Challenge for Excellence: Total Talent Portfolio

DVD Companion Guide

Supporting
Student
Success

Introduction

Total Talent Portfolio: DVD Companion Guide accompanies the professional development DVD *Challenge for Excellence: Total Talent Portfolio*. A Total Talent Portfolio (TTP) is a systematic method of compiling information about a student's abilities, interests, and preferred learning styles. The TTP is used to inform appropriate educational programming for individual students and is 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* (1996), the *Public School Program* (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 to

- 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 with the community
- 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

Total Talent Portfolio

While there are many types of portfolios, the TTP as designed by Purcell and Renzulli (1998) is defined as a systematic compilation of information and evidence in a variety of formats gathered from multiple sources that demonstrates students' abilities, interests, and style preferences. The TTP is reviewed and updated regularly, thus an accurate student portrait emerges, providing a deeper understanding of each student as a learner.

Principles

Total Talent Portfolios are intended to

- provide a holistic portrait of student accomplishments, abilities, interests, and strengths
- provide individual student profiles to help teachers make decisions regarding curriculum and instruction
- support student transitions throughout school years
- develop student autonomy in charting individual progress and setting goals
- provide documentation to parents enabling their active involvement in their child's academic and talent development
- assist school-based teams or committees to plan and create programming options and opportunities

Total Talent Portfolios evolve continuously through regular maintenance and updating of materials.

Implementation of the Total Talent Portfolio

While initial implementation of the TTP can be outlined in six sequential steps, TTPs are always works in progress. Once parents and students are informed and initial status information is collected (steps 1 and 2), collection of evidence, organization, review, and program planning (as described in steps 3–6) are ongoing.

Six Steps for Implementing Total Talent Portfolios

Step 1: Inform students and parents/guardians of TTP principles and process.

Send a letter home or hold a parent information meeting. A sample letter may be found in *Total Talent Portfolio: A Systematic Plan to Identify and Nurture Gifts and Talents*[1] (Purcell and Renzulli 1998, page 91).

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[1] This resource can be ordered through the Nova Scotia School Book Bureau On-Line System at <www.Ednet.ns.ca>. Resource details can be found by selecting ALR Resource Search and choosing "Challenge For Excellence" in the Listing Criteria Category.

Step 2: Gather status information early in the school year.

Status information is any information which provides insights into students' abilities, interests, and style preferences. (A sample form may be found in *Total Talent Portfolio: A Systematic Plan to Identify and Nurture Gifts and Talents*, page 106). The learning profile created from the status information provides a starting point for enrichment planning.

Status information on abilities may include

- accomplishments and awards
- results of special contests, competitions, fairs, exhibits
- students' previous work samples and products
- samples of teacher-made tests and assessments
- report card grades
- student profiles of multiple intelligences

Status information on interests may include

- interest inventories (sample inventories may be found in the *Challenge for Excellence: Enrichment and Gifted Education Resource Guide*)
- observation of interest-based activities
- documentation of formal and/or informal discussion with students and/or their families

Status information on style preferences may include surveys, conferencing, and/or observation of students' preferred

- instructional style
- learning style
- thinking style
- expression style
- learning environment style

(Sample surveys may be found in *Total Talent Portfolio: A Systematic Plan to Identify and Nurture Gifts and Talents,* Appendix F.)

Step 3: Collect new evidence and observations (students and teachers).

New evidence is any student work, products, activities, and/or accomplishments from the current school year. Students' original work (or copies of their work), certificates, and products (or photos of products) must be collected and stored for review and organization in step 4.

Observations of students who exhibit heightened interest in certain topics or lessons should be noted and recorded by teachers. For additional information on observation procedures such as the use of Action Information Messages to document observations, see *Total Talent Portfolio: A Systematic Plan to Identify and Nurture Gifts and Talents* and *The Schoolwide Enrichment Model: A How-to Guide for Educational Excellence* (Renzulli and Reis 1997).

Step 4: Organize contents (classify, categorize, pare down).

The teacher may provide a framework with broad guidelines for the categories of products to be included and presentation format of the TTP. Students must be responsible for establishing their own criteria, assessing their work, and selecting the actual products to be included.

Consideration must be given to

- **Criteria:** TTPs are intended to be limited collections of selective works. Teachers may want to provide opportunities to discuss and develop lists of indicators that describe high-level activities and products so that students will be able to better establish their own appropriate criteria for product selection.
- **Diversity:** TTPs should reflect a wide variety of student work and/or interests in various formats that are representative of the student in the current year.
- **Autonomy:** Students must make independent decisions about what to include in the TTP. This decision making includes the higher-level thinking skills of reflection, analysis, and evaluation.

Step 5: Review the TTP.

The TTP should be reviewed regularly and this process should represent a number of perspectives.

• **Student-led conferences:** The teacher responsible for the TTP should meet individually with students to review their portfolios. In this conference, students may explain their product selection criteria, describe their experiences and growth up to this time, and discuss their ideas for future educational opportunities and direction.

• **Team meetings:** Teachers involved with students developing total talent portfolios should review the portfolios to assess the learner's profile, inform options in programming (see Step 6), and evaluate the TTP process for individual students.

• **Parent-teacher discussion:** The review of the TTP by parents offers evidence of their child's progress and experiences to date. Parent-teacher discussion of the TTP may reveal new insights and/or suggestions for future planning.

Step 6: Plan options in programming.

At the end of each TTP review period, all of the accumulated information from the status information, new evidence and observations, team and parent discussions, and student presentations of their TTPs is used to inform educational programming decisions. The information collected can suggest meaningful and appropriate high-level learning experiences for the further development of students' talents. With support from their teachers, students reference their TTPs to make connections between their aspirations and their accomplishments and to set goals for themselves, both inside school and out. Through this process, students better understand themselves as learners.

Total Talent Portfolio Management

TTPs are meant to be easily portable and conveniently stored, therefore, they must be made as compact as possible. Responsibility is shared between the student and the school for TTP upkeep and storage.

School responsibilities:

- develop and maintain a procedure for TTP review
- secure suitable storage areas for completed TTPs and TTPs in progress
- develop and maintain procedures for the transition of TTPs (e.g., next grade level, new school)

Student responsibilities:

- date every piece of work at the time it is done to show progress over time
- develop and maintain a procedure for keeping all work—evidence of work/accomplishments and "works in progress" for possible inclusion in the TTP
- follow school/teacher guidelines for portfolio format and storage
- use photos, sketches, CD-Roms, floppy disks, videotapes, or audio cassettes of large products or presentations

The Total Talent Portfolio in the Context of the Public School Program

The Total Talent Portfolio is designed to assist schools with informing instructional practices and programming specific to student strengths. Students who are developing a total talent portfolio will continue to do so throughout their school careers.

Beginning at the grade seven level and continuing through secondary school, all students will develop a LifeWork Portfolio. The LifeWork Portfolio is not intended to replace the TTP. The LifeWork Portfolio is meant to provide students the opportunity to gather a chronological record of information and student work that focuses on career and life choices.

While it is intended that the TTP will complement the LifeWork Portfolio, the TTP gives a picture of who the student is and the impact of understanding a student's ability, interests, and learning style preferences when planning curriculum delivery.

References

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