Tapping Into Student Interest: Organizing and Implementing School-wide Enrichment Clusters

- Brian Rafuse

When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds, your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world.

Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and discover yourself to be greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be. - Pattangali

School-wide Enrichment

The concept of enrichment teaching and learning follows these basic principles:

(*Renzulli, Gentry, & Reis, 2003*)

- **Each learner is unique**
- **Learning is more effective when students enjoy what they are doing.**
- **Student learning is more meaningful and enjoyable when:**
  - **Content and process are learned within the context of a real and present problem**
  - **Knowledge and thinking skill acquisition is enhanced**

School-wide Enrichment

Type I – General Exploratory Activities

Type II – Group Training Activities

Type III – Individual & Small Group Investigations of Real Problems

School-wide Enrichment

- Enrichment Clusters (Type II)
- Academies of Inquiry and Talent Development (Type II)
- School-wide Enrichment Model: Enrichment Triad (Renzulli & Reis, 1997 - Type I, Type II; Type III)
- Total Talent Portfolios
- Enrichment Events and Activities for Students (Type I)

Enrichment Clusters

During enrichment clusters, non-graded groups of student come together because they share common interests that bind them together and a willingness to work cooperatively within a relatively unstructured learning environment.

- Nora G. Friedman

Enrichment Clusters

The best way to understand an enrichment cluster is to view it in the same way we view a research laboratory, small business organization, artists' guild, or public service agency. These organizations have certain things in common that make them substantially different from the "organization" that we call a classroom.

- **Nora G. Friedman**

- There is choice.
- There is a common interest and purpose that binds the group together.
- Everyone does not do the same job. A division of labour allows each individual to contribute in his/her own area of specialization.
- There are not pre-developed lessons. Rather the interest and strengths of the students within the group become the basis for the cluster and its focus and direction
- Instruction that occurs in the cluster takes the form of “how to ...” skills, which will later help form the direction of the cluster.

The facilators responsibility becomes:

- **Helping the students determine the direction of the cluster**
- **Helping the students determine what they need to learn/know for their activity**
- **Helping the students secure resources**
- **Helping the students develop an authentic real world product or service**

Other Major Features:

- **Students and facilators select the clusters in which they will participate. All students and teachers are involved.**
- **Create conditions that make each student is a specialist in a specialized group.**
- **The authentic methods of professional investigators are used to pursue product and service development.**
- **Specially designated time blocks are set aside for clusters.**

- **The Golden Rule of Enrichment Clusters: All activity is directed toward the production of a product or service.**

- **The Silver Rule of Enrichment Clusters: The rules of regular schooling are suspended!**

Getting Started

- Determine a schedule – when? How often?
- Assess the interest of students, staff, and community volunteers
- Compile cluster options for students to choose their top five interests.
- Map out cluster locations in the school.
- Provide a facilitator orientation sessions for parent and community volunteers.
- Create a database for Total Talent Portfolio.
- Post Enrichment Cluster Titles outside locations.

Getting Started

- Take younger students on school tour to find their cluster locations, and make name / location tags for younger students
- Do student evaluation forms at the end of the clusters.
- **Enjoy the fun and celebrate the success!!**

Assessment and Evaluation

- **Parental Attitudes About Enrichment Opportunities (Gentry & Reis, 1995)**
- **Student Survey About Enrichment Clusters (Gentry & Maxfield, 1995)**
- **The Student Product Assessment Form (SPAF) (Reis, 1981)**
- **Portfolio Certificates**
- **Cluster Facilitator Evaluation Feedback Form**
- **Student Feedback Forms for Evaluating Enrichment Clusters**

Debriefing Questions (for discussion)

Student Interest Survey – What Lights You Up?

Samples of Cluster Offerings

Discussion on which ones are true enrichment offerings.

Questions