Scaffolding independent learning

Overview

Research in 2009 and reported in 2012 by Blatchford, Russell and Webster presented the alarming conclusion that the greater level of support given to a pupil by a Teaching Assistant (TA), the less academic progress they made in the course of a school year. The research suggested that this was largely due to TAs being underprepared for their duties and deployed inappropriately. For instance, in too many cases, pupils with the highest needs and at the greatest risk of not fulfilling their academic potential were taught almost exclusively by members of staff least qualified to do so. The report suggested that, as part of school efforts to better prepare and deploy TAs, they should be alerted to the counter-productive nature of focussing on helping pupils to get their work done rather than on what they are learning during any given activity. This CPD resource is designed to provide TAs (and any individuals responsible for supporting independent learning) with some advice about to work with learners so as to promote their learning and independence. The resource also provides guidance on how to record and report assessments of what learners have been able to do with different levels of support. The activities are derived from a set of materials from the maximisingtas.co.uk project.

Target audience

Teaching Assistants, teachers and all involved in supporting independent learning

Duration

Approximately 2 hours

The Learning Institute provides opportunities for individuals and communities through high quality education, training and research programmes that challenge personal barriers and promote social inclusion. To find out more, please get in touch.

Introduction

In your role you may be required to support learners with their independent learning. This may seem to be a peculiar request. Surely, if the learning is to be completed independently, learners should not have support!

This CPD session will illustrate how supporting learners in these circumstances can be done without the support being limited to encouraging learners to complete the task alone or it resulting in the work being done for the learner(s). The strategies presented promote independence within lessons, but also the development of learners' independence over time. Furthermore, the strategies shared here show how it is possible to support learner(s) without misleading yourself or others as to what the learner can do alone. You will learn how to provide easy to complete, yet detailed written feedback/records of learning.

Objectives

- To understand how to *scaffold* independent learning

- To understand how to record what learners can do during independent tasks with different levels of support

- To support personal reflection on effective support for learners' independent learning

Resources

Pen and paper for note taking

Internet access to following:

- Maximising the Effectiveness of Teaching Assistants [website] available at www.maximisingTAs.co.uk

Task 1: Understanding the term *scaffolding*

This task will help you to understand what is meant by *scaffolding* in the context of education and will introduce you to a helpful sequence of strategies to use when scaffolding learning.

What does the word "scaffolding" mean in the context of education?

In a learning context scaffolding is an approach to supporting and teaching another in such a way as to ensure they achieve success **and** become better able to complete the task or aspects of it independently. Just as a piece of scaffolding provides a platform for builders on a construction site to reach their goals, scaffolding in the classroom enables learners to achieve more than they would be able to achieve otherwise. A core principle underpinning this practice is the belief that, prior to a learner being able to complete a new task independently, they will need assistance from others who have already achieved proficiency with one or more elements of the task. Effective

scaffolding requires the more able other to provide just enough support (not too much and not too little) so that the learner is stretched rather than stressed. The learner should be exercising skills that lie just beyond that they can do independently.

What is the *Scaffolding Framework*?

The *Scaffolding Framework* represented below is drawn from *The TA's Guide to Effective Interaction* (Bosanquet, Radford and Webster, 2016) and is available at http://maximisingtas.co.uk/assets/content/tagscafframe.pdf. The framework is designed to provide a prompt for adults supporting learners. It is designed to provide a reminder for those supporting independent learning of:

- strategies that have been shown to be helpful to pupils when they are being supported with independent learning

- the order in which these strategies are best used so as to ensure pupils receive the least amount of support that they need to achieve independence

- the amount of each type of support learners should experience when completing independent work

Read the text below and reflect on the questions within to understand how the framework achieves these ends.

The *5 Step Model* available at http://maximisingtas.co.uk/assets/ta-5-step-model.pdf provides useful definitions of the different scaffolding strategies recommended. Read the *5 Step Model* sheet and reflect on the following questions drawn from the definitions provided.

Why do you think it is best to observe learners completing independent work before assisting them on each part of an activity?

1. Can you think of any 'prompt' questions of your own? They should be useful coaching questions that you could ask anyone completing any task.

2. What do you think is the difference between a small clue and big clue? Can you think of an example of each for someone completing a task familiar to you?

3. It is suggested that when 'modelling' how to do a learning activity, learners should be actively watching and listening. What could you do prior to modelling an activity to promote this active participation?

4. Why do you think the guidance states that TAs should avoid correcting learners?

Having reflected on these questions for yourself, compare your answers to the following suggestions:

1. TAs should observe learners working independently on each part of an activity before providing support so that they

   a. avoid doing for learners that which they can do for themselves

   b. gain a better appreciation of which parts of a task learners can and can't do

c. help learners to come to expect and manage challenge in their learning

2. Here are some suggested 'Prompt' questions (general coaching questions applicable to any task):

   a. What is your task?

   b. Have you ever done anything like this before?

   c. Which parts of the task look easy or hard?

   d. What can/can't you do already?

   e. What strategies you use?

   f. Which strategy are you going to try first?

   g. What are your going to need from yourself, your peers and/or the adults in the room?

   h. How will you know when you have succeeded?

   i. What are you going to do if you get stuck?

3. A small clue might help direct a learner's attention to a particular area or shared experience in which a useful strategy/resource might have been found or mentioned e.g. *What is in the resource areas that might help you?* or *Is there anything we learnt in the last lesson that might help you here?* A 'big clue' may include the recommendation of a particular strategy/resource e.g. *If I were you, I think I would…* or *Have you tried using …*

4. Before providing a model to learners it is good to stop them entirely, explain to them that you are going to show them how you would do a similar problem and describe to them the types of behaviour you are looking for from the individual or group whilst you do so. You should only start and continue when this is the case.

5. Correcting learners can suggest to them that you do not believe that they are capable of finding the answers for themselves and makes it more likely that they will turn to you for answers in future rather than taking responsibility for this themselves.

The *5 Stage Model* is presented in the "scaffolding framework" presents the same five strategies in an 'upside down' triangle divided into segments (see below).

Self-scaffolding

Prompting

Clueing

Modelling

Correcting
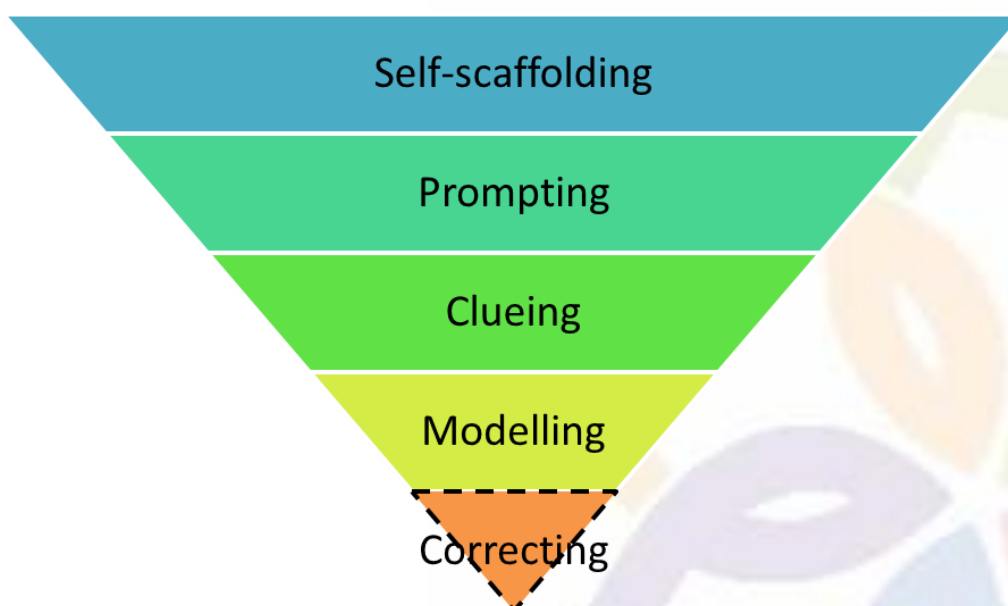
In this diagram the size of the segments correspond to the amount of time an adult or more able peer should spend utilizing each strategy. Self-scaffolding has the largest section because the default position of the learning supporter should be that of an observer allowing the learner to grapple with the tasks that they have been set. Correcting on the other hand has the smallest segment because it should be seen the least, in fact, the dotted line around the edge of this segment is meant to indicate that it should not happen at all.

As well as the size of the segments having meaning, the order of the strategies is also significant in this model. The individual supporting a learner should be aiming to offer just the right amount of support to enable the learner to succeed without experiencing the task as too easy or too difficult. It is unlikely that any individual supporting a learner will begin each and every support session with an accurate understanding of what the learner(s) can already do. This framework allows for this and requires the individual to notice what it is that the learner(s) can and can't do before offering support. If the learner(s) cannot *self-scaffold* their learning (i.e. they get stuck or are doing the learning incorrectly), the individual supporting is required to offer the next level of support. This is achieved by moving down a segment of the triangle to *prompting*. Should *prompting* not work, *clueing* may be required. Weak clues should be used before stronger clues. However, if the learner clearly requires (re)teaching then the framework suggests *modelling*. More guidance on what this entails is below.

The logic behind this approach to offering support is based on the principle that learners benefit from being able to achieve independently. It is thought that by doing so they gain confidence in their abilities to learn independently, learn more from grappling with tasks for themselves and retain ownership of their learning in the process. Should the level of support be adequate, the individual providing the support should look to remove themselves by offering less and less support, leaving the learner to manage their own learning once again.

The Framework presents modelling as the most intrusive from of support recommended as a last resort during independent learning. Two types of modelling are identified in the literature:

1. Providing a commentary
2. Re-casting

In order to provide a commentary, the individual supporting the learning should show the learner(s) how they would go about completing *a similar* problem. When doing so, they should speak aloud: putting into words the thoughts they would have when deciding what they would do, completing the task and reflecting on the success (or otherwise) of their efforts. They should use the same resources and strategies that the learners have been introduced to.

Time to have a go…

Have a go at doing this whilst you model doing a task with which you are familiar and confident. Be sure that the tasks requires multiple steps and requires some decision-making, particularly for a novice. You could choose something as simple as making a sandwich. Practice explaining every step and your thought process, including how you make choices and deal with things going wrong. Practice being in clear, concise and brief so as to ensure learning time would not be being

needlessly taken up. Consider working with a partner, in front or a mirror or recording yourself to aid you in reflecting on what you do well and what could be improved.

Re-casting is the strategy that is closest to correction. It involves listening out for and keeping an eye out for learner error and the subtle rephrasing or repetition of that which they have done, but this time using the correct word or method. If a learner were to say, 'I'm going Plymouth', a recast would involve a response such as 'Oh, you are going to Plymouth are you?'. Using this method avoids highlighting learner error, whilst also exposing them to the desired phrasing or technique.

Both types of modelling can be used in situations where a learner has made an error, but appears to have not noticed. Regardless of the reason for your use of modelling, it is only likely to be effective if learners are able to try the method you have shown them immediately following your demonstration, so ensure there is time for this and urge them to have a go.

Task 2: How can the Scaffolding Framework assist you in making and recording accurate assessments of what pupils can do with differing degrees of support?

In addition to the Scaffolding Framework the maximisingtas.co.uk project has produced the *Assessment for Learning Sheet* Appendix 4, available from http://maximisingtas.co.uk/resources/the-tas-guide-to-effective-interaction.php.

This sheet shows how the Scaffolding Framework can be turned into a key. This has been done to permit you to record and report the level or assistance a learner has received. Some TAs use this system as an extension to the more commonplace methods of noting on a learner's work whether it has been done independently or with support in their books. This system - recorded below - permits those assisting others with their learning to report not only when a learner has required assistance, but also what type/level of assistance they have had.

The Key is as follows:

Symbol	Meaning	What this might look like in class
✓	Can do this independently (self-scaffolding)	Learners can either do the task with ease or are able to think things through for themselves, asking themselves useful questions that allow them to become 'unstuck'.
P	Can do with prompting	Learners can complete the task, but only when prompted to think for themselves about the nature of the problem and what resources/strategies they have available to them.
C	Can do with clues	Learners can complete the task, but they have to be reminded of specific strategies/resources that they have been shown to be useful.
M	Modelling required	Learners can complete the task, but only after they have been shown how a very similar version could be completed successfully with a full explanation.

Establishing a system such as this allows you to record and report the level of support learners have needed swiftly and without having to have copious amounts of time with other members of staff. To use the *Assessment for Learning Sheet* in full an additional step is required. This shall be explained below.

On the left hand side of the table there is space to record the sub-parts of any given task a learner or group of learners has been asked to complete. The sub-parts of a given task can be determined before a lesson or, for a TA observing the input to a lesson, during the teacher's explanation of the activity. Once the sub-parts are noted down the individual supporting the learning can observe their learner(s) to a) determine whether they require prompting/cueing/modelling and b) to record in the table what level of support was given to them. Note each column on the *Assessment for Learning Sheet* pertains to a different child. The example below has been made-up to show how a group of learners might have got on making sandwiches following an input on doing so.

Process success criteria	Peter	Sabrina	Kai	Ella
Wash your hands	✓	✓	✓	P
Take two slices of bread	P	P	✓	P
Butter one side of each with a sharp knife	P	M	M	M
Place the slices of cheese on one of the buttered sides	C	M	C	M
Places the other slice of bread, buttered side down, on top of the cheese.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Slice the sandwich in half with a knife.	M	C	C	C

You may have noticed that the sub-parts of task have been written in the order in which they should be completed. This is a useful approach as it provides the individual supporting the learner with not only a success criteria, but also a memory aid.

Task 3: Reflection on learning

Note down your responses to the following questions:

- If someone observed me supporting one or more pupils' independent learning and were to keep a tally of the different scaffolding strategies I used, which of the strategies covered in this session would they see the most of and the least of: observing pupils, prompting, clueing, modelling or correcting?

- Do you think you have got the balance right? Do you, for instance, spend enough time observing what pupils can do on their own? Do you sometimes provide too much support too soon? If so, how might the resources shared in this CPD resource assist you in re-addressing the balance?

- How does the level of detailed reporting/recording in the *Assessment for Learning Sheet* compare to the reporting/recording systems you have in place in your current practice? How might the level of detail suggested here result in better pitching of pupil learning in subsequent lessons?

- What would need to happen in order for the ideas you have come across in this CPD resource to be implemented in your setting? What could you do to make this change more likely?

Sources

Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants. Available at: http://maximisingtas.co.uk/

Further reading

Bosanquet, P., Radford, J. and Webster, R. (2016) *The Teaching Assistant's Guide to Effective Interaction: how to maximise your practice.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Want to learn more?

If you enjoyed this CPD, you may be interested in our other courses. Find out more on our website:

FdA Learning and Education - www.learninginstitute.co.uk/fdle

Apprenticeships - www.learninginstitute.co.uk/apprentices