Adaptive Teaching: Non-subject-specific peer review

Adaptive Teaching: Non-subject-specific peer review

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This Action Research case study was completed as part of the Department for Education (DfE, UK) nasen Universal SEND programme.

Abstract

Context: The study is situated within the framework of inclusion and special educational needs and disability (ISEND) in mainstream secondary education. It explores the role of adaptive teaching approaches and peer review among teachers as a means to enhance professional development and improve teaching practices.

Aims: The primary objective of the research is to assess the efficacy of non-subject-specific peer observations in gauging adaptive teaching methodologies. It seeks to identify how such observations contribute to the professional growth of educators by allowing them to learn from one another's expertise in different subject areas.

Methods: The research employs an action research cycle divided into two cycles. The first cycle focuses on planning, executing, and reviewing methodologies that inform the research question. Ethical consent was obtained for data publication, and systematic observations were made during the peer review process, facilitating an understanding of the various adaptive teaching strategies employed in the classroom.

Findings: Teachers reported that observing outside their subject area helped them concentrate on how lessons were delivered and how accessible they were to learners. This approach reduced fixation on curriculum content and encouraged reflection on adaptive strategies such as scaffolding.

Implications: Other educators may draw lessons from this study regarding the benefits of engaging in non-subject-specific peer review as part of their professional development. The practice not only enhances teachers' adaptability but also promotes a culture of continuous improvement in teaching strategies, ultimately leading to enriched classroom experiences for students with special educational needs and disabilities.

Keywords

Inclusion, special educational needs and disabilities; secondary school; adaptive teaching; peer review; language

Codina, G. & Doak, L. (2025). Adaptive Teaching: A non-subject-specific peer review. In G. Codina & L. Doak (Eds.). *Action research for ISEND* Derby, UK: University of Derby. Retrieved from: https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/1009

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Action Research for Inclusion and Special Educational Needs and Disability (ISEND): Case Study

Adaptive Teaching: Non-subject-specific peer review

Teachers conducting observations of subjects outside of their expertise is an effective way of assessing the efficacy and quality of adaptive teaching approaches; it also serves as a useful continuing professional development (CPD) opportunity for teachers (Mainstream, Secondary school).

Contents

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Type of setting	Mainstream Secondary
Age range of pupils	Year 7 to Year 11 (age 11-16)
Roles of the Research Team	School SENDCo (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Co-Ordinator)

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES
See Appendix 1 for the Action Research Cycles

Ethical consent has been sought to publish this data anonymously.

SUMMARY

Research focus	Adaptive teaching, collaboration, peer review, secondary schools
Research question	How can peer review support the understanding of adaptive teaching in secondary schools?
Overview/Key information	This action research case study explores how non-subject-specific peer review can enhance adaptive teaching in secondary schools. Teachers were paired across departments to observe each other's lessons from a student's perspective, focusing on delivery rather than curriculum content. Findings showed that removing subject expertise helped observers concentrate on accessibility and teaching methods, rather than focussing in on the lesson content.

	This observation methodology yielded interesting teacher reflections, such as those about scaffolding needing to include a more comprehensive breakdown of the task.
Evidence-informed theory	Teachers conducting observations of subjects outside of their expertise is an effective way of assessing the efficacy and quality of adaptive teaching approaches; it also serves as a useful continuing professional development (CPD) opportunity for teachers.

RESEARCH TIMELINE

November	December	January	February	March
Action Research Cycle 1 Step 1: Establish the research focus	**Action Research Cycle 1** Step 2: Study Steps 3-5: Plan 1	Step 6: Do 1 Steps 7-8: Review 1 **Action Research Cycle 2** Step 9: Study 2 Steps 10-12: Plan 2 Step 13: Do 2 Step 14-15: Review 2		Share and disseminate the research (anonymised) with other interested parties.

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE 1

RESEARCH FOCUS: Step 1

Initial research interest, aim/question (Step 1)	To understand a lesson **from the perspective of a student**, to ensure adaptive teaching is effective.

KEY LITERATURE SHAPING THE RESEARCH (STUDY 1): Step 2

Reference	Randi, J. (2017). Teaching and Learning Hand in Hand: Adaptive Teaching and Self-Regulated Learning. *Teachers College Record*, *119*(13), 1-34. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811711901310
Key point(s) of note	Adaptive teaching is the next stage in the development of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning needs to be developed further to adjust to the individuals within the room rather than making generic adjustments.
Reference	Vogt, F., & Rogalla, M. (2009). Developing Adaptive Teaching Competency through Coaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *25*(8), 1051–1060. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.04.002
Key point(s) of note	Working collaboratively allows you to understand fully the nuances of what is occurring within the lesson. The key is to have both a sound understanding of the content and a good understanding of the teaching and learning methods. This method uses the observer as a support in the lesson, not solely observing. The planning is key to this and requires a symbiotic working relationship when developing the curriculum.

PLAN 1: Step 3

As part of the process of planning Action Research Cycle 1 and having completed the 'study' phase, the research question can evolve and become further refined.

Revised research question	At this stage, no revisions to the original research question were needed.

PLAN 1 and DO 1: Steps 4 and 6

Methods of data collection

Lesson observations and discussions with staff.

Description of research sample, timing and location

The focus group consisted of 6 staff in 3 paired groups. There was an initial meeting of 30 minutes facilitated by the SENDCo to pair staff into opposing subject areas:

- Physical Education teachers *with* Maths teachers
- History teachers *with* Design teachers
- Technology teachers *with* English/Science teachers

Staff were asked to observe each other's lessons, **from the perspective of a student, which included participating in activities**, and to give feedback in a non-judgemental way.

PLAN 2: Step 5

Ethical consent was sought from each participant to publish this data anonymously.

REVIEW 1: Step 7-8

Data Analysis: process
Reviewed teacher observation notes. Pleasingly, the observations contained few comments on the curriculum content, as they were paired in non-subject teams, but instead focussed on the delivery and accessibility of the lesson content.
Summary of Findings
Research Question To understand a lesson from the perspective of a student, to ensure that adaptive teaching is effective. By appointing an observer without subject-specific knowledge and by requiring them to participate in the class activities, **observations began to focus on the teaching and delivery**, and they were more able to appreciate the possible perspectives of students. This is because an observer from another subject area didn't feel fully equipped to be able to comment on the curriculum content of the lesson, **and so focused on aspects such as adaptive teaching, which are common to all subject areas.**
Analysis and next steps leading into Action Research Cycle 2
By removing the subject knowledge, feedback can be focused on the mechanics of the lesson, making it easier to view the lesson through the eyes of the learner.

Next Step(s): Action Research Cycle 2
Having tested this pairing methodology, the next step was to focus in on adaptive teaching to a greater extent. To achieve this, I offered some adaptive teaching strategies for teachers to try; for example, scaffolding[1]. Observing teachers were once again asked to view the lesson from the perspective of a student.

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE 2

KEY LITERATURE SHAPING THE RESEARCH (STUDY 2): Step 9

Reference	No further literature was drawn upon.

PLAN 2: Step 10

Revised research question	Following the completion of Action Research cycle 1, the researchers continued to explore the original question further; thus, no revisions to the original research question were needed for Action Research cycle 2.

PLAN 2 and DO 2: Steps 11 and 13

Methods of data collection

Observations of lessons and review meeting.

Description of research sample, timing and location

The focus group consisted of 6 staff in 3 paired groups. There was an initial meeting of 30 minutes facilitated by the SENDCo to pair staff into opposing subject areas:

- Physical Education teachers *with* Maths teachers
- History teachers *with* Design teachers
- Technology teachers *with* English/Science teachers

Staff were asked to observe each other's lessons, looking at an example of adaptive teaching and observing as a participant in the lesson rather than a remote observer. Observations were for 30 minutes of an hour lesson (longer if a pair agreed), and the sessions were fed back in our next cycle.

[1] Aubin, G. (2022, September 22). *EEF Blog: Scaffolding – more than just a worksheet*. London: Education Endowment Foundation. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/scaffolding-more-than-just-a-worksheet

The EEF defines scaffolding as 'a metaphor for temporary support that is removed when it is no longer required', providing 'enough support so that pupils can successfully complete tasks that they could not yet do independently'.

Key questions arise about when to 'remove' scaffolding; maybe the scaffolding should be reduced in stages that support the learner. Seeking the child/young person's feedback on alterations, and the appropriateness of scaffolds is critical – after all, it is the child/young person whom the teacher is trying to support, their view mattes most.

PLAN 2: Step 12
Ethical consent was sought from each participant to publish this data anonymously.

REVIEW 2: Steps 14-15

Data Analysis: process
Discussed the findings of the observations as a group. Focussed on common themes and also differences in findings and contrasts.
Summary of Findings
Action Research Cycle 2 Research Question To understand a lesson from the perspective of a student, to ensure adaptive teaching is effective. Looking at the lesson as a participant rather than as a teacher observer with specialist knowledge yielded some interesting findings. - It was suggested that the **language** used in some explanations was much too complex for students with low reading ages to understand. **Subject-specific language**, whilst important for students to learn, led to many students not being able to follow and fully understand the requirements of the task. - **Adaptive strategies**, such as scaffolding, in principle, were being used appropriately and at the correct level of the learner. However, on occasion, some steps in the scaffolding were not as explicitly outlined as others. Whilst the member of staff felt that they were appropriately adapting their lessons, some of the adjustments were not in-depth enough for the students to fully understand.
Analysis and next steps leading to the research conclusions
Lesson observations are to be carefully considered when supporting department development, and the learner perspective is to be taken into account.

CONCLUSION

Research aim/question
To understand a lesson from the perspective of a student, to ensure adaptive teaching is effective.
Conclusion(s) Following the two cycles, it has become clear that for effective lesson observation with a focus on adaptive teaching, the removal of a subject knowledge focus is essential. Staff become too fixated on the content and relevance of the curriculum being delivered and less focused on the teaching methods being used. Following the paired meeting to agree on a method of adaptive teaching to trial in the lesson, the second round of observations was very productive. The lessening of anxiety around content delivery and the paired observer's lack of subject-specific knowledge meant that the conversations were conducted with more confidence. The feedback was also more informative. It was realised that some of our explanations, although initially appearing to have an appropriate level of language, could sometimes be a little too complex for some of our students to understand. Moving forward, it seems that cross-subject observation pairings are more effective than within-subject pairings at supporting the understanding and effectiveness of adaptive teaching in school. **For a department to make effective development plans, it is suggested that a combination of**

both types of observations is needed to ensure curriculum content is critically examined by a subject specialist, but that the accessibility of learning is appraised by a non-specialist.

Next Steps

Our next cycle will involve rotating pairings between subjects to share further ideas on adaptive teaching which are effective for our setting and to identify further areas for development.

Appendix 1 – Action Research Cycles

Action Research Cycle 1	**Establish the research focus**	**Step 1:** Identify the ISEND area for development which requires research.
	Study 1	**Step 2:** Review the research literature.
	Plan 1	**First Plan**
		Step 3: Start the process of refining the research.
		Step 4: Decide what kind of direction you are going to take (direct or enquiry).
		Step 5: Consider research ethics (engage with the ethics checklist).
	Do 1	**Step 6:** Implement the first plan (either direct action or enquiry as action).
	Review 1	**Step 7:** Review and Reflect.
		Step 8: Analyse the meaning of the data gathered.
Action Research Cycle 2	**Study 2**	**Step 9:** Review further literature if required.
	Plan 2	**Second Plan**
		Step 10: Based on the ‘reflect’ phase, refine the research (this may involve revising or developing the research questions) and plan the next actions.
		Step 11: Decide what kind of action you are going to take (direct or enquiry).
		Step 12: Seek any further ethical permissions if needed (engage with ethics checklist).
	Do 2	**Step 13:** Implement the second plan – (either direct action or enquiry as action).
	Review 2	**Step 14:** Review and reflect.
		Step 15: Analyse the meaning of the data gathered.