BE-IN: Best Innovative Practices for an Inclusive and Emotional Education to face early school leaving in Europe

BE-IN

STRATIFIED LEARNING and SEL

Some theoretical and methodological notes

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There is a lot of pressure on teachers, who need to use their prep

and class time to ensure their students are gaining all the content knowledge required by the state and by standardized assessments (INVALSI in ITALY). Teachers are often not afforded enough professional development to feel confident in teaching SEL skills on top of their primary curricular responsibilities. This skill set includes emotional intelligence skills such as self-regulation, prosocial behavior, wellness, mindfulness, resilience, decision-making, and empathy. CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, Goleman Rockfeller Growan) categorized five key SEL competencies:

- Self-Awareness: Understanding yourself

- Self-Management: Controlling impulses, stress, and emotions

- Social Awareness: Understanding the perspectives and feelings of others

- Relationship Skills: Communication, Cooperation, and Conflict resolution with others

- Responsible Decision Making: Identifying problems and brainstorming solutions

While many teachers do an excellent job of teaching these skills through classroom culture and modeling, there are often missing pieces, as these skills are not yet categorized and sequenced in the same way as traditional academic skills. In any case, most studies and articles say that SEL should be ideally embedded in the fabric of every classroom and the entire school culture. This means SEL should not only be taught as a standalone skillset through projects and specifically devoted moments but incorporated directly into your subjects' curricula. One way of doing this is personalization and stratification. Personalization responds to the need to take into consideration the different personalities and intelligence of the students, the aptitude of each one for learning, the motivation to study, differences from person to person, cognitive development, cognitive and learning styles, and socio-cultural background (Caon 2006: 11-17).
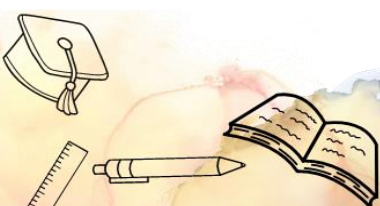
Personalization is implemented with respect to:

- teaching methodologies and strategies

- teaching techniques;

- the type of task

- the pace of lesson management and the spatial organization in the classroom setting.

STRATIFICATION

The concept of stratification (D'Annunzio, Della Puppa 2006: 147-148) refers to, in general, the possibility of proceeding in the classroom by proposing activities, tasks, or exercises organized in layers, ranging from the simplest to the most complex but which can be used simultaneously in the classroom, often in a single activity sheet or tasks. The layers, built ad hoc by the teacher, can correspond to different degrees of accessibility to a text or a meaning. Yet, they can also constitute interesting "lateral openings" in the direction of personalization.

Multiple interrelated factors allow us to define the complexity of a task. These factors concern the input, output, and to a larger extent, the student with their emotions, skills, preparation, and abilities. The complexity of the task can be traced back to the context, the text, or the task itself (Coonan 2002: 181-182).
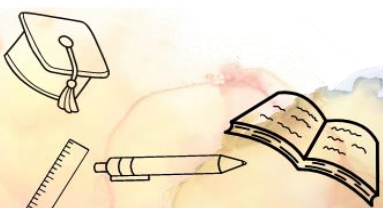
We work in three directions:

- stratifying the contents (the linguistic exponents, too, if needed).
- stratifying tasks
- didactic techniques to embed SEL in our teaching routine

The main strengths identified are:

- Contents and tasks tailored to each one. The stratification allows the personalization of learning.
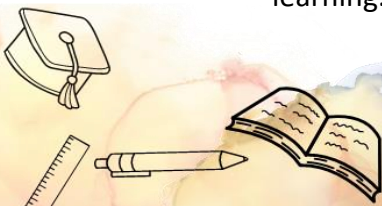
- Increased motivation for being able to choose which activities to carry out and to face the level of difficulty felt closest to one's abilities.

- Work on different linguistic structures according to the level and attention to the interpersonal function of language

- Stratified TESTS. For example, a sheet that is the same for everyone, with eligible tasks in the same sheet activities where different levels of difficulties are considered.

- Stratify teaching techniques.

- Use of the jigsaw methodology in mixed groups. Each pupil receives their own (layered) tasks and performs the group task together with peers. The students' different tasks are all essential to complete the general task. If there are doubts or questions, they first try to resolve them within the group. Here the teacher has a supervisory function and intervenes as little as possible (except in cases of conflict or personal blocking by some pupils). At the end of the individual work, it's time for sharing: the members of each group complete the sheet for the group together (one copy per group). It is a common task that uses all the words and information that emerge from the individual work. The time you spend on SEL skills has been shown to have a dramatic increase in academic engagement and performance, as well as a reduction of behavioral issues. It will take a fair amount of professional development/prep time, but it is extremely rewarding for students' and teachers' well-being.