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## PREFACE:

# Getting It All Together

This Guidebook represents an attempt to bring together many aspects of programming for gifted and talented children that we have been working on for several years. The major goals of the Guidebook are twofold. First and foremost, we have attempted to provide teachers and administrators with a practical model for individualization and with the “software” and step-by-step procedures that are necessary for implementing the model. Our second goal is somewhat more abstract but nevertheless equally important. This goal is to provide a valid rationale for special programming that is soundly based on the best knowledge available concerning the characteristics of gifted and creative individuals.

The chart on the opposite page represents the several components of the overall model and the ways in which they are interrelated. The top row of the chart deals with three underlying models that are derived from research studies and theories of learning and instruction. The first column focuses on characteristics of gifted and talented students and it is considered to be the keystone of the overall IEP model. The second column deals with a learning process model that is based upon the concept of matching students to learning environments. The third column is an enrichment model that attempts to integrate regular curricular experiences (that are good for all youngsters) with those experiences that are mainly appropriate for students who possess the characteristics pointed out in the upper left-hand corner of the chart.

The middle row of the chart points out some of the practical matters that should be taken into consideration in developing a program for gifted and talented students. The first column deals with identifying strengths of students from a variety of data sources; the second column deals with the concept of “buying time” so that gifted youngsters can become involved in the higher level experiences that we recommend; and the third column deals with both aspects of cognitive and affective development, integration with the regular program, strategies that are necessary for the total faculty in-service training and involvement in programs for the gifted, and finally, how to develop and organize learning experiences that represent *true* differentiation. The bottom row (Management) deals with a system for organizing and carrying out the theoretical and practical concerns described in the top two rows of the chart. This row represents a step-by-step procedure for translating theory and practice into actual classroom management activities that we do on a day-to-day basis with gifted children.

The arrows in the chart point out the major interrelationships between theory, management, and practice. Thus we see, for example, a strong relationship between looking at abilities, interests, and learning styles and “feeding” this information into the form entitled the *Strength-A-Lyzer*. The *Strength-A-Lyzer* in turn feeds into the other two instruments.

One of the conclusions that we hope you will reach after reading this Guidebook is that the overall IEP model is just “organized common sense.” Although individualized programming for gifted and talented students is not an easy task, neither is it an impossible task, nor one that requires a teacher to have magical powers. The guidelines in the chapters that follow offer suggestions for the management of learning that most good teachers already possess or can easily learn. If there is any magic involved in individualizing for the gifted, it is simply *taking the time* to analyze a child’s strengths, to compact the regular curriculum whenever possible, and to make available learning experiences that are based on abilities, interests, and learning styles.



# Introduction

## Overview of the IEP Model

The major purpose of this model is to provide a management plan for individualizing the learning process of students with advanced ability levels, unusually high degrees of task commitment and creativity. The model is based on three major underlying assumptions and three objectives and implementation strategies which are derived from these assumptions.

The first and certainly most unquestionable assumption is that many gifted students are capable of mastering the regular curriculum at a much faster pace and higher level of proficiency than students in the general school population. Although it is important for all students to develop mastery in the basic skill areas necessary for further educational and/or vocational pursuits, it is equally important to provide some alternative means which will allow students with varying ability levels to cover basic material at different rates and in a way which will respect a variety of learning styles. Indeed, evaluation studies have shown that major criticisms reported by gifted students about their regular school program are (1) that they are forced to cover material already mastered, (2) that they must wait for other students to “catch up” before going on with new and different studies, and (3) that very little variety is used in the methods through which basic material is covered. Thus one of the first objectives that must be achieved in the implementation of this model is to devise specific strategies for breaking the lock-step curriculum so that we can both cover basic material in a manner that is more commensurate with the learning abilities and styles of gifted students and “buy some time” so that gifted students can work on enrichment activities *without* being penalized for not participating in all aspects of the regular curriculum. The major strategies for achieving this objective will be discussed below in the section entitled “Compacting and Streamlining the Regular Curriculum.”

The second assumption underlying this model is that gifted students should be provided with opportunities to identify and to pursue advanced topics and areas of study that hold special fascination for them. This assumption follows from somewhat critical observations about both the regular curriculum and special programs for the gifted. Basically, these criticisms relate to the overuse of total-group instruction, prescribed topics, presented exercises, and predetermined strategies for problem solving.\* Thus a second objective that is necessary for implementing our model is to develop specific procedures for allowing gifted students numerous opportunities to (1) explore a wider variety of potential interests, (2) identify general areas of special interest, (3) focus or “frame” problems within these areas, and (4) pursue these self-selected problems in a manner that resembles the *modus operandi* of a first-hand inquirer rather than a passive lesson learner. The implementation strategies that will be recommended as an outgrowth of this second assumption and related objective are discussed below under the subtitle, “Individual and Small Group Investigations of Real Problems.”

The third assumption underlying the model is that the major focus of IEP’s for gifted students must be placed on individual strengths rather than weaknesses. The IEP “movement” in special education is certainly a long overdue idea, and it is a concept which holds great potential for truly individualizing the learning experiences of children with special needs. But a very big caution must be exercised in applying this model to the gifted and talented.

\*A more detailed discussion of concerns about both regular and special education can be found in Chapters I and II of *The Enrichment Triad Model: A Guide for Developing Defensible Programs for the Gifted and Talented*, Renzulli, J.S., Creative Learning Press, Inc., Mansfield Center, CT, 1977.