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# CAN WE DO IT DIFFERENTLY? INTRODUCING THE SCHOOLWIDE ENRICHMENT MODEL

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## ABSTRACT

*Today, giftedness is a multifaceted concept that is much and frequently discussed. Educational institutions often struggle with the challenge of identifying gifted students, and existing research has confirmed teachers' dissatisfaction with the evaluation criteria and insufficient preparation for discovering gifted students. Gifted students exhibit a wide range of characteristics, ranging from slightly above average to highly gifted students.*

*This paper presents the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) designed to address some of the challenges teachers face in a restructured learning environment as well as the many external regulations imposed on them (Renzulli, Reis, 2014). The primary goal of SEM is to apply the gifted education pedagogy to achieve whole-school improvement. SEM relies on two types of giftedness. It is recognized by high achievement in the school environment and creative productive giftedness, and the triad model of enrichment includes type I general research activities, type II group training activities, and type III individual and small group research of real problems. Thus, the model sees students as unique beings with all their potential, and teachers as their guides who contribute to their students' well-being and success.*


**Keywords:** giftedness, school, SEM, program enrichment, teacher.

## WHAT IS GIFTEDNESS?

Since long ago people have shown interest in those who show extraordinary abilities, and because of this, they were often appointed to state leadership positions (Renzulli, 2011). Today, giftedness is a multifaceted concept that is much and frequently discussed. Koren (1991) divided the definitions of giftedness into three categories: definitions that understand giftedness as highly developed general intelligence, definitions that identify giftedness with creativity, and giftedness that is interpreted as the interaction of highly developed abilities, personality traits, and a stimulating environment (Koren, 2013).

The first set of definitions includes the so-called conservative definitions that limit giftedness to the cognitive domain (e.g., Terman, 1921), thus failing to identify gifted individuals, for example, those gifted in areas such as art, sports, or social relations. Today, few people approach giftedness exclusively by interpreting the results of an IQ test, and, in the interpretation of this phenomenon, we rely much more often on broader and more liberal definitions.

The second set of definitions, those that equate giftedness with creativity, emphasize the importance of divergent thinking, originality, and productivity, and label "true" giftedness as "productive-creative giftedness," as opposed to scholastic giftedness, which is unproductive and reproductive (e.g., Renzulli, 1978; Guilford, 1950, and others). According to the proponents of these definitions, gifted individuals are those who demonstrate a strong ability to generate new ideas that will develop individuals into productive creators. Research carried out by these authors shows that individuals who are recognized for their unique achievements and creative contributions possess a well-defined set of not necessarily above-average, general abilities, commitment to tasks, and creativity. While none of these aspects represent "giftedness," research has shown that these aspects are necessary for the transition from latent talent to productive giftedness, i.e., the realization of creative, productive achievement (Renzulli, 2011).

The last group of theories interprets giftedness as an interaction of highly developed abilities, personality traits, and a stimulating environment, thus expanding the earlier definitions with social determinants. At the same time, a gifted person is considered to be one who, in addition to developed general intellectual abilities, has particularly high abilities in one specific area, for the mastery of which they show exceptional motivation, commitment, and dedication (Pejić Papak et al., 2007).

## UNDERSTANDING GIFTEDNESS IN EDUCATION

Educational institutions often struggle with the challenge of identifying gifted students, and prior research has confirmed the unsatisfactory assessment of teachers related to evaluation criteria and insufficient preparation for the procedures for discovering gifted students (Reis, Renzulli, 2020). Due to the lack of awareness of the characteristics and teaching requirements of students with high abilities, teachers are at a disadvantage (Manning, 2006). Identifying and assessing giftedness is a complex process that requires careful consideration. It is crucial to define and observe giftedness as broadly as possible (Pfeiffer, 2015). As stated earlier, the definition should include both cognitive and affective components, as well as different types of abilities and talents. Gifted students show a wide range of characteristics, ranging from slightly above average to highly gifted students, and show high abilities or talents in different domains (Ruban, 2005). The current number of identified gifted students is muchlower than the actual number (McBee, Makel, 2019), which indicates an error in the identification process (Reis, Renzulli, 2020). For this reason, there is a need to modify the teaching process in order to enable the development of a wider range of skills and talents and to fully realize the potential of all children.

Providing appropriate education to gifted students requires recognizing their unique characteristics and abilities and implementing educational support measures to encourage their intellectual, social, and emotional development. One of the main benefits is encouraging gifted students to excel, rather than allowing them to become bored or disinterested in learning. A higher level of teaching for gifted students can often be tailored to benefit the learning of all students in the class whereby, in addition to benefiting gifted students, the teacher's identification and support of giftedness contributes to the creation of a more inclusive and effective environment for all students within the classroom. Furthermore, in addition to the benefits for students, recognizing and supporting giftedness has benefits for teachers themselves, who, through a better understanding and support for the unique needs of gifted students, improve their own teaching skills in heterogeneous classrooms.

In order to meet the needs of gifted students, educational programs should provide a differentiated curriculum and teaching that challenges and encourages their abilities and interests (Smith, 2017). This can be achieved through individualized and flexible educational programs that meet the specific needs of gifted students (Smith, 2017). Providing opportunities for gifted students to engage in intellectual challenges and pursue their interests can improve their

skills and encourage their school engagement (Smith, 2017). It is necessary to ensure a good classroom climate that encourages students to think independently and proactively, whereby student activities have priority over teacher activities; a climate that promotes the development of intrinsic motivation, gives students freedom, and encourages their divergent thinking and imagination (Čudina-Obradović, 1991). Bearing this in mind, Sekulić-Majurec (2002) lists specific ways of using creative work that have proven successful in the development of giftedness, such as project work, teamwork, work on practical research projects, etc. The author highlights that, when encouraging giftedness, teachers must take into account the harmonious development of the personality as a whole and not only the development of individual abilities. It is important to recognize that gifted students have unique social and emotional learning (SEL) needs that must be met through education. Sustaining social and emotional growth is critical to gifted students' participation in school, and addressing their SEL competencies can improve their school success and promote their well-being and healthy relationships (Smith, 2017). Collaboration between teachers, parents, and students is essential to fully meet the needs of gifted students (Smith, 2017). Competent and effective teachers provide gifted students with opportunities for independent and collaborative work, as well as feedback and support. Also, such teachers recognize the importance of optimism in motivating gifted students to reach their full educational potential (Smith, 2017). In conclusion, there is a need for a tailored approach that recognizes the unique characteristics and needs of gifted students in order to provide effective educational programs that enhance their skills and encourage their well-rounded development.

Because of the many conceptualizations of giftedness, there are numerous models used to recognize and take care of gifted students (Baccassino, Pinnelli, 2023). In their literature review, the same authors singled out *Differentiated curriculum and instruction for advanced and gifted learners*, by Sandra Kaplan (1986), models for gifted students living in poor rural areas, such as the model of VanTasselBaska (2021), Felder et al. (2021) and Stambaugh et al. (2021) and examples of good practice of working with doubly and multiple exceptional students such as the model by Weinfeld et al. (2021) (Baccassino, Pinnelli, 2023, 10).

Today, the most famous are the *Schoolwide Enrichment Model*, compiled by Joseph Renzulli, and the *Model of Talent Identification and Development*, compiled by Julian Stanley.

The Model of Talent Identification and Development (1971) consists of an accelerated teaching programme and an independent work programme whose essence lies in acceleration, curriculum adaptation and a fast-paced academic

programme. Many studies confirm the success of the model (Čudina-Obradović, 1991).

However, when it comes to work within the class, the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) comprehensively affects the development of all children within the class group (Renzulli, Reis, 2014, 5).

With this in mind, the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) was designed to address some of the challenges teachers face in a restructured learning environment, as well as the many external regulations imposed on them, such as learning based solely on grades to the detriment of the joy of learning itself (Renzulli, Reis, 2014).

## THE SCHOOLWIDE ENRICHMENT MODEL (SEM)

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) has a tradition of four decades and is widely used. It has been developed for work with gifted and talented children, but it develops the creative potential of every child in the SEM classroom. So, the main goal of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model is to apply the pedagogy of gifted education to achieve progress for the entire school. It is not a fixed model but rather adapts to the particularities of each school, class, and student, and also integrates community resources. Therefore, each application of SEM is unique and unrepeatable, and only as such can it realize children's potential. SEM looks at schools as a place for the development of giftedness, places where creativity is encouraged and student motivation is nurtured as an incentive to realize their potential.

Today, SEM is applied all over the world (Reis, Renzulli, Renzulli, 2021) and over the decades it has developed and evolved (Reis, Peters, 2020) using knowledge, research, and practical experience obtained through its application. The most important principle is the belief that the creative and productive experiences of children who were involved in SEM significantly affect their lives and productivity in adulthood (Reis, Peters, 2020).

SEM relies on two types of giftedness. The first is recognized by high achievements in the school context and refers to those children who have good grades, achieve good educational achievements, and are adaptable to the school environment. Such students are "especially loved" by the school because they do not cause problems, i.e., it seems as if the school was tailored to them. Of course, High Achieving Giftedness, as it is called in SEM, is very useful in society. Another form of giftedness that SEM recognizes is creative productive giftedness. The model focuses precisely on it – Creative Productive Giftedness. Students who possess this form of giftedness are neglected in the typical school system. They possess specific

characteristics that are social, cultural, and economic capital (Renzulli, Reis, 2021). These qualities have been possessed by many famous scientists, artists, innovators, and others. Of course, the two types of giftedness do not have to be mutually exclusive, but the approach of the school system differs greatly in encouraging these two forms of giftedness.

In SEM, a significantly larger number of students are included in the talent pool than in many other approaches to giftedness; on average, 15 to 20% of students identified by different measurements are included. Students identified by IQ tests and students with high academic achievements are automatically part of the talent pool, but teacher assessments, self-nomination, and parental recognition and the assessment of the potential for creativity and task commitment are also used.

Organizational and theoretical (pedagogical) concepts form the foundation of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model. It is based on four sub-theories.

*The Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness* was developed in the 1970s. Today, the concept of giftedness is very widespread and used. This concept is based on considering three related parts that make individuals successful in different fields, regardless of whether they are scientists, musicians, inventors, or something else. One of them is, of course, high abilities (Above Average Ability). However, research shows that successful individuals, although mostly above average, are not often those with the highest IQ. This implies other factors that make the difference between a potentially and a productively gifted individual. Task Commitment and Creativity, in contrast to abilities, are very situational and variable categories (Renzulli, Reis, 2021) that remain with certain people for a certain time under certain conditions. All three parts, Above Average Ability, Task Commitment, and Creativity are in an interactive relationship and their overlapping leads to a creative product of giftedness. Teachers are important persons in the lives of students who, through their actions, creating opportunities, and encouraging students, can positively influence Task Commitment and Creativity, but they can also influence the absence of them through their (in)action. Above Average Ability is the most consistent category of this concept, and corresponds mostly to traditional cognitive achievements.

The original *Enrichment Triad Model* (Renzulli, 1976) was developed in the mid-1970s and was first implemented by school districts primarily in Connecticut, USA. Prompted by good experiences, it soon began to spread, which resulted in the need to research its application. It immediately became clear that there are significant differences between teachers and their students' achievements. The Enrichment Triad Model is still the foundation of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model today.

The Enrichment Triad Model includes three types: Type I General Exploratory Activities; Type II Group Training Activities; and Type III Individual and Small Group Investigations of Real Problems.

The purpose of Type I is to enable students to meet different topics, contents, places, occupations, events, etc.; in other words, everything that children would not be exposed to in the regular curriculum.

Type II consists of materials and methods designed to promote the development of thinking and feeling processes (Renzulli, Reis, 2014; Renzulli, Reis, 2021). Special emphasis is placed on the development of (1) creative thinking and problem solving, critical thinking, and affective processes; (2) a wide variety of specific learning how-to-learn skills; (3) skills in the appropriate use of advanced-level reference materials; and (4) written, oral, and visual communication skills. This part cannot be planned in advance, because it depends on the children's interests.

Type III may not involve all children. Here, those children who show interest and express engagement are profiled. They enjoy investing their free time in research, work, and presentation of their work. According to Renzulli (2014, 546), the goals of Type III enrichment are: „*a) providing opportunities for applying interests, knowledge, creative ideas and task commitment to a self-selected problem or area of study; b) acquiring advanced level understanding of the knowledge (content) and methodology (process) that are used with in particular disciplines, artistic are as of expression and interdisciplinary studies; c) developing authentic products that are primarily directed to ward bringing about a desired impact upon a specific ed audience; d) developing self-directed learning skills in the areas of planning, organization, resource utilization, time management, decision making and self-evaluation, and, e) the development of task commitment, self-confidence, and feelings of creative accomplishment.*"

In Type III, the child thinks, feels, and works like a professional.

The enrichment part of SEM is the most known part of the model. Enrichment is mostly interest-based, enables differentiation and adaptation to children of different abilities, enables interdisciplinary learning, encourages autonomy and independent learning, and develops creativity and creative problem-solving, among other things (Reis, Renzulli, Renzulli, 2021). Activities are oriented towards the child and their engagement and, as proven by many studies, including the child's enthusiasm, they increase achievement (Renzulli, Reis, 1985). In order to achieve this, it is necessary to include the students' "learning styles and preferred modes of expression as well as interests and levels of knowledge in an area of study".

*Operation Houndstooth* is a theory that addresses the connection between Gifted Education and Social Capital. The Schoolwide Enrichment Model sees the economic benefits of creative education and seeks to enable different variants of socio-emotional experience and the use of one's strengths to make the world better. All this occurs not through instructions, but through the manner of work. It is not irrelevant who will rule the world and which personality characteristics are nurtured through education, and which one day will be dominant in society. According to Renzulli (2002), personality traits that are directly related to an individual's commitment to social betterment include Optimism, Courage, Romance with a Topic or Discipline, Physical and Mental Energy, Vision and a Sense of Destiny, and a Sense of Obligation to Change Things. Renzulli and Rise (2021) emphasize that if we want leaders who will take into account the components of Operation Houndstooth, then giftedness must be redefined to include these co-cognitive components.

*Executive Functions* is the fourth sub theory on which the Schoolwide Enrichment Model rests. Executive functions is "*...defined as the ability to engage in novel situations that require planing, decision-making, troubleshooting, and compassionate and ethical leadership that is not dependent on routine or well-rehearsed responses to challenging combinations of conditions*" (Renzulli, Rice, 2021, 32).

## CONCLUSION

The School Enrichment Model has a long tradition based on hundreds of research papers (Reis, Peters, 2021). Throughout its development, it has been supplemented with new theories that have been verified in practice, in different cultural and now also historical contexts. Many templates have been developed as part of the model for the assessment and monitoring of gifted students as well as support systems for students, teachers, and schools in enriching educational work and differentiating it, and according to interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression.

It sees the child as a unique being with all their potential, and teachers and schools as guides in their development, who with their enthusiasm, motivation, and understanding of students' needs and possibilities can contribute to their well-being and success. Emphasis is placed on the 3Es in teaching: enjoyment, engagement, and enthusiasm (for learning).

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) is most widely used in the United States of America, so the research conducted and the literature deriving from

them originate in America. The research contribution of European and the eastern countries is lacking.

In the 2022/2023 school year, the Center for Encouraging Giftedness from Rijeka, in partnership with the Ivan Goran Kovačić Elementary School from Vrbovsko and the Drago Gervais Elementary School from Brešca have been and still are implementing the *School as a Nest of Giftedness* project – a stimulating environment for the well-being of all children[1]. Part of the project is dedicated to lower elementary school teachers' and subject teachers' education and their application of SEM inside their classrooms. This is the first application of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model in Croatia, which will provide an insight into the possibilities and challenges of its application in our educational context and the likely continuation of its expansion into new classrooms and new schools. At the moment, 12 lower elementary school teachers and subject teachers from the mentioned schools, as well as professional services and their principals, are involved in the education.

In future research, it is necessary to present practical examples of the implementation of the SEM model in the European area.

Despite the emphasis on giftedness, SEM contributes to the betterment of all students, and its motto actually clearly underscores what educational work should aim for: *"No Child Left Bored!"*

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# MOŽEMO LI DRUGAČIJE? UVOĐENJE MODELA OBOGAĆIVANJA ŠKOLE

## SAŽETAK

*Danas je darovitost višestruk pojam o kojem se mnogo i često raspravlja. Obrazovne ustanove često se bore s izazovom prepoznavanja darovitih učenika te su provedena istraživanja potvrdila nezadovoljstvo učitelja kriterijima vrednovanja i nedovoljnom pripremljenošću za njihovo otkrivanje. Daroviti učenici pokazuju širok raspon karakteristika, u rasponu od malo iznad prosjeka do visoko nadarenih učenika.*

*Ovaj rad predstavlja Model obogaćivanja škole koji je dizajniran za rješavanje nekih od izazova s kojima se učitelji suočavaju u restrukturiranome okruženju učenja, kao i s mnogim vanjskim propisima koji su im nametnuti (Renzulli, Reis, 2014.). Primarni je cilj Modela primijeniti pedagogiju obrazovanja darovitih da bi se postiglo poboljšanje cijele škole. Model se oslanja na dvije vrste darovitosti. Prepoznaje se po visokome uspjehu u školskome okruženju i kreativnoj produktivnoj darovitosti, a trijadni model obogaćivanja uključuje I. tip opće istraživačke aktivnosti, II. tip aktivnosti usavršavanja i III. tip individualno i grupno istraživanje stvarnih problema. Dakle, model vidi učenike kao jedinstvena bića sa svim svojim potencijalima, a učitelje kao svoje vodiče koji pridonose dobrobiti i uspjehu svojih učenika.*

**Ključne riječi:** darovitost, škola, Model obogaćivanja škole, program obogaćivanja, učitelj.