curriculum
Definition of Highly Capable Students

• Students who perform or show potential for performing at significantly advanced academic levels when compared with others of their age, experiences, or environments.

• Outstanding abilities are seen within students' general intellectual aptitudes, specific academic abilities, and/or creative productivities within a specific domain.

• These students are present not only in the general populace, but are present within all protected classes according to chapters 28A.640 and 28A.642 RCW.
Potential - Not Yet!
Why is it so complicated to identify young children as gifted?

• What we know about intelligence
• What we know about early environmental influences
• What we know about early childhood programs
• What we know about approaches to learning
What do we know about intelligence?

• Intelligence is **malleable**
  – Brain scans show differences related to different occupations

• Intelligence is **not static**

• Prior experience matters in developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions
• Poverty has profound impact on learning opportunities

• Study indicates that students whose families socioeconomic status places them in the top quartile of the population are about five times more likely to be in programs for gifted students than are students from families in the bottom quartile.
Achievement Gaps Start Young

- Vocabulary development – key factors
- Children from low-income homes hear an average of 8 million fewer words per year than those from wealthier families
- 30 million fewer words by the time child is 4.
Majority of poor children of Hispanic Origin

Best Practices for English Language Learners --- Support home language

These children no less gifted, less intelligent, or have fewer aspirations to become eminent

Drawing attention to and nurturing at-risk children’s areas of strength offers a promising alternative to the all too typical characterization of this population as deficient.
Potential for Showing Exceptional Performance
How do you nurture potential?
1. Identify strengths in young children by ongoing assessment to inform instruction – *Young children are moving targets*

2. Redefine what is meant by “A Gifted Program”

3. Focus resources on professional development for teachers – *teachers key* to engagement and challenge

4. Focus on environments where children are appropriately challenged

5. Develop and maintain *ongoing positive relationships with parents* – parents know their young children.
• Collaborative Resource Teacher
• Flexible grouping: reading, math, integrated projects, interests
• Professional Development for Classroom Teachers
• Multiple Services and Programs:
  – Acceleration in specific subject areas
  – Opportunities to explore interests
  – Programs for Parents
What is an early childhood gifted program?

• Defined by curriculum and instruction – not only good for “gifted” children, **but must be there to challenge gifted children**

• Focus on **creative, critical and evaluative thinking**

• **Role of teacher** – facilitator of learning; empower the student; teach students, not prescribed curriculum

• **Role of student** – agency and ownership in learning
What does it look like?

- Inclusive classroom – where talents are developed and nurtured
- Children working on many different things at the same time – Choice Time
- Resource teacher helping classroom teacher – Higher teacher/student ratio
- Collaborative relationships with parents to share curricular projects, elicit suggestions
- Students integrating project investigations and applying their skills in authentic learning experiences – Very little rote and drill!
Three Components

- **Family connection** welcomes families into the Washington K-12 system as partners in their child’s education.

- **Whole-child assessment** gives kindergarten teachers information about the social/emotional, physical, cognitive, language, literacy and mathematics development of the children in their classrooms, so they may tailor their instruction to the individual needs of each child.

- **Early learning collaboration** aligns practices of early learning professionals and kindergarten teachers to support smooth transitions for children.
Getting to know your students

• Family Connection
  – Talk about each students’ strengths and needs

• Whole Child Assessment
  – Teachers observe and record each child’s developing skills in six areas: social-emotional, physical, cognitive, language, literacy, and mathematics
Defensible Conclusions

- Young children have potential for talent development.
- Early life experiences greatly impact later achievement.
- Poverty has a profound impact on children’s learning experiences.
- Building a foundation in children’s first language helps them to acquire English.
- High-quality early learning environments challenge young children and address their individual learning needs.
- The social-emotional skills and positive approaches to learning that enhance peer relationships and later achievement can be taught.
The practice of labeling young children as gifted through standardized tests, in particular IQ tests.

The use of behavioral checklists that include curiosity, persistence, and attentiveness to label young children gifted. We know that these skills can be taught and should be part of all early childhood learning experiences.

The practice of separating young children—determining some are gifted and others not—does not take into account influences of early learning experiences and unwittingly serves to widen the opportunity gap.

Children learning English should be gaining a foundation in their first language as well as acquiring a new language. Pulling them out of instruction in their own language to attend special programs (e.g., gifted programs) should be done with caution.
Exploration – but with Guidance and Skill