

Following are some personal reflections about the two asked questions that I most frequently receive.

Critical Question # 1: Who Are the Gifted?

I began my career as a middle school science teacher shortly after the Russians fired Sputnik into space in 1957. Because of this historic event, our superintendent of schools asked me to start an after-school science program for our “gifted students,” and he sent me a list of all middle graders with IQs of 130 or higher. Little did I realize at the time that this experience would lead to an examination of two critical issues that in a certain sense have defined my career for half a century.

The first critical issue is who are the gifted and how do we identify them? I did, indeed, begin my special program with the high IQ students, but because I was a general science teacher, I realized that there were several students in my regular science classes that showed the kinds of interests, strengths, and motivation to learn science that made them excellent candidates for the special program. I invited these students to participate in the special program and they did as well or, in some cases better, than the high IQ students. I started reading everything I could find on gifted education, discovered the concept of creativity, and biographical reading about highly creative and productive people led me to the concept of “task commitment” in what eventually became The Three Ring Conception of Giftedness model (Renzulli, 1977).

A special influence was the monumental work of Lewis Terman (1925–1959) on identifying high IQ young people. Terman’s work is well known, but he is also known in the research and evaluation literature for conducting one of the world’s most famous longitudinal studies. What was learned after following up these subjects for almost 40 years? The following quote from the final volume his five-book series called *Genetic Studies of Genius* provides a hint of often unrecognized conclusions of Terman’s work.

A detailed analysis was made of the 150 most successful and 150 least successful men among the gifted students in an attempt to identify some of the *non-intellectual factors* that affect success. Since the less successful subjects do not differ to any extent in intelligence as measured by tests, it is clear that notable achievement calls for a lot more than a higher order of intelligence.

The results [of the follow up study] indicated that personality factors are extremely important determinators of achievement. The four traits on which the [most and least

successful groups] differed most widely *were persistence in the accomplishment of ends, integration toward goals, self-confidence, and freedom from inferiority feelings*. In the total picture the greatest contrast between the two groups in *all-round emotional and social adjustment, and in drive to achieve*. (Terman & Oden, 1959, pg. 148; italics not in the original).¹

These traits are obviously more difficult to measure or create norms for than the assessment of achievement or cognitive abilities. If, however, they were considered by Terman to be major determinants of high creative productivity, should we look both for the means to identify them in young people? And more importantly, should we consider the ways to develop them through the types of challenging learning experiences that we provide for *all* young people. This is exactly the reason why we recommend two types of general enrichment for *all* students in our Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Reis, 2014).

Renzulli, J. S. (1978). What makes giftedness? Re-Examining a definition. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 60(3), 180–184, 261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171109200821>

Renzulli, J. S., & Reis, S. M. (2014). *The Schoolwide Enrichment Model: A how-to guide for talent development* (3rd ed.). Prufrock Press.

Terman, L. M., & Oden, M. H. (1959). *Genetic studies of genius (Vol. V). The gifted group at mid-life*. Stanford University Press.

Critical Question # 2. How Do We Develop Creative/Productive Giftedness?

The launching of Sputnik mentioned above resulted in my being asked to develop a special program in science for gifted students. I searched the literature curriculum materials for the gifted but found only suggestions for acceleration—teaching advanced material to younger students through traditional instructional procedures. But when I came across a wonderful book by Dr. F. Paul Brandwein, entitled *The Gifted Student as Future Scientist* (Brandwein, 1955), it changed my entire attitude toward teaching. Brandwein advocated what is popularly being discussed called the project method and emphasized problem finding and focusing in an area of interest, using instruments inquiry, and thinking skills to gathering and analyze data, and to

¹ It is partially this research that resulted in having Task Commitment as one of the three major components in the Three Ring Conception of Giftedness (Renzulli, 1978).

produce a product that is targeted on one or more target audiences—exactly what real scientists do when carrying out their work.

In my teaching I began using a different “brand” of pedagogy that is totally opposite from the deductive, didactic, pre-scripted learning used in most classrooms most of the time and I contrasted lesson-learning giftedness vs. creative/productive giftedness. C/P giftedness attempts to create in young people a mindset that is more like that of practicing professionals. Students pursue a topic, in this case in science, thinking, feeling, and doing like practicing adult scientists, even if at a more junior level. In later years, this approach resulted in the development of what are now known as The Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli, 1976) and The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Reis & Renzulli, 2000).

Brandwein, P. F. (1955). *The gifted student as future scientist: The high school student and his commitment to science*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Reis, S. M., & Renzulli, J. S. (2000). The Schoolwide Enrichment Model: Developing students’ creativity and talents. In M. D. Lynch & C. R. Harris (Eds.), *Fostering creativity in children, K–8: Theory and practice* (pp. 15–39). Allyn & Bacon.

Renzulli, J. S. (1976). The Enrichment Triad Model: A guide for developing defensible programs for the gifted and talented. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 20(3), 303–306.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001698627602000327>