Gifted Education
Using Enrichment Clusters to Provide Challenging Strategies for All

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This reference guide provides an overview of Enrichment Clusters, an innovative component of the Renzulli Schoolwide Enrichment Model. This guide contains valuable information on how educators can successfully implement Enrichment Clusters to provide all students with opportunities to develop their gifts, talents, and potential.

Understanding Enrichment Clusters

What are Enrichment Clusters?

Enrichment Clusters engage students and facilitators in interest-based, student-driven, real-world learning experiences. Grouped by interest, students working like practicing professionals apply advanced content and methods to develop products and services for authentic audiences. Cluster sessions are scheduled during the school day over an extended period of time and involve all students.

Goals of Enrichment Clusters

- To provide students with opportunities, resources, and encouragement to apply their interests, knowledge, thinking skills, creative ideas, and task commitment to self-selected problems or areas of study.
- To acquire advanced-level understanding of the knowledge and methodologies used within particular disciplines, artistic areas of expression and interdisciplinary studies.
- To develop authentic products, performances, or services that are directed primarily toward bringing about a desired impact on one or more specified audiences.
- To develop self-directed learning skills in the areas of planning, problem finding and focusing, organizational skills, resource utilization, time management, cooperativeness, decision making, and self-evaluation.
- To develop task commitment, self-confidence, feelings of creative accomplishment, and the ability to interact effectively with other students and adults who share common goals and interests.

How and *When* to Schedule Enrichment Clusters

Flexibility is a key issue when examining scheduling options. Enrichment Clusters are typically scheduled eight or more weeks each semester, and sometimes they are extended because of high levels of interest, student productivity, and ongoing projects that may require additional time. Approximately one hour or the equivalent of a double class period is set aside in the school's schedule for Enrichment Clusters each week. This time block could be at a fixed time each week, scheduled on a rotating basis, or results from a day in which each class period is shortened by a few minutes, so that it accommodates other "special subject area classes" such as art, music, and physical education.

Facilitating Enrichment Clusters

Most Enrichment Clusters are facilitated by classroom teachers, staff members, and other specialists who have a strong interest in a particular topic or area of study. Other personnel who can be recruited as facilitators include: retirees, members of community service clubs, members of the business community, college/university faculty and students, government agency employees, parents, education partners, pre-service teachers, etc.

Major Features of Enrichment Clusters

Theme: Every student is special if we create conditions that make each student a specialist in a specialized group.

1. **The Golden Rule of Enrichment Clusters**: All activity is directed toward the production of a product or service.
2. Students and teachers select the clusters in which they will participate. All students and facilitators are involved.
3. Students are grouped across grade levels by interest areas.
4. There are no predetermined lesson or unit plans.
5. The authentic methods of professional investigators are used to pursue products and service development.
6. Divisions of labor are used to guarantee that all students are not doing the same thing.
7. Specially designated time blocks are set aside for clusters.
8. **The Silver Rule of Enrichment Clusters**: The rules of traditional teaching are suspended!

Brand of Learning

An Enrichment Cluster is a "brand of learning" that focuses on providing resources, guidance, and feedback to individuals and small groups based on their interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression. The facilitator serves as a guide-on-the-side rather than a dispenser of prescribed curriculum. Students use authentic investigative skills, how-to books, and inquiry strategies to produce a product, presentation, or performance for targeted audiences. Enrichment Clusters are the academic equivalent of extra curricular activities with teachers serving as coaches or facilitators rather than traditional instructors.

7 Steps to Implementing Enrichment Clusters

Step #1: Learn About the Interests of Students and Staff

Determining the interests of both students and adult facilitators of clusters is very important. Students can be assessed using various survey instruments to identify present or potential interests. An example interest inventory is *IF I Ran the School* (Burns, 1992) where students select topics that they might explore from general academic areas such as science, social studies, math, etc. Another series of age-appropriate questionnaires called *The Interest-A-Lyzers* (Renzulli, 1997) are effective in assessing students' interests.

To assess the interests of adult facilitators, an instrument entitled *Inspiration* (Renzulli, Gentry & Reis, 2003) can be used to identify areas in which they would like to conduct an Enrichment Cluster. This instrument is a survey that helps to examine interests, professional/ personal experiences, and talents with an eye toward developing an ideal teaching and learning situation.

Step #2: Set Up a Wall Chart

A wall chart helps leaders and potential facilitators organize student interests into major disciplines and outlines possible clusters that would meet those interests. Here is an example of a wall chart:

General Interest Areas	Specific Examples of Clusters
Language Arts, Literature & the Humanities	The Young Authors' Guild, The Poet's Workshop, The Investigative Journalism Group
Physical and Life Sciences	The Save the Dolphins Society, The Physical Science Research Institute, The Mansfield Environmental Protection Agency, The Experimental Robotics Team
The Arts	The Electronics Music Research Institute, The Visual Artists' Workshops, The Video Production Company, The Photographers' Guild
Social Sciences	The Hispanic Cultural Awareness Association, The Junior Historical Society
Computers	The Computer Graphics Design Team, The Creative Software Society, The Computer Games Production Company

Step #3: Create a Schedule

It is important to identify a specific time within the school week for cluster activities. Remember, all students need to be involved in Enrichment Clusters, so scheduling must not interfere with any pull-out or special programs or with teacher planning time. Scheduling issues that need to be determined include:

- Length of the cluster blocks;
- Length of each cluster session;
- Number of blocks per year;
- Day(s) of week and time of day.

The Period Exchange Schedule				
Monday	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*
Enrichment Clusters	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
Math	Enrichment Clusters	Math	Math	Math
Language	Language	Enrichment Clusters	Language	Language
Social Studies	Arts	Social	Arts	Arts
Etc.	Social Studies	Studies	Enrichment Clusters	Social Studies
	Etc.	Etc.	Etc.	Enrichment Clusters
				Etc.

Step #4: Locate People to Facilitate Clusters

Facilitators for Enrichment Clusters can include any of the following:

- Teachers (classroom teachers, administrators, special subject area teachers, reading teachers, retired teachers, etc.);
- Support staff (counselors, teaching assistants, secretaries, etc.);
- Parents (if not available for all sessions, can serve as "guest speakers");
- Community Volunteers (from local businesses or community agencies);
- Student teachers and interns;
- College/University faculty or students.

Step #5: Provide Orientation for Facilitators

Orientation for cluster facilitators needs to be held to accomplish two goals:

1. To provide an understanding of and appreciation for the difference between traditional teaching and student-driven learning;
2. To provide actual know-how for developing an authentic Enrichment Cluster.

Ongoing support and feedback should also be available to facilitators, as well as periodic debriefing and sharing sessions to discuss ways to problem-solve issues and improve the learning environment.

Step #6: Register Students for Clusters That Interest Them

Registration is one key to developing a smooth-running cluster program. Design a brochure with cluster descriptions and a registration form. Placing students in clusters with others who share their common interest creates an exciting synergy. Factors to consider when placing students into clusters include:

- A good representation of ages, genders, and abilities;
- A satisfactory student/facilitator ratio;
- The need to determine if extra adult supervision is necessary;
- The appropriateness of the match between student choices and their interests/abilities.

Step #7: Celebrate Your Success

There are many ways to celebrate and acknowledge successful Enrichment Clusters. From award ceremonies to the prominent display of products developed by the cluster, a limitless range of methods exists to build on students' enthusiasm and excitement. These celebrations also serve as valuable public relations efforts for the school.

Cluster Celebration Outlets			
•Newsletter	•Programs at retirement homes	•Service vendor fair	•Programs at hospitals
•Reception/Banquet	•School TV	•Portfolio certificates	•Historical society
•Open house	•National TV	•Record a CD	•Programs for service clubs
•Invite a news reporter	•News/Magazine article	•Displays at school	•High school
•Invite a school board member	•PTA meetings	•Displays at malls	•University groups
•Who's Who directory	•Product fair	•Newspapers	•Powerpoint
•Portfolio recognition	•Photo album	•Kids' show	•Board of Ed.
•Website	•Letters to celebrities	•Billboard	•Scholastic Ntwk
•Bulletin boards	•Breakfast celebration	•Make a video	•TV report
•Share at conferences		•School assembly	
		•Brochure	