

# How Rich Is Your Enrichment Program?

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## Abstract

The term “enrichment” has been loosely applied to gifted children and gifted programs over the years. However, there is very little agreement as to this term, and there is minimal if any short term or long term evaluation over time regarding the benefits of this term and there is almost no long term research on the impact of various “enrichment” programs, nor can the average parent be assured of implementation with fidelity or integrity. In addition, “enrichment” varies from grade to grade, school to school and state to state, and the definition of enrichment varies from subject to subject and child to child. On-going objective evaluation is minimal at best. This paper will attempt to review the various programs that constitute “enrichment”. Some enrichment programs focus on higher order thinking skills, other critical thinking skills, other reasoning, other inferential and inductive and deductive reasoning. Some programs focus on “projects” while others examine community services. This paper explores this issue and examines some of these relevant, salient issues and discusses some of the issues regarding this term. Some “enrichment” processes and procedures will be addressed and concerns elaborated on.

## Keywords

Gifted, Gifted Education, Enrichment, Acceleration, Evaluation of Educational Programs

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## 1. Introduction

Every year across America, students identified as gifted are placed into “enrichment” programs.

These “bright, smart, intelligent” gifted individuals are offered what is loosely termed “enrichment”. This term covers a wide variety of interventions and educational supplements. In certain instances, this is formalized in writing. And in other instances, a global directive to provide enrichment is forthcoming without follow-up or evaluation.

## 2. A Legislative and Legal Perspective

Education is a function of state government in the United States, not the national government, unlike most other

nations in the world. Because education is not mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, the type of education that children receive is left for the most part to the state legislatures, the state departments of education, and local school boards, all working in unison. In 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States had the opportunity to declare that education was a fundamental right. However, in the *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, the equal protection argument was denied, as the court stated, “though education is one of the most important services performed by the State, it is not within the limited category of rights recognized by this Court as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution”. The decision in *San Antonio* was 5 - 4.

The federal government certainly plays a part in education with various Congressional statutes and Department of Education directives. In 1972, the Maryland Report was the first formal definition of giftedness is given in which schools are asked to define giftedness broad, along with academic and intellectual talent the definition included leadership ability, visual and performing arts, creative or productive thinking, and psychomotor ability. Psychomotor ability is excluded from subsequent revisions of the federal definition. In 1974, the Office of Gifted and Talented is given official status and housed within the U.S. Office of Education.

Public Law 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, establishes a federal mandate to serve children with special education needs, but the Act does not include children with academic gifts and talents. The Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed, but no federal dollars were established to support the statute.

Public education dollars as a percentage of federal dollars ranged from less than 4% in New Jersey to 19% in Louisiana for the 2009-2010 school term with 8% being the federal dollar average to the states, mostly in Title I funding (Brimley, Verstegen, & Garfield, 2012: p. 204).

Most estimates state that academically and gifted students make up between six to ten percent of the total K-12 population. Gifted students are as different as other “special” education for which services are federally mandated.

There is no federal mandate for enrichment for gifted students.

Decisions about education for gifted students are made at the state level and typically at the local school district level.

Moving from school district to school district within a state, or moving from state to state will likely offer very different educational opportunities for all children and those children that qualify as gifted in particular. A student may be involved in an Advanced Placement (AP) class in their district, then move and find that no AP classes exist. A student may have an IEP (Individual Education Plan) that recognizes giftedness in one district or state and find in moving to a new location that there is no gifted program whatsoever.

In 2013-2014, fourteen states did not provide any funding to local districts for gifted education (Gifted Education in the U.S.). Illinois does not legislatively mandate that any gifted student be served, but Illinois does make funds available based on the number of identified gifted students in a district on an amount of pro-rated dollars from the state legislature that vary from fiscal year to fiscal year depending of the health of the state economy. In Illinois in order to qualify for the “gifted grant” the district must identify a gifted education administrator. Teachers of gifted students receive training through a workshop in order to qualify for any state funding stipends. Many of the small Illinois school districts do have AP programs at the high school level.

Elementary gifted students are most typically offered a special class during the school day, often only one day per week that addresses a specific topic in greater depth. My fondest recollection as an administrator in Illinois occurred in 1987 when the gifted class was allowed to take the school van on a ten-day trip to the Badlands of South Dakota, Mt. Rushmore and Yellowstone National Park. The principal serving as the gifted coordinator was accompanied by seven members of the junior high school that had been identified as gifted.

The program that we utilized in the second author’s district in Illinois was a pull-out program where the gifted students were given a special class in a specific subject or high interest area. In the example listed, traveling west and viewing historic sites was a unique educational event for these middle school students.

A “class” of this nature had to be approved by the state, the board of education and the parents of the students. Other pull-out classes that were utilized were classes in simple computer programing. We must remember that in 1987 computers were not ubiquitous, as I recall this small district had only four at the time.

In the state of New Mexico, the state legislature mandates that gifted students be served, and yet the state does not require that teachers possess any specified training in gifted education nor is a gifted administrator required (Davidson Institute).

New Mexico’s statute defining gifted and talented states:

Gifted child means a school-age person whose intellectual ability paired with subject matter aptitude/achievement, creativity/divergent thinking, or problem-solving/critical thinking is so outstanding that a properly constituted IEP team decides special education services are required to meet the child's educational needs. Intellectual ability means performance in a very superior range as defined by the test author on a properly administered intelligence measure (New Mexico Admin. Code title 6, @ 31.2.12).

### 3. A Typical Example

In Berrendo Elementary School in Roswell, New Mexico, the gifted coordinator oversees all of the special education programs. Teachers in this district are required to fill out a SAT (Student Assistance Team) packet with all Tier Interventions. Once the interventions have established the data and sufficient growth, a meeting is established with the parents. Students are then screened to see if they meet the gifted criteria and those that pass the screening are sent for testing.

A diagnostician tests the student and when testing is completed the Gifted Case Manager will call an eligibility determination meeting (EDT) to review the testing results. At this meeting a decision will be made as to whether the student meets the specific state qualifications for a student with exceptionality in areas such as reading, mathematics, written expression, critical thinking, or creativity. If the student is found to qualify an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is established.

This is typical for schools in New Mexico and very dissimilar for what occurs in the schools in Illinois. After speaking to a small district administrator in Illinois in 2014 he stated that "at best" the gifted program in the K-8 school involved enrichment activities accomplished in the classroom by cluster grouping the gifted students and providing them with supplementary independent projects. This involves clustering some of the gifted children of each grade.

Clustering as the principal describes it is a type of grouping, a strategy that allows the identified students to access an appropriate level of challenge. Almost any form of grouping will provide an achievement gain for gifted learners (Rogers, 2006: p. 4).

### 4. A Review of Some Approaches to Enrichment

For the gifted student, the child may receive more work, more comprehensive work, more in-depth work, more broad work, or simply more time to explore topics in the school library. This paper plans to address the issues of academic potential and how it can be nurtured, enhanced, squelched, or neglected. Often teachers are given global directives to provide "enrichment". It is often not indicated as to whether that includes higher order thinking skills, critical thinking skills, additional reading or educational software. For some teachers, "enrichment is equivalent "independent study" or individual research, or book reports.

Some teachers are better prepared than others to provide enrichment, and some teachers simply allow the student to follow their own interests and investigate any topic with which they are interested. Not all teachers are keen on providing quality enrichment when there are so many students needing remediation and assistance. Further, not all schools have adequate supplies and materials to investigate any single topic in depth. Thus, much instructional time is lost, and there may be no clear focus as to what the time spent in enrichment constitutes.

Is There a Priority of Enrichment Activities?

For certain students, a comprehensive exploration or examination of any topic is warranted and indeed worthwhile. The student may study the American Revolution in depth, and then follow this study with an additional investigation of the French Revolution, followed by the Russian Revolution.

### 5. On Integrating HOTS as "Enrichment"

As an enrichment strategy, the gifted student can be verbally asked higher order thinking questions, given assignments that require higher order thinking skills, or can be asked to utilize Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives for all of their lessons. In a sense the student may be using Bloom's model for an entire school year or the teacher may focus all lessons on the higher order rungs of Bloom's taxonomy.

The issue becomes one of assessing how many questions are asked by the teacher, how often the teacher prompts higher order thinking and evaluating, comparing and contrasting, and synthesizing, and if there is ever any assessment of growth and development in this realm, much less any type of evaluation with any type of standardized test.

Some teachers continually employ an emphasis on knowledge and remembering, others focus on understanding and comprehension, some focus on applying, and application, while still others focus on the higher domains of Bloom's taxonomy-analysis or analyzing, evaluating and evaluation and synthesis or creating.

Many schools post Bloom's taxonomy in the hope that this will stimulate teaching and student learning. Just because a poster appears on some classroom wall, does not translate to higher order thinking skills in the long run.

In today's schools with such an emphasis on standardized testing, many teachers bemoan the fact that they do not have the time for in depth robust classroom discussion, and the use of higher order thinking strategies.

In various subjects, teachers can employ Howard Gardner's ideas of multiple intelligences, particularly in specific classes such as science, music, art, theatre and the like. Further, a teacher can utilize the realm of intra- and inter personal intelligence to enhance social skills, leadership skills and future planning.

## 6. On Integrating Critical Thinking

The gifted student can be primed and prompted to examine events, perspectives and historical antecedents from a critical perspective. The teacher can ask the student to examine all events from multiple perspectives, integrate morality and justice concepts into the lesson and ask the student to examine long term as well as short term ramifications and repercussions.

As with higher order thinking, time is limited to challenge students and to examine and explore the multitude of issues that confront our current zeitgeist and political climate. Further, students may find venturing into this realm somewhat alien, as previous teachers may not have utilized this type of pedagogy.

## 7. Personal Acknowledgement and Recognition

One part of enrichment can be quite inter-personal and subtle. When a teacher takes a personal interest in the student, comments on their accomplishments or successes, this could be quite important and relevant to the pupil's success and self-esteem. Often parents do not praise or reward student accomplishments and when a teacher publically acknowledges a student's contributions, either during the class or after the class, or before a class, the student may receive the reinforcement that may constitute "enrichment".

This paper will attempt to review the various programs that constitute "enrichment". Some enrichment programs focus on higher order thinking skills, others critical thinking skills, others reasoning, others inferential and inductive and deductive reasoning. Some programs focus on "projects" while others examine community services.

## 8. In Class "Enrichment"

Out of school enrichment-With the advent of educational software, C.D.'s and downloadable materials, students can pursue their interests and educational endeavors on line and at home. In some instances, this is done in a totally independent, voluntary manner. The student pursues his or her interests in the Renaissance, the Reformation, the War of the Roses, the Hundred Year's War, and World War II in a totally independent fashion. Books are read, primary documents are sought and people investigated.

## 9. Summer School as "Enrichment"

In many states, there are robust programs for gifted students during the summer time. These could take the form of computer camps, chess clubs, competitions, robotics, and nature investigations as well as museum trips or foreign trips to London, Paris, Rome, and other major European cities. Often parents take the initiative to enroll their son or daughter in one of these "summer camps", thus providing enrichment, independent of the school system. In a sense the parent is going "above and beyond", often purchasing supplies or a place in a summer camp for the long term growth and development of their child. While these may be very enriching experiences, the implications of these programs have not really been empirically evaluated.

## 10. Mentoring

For years, mentoring has been seen as a way to encourage, nurture, and foster human growth and development.

Mentoring can be formal or informal, and can be highly structured or simply an on occasion process, as needed. In general, mentoring involves a mentor and protégé and the basic assumption is that the mentor is going to help the protégé to “get ahead”. In the schools, this may relate to academic advising, suggesting books to read, movies to see, or simply discussing current fiction and literature. For some students, the fact that an adult takes a personal interest in them and in their learning is motivation enough to sustain them through their high school years.

## 11. Technology and the Internet

In many circles, teacher instructional time is valuable, and as such, teachers are encouraged to employ technology as a substitute and so as to apply “enrichment” to the gifted student. The student is allowed access to the Internet, and is allowed, on occasion to “research” whatever they want. Often these investigations are monitored, but in other cases, they are not. Thus, the student can research museums, mollusks, or moles, and learn all the can about these three

## 12. Subject Specific “Enrichment”

Often colleges and universities have specific courses available for high school students. The student may take calculus, trigonometry, physics or some other subject as part of their “enrichment” package or program. It is often difficult to evaluate and assess the impact that this experience would have on a gifted student. Obviously, the student would be exposed to a different environment, perhaps be more challenged, see the world from a different perspective, and possibly earn college credits to assist him or her in the long run.

## 13. Enrichment via “The Great Courses”

One avenue for enrichment is via a series of courses that are available on C.D. “The Great Courses” boasts “the World’s Greatest Professors at your Fingertips”. This venue touts “all the joy of learning with none of the pressure of schedules, homework or tests”. This is certainly a form of enrichment, sans the final A, B, C, or D grade. The student can be exposed to The Louvre, Latin 101, Physiology, World History, The Old Testament, Music, Anatomy and Physiology, Philosophy, and Astronomy. Again, it is difficult to evaluate and to put a number on an experience so rich and robust as studying Western Civilization, European Art, Medieval Europe, and to be exposed to these realms via some of the leading scholars in the field. This is not an endorsement of “The Great Courses” but merely an option or alternative for students who are sincerely interested in learning more about a topic or parents who want to expose their children to the vast panorama of learning, and learning about the world.

Certainly, enrichment should differ from subject to subject and grade level to grade level. We would not expect the same amount of depth, breath and scope from a second grader as a twelfth grader. “Enrichment” in math would take a very different format and shape than enrichment in science. Having a student do 100 multiplication problems rather than 50 is not enrichment-it is as is often heard “more of the same” and this is a very egregious waste of time. The child’s time may be better used solving problems or aiding another student (which many people see as exploitation) or preparing for the next year’s content of mathematics.

At the elementary level, enrichment provides more of scaffolding for later more in depth study and discussion. At the elementary level, concrete items are provided so as to enhance the foundational knowledge of the child. Many teachers advocate the Core Knowledge program at the elementary levels so that the students are better prepared for later more in depth study. At the middle school or junior high level, there should be more depth, breath and scope, and at the high school, extensive use of outside resources and more comprehensive investigation is needed ([National Association for Gifted Children, 2015](#)).

## 14. An Overview of “Enrichment” and Domains

At the elementary level, enrichment could follow the P.P.E.C.C. concept (Person, Place, Event, Concept, Contributions) In this approach, the student might investigate or learn about a person (for example George Washington) and depending on the child’s age, might learn global information or specific details (birth place, contributions, where he or she lived).

Investigating a place, rather than a person might involve the student learning about the Grand Canyon, the



Eiffel Tower, the Tower of London, or the Great Wall of China. This would involve the history of the site, the person or persons responsible for it, and its importance.

Investigating a concept could involve the student learning about gravity, and lastly in terms of an event, the student could learn about both George Washington and the Revolutionary War.

The student could utilize books, (both autobiographical and biographical) the encyclopedia, the Internet, the school or local library, and the depth, breath, scope and sources would be agreed upon by teacher and pupil beforehand.

At the middle school or junior high level, a person such as Martin Luther King could be studied (with his contributions, writings, and particular events being studied, or an entire country could be investigated (such as Australia-looking at form of government, economy, politics, products, geography, history).

At the middle school level, more concepts could be investigated such as democracy, socialism, communism, totalitarianism, and these concepts would be at an appropriate level, given the child's intellectual capacities.

A Major Event such as the Civil War could occupy the student for a semester or perhaps even a year. The student could study the people involved, leaders, places, books (Stillness at Appomattox) battles, music, art, causes (slavery, Bombing of Fort Sumner, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Emancipation Proclamation) long and short term causes and ramifications and repercussions, and post war events (carpetbaggers, etc.).

At the High school level, a major figure could be chosen such as Albert Einstein, an entire planet could be studied, such as Pluto (which apparently is no longer a planet), a major concept (Socialism) and a major historical event, such as the Renaissance or the Reformation or Major War (War of the Roses, Hundred Years War). At the high school level, a multiyear event such as the Renaissance could involve the study of people (Leonardo, Michaelangelo) art, (pictures, paintings, sculpture,) literature, music, and involve the use of authorities, and experts on this period of history. The time frame may have to be clearly delineated depending upon the age, interest, and importance of the topic to the student and teacher.

Some teachers feel certain topics are of critical importance in the big scheme of things, other teachers feel that certain events have an impact on the entire world. Certainly there is a subjective nature to this process. Is Agatha Christie a more important writer than Leo Tolstoy? Is Bach a more important composer than Beethoven? Is the Magna Carta more critical than the Declaration of Independence?

Who Can Evaluate the Efficacy of Any Enrichment Program?

There is always this emphasis on evaluation, assessment, measurement etc. Often an IEP team will suggest goals and objectives, which are supposed to be exact, specific, precise, countable and measurable. It is not known who does the evaluation of enrichment programs, how they may be adjusted, and how they may be measured in the short term or long term. It is not known if the typical teacher has the pre-post test skills to ascertain growth and development. And there is, to my knowledge, very little published research on the long term impact of any enrichment program. I will however, attempt to contact Joe Renzulli and Sally Reis to see if they have any insights into this matter. Their Clearinghouse may have this type of data, although it may not be available to the general public. In fact, much information, while buried in the Internet or web somewhere is not readily accessible, for example the information about enrichment's alternative-acceleration. At least some individuals know about [www.nationdeceived.org](http://www.nationdeceived.org) (Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration).

## 15. Summary and Conclusion

This paper has simply attempted to ask teachers, guidance personnel, and gifted coordinators to reflect on the quality, quantity and long and short term evaluation of their "enrichment" programs. Granted, any enrichment is better than no enrichment, but if anything is worth doing, it is probably worth doing well, although in this age of expediency, this is not always the case.

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