Why School Enjoyment Leads the List of the Three Es: Using Enrichment Cluster Teaching Strategies to Promote More School Happiness in the Regular Curriculum

Joseph S. Renzulli
University of Connecticut

A good deal of research has pointed out that a happy school environment is very important to promoting effective learning and bringing out students' gifts and talents (Aydin, 2016; Bird & Markle, 2012; Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Yucel & Vogt-Yuan, 2016). Similarly, this research shows a happy school environment not only contributes to student's academic success but also improves other life skills, such as healthy communication, lifelong success, and self-fulfillment. The research factor loads these investigators identified that lead toward happier school environments include physical facilities, the learning environment, collaboration, hands-on activities, and school administrative support.

An instrument development study dealing with the construction of a school happiness scale (Sezer & Can, 2019) found that teachers perceived moderate levels of school happiness in some sub-dimensions such as "physical equipment," and "activities." They also perceived high level of school happiness in "collaboration," and "school management" sub-themes. The scores varied according to the school type and teaching variables (e.g., grade, topic). The results suggested that the school principals should encourage teachers and display democratic and fair school management attitudes to increase school happiness. Administrators should encourage the enhancement of the physical conditions of the schools. In order to increase the school happiness of teachers, opportunities for open communication and collaboration should be provided. The School Happiness Scale can be applied to both teachers and students.

Observations of my own children and the many young people I have witnessed in schools in which I have worked in or visited have led to the conclusion that school happiness is the most important of the 3 Es depicted above. Instead of asking my children if they learned anything new is school today, I began asking, "Did you have any fun in school today." Answers almost always referred to art classes, home economics, vocational or "shop" classes, or extracurricular activities. Seldom (if ever) were regular curriculum goings-on mentioned!

This finding led to the development of one of the most popular components in our Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Reis, 2014) called Enrichment Clusters. Like extra-curricular activities, students choose the cluster in which they would like to enroll, they are with other students who share a similar interest or mind set, and the goal is to produce something (e.g., a school news paper or piece of artwork) or a performed event (e.g., school play, concert,

or basketball game). Research on enrichment clusters continuously called attention to fun or school happiness resulting from the clusters (Reis & Peters, 2020). The purpose of this brief article is to promote some of the teaching strategies used in enrichment clusters to general curriculum teaching experiences.

Although we have developed different kinds of teaching strategies for enrichment clusters (Renzulli et al., 2013), we believe that we can make the general curriculum more engaging by infusing enrichment activities into the prescribed curriculum. Some of this work was inspired by Glasser's Choice Theory (1998), which identifies five basic human needs: survival, love & belonging, power, freedom, and—last-but-not-least—fun.

What Are Enrichment Clusters?

Enrichment Clusters are nongraded groups of students who share common interests and come together during specially designated time blocks to pursue these interests. The goal is to have young people think, feel, and do like practicing professionals, even if at a more junior level than adult scientists, artists, writers, business entrepreneurs, etc. The teaching strategies used in enrichment clusters focus around the following six questions:

1. What do people with an interest in this area do?
2. What products do they create and/or what services do they provide?
3. What methods do they use to carry out their work?
4. What resources and materials are needed to produce high quality products and services?
5. How, and with whom, do they communicate the results of their work?
6. What steps need to be taken to have an impact on one or more intended audiences?

The article "Innovative Approaches for Developing Giftedness Using Enrichment Clusters" will give you a more detailed description of procedures for implementing enrichment clusters. We have found through follow-up questionnaires that students report much higher levels of enjoyment and engagement from their experiences in enrichment clusters than in the regular curriculum (Renzulli et al., 2013). We believe that the reason for greater enjoyment and happiness for learning is the result of allowing students to select the clusters in which they will participate, work with a teachers or other adults that have a strong interest in the topic, and with other students also share the same interest. Other factors for greater enjoyment are providing them with How-To Books so that they can simulate the roles and methodologies of practicing professionals. They can also focus their efforts on producing a creative product, performance, presentation, or some kind of community action activity that is intended to have an impact on one or more targeted audiences. These outcomes are exactly what makes dedicated adult professionals gain so much satisfaction from their work.

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