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# Chapter I

## General Considerations for Interest Analysis

Discovering what children are interested in has beneficial effects for all members of the educational “team”. Use of the *Interest Questionnaire for Young Children* furnishes counselors and parents with insights into children and their interest patterns about which the team might otherwise not be aware. The child is allowed the chance to think and share and is provided with the possibilities of new projects based on choice and new friends based on a common interest. When evaluated, responses from a questionnaire offer a “base of operations” from which we can take steps toward individualized instruction. As I write, I am thinking of a teacher friend of mine from western Massachusetts who field-tested this instrument with her classes. The brighter children in her community had no formal gifted program and were for all purposes mainstreamed. The analysis of the Questionnaire assisted in identifying and focusing in on interests of bright young children in the community.

Interests vary from child to child and will depend upon many variables (i.e. age, grade level, maturity, breadth of experience and home environment—including parental occupations, level of achievement and intellectual ability). One must take these characteristics into account when reviewing responses. For example, in dealing with a very young child, it is easy to feel that he or she has no interests

when items are answered negatively or not at all. The child might simply lack exposure to a particular concept and thus not know how to answer appropriately. Therefore a teacher has a responsibility to “fill in the gaps”. In *The Enrichment Triad Model* (1977), Dr. Renzulli explains that:

By providing students with a wide variety of opportunities to become exposed to different areas of potential interest, youngsters can begin to make their *own* decisions about the topics that they might like to explore at greater depths and higher levels of involvement (p. 17).

Generally speaking, very young children of five or six have a limited exposure to areas of interest, but a small potential interest could have a “snowball effect” as it grows and develops through the years. Another thought is that non-school surroundings and activities will play an important role due to this age group’s limited experience in formal learning situations. However, with a larger number of our children attending nursery schools and day-care centers, the word school may be more familiar than we think.

A word of caution related to teachers “pushing” a child into an independent study or activity at the first sign of an interest in a topic, person or subject can be given by the

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following example. Matthew was a fifth grader who was anxious for an independent study on war boats—namely submarines, battleships and aircraft carriers. His exploratory reading led him to the name of John F. Kennedy and P. T. 109. His entire focus changed after this discovery from a technical interest in war boats to a biographical study of John F. Kennedy. In eighth grade he expanded his topic to win a literary award on “Man and His Relationship With the Sea”. This year he led a group of students from our gifted program on a field trip to the Kennedy Library in Boston. What a tour guide!

As shown in the above example, interest development can have a “ping-pong” effect

as well as the “snowball” quality. That is, one idea leads to another and another until the child, having redefined and refocused his interest, feels comfortable with the direction in which he is heading.

Any type of independent study is, after all, a research project (even on the smallest scale) and research is, by its very nature, venturing into the unknown. If we always know exactly the direction in which we are heading, then we are in a sense working with blinders on and not taking into account life’s endless possibilities (i.e. new experiences, books, people, places, etc.). This seems especially true with young children for whom many discoveries and wonders have yet to unfold.

## Chapter II

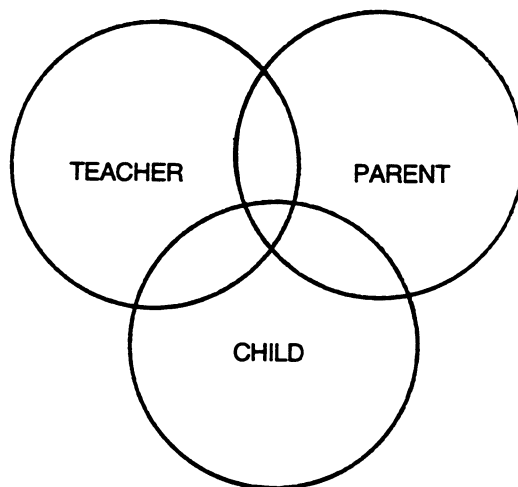
# Overview of the Interest Questionnaire for Young Children

The Questionnaire itself consists of fifty-eight questions relating to topical interests, learning styles and both real and hypothetical situations. Field testing has been accomplished successfully with students in second through fifth grades (ages seven to eleven) in both gifted and regular classes. There are also many successful reports from teachers and counselors who have utilized the Questionnaire with gifted five and six year olds in an attempt to gain a more individualized profile. The administra-

tion techniques may differ, but precocious children at these young ages also deserve our utmost consideration in planning.

The main purposes of the Questionnaire are to "open up" discussion between teachers, children and parents and to provide a better means of planning curriculum around the current and potential interests of children.

Examples of relationship development are as follows:



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<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Result</i>
Teacher/Child	Teachers may provide enrichment centers, choices of independent study and mentorships based on a child's interest. They may also share personal experiences and priorities with children.
Teacher/Teacher	Teachers offer other staff members valuable ideas concerning a child's interest and subject matter preferences.
Teacher/Parent	By using the Profile Sheet and My Book of Things and Stuff, we are able to plan a more efficient use of conference time. Parents are often surprised at ideas and interests their children convey. Likewise, parents can share with teachers pertinent information about a child—thus contributing to the Profile Sheet.
Child/Child	Children from various classes and grade levels may be brought together for small group discussion based on similar interests (i.e. astronomy, history, aquariums, etc.).
Parent/Child	Results of this instrument can provide parents with knowledge of their child's interests. They are then able to make "out-of-school" arrangements to follow up on these needs.

All of the above relationships play an important role if the *Interest Questionnaire for Young Children* is to be used wisely.

The Student Profile Sheet is designed to help teachers highlight a child's interests, values and preferences. This Profile Sheet is included and can serve to summarize activities or studies the child might be interested in pursuing. This also may serve as a quick reference for teachers or counselors who are responsible for following up on a child's progress in a particular topic or activity. The Profile Sheet proves especially helpful in grouping children by interest.

The pages marked "My Journal" offer children an opportunity to explore areas of interest *not asked* about in the Questionnaire and/or to *expand* upon questions already mentioned. Journals have always proven to be valuable in gifted classes. The word "Journal" is a sophisticated term that appeals to young-

sters. It differs from a diary in that a child is not required to write in it every day but only when he or she feels there is something worth entering. Entries may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Poems, original contributions and samples appealing to the child
- Short stories, written and illustrated
- Photos, with captions
- Drawings of people, places, pets, etc.
- Unusual codes, puzzles, jokes
- Original cartoons, inventions
- Reactions, feelings in various situations
- Descriptions of contests and fairs entered
- Interviews with friends, family, etc.

One Journal cover and two sample pages have been provided. The Journal pages may be used in conjunction with the Interest Questionnaire or as a separate item.