A Bird's Eye View of *Schools for Talent Development: A Practical Plan for Total School Improvement**

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If we always do what we've always done,
We'll always get what we've always got!
Adam Urbanski, Rochester Public Schools

No more prizes for predicting rain,
prizes only for building arks.
David Kearns, Xerox Corporation

If there is one thing upon which most educational reform leaders agree, it is that remedial models for school improvement have not been highly successful. Attempts to push up achievement test scores from "the bottom" through highly prescriptive mastery learning models have frustrated low achieving students and dragged down the performance of average and high achieving youngsters. An alternative to what one student called the drill-and-kill approach is an enrichment-based model that uses "high-end learning" strategies and accelerated content to improve the performance of all students.

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) is a detailed blueprint for total school improvement that is flexible enough to allow each school to develop its own unique program based on local resources, student populations, school leadership dynamics, and faculty strengths and creativity. Although this research-supported model is based on highly successful practices that had their origins in special programs for gifted and talented students, its major goal is to promote both challenging and enjoyable "high-end learning" across the full range of school types, levels, and demographic differences. The model is not intended to replace or minimize existing services to high achieving students. Rather, its purpose is to integrate these services into "a-rising-tide-lifts-all-ships" approach to school improvement, and to expand the role of enrichment specialists by having these persons infuse specific practices for high-end learning into the total school program. The Schoolwide Enrichment Model provides educators with the means to:

- develop the talent potentials of young people by systematically assessing their strengths; providing enrichment opportunities, resources, and services to develop the strengths; and using a flexible approach to curricular differentiation and the use of school time.
- improve the academic performance of all students in all areas of the regular curriculum and to blend standard curriculum activities with meaningful enrichment learning.
- promote continuous, reflective, growth-oriented professionalism of school personnel to such an extent that many faculty members emerge as leaders in curriculum and staff development, program planning, etc.
- create a learning community that honors ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity, and promotes mutual respect, democratic principles, and the preservation of the Earth's resources.
- implement a collaborative school culture that includes appropriate decision-making opportunities for students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model consists of three interacting dimensions (see Figure 1). Two dimensions, called the *organizational components* and the *service delivery components,* are brought to bear on a third dimension, which represents various *school structures* such as the regular curriculum, a variety of enrichment situations, and a continuum of services that ranges from enrichment in the regular classroom to special projects, internship opportunities, and various grouping arrangements. The organizational components are resources used to support program development such as staff training materials, an enrichment materials data base, procedures for staff teaming and interaction, and vehicles for promoting parent and community

involvement. These components are cross referenced with the following three service delivery components, which are direct services to students and form the centerpiece of the model.
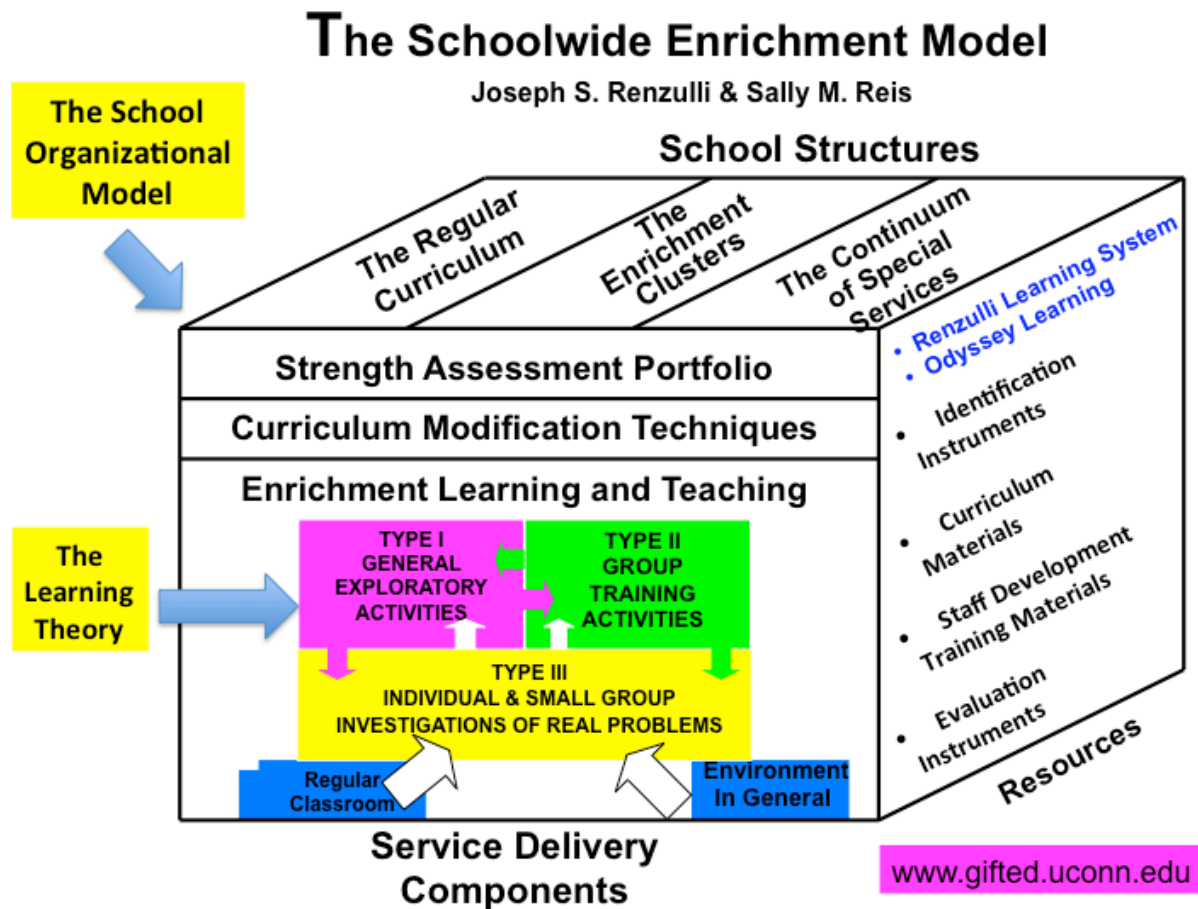
The Schoolwide Enrichment Model
Joseph S. Renzulli & Sally M. Reis

School Structures

The School Organizational Model

The Regular Curriculum

The Enrichment Clusters

The Continuum of Special Services

- Renzulli Learning System
- Odyssey Learning

Strength Assessment Portfolio

Curriculum Modification Techniques

Enrichment Learning and Teaching

The Learning Theory

| TYPE I GENERAL EXPLORATORY ACTIVITIES | TYPE II GROUP TRAINING ACTIVITIES |

TYPE III INDIVIDUAL & SMALL GROUP INVESTIGATIONS OF REAL PROBLEMS

Regular Classroom

Environment In General

- Identification Instruments
- Curriculum Materials
- Staff Development Training Materials
- Evaluation Instruments

Resources

Service Delivery Components

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Figure 1. The Schoolwide Enrichment Model.

The Total Talent Portfolio (TTP)

This component is a vehicle for systematically gathering, recording, and using information about student strengths in three categories—abilities, interests, and learning style preferences. Best-case samples of students' work as well as information resulting from interest and learning styles assessment scales are reviewed and analyzed cooperatively by students and teachers in order to make meaningful decisions about necessary curricular modifications and enrichment opportunities that capitalize on students' strengths and interests. A part of the process involves helping students develop skills for evaluating portfolio items according to their own set of internal criteria and developing procedures for examining portfolio items on the basis of external criteria with teachers and other students. Students should achieve autonomy and ownership of the Total Talent Portfolio by assuming major responsibility in the selection of items to be included, maintaining and regularly updating the portfolio, and setting personal goals by making decisions about items that they would like to include in the portfolio at some future point in time. Although the teacher should serve as a guide in the portfolio review process (especially with younger students), the ultimate goal is to create autonomy in students by turning control for the management of the portfolio over to them.

Curriculum Modification Techniques

The second service delivery component of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model consists of a series of techniques that are designed to: (1) assess each student's mastery level of regular curricular material, (2) adjust the pace and level of required material to accommodate variations in learning, and (3) provide enrichment and acceleration alternatives for students who have, or can, easily master regular material at a more rapid pace. The first curriculum modification procedure is carried out for individuals, and for small groups of students working at approximately the same level, through a systematic process called Curriculum Compacting. This three-step process consists of defining the goals and outcomes of a particular unit of study; determining and documenting which students have already mastered most or all of a specified set of learning outcomes (or which students are capable of mastery at an accelerated pace); and providing replacement activities that are pursued during the time gained by compacting the regular curriculum. These options include content acceleration, self-selected individual or group research projects, peer teaching, and a variety of out-of-class or non-school activities. Research on Curriculum Compacting has shown that this process can easily be learned and implemented by teachers at all levels and that students using this process benefit academically.

A second procedure for making adjustments in regular curriculum on a more widespread basis is the examination of textbooks and workbooks in order to determine which parts can be economized upon through the "surgical" removal of excessive practice material. Based on the belief that "less is better" when it comes to promoting greater depth in learning, this process also includes replacement activities in the form of direct teaching of thinking skills and curriculum development options for high-end learning based on the Multiple Menu Model. This model for curriculum differentiation focuses on using representative concepts, themes, patterns, organizing structures, and investigative methodologies to capture the essence of a topic both within traditional domains of knowledge and in interdisciplinary studies. In-depth learning also requires increasingly complex information that moves up the hierarchy of knowledge: from facts to principles, generalizations, and theories. These skills, plus the use of advanced-level knowledge, form the cognitive structures and problem-solving strategies that endure long after students have forgotten the factual material that is the focus of so much traditional learning. The surgical removal of repetitive practice material provides the time for experiences built around problem-based learning, the use of thematic and interdisciplinary units, and a host of other authentic learning experiences.

Enrichment Learning and Teaching

Enrichment learning and teaching is a systematic set of strategies that is designed to promote active engagement in learning on the parts of both teachers and students. In a certain sense, the approach strives to do everything the opposite from traditional, didactic teaching. Four principles define this concept:

- Each learner is unique. Therefore, all learning experiences must take into account the abilities, interests, and learning styles of the individual.
- Learning is more effective when students enjoy what they're doing. Therefore, learning experiences should be designed and assessed with as much concern for enjoyment as for other goals.

- Learning is more meaningful and enjoyable when content and process are learned within the context of a real problem, when students use authentic methods to address the problem, and when they want to have an impact on a real audience.
- Enrichment learning and teaching focuses on enhancing knowledge and acquiring thinking skills. *Applications* of knowledge and skills must supplement formal instruction.

Although enrichment learning and teaching can be used in all school structures (e.g., regular curriculum, special groupings, internships), we have found that creating a special "place" in the schedule is the best way to guarantee that every student will have an opportunity to participate in this different approach to learning. The special place is called enrichment clusters. Our experience has shown that implementing these clusters provides immediate visibility to the improvement process and a remarkable amount of enthusiasm on the parts of students, teachers, and parents.

Enrichment clusters are **non-graded** groups of students who share common interests, and who come together to pursue these interests during specially designated time blocks usually consisting of one-half day per week. There is one "golden rule" for enrichment clusters: *Everything students do in the cluster is directed toward producing a product or delivering a service for a real-world audience.* This rule forces the issue of learning only relevant content and using only authentic processes within the context of student-selected product or service development activities. All teachers (including music, art, physical education, etc.) are involved in facilitating the clusters, and numerous schools using this vehicle have also involved parents and other community resource persons. Adult involvement in any particular cluster should be based on the same type of interest assessment that is used for students in selecting clusters of choice.

Like extracurricular activities and programs such as 4-H and Junior Achievement, the clusters meet at designated times and operate on the assumption that students and teachers (or community resource people) want to be there. The clusters place a premium on the development of higher-order thinking skills and the creative and productive application of these skills to real-world situations. Common goals make *real* cooperativeness a necessity, and "divisions of labor" within the clusters allow for differentiated levels of expertise and involvement, varying levels of challenge, and opportunities for different types of leadership to emerge on the parts of students. 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.*

Enrichment clusters 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. Clearly, the clusters deal with how-to knowledge, thinking skills, and interpersonal relations that apply in the real world. Student work is directed toward producing a product or service. Instead of lesson plans or unit plans, three key questions guide learning:

- What do people with an interest in this area—for example, filmmaking—do?
- What knowledge, materials, and other resources do we need to authentically complete activities in this area?
- In what ways can we use the product or service to affect the intended audience?

Clusters are offered for an extended time block—usually one-half day per week, and they sometimes continue over several semesters (or even years) if interest remains high and there is a continuous escalation of student engagement and product quality. Students enter a cluster based on interests and other information gleaned from the Total Talent Portfolio. Students who develop a high degree of expertise in a particular area are sometimes asked to serve as an assistant or a facilitator of their own cluster (usually with younger students).

Numerous research studies and field tests in schools with widely varying demographics have yielded both research support and practical suggestions for schools wishing to implement the SEM. Persons interested in implementing this model should contact the author and/or examine some of the material mentioned in the following footnote.

A new addition to our work is an internet-based tool that provides teachers with the resources to easily identify student strengths and to personalize learning by matching these resources to individual student profiles. Teachers can use the system to infuse into any and all curricular topics highly challenging and engaging enrichment activities and unit supplements that are standards based and categorized according to student interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression.

What is Renzulli Learning?

Renzulli Learning is an interactive online teaching and learning tool that helps teachers customize the World Wide Web for their students, and easily differentiate their teaching. The system uses an individualized student profile, and a safe, age-appropriate database of over 35,000 on-line and off-line resources to engage and enrich students.

Renzulli Learning is comprised of four key components:

- **Renzulli Profiler:** After they register, each student completes a Profile. This gives teachers a comprehensive learning assessment of each student's motivational makeup in about 45 minutes. The Profile focuses on interests, learning styles and expression styles of the student.

- **Renzulli Differentiation Search Engine:** The differentiation search engine matches online and offline resources to each student's profile results - so right away students have websites matched to them. Students and teachers are free to explore the entire safe database of over 35,000 handpicked, age-appropriate websites and resources.

- **Lesson Planning and Differentiation Tool:** This section of the system allows teachers and students to work collaboratively on topics, assignments, and projects. Teachers can differentiate and disseminate a lesson in less than 15 minutes. Users can create their own work – or the system offers ready-made assignments and projects with linked-in resources. It helps students understand 'the why' of using the internet by helping them make the best use of web resources and helps focus their interests as they pursue advanced level work. Also, it helps students define a project and create the steps needed to achieve and complete their goal.

- **Total Talent Portfolio:** The talent portfolio stores all of a student's work. It is accessible anytime, anywhere, and can transport student information from grade-to-grade or school-to-school. The portfolio captures sites visited, student assessment of resources, and favorite sites, as well as any projects and assignments. This ongoing record can be reviewed anytime by teachers and parents.

How Does It Work?

Once schools subscribe to Renzulli Learning Systems (RLS), teachers and students immediately have access to it anywhere they have a computer and internet service, including home and public libraries. Teachers and students sign on to the system with a user ID and password.

How Does RLS Utilize Technology?

Renzulli Learning is web-based. It requires no software downloads or maintenance fees. It is easily integrated into curriculum, requires only basic staff development, and can be implemented using current technology infrastructures. Renzulli is available anywhere that users can connect to the internet.

Why Should Schools Focus on Talent Development?

Many people view America's public education system as a failed public monopoly. Policy makers, parents, educational leaders, and the corporate and business community are expressing the lowest level of confidence in public education in our nation's history. Parents of economically disadvantaged youth have all but given up on expectations that schools can improve their children's future, and they have grown weary and suspicious of endless rhetoric and flavor-of-the-month reform initiatives that devour more and more of our limited dollars without producing any noticeable results. It doesn't take a rocket scientist, or even a person who

knows little more than elementary arithmetic, to realize that the billions of federal and state dollars spent on remedial and compensatory education models have not produced achievement gains of any significance.

Lack of confidence in public education is also being expressed by middle class parents who have watched the slow but steady decline of SAT scores at the top-end of the achievement continuum. In an article entitled "The Other Crisis in Our Schools," Daniel Singal documented the effects of what happens when our brightest students get a "dumbed-down" education. "For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach those of their parents. This failure will bring a lower sense of professional fulfillment for our youngsters as they pursue their careers, and will hamper their ability to stay competitive with European and Asian countries." The middle class has become so disenchanted with the quality of public education, that for the first time in history, they are asking for *public* funds to pursue private educational alternatives.

Dr. Leon Lederman, the Nobel Prize winning physicist, recently said, "Once upon a time, America sheltered an Einstein, went to the Moon, and gave the world the laser, electronic computer, nylons, television, and the cure for polio. Today we are in the process, albeit unwittingly, of abandoning this leadership role." Every school and classroom in this country has in it young people who are capable of continuing this remarkable tradition. But the tradition will not survive without a national resolve to invest in developing the talent potentials of *all* of our young people. Every school has within it students who possess the highest potential for advanced level learning, creative problem solving, and the motivation to pursue rigorous and rewarding work. As the United Negro College Fund aptly puts it, a mind is a terrible thing to waste. It's time to recognize that we have been wasting far too many minds.

Here's what leading scholars are saying about ***Schools for Talent Development: A Practical Plan for Total School Improvement*** by Joseph S. Renzulli.

"Practical! A how-to manual for curriculum planners and principals. Renzulli's book is a must for today's administrator."
–Don Senti
Superintendent, Parkway School District,
St. Louis County, Missouri

"Joseph Renzulli's book breaks new ground by tackling school-wide improvement. He makes a critical contribution to those working on talent development and makes it all the more powerful by linking his ideas to strategies for school improvement."
–Michael Fullan
Dean of Education, University of Toronto

"A thoughtful and comprehensive approach to school reform. Renzulli illuminates the kinds of organizational structures that can help each individual develop his or her interests and talents to the fullest."
–Howard Gardner
Director,
Harvard Project Zero

"Schools Are Places for Talent Development is a plan that promotes high-end learning opportunities for all students. The concepts outlined in this book have provided valuable guidance during Rhode Island's state policy development regarding equity and excellence."
–Peter McWalters
Commissioner of Education, Rhode Island

"In the plethora of books on education, this book stands out as being the next generation forerunner. It gives us more than a general challenge; it provides practical guidance on how to move ahead meaningfully."
–A. Harry Passow
Professor Emeritus,
Teachers College, Columbia University

"For over 30 years, Professor Joseph Renzulli has been giving education innovation after innovation. In this book, Renzulli has offered a synthesis of these innovations along with others."
–E. Paul Torrance
Distinguished Professor Emeritus,
The University of Georgia

"There are many books describing what is wrong with the world's schools, but only a few which propose clear, creative proposals for helping schools to change...this is a step-by-step guide filled with practical, constructive suggestions for improving the way we teach children–all children."
–Edward deBono
Noted Author and Developer of Thinking Skills Materials

"This book brings together in one place the many and multifaceted ideas of a leading thinker in American education. It is a book that will be of interest to researchers and practitioners alike, and will be indispensable for all who wish to discover where the future of education should be going."

–Robert J. Sternberg
IBM Professor of Psychology and Education,
Yale University