

Mentor handbook | S11 | Adapting lessons to meet pupils' needs

Study

Get yourself into a strong position to mentor your teacher by working through the following:

Key takeaways for this module

In considering how to adapt their teaching to meet pupils' needs, your teacher needs to know that:

- > The value of formative assessment is in allowing teachers to understand and respond to pupil needs.
- > Targeting learning styles is ineffective and individualised tasks for all pupils are prohibitively time-consuming.
- > Adaptations should focus on the misconceptions and knowledge gaps identified, particularly when they are common to many pupils.

[CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO S11](#)

[READ THE EVIDENCE SUMMARY](#)

Teaching challenge:

Mr Jones is using formative assessment regularly and becoming increasingly skilled in analysing what he learns from it. He is confident he can identify the knowledge gaps and misconceptions pupils face. However, he is uncertain how best to adapt lessons to meet pupils' needs. Should he create tailored activities and resources for individual pupils? How can he meet pupils' individual needs efficiently?

Key idea:

Teachers can use information about pupil understanding and needs to target support at the whole class, groups and individuals.

Using information from assessments to adapt lessons

Mr Jones designs assessment tasks and analyses the information they provide to allow him to adapt his teaching to meet pupils' needs. When teachers know what their pupils have understood, and use this information to adapt their teaching, pupils' achievement increases (Speckesser et al., 2018). Mr Jones should also collect information about pupils needs and possible strategies, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, by working closely with colleagues including the SENCO, families and pupils. However, using information on pupil needs to adapt teaching is challenging as it requires teachers to decide how to respond rapidly and there are no perfect solutions. Pupils learn at different rates and require different levels of support. In any class, when seeking to understand pupil differences including levels of prior

knowledge and barriers to learning, at any one time some pupils will be ready to move on and others may need further support.

Learning styles and individualisation will not be effective or sustainable

Mr Jones could design a different lesson or task for every pupil, but this would be a mistake. Pupils have distinct learning preferences: some prefer to read, some would rather listen, some might prefer group activities. Mr Jones could try to create distinct activities for different groups. However, no evidence exists that tailoring learning to pupils' preferred learning styles is effective (Pashler, et al., 2008). The authors of this study were adamant that "limited education resources would better be devoted to adopting other educational practices that have a strong evidence base, of which there are an increasing number" (Pashler, et al., 2008, p.105).

Similarly, Mr Jones might try to design individual activities around individual pupils' current knowledge gaps or misconceptions. The problem with this approach is that it requires Mr Jones to spend a huge amount of time planning and setting out activities for individual pupils. It also robs individual pupils of the chance to benefit from the teacher's expertise by forcing them to overcome their knowledge gaps and misconceptions individually (Sadler, 2010). Mr Jones is more likely to be successful if he prioritises designing tasks to support the whole class or groups within it first. Once the majority are experiencing success, he can then responsively support groups and individuals during the lesson where this is feasible.

Common tasks and flexible grouping

Mr Jones can best meet the needs of individuals by identifying the needs which several pupils have in common. Mr Jones should still build relationships with individuals and seeks to support them with specific individual needs, such as seating visually impaired pupils at the front of the class and providing large print resources or providing a story about dinosaurs if he knows this will be particularly motivating for pupils who usually struggle to focus. However, many pupil needs are shared by the rest of the class: many misconceptions are common to pupils learning specific subjects so he can address them simultaneously.

For example, many pupils use apostrophes unnecessarily for words ending in a plural 's', add the numerators and denominators separately when adding fractions and believe that air tubes distribute air around the body. Likewise, Mr Jones is likely to find knowledge gaps which are shared among many pupils since they are based on not having been introduced to (or not recalling) past content. While Mr Jones can look for opportunities to work with misconceptions or knowledge gaps held by all pupils, if one individual pupil has a specific need, he can dedicate individual time to them.

Having identified the need of several pupils, Mr Jones may decide to:

- > **Work with the whole class:** Planning new explanations and additional learning tasks for the whole class. This gives him the opportunity to reiterate key ideas and give all pupils additional practice.
- > **Group pupils:** Putting pupils together into small groups based on shared need. For example, all pupils who got question seven wrong or who missed the last lesson. This kind of within-class grouping tends to prove effective and to benefit pupils at all levels (Steenbergen-Hu, et al., 2016). It enables groups of pupils to benefit from more of Mr Jones's time and expertise as he can explain a misconception or overcome a knowledge gap with all pupils who hold it at once. This also makes it a more efficient way for him to use his time. If an individual pupil has a specific need perhaps linked to special educational

needs or a disability, Mr Jones can devote additional time to them: his grouping of other pupils increases the time he can spend with the individuals who need it most.

Nuances and caveats

In adapting lessons – and particularly when working with small groups with specific misconceptions – Mr Jones should continue to convey his high expectations of pupils (Murdock-Perriera & Sedlacek, 2018).

Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities are likely to need additional levels of support. Mr Jones should seek specific strategies to support these pupils with specific learning barriers where appropriate, such that they can meet these high expectations e.g. sitting a visually impaired pupil at the front of the class and providing large print resources so that they can complete common class tasks successfully.

Teaching assistants can provide further support but they need to be prepared for the lesson by the teacher and used to supplement, rather than replace, the teacher (EEF, 2018). For example, the TA could support pupils to successfully correct the apostrophes in their work after the teacher has explained correct usage.

An ongoing dilemma for Mr Jones will be when to review a topic and when to carry on. His work identifying the most important core ideas within a subject and a topic should make it easier for him to prioritise this.

Another dilemma for Mr Jones is whether to give pupils feedback. As pupils benefit from accessing material several times to learn it (Pashler et al, 2007; Dunlosky et al., 2013), it will often be more efficient to use strategies like modelling content, not least as written feedback adds to teacher workload leading to learning gains, especially if it is not acted upon (Gibson et al, 2015; EEF, 2016).

SELECT A DEVELOPMENT AREA

Consider the development areas for this module (below). Then make a note of the area you plan to zoom in on and when you plan to visit so you can observe your teacher in this area. Familiarise yourself with the focused development areas. You will select one later when you observe your teacher.

Development areas	Focused development areas
Efficient feedback to meet needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher uses whole-class or group feedback where possible to address common misconceptions, gaps in knowledge and errors the class are making. > Teacher prioritises re-addressing core knowledge gaps during feedback.
Targeted support and challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher plans additional support for pupils they anticipate may benefit from it. > Teacher ensures pupils who show they have understood core content are able to apply their understanding and be challenged.
Adapting teaching over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher plans time efficiently into future lessons to address patterns of misconceptions, gaps in knowledge and errors made by pupils in assessments. > Teacher plans effective ways to tackle patterns of misconceptions, gaps in knowledge and errors made by pupils.

EXAMPLES OF PRECISE TARGETS

If your teacher is..	Then your precise target might be...
Not doing it at all...	Identify pupils who are likely to require additional support with understanding core knowledge and skills and plan time for them to have additional practice with your support.
Doing it but needs some improvement...	Plan how you might rephrase the question you have asked or provide a prompt for pupils who need additional support.
Doing it well and needs some stretch...	Plan how you would further break down the challenging aspects of the core knowledge and skills you are teaching for pupils who you anticipate will need additional support, if they show they need it.

Observe

Consider the following questions based on a short (approximately 15 minute) observation of your teacher.

What was your teacher's previous target? Are they meeting it? How do you know?

Thinking about the development area you have selected for this module, what is your teacher already doing well in this area? Which focused development area best aligns with what your teacher needs to get better at? What one precise target (bite-sized action) might you work with them on during your mentor meeting?

REMINDER: You can choose to stick with this previous target if they have not made enough progress. When moving on to a new precise target, you can select one from the table above or, if this doesn't fit your teacher's needs, you can write your own.

How will you model the target to your teacher to show them what good looks like? What questions will you ask to check your teacher understands the model? For example, 'How it is different from your current practice?' and 'What impact might it have on your practice and pupils?'

Reminder: Your model should help your teacher develop their ability in some of the following:

- > Be aware of common misconceptions and discuss with experienced colleagues how to help pupils master important concepts.
- > Adapt lessons, whilst maintaining high expectations for all.
- > Plan to connect new content with pupils' existing knowledge or provide additional pre-teaching if pupils lack critical knowledge.
- > Build in additional practice for pupils that need it.
- > Reframe questions to provide greater scaffolding or greater stretch.
- > Consider carefully whether intervening within lessons with individuals and small groups would be more efficient and effective than planning different lessons for different groups of pupils.

Next, meet with your teacher to work through the 'feedback' stage of instructional coaching.

References

- Education Endowment Foundation (2016). A marked improvement? A review of the evidence on written marking. bit.ly/ecf-eef11.
- Gibson, S., Oliver, L. & Dennison, M. (2015). Workload Challenge: Analysis of teacher consultation responses. Department for Education. bit.ly/ecf-gib.
- Murdock-Perriera, L. A. & Sedlacek, Q. C. (2018). Questioning Pygmalion in the twenty-first century: the formation, transmission, and attributional influence of teacher expectancies. *Social Psychology of Education*, 21(3), 691–707.
- Pashler, H., Bain, P. M., Bottge, B. A., Graesser, A., Koedinger, K., McDaniel, M. & Metcalfe, J. (2007). Organizing Instruction and Study to Improve Student Learning. US Department of Education.
- Pashler, H., McDaniel, M., Rohrer, D. & Bjork, R. (2008). Learning Styles: Concepts and Evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 9(3), 105-119.
- Sadler, D.R. (2010). Beyond feedback: developing student capability in complex appraisal. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(5), 535-550.
- Speckesser, S., Runge, J., Foliano, F., Bursnall, M., Hudson-Sharp, N., Rolfe, H., & Anders, J. (2018). Embedding Formative Assessment: Evaluation report and executive summary. Education Endowment Fund.
- Steenbergen-Hu, S., Makel, M.C. & Olszewski-Kubilius, P., 2016. What one hundred years of research says about the effects of ability grouping and acceleration on K–12 students' academic achievement: Findings of two second-order meta-analyses. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 849-899.
- Supovitz, J. (2013). The Linking Study: An Experiment to Strengthen Teachers' Engagement with Data on Teaching and Learning. CPRE Working Papers.
- Vescio, V., Ross, D. & Adams, A. (2007). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 80–91.