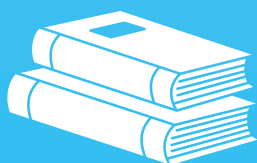
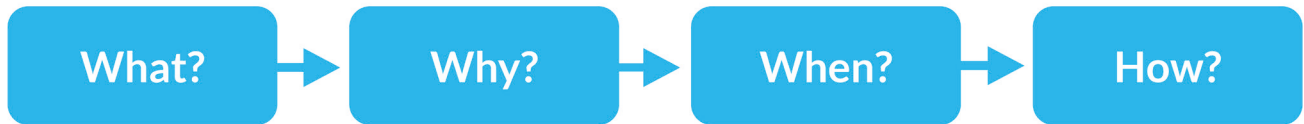


Theory Guide:



Responsive Teaching

Responsive Teaching: Overview



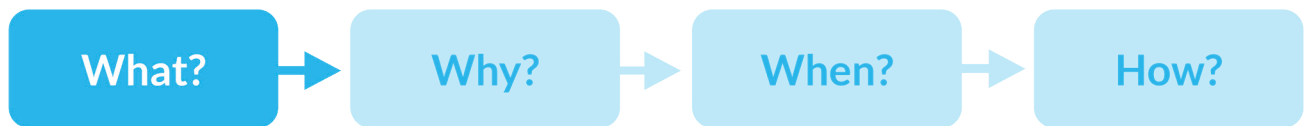
In this theory guide you will understand:

- what responsive teaching is
- why responsive teaching is important
- when it is important to consider responsive teaching
- how to teach responsively: principles and problems



Responsive Teaching:

What is responsive teaching?



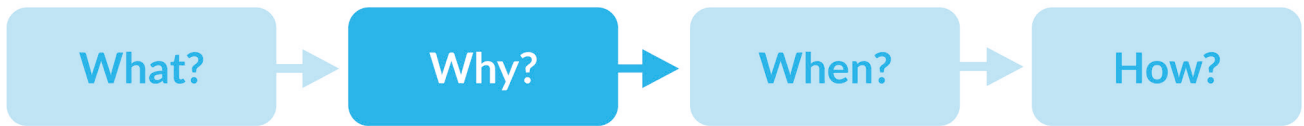
Responsive teaching is about adapting to the varied and evolving needs of students. It is part of a process of planning, checking for understanding and responding to students' learning needs. In other words, teachers can think about how to respond to students' needs at the planning and delivery stages. For example, a teacher, when planning a lesson, thinks about students' starting points and how to build from where they are. They also consider the content they are teaching and plan to mitigate any common misconceptions. During the lesson they employ robust checks for understanding, make inferences and adapt their teaching responsively.

To teach responsively requires teachers to develop a mindset where they never assume what students know. They see it as their role to check and respond appropriately. Students do not all learn at the same rate and targeted support is sometimes necessary. However, this does not mean that teachers need to design separate lessons for different students. High-quality teaching can often be the answer to ensuring all students are supported. However, sometimes students will need some additional support and teachers will need to have the same high expectations of these students whilst making adaptations. Sometimes it will mean providing challenge to students who show they need to be stretched.

Making adaptations in the moment is challenging. It requires good judgement from the teacher, and this takes experience and support to develop. For example, surveying a class' whiteboards and seeing that some students are using key vocabulary incorrectly may mean the teacher needs to give more examples of how to use these words. Do they give more examples to the whole class? Just the group who are getting it wrong? Do they get the students who are using it correctly to explain to the students who aren't? How do they ensure the students who got it wrong aren't demotivated? Reflecting on the different options with a coach and rehearsing different courses of action can support teacher judgement.

Responsive Teaching:

Why is responsive teaching so important?

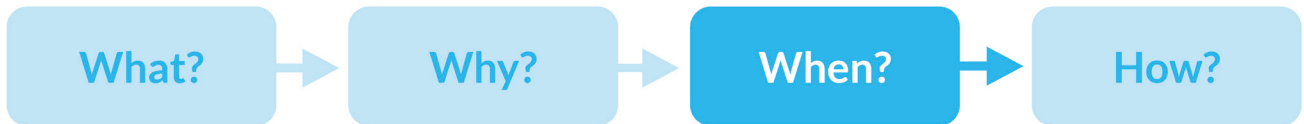


It is the teacher's role to support all students. All students come to their lessons with different levels of prior knowledge about a topic and some students have particular needs that may make it easier or more difficult for them to learn. Teachers need to be sensitive to the needs of their students and adapt their teaching appropriately to make sure they achieve the high standards they set for them.

But it is really challenging to teach responsively. It requires a great deal of knowledge and experience. Focusing professional development time on examining situations when being responsive is important and working hard to learn ways of thinking that can support with responsive teaching is likely to be an ongoing and valuable endeavour.

Responsive Teaching:

When is it important to consider responsive teaching?



When planning: responsive teaching begins when teachers are planning lessons. For example, a teacher considers how students are to meet the learning goals of the lesson and realises they need to pre teach necessary prior knowledge to ensure students can grasp the new ideas.

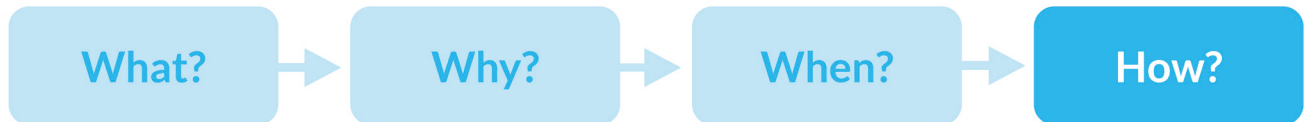
Teachers may also plan to flexibly group students so they can provide some additional support to those that might need it. This will entail setting the class off on a task and then delivering additional explanations, models etc to the group who need it. The idea of flexible grouping is that the teacher does not assume the same students will always need support as this may lower their expectations. Instead, teachers will check who needs this support in the lesson. However, it is useful to plan how this extra support will go for those that might need it. At the planning stage, teachers will want to consider their checks for understanding carefully so they can work out how to respond to students' needs.

At critical points: teachers will deliver checks for understanding at critical points in the lesson where they know that they cannot move on until students have grasped key ideas/skills. It is at these points that teachers will need to become confident at making inferences from the data they get from students and deciding on an appropriate course of action.

After checking for understanding: teachers will adapt their teaching appropriately to meet the needs of their students after they have checked for understanding and interpreted the responses. There are many ways in which it might be appropriate to respond: teachers may continue with the lesson as planned, reteach or provide additional support to some students.

Responsive Teaching:

How should a teacher teach responsively?



There are many methods to teach responsively because as we have said, thinking in this way begins at the planning stage. Here are some key principles to guide how teachers teach responsively.

Ensure high-quality teaching: the best way to cater for the needs of all students is not to plan separate tasks or lessons for different students. The best way is to ensure teaching is high-quality. For example, teachers should ensure that scaffolds are baked into how they teach, this includes planning to avoid misconceptions, considering different ways of explaining the same idea and modelling processes to students.

Never assume; always check: a key principle of responsive teaching is that “I taught it” does not equate to “they learned it”. Teachers need to check at critical points whether students have grasped what they have taught.

Maintain high expectations: teachers know that students do not all learn at the same rate all the time. It is important to have the same goals and aspirations for all students whilst giving more support to some than others in order to get there and enabling students who need it to experience greater challenge.

Develop judgement: it is not a failure for a teacher to go off plan. Those with the greatest expertise are adaptive. The adaptations the teacher makes are informed by their judgement and teachers can be supported to develop this judgement by exploring different possibilities and rehearsing techniques in different ways.

Any technique will only be effective if it is linked to a well-understood problem. Reflect on and define the problem you are trying to solve or do so with your coach. Then, you can use our decision tool for suggestions as to techniques you can adopt, adapt and test.

Problems related to this area:

- *How do I plan lessons that support all students to learn?*
- *How do I work out whether to move on with a lesson?*
- *How do I respond flexibly to students' needs?*

Responsive Teaching:

References and further reading

Eaton, J. (October 19, 2022). EEF blog: Moving from 'differentiation' to 'adaptive teaching'. Education Endowment Foundation. Available [here](#).

Sherrington, T. (April 29, 2024). Responsive Teaching: The challenge and necessity of checking in on every student. Teacherhead. Available [here](#).