

TEACH **TO THE** TOP

How to Keep High Achievers Engaged and Motivated
By Joseph Renzulli, Ph.D.



“You can challenge your academically talented, advanced students to keep them both engaged and motivated within the regular classroom,” says Joseph Renzulli, director of the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut and cofounder of Renzulli Learning. The key is to spend time each day focusing on students’ strengths and interests, and to remember that your classroom is a place for developing all sorts of talents in all students. Here, Renzulli shares seven strategies to help you provide opportunities for all students to continue growing and learning in the areas where they have the greatest strengths.

1 PROVIDE OPEN-ENDED ASSIGNMENTS

The more you can offer open-ended learning opportunities in reading, social studies, and science, the better. While this allows high-achieving students to take their work to a deeper level, it is

incredibly beneficial for all students. Projects that draw on a broad range of higher-level thinking and provide opportunities for real-life learning experiences lead to more enjoyment in learning for all students. And I believe that should always be our first goal.

2 CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

Consider cluster-grouping high-achieving and gifted students for more in-depth group assignments. This will enable you to more easily provide different assignments and content. If there are not enough students in your classroom to create a group, work cooperatively with other teachers in your grade level to try to accommodate the needs of your most advanced students. It makes more sense for one teacher to spend the time looking for advanced options for four or five students than it does for four or five teachers to do this level of work for one student in each classroom. (For more on cluster-grouping in the classroom and across grade level, see www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/gentry.html.)

3 USE TIERED ASSIGNMENTS

All your students will benefit from tiered assignments with shared content and themes. It gives all students a chance to share knowledge and ideas yet, at the same time, work at a level that is both academically challenging and comfortable. It also gives you the chance to teach more flexibly and to engage students’ interests as well as meet their needs. For example, you may let students choose the way they present their learning: writing a traditional

report, making a movie, giving a speech, or doing original research. One size does not fit all.

4 LET THEM PURSUE INDEPENDENT PROJECTS

Give interested students the chance to pursue independent study or project work. One way to keep them engaged is to pose a few questions and let them choose one to solve. To add even more value to the project, consider ways that their work might help the school or the wider community. A student could, for instance, organize a food drive or look for ways to improve cafeteria recycling.

5 FIND THE RIGHT BOOKS

Look for beyond-grade-level content for your advanced learners. Allow them to read appropriately challenging fiction and nonfiction books that relate to their interests. Your most advanced students should have the chance to encounter words and ideas that are new to them. Collaborate with your librarian or teachers in higher grades to help you find the right books.

6 CONSIDER AN ACCELERATED PROGRAM

Certain extremely advanced students may need or prefer an accelerated program. There are many forms of acceleration such as grade skipping or content acceleration to challenge your gifted and talented students. Research on acceleration suggests that it benefits gifted and talented students in many ways. (For more on acceleration, you may want to read more at www.nationdeceived.org.)

7 AIM FOR SCHOOL-WIDE ENRICHMENT

The same learning opportunities that engage and motivate advanced students work with *all* students. We all want authentic learning experiences that are exciting and challenging. Work with administrators and other teachers to implement regular options for deep enrichment school-wide. (Learn more about school-wide enrichment clusters at www.gifted.uconn.edu/sem/semart01.html.)