

Mentor-Assisted Enrichment Projects for the Gifted and Talented

Mentoring is good for everybody—the university students who gain experience in working closely with youngsters, and the capable students who receive individual assistance.

To paraphrase Charles Dickens, "This is the best of times, this is the worst of times" for educating gifted and talented students. After more than a decade of virtual neglect, special education programs for our ablest learners are once again being widely advocated. But the economic retrenchment of the 1980s does not permit the same funding that characterized enrichment programs in more affluent times (compare Havighurst, 1958, with Passow, 1979).

Because economic necessity is truly the mother of invention, in 1978 we began using preservice teachers as mentors to provide a variety of *inexpensive* yet educationally sound enrichment experiences for gifted and talented (G/T) pupils in grades five through seven. From September 1978 to May 1982, 85 "Mentor-Assisted Enrichment Projects" (MAEPs) have been carried out with 125 pupils at an average cost of \$25 per pupil.

The Origins of MAEP

Sheila Herman, a local enrichment teacher, was attempting to implement Renzulli's Type III Enrichment: "Individual and Small-Group Investigations of Real Problems." Herman's pupils, found that they needed adult help in planning, conducting, completing, and presenting an eight- to ten-week enrichment project of personal interest—help that one teacher could not provide alone.

One possible solution was to arrange for her G/T students to spend time with professionals in the work force, who could serve as mentors and share their

expertise. This type of mentoring, although advocated by many educators (Fox, 1979; Gold, 1979), was rejected for several reasons. First, mentor-pupil matches are administratively awkward to arrange (Gallagher, 1975); second, mentors are not always able to relate to youngsters (Fox, 1979); and, third, mentors typically do not have sufficient time to help students carry out an enrichment project of any great length or significance (Boston, 1976).

At this point, Herman contacted me. I offered to assist by giving future elementary and secondary school teachers enrolled in my educational psychology course partial credit for voluntarily serving as mentors for Herman's G/T pupils.

Implementing an MAEP

During the first year, our preservice teacher-mentors assisted G/T pupils in completing a variety of enrichment projects—without guidelines since none existed (Boston, 1976). At the end of the year, interviews conducted with the original 14 mentors and their 27 pupils led us to specify the detailed guidelines for MAEPs presented in the "Four-Phase Enrichment Model" depicted in Figure 1. (See Gray and Rogers, 1982, for a more detailed discussion of the development of this model.)

Since the second year, our mentors have used this model to assist up to three G/T pupils at a time in planning, conducting, completing, and presenting to their classmates and other teachers an enrichment project of eight- to ten-weeks duration. Mentors share their expertise in an academic specialization, a job, a hobby, or a personal interest. They also arrange field trips and prepare students for interviewing a variety of people in the work force and the community.

Because a *compatible match* between mentor and pupil is essential to the success of an MAEP, we require prospective mentors to write a thoughtfully proposed sequence of interesting and varied enrichment activities in their area of expertise. After mentors describe their proposed topics to the students, I meet with each enrichment teacher to match pupils to specific mentors. Sometimes it is possible to reverse this procedure so that mentors can base their proposals on what we already know students are interested in.

The mentor's written proposal is also essential in other ways: (1) it quickly enables mentor and pupil to agree on a finalized project plan during Phase II; (2) it gives direction to overall project planning and execution; (3) it helps mentor and pupil prepare properly before each meeting since they know what is planned; (4) it helps avoid last-minute rushes and pressure on the pupil to complete a presentable project; and (5) it allows time for rehearsing the project presentation so that it is interesting and informative.

During Phase II, mentors establish harmonious working relationships by involving their pupils in decisions about what *they* want to do, how, why, and so on. At the first meeting with pupils, each mentor presents his or her proposal without trying to impose it, and solicits pupil reactions, which are incorporated into a mutually agreed upon revised written plan to which both mentor and student commit themselves.

Successfully carrying out an MAEP during Phase II depends on several things. First, mentors should not assume that because pupils are "gifted" they already know how to do something (such as prepare good interview questions) or understand complex concepts. Instead, mentors should ask questions

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Figure 1. A "Four-Phase Enrichment Model" for Planning, Conducting, Completing, and Presenting a Mentor-Assisted Enrichment Project.

Phase I: Mentor plans a proposed enrichment project before meeting pupils.

What To Do	Special Hints for Success
1. Mentor identifies a topic or an area of personal expertise (hobby, work experience, university major).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The topic should be broad enough to obtain material, yet limited enough to be completed in the available time. 2. The topic should be of interest to the age level of your pupils; therefore, pick a topic you can be enthusiastic about to help motivate your students. (Don't assume all pupils are intrinsically motivated.)
2. Write a <i>proposed sequence</i> of active learning experiences that will enable your pupils to gain new knowledge, skills, and sensitivities from an in-depth study of your topic, culminating in the completion of a project and a class presentation of it. (Note: This proposal is used to match mentors to pupils who are interested in the same topic.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Active learning experiences (field trips, interviews, making something) heighten and sustain pupil interest. 2. At times you will have to provide information. Use not only verbal explanation, but also <i>visual aids</i> (pictures, movies, filmstrips, concrete models). 3. Communicate to your pupils why each learning experience is important—how it leads to the next experience and how it promotes specified learning outcomes. 4. The completion of a project <i>product</i> gives pupils a feeling of accomplishment, and it can be shared with classmates for their benefit.

Phase II: Mentor and pupils agree on actual project.

3. Mentor and interested pupils discuss the <i>proposed</i> enrichment project as a take-off point for agreeing on the actual project to be done.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask questions related to your proposal and then <i>listen</i> to pupils' needs and interests. It is they who will ultimately do the project; if they have a say in deciding what will be done and when, they will carry it out more willingly. Don't talk pupils into doing <i>your</i> project. 2. Emphasize special aspects of your proposed project, especially out-of-class activities and meeting people in the community. 3. Don't <i>overburden</i> pupils with unnecessary homework. Many "gifted" students are already doing numerous extracurricular activities. Plan your schedule so that most things can be done when you can provide necessary help.
4. Jointly agree on the actual project to be done and prepare a revised written schedule of learning activities and outcomes accordingly. Specify due dates for special assignments.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree on responsibilities that <i>you</i> will assume and your <i>pupils</i> will assume. (If you're working with more than one, it is imperative that each one takes on well-defined responsibilities/roles that are important to carrying out the overall project and completing a final product.) 2. Agree to periodically review the scheduled learning activities to take into account illness and other setbacks and to include new learning experiences. Then, revise the schedule of activities in <i>writing</i> so everyone has a record of the changes. 3. Get a commitment from your pupils to do what's been agreed, including necessary homework, in accordance with scheduled due dates.

Phase III: Doing the project.

5. Prepare novel materials and experiences before each meeting to prevent pupil loss of interest and boredom.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obtain parents' permission (on proper forms) and make necessary arrangements well before out-of-school activities. 2. Don't assume that the classroom teacher or school already has the materials and resources you need. Check beforehand!
6. Provide <i>active</i> learning experiences, whenever possible, which: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) have a perceivable purpose in themselves; and (b) lead to completion of a presentable product. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At the beginning of each meeting, briefly <i>review</i> what has been done to date as a lead-in to what's being done at this meeting. 2. Weekly learning experiences must be directly related to the topic and to the final product (The results of several interviews or visits might be summarized and compared in some meaningful way.) 3. Do not do for students what they can do for themselves. Nevertheless, it is important to provide instruction when necessary so that students learn new skills and concepts needed for active learning experiences. 4. Be sure pupils understand and accept the purpose of each activity (to maintain motivation).

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| 7. Prepare pupils for subsequent learning experiences (meetings). These should be directly related to the overall project plan and proposed product. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The week before each meeting, discuss what activity is scheduled for next week and what responsibilities everyone has, and why (how the activity fits into the overall project and will lead to the completion of the product). This will enable pupils to understand and do what's been planned (including homework assignments). 2. Don't assume that pupils can, for instance, design their own questionnaires at home for next week's out-of-class interview. Explain and demonstrate. 3. Phone pupils one or two days before your meeting to find out if necessary homework assignments have been done, if your help is needed, and so forth. |
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Phase IV: Completing and presenting the project.

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| 8. Help pupils organize whatever materials will be used in the class presentation of the product. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide assistance where necessary, always remembering that it is the pupil's project—you are the mentor. 2. Emphasize neatness and the use of colorful materials—This attracts audience attention during the class presentation. <p>Note: Materials (such as photos, pictures, reports, charts, models, slides, graphs) should have been prepared throughout the project so that they can now be organized into a coherent product that reflects what was done and learned during the project.</p> |
| 9. Practice the class presentation of the project. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Let pupils present the project to you. Pretend you are the class, and ask questions where appropriate to get students used to answering them. Emphasize the proper use of visual aids in the presentation and voice projection. 2. Use a tape recorder so pupils can hear themselves. (Better yet, use a videotape playback unit.) 3. Time the various parts of the presentation, emphasizing smooth and proper pacing (not too slow nor too fast). <p>Note: You might need to demonstrate how to give an interesting presentation, which smoothly incorporates the materials and visuals that will be used.</p> |
| 10. Next week, pupils present the completed project to classmates. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Your attendance will provide moral support, resulting in a better presentation (You can also help set up AV equipment.) |

that diagnose the specific instruction they must provide.

Second, mentors should periodically review with their students what has been accomplished and learned in order to consolidate new learnings and incorporate them into a presentable product.

Third, visual evidence of what was done and learned should be compiled each week (in the form of models, photos, slides, charts, posters, and so forth) so that this material will not have to be hastily assembled just before the class presentation.

Fourth, mentors should ascertain if pupil interest is waning or has taken an unexpected direction. If so, they should rewrite the remaining schedule of activities.

Fifth, mentors should telephone their pupils at home a night or two before each meeting to ensure that their pupils will be prepared and able to meet.

During Phase IV, not only do mentors and their pupils look forward to presenting a well-rehearsed, interesting, and informative discussion of their project, but so do classmates and other teachers. Thus, during Phase IV the

mentor helps students organize previously prepared visuals into a smoothly sequenced multimedia presentation, and provides feedback as pupils rehearse. Sometimes mentors need to demonstrate how to do a class presentation.

An Example of an MAEP

Figure 2 presents an outline of the weekly enrichment experiences and related learning outcomes for one MAEP on the ethics of seal hunting. This is the kind of mutually agreed upon, finalized project plan we require every mentor to prepare during Phase II of the model. This written plan provides direction for completing and presenting the enrichment project to classmates. The enrichment teacher uses the plan to assist where necessary (such as obtaining parental consent for field trips) and to answer queries from other teachers or parents.

Figure 3 is an example of the mentor's weekly report, which indicates what has been done and learned, and what is planned for the next meeting. Weekly reports maintain the mentor's responsibility to be properly prepared for

each meeting, and help ensure that the enrichment project will be completed and presented according to schedule.

Pupil Reactions and Benefits

In a 1980-81 study, we found that G/T pupils use significantly more community resources and people in the work force in the course of an MAEP (because their mentors arrange these things) than they do when working on Self-Directed Enrichment Projects. In addition, our G/T pupils complete and present significantly more Renzulli Type III enrichment projects while working with a mentor than when working independently.

Our pupils also rate the quality of independent projects more highly after they have worked on an MAEP. This suggests that a beneficial carry-over effect results from learning how to do an enrichment project while working with a mentor.

Figure 4 shows that our G/T pupils overwhelmingly preferred MAEPs to independent projects, regardless of the sequence in which they did these two types of enrichment projects.

The t-test findings for questions 1, 2,

8, 9, and 10 are consistent with findings shown in Figure 5. The findings related to questions 17 and 19, although consistent with each other, seem inconsistent with those for question 18 until one reads the students' open-ended comments, which explain their responses to these questions. For example:

I would recommend a mentor project to a friend because I think a good mentor pre-

pares students to do their own projects better by themselves. Now I would like to do a self-directed project.

In this same study, 29 of 31 pupils reported that the MAEP must be completed in order for them to view it as successful and worthwhile. Mentors reported that because students knew from

the outset that they were required to present a completed enrichment project, the students were motivated to do their homework and show up for scheduled meetings with mentors prepared to do what was planned. Moreover, knowing these expectations from the outset encouraged pupils to fit the MAEP into their already busy course loads and extracurricular schedules.

Figure 2. A Finalized Plan for a Community-Based "Mentor-Directed Enrichment Project."

	Mentor's Name <u>Jeannie G.</u> Pupil's Name <u>Grania M.</u>	
	Project Topic <u>Sealing: Right or Wrong?</u>	
	Project Meeting Time <u>Friday Afternoons 1:00-3:00 or longer</u>	
	Week #	Learning Activities (Including Resources)
		Related Learning Outcomes
Phase I Planning Proposal	1. (a) Mentor writes up proposed project in his or her area of expertise (b) University instructor and enrichment teacher use proposal to match mentor to an interested pupil	(a) Preparing for first meeting with pupil
Phase II Agreeing on Finalized Project Plan	2. (a) Introduce proposal and topic (b) Find out what Grania knows about seals and sealing, and what her attitudes are (can change project plan if necessary) (c) Prepare questionnaire for next week's interview, and role-play an interview using tape recorder (d) Make "thank you" card	(a) Increasing intrinsic motivation (b) Planning an enrichment project (c) Posing answerable questions (d) Interviewing skills (e) Practicing courtesy
Phase III Carrying Out the Project Plan	3. (a) Visit Vancouver Aquarium to observe seals (b) Interview (tape record) seal trainer discussing what seals are like (c) Take slides of seals; sketch them	(a) Observation skills (b) Interviewing skills and confidence (c) Background knowledge about seals (d) Artistic skills
	4. (a) At school, Grania decides which sketches, slides, and information are to be used in her presentation (b) Read materials on seals and compare to observations made at aquarium	(a) Decision-making and organization skills (b) Comparing and contrasting
	5. (a) Assess project thus far (review) (b) Prepare and rehearse questions for next week's interview with Gordon Rogers (a "pro-sealer" from Newfoundland) and the following week's interview with someone from the Greenpeace organization (anti-sealing)	(a) Grania has greater voice in preparing questions (b) Brainstorming imaginative questions
	6. (a) Interview Gordon Rogers (b) Obtain leads to other pro-sealing sources	(a) Gain a "pro-sealer's" point of view firsthand (b) Refine interviewing skills
	7. (a) Interview spokesperson from the Greenpeace organization (b) Obtain leads to other anti-sealing resources (c) Obtain materials to be used in presentation (including visuals)	(a) Gain an anti-sealing point of view firsthand (b) Refine interviewing skills
Phase IV Completing and Presenting the Project	8. (a) Organize the material to be used in the class presentation (b) Mount Grania's sketches (c) Mould clay seals; paint them (d) Prepare posters to display pro and con information obtained	(a) Decision-making and organization skills (b) Lettering posters (neatness)
	9. (a) Role-play the class presentation (mentor demonstrates; pupil practices) (b) Objectively present both pro and con information to allow class members to decide for themselves if sealing is right or wrong	(a) Speaking skills and self-confidence (b) Objective reporting of controversial information
	10. (a) Pupil gives class presentation and answers questions about what she liked best about her project, and so forth	(a) Public speaking skills (b) Thinking "on one's feet" while answering questions

Figure 5 presents the results of pupil ratings on nine aspects of the four-phase enrichment model correlated with pupil self-evaluations of the quality of their completed MAEPs.

Taken together, these findings indicate that working harmoniously with one's mentor is much more important to completing a high quality MAEP than is the pupil's prior or initial interest in wanting to do the particular project proposed by the mentor. (This finding is consistent with that reported for question 1 in Figure 4.) It is also important that mentors not "take over" the project, but listen to students' ideas and motivate

them to become more interested in the topic as they work together. All of these ingredients for success are necessary throughout Phases II through IV of the project.

Concluding Cautions

Implementing a Mentor-Assisted Enrichment Project is not easy; much time and effort is required from all participants. The enrichment teacher must obtain cooperation from regular classroom teachers since project students sometimes have to leave their regular classrooms to meet with mentors. The enrichment teacher must also spend

time at school and on the telephone at home helping mentors resolve problems and obtaining resource materials for the project.

The principal must maintain the cooperation of regular classroom teachers and parents by communicating the advantages of working with a mentor and by obtaining permission for unusual field trips. (One of our mentors took his pupil flying, accompanied by the pupil's grandfather.) Since the major cost of an MAEP lies in the materials used in class presentations, the principal must also obtain funds for this purpose (and for field trips).

Figure 3. Mentor's Weekly Report.

Mentor	Jeannie	Pupil	Grania
Project Topic	Sealing: Right or Wrong?	Meeting #	5
Starting Time	1:00 p.m.	Finishing Time	4:00 p.m.

1. State what your pupil did today and how it is related to his or her final enrichment project product.
Today Grania and I got a pro-sealing view by interviewing Gordon Rogers, who hails from Newfoundland. He provided us with insight into the sealing industry and with some excellent background material (books, ideas to pursue). The interview raised some questions in our minds, which will help us to present our project in that we want our audience to decide the issue themselves. We will merely present the facts that we have gleaned. We now have a more rounded view of the question we are investigating; we've had a real glimpse into the life of the seal hunter. We will use Rogers' information to present the pro-sealing case to our audience.
2. Describe two main specific learning outcomes your pupil demonstrated today. (That is, briefly describe specific thinking skills, social skills, performance skills, and so forth.)
Grania herself noted her improvement in interviewing: there were no false starts as there had been with the seal trainer at the aquarium. She seemed more comfortable and sure of herself and said so. I was pleased to see Grania remain after the interview to talk to Rogers and give him some information regarding our project. I know this was a feat for her because she is normally shy with strangers and usually turns to me to provide information. This demonstrated her overcoming shyness and proved her enthusiasm for the project.
3. Describe how you and/or your pupil used specific resources (human, nonhuman, community, and so forth). How effectively?
Rogers proved to be a veritable well of information. I was impressed with how Grania "filled out" the questions she asked with follow-up queries. Rogers also suggested some books to read, and suggested that we interview a Federal Fisheries officer (an excellent plan, I say). We certainly got the maximum from today's interview.
4. Describe the specific instruction methods (exposition, discovery, modeling, role playing, and so forth) that you used today. How effectively?
Discovery: By my remaining mute, Grania was put into a position where she had to speak to Rogers on her own. I was pleased to see that she warmed to her subject and grew confident. Questioning: I "quizzed" Grania about sealing on the bus ride to and from the interview, making sure that I included "higher level" questions for her to ponder and answer orally. In both these ways her enthusiasm for the project was maximized.
5. Describe specific motivation and/or discipline techniques that you used today (such as assertiveness, reality therapy, behavior modification, and so forth). How effectively?
Fortunately, merely setting up the interview between Grania and Rogers proved motivating: Rogers was knowledgeable and enthusiastic and transmitted this to Grania. I simply had to bring up some of the points that he had raised and Grania responded most enthusiastically. Made my job easy—but proved effective!
6. Describe three specific things you learned from today's mentoring experience.
 - a. Shyness vanishes as a child is motivated and "gets into" a project. This should be applied to the classroom.
 - b. A friendly discussion fosters learning better than a structured question-and-answer period. The prepared questions facilitated a flowing discussion.
 - c. Allowing the child to discover things about herself by herself should be a definite aim in mentoring. Grania was pleased with her newly found talent in relating to others.
7. Briefly indicate next week's plans regarding each of the following:
 - a. What will your pupil do (visit, make something, and so forth)?
We hope to conduct a telephone interview with the Federal Fisheries officer and a personal interview with a Greenpeace officer. We will also be molding seals from baker's clay, mounting Grania's pictures, and viewing our slides. Hopefully, we will get around to planning our display and reviewing the tapes for the presentation.
 - b. What resources will be needed?
 - tape recorder
 - baker's clay
 - mounting cardboard
 - viewer

Note: Did you have any problems for which you need my assistance?
Not yet . . . thank you!

Figure 4. Binominal t-Tests Comparing the Frequency with Which 31 Pupils Indicated a Preference Between a "Mentor-Assisted" or a "Self-Directed" Enrichment Project (to test the probability of students equally choosing either type of project).

Questions	Response		2-Tail Prob.
	MDEP	SDEP	
1. Which enrichment project did you <i>most</i> want to do <i>before</i> beginning the project?	19	12	0.28
2. Which enrichment project did you become more interested in doing as you <i>worked</i> on the project?	25	6	0.00
3. Which project did you <i>most</i> want to <i>complete</i> ?	22	9	0.03
4. Into which project did you put your <i>best</i> effort?	22	9	0.03
5. Which project did you <i>most</i> want to present to your classmates?	22	9	0.03
6. Which project did you do a <i>better</i> job of presenting to your classmates?	24	7	0.00
7. Which project did you spend more time doing <i>outside</i> of school time?	18	13	0.47
8. Which project best helped you learn how to take more <i>responsibility</i> for doing an enrichment project?	21	9	0.04
9. Which project was better <i>planned</i> so that you <i>finished</i> the whole project according to your plan/schedule?	24	6	0.00
10. Which project was better planned <i>each week</i> so that you knew what to work on?	24	6	0.00
11. Which project was <i>better completed</i> to your satisfaction?	22	9	0.03
12. Which project most required you to use <i>higher level</i> thinking skills?	20	11	0.15
13. Which project most helped you to develop a <i>more positive self-concept</i> ?	22	9	0.03
14. Which project most helped you learn how to <i>ask questions</i> you would later answer?	22	7	0.01
15. Which project most required you to use the <i>community</i> as a resource?	25	6	0.00
16. Which project most required you to use <i>other people</i> as a resource?	25	5	0.00
17. If you were to recommend <i>one</i> type of enrichment project to a friend, which one would it be?	27	4	0.00
18. Which type of enrichment project would you <i>most</i> want to do again?	18	13	0.47
19. Which project do you think should be done first?	24	7	0.00

Figure 5. The Relationship of Nine Aspects of the "Four-Phase Enrichment Model" to the Ratings 31 Pupils Gave to Their Completed "Mentor-Assisted Enrichment Projects."

(These nine aspects are ranked in terms of the percentage of variance they account for as predictor variables for the dependent variable, based on a Multiple Classification Analysis of nominal data derived from Yes/No pupil ratings given to each question below.)

Rank	Aspects of "Four-Phase Enrichment Model"	Beta Wts.
1.	Did you and your mentor agree on and draw up a clear plan of what you were going to do?	0.48
2.	Were you and your mentor well matched?	0.33
3.	Did you do more work on the project than your mentor?	0.30
4.	Did your mentor clearly explain to you that you were to be mainly responsible for carrying out your project?	0.28
5.	Did you become more interested in the topic as your mentor worked with you?	0.22
6.	Did your mentor listen to your ideas so that your project would be more interesting to you?	0.21
7.	At the first meeting, did your mentor come prepared to describe an enrichment project to you?	0.20
8.	Did you want to do the enrichment project that your mentor proposed to you?	0.05
9.	Were you interested in the topic before the project began?	0.05

Multiple Correlation (adjusted) = 0.51524

Multiple R-Squared (adjusted) = 0.26547

The college or university instructor must be willing to spend time helping prospective mentors prepare and revise their proposals into manageable plans of interesting enrichment activities. The instructor must also read and comment on each mentor's weekly report to ensure that mentors fulfill their responsibilities.

The enrichment teacher and the university instructor must work harmoniously in matching mentors and pupils, supporting each other's supervision of the mentors, handling unforeseen problems, and making necessary changes.

Are Mentor-Assisted Enrichment Projects worth this much time and effort? Our preliminary findings clearly indicate that G/T students and their mentors benefit in a number of ways. Also important is the fact that parents are very supportive, as this comment

illustrates:

Before the mentor project, my child had developed a very strong "boring, boring, boring" attitude. The mentor project reversed this in a matter of days. Here is a case of something that neither parents nor teachers, regardless of reasonable effort, can seem to change. It seems to me that university student-mentors have a unique ability to influence youngsters in a very positive way. Keep up the good work. EL

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