



SYNERGY AND ENVIRONMENT TO  
EMPOWER DECENTRALISED SCHOOLS

GREEN·S.E.E.D.S

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

## MODULE 2 Seeds for Teaching

### UNIT 2 Multilevel Teaching



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

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## PROJECT

GREEN S.E.E.D.S. - Synergy and Environment to Empower Decentralised Schools,

[www.greenseeds.eu](http://www.greenseeds.eu)

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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 2.2

# METHODOLOGIES IN THE RURAL CLASSROOM: MULTILEVEL TEACHING

*"My first day at a rural school showed me a reality which was very different from the one I had been raised in. I had students of different ages and levels. I didn't know where to start..."* (Sofia, primary-school teacher).

Let's imagine a world in which children with different abilities and learning-levels play, learn, and advance together. This situation, as described by Sofia's short story, is the goal of many small rural schools and classrooms throughout Europe, where a variety of students share classrooms. The main concern of teachers in these classrooms is to ensure that their classes take into account these differences, and that the needs of every student are addressed.

This unit intends to answer the question of what we can do so that a variety of students in the aforementioned educational environments learn together and support each other in their differences, instead of dividing the classroom based on them.

### 1. What is multilevel instruction?

In classrooms with a variety of students of different learning levels in which one does not wish to give up on common objectives because of this fact, but rather in which the objective is to use diversity as a tool for improvement, multilevel instruction has been developed; it is also known as tiered teaching or teaching different levels (Tomlinson, 1999; 2008).

Multilevel instruction is a teaching methodology which allows every student to participate in the same class, independent of their level or learning style. This methodology is adapted to how the different students in the classroom learn, being flexible in terms of its development and aiming for the inclusion and incorporation of each and



every student via a common curricular base. The name 'multilevel' comes from the fact that different learning levels and their impact are taken into account when planning a lesson (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010).

With this teaching methodology, students have learning proposals adopted to their learning level, rhythm, and style. Throughout the multilevel-learning process, students can work in different

groups, based on where they are in an exercise. Some parts of the work can be done individually, others in small groups. There is no single grouping criterion, with the exception being that the groups should be heterodox. Generally speaking, students are grouped by the teacher prior to starting a task in order to guarantee the heterogeneity of each group and enrich the results of interactions and complementarity between different students.

#### WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF MULTILEVEL INSTRUCTION?

- ◆ Promotes the inclusion and participation of every student, and accepts the various contributions of each student
- ◆ Adapts teaching to different levels and learning styles found in the class.
- ◆ Allows for every student to be enriched, regardless of whether they are very high level or have learning difficulties.
- ◆ Promotes the interaction between students and cooperation and learning among peers.
- ◆ Evaluates each student based on their level and progress in terms of learning, taking their starting point into context.

Source: own

## 2. What different types of multilevel instruction are there?

There is no single way to develop multilevel instruction. Tomlinson, (2005) differentiates two basic types of multilevel activities or proposals:

- a) Multilevel activities with different materials and contents for different students or groups of students, which in turn come together around the similar demands which may arise.
- b) The planning of tasks and activities with the same materials and contents



for every student, which are then diversified based on the different and personalized needs of the student, in accordance with the level of the students.

Let us take a look:

### A) PLANNING MULTIPLYING TASKS: DIFFERENT MATERIALS, SIMILAR DEMANDS

Today, upon entering Maite's class, students between the ages of 9 and 11 were given a series of cards with a range of information (written, tables, drawings, etc.). 6 cards were given to each student.

After giving them out, she told them: "Today's class will be about **pollution in gardens**". *The task consisted of studying the newly-discovered concepts, grouping cards with similar ideas together, giving them titles based on their content, and making a brief summary of them.*"

Everyone started working individually, consulting their books, other materials, and the cards, without realizing that the information they were working with was different depending on the student. There were common cards, but others varied from student to student. Each student had cards which informed them about the environmental impact of using chemical products while gardening, and the current trend of creating more ecological gardens. In addition, some had information on how to maintain a garden with natural fertilizers. Other students were given statistics about the same topics, and there were others who were given except from articles dealing with the topic.

After some time, the teacher again intervenes: *"Now form teams of four and try to write a coherent composition with the materials you have".*

It was then that the classmates discovered their differences. Maite had not told them that the cards had been assigned to the students based on their previous knowledge of the topic. Maite planned the activity by choosing a common goal and imagining a range of paths and approaches towards it, based on the different learning level of her students. This was both individual student work and group work were carried out.



The story about the gardening class involved planning the lesson with every student in mind and thinking about the activities and tasks to be done in the classroom in the same fashion. As one can see, the teacher's knowledge of their students' levels and learning styles is the first step (the teacher designed a warmup activity with different sheets for each student, according to their knowledge level) which was given to each one according to their situation.

Secondly, the method of thinking about the task, with the demands in this case

being the same, involved respecting differences (nobody was marginalized or segregated due to their abilities, but rather respected and valued; this can be seen in subsequent group work).

Thirdly, the class used the different knowledge levels of each student as a teaching resource. Although they worked individually at first, the key to the work in the second phase of the class was precisely the heterogeneity with regards to the levels of the students which guaranteed a job well done).

## B) PLANNING MULTIPLE DEMANDS: COMMON MATERIALS AND CONTENTS, DIFFERENT, AND PERSONALIZED DEMANDS

Today Maite arrived to class and distributed a written text to her students; it was the same text for every student. They were in English class, but there are students at significantly different levels in the classroom. She organized her class by taking into consideration three different levels of achievement and learning with regards to foreign languages.

For the class, she selected an opinion piece about the importance of consuming local products. She gave this text to every student. After handing them out, she briefly explained their contents, saw what the students know about the topic, and encouraged them to talk about their eating habits. Afterwards, she gave each student a sheet with instructions for working with the text.

Three different tasks were planned, according to the English level of each student. The students, as always, were groups in multilevel, heterogeneous groups, with each group having one student from each of the three levels identified by Maite.

The first task, designed for students with a very basic English level, focused on increasing basic vocabulary connected to the topic (local food products) and their use in simple sentences.

The task at the second step or acquisition level was designed for mid-level English learners, and presented questions connected to a syntactic analysis of the text (looking for verbs, subjects, etc.).

Lastly, there was a task meant for students with a higher level of English which involved reworking and discussing the contents of the context (writing a proposal to promote the products themselves). Furthermore, the teacher encouraged the students to help each other to reach different proposed objectives.

Upon finishing the tasks, together they had to fill out a booklet titled “0-km products in my area”, which included the different analyses and studies done by the group, with the proposal that a list of local products with recommendations about their use be created; as a whole this had a working unit. Evaluation was individual for each student, according to their objectives; this was completed by evaluating each student’s working group.

In this second example, the same material was used for each student. On the other hand, what was diversified and tiered were the related tasks to be carried out. Using common material as a starting point, the teacher was able to connect with the different levels of her students, proposing at the same time a common task which helped to create a sense of belonging and teamwork among the students

### 3. How can we put it into practice?

The use of this methodology means the use of a planning process which is different from the traditional one, since the idea is to guarantee the development of common (basic)

programming for every student. This is diversified and personalized at different points (Collicot, 1991).

#### STEPS:

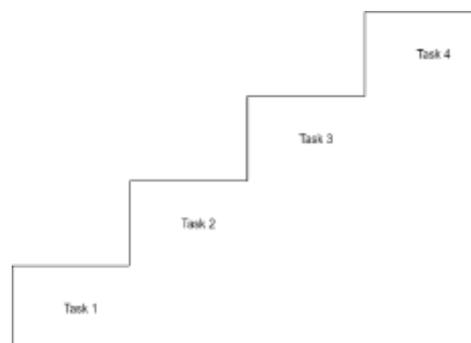
- ◆ The first step consists of identifying the most important contents common to all the students that we wish to work on: these are the strong ideas of the chosen topic.
- ◆ The second step consists of thinking about the different competence levels and learning styles there are in the classroom in relation to the content or topic, in order to determine how many different types of work should be planned (or tiered).

- ◆ The third step involves designing different presentation strategies for the work carried out in the classroom, so that they can be understood by every student.
- ◆ The fourth step involves tiering and proposing different practices and activities related to the selected content, so that every student, regardless of level, can do them. Tasks of varying complexity are proposed, taken into consideration the different chances of participation, competence levels and goals identified in step two.
- ◆ And, lastly, the fifth step consists of deciding on different evaluation strategies which are appropriate in terms of what has been done and how every student has learnt it (taking into consideration the different levels of ability and accepting different evaluation procedures).

## *DO IT IN YOUR CLASSROOM*

Choose one of the two previously described modalities and design a multilevel activity on the proposed stairs, following the previous steps. It is

recommended to do it with a partner with whom to discuss and deliberate why, when, and how to do it.





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## TO LEARN MORE

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