

BUILDING STUDENT INTEREST INVENTORIES

Student Interest Inventories

To encourage real-world creative productivity in gifted and talented students, interest areas should be analyzed using an interest identification instrument. Teachers are encouraged to assess students' interests at the beginning of the year to discover new interests or to determine trends in students' interests. Interest surveys or interest inventories allow teachers to learn things about their students that may not typically come to their attention. Besides giving insights into students' areas of interest for in-depth study, the student interest inventory can help teachers motivate reluctant learners. A good interest assessment instrument includes sections to identify **thinking style preferences**, **learning environment preferences**, **instructional style preferences**, and **product or expression preferences**. Many advanced level projects are successful due to student interests determined early and strongly supported by teachers.

Determining a student's **instructional style preference** requires questioning their instructional format preference. Purcell (1998) asks the teacher to determine in which instructional format the young person:

- Asks the most PROVOCATIVE questions?
- Generates ENTHUSIASTIC insights?
- Naturally assumes a LEADERSHIP role?
- GRAVITATES and LINGERS, IMMERSED in what he/she is doing?
- Produces his or her BEST work?

Teachers should consider that one **thinking style preference** is not better than another. It is important to present students with opportunities to engage in many thinking styles, since this more closely simulates real-world learning. Thinking is an artful process that directs a person's intelligence. Some students are planners/creators. They design and invent. Others love to build thought structures to clarify information. Still others are evaluators who appraise, judge, determine, and review information.

Expression style preferences identify a student's favorite formats or products for expressing their ideas or the information they have learned. Expression styles can include any of the following: written, multi-media, service/leadership, oral/discussion, artistic, manipulative, display, performance, or dramatization.

Learning environment preferences can include student preferences to work alone, with a partner, on a team, or with adults. A student may work best in one or more of the following learning environments: self-oriented, peer-oriented, or adult-oriented.

Although only a portion of a student's education can be built around interests, by focusing on those interests, classroom opportunities can capitalize on high interest areas and encourage real-world productivity. Teachers are encouraged to probe with questions that assist students in reflecting upon their interests prior to advanced level product development.

Recommended Reading for Student Interest Inventories:

Purcell, Jeanne H. and Joseph Renzulli. *Total Talent Portfolio – A Systematic Plan to Identify and Nurture Gifts and Talents*. Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press, 1998. Print.

“Renzulli Learning System.” Renzulli Learning Systems, LLC, 2011. Web. <www.renzullilearning.com>

Renzulli, Joseph. *Interest-a-lyzer: Family of Instruments –A Manual for Teachers*. Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press, 1997. Print.

Renzulli, Joseph and Sally M. Reis. *The Schoolwide Enrichment Model: A How-To Guide For Educational Excellence*, 2nd Ed. Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press, 1997. Print.