# Challenge for Excellence: Enrichment Clusters

## DVD Companion Guide

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# Introduction

*Enrichment Clusters: DVD Companion Guide* is intended to complement the professional development DVD *Challenge for Excellence: Enrichment Clusters*. Enrichment clusters is a term used to describe groups of students with self-identified similar interests working together in a specifically designated time block (6–10 weeks) to produce a product, performance, or targeted service for an appropriate audience. Enrichment clusters are challenging, self-selected, real-world learning experiences and are a component of schoolwide enrichment. Schoolwide enrichment identifies, develops, and supports the gifts and talents of all students through a broad range of opportunities and experiences. The DVD and companion guide are part of a series of materials that support implementation of *Challenge for Excellence: Enrichment and Gifted Education Resource Guide* (Nova Scotia Department of Education 1999), which provides a framework for developing enriching experiences to enhance student learning.

# Background

## Enrichment Teaching and Learning

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

1. Each learner is unique; therefore, all learning experiences must be examined in ways that take into account the abilities, interests, and learning styles of the individual.

2. Learning is more effective when students enjoy what they are doing; therefore, learning experiences should be constructed and assessed with as much concern for enjoyment as for other goals.

3. Learning is more meaningful and enjoyable when content (i.e., knowledge) and process (i.e., thinking skills, methods of inquiry) are learned within the context of a real and present problem. Therefore, enrichment teaching and learning attention should be given to opportunities to personalize student choice in problem selection, the relevance of the problem for individual students at the time the problem is being addressed, and strategies for assisting students in personalizing problems they might choose to study.

Enrichment teaching and learning enhances student construction of meaningfulness through the aquisistion and application of knowledge and thinking skills.

The principles outlined above have been adapted from Renzulli, J. S., M. Gentry, and S. M. Reis, *Enrichment Clusters: a Practical Plan for Real-World, Student-Driven Learning* (Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press, 2003).

## Context

The philosophy underlying enrichment teaching and learning is consistent with the *Nova Scotia Education Act and Regulations under the Education Act* (1996), *Public School Programs* (PSP), the *Special Education Policy Manual*, school improvement planning, and curriculum outcomes frameworks. This linkage is evident, for example, in the goals of public education as expressed in the PSP where the point is made that quality of educational programming is "demonstrated by the diversity of educational experiences in which students are actively involved and by the extent to which individual students' needs are met."

## Rationale

The implementation of enrichment teaching and learning will result in benefits for students, teachers, and school/community.

For students

- to foster an enjoyment of learning
- to develop and apply relevant knowledge and skills to authentic problem solving
- to foster student ownership of the learning experience and personal development by incorporating their interests
- to acquire self-directed learning skills
- to make learning more meaningful by supporting students in the identification of their own areas of strengths and interests
- to offer diverse learning experiences to support particular individual interests
- to provide extended challenges to students with gifts and talents

For teachers

- to develop more in-depth student learning profiles
- to support student ownership of learning
- to enhance professional renewal and development
- to identify additional content to support the achievement of educational outcomes
- to support student decision making concerning pathways through high school and beyond
- to broaden the repertoire of instructional and assessment strategies
- to strengthen student-teacher relations
- to provide opportunities to meet the range of learners' diverse needs

For schools/communities

- to provide opportunities to identify and develop student talent
- to promote a culture of high achievement and accountability
- to develop partnerships and foster positive relations
- to support school improvement planning by providing opportunities for enhanced student engagement and achievement
- to enhance effective curriculum delivery through student-driven programming based on inductive approaches
- to increase positive cross-grade/multi-age student interactions

# Enrichment Clusters

Enrichment clusters are intended to

- engage all students in school activities, removing some of the traditional barriers that may restrict student participation (e.g., transportation, fees, limited options available)
- teach authentic, investigative methods and advanced content
- apply higher-order thinking skills to real-life situations
- produce a product, performance, or targeted service for an appropriate audience
- identify student talent for further support and development
- provide opportunities to develop multiple talents through division of labour
- produce measurable focussed outcomes

The use of enrichment clusters, a component of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM), is one approach to enrichment teaching and learning. While exploratory activities, workshops/mini-lessons, or facilitator-designed units may be components of an enrichment cluster, they do not constitute a cluster in and of themselves.

## Academies of Inquiry and Talent Development

At the secondary school level enrichment clusters can become Academies of Inquiry and Talent Development (AITDs). The same guiding principles apply to both enrichment approaches, but academies of inquiry provide more advanced content and process and are of longer duration than enrichment clusters.

The academies (AITD) are organized into seven scholarly domains of knowledge from which students select an area of interest. These domains are compatible with the Nova Scotia Public School Program and support the acquisition of educational outcomes. The seven areas are

1. literature, language, and humanities
2. applied mathematics
3. social sciences
4. fine and performing arts
5. physics and life sciences
6. sport and leisure studies
7. computer science and technology

After experiencing many different enrichment activities at the elementary school level, older students are ready to take on additional and more-challenging involvement in their respective areas of interest. Providing opportunities for students in an AITD to explore more challenging involvement may result in students remaining together in non-graded groups for prolonged periods of time. Due to the long-term collaborative efforts of individuals with common interests, involvement in an AITD promotes the development of strong association between and among students and teachers. It also provides the opportunity to identify student talent for further support and development.

# Implementation of Enrichment Clusters

To begin implementation of enrichment clusters, a schoolwide enrichment team (outlined in *Challenge for Excellence: Enrichment and Gifted Education Resource Guide*, p. 8) should be established. This team will be responsible for organizing professional development and for developing a plan to implement and evaluate enrichment clusters.

## Seven Steps for Implementing Enrichment Clusters

### 1. Learn about the interests of students and staff.

For this information-gathering stage, the schoolwide enrichment team may choose to develop a customized survey or choose from a variety of surveys and interest assessment inventories that are available. Sample inventories may be found in *Challenge for Excellence: Enrichment and Gifted Education Resource Guide* and in the book *Enrichment Clusters: A Practical Plan for Real-World, Student-Driven Learning* (Renzulli 2003).

**2. Set up a database.**

Organize student interests into major domains of knowledge and begin outlining possible clusters with a focus on academic and artistic rigour rather than solely on crafts and hobbies.

**3. Create a schedule.**

Enrichment clusters may vary in length; however, to ensure in-depth involvement and high-quality products or services, a minimum of 6 weeks is required, and 8–10 weeks are recommended. Clusters should meet once a week for at least an hour. To keep the focus on talent development, enrichment clusters should be scheduled so that all students have the opportunity to participate. Scheduling distinct time blocks will avoid conflicts with other programming and services. Academies (AITD) require a regularly scheduled block of time running throughout the entire semester/year.

**4. Locate people to facilitate clusters.**

All teachers should facilitate a cluster or assist a volunteer facilitator. To ensure that the best possible match between student interests and cluster availability is achieved, the enrichment team also is encouraged to involve interested school support staff, parents, and community volunteers. A sample community survey is available in *Challenge for Excellence: Enrichment and Gifted Education Resource Guide* (Appendix C-1).

**5. Provide orientation for facilitators.**

All facilitators must understand the guiding principles underlying enrichment activities as outlined on page 2. Facilitators need to be supported in the development and delivery of authentic enrichment clusters. At the conclusion of an enrichment cluster, ongoing orientation includes debriefing sessions to examine ways to improve future clusters (e.g., share cluster experiences, address difficulties, discuss future needs).

**6. Register students for clusters that interest them.**

a) Design a brochure of cluster descriptions and a student registration form. A sample brochure can be found in *Enrichment Clusters: A Practical Plan for Real-World, Student-Driven Learning* (Renzulli 2003, p. 126).

b) Students should select three clusters of interest in no order of preference. For actual placement in clusters, there are several considerations:
   – good cross representation of ages, gender, and abilities
   – satisfactory student-teacher/supervisor ratio
   – appropriateness of student choices for their interests and abilities

c) Generate cluster member lists for homeroom teachers, cluster facilitators, and the office.

## 7. **Celebrate your success.**

It is important for schools to celebrate student and facilitator efforts in enrichment activities. Celebrations recognize individual student accomplishment and cluster achievement and promote school pride, public awareness, and ongoing community support. Celebration formats will be decided by input from cluster participants and facilitators, with consideration given to the nature of the cluster activities and the availability of resources. Cluster celebration outlets may include thank you letters, displays, receptions, presentations, assemblies, and newsletters. An example of a school celebration can be seen on the DVD that accompanies this guide.

# References

*Education Act,* S.N.S. 1995–96, c.1.

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