

Taking Pedagogical Action: Deciding on Action

Here is an example of how one teacher uses a learning progression. For this lesson, a teacher has asked her students to explain to one another how they brush their teeth. She also has them recite their explanations to her one-on-one to formatively assess their learning, provide feedback, and set new individual Learning Goals.

The learning progression the teacher is using indicates that word knowledge comes before abilities such as stamina and cohesion in an explanation. Since her students have been developing basic word knowledge in recent lessons, as well as the use of simple connectors like “and,” she now wants her students to understand how to establish cohesion in their explanations by using sequencing.

Learning Goal

Understand how to explain a sequence of steps in an everyday activity.

Success Criteria

I can explain the sequence of steps I take when I brush my teeth using a variety of time order words.

I can accurately describe the steps I take when I brush my teeth using topic vocabulary.

The teacher has selected two Success Criteria to ensure students continue their work on topic vocabulary while beginning their new work on cohesion. When she analyzes students’ explanations and decides what action to take, she considers if their understanding is emerging, maturing, or consolidated in relation to the Learning Goal and Success Criteria.

Emerging Level

I brush my teeth like a circle. Then I brush it right here. I brush it on my right there. Then I brush it on my tongue for so my tongue can be clean too. And that’s it.

This student’s explanation is at the emerging level. She uses the word “then” a few times to indicate a sequence but does not include a variety of time order words. Her topic vocabulary is also fairly minimal. In this explanation, it is clear that the student is pointing to parts of her mouth but struggles to explain them verbally, such as in, “brush it right here.”

To help this student advance, the teacher will ask her to first focus on including the words: “first” and “next” in her explanation when she practices. The teacher will also loop back with this student to provide more instruction targeting topic vocabulary so that she does not need to rely as much on gestures.

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Maturing Level

In this student's explanation at the maturing level, he is able to create a clearer sequence of actions using the time order words: "first" and "then."

I get the toothbrush and I wash it first. Then I put my toothpaste. And then I go side to side and side to side. And then I clean my tongue and the upper side and my side teeth.

To follow up on this lesson, the teacher asks him to include more time-order word variety by incorporating the additional words, "next" and "last". This will enable him to more distinctly specify the sequence of events. To support this further, the teacher also decides to provide the whole class with sentence stems beginning with the words: first, second, next, last, and finally.

This student also appears to have a grasp of the topic vocabulary needed to explain his tooth brushing process, specifying parts of his mouth, as in, "the upper side" and "my side teeth."

Based on this, the teacher decides that while he needs to continue working on enlarging his topic vocabulary, this student is ready to starting putting the words together in new ways. She will ask him to begin working on another concept in their learning progression which is expanded word groups. When using this language feature, students can start with a noun such as "teeth" and add descriptors to it to create expanded word groups, as in, "the white, clean teeth."

Incorporating this language feature into his explanations will enable this student to efficiently add more detail to his ideas. The teacher will check to see if there are any other students ready for this, and if so, provide a mini lesson for them together.

Consolidated Level

The first thing I do when I clean my teeth is, I get my toothbrush and I put water on it. And then I put the paste on it and I start brushing my teeth. And on each side of my teeth, I take a good amount of time. After that I spit some out. And then clean my brush and put it back where it was. After that, I rinse my mouth and that's... And then I'm done.

This student, whose explanation is at the consolidated level, uses a variety of time order words to demonstrate sequence in her explanation, including "first", "when", "then", and "after". Even though she is at the consolidated level in terms of meeting this lesson's Learning Goal, the teacher feels that this student can still make her explanation better in this area by changing some of the repetitive sentence beginnings from "and then" to different time-order words such as "second" and "next." The teacher asks the student to include these words in her explanation as she continues practicing.

In terms of topic vocabulary, this teacher is confident that the student knows enough to communicate herself effectively in this context.

Based on the student’s understanding of topic vocabulary and sequencing, the teacher decides that she is also ready to work on expanding word groups. The teacher notes that this student has already started to incorporate them into her explanation with noun phrases such as “each side of my teeth” and “a good amount of time”. The teacher decides that this student can specifically benefit from learning to expand her verb groups by adding information about *how* she cleans her teeth, for example, how she brushes, cleans, and rinses.

In each of these instructional decisions, the teacher cross references the evidence of student learning with a language learning progression to determine what is the most appropriate next step for that student.

Other contexts for this type of lesson that include cultural content goals could be, for example, describing the putting on of dance regalia and explaining the steps in making a pair of baby moccasins.