



## Part II: Academies of Inquiry and Talent Development

Middle school teachers facilitating AITD do not use traditional lesson plans; instead, they guide students through an inquiry-based process by helping them identify topics they are curious about through interest surveys, brainstorming, and discussion. After students select an area of interest, facilitators support them in developing questions, planning investigations, and exploring resources, allowing the experience to be flexible and tailored to student needs and interests.

Middle school teachers should begin by completing an interest assessment instrument prior to the beginning of the school year. The results of this assessment, along with discussions with friends and colleagues can guide teachers in identifying the AITD they would like to be a part of. Teachers then organize themselves in the AITD, developing working relationships and planning for team governance.

One problem to be avoided when facilitating the AITD is the tendency for some teachers to turn the enrichment clusters into mini-courses designed to teach a set of content or thinking skills to students. Clusters are not meant to teach pre-selected concepts or ideas but rather to expose students to learning situations designed to produce a product or service that will have an impact on an intended audience.

Teachers' reluctance to adjust schedules can pose challenges for implementing AITD. However, there are creative approaches schools can use to navigate time constraints. A willingness to experiment with scheduling, an appreciation for the value of enrichment experiences, and openness to new ideas are all essential for finding workable solutions.

An important consideration for facilitators within AITD is the maintenance of high standards. Having facilitators able to escalate the level of knowledge pursued within a cluster is paramount to maintaining high standards. That is, it is the facilitator's responsibility that students engage in more than simple "hands-on fun-filled" activities by guiding them to tap into deeper knowledge that promotes higher-order skills.

An AITD can begin with a small planning committee that explores the purpose, structure, and resources needed. It is important to involve administrators at this stage so they can help guide the process, offer logistical support, and ensure the model fits within school priorities. Administrative support may include helping coordinate meeting times, reviewing proposals, and identifying potential resources.

### Resources:

1. Renzulli, J. S. (2000). Part I: One way to organize exploratory curriculum: Academies of Inquiry and Talent Development. *Middle School Journal*, 32(2), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2000.11495261>
2. Renzulli, J. S. (2001a). Part II: Academies of inquiry and talent development. *Middle School Journal*, 32(3), 7–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2001.11495270>
3. Renzulli, J. S., & Renzulli, S. R. (2010). The Schoolwide Enrichment Model: A Focus on Student Strengths and Interests. *Gifted Education International*, 26(2–3), 140–157.