The Schoolwide Enrichment Model Downunder: Developing the Giftedness and Talents of Young People

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Developing the gifts and talents of young people is one of the most important responsibilities of any nation's comprehensive education system. The economic social, and cultural well-being of any nation is directly related to the creative productivity of its citizens; and the approach to talent development described in the Schoolwide Enrichment Model is designed to maximize the creativity, inventiveness, and scientific and artistic pursuits of the young people who will become the future leaders of their nations.

The traditional purposes of schooling have been to socialize the young, to teach particular forms of knowledge that will bring about a realistic and rational view of the world, and to prepare citizens for participation in the democratic way of life. These purposes reflected the needs of societies that were dominated largely by the industrial revolution; and thus, schools in many ways became prototypes of the factories for which they were preparing workers. Although these purposes are still important today, changes taking place in the post-industrial world have caused us to reexamine some of the historical roots of education set forth by progressive educators who viewed learning as a vehicle to unleash the creative potential of young people and to engender in them a role that leads to the making and shaping of society as well as merely participating in it. Early leaders such as Rousseau and Pestalozzi, and more contemporary theorists such as Piaget and Dewey called attention to the importance of fulfilling the individual potential of each child and to making accommodations in learning that reflect the broad range of abilities, interests, motivation, learning styles, and expression styles that are the essence of uniqueness in individual learners.

As we begin a new century it is a good time to reconsider the purposes of schooling and the things that educational leaders can do to prepare young people for creative and productive lives in a rapidly changing world. Everyone has a stake in good schools because schools create and *re*create a successful modern society. Renewed and sustained economic growth, the development of intellectual, creative, and social capital, and the well-being of all citizens means investing in high-quality learning the same way that previous generations invested in machines

and raw materials. As we move toward a modern, post-industrial world, creativity, inventiveness, entrepreneurship, and concerns about social well-being will determine which nations initiate the ideas and provide the leadership for continued productivity, and indeed, even the preservation of a democratic and way of life.

This work that we have done focuses an approach to education that maximizes the potential of each child, both as a learner and as a creative producer. It defines a plan that has demonstrated its effectiveness in bringing about significant changes in schooling. That plan, the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM), is a systematic set of specific strategies for increasing student effort, enjoyment, and performance, and for integrating a broad range of advanced level learning experiences and higher order thinking skills into any curricular area, course of study, or pattern of school organization. The general approach of the SEM is one of infusing more effective practices into *existing* school structures rather than replacing the ways in which schools are organized and operated. This research-supported plan is designed for general education, but it is based on instructional methods and curricular practices that originated in special programs for high ability students. These programs have been especially fertile places for experimentation because they usually have the freedom to prescribed curriculum guides or traditional methods of instruction. It was within the context of these programs that the thinking skills movement and the focus on creative productivity first gained acceptance and provided opportunities for research that verified the effectiveness of learning experiences specifically designed to promote higher levels of thinking and creativity.

Research opportunities in a variety of special programs allowed us to develop instructional procedures and programming alternatives that emphasize the need (1) to provide a broad range of advanced level enrichment experiences for *all* students, and (2) to use varied student responses to these experiences as steppingstones for relevant follow-up on the parts of individuals or small groups. This approach is not viewed as a new way to identify who is or is not "gifted!" Rather, the process simply identifies how subsequent *opportunities, resources, and encouragement* can be provided to support continuous escalations of student involvement in both required and self-selected activities. This approach to the development of high levels of multiple potentials in young people is purposefully designed to sidestep the traditional practice of labeling some students "gifted" (and by implication, relegating all others to the category of "not-gifted"),

an orientation that has allowed many students opportunities to develop high levels of creative and productive accomplishments.

Practices that have been a mainstay of many special programs for "the gifted" are being absorbed into general education by reform models designed to upgrade the performance of all students. This integration of gifted program know-how is viewed as a favorable development for two reasons. First, the adoption of many special program practices is indicative of the viability and usefulness of both the know-how of special programs and the role enrichment can and should play in total school improvement. Second, *all* students should have opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills and to pursue more rigorous content and first-hand investigative activities than those typically found in today's knowledge-oriented textbooks. The ways in which students *respond* to general experiences should be used as a rationale for providing individual and small groups of highly motivated students with advanced level follow-up opportunities. This approach reflects a democratic ideal that accommodates the full range of individual differences in the entire student population, and it opens the door to programming models that develop the talent potentials of many at-risk students who traditionally have been excluded from anything but the most basic types of curricular experiences.

The application of gifted program know-how into general education is supported by a wide variety of research on human abilities. This research clearly and unequivocally provides a justification for much broader conceptions of talent development. These conceptions argue against the restrictive student selection practices that guided identification procedures in the past. Lay persons and professionals at all levels have begun to question the efficacy of programs that rely on IQ scores and other cognitive ability measures as the primary methods for identifying which students can benefit from differentiated services.