

# PLC/Book Study Guide for *Teaching Gifted Children in Today's Preschool and Primary Classrooms*

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This guide is designed as a professional development resource and can be used to facilitate a book study or as a learning experience for a professional learning community (PLC). Facilitator notes are provided for additional support and explanation in facilitating your groups' sessions. We recommend that the facilitator read the entire guide and the book before beginning the study.

For each session, participants will be asked to read chapters of the book. They may also be asked to bring particular materials or create or implement something *prior* to attending a session. Please note that preparation work is noted at the beginning for each meeting. Before participants depart from each session, look ahead to the next session and review and clarify what should be done before the next meeting.

***Facilitator Note:*** Each session in this PLC/book study guide is focused on a book chapter. Depending on the needs of the group, each session can involve more than one meeting. While the guide offers a range of discussion topics, many more could be covered. At each session, be sure to assess what participants most want and need to discuss and learn, and allow time to focus on those topics.



# Chapter 1 Session: Identifying the Young Gifted Child

To be completed before the Chapter 1 session:

- Have participants read Chapter 1.
- Ask participants to write down their beliefs about gifted students.
- Have participants list any questions they have about giftedness.

1. Examine the various definitions and compare your school's or district's definition. Compare and contrast the various elements of definitions. How do the various definitions influence your perspective of gifted children?

**Facilitator Note:** *The goal is to identify the various definitions, focus on your school's or district's definition, and have teachers analyze their own perspectives and views.*

2. Review the chart with the positive and negative characteristics on page 10. Discuss how these look in classrooms. Identify strategies for addressing the negative behaviors as well as ways to change negative mindsets related to these behaviors.

**Facilitator Note:** *Address the view of various behaviors and figure out ways to look at the negative behaviors in a more positive way. Discuss strategies for addressing some of these behaviors.*

3. Discuss strategies and ways to get to know your students. Share ideas and add new ones to use.

**Facilitator Note:** *The chapter provides myriad of ideas to get to know students. Teachers also have their own ways and ideas. Encourage the sharing of these ideas as related to the school culture, grade level, or specifics for classrooms. This is a great opportunity for teachers who are not including several activities like this to add more to their classroom.*

# Chapter 2 Session: Creating the Learning Environment

To be completed before the Chapter 2 session:

- Have participants read Chapter 2.
- Ask participants to create a list of ways that they design their classroom to make it inviting for their students.
- Have participants think of ways that they use or apply different learning modalities in their classrooms and list them.

In workshop format, discuss how your classrooms are designed to make students feel welcome and comfortable.

1. What strategies have you used that work well? List them. What would you like to change or try that is different from what you currently do?
2. How could you use the name card method to engage all students in class discussions? What other techniques work well to engage students?
3. In small groups, share how you implement or explain how you plan to implement different learning modalities in your classroom.
4. How do you balance group and individual activities? Structured and creative activities? Share these ideas with your group.

**Facilitator Note:** Record or assign a recorder to capture group response ideas. Identify which activities are helpful and who is planning to implement them with their students.

# Chapter 3 Session: Planning for Curriculum and Extending Learning

To be completed before the Chapter 3 session:

- Have participants read Chapter 3.
- Ask participants to list what they want their students to know and be able to do as a result of studying a unit in one content area.

1. In small groups, discuss the ways you pre-assess what students already know when you are about to begin a unit of study.
2. What do you do with the child who already has mastered the material? Share your ideas with your small group.
3. How do you extend or accelerate learning and skills for students who excel? What new ideas would you like to try? Share with the group.
4. Try to implement new ideas and report how well they worked. If the attempt was not as successful as you desired, how could you reframe or clarify the ideas and their implementation?

**Facilitator Note:** *Try to steer comments toward a positive, problem-solving discussion that will assist participants in supporting young gifted learners more effectively.*

# Chapter 4 Session: Promoting Creativity, Discovery, and Critical Thinking in the Social Studies Curriculum

To be completed before the Chapter 4 session:

- Have participants read Chapter 4, and ask them to use the “Taxonomy of Creative Thinking” on page 10 as a reference for this session.

1. Focus on a process such as *fluency*, *flexibility*, or *originality*, and explore these questions:

- How can creativity meet learning goals and required curriculum standards and also serve the educational needs of young gifted children? Discuss and share examples.
- Explore questions under the section “A Map of Creative Activities.” How can they help with planning and implementing creative projects in a social studies unit?
- Brainstorm and share practical uses of the visual and performing arts in a social studies unit.
- What kinds of creative activities do you currently apply to social studies units to promote discovery and critical thinking? Share examples.
- What new processes from the book would you like to try? What sorts of adjustments might you need to make?

2. Using ideas and examples from the book as a starting point, assess how you might adapt them in the following areas:

- Setting the stage/creating environments
- Choosing catalysts and questioning techniques to stimulate imagination and creative thinking
- Selecting a wide range of resources (including technology) and tying them to the individual needs of students
- Applying the arts and imaginative activities effectively
- Drawing on processes in the taxonomy (e.g., fluency or flexibility) to expand the imagination and forge links between creative and critical thinking
- Applying, testing, and adapting ideas in creative ways

# Chapter 5 Session: Promoting Imagination in the Language Arts Curriculum

To be completed before the Chapter 5 session:

- Have participants read Chapter 5 and use the “Taxonomy of Imaginative Thinking” on page 82 as a reference.

1. Explore creative strategies you have used (or would like to use) to stimulate students’ imaginations in language arts—poetry, fiction, readers’ theater, and biography.
2. Brainstorm and share examples of how to create catalysts that integrate, for example, the visual, performing, and language arts to advance the reading/writing/interpretive experience.
3. Examine ways to adjust creative projects to meet the needs of children at different levels of ability and/or experience.
4. Share ideas on how to integrate the arts for creative work. Discuss how the arts draw on multisensory experiences (seeing, hearing, feeling, embodying) and how this enriches the learning experience.
5. Discuss how to plan and manage integrated arts activities—specifically, how to tie them to fundamental learning goals and curriculum standards. Share examples.
6. Break up into small groups according to processes in the taxonomy: *creative response*, *creative divergence*, *creative exploration*, and *creative composition*. Focus on these steps:
  - Choose the process you feel will be most accessible to the whole class (and most relevant to the curriculum) to try first; explore ways to encourage your gifted students to go further with it.
  - Improvise with specific activities described in this chapter. This might include combining processes you feel would work together well in your curriculum.

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- Explore as many media as you can. Children benefit enormously from the integration of art, video, music, literature, magazines, dramatics, and creative movement.
  - Use arts activities in lessons that integrate different subjects. For example, they might have children create stories out of a historical event or write poems on an environmental issue.



# Chapter 6 Session: Promoting Discovery and Higher-Level Thinking in Math and Science

To be completed before the Chapter 6 session:

- Have participants read chapter 6. This chapter explores how to integrate language arts and visual and performing arts with math and science to expand understanding and knowledge.
- Ask participants to focus on the exploration of *properties* and *processes* in math and science. The goal is to help children see math and science all around them and to apply mathematical and scientific insights in innovative and lively ways.

1. Discuss observations and ideas from different domains. Possibilities include:

- objects/activities/organisms from everyday life
- images from art, magazines, photographs
- experiments, improvisations with materials
- storytelling
- dramatization
- music, rhythm

For example: In a geometry lesson, students could learn the basic *properties* and *processes* involving two- and three-dimensional shapes and might then explore their ideas about shapes through art, creative writing, and drama.

2. In groups, examine the following strategies:

- Questioning techniques (e.g., “What if” questions) and share examples
- Simulations (being a tree/animal/shape/operation), role playing (a biological process, a math operation etc.)
- Building connections to the children’s real-world environments (nature, architecture, home, neighborhood)
- Tailoring multimedia resources to the interests and talents of students and tie them to fundamental goals of a unit

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- Manipulating and improvising with shapes, diagrams, number quantities through story, games, drama
  - Using the arts as catalysts for learning about science subjects (trees, animals, ecology) and how to interpret new learning in creative and artistic ways (e.g., designing, writing, painting, dramatizing)

# Chapter 7 Session: Assessing and Documenting Development

To be completed before Chapter 7 session:

- Have participants read Chapter 7.
- Have participants investigate what measures their school or school district uses to assess students. If standardized tests are used, list the tests and levels at which they are used.

1. In small groups, discuss the different measures used to assess young children. Plan and list assessment activities for your class that are: natural rather than contrived, open-ended, incorporate all areas of the curriculum, age-appropriate, reflect the many ways in which children learn. Share them with the group. Report group lists with others in the study session.
2. Discuss as a class the tests that are used in the schools. Are they formative or summative? What information do they relay? How helpful is the information?
3. Have you ever used portfolios? If you have not used portfolios, set up a plan to organize what you wish to do and how you will begin. Share it with a small group and refine it as you progress.
4. How and when would you use particular assessments? Develop a plan to outline what information you desire, which assessments you would use, and what you hope to do with the information.

# Chapter 8 Session: Flexible Grouping to Help All Children Learn

To be completed before the Chapter 8 session:

- Have participants read Chapter 8.
- Ask participants to list ways that they group and regroup students and for what purposes do they use the grouping.
- Have participants investigate whether cluster grouping is used in their school. If yes, what are the results?
- Have participants review their practices. Do they offer students choices? What choices? When is this done?

1. Have small groups discuss how grouping is used and list those groupings that are believed to be the most beneficial along with their purposes and outcomes. Create a list of grouping strategies to share with the class of the most successful grouping strategies.
2. Develop a list of ground rules for use in grouping students in your classroom.
3. Why may a group not function well? In such an instance, what would you do? Anticipate the problem before it happens.
4. Develop a plan for learning a skill or new content area with pairing students with a partner who has a similar interest or ability level. Evaluate how it worked and share with the study group.

# Chapter 9 Session: Building Partnerships with Parents

To be completed before the Chapter 9 session:

- Have participants read Chapter 9.
- Ask participants to write down why it is important to have parents involved and identify difficulties in involving parents.

1. Discuss parent perspectives of what is happening in the classroom. These can be based off comments that have been received, feelings that you have/had as a parent, or things that have been heard in the community.

**Facilitator Note:** *The goal is to identify the importance of having parents aware of what is happening in the classroom, develop a relationship with the parents, and establish a trusting environment for the students. Parents want to know that the teacher cares for their child.*

2. In the section titled “Examining Your Own Feelings,” break into smaller discussion groups and assign the six questions that are in the book. Share ideas and suggestions back as a larger group.
3. Review communication procedures and ways that the classroom communicates information to parents. Select additional strategies to implement and how these will be utilized with parents for this year.
4. Address the difficulties in getting parents involved and provide discussion and suggestions for these areas.

**Facilitator Note:** *The goal of questions 3 and 4 is to help teachers recognize that there are additional ways to communicate and that every family is unique, however, by providing a variety of communication and strategies, the more likely the family will be engaged.*

# Chapter 10 Session: Understanding and Meeting Children’s Social and Emotional Needs

To be completed before the Chapter 10 session:

- Have participants read Chapter 10.
- Ask participants to identify a person that has made a difference in their life and to be prepared to discuss this person.

1. In small groups, share the people that made a difference in your life. Identify a list of characteristics that these individuals have/had in common. Discuss how you are similar or different from these individuals.

**Facilitator Note:** *The goal is to help participants identify characteristics of a “mentor.” The purpose is to have them reflect on their practice, things they do well, and areas that may need to be improved.*

2. Look at the common misconceptions about young gifted children listed in the chapter. In small groups, discuss the misconceptions and reasons why people believe they are true. Identify and discuss why they are false.

**Facilitator Note:** *This discussion will provide an opportunity to focus again on the beliefs related to gifted education from Chapter 1. It is also an opportunity to address any misconceptions that participants still believe.*

3. Divide the social-emotional characteristics into sections and have each small group take a characteristic (intensity, sensitivity, structure and control, perfectionism, underachievement and lack of motivation). Have each group become the “expert” on the section and review the “Coping Strategies” section. Have each group identify strategies and ways to address the characteristic with young gifted children.

**Facilitator Note:** *The goal of this activity is to help teachers recognize that there are various strategies to support the social-emotional characteristics and needs of young gifted children.*

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4. Review the introversion/extroversion chart on page 163. Discuss as a group what elements in the classroom support both types of students and additional strategies that could be incorporated into the classroom.

**Facilitator Note:** *The focus on this question is to recognize that the majority of school is designed for extroverts and that often introverts get lost in the mix (especially if they are compliant). The teachers should be able to provide a variety of strategies that work with all types of students.*

# Chapter 11 Session: Meeting the Needs of Children from Diverse Populations

To be completed before the Chapter 11 session:

- Have participants read Chapter 11.

1. Discuss the basic challenges identifying and serving the gifted among the populations explored in the chapter (cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups; economically disadvantaged; rural and disadvantaged; girls; boys; twice-exceptional; highly gifted; and high energy).
  - What common attitudes, biases, and problems have you seen underrepresented gifted students face in your district or other districts?
  - What resources and support are available in your school or district?
  - What limitations or obstacles have you personally encountered that make it difficult for you to reach more gifted young learners among these populations?
2. In small groups, choose a student population from those discussed in this chapter and write down their primary challenges in school. (Examples might include biased identification procedures, deficit-orientation to children in certain circumstances, lack of understanding and resources.)
  - How have they addressed these challenges in the past? How might they apply and adapt ideas from the book to address these challenges today?
  - What difficulties have they faced in trying to assist these populations (e.g., time constraints, language, lack of human and material resources)?
  - What strategies from the book might assist them in identifying high potential in this population (e.g., other criteria besides testing, the role of parents and community members)?
3. Focus on the priorities listed for the population—what their greatest needs are academically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Select some ideas in the book that you think might assist you in reaching gifted learners. Depending on the population considered, examples could include these:



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- Developing a curriculum more responsive to other cultures and languages
  - Improving access to technology that significantly expands resources
  - Offering more creative and artistic choices
  - Providing mentoring opportunities and supporting gifted girls and boys with gender-related struggles

# About the Authors



**Joan Franklin Smutny, M.A.**, is founder and director of the Center for Gifted and Midwest Torrance Center for Creativity. She directs programs for gifted children, teaches graduate courses, serves as editor of the Illinois Association for Gifted Children Journal, and is a regular contributor to the Gifted Education Press Quarterly. The author of many books for teachers and parents, Joan has been honored with the National Association for Gifted Children's (NAGC) Distinguished Service Award and was the 2011 recipient of the NAGC E. Paul Torrance Award for contributions in creativity. She lives in Illinois.



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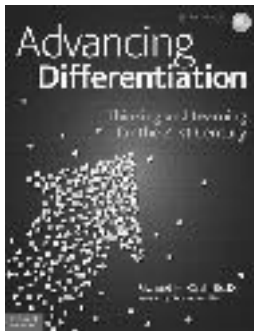
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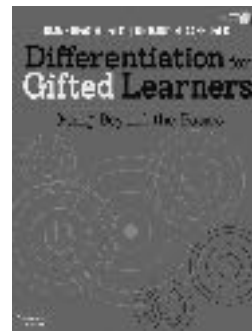
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