



Learning to Like Learning:

The Enrichment Strand Curriculum in Middle School

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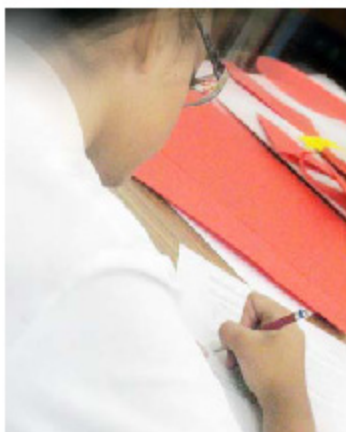
What is learning? In a survey conducted among middle and high school students in the United States, the most common answer was, "to remember what teachers and parents said." In RIS, we believe that learning is multi-faceted and centers around the learner - the student. In our classrooms, we facilitate discovery and attempt to make learning relevant to the learner so that each student's potential can be developed and refined as a result of their learning experiences.

In keeping with the mission of our academic program, we have piloted and continue to implement the Enrichment Strand Curriculum in Social Studies in the Middle School. The Enrichment Strand Curriculum was piloted in school year 2007-2008 by Mr. Kevin Thomas in his Grade 6 Social Studies classes. The Curriculum Director and the Middle School Principal both approved the program, and it was reevaluated at the end of the school year. The vision for ESC came from the grassroots level, after parents, teachers, students, and administrators expressed interest in an enrichment program. In 2008-2009, Ms. Aloha Lavina discussed the idea with Mr. Kevin and decided to continue the ESC for the Grade 7 students in her Social Studies classes. The program will be reevaluated at the end of this school year.

Like the Grade 6 program, the Grade 7 Enrichment Strand Curriculum is based on Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Howard Gardner is a world-renowned professor of education at Harvard University. In 1983, he published his Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Since then, the field of education has widely accepted Gardner's ideas on how learning occurs in the human brain. His Theory states that there are eight different intelligences, namely Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, Spatial, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Musical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Naturalistic. In 1999, he also added Existentialist Intelligence, which comprises the ability to examine the world in terms of overarching ideas, or the "big picture," a philosophical outlook toward reality. In the Enrichment Strand Curriculum, Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences is used as a framework to design learning activities to challenge and enhance student learning.

The Enrichment Strand Curriculum aims to strengthen each student's learning experience. The program is based on individual needs and is designed to take students beyond the required assignments with the purpose of experiencing more in-depth opportunities to learn about course material for each unit. All students will have the opportunity to participate; however the work is intensive

and challenging. The reward will be rich learning experience that is the result of student choice and self-guided learning.



"I really did not know anything about Terracotta warriors before I did this assignment," wrote Prair in her reflection, after completing a spatial assignment on the Emperor Shi Huangdi's tomb terracotta warriors. "I learned how the army and troops are divided into pits and what the different pits held." The students make real-life connections while they are completing the projects. "In this assignment," Prair explains, "I had to graph the pits out which was pretty frustrating. I kept drawing lines on the wrong square and the tiny boxes made my eyes hurt. It reminds me of how my mom writes or draws out her plans. She's an interior designer and often, she has to draw and graph everything out. This assignment seems like what an architect would do."

In Grade 6 last year, 17 out of 55 students participated voluntarily in the ESC program. In its pilot year, work done in the Enrichment Strand Curriculum was not graded, although feedback was provided. "The amazing thing is that students of a range of abilities were participating in the ESC program and learning successfully," says Mr. Kevin Thomas. "There is a misconception that the ESC is a gifted and talented program, but it really is for all learners." Gardner's theory teaches that all people can learn and that each person has a different way of learning. School has traditionally tended to be mostly auditory (lectures) and misses out on other opportunities for students to optimally learn according to their learning preferences.

We hope that Social Studies can be a way for students to discover their strengths and have opportunities to express and celebrate them.