

A CASE STUDIES APPROACH



# Exploring Critical Issues in Gifted Education



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# Introduction



## **Why Read a Book on Case Studies for Professional Development?**

Although the best way to provide opportunities for educators to analyze and reflect on various situations in education is through field experiences and hands-on practice, it is not always easy or even possible to organize such encounters with experienced professionals, especially in the field of gifted education. Burkman's (2012) study, related to preparing novice teachers for success in elementary classrooms, identified teaching gifted and talented students in the top 25% of the list of challenges faced in the classroom. It is important to note these novice teachers also ranked interactive and cooperative learning as a method of presentation that would be most meaningful or appealing for the delivery of professional development. Thus, we need to take into consideration how to provide the best training and instruction for educators and stakeholders working with gifted and talented students. In order to better prepare educators and other school personnel to work with these children, we have developed a book of case studies representing various problem-based learning scenarios that focus on information and authentic stories gathered from our own experiences. These encounters range from those exemplified by teachers, parents, administrators, higher education professionals, and state leaders, with each representing events that occur in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms located in a variety of settings. We find that learning scenarios have enormous appeal and are appropriate for professional development because they:

- can be read and discussed in a short amount of time;
- allow the reader to gain greater understanding through empathy;

- encourage an active response;
- encourage an analysis of multiple perspectives;
- illustrate active problem-solving strategies that can be modeled and used with participants;
- encourage reflection on various solutions, thereby opening doors to new possibilities; and
- provide resources for further exploration of issues related to the case.

We have also discovered that learning scenarios mirroring real-world problems that end in a dilemma engage the reader in a reflective analysis of teaching and learning. This book portrays learning scenario *narratives*, each with brief *introductions* that provide an overview of the case before proceeding to read the entire scenario. Within each case, the *things to consider* section supplies the reader with essential information without imparting an explicit action, recommendation, or solution. *Discussion questions, activities, extensions, and suggestions for further reading* support the standards of excellence set forth in the revised *NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Education Programming Standards* (2010; see Appendix A). It is our goal that educators draw from the cases presented, which situate learning in authentic and meaningful contexts for the purpose of improving the identification of and services for gifted and talented students in light of these new standards. There are several decision-making strategies provided that one could use during various stages of analysis to enhance the understanding of each learning scenario.

### What Will You Learn From Case Studies?

The learning scenarios encourage a detailed analysis and critical reflection of the most current and prevalent issues in gifted education, such as identifying gifted children of poverty, differentiating instruction, implementing grouping practices, meeting social and emotional needs, serving twice-exceptional students, incorporating Response to Intervention (RtI), and facing the reality of limited resources. These scenarios constitute real-life experiences of the authors representing those dilemmas typically found in schools. It should be noted that all names have been changed in an effort to preserve the privacy of the individuals, schools, and communities portrayed in the case studies. In some cases, the attributes of several students have been combined to illustrate the complexity of student needs.

This book offers the opportunity for educators and stakeholders to examine giftedness in a variety of contexts that are authentic in nature. It is recommended that readers work in pairs or in small groups to investigate and analyze the scenarios using a five-step model adapted from the work of Finkle and Torp's (1995)

problem-based learning, as further developed in Chapter 1. Each case supports an examination of one of the *NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Education Programming Standards* (2010), which includes:

- Standard 1: Learning and Development
- Standard 2: Assessment
- Standard 3: Curriculum Planning & Instruction
- Standard 4: Learning Environments
- Standard 5: Programming
- Standard 6: Professional Development

### **Who Might Benefit From Analyzing the Cases?**

Case studies provide an opportunity for both the prospective teacher and in-service teacher to begin anticipating the issues that they might encounter and be required to resolve. Specifically, those who would benefit include:

- Preservice teachers enrolled in general and special education coursework.
- In-service teachers enrolled in advanced and/or graduate level coursework.
- All educators (teachers, administrators, counselors, psychologists, support staff) enrolled in gifted and talented endorsement, certification, and/or professional development coursework.
- Practitioners at any level of professional development, responding to cases through discussion, who may refine understanding, explore more in-depth, reflect on current practices, and extend his or her perspective.
- Parents and community members who wish to learn more about students who are gifted and talented.

### **How Will Reading Case Studies Be Relevant to Your Educational Practice?**

We have discovered that the approach of presenting issues in a case study related to educating gifted and talented learners influences both the classroom and school setting by:

- requiring connection to formal learning with real-life situations;
- relying on personal experiences to collect, interpret, and explain circumstances presented in the case;
- providing facts and limitations related to a particular event;
- encouraging the examination of possible interpretations;
- using inquiry to investigate what is happening; and

- requiring reflection of a situation for learning, while providing different perspectives on common problems.

This knowledge base and set of skills are essential for making effective decisions related to meeting the needs of gifted learners, whether you are a parent, educator, administrator, counselor, or other school personnel. Kuntz and Hessler (1998) stated that the case study method effectively enhances learning because it:

- develops higher order thinking skills;
- illustrates the relevance of the study in society;
- asks readers to question assumptions underlying the theories presented; and
- most importantly, exhibits learning from the cases long after the study concludes (pp. 7–9).

### How Does Our Case Study Book Differ From Others?

Each learning scenario is specifically designed to help the reader explore critical issues within the field and includes the following components:

- addresses an important issue in educating gifted and talented children;
- engages the readers in the study of a variety of issues from a pedagogical and conceptual perspective;
- presents a dilemma commonly found in the field and provides decision-making tools to facilitate inquiry and stimulate an interactive response;
- is open-ended, providing motivating “what if” questions for further study of the issue;
- provides an opportunity for analysis implementing the NAGC Programming Standards (2010); and
- supports professional development opportunities for all educators and stakeholders involved in the education of gifted learners.

The matrix on page 17 represents the cases and their key issues provided for discussion and analysis in this book. The *NAGC Pre-K–Grade 12 Gifted Education Programming Standards* (2010) align with each case.

*A Matrix of Case Studies*

	Title	Key Issue(s)	
Chapter 2	Claire	Response to Intervention (RtI)	Standard 1: Learning and Development
	Wyatt	Identification, characteristics, and middle school issues	
	Jessica	Characteristics of twice-exceptional learners	
Chapter 3	Eric	Assessing programs and evaluating services	Standard 2: Assessment
	Dumont Public Schools	Assessing students for services	
	Tonya	Identifying creatively gifted students	
Chapter 4	Mrs. Lewis	Curriculum and differentiated instruction in rural schools	Standard 3: Curriculum Planning & Instruction
	Mr. Jackson and Miss Mendoza	Tiered assignments	
	Mike, Martha, and Lucy	Analysis of data to inform instruction appropriately	
Chapter 5	Raul	Special populations, at-risk learners, and cultural competency	Standard 4: Learning Environments
	Rebecca	Special populations	
	Ingrid	Social-emotional; parent's view	
Chapter 6	Lenore School District	Program services in rural schools	Standard 5: Programming
	Martin	Acceleration	
	Skylar School District	Defensible programs	
	STARS	Services in the middle school years	
	Avery, Ethan, and Brazos	Young gifted with varying needs	
Chapter 7	Rosamaria	Professional development; counteracting bias	Standard 6: Professional Development
	Hendersonville Day School	Professional development for implementing differentiation	
	University School District	Professional development related to creating classrooms for gifted and advanced learners	

Finally, tools for analysis and decision-making are provided in Appendix B to help examine all of the nuances presented in the scenario without missing key points and critical ideas.