The Schoolwide Enrichment Model: A How-to Guide for Talent Development

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Third Edition

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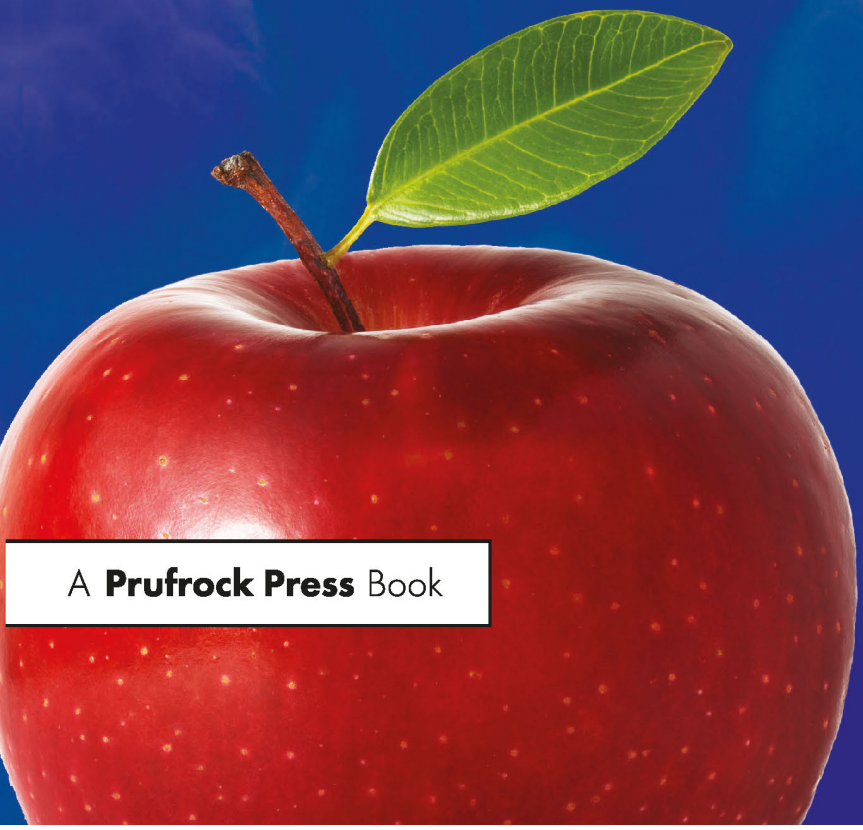

A **Prufrock Press** Book

Joseph S. Renzulli, Ed.D.,
& Sally M. Reis, Ph.D.

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A How-to Guide for Talent Development

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Dedication

We dedicate this book to all of the teachers and administrators who have worked in and developed SEM programs and have provided us with many of the strategies that have helped our model to evolve and grow over the last four decades. We are profoundly grateful for the opportunities that we have had to work with some of the best educators in the world.

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PREFACE

Your Own Creativity Is the Best Way to Get to Rome

What's a Model?

Before beginning to read this book, it might be worthwhile to reflect for a moment about the meaning and purpose of this or any other plan that is designed to bring about selected changes in a school and the ways in which educators serve young people. The first consideration in answering the above question is the distinction between two categories of educational models. We will refer to one category as administrative models and the second as theoretical models.

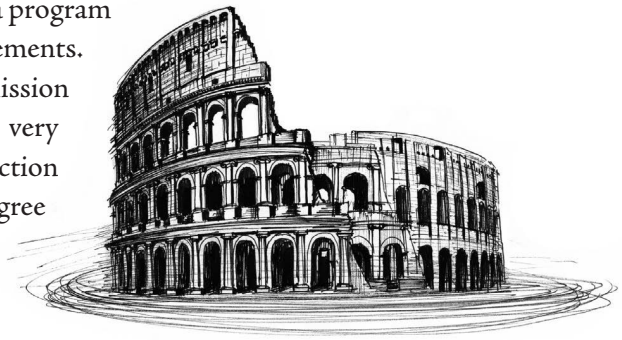
Administrative models consist of patterns of school organization and procedures for dealing with such issues as how educators group students, develop schedules, and allocate time, money, and human resources. Administrative models focus mainly on how educators "move students around" and how they *arrange* for the delivery of services. Issues dealt with in administrative models might include homogeneous versus heterogeneous grouping, length of the school day or year, inclusion of special education students in regular classrooms, and whether or not educators should use a resource room or within-the-classroom program for the gifted.

Theoretical models, on the other hand, usually focus on the actual services that educators provide to students, regardless of the ways in which they organize their schools or school schedules. Theoretical models consist of principles that guide the learning process and give direction to the content of the curriculum, the assessment and instructional strategies that teachers use, and ways

in which educators evaluate the extent and quality of what their students have learned. Theoretical models focus on the actual outcomes of learning experiences that might take place within any given administrative pattern of organization. Theoretical models are influential in determining the *quality* of school experiences, whereas administrative models are more concerned with the efficiency and "smoothness" of the school's operation.

Although the model presented in this book has certain implications for organizational patterns, we consider it a theoretical model because it is based on: (1) a series of assumptions about individual differences in learners, (2) principles of learning, and (3) recommended practices that logically follow from these assumptions and principles. A crucial consideration in selecting this or any other model is whether or not there is a consensus of agreement among teachers, parents, and administrators about the assumptions, principles, and recommended practices. We have found that when such a consensus exists, the relatively small organizational or administrative changes necessary for implementing the model are easily accomplished by most schools. Our experience has also shown that a theoretical model that infuses instructional practices into existing administrative patterns of organization has a higher probability of success than an approach that tries to completely reorganize the school.

All Roads Lead to Rome!



We believe that the selection and use of a program development model has two essential requirements. First, a model should consist of a shared mission and set of objectives. Everyone (or at the very least, almost everyone) involved in the selection and implementation of a model should agree that the mission and objectives represent a "destination" that they would like to reach. If an agreed upon goal is "to get to Rome," then there is no ambiguity, vagueness, or misunderstandings about where everyone is going.

This first requirement of a model means that a great deal of front end time should be spent exploring alternative models, discussing and debating the advantages and disadvantages of various approaches, and examining related factors such as underlying research, implementation in other schools, and the availability

of supportive resources. Reaching consensus *before* embarking upon a journey will help ensure that everyone involved will get to Rome rather than to Venice or Moscow!

There Are Many Ways to Get to Rome

Although we believe that programs based on the Schoolwide Enrichment Model should strive to accomplish an agreed upon mission and set of objectives, we also believe that any plan for program development must allow for a great deal of flexibility in the achievement of its objectives. This flexibility is necessary because no written plan or set of procedures can take into account the variations that exist at the local school level. Differences in school populations, financial resources, the availability of persons from the community at large, and a host of other local variables must be considered in the implementation of this or any other approach to school improvement. A model that does not allow for such flexibility could easily become a straightjacket that simply will not work when one or more of the local considerations is not taken into account. Some schools will have supplementary resource teachers for advanced-level students and others will not. Some school districts will have an abundance of community resources readily available, and others, perhaps more geographically isolated, will have limited access to museums, planetariums, colleges and universities, etc. Some schools may serve larger proportions of culturally diverse students than others and certain districts may have such large numbers of high-achieving students that it is conceivable that the entire school population might be considered a Talent Pool.

Another reason why we believe that a model for program development must maintain a large degree of flexibility is that educators tend to quickly lose interest in "canned" programs and models that do not allow for local initiative, creativity, and teacher input. New and better ways to provide enrichment experiences to students will be discouraged if program development does not encourage local adaptation and innovation to occur. This book provides a certain amount of general direction in both the development of program objectives and in the procedures for pursuing these objectives. At the same time, however, the specific types of activities that educators select and develop for their programs, and the ways in which they make these activities available to various populations of students will actually result in the creation of their own programming model. Educators will, in effect, be writing their own resource guide, because the actual content of the

enrichment experiences will be developed locally by their own school personnel. We believe that if the Schoolwide Enrichment Model objectives are maintained, even if in a slightly modified form, a school's program will achieve the integrity that is sought in this total system approach. In this regard, the Schoolwide Enrichment Model that educators develop will attempt to achieve the best of two worlds! First, programs will benefit from the theoretical and research developments and the many years of field testing and practical application that have led to the advice put forth in this book. Second, the ideas, resources, innovations, and adaptations that emerge from local situations will contribute to the uniqueness and practicality of programs that are developed to meet local needs.

Throughout this book we have consistently recommended that educators should make whatever modifications and adaptations that are necessary to the particular procedures recommended for accomplishing various program tasks. We believe that there are many pathways and alternatives to reaching desired program outcomes. Once everyone in a school has agreed upon a destination, the uniqueness and excitement of the journey should involve the creation of an individualized plan for getting there. If all roads lead to Rome, what an unimaginative, and indeed, even boring world it would be.

Your contribution to this book is the way that you selectively adopt, adapt, and create the methods, materials, and organizational components that will make your school and program an *original* application of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model.

CHAPTER 1

A Vision and a Plan

The "Why" of Schoolwide Enrichment

Imagine if your students came to school each day with the same positive attitude we see when they are working on the school yearbook, preparing for a choir presentation, getting ready for a field trip, working on a robotics competition, or preparing to play their archrivals in basketball. Why is the magnetism surrounding these experiences so different from regular schooling and how can this positive energy be created within the regular curriculum? Ask teachers this question, and you will almost always get similar answers about why it is challenging for them to replicate the types of excitement that accompany the activities described above: "We have a prescribed curriculum to cover." "We need to prepare our students for the state achievement tests." "We don't have the time or resources for differentiation." "We are evaluated based on our students' test scores." In this book, we provide a plan that will help educators create enrichment opportunities that will engage and enrich education for all students.

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) was designed to address some of the challenges teachers face in overstructured learning environments and the many outside regulations that have been imposed on them that inhibit what should be a joyful "brand" of teaching and learning. For many teachers, there is a disconnect between their vision of challenging and rewarding teaching and the day-to-day grind of test-prep so rampant in today's highly prescribed curriculum. Teachers have the skills and motivation to do the kinds of teaching about which they dreamed but the regulations and requirements imposed upon them "from above" result in both a prescriptive approach to teaching and a barrier to creating challenging and exciting classrooms. Overprescribing teachers'

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work can lobotomize them and deny the creative teaching opportunities that attracted them to the profession. Not every type of prescribed, standards-based teaching is bad; however, a good education must *balance* a prescribed curriculum with regular, systematic enrichment opportunities that allow students to develop their interests, abilities, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression.

The Three Es of The Schoolwide Enrichment Model

When considering the goals of the SEM model, we have avoided endless lists of clichés, jargon, and the latest flavor-of-the-month education buzzwords that have come to dominate the school improvement literature and the speaker's staff development circuit. We choose instead to express the goals of our model with a few simple concepts depicted in Figure 1. Our work has clearly and unequivocally found that school achievement, the minimization of boredom, and positive attitudes on the parts of *both* teachers and students can be accomplished when we focus on what we call the Three Es of the SEM—*enjoyment*, which leads to higher *engagement*, which in turn leads to greater *enthusiasm for learning*. Our research shows that when the Three Es are working well, students not only like school better, they also show improvements in school achievement (Reis & Renzulli, 2003; Renzulli & Reis, 1997).

Although we could easily spend a great deal of time criticizing the regular curriculum, the reality is that prescribed curriculum is and will continue to be a fact of life in most schools. It includes important information for successful learning and is necessary in today's dominant accountability environment. Any model that challenges the standards-based movement and the major role played by standardized achievement testing is doomed to failure due to contemporary policies, political considerations, and the vast financial investments that have been made by the influential prepackaged curriculum companies and the testing industry. SEM, however, offers what we have called an "infusion-based approach" that examines the regular curriculum and explores opportunities and strategies to inject enrichment experiences into any and all prescribed topics. The procedures for using this approach will be described in a later section of this chapter.

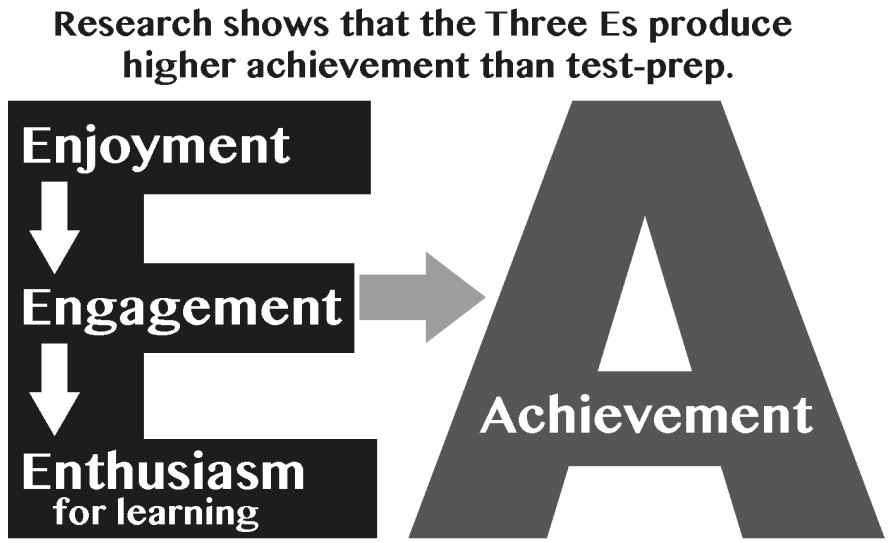

Figure 1. The Three Es.

The SEM and Talent Development

The SEM has been developed over three decades and is based on the shared vision of thousands of teachers and administrators with whom we have worked in academic programs and summer institutes that date back to the 1970s. Simply stated, the vision underlying the SEM is that *schools should be places for talent development* (Renzulli, 1994). We believe that academic achievement is one of the most critically important parts of the model for schoolwide enrichment described in this book. What has made our nation great and our society one of the most productive in the world have been opportunities for talent development across all levels of human productivity. From the creators and inventors of new ideas, products, and art forms, to the vast array of people who manufacture, advertise, and market the creations that improve and enrich our lives, there are levels of excellence and quality that contribute to our standard of living and way of life. Our vision of the SEM and our belief in schools for talent development is based on the premise that all students should have some time in school to develop their talents. We believe that *all educators* should provide students with opportunities, resources, and encouragement that enable them to develop their talents. Rewarding lives are a function of the ways people use and develop their individual potentials in productive ways, and the SEM is our practical plan to make schools

for talent development a reality. We are not naive about the politics, personalities, and financial issues that often supersede the pedagogical goals that are the focus of this book. At the same time, we have seen this vision manifested in schools in impoverished urban areas, poor rural areas, and affluent suburbs. The strategies to implement the SEM described in this book have provided the guidance for transforming schools into places for talent development for more than three decades.

There are no quick fixes or easy formulas for creating schools based on a talent development philosophy. However, our experience has shown that once the concept of talent development begins to catch on, students, parents, teachers, and administrators view their school in a different way. Students become more excited and engaged in what they are learning; parents find more opportunities to become involved in various aspects of their children's education; teachers begin to find and use a variety of resources that, until now, seldom found their way into classrooms; and administrators start to make decisions that affect positive outcomes in learning that are conducive to implementing the SEM.

Everyone has a stake in schools that provide our students with a high-quality education, as parents benefit when their children lead happy and successful lives. Employers and colleges benefit when they have access to people who are competent, creative, and effective in the work they do and in higher educational pursuits. Political leaders benefit when good and productive citizens contribute to a healthy economy, a high quality of life, and respect for the values and institutions of democracy. Professional educators at all levels benefit when the quality of schools for which they are responsible is effective enough to create respect for their work and generous financial support for the educational enterprise.

Everyone has a stake in good schools because schools create and *re*create a successful modern society. Renewed and sustained economic growth and the well-being of all citizens requires investments in high-quality learning in the same way that previous generations have invested in machines and raw materials. Our schools are already placing millions of functionally illiterate young people into the workforce. More and more colleges are teaching remedial courses based on material formerly taught in high school, and college graduates in almost all fields are experiencing difficulty entering career areas of choice.

Although everyone has a stake in good schools, some Americans have declining confidence in schools and the people who work in them, limitations in the amount of financial support for education, and some public apathy or dissatisfaction with the quality of education our young people are receiving. The parents of poor children have given up hope that education will enable their sons and daughters to break the bonds of poverty. The middle class, perhaps for the first time

in our nation's history, is exploring government-supported alternatives such as vouchers and tax credits for private schools, homeschooling, charter schools, and summer and afterschool programs that enhance admission to competitive colleges. Much has been written about America's "school problem" and studies, commissions, reports, and even a Governor's Summit Conference have been initiated to generate solutions to problems facing our schools. But the hundreds, if not thousands of conferences, commissions, meetings, reports, proclamations, and lists of goals have yielded minimal results, because they generally focused on change related to traditional methods of schooling. Our response to better schools is to consider a paradigm switch and the creation of schools for talent development, which is the basis of the SEM.

The SEM is a detailed blueprint for schoolwide talent development that is flexible enough to enable each school to develop its own unique program based on local resources, student populations, school leadership dynamics, and faculty strengths and creativity. Although this research-supported model is based on highly successful practices that had their origins in special programs for gifted and talented students, the major goal of SEM is to promote both challenging and enjoyable high-end learning across the full range of school types, levels, and demographic differences. The SEM is not intended to replace or minimize existing services to high-achieving students. Rather, it is a common sense plan that provides a broad variety of general enrichment experiences for all students and opportunities for advanced-level follow-up on the parts of individuals and small groups who show special aptitudes, interests, and motivation for more challenging involvements in academic, artistic, or other pursuits. We believe that "a rising tide lifts all ships" and that making schools more joyful and challenging places for *all* students also improves learning for any group or individual with special needs across the entire range of the aptitude, achievement, interest, and creativity continuum that exists in every school.

The SEM provides educators with the means to:

- develop the talent potentials of young people by systematically assessing their strengths; providing enrichment opportunities, resources, and services to develop their strengths; and using a flexible approach to curricular differentiation and the use of school time;
- improve the academic performance of all students in all areas of the regular curriculum and blend standard curriculum activities with meaningful enrichment learning;

- promote continuous, reflective, growth-oriented professionalism of school personnel to such an extent that many faculty members emerge as leaders in curriculum and staff development, program planning, etc.;
- create a learning community that honors ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity and promotes mutual respect, democratic principles, and the preservation of the Earth's resources; and
- implement a collaborative school culture that includes appropriate decision-making opportunities for students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

How to Use This Book

It is difficult to summarize in a reasonably sized book more than 30 years of research and development that have been incorporated into the SEM and the voluminous amounts of practical know-how that we have gained from thousands of schools and teachers that have used this model. And nowadays, school administrators and policy makers are cautious about adopting any school improvement initiative that does not show evidence of a strong theoretical and research-based background. Because we intend this book to be a guide for practical implementation of the SEM, we are addressing the background-material problem in two ways. In Chapter 2, we will provide a brief overview of the theories and research underlying the SEM, but we will also provide references to a website entitled The Schoolwide Enrichment Model—Theory and Practice (see http://www.routledge.com/Assets/ClientPages/sem.aspx). This easy-to-access site is specif-ically tailored to this book and includes both a "Theory and Research" section as well as a "Practical Implementation" section. All material at this site is down-loadable and can be reproduced for classroom use without cost or permission. If someone wants to, for example, "see the research" on a specific component of the model, they can access this website and download what they need. The website also includes the names of other books and resources on implementation, such as our book *Enrichment Clusters*. We have also included a section on human and material resources and a direct contact to our SEM Outreach Coordinator. This person is readily available for e-mail and telephone contact and for assistance with implementing the SEM.

Three Things to Keep in Mind as You Read This Book

Common Goals and Unique Means: All Roads Lead to Rome!

The selection and use of a program development model has two essential requirements. First, a model should include a shared mission and set of objectives. Everyone (or at the very least, almost everyone) involved in the selection and implementation of a model should agree that the mission and objectives represent a "destination" that they would like to reach. If an agreed upon goal is "to get to Rome," then there is no ambiguity, vagueness, or misunderstanding about where everyone is going. This first requirement for selecting a model means that a great deal of front end time should be spent exploring alternative models, discussing and debating the advantages and disadvantages of various approaches, and examining related factors such as underlying research, implementation, and the availability of supportive resources. Reaching consensus before embarking upon a journey will help ensure that everyone involved will get to Rome rather than to Venice or Moscow.

But . . . There Are Many Ways to Get to Rome

No one likes cookie-cutter solutions to initiatives that should be opportunities for developing our creativity. One thing that is different about the SEM is that it is not a rigid formula, and we do not expect all SEM schools to look alike or to do the same things. When this is the case, model builders have overstructured schools "from the outside," and by doing so, have failed to take into consideration the demographics of varying school populations. They have also failed to take into account the various strengths, interests, and talents of the faculty, and the creative ideas that generate the energy and enthusiasm for building programs. As long as we all agree upon and pursue the common goals (getting to Rome), the unique means that a school uses to reach these goals is what causes teachers and administrators to build ownership and pride in their program. It also creates fertile ground for educators to try new things, experiment with emerging resources and technology, and provide an environment for various leadership opportunities to emerge from faculty members. We believe that the SEM enables teachers to be more creative, to make choices about what is in the best interests of their students, and to have more choice in the instructional strategies they use and the curriculum they implement. There will certainly be some things that don't work

out as planned or that need additional tweaking and development. This is what being an experimenter and an inquirer is all about, but we all know that growth comes from disappointments as well as successes.

We have observed with pride the many teachers from SEM schools who have made and will continue to make original contributions to program development, presenting their work at conferences and conducting workshops for other schools, and writing material that has been used by other teachers throughout the country. These conditions give new initiatives sustainability, and most of all, create continuous opportunities for program development, making teaching the exciting and creative profession that we all envisioned it would be when we entered this career path.

The SEM Infusion-Based Approach to Curriculum Enrichment (Selection, Injection, and Extension)

The SEM uses an infusion-based approach to school transformation. We do not criticize or recommend "throwing out" basic curriculum, current practices, programs, or projects if they are currently producing positive results in *both* achievement and joyful learning. Rather, the SEM strikes a balance between traditional approaches to learning and approaches that promote thinking skills, hands-on learning, and creative productivity on the parts of all students. Our goals are to minimize boredom and "school turn-offs" and to improve achievement and creative productivity by infusing our Three Es into the culture and atmosphere of a school as well as into the toolkits of teachers and administrators.

An infusion-based approach simply means that teachers will:

- examine opportunities to review and select highly engaging enrichment-based activities related to particular topics,
- inject them into the curriculum to make the topics more interesting, and
- provide support and encouragement for individuals and small groups who would like to extend their pursuit of the enrichment activities.

The following examples demonstrate how an infusion-based approach works. An elementary teacher was required to have her students memorize all of the states and capitals of the U.S. To make the assignment more interesting, she gave them an opportunity to select a project that had something to do with this topic and that was related to a personal interest. One group of students interested in music decided to develop a rap song for its state's official anthem. Another group interested in history decided to develop historic site maps, posters, and travel brochures for a state it had visited or would like to visit some day.

A third group used state-shaped cookie cutters to make an edible map of the U.S., using chocolate bits to designate the locations of each state's capital. This group of students was so enthusiastic that it extended its work by visiting other classrooms, sharing its cookies with other classes, and providing brief historical facts about some of the states.

A middle-grade math teacher had her students develop fictional fantasy baseball cards and analyze the players' statistics to draft and trade players while building their own teams. They drew caricatures of their players and a "Player Wheel" with geometric representations of players' strengths and weaknesses was created and used to play against other students' teams. A regular season schedule was set for the class, ending with a World Series game to decide the classroom champion.

A high school AP Physics teacher assigned a yearlong project that encouraged students to use all of the concepts they covered in his course for addressing a practical problem. The project asked students to apply everything they had learned in physics to the launch of a video camera carried by weather balloons high above the Earth's surface that recorded the journey there and back. At the end of each unit of study, the teacher asked students how the principles and concepts they studied in the unit applied to their project, making learning more relevant and meaningful.

A middle school social studies teacher covering Ancient Egypt used our *Renzulli Learning System* database to find a site to enable students to conduct a virtual dissection and preservation of their own mummy. Tools for removing organs, labeling them, placing them in jars and glueing, wrapping, and preserving their mummy enabled them to have a hands-on experience that made this topic more meaningful. Material in hypertext familiarized the students with Egyptian language and culture. The excitement of this activity created interest that had far-reaching effects on interest and motivation that extended beyond simply covering the material in a textbook.

This engagement and infusion approach works because teachers have the tools to infuse engaging material into the curriculum due to technology that has given us the potential to make formal learning a different process than it was a decade or two ago. Today's young people are digital learners and emerging masters of interactive media technology. Traditional ways of learning, even under the best of circumstances, cannot compete with students who find texting under their desks more engaging than listening to their teachers and professors or memorizing factual material for a forthcoming test.

Another development in technology that will aid infusion is the unlimited amount of information now available through the Internet. Thousands of free course-related materials are easily accessible through organizations such as the Khan Academy, which has produced more than 4,000 videos on topics across all grade levels and several curricular areas. The massive open online courses (MOOCs) sponsored by some of the best-known universities in the country, including MIT's OpenCourseWare program and Coursera, have produced thousands of courses that can be widely accessed without cost.

Changing the learning process has become a reality because of the unlimited access to the knowledge sources mentioned above, but teachers can also become creative contributors to the resource stockpile and the producers of their own televised lectures, course-related material, and media events. Free or inexpensive software now enables teachers to prepare and upload their own lectures and assignments for student use anytime and anywhere through the application of easy-to-use screen casting software (e.g., Camtasia Studio 8, ScreenFlow Software). A program called Juno (http://gofrontrow.com/en/products/frontrow-juno) enables easy recording of high-quality audio/video clips without adding any extra work to a teacher's day. The program automatically adds titles and prepares files for uploading, which can then be accessed by computers, tablets, smartphones, or interactive white boards. As mentioned above, content recorded by others is readily available in all subject areas. These tools enable teachers to easily turn their lectures and related lesson planning material into audio and video podcasts and printed course and video materials that can be easily uploaded for student access. We can capitalize on students' fascination and skills with technology and the availability of vast amounts of online material by giving teachers the license and the skills to infuse creativity and thinking skills activities into standards-driven curriculum.

Although it is not practical to use infusion for every topic or course, this approach makes learning more engaging and creates an enthusiasm for learning that seldom results from covering the material in traditional ways. The guidelines for infusion are easy to follow:

- Select an activity that does not always have a single, predetermined correct answer.
- Find things that students do rather than things they sit and listen to.
- Give students choices that they will have fun carrying out.
- Select activities that have various levels of challenge to which interested students can escalate.

Finding activities for infusion is now easier than ever. Internet-based search engines such as the *Renzulli Learning System*, described in a later chapter, allow teachers to enter topics, subtopics, and sub-subtopics by subject area, grade level, and difficulty level. Thousands of high-engagement activities can be found with this new technology and even by the use of general search engines that enable teachers to locate an almost endless array of exciting enrichment activities and aid the implementation of the SEM.

The Characteristics of a Winning SEM School

We are often asked, "What makes an outstanding SEM school?" By working directly with hundreds of schools we have narrowed the answer to this question to the six basic elements depicted in Figure 2. Some of these elements are the result of training and strong leadership and some happen because of the synergy that evolves from the interaction among these six elements.

The first is *Knowledge About the Model*. This guidebook and related training materials plus courses (both online and face-to-face), our annual Summer Institute (Confratute—http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/confratute/), and on-site staff development are essential for getting everyone on the same page. Second is the *Ownership* discussed above and the creative touches that each school has identified to make its program relatively unique. The third element is perhaps the hardest to define but we know it when we see it—the joyful *Energy* that seems to emanate from the teachers, students, and administrators as they go about their work. This energy appears as teachers implement various parts of the SEM and infuse enrichment techniques into their classrooms. *Teacher and Administrator Trust* is the fourth element, and we have seen outstanding examples of this and have learned just how important it is when this trust is absent. It is for this reason that we do everything in our power to involve principals from the very beginning of program planning and have them participate in all training activities. An excellent guidebook, *Opening Doors: The Administrator's Guide to the Schoolwide Enrichment Model*, has been written by Nora Friedman (2005), a long-time principal of a successful SEM school, to help principals learn about how to build trust with faculty and parents. The book also summarizes the professional development that is so critical in creating a successful program.

The final two elements, *Attitude* and the *Culture of the School* are continually evolving dynamics that are difficult to define but that are obvious whenever we enter an outstanding SEM school. In schools in which the model is implemented well, teachers and administrators appear happy, parents send complimentary notes to teachers and principals and volunteer to do things for the

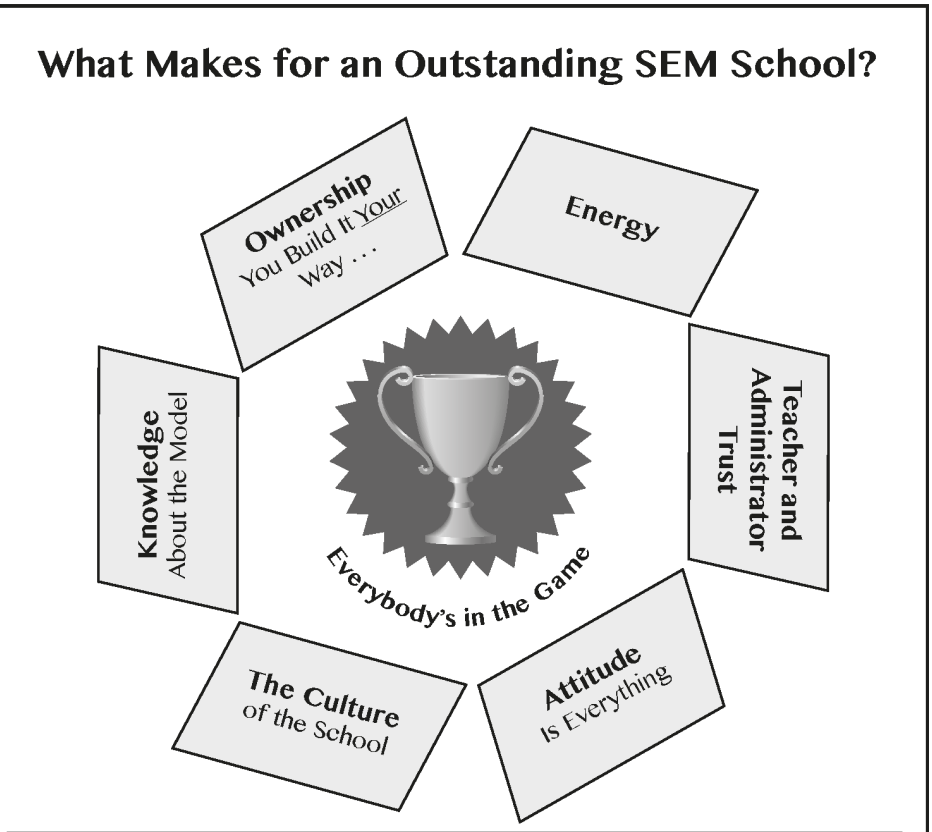

Figure 2. Trophy school model.

school, custodians and staff are eager to go above and beyond assigned duties, and everyone is enthusiastic to show us their work and tell us what they are doing. Teachers describe their enrichment clusters, the projects that their students are doing, and the types of challenges they create in their classrooms each day. In this book, we summarize both the ideas and strategies for implementing the SEM into an implementation plan that we believe is easy to understand and remember, and can be implemented by all educators involved in the program. The SEM emphasizes common goals and encourages all teachers to pull in the same direction, knowing that their work contributes to the same set of goals—that is, schools should be places for talent development. In the rest of this book, we outline the steps to develop an SEM program that enables enrichment and talent development to be implemented in schools.

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