This pamphlet discusses the benefits of using the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) for providing numerous enrichment and acceleration alternatives that are designed to accommodate the academic strengths, interests, and learning styles of all middle school students, including gifted students. It explains the different components of SEM including the Total Talent Portfolio, a vehicle for systematically gathering, recording, and using information about students' abilities, interests, and learning style preferences. Curriculum modification techniques that are used in the SEM are then described and include adjusting the pace and level of required material to accommodate variations in learning and providing enrichment and acceleration alternatives for students who have, or can, easily master regular material faster than the normal pace. The use of enrichment clusters for non-graded groups of students who share common interests and come together to pursue these interests during specially designated time blocks is also explained, along with types of enrichment clusters and cluster goals. (CR)
National Research Center on the Gifted & Talented

Addressing the Needs of Gifted Middle School Students.

Practitioners' Guide A0023

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a service for a real-world audience. This rule ensures that students learn only relevant content and use only authentic processes to create a product or develop a service.

Middle school enrichment clusters have studied the stock market, learned carpenter's construction techniques, explored the insect world, and created an editorial board to learn how to evaluate and edit manuscripts for a literary magazine. Students enter a cluster based on interests and other information gleaned from their Total Talent Portfolios. Common goals make cooperation a necessity, and divisions of labor within the clusters allow for differentiated levels of expertise and involvement, varying levels of challenge, and different leadership roles. This type of learning environment is highly supportive of individual differences and, therefore, promotes the development of self-concept, self-efficacy, and positive feelings that result from being a member of a goal-oriented team. To put it another way: Every child is special if we create conditions in which that child can be a specialist within a specialized group.

Inside an Enrichment Cluster

Enrichment clusters can revolve around major disciplines, interdisciplinary themes, or cross-disciplinary topics. A theatrical/television production group, for example, might include actors, writers, technical specialists, and costume designers. Within such a cluster, students direct their how-to knowledge, thinking skills, and interpersonal relations toward producing a product or service. Instead of lesson plans or unit plans, they are guided by six questions.

- What do people with an interest in this area—for example, filmmaking—do?
- What products do they create and/or what services do they provide?
- What knowledge, materials, and other resources do we need to authentically complete activities in this area?
- What methods do they use to carry out their work?
- How, and with whom, do they communicate the results of their work?
- In what ways can we use the product or service to affect the intended audience?

Recently, a number of schools have begun experimenting with an expanded enrichment cluster concept called the Academies of Inquiry and Talent Development. With academies, students and teachers who share a common interest in a curricular area (e.g., science, literature, or math) are clustered over the three or four years that they are in middle school. We have found that strong associations develop between and among both students and adults, due to their common interest and collaboration in developing a product or a service.

Additional Resources


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One of the main tasks of adolescence is to achieve an identity—not necessarily a knowledge of who we are, but a clarification of the range of what we might become.

Terri Apter

Practitioners' Guide A0023
Enrichment learning and teaching

Enrichment Learning and Teaching

Enrichment learning and teaching strategies are designed to meet the special needs of individuals, including those that may or may not have the appropriate characteristics for a specific skill set. Differentiated instruction and enrichment learning are the key components of this approach.

The Total Talent Portfolio (TTP) is a vehicle for tracking individual student performance and progress. It is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of a student's academic and extra-curricular achievements. The TTP includes a variety of assessment tools, such as portfolios, rubrics, and self-assessment forms, to help students and teachers monitor progress and identify areas for improvement.

The Enrichment Learning and Teaching Model is a series of techniques that are designed to assess each student's mastery level of the required material, level of understanding, and level of skill. The process involves helping students understand the material, assess their current level of understanding, and identify areas for improvement. The goal is to turn portfolio management over to the student, giving them the opportunity to take ownership of their learning experience.
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