

What is meant by 'adapting teaching'?

'Adapting teaching' and 'adaptive teaching' are phrases that appear in Ofsted's 'Overview of research' document (2019), the new ITT Core Content Framework (2019) and the Early Career Framework (2019), but what do they mean? Are they the same as differentiation? How can we incorporate them into our practice in the classroom? And what do they mean for those pupils who have the highest levels of need?

Inclusive high-quality teaching

Before thinking about adapting or differentiating teaching, it is important to remember that the vast majority of pupils' needs will be met through effective, inclusive high-quality teaching. If your teaching is inclusive, and you use strategies such as dual coding, reducing cognitive load, creating a positive, emotionally supportive environment, breaking down complex material, careful sequencing, reducing distractions and so on, then you will find that fewer further adaptations will be needed for most pupils.

What is adaptive teaching?

Essentially, it begins by having the same learning intentions for the vast majority of pupils (with the possible exception of 'some learners with the highest levels of SEND' (Ofsted education inspection framework, p.9)), with no lowering of expectations for those pupils might find these more challenging. In order for all pupils to be able to achieve these intentions, it will be necessary to 'adapt teaching' for some, through the use of strategies such as:

- Breaking down content into smaller chunks or steps
- Varying levels of support, including effective support from TAs as well as the teacher
- Removing unnecessary expositions i.e. keeping your spoken language at an amount and level that will enable maximum access
- Reframing questions
- Intervening appropriately, i.e. in the classroom/lesson wherever possible, to minimise the need for out-of-class interventions (though these will still be appropriate and necessary for some pupils)

Examples might include:

- Checking on the understanding of specific pupils after a whole class introduction, and repeating key information as necessary
- Ensuring that a TA guides a pupil through a learning activity, scaffolding his learning, and ensuring that the development of the pupil's independence is key in this
- Asking a question that requires the same high level of thinking, but using a simpler construction e.g. by using an active rather than a passive voice, or by focusing on one aspect at time
- Observing when a pupil or group of pupils seems to be struggling with a new concept or idea, and taking them to one side during the lesson to dig deeper into any misconceptions that may have arisen, before these have the chance to become entrenched

The expectation is that with the adaptations you have applied, (almost) all pupils will be able to achieve the learning intention.

What is differentiation?

Differentiation, as referred to by Ofsted and the DfE, means the provision of different types or levels of activities for different pupils or groups of pupils. The possible danger behind this is that it may lead to a lowering of expectations, particularly when in-class groupings are permanent e.g. 'the bottom group' receives a different task to everyone else, regardless of the particular needs or aptitudes of the pupils in this area of learning. The provision of 'unnecessarily elaborate' approaches is not considered to support the learning and progress for the majority of pupils; this means that, for example, the practice of providing three levels of task for every lesson, with different worksheets etc, would not be appropriate.

It is important to remember, however, that there will still be pupils ('with the highest levels of SEND') who will continue to need and benefit from the provision of different resources, teaching materials and strategies in order to access the learning. Pupils who have an Education, Health and Care Plan are still required to receive the provision set out in their plan, and if this includes elements of differentiation, then they must continue. Differentiation may be thought of as a subset of adaptive teaching rather than as something different.

Examples of appropriate differentiation might include:

- A pupil working three years below their age in maths will still be learning about 'addition' with their class, but will use concrete materials to complete their calculations, which will be at a level appropriate to their current understanding and attainment
- A pupil with a diagnosis of ASD will access the same teaching and learning as the rest of their class, but will have a visual timetable for the day on their desk, in order to see what is coming up next; the teacher will allow them to write their response to the class on a whiteboard, rather than say it out loud
- A pupil with severe dyslexia is allowed to use a spellchecker and a word mat for their writing, when the focus is on content

Such examples of differentiation are more than simply adaptation in that these pupils have specific identified needs, and they are using specific strategies (which may involve resources, level of content, or ways of working) across all relevant lessons, which allow them to make good progress from their starting points.

The curriculum and learners with 'the highest level of SEND'

For some learners, which may include a small number of pupils in mainstream schools as well as most pupils in specialist provision, the curriculum offer may need to be significantly different to that for the majority of pupils. This requires consideration by SLT, including the SENCO, as well as by class and subject teachers. This curriculum needs to be carefully planned in order to 'be ambitious and meet their needs.' (Ofsted framework, p.9). At the point of curriculum planning, consideration will need to be given to the adaptations and differentiation that will be required in order for this curriculum to be effective.

References and quotations from the relevant documents

Ofsted education inspection framework (2019):

'They check learners' understanding systematically, identify misconceptions accurately and provide clear, direct feedback. In doing so, they respond and adapt their teaching as necessary, without unnecessarily elaborate or differentiated approaches.' (p.9)

Ofsted Overview of research (2019):

'Pupils are likely to make progress at different rates. As a consequence, they may require different levels and types of support from teachers to succeed (Hattie, 2009; Kriegbaum et al., 2018). In-class differentiation, through providing differentiated teaching, activities or resources, has generally not been shown to have much impact on pupils' attainment. In Scheerens and Bosker's (1997) meta-analysis of school effectiveness research, for example, this factor showed no or a very weak relationship with pupils' outcomes. Hattie (2009) likewise found the effect of differentiation to be among the weakest in his influential work on 'Visible Learning'.

'On the other hand, adapting teaching in a responsive way, for example by providing focused support to pupils who are not making progress, is likely to improve outcomes (Deunk et al., 2018; Education Endowment Foundation, 2018e). However, this type of adaptive teaching should be clearly distinguished from forms of differentiation that cause teachers to artificially create distinct tasks for different groups of pupils or to set lower expectations for particular pupils. In addition, it should be clearly stated that there is no evidence that pupils have distinct and identifiable learning styles (Pashler, 2008; Willingham, 2010). Trying to design tasks with this misconception in mind will increase teachers' workload but is very unlikely to improve learning.' (p.14)

ITT Core Content Framework (2019):

Standard 5 – Adapt teaching:

'Adapting teaching in a responsive way, including by providing targeted support to pupils who are struggling.

'Adaptive teaching is less likely to be valuable if it causes the teacher to artificially create distinct tasks for different groups of pupils or to set lower expectations for particular pupils.

'Identifying pupils who need new content further broken down.

'Observing how expert colleagues adapt lessons, whilst maintaining high expectations for all.

'Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities are likely to require additional or adapted support; working closely with colleagues, families and pupils to understand barriers and identify effective strategies is essential.

Early Career Framework (2019):

Standard 5 – Adapt teaching:

‘Adapting teaching in a responsive way, including by providing targeted support to pupils who are struggling, is likely to increase pupil success.

‘Adaptive teaching is less likely to be valuable if it causes the teacher to artificially create distinct tasks for different groups of pupils or to set lower expectations for particular pupils.

‘Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities are likely to require additional or adapted support; working closely with colleagues, families and pupils to understand barriers and identify effective strategies is essential.’