

Teach for stretch and challenge



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What's the idea?

Teachers must ensure that all students, including the highest attainers, are challenged to achieve excellence. This demands certain attitudes, curriculum planning and in-class approaches.

What does it mean?

There are three main areas that need attention for you to get stretch and challenge right:

Mindsets and beliefs: Teachers need to believe it's possible for students to succeed with high levels of challenge; if they don't, they may restrict the curriculum or accept lower standards. This influences the pitch of lessons, the difficulty of questions and the selection of texts.

Routine practice: Every lesson, teachers should ask more probing questions, push students to develop ever better, deeper written and verbal answers, and demand more in terms of focus, precision and quality.

Occasional events: Additional activities – such as presentations, debates, extended projects and deep-end, problem-solving questions – can add challenge to the overall curriculum diet. If you engage students in understanding the overall learning process, it helps them to make more productive use of strategies like pre-reading, 'flipped learning', teaching aspects of the course or presenting essay outlines and worked examples.

What are the implications for teachers?

Teachers should examine their mindset around challenge and consider their capacity to go further in each area. For example:

Consider whether you could allow some students to solve more difficult problems, write more extended answers without support, access higher level texts and generally be more ambitious with the selection of material, eliminating easy word-searches

and gap-fill exercises.

Spend time exploring the answer to 'what does excellence' look like? Set a high bar and show students how to reach it step by step, always with a challenging goal in mind.

Include some additional stretch activities such as debating, open-ended research projects or Olympiad questions in a more embedded manner across the school year, adding to the overall experience for the highest attaining students and pushing others further.

Top tips:

Adopt an explicit, bold 'teach to the top' mentality: find out who the highest attaining students are and then teach every lesson sequence with their needs in mind, never allowing them to find work too safe or too easy.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- » Heroic ImaginationTV (2011) The Pygmalion Effect. Available at: <https://youtu.be/hTghEXKNj7g> (accessed 8 February 2019).
- » Sherrington T (2017) The Learning Rainforest: Great Teaching in Real Classrooms. Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Ltd.