The Benefits of a Programming Model for Talent Development: The Schoolwide Enrichment Model

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You can't open a door unless you have a house.
Tom Stoppard, Playwright

In this chapter, we discuss the evolution of our Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM; Renzulli & Reis, 1985, 1997, 2014) used in many gifted and enrichment programs across the world. Simply stated, we believe now, as we have over the last four decades in which the SEM has been implemented, that *Schools Should Be Places for Talent Development.* A talent development approach must move beyond various iterations of standards-based learning and the current knowledge-based curriculum. Our focus in the SEM is on the flexible development of a broad range of thinking skills, an attitudinal focus on and mindset of creative productivity. A "model" is a plan or organizational system that allows others to replicate practices that have been put into action at other places and, hopefully, are based on research and successful practice. The effectiveness of various program models will always be the subject of controversy, and for this reason the discussion in this chapter will be built around the typical questions and suggested answers that are frequently raised about any organizational plan or system that is designed to deliver services to students in educational settings. We believe that a program model must do more than simply schedule time and how we group students for various learning activities. Therefore, pedagogical issues as well as the purpose and strategies of various of the service delivery components will be addressed in this chapter.

The SEM includes a series of services that enable teams of educators to develop plans for implementing as their program evolves and matures. School leaders should understand that not all schools are expected to implement all components and it takes approximately three to five years for a comprehensive SEM program to be developed. Nevertheless, some of the basic services are easily implemented at the outset of a new program.

The Enrichment Triad Model is the pedagogical core of the SEM and it identifies two categories of general enrichment (Types I and II), which we recommend for all students, and a third category (Type III), which is appropriate for some students. These three types of enrichment are explained in depth later in this chapter but are introduced briefly here for context. Type I Enrichment consists of general exploratory experiences that expose young people to new interests and potential areas of follow-up. Type II Enrichment consists of training activities in the following six categories: Cognitive Thinking Skills, Character Development Skills, Learning How-To-Learn Skills, Using Advanced Research and Reference Skills, Written, Oral, and Communication Skills, and Meta-Cognitive Technology Skills. Type III Enrichment includes individual and small group investigations of real problems; and it is this type of enrichment that we have seen the most innovative and creative examples of talent development.

The SEM (Renzulli & Reis, 1985, 1997, 2014), a product of almost four decades of research and field-testing, emerged from earlier work on the previously developed Enrichment Triad and Revolving Door Identification Models. The SEM has been implemented in school districts worldwide, and extensive evaluations and research studies indicate the effectiveness of the model which VanTassel-Baska and Brown (2007) called one of the mega-models in the field (VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007). Prior and current research suggests that the model is effective at serving high-ability students in a variety of educational settings and works well in different types of schools across the globe (Reis & Peters, 2020; Reis & Renzulli, 2003; Renzulli & Reis, 1994). The SEM has been implemented in schools across the world, specifically, in China, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, the Virgin Islands, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Turkey, Hungary, Holland, Lebanon, Switzerland, Croatia, South Korea, England, Japan, Peru, India, United Arab Emirates, and Austria. Efforts to implement the SEM, however, in some countries such as China, are just beginning.

In the SEM, a talent pool of approximately 10%–20% of above-average ability/high-potential students is identified through a variety of measures, including achievement tests, teacher nominations, assessment of potential for creativity and task commitment, as well as alternative pathways of entrance (self-nomination, parent nomination, etc.), and these measure, as the highest levels of achievement tests were documented as the basis for the identification. Students in SEM programs receive several kinds of services. First, interest, learning styles, and product style assessments are conducted with talent pool students using the program Renzulli Learning (https://renzullilearning.com). Each student helps to create a profile that identifies their unique strengths and talents and teachers can identify patterns of student's interests, products, and learning styles. These methods are used to both identify and create students' interests and to encourage students to develop and pursue these interests in various ways.

Most of our work on the SEM has been devoted to research and development on identification practices and teaching strategies for promoting talent development (Reis & Peters, 2020; Reis & Renzulli, 2003; Renzulli & Reis, 1997). Over the decades, we learned that many students, in addition to those formally identified as gifted, can and do benefit from enriching school experiences that are engaging, and challenging and help to develop their interests and talents. We also realized that in order to make changes in *entire* schools we needed to implement an organizational plan or model for the delivery of these strategies and the professional development that is guided by our theories and research. The SEM is designed to infuse various types of enrichment and planned talent development practices into all aspects of the school curriculum and to ensure certain types of enrichment activities are available to the larger school population. We believe that a total talent development model must take into account the mission, culture, and commitment of entire schools in addition to what happens in special programs.

Our approach to applying the pedagogy of gifted education to the talent development of more students is a departure from most traditional approaches that focus on identified gifted students. Although persons representing more conservative positions in our field may disagree, national interests in both promoting 21st Century skills for all students and the need to recognize talent potentials in underrepresented groups have resulted in a growing number of adoptions of our SEM. The explanatory information about SEM that follows is organized around the three major service delivery components listed on the face of the cube in Figure 1, and the three major service delivery components are brought to bear on three school organizational structures.
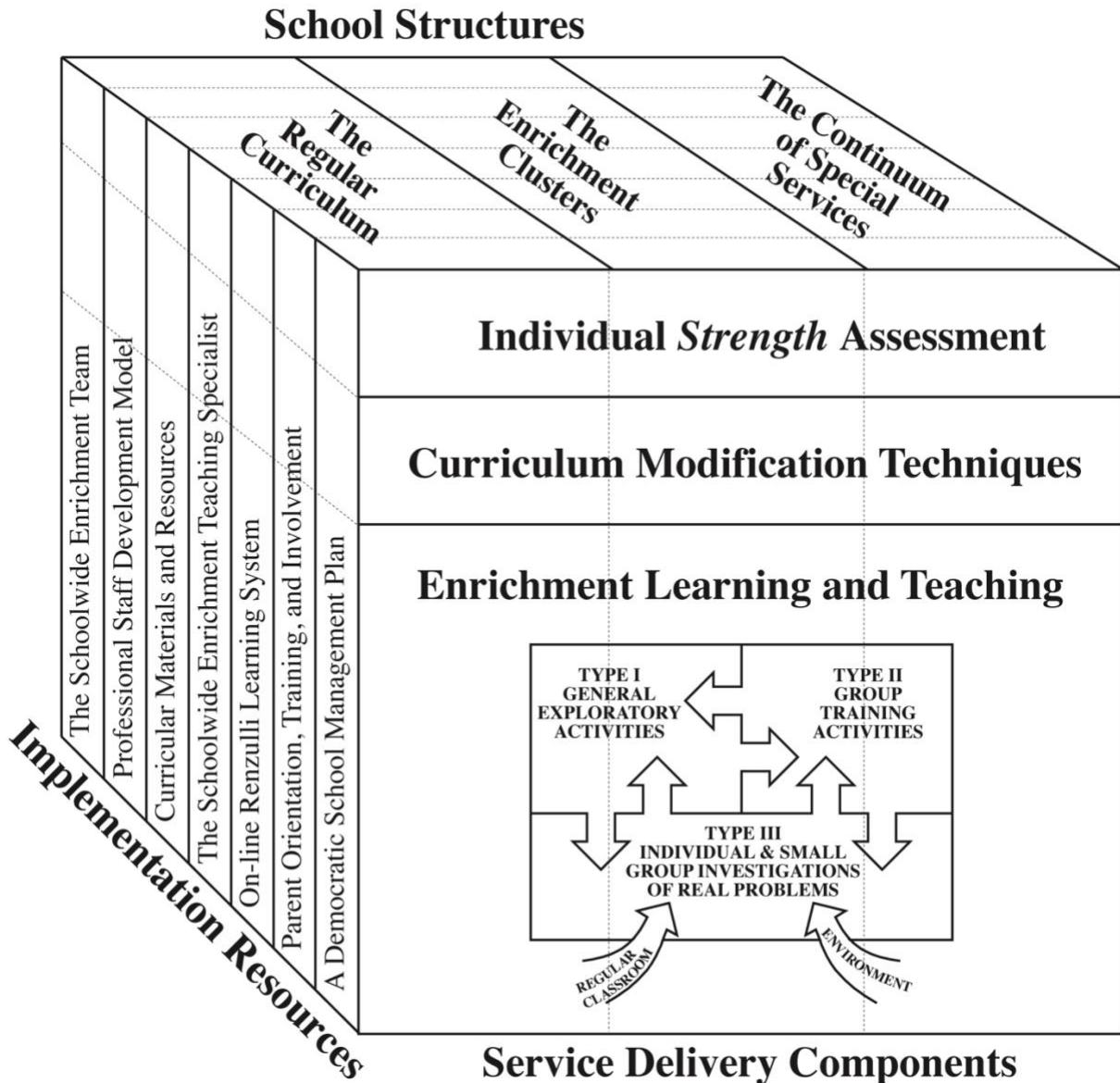
Figure 1. The Schoolwide Enrichment Model.

Comprehensive Strength Assessment in the SEM

The first service in the SEM, Strength Assessment, is achieved by compiling a strength-based profile for students that includes information about their academic achievement, student interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression. Each of these areas include research-based questionnaires: teacher ratings of students' potential for creativity and task commitment (SRBCSS; Renzulli et al., 2002) and self-ratings that students complete about their interests, learning styles (Renzulli & Sullivan, 2009), and preferred modes of expression. Interest questionnaires cover the full range of academic areas as well as questions about topics in which students may have interests that are outside traditional academic areas. Learning style preferences include: projects, independent study, teaching games, simulations, peer teaching, computer-assisted instruction, lecture, drill and recitation, and discussion; and expression style

preferences include written, oral, artistic, graphic, dramatic, and service-oriented ways in which students like to express themselves. This information can be gathered through the use of paper and pencil assessments or the use of a computer-generated profile completed by each student on Renzulli Learning (Field, 2009; Renzulli & Reis, 2007). We strongly recommend that this talent development profile process focus on student *strengths*.

Curriculum Modification, Enrichment and Acceleration (Curriculum Compacting)

Our approach to addressing students' advanced learning needs in the regular curriculum is the second service provided in the SEM. We recommend a process called curriculum compacting to provide content acceleration for students who can cover regular curriculum material faster. In this way, the SEM is compatible with acceleration practices and models. Curriculum compacting is one of the most well-researched and practiced methods of differentiation (Reis, Renzulli, & Burns, 2016). It is traditionally offered and provided to all eligible above average students. Compacting enables classroom teachers to modify the regular curriculum by eliminating portions of previously mastered content when students demonstrate content strengths in a particular area(s). Research on compacting has demonstrated that academically talented students can have up to 50–75% of their regular curriculum eliminated or streamlined to avoid repetition of previously mastered work while guaranteeing mastery and simultaneously substituting more appropriately challenging activities (Reis & Purcell, 1993; Reis, Westberg, Kulikowich, & Purcell, 1998). Compacting enables teachers to document the content areas that have been compacted and substitute them with alternative work that is more interesting, challenging, and engaging. In a certain sense, compacting allows students to "buy time" that can then be devoted to talent development activities.

Enrichment Learning and Teaching: The Enrichment Triad Model

The curriculum/instructional focus in the SEM for all learning activities is the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli, 1977). This was initially implemented in school districts as a gifted and talented program and is often now integrated into whole school programming. Research on the use of the SEM has consistently shown positive outcomes for students, finding that the enriched and accelerated content can reverse underachievement and increase achievement (Baum, Renzulli, & Hébert, 1995; Baum, Schader, & Hébert, 2014; Reis, Eckert, McCoach, Jacobs, & Coyne, 2008; Reis, McCoach, Little, Muller, & Kaniskan, 2011). The Enrichment Triad Model is designed to provide talent development opportunities for students and to encourage their creative productivity by exposing them to various topics, areas of interest, and fields of study; and to further train them to *apply* advanced content, process skills, and methodology training to self-selected areas of interest. Accordingly, three types of enrichment are included in the Enrichment Triad Model. In order for enrichment learning and teaching to be applied systematically to the education of all students, it must be organized in a way that makes sense to teachers and students, and the Enrichment Triad Model can be used for this purpose.

The Enrichment Triad Model is based on the ways in which people learn in a natural environment rather than the artificially structured environment that characterizes most curricular-focused classrooms. External stimulation, internal curiosity, necessity, or combinations of these three starting points cause people to develop an interest in a topic, problem, or area of study. In the Enrichment Triad Model, the *interaction* between and

among the following three types of enrichment is as important as any single type of enrichment or the sum of all three types.

The Enrichment Triad Model is the curriculum core of the SEM and it includes three types of enrichment. Type I Enrichment includes general exploratory experiences to expose students to new topics and areas in which they may develop an interest. Type I experiences include guest speakers, field trips, demonstrations, interest centers, and the use of audiovisual materials and technology (such as webinars) that introduce students to exciting topics, ideas, and fields of knowledge not ordinarily covered in the regular curriculum. Type II Enrichment includes instructional methods and materials purposefully designed to promote the development of thinking, feeling, research, communication, and methodological processes. Type II training, usually carried out both in classrooms and in enrichment programs, includes the development of creative thinking, problem solving, critical thinking, and affective processes; a variety of specific learning-how-to-learn skills; skills in the appropriate use of advanced-level reference materials; written, oral, and visual communication skills; and metacognitive technology skills. We typically integrate these skills into teaching by collecting and categorizing skill-based activities in various subject matter areas and infusing these activities into required or standards-driven curriculum.

Type III Enrichment is the most advanced level of the Enrichment Triad Model, and it is completed by students whose above average abilities, task commitment, and creativity are brought to bear upon an area of interest or the development of a creative product. This is the most intense and exciting stage in the SEM talent development process. Although Types I and II Enrichment, interest assessment, and curriculum compacting should be provided on a regular basis to talent pool students, the ability to revolve into Type III Enrichment depends on an individual's interests, motivation, and desire to pursue advanced level study. Type III Enrichment is defined as investigative activities and artistic productions in which the learner assumes the role of a first-hand inquirer, thinking, feeling, and acting like a practicing professional. Type III Enrichment is pursued at as advanced or professional a level as possible given the student's level of development and age. The most important feature of the Enrichment Triad Model is the "flow" or connection among the experiences. Each type of enrichment is viewed as a component part of a holistic process that blends present or newly developed interests (Type I) and advanced level thinking and research skills (Type II) with application situations based on the modus operandi of the first-hand inquirer (Type III).

An example of a Type III project is a book written by a fifth grade student named Gretchen who had two major interests: the literature of Louisa May Alcott and cooking. Gretchen read all of Louisa May Alcott's books and identified each time a specific food was mentioned. She researched the recipes of the time that would have been used to make the food (such as buckwheat cakes), field-tested each recipe (including making substitutions for ingredients no longer available), and created an original cookbook entitled The Louisa May Alcott Cookbook, published by Little Brown. In this Type III project, both the process and the final product involve high levels of creative engagement and clear evidence of creative work.

What Enables Educators to Adopt and Implement the SEM as a Model for Talent Development?

A vast array of print, video, and media resources are available that describe how to implement the SEM, and the purpose of this brief overview is to present an overview that will enable interested educators to determine whether or not they would like to pursue this adoption by considering the most frequently asked questions by teachers, administrators, parents, and policy makers, which is: How does the Schoolwide Enrichment Model differ from other plans for talent development and why use an enrichment approach to education?

This most frequently asked question focuses on the parts of school administrators, board of education members, and persons attempting to address policy issues about school improvement. The SEM is an *infusion-based* approach to school improvement and talent development. It is *not* the intent of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model to disagree with or minimize the importance of various state or district requirements, but rather to infuse a more engaging brand of learning into the regular curriculum through the use of model-specific teacher training experiences and the use of research verified resources. The SEM was specifically designed to make learning more enjoyable and engaging for all students by infusing teacher selected enrichment activities into the learning process. At the same time, we recognize that there is a range of achievement levels and potentials in every school; and we cannot improve performance with a one-size-fits-all approach to learning. Rather, our approach is personalize at least parts of every student's learning environment. We do this in several essential ways.

First, we personalize the pedagogy. The SEM is based on an easy-to-learn approach to curriculum enhancement called the Enrichment Triad Model; but our pedagogy has as much to do with *attitudes* about teaching and learning and the sense of belonging atmosphere that our model creates as it does with long lists of principles, platitudes, and educational clichés. Teachers and students develop a small number of skills about different ways to acquire knowledge or new ideas by using various questioning techniques, thinking skills, and opportunities to apply knowledge to investigative and creative projects. Teacher training in the SEM provides the know-how and technology-based resources that allow teachers to infuse various enrichment activities into selected units and lessons. For example, Materials in Reading (SEM-R; Reis, et al., 2009) have been specifically developed for infusing highly engaging enrichment experiences into these two areas of the curriculum. We don't say "Change your reading program!" We say, "Make it more interesting and engaging!" That is what is meant by infusion and that is how we improve achievement and develop talents in all students.

We also recommend pedagogical practices using a personalized technology-based program called Renzulli Learning. This program uses computer technology to diagnosis specific basic skill competencies and electronically sends to students individualized skill building activities. Individual student growth is constantly monitored and records are maintained automatically. A collective body of four decades of research on the SEM (Reis & Peters, 2020) has demonstrated that *enjoyment, engagement, and enthusiasm for learning* (The Three E's) are equally important contributors to higher achievement. Rather than constantly teaching-to-the-test, we have found that improved test scores are the *by-products* of a pedagogy that promotes investigative learning.

We also focus on strength-based assessment and personalized learning that result in talent development. Although the pedagogy briefly described above was originally developed for programs that serve gifted and talented students, the SEM is widely used as a school theme or magnet approach to talent development, providing enrichment experiences and highly engaging learning activities for all students to enable teachers to recognize and develop talents. We do this by creating individual profiles of each student's achievement levels, interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression and matching enrichment resources that will engage and enrich the academic experiences of all students.

Talent development of all students is the goal of the SEM, involving providing opportunities both within and outside of the curriculum to develop students' advanced abilities and interests. Talent development must be acknowledged as an essential, non-negotiable component of any program designed for twice-exceptional learners. The SEM is appropriate for providing a strength-based, talent-focused approach for all students, including those who are 2e students (Baum, Schader, & Owen, 2017). A talent development approach provides enriched learning experiences and higher learning standards for all children with a focus on a broad range of enrichment experiences to expose students to new ideas and skills and follow-up advanced learning for academically talented children interested in further investigation. The SEM expands opportunities for enrichment approaches to learning and talent development that can be used to identify and enhance interests and strengths through providing exposure to areas of interest (Type I), giving instruction in higher-order problem-solving, creative and critical thinking, and information processing (Type II), and giving opportunities to produce products and services so that students can pursue interests in areas of strength in ways that engage students in advanced independent or small group work (Type III) can have a positive outcome with all students. These kinds of enrichment activities are especially important because they enable these students access to high level topics, opportunities to process information using inquiry and critical thinking, and choices to present understandings in ways that align to their strengths, interests, and talents.

As discussed, the SEM also provides a specified process called Curriculum Compacting that is designed to adjust the rate and pace of learning according to each student's achievement level leading to talent development opportunities. Curriculum compacting is often implemented first with the most academically advanced students in a classroom or school. When it comes to basic or required curriculum, "one size does not fit all." We adjust the pace and levels of challenge so that students in need of remediation can be targeted and served according to their specific achievement levels and students who have already mastered particular skills can be provided with accelerated or enriched learning experiences. Specially designated time blocks called Enrichment Clusters are provided each week during which time all students who share common interests are organized across grade levels and come together to pursue their interests using an investigative model of learning and these also provide opportunities for enrichment and talent development for all students.

SEM and Talent Development

The SEM is designed to infuse various types of enrichment and planned talent development practices into all aspects of the school curriculum and to ensure that certain types of enrichment activities are available to the larger school population. We believe that a total talent development model must take into account the mission, culture, and commitment of entire

schools in addition to what happens in special programs. In SEM programs, attention is paid to students' talents and strengths, and because of this, they are more engaged and productive in school. Participating in talent development activities can also enable students to become part of a group of young people focused on creative productivity; develop ongoing creative relationships with people in talent areas; and develop expertise and confidence in an area of talent and interest. Ultimately, we believe that the major purpose of SEM talent development programs should be to increase the world's reservoir of creative and productive individuals.

The Uniqueness of SEM Schools

Each SEM school is unique. School populations, leadership, faculties, resources, and commitments to existing programs and practices differ across SEM schools. The only thing that we ask for all SEM schools is that educators make a commitment to talent development and the 3 E's for both students *and* teachers: Enjoyment, Engagement, and Enthusiasm for Learning. We strongly believe that each school must devise its own unique means for pursuing these goals. Thoughtful educators usually become interested in the SEM because they are tired of over prescription and school improvement plans that have largely factored out their own intelligence, creativity, and the unique demographics and conditions that characterize every school! Each SEM school faculty should develop pride and ownership of their own program because they took part in building it. This opportunity for more flexibility and talent development opportunities also encourages ongoing reflection and creative opportunities to pursue continuous modifications for direct services that promote the 3E's of enrichment teaching and learning. As one teacher said, "When it comes to SEM, the attitude and the culture of the school is as important as the things we do on a day-to-day basis." Each school develops its *own* SEM program by the ways in which it selectively adopts, adapts, and creates the methods, materials, and organizational components that will make the school and program an *original* application of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model but each SEM program focuses on talent development.

In conclusion, we have consistently found that students who experience the joys, challenges, and intensities of creative productivity in elementary, secondary school, and college are more likely to pursue creative work and challenges in their adult lives, regardless of the field, major, domain, or career they choose. This is why we advocate that these talent development opportunities become an essential part of the talent development process in SEM programs and schools.

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