

Adaptive Teaching

By Katherine Fas

All pupils learn at different rates and require different levels of support to achieve so it's important we adapt our teaching to meet the needs of all learners in the class.

Before I deliver a new topic, I have always found a good starting point is to consider where the learners have come from. Looking at the national curriculum, or progression maps informed me of what pupils will have already covered in other years groups that link to the topic I was about to teach. This supported me in pitching the sequence of lessons correctly as it helped to identify what existing skills I could build upon.

The next step was to use any available information I had that could tell me what the children's learning needs would be in this area and more generally. Knowing my pupils was key here. Sometimes, I would give pupils a task to assess their confidence and competence in the given subject and other times I would use information that I already knew about the children to identify who might require additional support. Before teaching a topic, I would identify a selection of children to deliver a pre-teaching session to. These children would be pupils who lacked critical prior knowledge or required content to be further broken down. Pre-teaching would allow them to be at a similar starting point to their peers when new material was introduced to the whole class. One of the main things I focused on in these sessions was the vocabulary I would be covering in the topic. Research has found that many gaps in attainment can be linked to vocabulary comprehension and when these gaps are narrowed, pupils have a much greater chance of success.

During the lessons themselves, I ensured I made use of well-designed resources to ensure the learners were supported to achieve the learning goal. I also found it really useful to give myself and any other additional adult a specific role in the lessons by working with a target group to either provide additional support or challenge to pupils. I would often start by working with pupils that received pre-teaching, to ensure they were supported in embedding the content I delivered into practice. However, I would always ensure that these target groups were not static and built a culture of acceptance by reinforcing that these groups were fluid and any child could be in them at any given time.

How did I know which pupils to work with during a lesson?

I used a variety of formative assessment strategies, such as questioning, throughout the lesson to ensure that myself, my teaching assistant and the pupils themselves were aware of the progress they were making against the success criteria. This way, at any point in the lesson, I could shift my focus to a different target group. For example, if pupils I supported at the beginning of the lesson gained confidence, I could work with children who faced a different barrier in their learning. A particularly good strategy I have found when it comes to assessing who might need further support is the use of hinge questions. These questions quickly and effectively informed me and my learners of how well they understood something at a point in the lesson when a quick intervention could be implemented to support pupils to succeed in their next steps.

Towards the end of the lesson, I always found it useful for the children to self-assess against the learning goal by placing their books in colour coded trays. I personally used a traffic-light system, where green was used if they felt ready to go, amber if they were almost there and red if they were unsure. Generally, due to the work that had been done in the lesson to ensure pupils were on-track, there were few children who were left completely in the dark, but it still happens and it's important for pupils to ensure they feel confident at sharing this!

Asking pupils to self-assess throughout, but especially towards the end of the lesson, helped me to prioritise my marking and feedback. Reading through the work and identifying common misconceptions present in groups of pupils helped to plan how I would group pupils in the next lesson.

In summary, the 5 greatest tools for me in adapting my lessons for the learners were:

- Knowing the children inside and out!
- Prioritising assessment opportunities throughout the lessons
- Planning for questioning that will support and extend
- Ensuring a fluid group structure
- Use marking and feedback opportunities effectively and consistently, ensuring that these are built into lesson and classroom culture