



SYNERGY AND ENVIRONMENT TO
EMPOWER DECENTRALISED SCHOOLS

TOOLKIT GREEN S.E.E.D.S.

MODULE 1 Seeds for Boosting

UNIT 2 Teachers' sense of belonging: to the school and the community



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RESPONSIBLE FOR IO1 “TOOLKIT GREEN S.E.E.D.S.”

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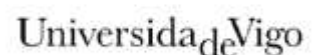
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1. Training of the national responsible (5-6.03.2020)
2. Training of the teachers at local level (1.04.2020 – 31.06.2020)

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UNIT 1.2

TEACHERS' SENSE OF BELONGING: TO THE SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

The Video of Santi

In this video we see Santiago, a teacher at a primary school in a rural and isolated part of Spain. It is his first year as a teacher. During the interview, he tells us what his arrival at the school was like, his relations with other teachers, and the factors which have made feeling as if he belongs to the school more or less difficult. Santiago answers the following questions in the video:

- ◆ *How was your first contact with the school?*
- ◆ *Have you felt accepted by your colleagues?*
- ◆ *Do you think you are treated differently due to it being your first year?*
- ◆ *Although you have not been at the school long, do you feel like a part of the school?*
- ◆ *What do they do that make you feel part of the school?*
- ◆ *What do they not do that make you feel part of the school?*

We believe that his way of being and his concerns may be similar to other young teachers dealing with arriving at a school as a first-year teacher. This unit will analyze the importance of teachers identifying with their school; it will consider what can be done to improve said sense of belonging.

1. What is the teachers' sense of belonging?

It is common for teachers at rural schools and classrooms to feel isolated, disconnected from the day-to-day of the regular school system, with them viewing their situation as marginal in relation to

other schools. Reinforcing contact and connections with other schools and teachers is a method to deal with this situation¹. Other ones include improving the sense of connection and belonging with regards to the school itself, as well as strengthening teacher's identification

¹ This specific question is addressed in module 4, unit 4.2



with and involvement in the educational project of the school and with the members of the school community.

A teacher's sense of belonging is related to the degree to which they feel integrated at the school, in its organization and with its students (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2010). Nonetheless, research indicates that teaching is one of the professions with the highest levels of work stress and burnout (Stoeber and Rennert, 2008). There are many different causes of this situation; it may be due to work overload, problems with academic autonomy, stilted relations with student families, the presence of disruptive students in the classroom, or the lack of a shared, common ideas; it may also be the result

of them carrying out their individually, alone, and without maintaining a cooperative relationship with other teaching staff.

Professional development for teachers is continuous, during which time they experience different emotions, sensations, and feelings while, at the same time, consolidating their knowledge and gaining experience. Teachers develop a sense of connection with their school when they feel part of the teaching and learning process and consider themselves to be members of their school's working group. Thus, the more a teacher is engaged with the school, the better they do their job and the easier it is for them to connect with their students.

WHAT MAKES AN INVOLVED TEACHER?

The existence of engaged, satisfied, and academically-successful students is often connected to involved teachers, teachers who (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005):

- Consider their work to be important and necessary.
- Believe their work benefits students
- Encourage student participation.
- Take care to provide quality teaching.

Teachers feeling as if they belong, however, does not solely depend on them

and their work with students; rather, the school itself has a key role to play. In fact,



one function of schools is to prepare and involve their teachers in their school's life objectives, values, and goals. This way schools, and especially rural and isolated schools, can and should consider the creation of a strong educational community which allows teachers to feel part of a common project in which their participation is essential.

2. How can we reflect on the feeling of belonging?

When we remember teachers, who have positively influenced our educational experience, we tend to think of charismatic, and enthusiastic educators who are connected with the school's educational project Rutter and Jacobson (1986) have established a series of elements which facilitate teacher involvement and feeling of belonging. The first two elements they point to are individual in nature and are concerned with years of experience and sex; they emphasize that more experience means a greater ability to adapt and that being a woman often means a greater degree of involvement since it is a traditionally female profession. The following three elements are demographic in nature and are school size (very large schools make it difficult to feel as if one belongs), the

level of the students (the greater the level the more involved teachers often feel), and school location (urban centers often result in a greater sense of belonging because they have more resources and more possibilities for social development). The following six elements which may help favor a sense of belonging are organizational in nature and are concerned with the school's environment (an organized and participative school environment creates a greater sense of belonging); a manageable teaching task which does not result in unmanageable overload; dedication to innovation means more options to facilitate belonging; the ability of teachers to make decisions is directly related to them feeling as if they belong to their group; the feeling of school community means greater integration in said community; finally, collaboration between different educational agents increases levels of autonomy and belonging.

In order to analyze this issue in greater depth, the following chart has a series of unfinished statements which must be completed in order to reflect on the factors mentioned at the school itself and by every teacher.





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BEING A MALE/FEMALE/OTHER (UNDERLINE YOUR OWN ANSWER) AT THIS SCHOOL MEANS...
MY (FILL OUT) YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AT THIS SCHOOL HAS ALLOWED ME TO...
THE SIZE OF MY SCHOOL HAS AN IMPACT ON...
THE LEVEL OF MY STUDENTS AT THIS SCHOOL MEANS...
THE FACT THIS SCHOOL IS IN A RURAL LOCATION MEANS...
THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT AT MY SCHOOL IS...
FOR ME, BEING A TEACHER AT THIS SCHOOL IS...
MY INVOLVEMENT WITH INNOVATION IS...
MY CAPACITY TO MAKE DECISIONS AT THIS SCHOOL IS...
THE FEELING OF COMMUNITY AT THIS SCHOOLS IS...
THE COLLABORATION WITH... AT THIS SCHOOL IS...

DO IT IN YOUR CLASSROOM

In pairs, teachers should reflect on their link to and commitment with their school. To do so, think about the questions which appear in the following image and try to complete them. The aim of the task is to help one think about both one's own

situation as well as those aspects which may help to improve the feeling of belonging, minimize obstacles to this, and set in motion changes to create a school capable of actively welcoming and involving every member.





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TO LEARN MORE

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