MANSFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS' ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

Educating Children with Special Talents

The Public Schools of
Mansfield, Connecticut

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PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

Underlying the town of Mansfield's school program is the philosophy that education should provide for maximum development of each student. The Mansfield Enrichment Program seeks to develop the potential of intellectually gifted and creatively talented students. Options for students are provided within the classroom setting and through activities that challenge, accelerate, and enrich each student as well as to encourage self-development and service.

INTRODUCTION

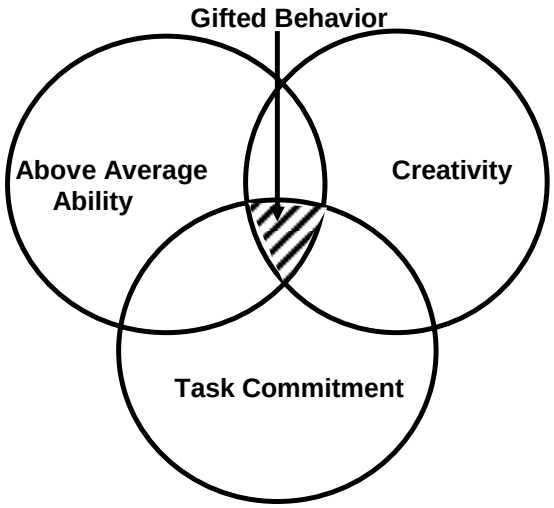
High ability students are often characterized by their advanced thinking skills. In general, these students are highly motivated and have in-depth and/or long-term interests in a variety of subjects. Yet, quite often, their skills are underdeveloped, and their motivations and interests are untapped. Usually, there is a need to develop critical, creative, and divergent thinking skills as well as the ability to synthesize information and ideas. Talented young people need to develop independence in thought and action, self-motivation, self-discipline, and self-evaluation. In addition, there is also a need to identify areas of interest and to discuss and exchange ideas with other students of equal ability or similar talents and with interested professional staff and community resources.

Recognition of these needs is reflected in the philosophy of the Mansfield Enrichment Program, forming the basis for planning differentiated curricula and teaching strategies. Specific experiences are tailored to challenge each child through the cooperative efforts of classroom and resource teachers. The main motivation for student participation and

involvement focuses on the student's ability, high interest, and task commitment in the activity or topic.

A WAY OF IDENTIFYING TALENTED YOUTH

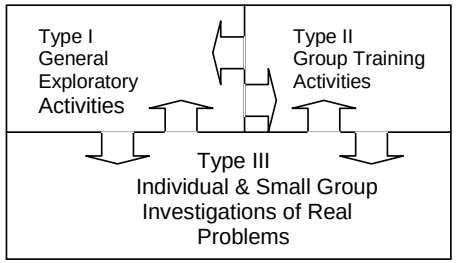
Research suggests that "gifted behavior" is an interaction among three clusters of traits: above average abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Individuals display gifted behavior at particular times and in specific contexts (Renzulli, 1977). Links to research in this area are at http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/sem/semart.html



THE ENRICHMENT TRIAD MODEL

Mansfield's model for identifying and teaching high ability students stems from a belief in differentiated approaches in working with young people. It allows students to move in and out of special programs as the need or interest arises.

It is designed to increase substantially the number of students receiving services because it is a collaborative effort between the classroom teacher and the enrichment teacher, the specialists, or a mentor. It is also a model that helps teachers identify students' specific strengths and aptitudes by organizing as many activities, classes, and services as possible to serve the needs of youths with special talents.



TYPE I enrichment consists of experience and activities that are designed to bring the learner into touch with the kinds of topics of areas of study in which he or she may develop a sincere interest. Those activities may be offered to the entire student body, a whole class, or to a small group of students outside the classroom.

TYPE II enrichment consists of materials, methods, and instructional techniques that develop high level thinking and feeling processes. These processes include critical thinking, awareness development, and creative or productive thinking.

TYPE III enrichment consists of activities in which the student becomes an actual investigator of a real problem or topic by using appropriate methods of inquiry. The success of a type III activity depends on the interest and task commitment of the individual student.[1]

STUDENT SELECTION PROCESS

A. TALENT POOL, K - 8

A 'talent pool" is formed at each grade level in each school based on several criteria. This pool consists of students who are above average in one or more specific areas.

B. IDENTIFICATION

The identification process is managed by the enrichment teacher, in collaboration with school instructional staff using the following criteria: academic performance, task commitment, and creativity in classroom activities.

K - 2: A referral may be processed at the time of the annual kindergarten screening if it is recognized that the child is reading one or two grade levels above grade placement. If needed, the classroom teacher and enrichment teacher may make a similar referral when a child is in first or second grade. The enrichment teacher and classroom teacher will make appropriate recommendations, which will be reviewed with the child's parents (see *Specialized Programming, #1*).

Grades 3 - 8: Students show strengths and abilities in a variety of contexts, therefore, the following criteria *may* be used for deciding placement in an Enrichment Program:

- Criterion and Norm-Referenced test data based on national and local norms.
- Progress reports.
- Samples of student work.
- Evaluations by art, physical education, music, and other specialists, as appropriate.
- Mansfield Middle School Interest Inventory.

Referrals: At any grade level a referral by the classroom teacher, other specialists, parents or student self-nomination will be considered.

C. STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

The objective of the Enrichment Program is to meet the strengths and interests of the students in the talent pool, as much as possible within the classroom setting. Depending on individual interests, students may be involved in a group enrichment program and/or an independent study outside of the regular classroom. They may be involved in specific enrichment activities for only a portion of the entire school year, depending on the topics offered and the interest of the student.

PROGRAMMING OPTIONS

The following instructional opportunities also may be considered:

- Participation in enrichment activities based on abilities and interests.
- An individualized reading or math program with a resource person.
- Working with a mentor.
- Participation in math or reading with a higher grade class.
- Subject area acceleration.

SPECIALIZED PROGRAMMING

Specialized programs will be initiated when the classroom and enrichment teachers determine that a child needs a differentiated educational plan. A program review will be considered for the following students:

- The child who is performing at such an advanced level in a discipline, that a specialized program is necessary.
- The child who is new to the school system and whose previous records indicate that he or she has been involved in a gifted program.
- The child who has been identified as a "bright underachiever", in need of receiving direct services from the Enrichment Program. This is the child who scores high on a standardized rest, is often verbally fluent, and knowledgeable, but who does not perform to his or her ability in the classroom.
- The child who has been accelerated to a higher- grade level.

Following this review, parents will be invited to a meeting to discuss an educational plan for their child.

COMMUNICATION and EVALUATION

Throughout the school year, the enrichment teacher and classroom teachers meet to discuss the progress of current students and identification of new students for the talent pool.

A. COMMUNICATION

1. A schedule is developed for teachers, outlining times student will be involved in enrichment programs.

2. Parents and students are notified in writing of placement in the talent pool and/or involvement in enrichment programs. Parents will be notified throughout the year if their child is involved in an additional enrichment program or independent study.

3. Parents will be invited to attend an informational parent meeting.

4. Throughout the year, the enrichment teachers attend "grade level" (elementary school) or "kid meetings" (middle school) to discuss student programs.

5. Parents and teachers will receive information describing the enrichment program activities with each report card. The enrichment teacher will attend parent/teacher conferences upon request.

6. In the spring, the enrichment teacher will meet with each classroom teacher to review the talent pool for the next year. New test data and teacher, parent, and student recommendations are considered at this time.

7. Enrichment teachers are available to meet with parents on request.

B. EVALUATION

1. STUDENTS

a. At the elementary level, students are evaluated upon the completion of an enrichment program unit or independent study project.

b. At the middle school, student evaluation is integrated into a specified classroom program.

2. PROGRAM EVALUATION FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED

The program is evaluated periodically by an outside consultant to determine what modifications should be made to help better meet the needs of students. Students, parents, and teachers may participate in the evaluation process.

For research and articles visit:
www.gifted.uconn.edu

Schoolwide Enrichment Model
www.gifted.uconn.edu/sem/semart.html

Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness
www.gifted.uconn.edu/sem/pdf/The_Three-Ring_Conception_of_Giftedness.pdf

Creative Learning Press
www.creativelearningpress.com/enrichmenttriadmodel.aspx

NOTES

Field Code Changed

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[1] Renzulli, J. S. The Enrichment Triad Model: A Guide for Developing Defensible Programs for the Gifted and Talented. Connecticut Creative Learning Press, 1977