

Flexible grouping - Secondary History

By Robert Gardner

Adaptive teaching is that on the spot, responsive adaptation of a lesson, or part of a lesson, in response to pupils who maybe need more support, scaffolding or modelling, and without which they would be unable to move on to the next step of the lesson because they haven't grasped something or are making too many errors. A key message here is don't be a slave to a lesson plan! You may have to adapt or modify your lesson based on pupils' needs - after all, a plan cannot account for every eventuality in your lesson.

How you adapt your lesson will be inextricably linked to the assessment for learning that will be taking place during your lesson. For example, questioning might reveal misunderstandings or errors that need to be corrected before moving on. If we see learning as a stepped process of progression, then it's clear why we would have to adapt our teaching if this situation occurred.

There are many assessment for learning strategies that I use during a lesson to gauge pupil knowledge, for example, I often use question and response using mini whiteboards, or using targeted questioning, whereby I question a selection of pupils to sample responses from around the class.

In a recent lesson, I asked pupils to use mini whiteboards so I could assess the whole class during Q and A. Pupils used their whiteboards to practise a range of punctuation accurately with the ultimate aim of writing a descriptive paragraph that demonstrated they could punctuate effectively. Because I could see what the pupils had written, I was able to identify those pupils that needed further scaffolding to use semi colons. I knew they would require further support during the activity to avoid misconceptions or errors becoming embedded in their writing.

As a result, I bought those three pupils around a desk to work with me, while the rest of the class moved on to the independent descriptive writing task. It was very important for me to adapt the lesson progression for this group of pupils in order to support them to be successful in the next steps of the lesson. If I had ignored the errors, then they wouldn't have been able to achieve the specific aim of the writing. Their journey through the lesson had to be modified on the spot based on the assessment evidence.

Through the use of flexible grouping, the identified pupils were able to successfully achieve the aim of the writing task, something which would have been impossible for them if I hadn't provided additional support and scaffolds based on their specific needs and knowledge gaps.