

An Internet Based Approach for Infusing Enrichment Experiences Into All Curricular Topics

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A new system developed at the University of Connecticut is designed to use our longstanding research on strength-based assessment and high-end learning as a theory-based model for providing truly differentiated learning experiences for students in grades K – 12. The Renzulli Learning System (RLS) is based on a theory called the Enrichment Triad Model, which was developed in 1977 and is the most widely used model in programs for the gifted around the world. Although based on a theory originally developed for advanced learners, the RLS can best be described as the application of “gifted education pedagogy” to all learners.

The diversity of talents and interests that we serve in today’s schools requires a remarkable range of resources and inordinate amounts of time on the parts of teachers. The RLS is designed to save teachers time by making thousands of carefully selected and multiply categorized resources easily assessable and individually tailored to each student’s unique profile. The system is built around the following five components.

1. Strength Assessment Using the Electronic Learning Profile

The first component consists of a computer-based diagnostic assessment that creates an individual profile of each student’s academic strengths, interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression. The on-line assessment, which takes about thirty minutes, results in a profile that highlights individual student strengths and allows teachers to form groups based on common interests, learning styles, and other strength areas. Open-ended questions allow for further in-depth analysis of student strengths and curricular options.

2. Enrichment Differentiation Databases

The profile acts like a compass for the second step, which is a differentiation search engine that examines thousands of resources that relate specifically to each student’s profile. Student profiles can also be used to form groups of students who share common interests. A

project management tool guides students and teachers to use specifically selected resources for assigned curricular activities, independent or small group investigative projects, and a wide variety of challenging enrichment experiences. Another management tool enables teachers to form instructional groups and enrichment clusters based on interests and learning style preferences. Teachers have immediate access to student profiles, all sites visited on the web, and the amount of time spent in each activity. Parents may also access their own child's profile and web activities. In order to promote parent involvement, we suggest that students actually work on some of their favorite activities with their parents. In this component the search engine matches student strengths and interests to an enrichment database of approximately 20,000 enrichment activities, materials, resources, and opportunities for further study.

These resources are not merely intended to inform students about new information or to occupy time surfing the World Wide Web. Rather, they are used as vehicles for helping students find and focus a problem or creative exploration of personal interest that they might like to pursue in greater depth. Many of the resources provide the methods of inquiry, advanced level thinking and creative problem solving skills, and investigative approaches that approximate the *modus operandi* of the practicing professional. Students are guided toward the *application of knowledge* to the development of original research studies, creative projects, and action-oriented undertakings that put knowledge to work in personally meaningful areas of interest. The resources also provide students with suggestions for outlets and audiences for their creative products. A set of learning maps for teachers is provided for each of the fourteen enrichment resource databases and for the many other resources available for teachers. Teachers can also download numerous curricular activities for use in their classrooms. Management tools classify and cross reference activities by subject area, thinking skill, and subject matter standards.

Our goal in this approach to learning is to promote high levels of engagement by providing a vehicle where students can engage in *thinking, feeling, and doing like the practicing professional*, even if they are operating at a more junior level than adult scientists, artists, writers, engineers, or other adults who pursue knowledge in professional ways.

3. The Wizard Project Maker

The third component of Renzulli Learning is a project organization and management plan for students and teachers called **The Wizard Project Maker**. This guide allows teachers to help

students use their web-based explorations for original research, investigative projects, and the development of a wide variety of creative undertakings. This management device is designed to fulfill the requirements of a Type III Enrichment experience, which is the highest level of enrichment in the Enrichment Triad Model. Specifically, the Wizard Project Maker provides students with the metacognitive skills to: Define a project and set a goal; Identify and evaluate both the resources to which they have access and the resources they need (e.g. time, Internet sites, teacher or mentor assistance); Prioritize and refine goals; Balance the resources needed to meet multiple goals; Learn from past actions, projecting future outcomes; and Monitor progress, making necessary adjustments as a project unfolds.

4. The Total Talent Portfolio

The final component in the Renzulli Learning System is an automatic compilation and storage of all student activity from steps one, two, and three into an on-going student record called the Total Talent Portfolio. A management tool allows students to evaluate each site visited and resource used by completing self-assessment questions, and if they choose, they can store favorite activities and resources in their portfolio. This feature allows easy-return-access to on-going work. The portfolio can be reviewed online at any time by teachers, allowing them to give feedback and guidance to individual students or students engaged in group projects. Parents can use an access code to review a read-only version of their own child's work.

The Total Talent Portfolio "travels" with students throughout their educational career. It can serve as a reminder of previous activities and creative accomplishments that they might want to include in college applications and it is an ongoing record that can help students, teachers, guidance counselors, and parents make decisions about future educational and vocational plans.

5. The Curriculum Compactor

This component of the RLS provides a management system and resource procurement function that assists teachers in documenting the progress of students who can cover regular curricular material at a faster pace and higher level of comprehension than their classmates. The compacting component makes recommendations for advanced level resources and helps to avoid needless practice for students who have already mastered basic curricular material. In a certain

sense, the compacting function “buys time” for students so that they can use their regular curriculum and on-line resources to pursue advanced learning options.

The RLS is currently being used by approximately a half million students nationwide and research about the use of this approach has yielded very favorable results. Persons interested in touring the program can find it at <https://renzullilearning.com/>.