

# Taking Pedagogical Action: Responding Contingently

## Cooking Example: small group response

Consider a language teacher who has set the Learning Goal for his students to:

### Learning Goal

Explain how to make a traditional culinary dish, using words and phrases to create coherence in the explanation.

The teacher has just finished sitting down one-on-one with his students as they each describe the cooking processes out loud to him (a Gathering Evidence strategy). As a result of the teacher's analysis of this evidence, he determines that:

- Three of his students are at the emerging level, still struggling with including conjunctions (such as and, but, and in addition),
- While others are at the maturing level, ready to begin using sequence words (such as then, next, first, and finally).
- One or two students have a consolidated understanding and can already include conjunctions and sequence words. They are now stumbling over how to consistently express complete ideas.

With this variation among his students, what Pedagogical Action does the teacher need to take? Clearly, it would not be appropriate to take the same next steps for all students. If his response is to be contingent on students' current learning status, he will need to differentiate his actions.

He decides to give small group, mini lessons. As students are working in centers to reinforce concepts or skills to which they already had been introduced:

- The teacher pulls together the three students who are still struggling with conjunctions for a direct skill lesson on the specific words with which they are struggling.
- In the next class segment, he conducts a mini-lesson with the students who are ready to move to sequence words,
- And in the last segment, helps the final group of students practice giving oral descriptions that contain complete ideas.

## Collaborative Discussion Example: whole group response

Although responding contingently may mean differentiated instruction sometimes a quick, whole group response is what is needed.

For example, in a mixed grade classroom a teacher conducts a lesson aimed to increase students' skill in building on each other's ideas in collaborative discussions.

### **Learning Goal**

Build on other's ideas in collaborative discussions

### **Success Criteria**

Students can use questioning and phrases to link their ideas to others in their discussions.

As the students in table groups discuss a story they have been listening to together, the teacher walks around the classroom collecting evidence through listening and taking notes on students' discussion contributions. He notices that while most students are using basic linking phrases such as "I agree" and "Yeah, that makes sense to me", very few students are asking one another questions about their ideas. He then stops the discussions and communicates his observations to students. Students also reflect on their experience, noting that they are not adding to what others have contributed, but mostly offering new ideas. In response to teacher questions, the students give examples of questions that they can ask, such as "What did you mean by that?" and "Can you tell me more?"

After this Pedagogical Action based on in-the-moment evidence, the teacher asks students to continue in their groups with a five-minute discussion focused on both sharing and asking follow-up questions. When students conclude the new discussion, they debrief again and share their thoughts on how well they met the Success Criteria.

## Creating Descriptions Example: individual response

At other times, teachers' analysis of student evidence may lead to contingent responses through individual conferences. For example, in a class where students are working on creating descriptions of their tribe's subsistence cycle, such as planting, fishing, or hunting, the teacher first reviews her notes on students' progress and selects a few students to conference with that day.

In this lesson, she begins with one student whose personal Learning Goal from their last conference was:

### **Learning Goal**

Include symbolism in writing about each stage of a subsistence cycle.

The teacher asks the student to orally present her description of the corn planting cycle and then to identify the places where she had added detail about symbolism and then to elaborate on what the symbolism means. Based on the student's response, the teacher feels confident that this student has met her personal Learning Goal and is ready to move on.

As a next step, the teacher says she thinks the description can benefit from additional information on what the process means to the community. With the student's agreement, the teacher writes this on a post-it note as the student's next personal Learning Goal. The student then attaches this to her class notebook for easy reference.