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

MODULE 2
Seeds for Teaching

UNIT 3
Teaching Methodology to personalize learning

PARTNERS

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UNIT 2.3

TEACHING METHODOLOGY TO PERSONALIZE LEARNING

Maite has just finished reading "Aulas diversificadas" by Ann Tomlinson. While reading, the teacher wrote down ideas which could change her teaching process and how she organizes her classroom. One of her major concerns is how to personalize teaching. She asks herself: 'How can I personalize teaching while teaching all of my students?' 'How am I going to work individually with each student?', and, 'If I personalize so much, will I have enough time to work with the group and achieve the common objectives?'

There are many teachers such as Maite who are interested in knowing more about new methodologies which allow them to give class in such a way that students are offered different options to connect with the contents and work at their own pace. In this situation, it is a good idea to reflect on the classroom learning processes we are proposing and how to personalize them.

Throughout this didactic unit, the reader will be invited to reflect on personalized teaching, it will be defined, and its use justified within the context of those pedagogies focused on the child and constructivist approaches. Likewise, some teaching strategies which allow one to personalize a student's teaching-learning process will be presented.

1. What is personalized teaching?

As in Maite's case, many teachers confuse personalizing teaching with individualizing it. They think it is not possible to teach in a personalized manner because they understand that this requires as many educational programs as there are students. But Maite should know that personalizing teaching does not mean giving a personalized and unique answer to each student. Personalization is different from individualization. Individualization leads us to believe that the ideal is to attend to each student separately, with their own, individualized program. But, as we know, this is both an impossible and undesirable option when one takes the reality of the classroom into consideration, and the fact that learning

is a social process and not merely individual.

Teaching personalization is an educational approach whose aim is that teaching be adapted to the strengths, needs, abilities, interests, and situation of each student (Coll, 2017). It allows one to work based on a common framework for all the students, but takes the uniqueness of each student into consideration at the same time. It can be used via shared planning, which is personalized at different moments and with different activities and strategies which are adapted to different students. Thus, personalization recognizes the social and shared nature of the learning process, which allows students to create significant learning with personal sense and significance for themselves.

In multigrade classrooms, with a diversity of students, objectives, paces, etc. it is necessary, more than in any other context, to recognize the unique nature

of learning in terms of each student's needs and characteristics. This includes their motivation, expectations, knowledge, prior experiences, abilities, etc.

In this context, the introduction of personalization in into teaching is especially relevant. This not only accepts the uniqueness, but also the relevant role of the student in the creation of the learning process, recognizing their ability to participate in the identification of their objectives and modes of learning based on their characteristics and interests. This is why personalization favors autonomous learning.

Personalization also allows one to offer a personalized touch in the classroom to meet the needs, interests, and situation of each case. Tomlinson (2001) established the following principles as key to planning and developing the personalized-learning process.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF PERSONALIZED LEARNING

- ♦ The teacher knows what is most important about each topic.
- ♦ The teacher understands and appreciates differences between students and constructs learning proposals based on this.
- ♦ Evaluation should be coherent and inseparable from instruction.
- ♦ The teacher adjusts content, procedure, and results to the students' preparation, their interests, and learning profiles.
- ♦ Every student works with dignity. Students and teachers collaborate in the teaching process.

Source: Tomlinson (2001), p. 92.

Resources, however, are needed to personalize teaching. Some of these are as simple as hanging bridges during classroom teaching. For example, 'roping' an unmotivated student into an oral presentation on machines, using the car their parents drive or their own bike as examples of machines. Another option is to modify the evaluation format for students who have problems with expressing themselves in writing in order to facilitate a fairer evaluation. Other more complex and structured resources mean the use of personalization strategies, whether they be one-off or long term. For example, when a student falls behind because they have been sick one can create a personalized learning path for them, until they catch up with their studies, via a teaching contract or a personalized plan. One can also incorporate personalization strategies into the classroom dynamic in a long-term manner. In a rural classroom, with different levels, or for specific material which some students find difficult, one can predict the continuous use of personalized agendas or plans as yet another resource for guaranteeing that we develop learning processes in the classroom which take every student into account.

Based on this perspective, in the following section we will review some of these strategies, including agendas, teaching contracts, and personalized work plans.

2. What personalized-teaching modalities can be developed?

The following are the descriptions of some of the teaching strategies which allow one to personalize teaching for the student.

Agendas are personalized lists of tasks which a specific student must complete within a given time. They are designed by the teacher and kept in a specific place in the classroom (agenda box. They can include activities dealing with one or several topics. They can be made for every student or some of them. When agendas are designed for all the students in the same class, they should contain both similar elements (to guarantee the common) and different ones (to personalize), and should last for approximately two or three weeks. It is the students themselves who decide in which order they are to complete the various activities included in their personalized agenda. Given its versatility, one may assign different specific moments to the agenda during the school day. They can be used during first period, once per week, or as reinforcement activities after other required tasks have been done.

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Agendas give students the opportunity to study the topics being dealt with in the classroom through their connection to them. For example, in order to study fraction they can create agendas for the same class, adapted to the different levels in the classroom, but also connecting the proposed tasks to subjects or areas which students find interesting. Likewise, one can predict activities for working on fractions through music, baseball cards, the sale of pie slices, news about the local or regional economy, etc. Each student chooses the activities which allow them to achieve the proposed objectives in accordance with their interests.

This strategy also facilitates the teacher's work. While the students work on their agendas, the teacher has a great amount of freedom to move around the classroom, giving advice and verifying the individual progress of each student. They can also decide to take advantage of this time in order to form small student groups which have to work using certain guidelines or which have to receive direct instruction about a specific ability or concept (Tomlinson, 2001).

Learning contracts are agreements negotiated between the educator and the student which provide the latter with a certain degree of freedom when it comes to acquiring specific knowledge and skills in a given time. Some of these pacts "*also allow for the partial selection of the material to be studied, the working conditions and the mode of applying or expressing the conclusions. This type of strategy offers students the opportunity to work independently, using materials which, mostly, have been recommended by the teacher*" (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 156).

Teaching contracts are agreements, normally in writing, which facilitate a student dedicating themselves to and getting involved in a specific learning material. The pact guides the learning process, showing how to learn, and requiring the student be autonomous

during the learning process. In short, it is a commitment which is acquired through negotiation between teacher and student.

Before commencing with drafting a teaching contract, the following elements are required:

a) **The analysis of the situation:** This analysis allows for the mutual establishment of contract objectives. Student participation in defining the objectives is the first step in making them feel responsible and in motivating them.

b) **The rules of the game:** When drafting proposals, it is necessary to inform the student as to which elements are negotiable and which are not.

When designing the contract, it is also necessary to include:

1. **The contract-content proposal:** This must include how long it is to last, the material and structural methods, the type of final production, the help offered to and asked by the student. In other words, the contract must answer the following questions: when? how?, where?, with whom?, with what methods?

2. **The promises for its completion.** The contract should set out the positive consequences arising from its completion. It should also include the negative results (the teacher shall determine the activities to be completed and shall

3. establish their parameters), in the event that the conditions of the contract are not met.

4. **The signatures of the student and the teacher, binding each of them to the terms of the agreement.**

There are different types of personalized-teaching contracts, depending on its purpose and the participants involved. These include makeup, conflict resolution, project-creation, and evaluation.

According to the proposed goal, one may draft different **types of personalized-teaching contracts**: makeup, conflict resolution, project, and evaluation.

TYPES	FUNCTIONS
MAKEUP	Its purpose is to make up a specific topic in a relatively short period of time.
CONFLICT-RESOLUTION	Its purpose is to resolve a conflict or attitude problem.
PROJECT-CREATION.	Its purpose is to create a project. It may last a long time, but time has to be set aside for mini progress reports.
EVALUATION	Its purpose is to establish the evaluation criteria for a task or learning sequence for a specific student.

Personalized work plans are personal-work proposals in which each student can work on common aspects in the planning at their own pace and in accordance with their own level. Personalized work plans allow them to work on the same topic, with different proposals for each student (although there are often proposals shared by students). These are very useful when working on a topic or issue when one knows beforehand that there is a great amount of difference between students. It makes it possible for all of the students to advance, since it is based on their actual levels and it respects the rhythm of individual work. It is also of interest because students are responsible for their work; they learn to organize their

time independently, being conscience of what they are working on and learning to analyze themselves critically through self-evaluation.

In a personalized work plan, the student may select the activities they wish to do from a list established by the teacher, during a specific amount of time (normally one or two weeks), and complete them in the order they deem convenient. This is how, despite students working on the same content, not all of them have to do exactly the same (the same activities, the same exercises, the same problems, etc.), nor exactly with the same level of difficulty.

PRACTICAL CASE

The students are seated, doing work individually. On their desks they have their books, colored pencils, and different art material. At times some comment is overheard: "Mario, what elements related to the composition of vegetables have you put?" or "How are you drawing the different types of pruning?"

The teacher explains to them that they are going to work on the same material individually, but not alone. They compare the activity to a family at a restaurant. The menu is the same for everyone, but each student adjusts it to their tastes, needs, and appetites. Although there are similarities, there are also differences in terms of what they eat. Once this has been explained, the teacher provides them with material with the work plan and a written proposal which specifies the different activities which have been established for different students.

Thus, each student advances at their own pace. Everyone works on the same topic, but the type and quality required may vary. The general objectives are the same, but some of these can be prioritized or adapted in accordance with the characteristics and needs of the students. The fact that this is based on a general structure, common to all, makes it possible for students to share questions, material, etc. Likewise, it does not favor one student over another; they all learn the same, although not to the same degree.

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3. How can we put it into practice?

The different formats of the three previously-seen strategies are included in this section in order to facilitate their use.

AGENDA FORMAT

This is an agenda for only one topic, designed for a small group of students; these can personalize their learning by selecting those activities they identify the most with.

Personal agenda of…………………………………………………………………………………
Start date ……………………………………………………………………………………………

ACTIVITY COMPLETION DATE	ACTIVITY	SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS
	Look for news about a volcanic eruption	Analyze where it occurred, how it has affected the surrounding population and environment, as well as how long the eruption lasted for.
	Read the book you have chosen on volcanoes	Record your progress in writing.
	Create a deck of HyperCard which show how volcanoes function.	Make sure the scientific data is accurate and that you use the computer correctly
	Investigate in order to write an article on the location of volcanoes in our scientific magazine. Write the article. Revise it with the editor. Redo, if necessary.	Keep an eye out for proper writing and punctuation. Do not let it negatively affect your ability to organize your ideas.
	Interview someone who has lived through a volcanic eruption.	Identify the main ideas and categorize the information together into subject blocks

CONTRACT FORMAT

Here is a teaching contract for making up homework. Maite has observed that in her classroom there is a student who has not achieved the objectives proposed in their personalized work plan. She has decided to design the following contract in the form of a document which includes a negotiated agreement between teacher and student.

Situation: multilevel classroom in a rural school. Student who has not passed the evaluation of a module dealing with competence in foreign-language (English) communication. The student complains that the texts they work with are not interesting, saying they are alien to their interests and reality.

MAKEUP CONTRACT

I, XXX (student name), have not completed the foreign-language reading-comprehension activities. I have agreed, with my teacher, to make them up within a fifteen-day period. I shall complete the tasks detailed below three times per week.

I PROMISE TO,

- Make a dossier of the entire module
- Read 2 of the 4 texts proposed by the teacher, taking my interests into account. I myself shall select the 2 texts, answering the questions which accompany them.
- Write a composition on each of the topics included in the 2 selected texts.

 I REQUEST

Since I want to pass the module, that I have the possibility to consult my teacher before handing-in the work and that she guides me.

IF I ACHIEVE, the proposed goal, that I be allowed to advance and work with a classmate-group of my choosing. In the event that I DO NOT achieve the established objectives, I shall be obligated to present myself for makeup on the date and in the manner determined by my teacher.

Signed the ...

The teacher   The student

The deadline shall be the XX of XX, 2020

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PERSONALIZED PLAN FORMAT

Teaching unit……………………………………………………………………………………
Time period…………………………………………………………………………………

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO WORK ON?	Objectives	- -
	Contents	- -
HOW AM I GOING TO WORK ON IT?	Individual work	- - - -
	Group work to be done in class	- -
	Group work to be done outside of class	- -
WHAT IS EVALUATED?		
HOW IS IT EVALUATED?		
QUESTIONS		

REFERENCES

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