Il Modello di Arricchimento Scolastico

Un approccio di sviluppo del talento per la scuola italiana

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Sommario

Il modello di arricchimento scolastico (SEM) è un approccio progettato per infondere vari tipi di arricchimento in tutti gli aspetti del curriculum scolastico allo scopo di promuovere lo sviluppo del talento di tutti gli studenti. Il SEM si basa su una premessa fondamentale: le scuole dovrebbero essere luoghi per lo sviluppo dei talenti. L'obiettivo del SEM è lo sviluppo della produttività creativa arricchendo le esperienze di apprendimento degli alunni e fornendo opportunità, risorse e incoraggiamento per sviluppare i talenti di tutti gli studenti, in un'ottica inclusiva. Le attività SEM si basano sugli interessi, stili di apprendimento, funzioni esecutive e preferenze di stile di produzione individuale. L'implementazione del SEM nelle scuole italiane ha dimostrato che possiamo fornire esperienze di apprendimento differenziate per migliorare le potenzialità degli studenti e promuovere la loro produttività creativa.

Parole chiave

SEM, Arricchimento, Inclusione, Sviluppo del talento, Implementazione italiana.

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The Schoolwide Enrichment Model

A Talent Development Approach That Works in Italian Schools

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Abstract

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) is an infusion-based approach 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. The SEM is based on a foundational premise, that is: *Schools Should Be Places for Talent Development*. Its focus is on the development of creative productivity in students by enriching the learning experiences of all students and providing opportunities, resources, and encouragement for the talent development process for all students. SEM actitivies are based on student's interests, learning styles, executive function skills, and product style preferences. The SEM implementation in Italian schools proved we can provide differentiated learning experiences to enhance students' potentials and promote their creative productivity.

Keywords

SEM, Enrichment, Inclusion, Talent development, Italian implementation.

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Any plan to define, identify, and develop gifted behaviors and talents in young people, should integrate what has been learned, based on research, our collective experiences from decades of involvement in gifted education programming, as well as lessons learned from students (Callahan, Renzulli, Delcourt e Hertberg, 2012). The Schoolwide Enrichment Model[1] (SEM) (Renzulli e Reis, 1985; 1997; 2014) is based on a foundational premise, that is: *Schools Should Be Places for Talent Development.* Our talent development approach has moved beyond various iterations of standards-based learning, no matter how advanced those standards and that curriculum may be, as our focus is different. Rather, our focus in the SEM is on the development of creative productivity in students. The SEM programming model, discussed in this chapter has been implemented in thousands of schools and is supported by decades of research (Reis e Renzulli, 2003; Renzulli e Reis, 1997).

The SEM (Renzulli e Reis, 1985; 1997; 2014) is a product of over four decades of research and field-testing and has been implemented in school districts worldwide (Reis e Peters, 2020). Extensive evaluations and research studies indicate the effectiveness of the SEM which Van Tassel-Baska and Brown (2007) called one of the mega-models in the field (Renzulli e Reis, 1994; Reis e Renzulli, 2003). 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 (Renzulli e Reis, 1994; Reis e Renzulli, 2003). The SEM has been implemented in thousands of schools across the country, and, thanks to a technology program discussed below, many other schools use it in a diverse group countries around the world.

In the four decades in which we have implemented the SEM, we have worked with thousands of schools and school districts. From small towns and villages in rural Maine and Vermont, to urban schools in California Georgia and New York, to schools in North and South Dakota, Switzerland, Spain, and Italy California, we have met with teams of teachers to implement the SEM programs. We have visited and/or provided professional development in hundreds of these schools. Some programs implement the SEM as a whole school enrichment theme, some use a talent pool approach where up to 20% of students in the school are identified for advanced enrichment opportunities. Others provide enrichment to all students without ever identifying talented students or creating a talent pool. Still others have pull-out programs with an itinerant teacher coming to the school for a day a week, but all have one common goal. Each implementation of SEM takes into account the unique features of the school community, and how these unique characteristics contribute to the process of talent development underlying the

[1] *The Schoolwide Enrichment Model* volume has been translated and edited by Lara Milan under the title: *Il Modello di Arricchimento Scolastico* (Edizioni Junior, 2021)

SEM. In this article we briefly describe the SEM approach and explain how some of these programs have adapted the model to meet the specific needs in Italian schools and communities.

Talent Development in Varied and Unique Schools: Three Ring Conception, Enrichment Triad and the Schoolwide Enrichment Model

The Three Ring Conception of Giftedness (Renzulli, 1978) calls attention to the importance of developing potential talent and creativity in all students, in addition to the development of cognitive ability. This makes it a good model for Italian schools as it focuses on enriching the learning experiences of all students and providing opportunities, resources, and encouragement for the talent development process for all students. The research on the Three Ring Conception of Giftedness underlying the SEM has consistently demonstrated that although no single criterion can be used to determine giftedness, persons who have achieved recognition because of their unique accomplishments and creative contributions possess a relatively well-defined set of three interlocking clusters of traits (Renzulli, 1978; 1986; 1988; 1999; 2005). These clusters include above average (not necessarily superior) ability, task commitment, and creativity. No single cluster «makes giftedness», but rather, it is the interaction of the three rings that has shown to be the necessary ingredient for creative/productive accomplishment (Renzulli, 1978; 1986; 2005). Each cluster plays an important role in contributing to the display of gifted behaviors. Comprehensive reviews of the literature on these clusters have, over time, provided updated pertinent research supporting this definition (Renzulli, 1978; 1986; 1988; 1999; 2005).

In the SEM, we consider «ability» to include both traditional academic performance and areas such as music, the arts, leadership, physical performance, and other non- or co-cognitive skills. We have found that creativity and task commitment «feed» upon one another. A creative idea may ignite the task commitment for an active talent development project, and likewise, a commitment to bring about a needed change may promote the generation of creative ideas.

Although no single statement can effectively integrate the many ramifications of the research studies that underlie the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness, our definition of gifted behavior summarizes the major conclusions and generalizations resulting from extensive reviews of research (Renzulli, 1978; 1986; 2005).

> Gifted behavior consists of behaviors that reflect an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits — above average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Individuals capable of developing gifted behavior are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits

> and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. Persons who manifest or are capable of developing an interaction among the three clusters require a wide variety of educational opportunities and services that are not ordinarily provided through regular instructional programs.

We believe gifted behaviors occur in certain people (not all people), at certain times (not all the time), under certain circumstances (not all circumstances), and within certain contexts or areas of study. Using the Three Ring Conception for talent development in Italian schools is especially helpful as we can point to the need to develop all students' talents and engage in enriching instructional and learning activities that promote strengths and talent development in all students. In smaller Italian schools, for example, the talent pool based on the the Three Ring Conception of Giftedness can be a larger group to enable more enrichment to be given to more students, or for some experiences, all students. This reduces the isolation, especially in smaller schools, of those who are identified for gifted programming and offers more opportunities, resources, and encouragement to all students (Renzulli e Reis, 2014). In the SEM, a talent pool of approximately 10%-20% of above-average ability/high-potential students is identified using 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.).

Technology Has Changed Enrichment Programs in Italian Schools

Talent development initiatives are influenced by many factors, including recent shifts in the goals of general education, the unprecedented changes happening in technology, and our rapidly changing global conditions. Who would have thought three or four decades ago that a student at an Italian school in the middle of the country could complete an on-line accelerated course remotely from an Ivy League university, or that most of the world's knowledge could be available on a young person's computer at any hour of the day or night?

For example, in a small school half-way up a mountain side in the Patagonia section of Chile, a teacher trained in the Schoolwide Enrichment Model is doing a debriefing with a group of students after taking them on a virtual field trip to a medical surgery facility in the U. S. A fifth-grade student said she was inspired by the visit and wanted to learn more so that she could follow her new dream of becoming an orthopedic surgeon like the one she saw on the virtual field trip. The teacher helped the student locate an online program that taught the student how to use virtual reality to conduct her own knee-replacement surgery. The

student subsequently visited other medical sites and proudly displayed her work at a school wide showcase event for students and parents.

Students in SEM programs receive several kinds of services, a main one being the assessment of interests, learning styles, executive function skills, and product style preferences. An inexpensive online tool (now available in all languages) called Renzulli Learning (https://renzullilearning.com) can be used to efficiently collect and organize this data. Using Renzulli Learning, each student creates a profile that identifies his or her unique strengths, interests, and talents. The search engine in the program then connects students to enrichment resources matched to each student's profile. Teachers can use the same program to identify and infuse resources from the program's 50,000 enrichment resource date bases.

Our work on the SEM in Italian schools has demonstrated that many students, in addition to those formally identified as gifted, benefit from various enrichment school experiences that are engaging, challenging, and that help develop their interests and talents. We also realize that in order to make changes in schools, we should implement an organizational plan or model for the delivery of these strategies in smaller schools, often with fewer resources due to geography. 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.

The explanatory information about SEM is organized around the three major service delivery components listed on the cube in figure 1. The three components should be viewed as brought to bear on the three school organizational structures listed on the top of the cube.

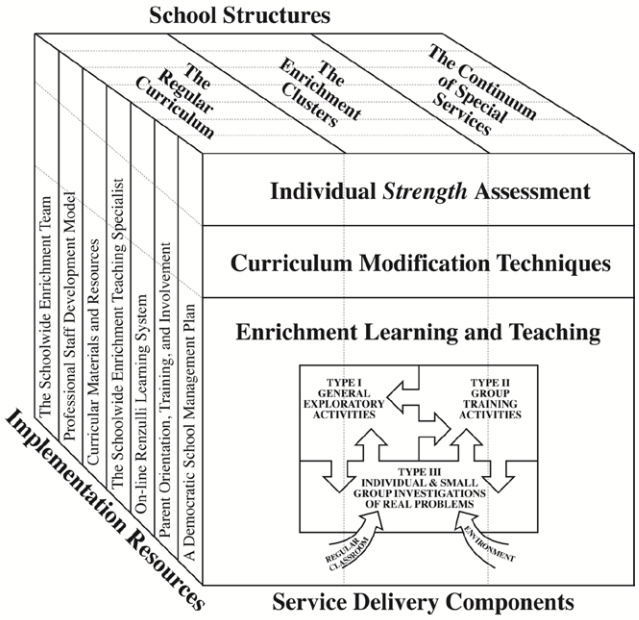
Comprehensive Strength Assessment in the SEM

The first service in the SEM, Comprehensive Strength Assessment, is achieved by compiling a strength-based profile for students that includes information about their academic achievement, student interests, learning preferences, such as projects or simulations, -and preferred modes of expression. These areas include research-based questionnaires: teacher ratings of students' potential for creativity and task commitment (SRBCSS;[2] Renzulli et al., 2002), as well as self-ratings that students complete about their interests, learning styles, 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

[2] The *Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students* (SRBCSS) have been translated, validated and published in Italy by Erickson under the title: *Scale Renzulli. Scale per l'identificazione delle caratteristiche comportamentali degli studenti plusdotati,* edited by Patrizia Sorrentino and Stefania Pinnelli (2021).

are outside traditional academic areas. This information can be gathered through using paper and pencil assessments or the use of a computer-generated profile completed by each student on Renzulli Learning (Renzulli e Reis, 2007; Field, 2009). We strongly recommend that this talent development profile process in Italian schools focus on student *strengths*, particularly for students who may attend small schools where the focus and time of teachers may be on students' who are achieving at below average levels and have deficits, rather than students who achieve above grade level and have obvious academic strengths.

Figure 1



The Schoolwide Enrichment Model.

Curriculum Compacting

Our approach to addressing students' advanced learning needs in the regular curriculum is the second service provided in the SEM. A differentiation strategy called *curriculum compacting* can provide content acceleration for advanced or high potential students who cover regular curriculum material faster. In this way, the SEM is compatible with acceleration practices and models (Colangelo, Assouline e Gross, 2004). Curriculum compacting is one of the most well-researched and practiced methods of differentiation (Reis, Renzulli e Burns, 2016). It is traditionally offered and provided to all above average students but

our research suggests it can be useful for up to half of students in a class when used comprehensively with all students.

This research demonstrated that approximately 50-75% of their regular curriculum can be eliminated or streamlined for academically talented students to avoid repetition of previously mastered work while guaranteeing mastery and simultaneously substituting more appropriately challenging activities (Reis e Purcell, 1993; Reis, Westberg, Kulikowich e Purcell, 1998).

Compacting enables teachers to document which content areas have been compacted and substitute more interesting, challenging, and engaging replacement activities. Compacting allows students to «buy time» that can then be devoted to talent development activities and this is particularly helpful in schools with smaller classes and a wide range of students. It is also very helpful for students to have the opportunity to replace the content that has been compacted with the selected enrichment materials in Renzulli Learning, which connects students to thousands of exciting enrichment opportunities to expose them to areas of interest that are not available in the areas in which they live.

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). Research on the Enrichment Triad Model and its integration into the SEM has consistently shown positive outcomes for students, finding that the enriched and accelerated content can reverse underachievement and increase achievement and engagement in learning (Baum, Schader e Hébert, 2014; Baum, Renzulli e Hébert, 1999; Delcourt, 1993; Hébert, 1993; Reis e Renzulli, 2003). The Enrichment Triad Model is designed to provide talent development opportunities for students and encourage their creative productivity by using three types of enrichment.

Type I Enrichment includes general exploratory experiences that 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 or available in their schools or communities. In this way, Type I enrichment is an excellent resource for all students. 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, is usually implemented both in classrooms and in enrichment programs, and 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 newer technology skills.

Type III Enrichment is the most advanced level of the Enrichment Triad Model, usually 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 within a specific domain or area of interest. Type III Enrichment is a chance for students to identify local or regional problems or challenges and pursue solutions. 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). Type III studies can be completed by students across grade levels, enabling students to pursue interests with other academically talented students at higher or lower grades. Type III studies can introduce Italian students to group projects in areas such as Invention Convention, History Day, and Science Fairs, that can be offered to all students and scaled to higher levels of complexity for students identified as academically talented.

Enrichment Clusters

Enrichment clusters, another component of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model, are non-graded, often multi-age groups of students who share common interests and who are grouped together during specially designated time blocks to work with an adult who shares their interests and who has some degree of advanced knowledge and expertise in the area (Renzulli, Gentry e Reis, 2013). A series of clusters is usually planned and implemented for all students in an SEM school both in the fall and the spring semester. Students complete an interest inventory to assess their interests, and an enrichment coordinator tallies all of the major families of interests (or uses technology to do so automatically). Teachers and parents who want to facilitate clusters also complete an interest questionnaire to help them decide which interest areas to offer as clusters. SEM

schools try to offer enrichment clusters in areas of high student interest as well as to provide talent development opportunities, such as the arts, drama, history, creative writing, drawing, music, science, inventions, archeology, and other areas. Training is provided to the facilitators who agree to offer the clusters, and a brochure is developed and sent to all parents and students with descriptions of enrichment clusters. Students select their top three choices for the clusters and scheduling is completed to place all children into their first, or in some cases, second choice. Like extracurricular activities and programs such as 4-H and Junior Achievement, the main rationale for participation in one or more clusters is that *students and teachers want to be there.* All teachers (including music, art, physical education, etc.) are involved in facilitating the clusters; and their involvement in any particular cluster is based on the same type of interest assessment that is used for students in selecting clusters of choice. The desired outcome of all enrichment clusters is a student-developed product/performance/service, based on students' interests and using authentic learning. These experiences can be vehicles through which students can apply their interests, knowledge, thinking skills, creative ideas, and task commitment to self-selected problems or areas of study, completing a product, performance, or service in every cluster.

Implementing the SEM in Italian Schools and Communities

Young people identified as gifted and talented are as diverse and eclectic as the paths they take to develop their gifts and talents. They exhibit a wide range of characteristics in ability, achievement, temperament, and effort invested in reaching goals. Our years of research on the SEM have enabled us to identify some patterns or paths to talent development in schools, as well given us new insights. The unlimited access to technology has now made resource procurement for smaller schools much easier and enhanced the development of qualities that are the key components of creative productive giftedness. In the SEM, students' abilities, task commitment, and creativity are applied to areas of interest or passion over time. The development of students' above average abilities is accomplished when they begin the process of developing their academic abilities and interests both in and out of school. The development of their task commitment and creativity occurs when they find an area in which an interest is activated; they develop these skills in order to pursue that interest. When children experience and enjoy creative and productive experiences, based on their interests, and pursue independent or small group investigative projects, they will be more likely to seek additional creative experiences later in life. These projects are the Enrichment Triad Model's (Renzulli, 1977) Type III experiences described above and are an essential part of the SEM.

The Triad Model was one of the first SEM components implemented in a recent research study, the first research on this model in Italian Public Schools. Enrichment was provided to all students participating with overviews of how a Type I activity can revolve into more advanced and self-selected follow-up studies related to a given topic or area of study (Type III). This activity enabled both teachers and parents to understand how enrichment activities can encourage students to pursue their topics using the *modus operandi* of the practicing professional.

General enrichment, Type I and II, was provided to all students participating in the project through the Enrichment Clusters on a wide variety of topics, issues, and materials not ordinarily covered in the regular curriculum. Students participated in cross-grade events, grade level or single -classroom events, or through special interest groups. The only criteria adopted in determining which students would participate in the enrichment clusters was student interests. None of the students participating in the project was identified as *gifted*.

Data analysis revealed that students' creative productivity was enhanced as a result of students' participation in SEM enrichment clusters. Descriptive data also shows positive changes in student and teacher attitudes toward educational approaches based on talent development, and more favorable attitudes toward special programming on the part of teachers, school administrators and parents. The study also demonstrated the flexibility of SEM to adapt to the Italian Education system, which was key to the success of this research.

Like the many positive SEM experiences across many other nations, this recent research study on the SEM — demonstrated that it is a combined approach to talent development, that integrates acceleration, enrichment and differentiation strategies (Milan e Reis, 2020a; 2020b). Its success demonstrates that we can provide differentiated learning experiences in public schools to enhance students' potentials, despite an absence of national guidelines on gifted and talented education.

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