

Responsive Instruction: Classroom Level Supports



Module 1: MULTI-LEVEL INSTRUCTION

Planning for Student Diversity

Preface

Saskatchewan is guided by a Student First approach which puts the student front and centre by focusing on each student's strengths, abilities, interests, and needs. To create intentional and responsive educational experiences in classrooms and in the school involves the entire school community, including students and families.

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education promotes the belief, attitude and approach of inclusion for meeting student needs. A strong commitment to inclusive education by the school community is demonstrated by inclusive educational practices that are part of the everyday school experiences of the student. Environments where students feel safe, accepted, respected and confident to engage in learning are essential to student success.

Supporting students through a needs-based service delivery model promotes the success of all students, including those who have learning needs that require supports to optimize learning opportunities. The needs-based model is a Student First strengths-based approach in which responsive instruction, interventions and supports are identified, planned and provided to meet student needs at the school and classroom level, through targeted and/or group approaches, and at an intensive individual level. The needs-based model recognizes that a student's needs change over time and that individualized, flexible and responsive supports are required.

Multi-Level Instruction: Planning for Student Diversity is part of a series of modules that provide examples of responsive instruction to support student learning. **This module focuses on differentiating instruction through multi-level teaching approaches.**

Supporting documents and resources can be found throughout the module by clicking on the underlined term, phrase or title.

Multi-Level Instruction

Multi-level instruction was an area of study by the Whole Schooling Consortium in the early 2000s when schools were focusing on implementing inclusive practices. Since that time, many of the principles that underlie this instructional approach have become part of everyday instructional practices. Multi-level instruction is an example of how teachers implement the Adaptive Dimension to adjust instruction so that learning is meaningful and appropriate for all learners in a classroom.

When teachers plan based on the strengths and needs of all learners, students do not lose interest from a lack of challenge or disengage from a lesson that is too difficult or frustrating (Inclusive Schools Network, 2011). This type of planning allows for individual differences so that all students work towards the same learning outcomes. Teachers need to consider the complexity of concepts, the type of thinking required to comprehend those concepts and the students' readiness or entry point. Some students may require the challenge of abstract

concepts, whereas others may need concrete examples to assist them in their thinking processes. Multi-level instruction allows all students to successfully participate in classroom lessons and activities.

Authentic multi-level instruction is based on the 14 principles that were identified by Peterson, Hittie and Tamor (2002).

Multi-level Instruction	
Principle	What the Principle Means
Authentic learning	Teaching is grounded in tasks that serve a real purpose. Students become motivated in the learning process if the tasks make sense and are valued by the students.
Multiple levels	Students are engaged in 'just right' learning activities that allow them to function at their level of ability, yet are challenged in their zone of proximal development to continue growing and learning.
Scaffolding	Students are given support and assistance to move from their present level of functioning to the next level.
Higher order thinking	Teachers frame inquiry questions and assignments for learning in ways that involve all students in higher order thinking while allowing students to approach the projects at various levels.
Inclusive, heterogeneous grouping	Teachers intentionally structure their class so that students with different abilities and learning styles work together in small or large groups or in pairs. Groupings are formed by interest, choice and self-selection of 'just right' work rather than on ability.
Integrated skill learning	Teachers address skill development as students work on authentic tasks by conducting whole class instruction or mini-lessons to groups or individual students on specific skills needed to accomplish learning tasks.
Focus on meaning and function	Teachers focus on learning and informational skills (the pursuit of knowledge) that have meaning in the lives of students.
Multi-modal	Teachers provide options for students to obtain information and demonstrate their learning.
Building on student strengths	Students' strengths are recognized, celebrated and built upon. Teachers offer choices of activities that draw on areas of strength.
Fostering respect	Teachers foster respect by being good role models inside and outside of the classroom, helping students to obtain information and providing students the opportunity to make choices and decisions.
Student interests, choices, power and voice	Teachers implement strategies that ensure students have their voices heard, assure them that their opinions matter and their work is respected.
Collaborative learning	Students provide leadership and mutual assistance to one another in the learning process. Students are explicitly and systematically taught

	to help, support and challenge one another as part of a community of learners.
Reflection	Teachers provide opportunities for open-ended, reflective responses rather than questions calling for the right answer. Students are taught to use a critical, reflective stance in their work.
Growth and effort-based learning	Students' accomplishments are not solely based on meeting curricular outcomes. Effort and progress of individual students is recognized and celebrated.

Multi-Level Instructional Strategies

There are instructional approaches that teachers use every day that incorporate the philosophy and principles of multi-level teaching. These types of instructional approaches provide a way for teachers to teach concepts or skills to the class while meeting individualized student needs. The following approaches illustrate how authentic multi-level teaching is naturally embedded in regular procedures and routines:

- reading workshop;
- writer's notebook; and,
- open-ended tasks.

The more that teachers use authentic instructional strategies and intentionally build into these multi-level learning opportunities, the richer the learning environment, the greater progress of students, the fewer specialized adaptations were needed, and the more time and energy the teacher had for supporting student learning.

(Peterson, Hittie & Tamor, 2002, p.12)

Reading Workshop

"You teach. You model. You let them practice with you watching. And then you send them off to read what they choose to read. And as they read, you circulate, checking to see if they are applying what you've just taught."

Beers & Probst, 2017, p. 131

Reading workshop, or focused silent reading, can be defined as an organized set of language and literacy experiences designed to help students become better readers (Beers & Probst, 2017). Teachers decide on how to best design and organize language and literacy experiences based on the strengths, needs and interests of their students. A reading workshop typically consists of four major components:

- mini-lesson;
- independent reading;
- conferring and small-group work; and,
- sharing what was read.

Mini-lesson: The teacher begins reading workshop with a short whole class lesson, usually 10 to 15 minutes long, in which the teacher models a reading skill or strategy that will support students to strengthen their reading skills.

Independent Reading: Students read independently to achieve the three goals of proficient reading: comprehension, engaged reading and fluency (Saskatchewan Provincial Reading Team, 2015). During independent reading, students read self-chosen texts that are usually within their “just right” range. However, student choices should not be dependent on reading levels, but should reflect a wide range of texts and genre. For students who are learning to read, or are learning to read English, the choices include age appropriate picture books, well-illustrated texts or graphic novels, and books in the student’s home language.

Conferring and Small Group Work: While the class reads independently, the teacher conducts individual conferences or leads small groups. This allows the teacher to tailor instruction to meet the needs and goals of individual learners (Calkins & Tolan, 2010). Each encounter should help students to understand themselves as a reader, focus on improving a skill or strategy and set individual goals for reading.

Sharing What Was Read: Students can share what they are reading in many different ways, including:

- talking about what was read with the teacher or a partner;
- drawing a picture about something read that was interesting, important or funny; and,
- sharing their thoughts, feelings, reactions and questions about characters, setting, plots, themes and other elements in a Reading Response Journal.

During reading workshop students are:

- engaging in reading that reflects real life, such as reading for entertainment or reading to learn;
- participating in meaningful communication about what they read;
- learning how to work together;
- setting goals and evaluating their own accomplishments;
- taking responsibility for their learning and supporting each other’s learning;
- setting their own pace while working but are expected to accomplish a series of tasks; and,
- making choices and carrying out assignments (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

The purpose of reading workshop is to involve students, at their entry point, in authentic multi-level reading tasks that encourage them to actively engage in reading while strengthening and building upon existing skills.

How Does This Instructional Approach Meet the 14 Principles of Authentic Multi-Level Instruction?

- **Authentic Learning:** Students determine the purpose for reading and choose texts that they are interested in reading.
- **Multiple Levels:** Students choose from a wide range of texts at various reading levels.
- **Scaffolding:** Teachers model reading strategies, students practice with teacher and other students during group activities and, when ready, apply the strategies during independent reading.
- **Higher order thinking:** Students are taught higher order thinking skills and, if required, are supported through collaborative group or partner activities.
- **Inclusive, heterogeneous grouping:** All students are taught using the same instructional structure. Groupings are flexible and formed on reading behaviours such as solving words, monitoring and correcting, rather than ability or reading level.
- **Integrated skill learning:** Teachers address skill development through mini-lessons to the whole class, groups and individual students on specific skills or concepts.
- **Focus on meaning and function:** The teacher focuses on skills and concepts to support students to become independent readers within each student's zone of proximal development.
- **Multi-modal:** Teachers use reading material at various levels, in other languages, braille or large print, or use text to speech software. Students share what they read by responding in their first language, drawing or using speech to text software.
- **Building on student strengths:** The teacher acknowledges student strengths and celebrates student progress during small group or individualized conferences.
- **Fostering respect:** Students are offered the opportunity to make choices and decisions about the books they read.
- **Student interests, choices, power and voice:** Students choose their own books and share their ideas and opinions.
- **Collaborative learning:** Students have the opportunity to work with partners or small groups.
- **Reflection:** Students are taught and encouraged to use a critical, reflective stance when responding to the material that has been read.
- **Growth and effort-based learning:** Teachers consider each student's zone of proximal development and celebrate effort and progress.

Want to Learn More?

Calkins, L. (2000). *The art of teaching reading*. New York, NY: Pearson.

Harvey, S. & Goudvis, A. (2017). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension for understanding, engagement, and building knowledge, grades K-8*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Serravallo, J. (2015). *The reading strategies book: Your guide to developing skilled readers*. Portsmouth, US: Heinemann.

Writer's Notebook

A writer's notebook is a blank book for students to collect their ideas about writing. The notebook provides students with a safe place - no grades, no one correcting their grammar - to practise writing on a regular basis until they are ready to step into the larger, more difficult task of writing for a wider audience. It is a place for students to generate text, find ideas, build writing stamina and practise what they know about spelling and grammar. Ideas from the notebook can be used to support the prewriting process (Writer's Workshop) in a very personal manner.

A writer's notebook creates a place for students (and writers) to save their words – in the form of a memory, a reflection, a list, a rambling of thoughts, a sketch, or even a scrap of print taped on the page. A notebook can become whatever the writer makes it to be.

(Buckner, 2005, p.4)

A writer's notebook is a place for students to:

- store their feelings, observations, ideas and opinions;
- gather ideas for future writing;
- record their reactions;
- collect ideas and memories; and,
- write for themselves.

A writer's notebook is not:

- a diary;
- a reading journal; or,
- a place to write for an audience.

What could be inside student writers' notebooks:

- small details that intrigue them;

- what amazes/surprises/angers them;
- memories;
- lists;
- photos, articles, ticket stubs or other artifacts;
- their own sketches, drawings or doodles;
- what they wonder about;
- quotes or inspiring passages from books or poems that mean something to them; or,
- snatches of conversation that they may have overheard (Fletcher, 2010).

Students may need strategies that help them find things to write about in their notebooks. These strategies help students to look at their lives and experiences to find ideas and stories for their writing. Unlike a prompt, these strategies can be used again and again in different contexts with different results. There are many strategies from which teachers can choose to unlock the writer in their students (Buckner, 2005; Calkins & Martinelli, 2006; Fletcher, 2003). In her book, *Notebook Know-How: Strategies for the Writer's Notebook* (2005), Aimee Buckner provides examples of strategies to get students writing. Among her strategies she includes the following:

Strategy	How	Why
Launching Strategy: History of a Name	Students write about their name, nickname or their family name. This may include what they like or do not like about their name, where their name came from and who named them.	This helps students to understand that the naming of something or someone is significant for writers.
Launching Strategy: Writing From a List	Students make a quick list based on a self-selected topic. List topics might include things that students are experts on, best events in their lives, worst events or favourite words. Students choose a topic and then write an entry on that idea.	Students are writing about their own personal experiences.
Fluency Strategy: Writing off Literature	After listening to a read aloud (picture books, short stories, poems or novels) by the teacher, students are asked to write about what comes to their minds.	Good literature causes students to think, relate and dwell on the story. Students are encouraged to write about their own thoughts and connections that were made while listening.

The writer's notebook is an instructional approach that supports all learners to capture their ideas in multiple, non-threatening ways and may provide an avenue to get reluctant writers writing. Some students may be drawing pictures, some maybe labelling a photograph while others may be writing pages about something they experienced.

How Does This Instructional Approach Meet the 14 Principles of Authentic Multi-Level Instruction?

- **Authentic Learning:** Students write from their own ideas, personal experiences and perspectives.
- **Multiple Levels:** Students collect ideas based on their entry point, experiences and interests. Some students record ideas by writing while other students may draw pictures.
- **Scaffolding:** Teachers model writing strategies and skills, students practice in their notebooks and may share their ideas with other students.
- **Higher order thinking:** Students are taught how to review and critique their writing. They are constantly being challenged to improve their writing style, for instance by using new and unfamiliar vocabulary or writing from a different perspective.
- **Inclusive, heterogeneous grouping:** All students are taught using the writer's notebook approach.
- **Integrated skill learning:** Teachers address skill development through mini-lessons to the whole class, groups and individual students on specific skills or concepts.
- **Focus on meaning and function:** The teacher focuses on skills and concepts to support students to become independent writers within each student's zone of proximal development.
- **Multi-modal:** Students can share what they have written by responding using their first language, drawing or using speech to text applications.
- **Building on student strengths:** The teacher acknowledges student strengths and celebrates student progress during small group or individualized conferences.
- **Fostering respect:** Students are offered the opportunity to make decisions about what they want to write about.
- **Student interests, choices, power and voice:** Students choose what they want to write about based on their own experiences, interests and perspectives. Pre-writing strategies are open-ended and personal.
- **Collaborative learning:** Students have the choice to collaborate with partners or small groups.
- **Reflection:** Students are taught and encouraged to reflect on their writing.
- **Growth and effort-based learning:** Teachers consider each student's zone of proximal development and celebrate effort and progress accordingly.

Want to Learn More?

Buckner, A. (2013). *Nonfiction notebooks: Strategies for informational writing*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Fletcher, R. (2003). *A writer's notebook: Unlocking the writer within you*. New York, NY: HarperTrophy.

Serravallo, J. (2017). *The writing strategies book: Your everything guide to developing skilled writers*. Portsmouth, US: Heinemann.

Open-Ended Tasks

Example: A classroom teacher held up a pair of muddy old boots and then asked the class to draw a picture of who might wear these boots.

Open-ended tasks are tasks to which a variety of answers are possible, rather than a single, correct answer. Such tasks allow students to explore and express their ideas and knowledge at their entry point as they move towards meeting outcomes. Open-ended

tasks are used to initiate and guide inquiries that lead to deep understandings about topics, issues, challenges and problems in areas of study across all curricula. An open-ended task encourages students to share and express their thinking, learn from each other, build upon prior knowledge and challenge misconceptions.

One way that teachers can incorporate open-ended tasks into their lessons is by implementing open-ended questioning techniques. This type of questioning:

- invites genuine and relevant inquiry into key ideas and core content;
- provides for thoughtful, lively discussion, sustained inquiry and new understanding and leads to more questions;
- requires students to consider alternatives, weigh evidence, support their ideas and justify their answers;
- stimulates vital, ongoing rethinking of ideas, assumptions or prior lessons;
- sparks meaningful connections with prior learning, personal experiences and ways of knowing; and,
- recurs naturally, creating opportunities for transfer to other situations and subjects.

(adapted from Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)

This method of questioning stimulates language use, acknowledges that there can be many solutions to one problem, affirms students' ideas, encourages creative thinking and invites

genuine inquiry. Open-ended questions can be used across all subject areas and can easily be incorporated into daily lessons.

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questioning techniques can support or be the focus of open-ended tasks. These broad-based questions invite meaningful responses from students at their entry point. Using open-ended questions is a way of differentiating a learning task since they challenge learners at different levels.

Open-ended questions can be used to review or reinforce concepts, start a lesson, be the main focus of a lesson or be used as bell work activities. Teachers can support students with limited language skills through modeling, parallel talk, repetition, extension, simplifying or rephrasing the question.

Marian Small (2017) uses open-ended questions to differentiate in math. She states that in math a good open-ended question:

- engenders thinking;
- focuses on important math;
- allows entry to all learners;
- leads to enriched mathematical conversation;
- extends strong learners; and,
- provides assessment for learning information.

Here is an example of an open-ended math question and possible student responses:

The answer is 150.		
What could the question(s) have been?		
Student A	Student B	Student C
100 + 50 50 + 50 + 50 100 + 25 + 25	10 × 10 + 25 × 2 200 - 100 + 15 + 35 25 × 6 Half of 300	How many quarters in \$37.50? How many minutes in 2 and half hours? 600 divided by 4 30 × 10 - 200 + 50

As the example illustrates, students respond at their entry point. All of the responses demonstrate an understanding of the task but at various levels. Students can support the learning of others in the class by sharing and discussing their thought processes. These types of activities help to expand conversations and understanding regarding a particular problem or inquiry.

How Does This Instructional Approach Meet the 14 Principles of Authentic Multi-Level Instruction?

- **Authentic Learning:** Students understand that everyday problems or inquiries can have multiple solutions.
- **Multiple Levels:** Students provide solutions at their own entry point based on their own understanding, experiences and background knowledge.
- **Scaffolding:** Teachers model, students brainstorm and share their ideas with other students.
- **Higher order thinking:** Students are challenged to deepen their understanding by comparing their thinking to others.
- **Inclusive, heterogeneous grouping:** All students are taught using the same instructional strategies and materials.
- **Integrated skill learning:** Teachers or students can pose open-ended questions in other content areas.
- **Focus on meaning and function:** The teacher focuses on skills and concepts to support students to become independent problem solvers using real-life problems.
- **Multi-modal:** Students represent and share their thinking in multiple ways.
- **Building on student strengths:** Students' strengths are recognized, celebrated and built upon through small and large group activities, and through individual conferences.
- **Fostering respect:** Students are offered the opportunity to make choices and decisions about how they want to address a problem and provide a solution or solutions.
- **Student interests, choices, power and voice:** The teacher can create activities based on the students' interests and real-life experiences, and provide choice as to how students share their understanding.
- **Collaborative learning:** Students have the opportunity to work with other students, listen to different ways of thinking and come to a consensus on the best way to solve a problem.
- **Reflection:** Students are taught and encouraged to be reflective thinkers and take chances.
- **Growth and effort-based learning:** All participation and contributions are celebrated.

Want to Learn More?

Daniels, H. (2017). *The curious classroom: 10 structures for teaching with student –directed inquiry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Small, M. (2017). *Good questions: Great ways to differentiate mathematics instruction in the standards-based classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Sullivan, P. & Lilburn, P. (2002). *Good questions for math teaching: Why ask them and what to ask, Grades K-6*. Sausalito, CA: Math Solutions Publications.

Many teachers use the instructional approaches referred to in this document. A deep understanding of these instructional approaches provides teachers opportunities to plan for the diversity of needs within a classroom without singling out specific students. Friend and Bursuck (2006) state that “reasonable adaptations are those that maximize student success without taking a disproportionate amount of time or diminishing the education of other students in the class” (p. 183). Multi-level instruction is a way for teachers to make adaptations while fostering positive learning experiences for students in a respectful learning environment.

Reflective questioning provides educators with the opportunity to think deeply about their educational ideologies and practices and how they impact students.

Multi-Level Instruction
Reflective Questions and Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Have I thought about the strengths and needs of all the students in my class?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Has my planning ensured that all students can participate in the lessons and activities based on their entry point, strengths and needs?○ Do my activities allow students to explore the subject matter, generate discussion and support peer-to-peer interaction?○ Are my lessons and activities connected to curricular and/or individualized outcomes?● Do my questioning techniques include questions at various levels of understanding so that all students can contribute?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Are my students being encouraged and given time to ask their own questions?● Have I thought about how I am going to guide class discussions from my class?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Have I planned for <u>wait time</u>?○ How will I support students who rarely offer a response or participate? How will I encourage or support them to participate?○ How will I keep my class on topic? How will I respectfully handle a student who dominates the discussion?

Helpful Ministry Documents and Resources:

- [Actualizing a Needs-Based Model](#)
- [The Adaptive Dimension for Saskatchewan K-12 Students](#)
- [EAL, Immigration and Languages](#)
- [Inclusive Education](#)
- [Saskatchewan Reads](#)
- [Stewart Resources Centre](#)
- [Supporting All Learners](#)

Bibliography

- Beers, K. & Probst, R.E. (2017). *Disrupting thinking: Why how we read matters*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Buckner, A. (2005). *Notebook know-how: Strategies for the writer's notebook*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Buckner, A. (2013). *Nonfiction notebooks: Strategies for informational writing*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Calkins, L. (2000). *The art of teaching reading*. New York, NY: Pearson.
- Calkins, L. & Martinelli, M. (2006). *Launching the writing workshop: Grades 3-5*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Calkins, L. & Tolan, K. (2010). *A guide to the reading workshop: Grades 3-5*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Daniels, H. (2017). *The curious classroom: 10 structures for teaching with student-directed inquiry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Fletcher, R. (2003). *A writer's notebook: Unlocking the writer within you*. New York, NY: HarperTrophy.
- Fletcher, R. (2010). Tips for young writers. Retrieved from <http://www.ralphfletcher.com/tips.html>.
- Fountas, I. & Pinnell, G. (2001). *Guiding readers and writers: Teaching comprehension, genre, and content literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Friend, M. & Bursuck, W. (2006). *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers* (4th ed). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Government of Saskatchewan. (n.d.). *Student First*. Retrieved from <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/education-and-learning/student-first>.
- Harvey, S. & Goudvis, A. (2017). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension for understanding, engagement, and building knowledge, grades K-8*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Inclusive Schools Network. (2011). *Using Multi-level instruction for a classroom of diverse learners*. Retrieved from <https://inclusiveschools.org/using-multi-level-instruction-for-a-classroom-of-diverse-learners/>.

- Peterson, P., Hittie, M. & Tamor, L. (2002). *Authentic, multi-level teaching: Teaching children with diverse academic abilities together well*. Retrieved from <http://www.wholeschooling.net/WS/WSPress/Authentic%20MultiLvl%206-25-02.pdf>.
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2015). *Actualizing a needs-based model*. Regina, SK: Author.
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2017). *Inclusive education*. Regina, SK: Author.
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2017). *The Adaptive Dimension for Saskatchewan K-12 Students*. Regina, SK: Author.
- Saskatchewan Provincial Reading Team. (2015). *Saskatchewan reads: A companion document to the Saskatchewan English language arts curriculum grades 1, 2, 3*. Retrieved from <https://saskatchewanreads.wordpress.com>.
- Serravallo, J. (2015). *The reading strategies book: Your guide to developing skilled readers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Serravallo, J. (2017). *The writing strategies book: Your everything guide to developing skilled writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Small, M. (2017). *Good questions: Great ways to differentiate mathematics instruction in the standards-based classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Sullivan, P. & Lilburn, P. (2002). *Good questions for math teaching: Why ask them and what to ask, Grades K-6*. Sausalito, CA: Math Solutions Publications.
- Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.