

Trainee Teacher Tutorial: Adaptive Teaching

What Is Adaptive Teaching and Why Is It Important?

Adaptive teaching is a pedagogical approach which means tailoring your lessons to meet the individual needs of each child in your classroom. This involves adapting the content, delivery or methods of learning to ensure every child learns in a way that's suitable for them. Children have many diverse needs which can be down to several factors.

This doesn't mean that you have to teach every student one-on-one. You can still deliver whole class or group activities that incorporate adaptive teaching. When done correctly, effective adaptive teaching seeks to create an inclusive and responsive educational environment.

Adapting how you teach is important because a one-size-fits-all approach does not work. Not every student is the same so primary teachers should consider how some students may struggle with tasks that others excel at. Without adapting your teaching style or methods, children in your class may become frustrated or bored, meaning that they become disengaged in their learning. With a more tailored approach, every student will be challenged at the appropriate level which allows them to succeed

on their own terms.

'Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.' - Albert Einstein

There are many ways to adapt a lesson. This tutorial features eight different examples. Please keep in mind that these eight ways are not the only ways to adapt your teaching strategies. Each class is as unique as every student is - your teaching methods should reflect this.

To explore how these examples of adapting your teaching style would work in a 'real-life' scenario, below is a set of mock class data that the discussion points below will be based on.

Example of Class Data

A	B	C	D	E	F	
	Name	Maths Level	SEND	EAL	FSM	
	Child A	1	☒			
	Child B	2				
	Child C	1		☒		
	Child D	3		☒		
	Child E	1				
	Child F	2			☒	
	Child G	3				
	Child H	3				
	Child I	4		☒		
	Child J	2			☒	
	Child K	2			☒	
	Child L	2				
	Child M	1	☒		☒	
	Child N	2				

1. Create a Seating Plan

This one is very simple but can be extremely effective. Children being situated where they are most productive is an obvious way to ensure they're engaged. It could be moving them away from potential distractions and closer to adults (so that they can engage and encourage) or even closer to you when delivering input (consider sight or hearing issues). The groupings within your class will also have an impact on this.

Data Discussion Points

- Would the children be best served sitting with those who are working at a similar level to their peers? Would this make the deployment of support staff more effective?
- Do any of the children have any individual needs that would require them to be seated in a certain position? Consider any children with sight/hearing issues.
- For those children with SEND or EAL needs - would they benefit from being seated in a position where they can see you? In particular, your mouth when speaking? (This would enable them to lip-read as a tool to aid their understanding of what is being spoken.)
- Could the children working at greater depth be situated where they are slightly removed from the main body of the class with an assistant? They could then work on extended pieces of work that differ from the activity that you're doing with the rest of the class.

2. Consider Groupings

When planning a lesson, consider how you're going to group the children. The groupings could be attainment driven or based on the ability of certain children to work well together. You need to consider whether children will be working on an individual basis, in pairs or collectively as a group during the lesson.

Your decisions to group the children are going to be based on your knowledge of the children and how to get the best out of them. If you can justify your choices with that principle in mind, then you're doing the right thing.

Data Discussion Points

- For those children who are working at greater depth - would you sit them together? Would this allow for more collaborative work?
- Consider those children with SEND - how would it be possible for you to address their needs in group-based work? As long as you consider what is in the best interests of the child and their learning, there is no wrong answer here.
- As long as you ensure that all children's needs are being met and that they are able to learn effectively, then you can decide how you wish to group your class.

3. Explore the Five Senses

Everyone has their own preferred learning style. This is the same for all the children in your class. How you choose to present the learning to the children has a big impact on their engagement. Does this mean that you're going to be able to cater to each child's **exact** needs in each and every lesson? The honest answer is no.

You will try as much as possible, of course, but to deliver lessons like this day in, day out is not realistic. Varying your teaching style and delivery during your lesson is key, and making decisions based on the needs of your class is paramount.

Consider your teaching input. Are you always standing at the front talking to the children? Do you use visuals? How often? Are the children actively engaged in any other way other than listening?

Data Discussion Points

- What if 11 of the 14 children represented in the data set were boys? Would you change your method/style of teaching? The answer is most likely yes - but you would still consider the needs of the children in your class.
- Three of the children spoke English as an additional language - could the use of consistent visual prompts aid their understanding of and engagement with the learning?
- Could using physical examples of fossils during geography provide a tactile object for those who struggle to concentrate and engage without a kinaesthetic approach?
- The same concepts can be applied to the lesson activity to increase engagement and concentration levels. Consider what motivates and inspires the pupils in different groups and differentiate by providing different activities and resources for them.

4. Research Available Resources

Considering the needs of your class:

- Are there any students who need additional resources, e.g. pencil grips for fine-motor barriers?
- Are there any students who would benefit from additional resources, e.g. a now-and-next board to help them stay on task?
- By providing certain resources, e.g. a key vocabulary list or books for research, can you allow children to be more independent in their work?
- Are there any resources that would help children regulate their behaviour, e.g. sensory toys or items such as ear defenders?

By considering what resources you could make available to your class, you are able to potentially differentiate your lesson further and demonstrate that you're considering each child's individual learning needs.

5. Deploy Adult Support Effectively

This one will be affected by the number of staff - if any - at your disposal, but considering the level of adult support you provide to your students is another way to differentiate your lessons.

Your use of adults during your lessons can vary based on the needs of the lesson and of the children. Most likely, they will be working with a group, either directly leading the learning or supporting it. You can consider which groups will most benefit from adult support and which can work without an adult supporting them directly.

Consider the deployment of your adults throughout the entire duration of your lesson. The most expensive resources in all lessons are the members of staff, so don't allow them to sit watching you lead the teaching input of the lesson. Delegate a specific role to them to make sure that:

a) They're being used to their full capabilities;

b) All children's needs are being met.

Most TAs and other professionals will do this anyway, but make sure you plan it into your lesson and that you are in charge of the session.

Data Discussion Points

- Which children would require the use of support staff the most in order to access the learning? Would those with EAL need support staff to ensure that they can access the lesson? Would those with SEND need support to ensure that their specific learning needs are met?
- Could you deploy your additional adults in a way that stretches learning further, in order to push those who are further along in their learning to achieve mastery?
- Do you have one group that is much bigger than others? Would a support staff member be effective if deployed here to ensure that all children understand what is expected of them during the lesson? Could they be used to continue doing additional teaching input while you set the rest of the class off with their independent work?

6. Question Your Questioning

Your style and type of questioning is another way you're able to differentiate during your lesson. Thinking carefully about how you use your questioning to extend, challenge and engage all children on their particular level can be extremely effective.

Consider your use of open and closed questioning. On your planning, note down a few suggestions of both, but in particular open questions. It allows you to make a mental tick when delivering your lesson and highlights your use of these sorts of questions to anyone who is observing you.

Some of the easiest open questions can be used near the start of a lesson. Ask the children why you are learning that particular subject and why it may be important. This prompts thinking even in very young children and the answers will give you a great insight into how they view that topic.

Data Discussion Points

Some of the children are working above the 'expected' level for their age. The type of questioning you use with them can be an extremely effective method of extending their learning and encouraging them to use higher order thinking skills - especially when you are looking to support the mastery of a subject area.

7. Try Out Scaffolding Strategies

Scaffolding strategies can be a useful way to differentiate your lesson by tapping into children's different skills and strengths.

Here are some examples of scaffolding strategies that you could use in your lessons:

- **Share prior knowledge** - Ask the children what they think they know about the subject you're going to teach. This will often lead to them thinking about their own past experiences and ideas.
- **Make time for discussion** - Allow the children the opportunity to discuss what they think with one another. Arrange 'talking partners' and allow the children thirty seconds to a minute (or two) to discuss their thoughts and ideas. Then, come together to share their ideas and hold discussions as a collective.
- **Demonstrations** - Demonstrating what you're wanting the children to do or achieve during the session is incredibly powerful means of aiding a child's understanding. Consider how and where you could use demonstrations in order to differentiate your lesson, e.g. small-group demonstrations to support the understanding of those who may struggle with the concept - allow independence and exploration (no demonstration) for those who need more challenge.
- **Allow children time to practise** - Make time in your lesson for those who may need it to practise what you're wanting them to achieve, e.g. a letter formation activity in EYFS might include a warm-up activity to practise fine motor skills, such as 'writing' letters in shaving foam

8. Extend the Activity

A great way to further differentiate your lesson is to consider the use of extension activities. These should not be a repeat of the same activity, just dressed up in a different way. They should either be a further means of embedding and practising the learning that has taken place or a practice of the next step in the learning.

For example, in a lesson on the 10x table - the extension could be practising 10x tables beyond what they have worked up to (e.g. 20×10) or working out/practising the 5x tables as a next step.

Another effective way of engaging those children who have done well in the lesson and have finished the main activity is to encourage them to support their peers with their work. The clear distinction here is not for these children to do the work for their peers, but to apply their learning by explaining the concept to someone else.