

Implementation of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model in Italy: A Three-Year Study

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Abstract

In this article, we describe the positive outcomes emerging from a three-year implementation of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) in the first Italian implementation of the model. Both students and teachers benefitted from the positive experience of the SEM educational approaches to talent development which provides an educational experience that other Italian and European schools may wish to adapt to promote talent development. The SEM benefits all students with some forms of enrichment and simultaneously provides educational opportunities for academically talented students in Italy.

Keywords: Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM); talent development; positive change; creative productivity; Italy; Renzulli Learning System (RLS).

Introduction

The field of gifted education is based on the universally accepted reality that some learners demonstrate outstanding performance or potential for superior performance in academic, creative, leadership, or artistic domains when compared with their peers (Renzulli & Reis, 2014; Renzulli et al., 2021). This widely accepted concept suggests the importance of exploring diverse approaches and models focused on nurturing the talents and abilities of students within the educational system in Italy. Talent development is a well-recognized and addressed issue in numerous European Countries and emerging nations, and there are a variety of methods used to identify gifted individuals. In Italy, specific measures aimed at promoting the development of gifts and talents among Italian students have not previously been implemented. During the past four decades, Italy has directed its human and financial resources towards developing programs, tools, and teacher training to meet the educational and emotional needs of students with disabilities, neglecting the educational needs of gifted students. The Italian educational efforts have primarily concentrated on remediation, aimed at elevating the performance of low-achieving students to a proficient level, rather than providing opportunities for students with exceptional abilities to realize their untapped high potential. In theory, all educational endeavors should help learners realize their potential and develop their talents. Achieving that goal and differentiating regular curriculum to meet the educational needs of high potential students demands highly professional training based on the knowledge of gifted education pedagogy, including the strategies described in this article.

A body of research suggests that, when not properly challenged, academically gifted students perform poorly in school and may be at risk for dropping out of high school (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Unfortunately, high ability students are regarded in Italy as part of a privileged group that will succeed without additional support. As a result, Italy lacks an agreed-upon definition of giftedness, instructional resources, including training courses on gifted education and talent development, as well as best practices in gifted education.

Recently, two Italian legislative initiatives, Bill n. 180 and Bill n. 1041 have been presented to correct this absence of gifted education opportunities. These two bills may set the stage for a bill to become law, as the text must be approved by both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Indeed, equity in education requires that each student be provided with services and instruction commensurate

with the student's individual needs. This implies the need to expand opportunities and services for Italian gifted and talented students making use of equitable identification methods and then building programs which empower all gifted learners. Several European provisions, which Italy has not yet enforced, suggest that different education models should be adopted in Italy to meet the diverse educational needs of children with high cognitive potential. The European educational trend leans toward endorsing an inclusive approach. This approach is designed to address some of the historical criticisms leveled at gifted education, which has been accused of creating "elitist" educational pathways for gifted children. The approach being considered is the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli et al., 2021), one of many programs designed to meet the intellectual, social, emotional, and educational needs of students with gifts and talents as well as high potential. This approach has a robust body of research (Reis & Peters, 2020) to support its use as a pedagogical framework specifically designed to extend the pedagogy of gifted education to all students by providing various levels of opportunities and enrichment to all students, promoting the philosophy of inclusive schoolwide enrichment. This model aims to provide every student with the *opportunities, resources, and encouragement* required to fully develop the student's individual potential. Extensive international research highlights the positive impact of research-based talent development programs on all children, fostering the development of their gifts and talents.

The SEM has been adopted by thousands of school districts in the USA as well as around the world and been successfully implemented in numerous school districts across the United States and worldwide (Reis & Peters, 2020). It has recently been introduced into the Italian school system as also described in this article, demonstrating its adaptability in the Italian education system as well as its inclusive approach, as all students participate in SEM activities (Milan & Reis, 2020). Italy abolished special classes in 1971 (Law 118/1971) to promote full integration for pupils with disabilities. It is unlikely that Italy's education system, at this time, will widely establish gifted programs for identified students or special classes for highly able students. The implementation of the SEM in Italian schools aligns with the inclusive approach recommended by the European Community and the Italian education system as SEM activities are offered to all students at school. It promotes talent development for all students, including those who are twice exceptional, while also providing intellectually challenging opportunities for highly capable and talented students. The SEM approach and its multi-criteria identification system help address the absence of a national identification system in Italy, fostering equity and opportunity for talent development among all Italian students. For example, at the Salesiani SEM School, some families submitted a formal evaluation produced by private psychologists but the school in Varese, based on the training with the SEM, also offered differentiated instruction to highly able students who were not formally identified by professionals outside the school. The involvement in SEM activities can help to reverse underachievement, provide equity of opportunity, bring enrichment to all students, and prevent students from dropping out of school. This article describes the initial implementation of the SEM in Italy.

School Enrichment Model (SEM) implementation in Italy

The SEM enriches students' learning experiences with creative activities that enable them to explore their skills and talents in several components including Talent Portfolio development, Curriculum Compacting, and various enrichment opportunities. The SEM was implemented for three years at Salesiani School located in Varese, Italy that serves middle school students. All students in the school were involved in the implementation of the SEM at Salesiani school, as summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Students involved in the SEM programme.

| | 6 th grader | 7 th grader | 8 th graders | TOTAL |
|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| 1 st Year | 54 | 54 | 53 | 161 |
| 2 nd Year | 58 | 57 | 58 | 173 |
| 3 rd Year | 58 | 58 | 58 | 174 |

The implementation at this school initially focused primarily on Enrichment Clusters. Additional components, including Curriculum Compacting, were subsequently adopted, as well. In future years, additional SEM components will also be included in the school program.

Enrichment clusters

Enrichment clusters play a pivotal role in the SEM approach, as they emphasize the acquisition and cultivation of practical skills while providing students with the opportunity to actively engage in real-world activities, with the ultimate goal to create an original product or service to be presented to a genuine audience. Enrichment clusters are cross-disciplinary, non-graded groups of students who share a common interest or passion. These groups convene on a weekly basis during a designated space and time within the school timetable to pursue their shared interests. Adult support is provided in the form of a mentor who possesses a particular interest in the subject matter and brings a certain level of competence and experience to guide and facilitate the group's activities.

SEM tools

The SEM has several tools that help to implement it and during the process at Salesiani School, many of these were used. Professional development was used to provide the staff at Salesiani school with training to use both the Renzulli Learning System (RLS) (<https://renzullilearning.com>) and the corresponding Cebeci Test of Creativity (CTC).

The Profiler, part of the SEM and RLS, is a software tool that creates a customized profile for each student, identifying their academic strengths, interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression. This profile serves as a guiding compass for the next step, which involves a differentiation search engine that scours through thousands of resources that are specifically tailored to each student's unique profile. The RLS is a research-based enhancement of SEM, as outlined by Field (2009), is an innovative online enrichment program that streamlines the process of individualized and personalized education, relieving teachers of the extra work it typically entails.

The RLS database includes thousands of meticulously reviewed, age-appropriate, and child-safe enrichment opportunities. This database is consistently monitored, updated, enhanced, and expanded. With RLS, students learn alongside their peers of the same chronological age while receiving content that matches their academic age. This approach is also beneficial for classroom teachers, as they may rely on these resources to prepare appropriate and engaging learning materials for advanced students. Additionally, the RLS has been translated into Italian by the first author to serve Italian students.

The latest addition to the Schoolwide Enrichment Model using Renzulli Learning is the CTC. This test is specifically designed to assess the creative potential of individuals of all age groups, with a particular focus on underrepresented populations. The CTC evaluates creativity using measures of fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. It's worth noting that the CTC is integrated into the Renzulli Learning platform, enhancing its accessibility and utility for educational purposes.

The Renzulli Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students (SRBCSS-R; Renzulli et al., 2002) are a teacher nomination instrument appropriate for use as one measure in the identification of gifted students. These scales are widely recognized and are recognized as a commonly used tool for identifying gifted children in the United States (Westberg, 2011). The Renzulli Scales asks teachers to rate children in comparison to their peers on a host of these observable behaviors. Students who score well on the scales are more likely to be gifted. Using a tool like the Scales, a school can narrow the number of students who will be fully evaluated for a gifted program. Recently, they have been translated and validated for use in the Italian educational context. To accommodate the inclusion of high ability students in classrooms, the SEM also incorporates a variety of within-classroom strategies such as curriculum compacting (Reis, et al., 2016). Compacting is used to provide more challenging learning experiences for talented youth, designed to help students to fully realize their potential.

Implementation of SEM

In SEM programs, teacher training is a fundamental requirement and having specialized and trained personnel is key to success, particularly enrichment or gifted education specialists. Professional development in the SEM was provided to the faculty by the first author and then, an Enrichment team was organized to collaborate in planning future activities, including the allocation of financial and human resources to support enrichment initiatives and activities. These meetings and collaborative efforts were crucial for the successful implementation of this talent development programs within the school.

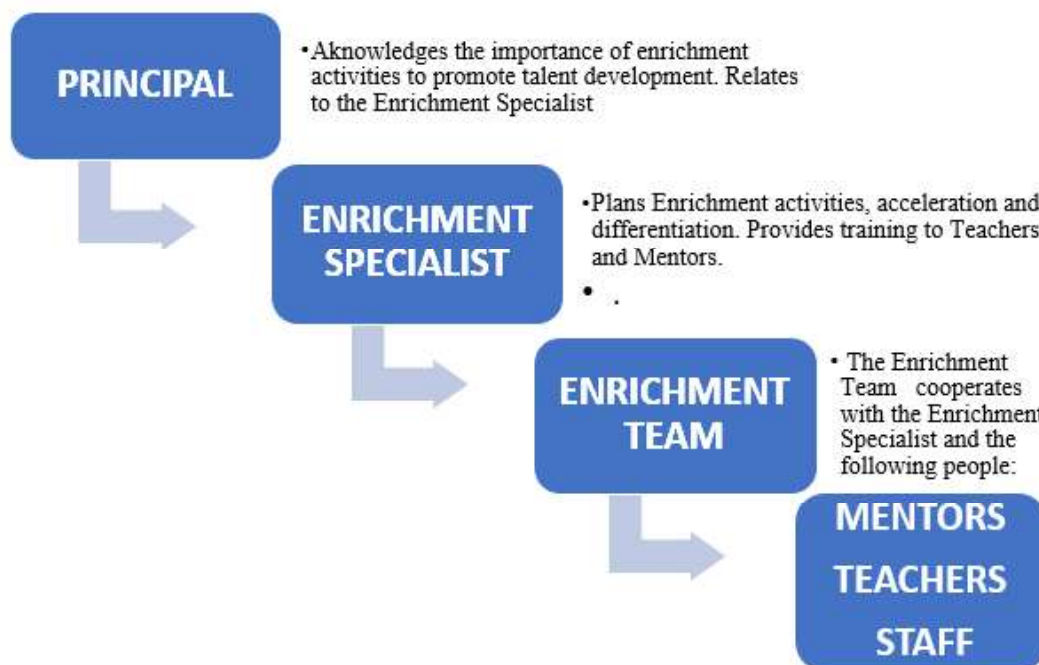


Figure 1: SEM organization at Salesiani Middle School.

The chronological steps for implementing SEM activities were as follows:



Figure 2: Steps in the implementation process.

Six steps to implement enrichment clusters

Enrichment clusters provide students with valuable opportunities to explore their individual interests and nurture their talents. A key feature of enrichment clusters is their non-graded nature: students come together based on shared interests and collaborate to create a shared product or service. Given that these common interests form the foundation for interest grouping in enrichment clusters, assessing and understanding students' interests has been given a high priority to effectively tailor and structure these clusters.

In the first step, all students' interests were assessed, using the Renzulli Learner System, which provided a comprehensive survey of students' interests, learning styles, and modes of expression. In the figure below is summary of all students' interests.

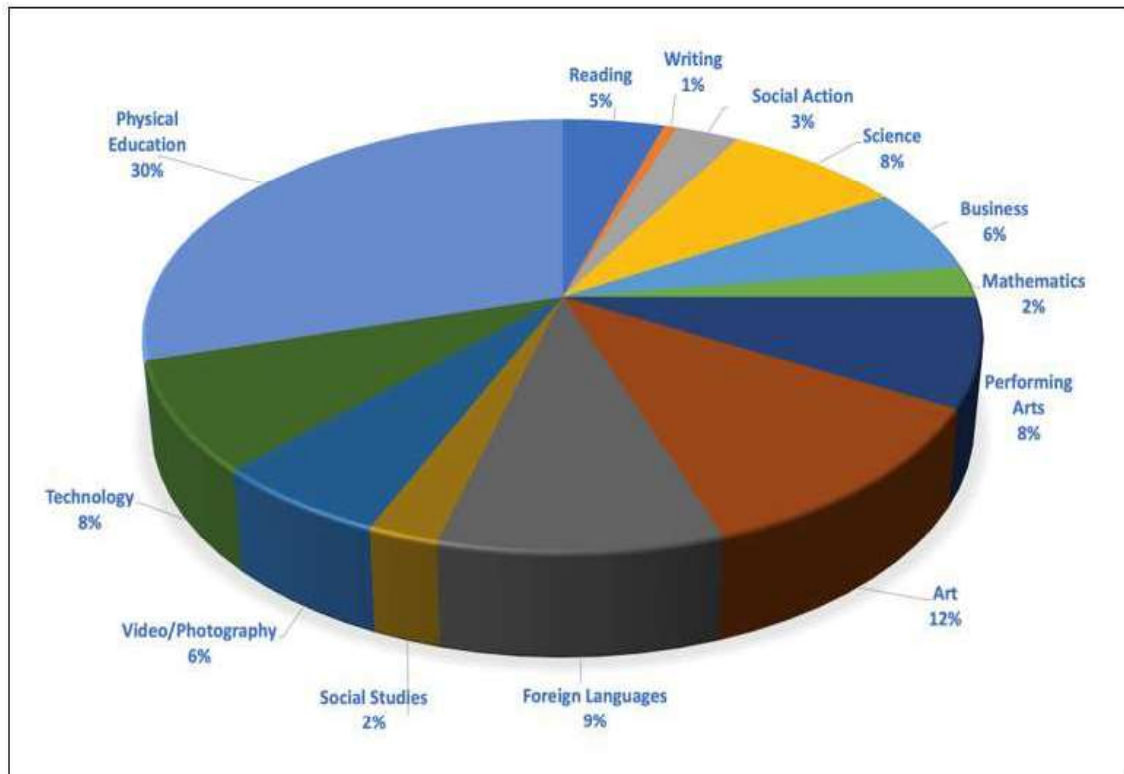


Figure 3: Summary of students' interests in 2022-23.

Step 2 included identifying a time, schedule, and place for enrichment clusters to be implemented. These took place from March to May, with a weekly duration of two hours. Step 3 included the identification of all facilitators of the Enrichment Clusters, and in Step 4, they were provided with a brief training course to explain the fundamental principles of the model. In Step 5, students were registered by placing them in clusters of their choice in which they had a personal interest. Step 6 included a celebration of all Enrichment Cluster successes in an event designed for students to showcase and share their products and services with an authentic audience.

Enrichment clusters arranged in three years

As stated by the authors, the SEM goal is that “schools should be places for talent development” (Renzulli & Reis, 2014). Students enrolled in the clusters they were interested in, as they perceived clusters offered them the opportunities to explore interest areas that are not typically covered in the regular school curriculum. These hands-on activities are more dynamic compared to the passive learning often associated with traditional classroom lessons. Moreover, participating in enrichment clusters enabled them to discover their classmates' interests and talents that many were previously unaware of. The titles of clusters offered during the three years are included below.



Figure 4: School year 2020-21: 15 enrichment clusters.

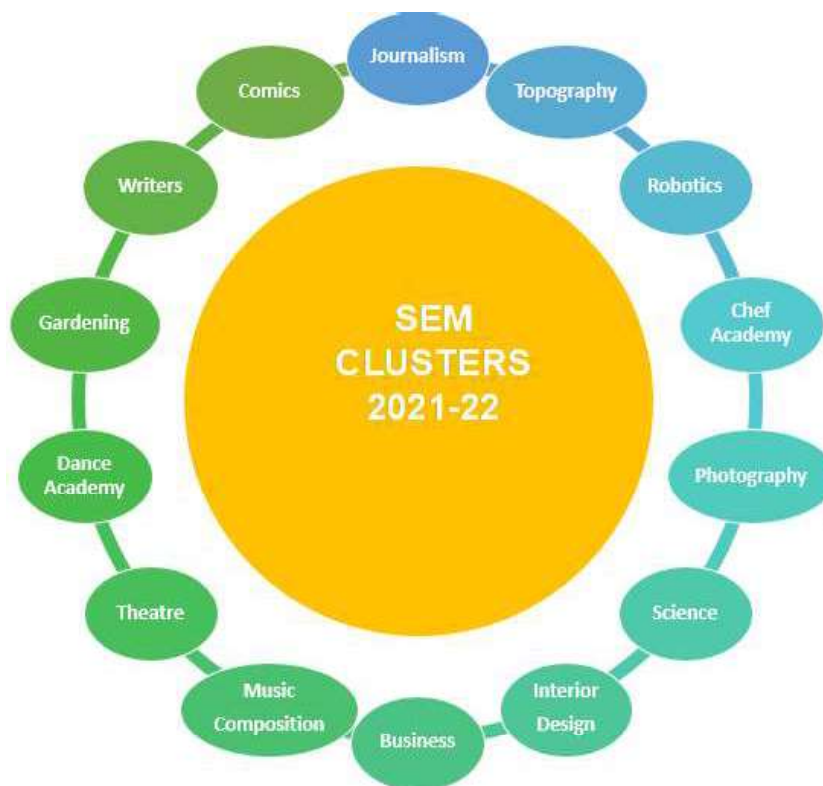


Figure 5: 14 Enrichment clusters in the school year 2021-22.



Figure 6: 15 Enrichment clusters in the school year 2022-23.

Curriculum Compacting

Curriculum compacting is one of the major service delivery practices in the SEM. This differentiation strategy can be used in any curricular area and at any grade level to make appropriate curricular adjustments for highly able students. This practical differentiation tool provides teachers the possibility to streamline the grade level curriculum for high-potential students to enable time for more challenging and interesting work. Teachers at Salesiani school were specifically trained to first define the goals and outcomes of a teaching unit, secondly to determine and document the students who already mastered most or all or most learning outcomes, and finally to provide replacement strategies for material already mastered, making a productive use of the student’s time. For example, the math teacher designed highly challenging and interesting math activities for a mathematically highly able student who experienced boredom in the regular math class and wished to be accelerated and enriched in his strength area.

Professional responsibilities and ethical commitments towards giftedness

The SEM model has been implemented in hundreds of school districts across the USA and around the world and has demonstrated effectiveness under widely differing socioeconomic levels and program organization patterns (Reis & Peters, 2020). Moreover, research in the research literature show highly favorable results for underachieving gifted students when the Three Ring Conception of Giftedness and the Enrichment Triad Model are used as a direct intervention for counteracting underachievement (Reis & Peters, 2020). Italy has one of the highest dropout rates in Europe, according to the CENSIS (2022) 56th Report on the social situation of the country. The collective body of related research shows a longstanding gap between the schools in the North and in the South of the country. Despite some improvements in school dropout rates recorded in recent years, much remains to be done. In Italy, an average of 26% of students fail to achieve their high school diploma, with maximum peaks of 30.7% in technical institutes. In the South, 31.9% of young people aged between 18 and 24 do not either study in school or work, which puts them at risk of joining organized crime.

The implementation of the SEM may hold the potential to address and reverse the underachievement of many high potential and gifted students due to the absence of a differentiated curriculum tailored to their educational needs. The SEM focuses on personalized and inclusive education, contributing to higher engagement of all students, offering them opportunities to explore and develop their talents, ultimately leading to improved academic outcomes and reducing dropout rates (Reis & Peters, 2020). The SEM focus is on offering equitable enrichment opportunities to all children. Due to the absence of a national identification system for gifted and talented students, only a small number of gifted students are officially recognized as such. Considering that the Italian school system has made extraordinary efforts to guarantee equity to students with various types of disabilities, the SEM may help to guarantee educational opportunities to 2e and highly able students who until now, constitute an under-represented and under-served populations. Aptitude testing, commonly used for identification, can be costly, and not all Italian families have the financial means to seek private counseling. As a result, ensuring equity in the identification of highly able students becomes a priority. In this context, The Renzulli Rating Scales can serve as valuable instruments for screening students, and their identification may help teacher serve them, either differentiating their curriculum, providing enrichment opportunities, as well as acceleration within self-contained classrooms. These opportunities are essential for highly able students, addressing the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach to gifted education. Indeed, teacher rating scales have been commonly used to identify students for gifted services for decades, including students from underrepresented populations (Peters & Gentry, 2012), low socioeconomic groups (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008; Reis & Morales-Taylor, 2010), and from rural, low education communities (Azano et al., 2017).

Finally, the work to implement SEM schools in Italy underscores the potential for change when adequate gifted and talented (G&T) training and professional development is provided to teachers, even in the absence of national norms and guidelines on gifted education. In this context, the responsibility of an SEM specialist is to extend the use of the SEM by inviting educators to visit Salesiani SEM school. Over the past three years, Salesiani school in Varese has welcomed numerous groups of Italian teachers, including teachers and administrators from abroad, who had the chance to observe how enrichment programs are organized.

Impact of the SEM implementation on creativity

The SEM implementation had a positive impact on the enhancement of enrichment and the development of creativity in the school. Creativity holds an important place in education, career development, and is a highly valued trait sought by employers in various fields. According to Forbes, creative thinking is a skill that is sorely needed in all professions and tapping into and building one's creative thinking skills is an absolute necessity. As the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Survey (2023) reported, approximately 73% of surveyed organizations rank creative thinking skills as top priority in the future. The SEM promotes educational environments in which creative thinking skills are encouraged and developed, contributing to a growth mindset culture that enable continuous improvement. As Dweck (1999) demonstrated, students who believe their abilities are malleable and can be improved with dedicated effort are more likely to attempt challenging tasks and persevere more in face of difficulties than students who believe that abilities are innate. This is also true for creativity, and the ultimate goal of SEM programs is to foster *creative productive giftedness*.

Within the context of SEM activities, one of the principal objectives is to foster students' creativity. The positive outcomes resulting from the implementation of SEM in this school were visible, as all clusters produced original products that were shared with an authentic audience, employing the approach, tools, and techniques of young investigators. Assessing creative ability can often be a costly and time-consuming process, as many widely used assessment tools are paper-based and require manual scoring. In this implementation of creativity levels at this Salesiani School, pre and post creativity scores were examined using the CTC, which calculated average and deviation standard scores. To investigate the effectiveness of the Schoolwide Enrichment Method pedagogy with the implementation of Enrichment Clusters on student's Creativity, we used the CTC in the RLS as a pre and post assessment of creativity investigating the use of Renzulli Learning and enrichment clusters.

The CTC is a web-based assessment tool designed to evaluate creative potential in students. It measures four key aspects of creativity: fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. This digital format offers several advantages over traditional paper-and-pencil creativity assessments. First, the CTC addresses the limitations of cost and time associated with conventional creativity evaluations. Many existing instruments require manual scoring, making them resource-intensive for schools. The CTC's online platform streamlines administration and scoring, reducing costs and facilitating wider implementation. Second, the CTC eliminates language barriers by employing non-verbal stimuli, making it suitable for students with diverse backgrounds and linguistic abilities. Additionally, the web-based format minimizes technological requirements, requiring only basic internet access and a user-friendly interface. Traditional methods of identifying gifted students often overlook individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds. These methods may rely on standardized tests that can be culturally biased or influenced by educational disparities. The CTC addresses this equity gap by offering a culturally neutral assessment that can uncover hidden talents in a broader student population. In conclusion, the CTC emerges as a promising tool for educators seeking to identify and nurture creative potential in students. Its digital format, cost-effectiveness, and non-verbal nature position it as a valuable addition to gifted and talented programming, particularly for promoting inclusivity within diverse student populations.

Students participated for approximately one academic year (381 ± 54 day). The total population of students who participated the study was 154 in grades 6, 7, and 8. The mean time difference between the first and the second test was slightly more than one year. In Table 2, the mean creativity percentiles in each dimension of creativity included in the test is reported, as is an overall creativity score of the students in the SEM Italy group.

Table 2: Mean creativity percentiles in each dimension of creativity.

| Italy SEM | Fluency percentile | Originality percentile | Elaboration percentile | Flexibility percentile | Creativity percentile |
|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| First Test Mean | 59 | 56 | 48 | 74 | 65 |
| First Test StDev | 30 | 31 | 32 | 28 | 25 |
| Second Test Mean | 86 | 74 | 82 | 93 | 86 |
| Second Test StDev | 20 | 26 | 21 | 16 | 15 |

All four reported creativity dimensions of creativity (fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration) and the overall creativity percentiles increased significantly in the SEM group. The mean fluency percentile of the students increased from the 59th percentile to the 86th percentile, a 0.9 standard deviation increase. The mean originality increased from the 56th percentile to the 74th percentile, an 0.6 standard deviation increase. The mean elaboration increased from the 48th percentile to the 82nd percentile, a highly significant 1 standard deviation increase. The mean flexibility percentile increased from the 74th percentile to the 93rd percentile, a 0.7 standard deviation increase. And finally, the overall Creativity percentile increased from the 65th percentile to the 86th percentile, an 0.8 standard deviation increase.

The development of creativity in the Italy SEM group is displayed in the following graph. As is depicted below, the majority of the students were above the $x=y$ diagonal line, indicating an increase in their overall creativity scores.

Although a control group was not available in Italy, we were able to access the anonymized data of 104 students from the United States that have been given the test twice in the same time frame, about a year apart. The majority of the students are from New Jersey and Texas, and with some students from Utah, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. These students did not have access to the SEM pedagogy and continued their regular school curriculums.

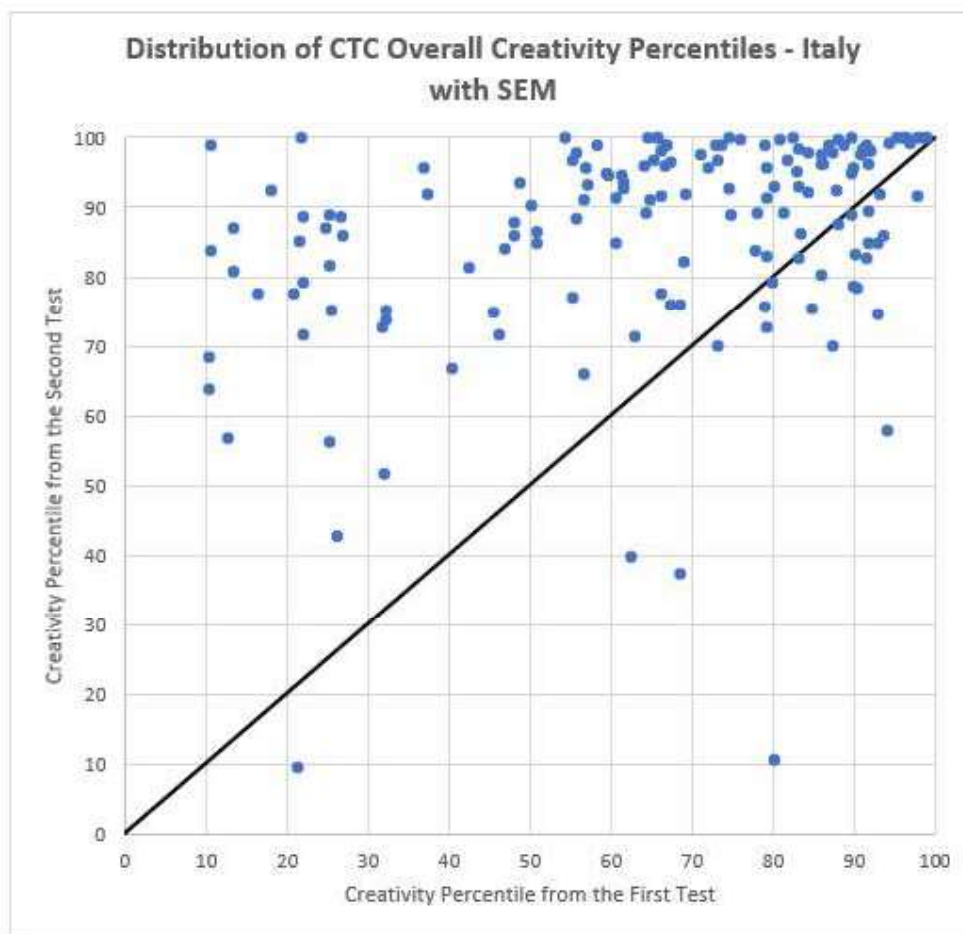


Figure 7: Distribution of CTC overall creativity percentiles in the Italian SEM school.

The following table summarizes the mean creativity percentiles in each creativity dimension and an overall creativity score of the students in the United States without a SEM pedagogy.

Table 3: Mean creativity percentiles in US Schools Sample without using SEM pedagogy

| American not participating in SEM | Fluency percentile | Originality percentile | Elaboration percentile | Flexibility percentile | Creativity percentile |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| First Test Mean | 59 | 55 | 48 | 67 | 63 |
| First Test StDev | 29 | 30 | 29 | 30 | 25 |
| Second Test Mean | 55 | 66 | 50 | 71 | 67 |
| Second Test StDev | 28 | 26 | 28 | 27 | 21 |

As summarized on the table above, there is no significant discernible change in the creativity dimensions in the group without SEM pedagogy, with a slight decrease in the Fluency percentile.

To view the individual change of creativity percentiles in the USA without SEM group, please refer to the following graph. As can be seen on the graph below, the students are distributed almost equally along the $x=y$ diagonal line indicating that there is no discernible shift between the first and second test in their overall creativity scores. While some students increased their overall creativity percentiles, other students decreased their percentiles during the year.

This data suggests that implementing the SEM has positive impact on creativity, as measured by this assessment, for students participating in an SEM program in this school.

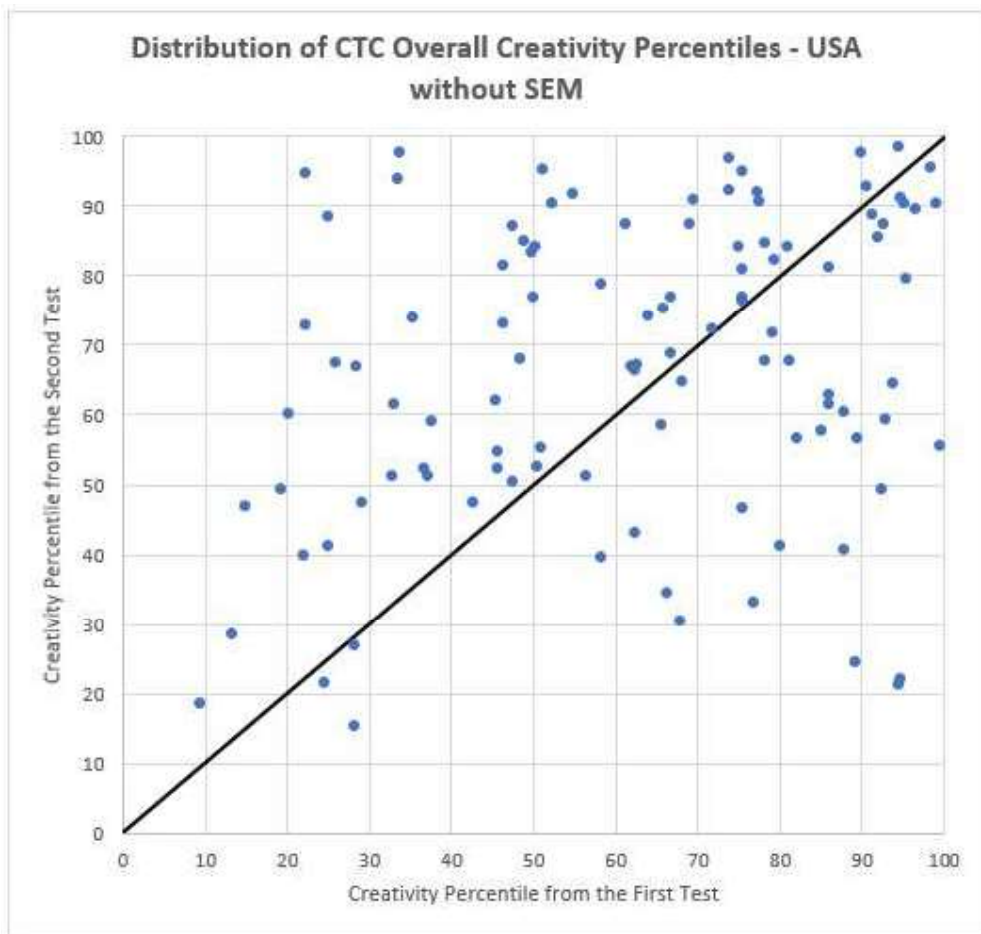


Figure 8: Distribution of CTC overall creativity percentiles in US sample without SEM

Project Impact on Students' Motivation

The core of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model is the identification and nurturance of student interests and creativity, as talent flows from interest development (Renzulli & Reis, 2014). All students can develop interests and in some students, interests become the path to talent development. During this three-year implementation, all students in the first Italian SEM school become more excited and engaged in what they were learning as they freely choose to participate in activities that align with their personal interests. It was gratifying for both teachers and parents to discover how the participation to enrichment activities served as a hook to keep engaged some high achieving and talented students who experienced boredom during some traditional schooltime. Enrichment clusters also provided all students at Salesiani School opportunities to discover and explore *their* natural talents and abilities, helping them to find a niche on which to build a successful school path and hopefully career in the future. Clusters may also help to prevent some of the traditional behaviors that prevent teenager from living up to their potential. For example, one student discovered a passion for classical music he was not aware of, and in just three years he learned to play both piano and violin at a proficiency level that allowed him to participate in important public concerts and then possibly enroll in a prestigious conservatory. Other students demonstrated to have a particular attitude in performing arts cultivating their passion for drama even outside the classroom. A 6th grade student enrolled in a photography cluster learned that he possessed an eye for photography and also came to realize that photography is a powerful form of visual communication that helped him give voice to his emotions. This intrinsic motivation and self-directed choice significantly contributed to the success and effectiveness of the SEM at Salesiani school. The research shows that when enrichment is working well, students not only like school better, but also show improvements in school achievement (Reis &

Peters, 2020; Reis & Renzulli, 2003; Renzulli & Reis, 2014). Thus, in this school, the SEM pedagogy appears to suggest that reversing the underachieving process may be possible.

Discussion of the SEM project impact on students, faculty, and community

One of the significant benefits of SEM Enrichment activities was that Salesiani Middle School students were exposed to a wide array of interests and subject areas that may not typically be covered in the regular curriculum. This exposure provides a valuable orientation service, enabling students to explore and discover subjects that could significantly influence their academic and professional choices in the future. The Schoolwide Enrichment Model 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. (Renzulli & Reis, 2014; Renzulli et al., 2021). It offers an “infusion-based approach” that examines the regular curriculum and explores opportunities and strategies to inject enrichment experiences into all prescribed topics (Renzulli & Reis, 2014; Renzulli et al., 2021). But unlike many G&T theories, the SEM was capable of translating theory into practice, providing educators with highly successful best practices and tools.

There are no quick fixes or easy formulas for creating schools based on a talent development philosophy, so flexibility was crucial to ensure the success of the SEM program because no predefined plan or set of procedures can accommodate the diverse variations that exist at the local school level. Not all SEM schools are alike and although SEM offers general guidance to accomplish an agreed upon mission and set of objectives, the specific activities educators at Salesiani school choose to implement their program, ultimately crafted their own SEM customized programming model.

The SEM includes a RLS toolkit that empowers teachers to provide more personalized and enriched educational experiences. Given that Italian teachers may not be aware how to differentiate instruction for gifted learners, access to the extensive database of 50,000 enrichment activities within the RLS was highly engaging, enriching the highly prescriptive material to meet the unique needs and interests of their gifted students. The implementation of the SEM at Salesiani School demonstrates its ability to foster positive attitudes toward special programming for gifted students within the Italian community. It also brings about positive changes in attitudes among teachers, students, and parents regarding gifted and talented education.

The SEM activities extend beyond the classroom and actively involve the community, enlisting mentors and facilitators who not only share their passion with students but also bring their real-world expertise and tools into the learning environment. This educational process creates a positive osmosis, promoting the development of an educational and educating community that encompasses families, schools, and the broader community, profoundly impacting student success. This collaborative approach contributed to the building of a stronger and more sustainable society that honors cultural diversity and promotes mutual respect.

As a result of SEM success at Salesiani School, the SEM is gaining popularity in Italy. More and more teachers and principals are showing interest in the model. In September 2023, the first Bilingual Elementary and Middle School in Milan adopted the SEM. The main promise of this budding field of teaching and learning in Italy will hopefully urge Italian institutions to promote a school reform that will enable Italian educators to meet the educational needs of gifted learners and to build a more inclusive and equitable school system.

Discussion of the future of the SEM and conclusion

The three-year experience underscores the challenges posed by the absence of state regulations on talent development programs, which may hinder efforts to bring about change in Italian schools. A significant issue that emerged during the implementation process was the general lack of understanding of the goal of gifted and talented Education. The community in general considers that human and financial resources should be primarily directed toward supporting disabled students. As a result, Salesiani SEM school encountered difficulties in finding mentors willing to volunteer to offer

their time and expertise to enrich the school experience of students. This points to the need for greater awareness and recognition of the value of gifted education and talent development in the Italian education system and society at large.

The scarcity of professional training in gifted education is another urgent concern in Italy. With this respect, the Salesiani School took proactive steps to be at the forefront of education as the first author provided its teachers with training in gifted and talented education and on the Schoolwide Enrichment Model. Furthermore, Salesiani School recognized the need of a dedicated professional figure and all enrichment activities. This commitment to training and specialized guidance demonstrates the school's dedication to foster students' talent development and meeting the unique needs of gifted students within the Italian educational context. With this respect, a specialist in gifted education plays a key role in implementing a gifted and talented model, adhering to recommended structures and processes. Indeed, implementation fidelity is a potential moderator of intended benefits of any educational strategy (Brigandi, 2019).

The successful SEM implementation at Salesiani school suggests that once the concept of talent development becomes more widely accepted and recognized, several positive outcomes ensue. Students can become more enthusiastic and engaged in their learning, parents discover increased opportunities for involvement in various aspects of their children's education, teachers begin to tap into a wider array of resources to enrich their traditional teaching methods not only in their enrichment clusters, but also in their regular curricular classes. Administrators also began to make decisions that have a positive impact on learning outcomes, aligning with SEM pedagogy.

This enrichment educational journey began five years ago and achieved a series of educational innovations focused on developing teaching and educational strategies and methodologies for the identification and talent development of students with high cognitive potential. In order to continue this work, additional training and professional development for teachers are needed, as is making use of the interventions of specialists of national and international standing. This SEM implementation holds significant value, as it can result in a wave of innovation that can potentially result in positive changes in the Italian educational system. If implemented, the SEM can provide the necessary resources, encouragement, and opportunities for Italy's talented students and to fully develop their potential.

We hope this research may encourage educators in Italy and other European countries to adopt a global talent strategy, bringing a fresh impetus to the SEM talent development approach that may help identify and develop students' gifts and talents by elaborating and implementing comprehensive enrichment and talent development strategies that will contribute to growth, equity and excellence, leaving no student or country behind.

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Paola Maraschi, graduated in Italian Literature at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan in 1992. Since the nineties, she has continued to pursue her training on learning disabilities and inclusion. In 2000 she obtained the degree to teach Italian and Latin in Italian Schools. She taught Italian and Latin for more than twenty years.

In 2013 she became principal at the Salesian school A.T. Maroni in Varese where in 2019 she also took on the role of director of the Salesian Opera. As principal at the Salesian school, over the years, has been responsible for innovating the school by introducing the most updated teaching

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Teaching Strategies and the Role of Creativity in Gifted Education: Perceptions of Students, Families, and Educational Professionals

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Abstract

The role of creativity in teaching gifted children is essential for gifted students to develop their high abilities and creative potential. Teaching and fostering creativity and creative thinking within other academic domains can provide opportunities for excellence and achievement within students' talent development and interests. This manuscript aims to highlight research participants' perceptions of teaching strategies and the importance of creativity in the development of gifted students. These perceptions were captured utilizing a qualitative, case-study design approach whereby the data was collected through semi-structured interviews and observations, and these data were analyzed through an exploratory analysis approach. Findings revealed that the perceptions of the selected participants (three gifted students, two mothers, five teachers, two principals, and one educator) are in line with the recommendations of experts in the field of creativity and giftedness. Implications for educators are discussed, including creating an environment that is responsive to the needs of gifted students and their creativity and cultivating a psychologically safe school space, that promotes the development of creative potential.

Keywords: Gifted; creativity; talent development; teaching strategies.

Introduction

From a historical context, many gifted and talented children remain unidentified and or underserved, preventing them from fully developing their high abilities and talents (Ford et al., 2018; Gagne & Gagnier, 2018; Kane & Silverman, 2014; Pfeiffer, 2015, 2016; Piske & Kane, 2020; Renzulli, 2003, 2016). A critical component of gifted programming is the services provided to gifted children.

The more comprehensive definitions (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2008) consider several domains beyond cognitive capacity in their components, including creativity, leadership, motivation, artistic and interpersonal skills, emotional processes, and variables associated with personality and social contexts. However, one of the most important challenges in this thematic is a disproportionately great emphasis on academic giftedness's cognitive facet. Consequently, other aspects, like cognitive ones, have been valued (Jones et al., 2016). Within this model, creativity has contributed, in a significant way, to the broader view of giftedness (Angela & Caterina, 2020; Kaufman et al., 2012; Lubart et al., 2019; Piske et al., 2016a; Sorrentino, 2019).

Creativity has been defined as the interaction between aptitude, process, and environment, through which an individual produces a product that is perceived, within a social context, as new and valuable (Plucker et al., 2018). It is considered a skill present in all people, at least as a potential, which can manifest itself at different levels and domains, being understood as a multidimensional