

A Focus on Student Strengths & Interests

Dr. Joseph S. Renzulli¹, Dr. Sally M. Reis²
joseph.renzulli@uconn.edu¹, sally.reis@uconn.edu²

ABSTRACT

Although most people agree that there is a need to make special educational provisions for students with superior potentials for innovation, controversies have existed for more than a century about the best ways to serve gifted students. These controversies exist along two interrelated dimensions. One dimension deals with the type of pedagogy or theoretical rationale that should guide education for the development of innovative abilities; and the second deals with the ways in which service delivery vehicles should be organized and implemented. The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) is a plan that attempts to address these controversies by (1) focusing on a pedagogy that approximates the cognitive and co-cognitive factors that bring creative productive persons to our attention, and (2) organizing programs around a continuum of services model that accommodates a wide variety of potentials across academic domains as well as other arenas in which potentials can be directed toward high levels of performance. The Schoolwide Enrichment Model also applies the know-how of education for innovation to the process of total school improvement. Based on the belief that "a rising tide lifts all ships," the SEM includes specific vehicles for providing all students with opportunities for "high end" learning, but it is also designed to guarantee that traditionally high achieving students receive the maximum amount of challenge and curricular differentiation. The model is composed of three interacting dimensions: Organizational Components and Service Delivery Components, and the School Structures upon which these components are brought to bear. In this regard, the SEM is different from other approaches to programming for innovative potential because it is designed to embrace rather than replace traditional programs for the development of giftedness. This goal is accomplished by targeting the individual strengths of all students in the areas of abilities, interests, and learning styles; and using this information to organize specific service delivery mechanisms that promote innovation and creative productivity. These mechanisms include: curricular modification, creativity training, experiences in innovation and invention, grouping practices, targeted individual and small group investigative opportunities, alternative scheduling patterns, and guides for developing differentiated curricular activities. To develop the talents of all students, the model focuses on two aspects of the work of classroom teachers and enrichment specialists who are specially trained in developing creative/productive thinking. The first aspect deals with defining and delivering truly differentiated services to targeted students based on their individual strengths. The second aspect is concerned with strategies for integrating general enrichment into the total school program, providing vehicles for the extension of general enrichment to targeted students, developing a cooperative support system between special program teachers and the general faculty.

KEYWORDS:

Special education provisions, Controversies in education, Individual strengths