

# Plant Deep

## OPENING

**No matter what you do, some students seem to get it, and some don't.**

You prepared the lesson (plan). Maybe you designed the slides into a beautiful presentation. You know way more than what you're going to present, and have rehearsed your explanation to possible questions coming up. You deliver and yet...

Some students are all in for it. And some are lost on the way. Where is the fault?

Let me tell you a story, in a parable of many centuries ago.

## Parable of the Sower

**A farmer went out to sow his seed.**

*“As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”*

One farmer. One kind of seed. One method. Why different results?

Imagine you're the farmer. And the seed is your teaching. The sowing is your method. Could it be that different results come from various type of soil? Let's hear the interpretation, and we can already think about students.

## Soil #1, Near the Road The Distracted Learner

**“Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, the evil one comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.”**

You know this student (some call it In-One-Ear-Out-The-Other).

They are physically present in the classroom, and mentally elsewhere. They are watching a screen behind the textbook, daydreaming about lunch, or simply somewhere else entirely. The teaching lands, and something immediately takes it away. As said, “in one ear, out the other”.

We can call this student “the distracted learner”. The path is packed earth — hardened, impermeable. The seed has nowhere to go.

Our focus should not be the birds (the evil one), but rather the condition of the soil.

## Soil #2, Rocky Ground The Enthusiastic but Shallow Learner

**“Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.”**

This student is a delight in the classroom: they are in, responding, raising their hand, engaging enthusiastically. You think that this one has it.

But (as there’s always a but), the time for homework comes. Think of the project, the practical session, the next exam. That is when they seem to disappear. All that enthusiasm simply vanishes.

This enthusiastic but shallow learner absorbs the information to the surface, without getting it deeper. They resonate, they mirror, they repeat, but can’t apply. When difficulty arrives, there is no mine (or source) from which to draw.

## Soil #3, Among Thorns The Overwhelmed Learner

**“Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”**

This is a hardworking student, not distracted, nor shallow. You can see she has capacity, she is present, she is in. But she’s crowded by the (many) competing demands of her lives: school, music, a younger brother, anxiety, pressure to achieve across too many fronts. Maybe a difficult home, she’s struggling with an identity that feels pulled in too many directions.

The seed sprouts, and no one can’t say she’s not trying. But it cannot win against the weeds. Their issue is not with the roots, is with what’s allowed drawing from the same (limited) source. In their life there is always another must, a new deadline, another course, a pressing priority.

The danger is suffocation.

## Soil #4, Good Soil The Integrated Learner

**“Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”**

We’ll call this student “the integrated learner”. They receive the teaching, absorb it, question it, connect it to what they already know, and carry it outward. Even more (imagine!) they can explain it to someone else, being able to apply it in more than one context.

They remember it not because they memorised it, but because it became part of how they see the world. This is deep learning, not for a grade, not for outwards look. The change comes from inside, it is a transformation.

Notice the multiplications: 30, 60, 100. They are not all the same. Maybe a stone is still there. Maybe some weeds still shadow a bit. The return is not uniform, as we are not machines. Deep learning produces different outcomes in different students. Accordingly, our measure of success cannot be a single standard, but rather honouring the range of what growth looks like.

## A word of caution

As teachers we are trained to focus on the content of our teaching, on the methods, on performance. And surely we spend hours on curriculum, lesson plans, slides, delivery, activities, assessments. Going late to sleep, waking up early. Working extra hours. All good, the quality of our seed really matters.

But the Parable of the Sower invites and challenges us to shift (a paradigm shift). What if the soil makes all the difference? Once again, this is not about finding faults, but rather focus objectively: don't lower your expectations, don't excuse poor learning. Rather understand why all seed doesn't bring the same result. When we know why a student is not receiving the teaching, we can respond with something more useful than frustration.

To recap: we cannot always control the birds, we cannot break all the rocks, nor clear all the thorns and weeds. OK, what can we, then?

But we can:

Become more curious about what is happening beneath the surface of our students' lives.  
Design for depth, not just coverage.  
Create classroom cultures where differences, and obstacles, and growth at various stages are part of the normal way of life.  
Be honest about what we are asking students to receive, and whether we have prepared the ground at all.

In the end, our invitation is for you to mind the soil — your students.

While we may tend to ask "Why didn't they get it?", we should rather think of: "What kind of ground are they standing on, and what can I do about it?"

## CLOSING — The Farmer (Teacher) Goes On

The farmer does not stop, but year after year, season after season, semester after semester he works. He never waits until all conditions are ideal, but keeps sowing: across the path, over the rocks, among the thorns, and onto the good soil.

In our classrooms there will always be all types of soil. But who know, maybe next semester, you focus on the soil. Plant deep: make sure it's not on the road, nor on the rocky soil, nor among the thorns.

Plant deep, in a good soil you care about. It will be for generational impact. 30, 60, 100.

## Questions for reflection

### Maybe for Interactive Session.

What if we apply it to teachers?  
What if we replace students with teachers. What are our roads, rocks, thorns?  
Why do we get 30, 60 or 100 times growth?