

## Scaffolding learning - Secondary

**By Kelly Challis**

If there is one thing which I used constantly with all of my learners when I was teaching, it was scaffolds. Now these could range from structured frameworks for accessing, for exploring written text, to a mind map for ideas which developed into a body of text. Scaffolds don't make the content easier, they create access to that content and help pupils, particularly those with literacy difficulties, to demonstrate the richness of their answers on paper.

It's important to consider the idea of cognitive load, when focusing on the purpose of a scaffold. Cognitive load theory by Sweller (1988) is a way of thinking about the total amount of information which a person is dealing with and processing at any one time. For example, if you have a learner that finds reading text difficult, but the objective of that lesson is to comprehend that text, a learner's cognitive load may be taken up with the process of reading, decoding the words, the speed of reading, the length of the text, the familiarity of the text or the stress of doing something which they perceive as a challenge rather than the set task of comprehending.

This is where scaffolding comes in. That same learner, if they are aware of some of the complex vocabulary that they will be reading in that text, if they have been given some guidance on how to scan a text and read it for meaning or signposted to the areas of text which they need to read closely, or if they have been modelled how to read through that text and identify the areas by highlighting parts of the text to aid comprehension later in the lesson. Everything I've just described could be a scaffold, none of them make the content any easier but the process of reading has become easier and thus the working memory load has more capacity for the teaching material.

Another example of a good scaffold to use and one which I have recommended several times to the schools that I work with is a task planner. This really helps those learners with literacy difficulties, but also those that struggle with organisation as it allows them to make sense of what they need to do. It also enables them to tick off what they've achieved in the lesson and for you, as a teacher, to see whether they are ready to move on from a scaffold.

This is an example of making the implicit, explicit through the use of concrete examples. Sharing those planning techniques that we may take for granted as teachers. The Education Endowment Foundation in their metacognition and self-regulated learning resource make reference to research supporting the idea that those learners who find learning difficult do not use these kinds of scaffolds and strategies inherently as some more successful learners do. Teaching those learners these kinds of strategies is not giving them an advantage it's equipping them with useful strategies they can continue to use in their learning.

Let me finish off by giving you some examples of strategies for planning, drafting and editing.

When planning, mind mapping is fantastic for getting ideas down quickly and this can then be extended by linking the ideas and prioritising them using numbers to then create a plan.

When drafting writing, having an expectation of what the finished article will look like to demonstrate how the piece of text should start and what content should be included in the body will help a learner frame their ideas. It's important to explicitly teach different purposes of writing and how these impact upon the writing structure, for example, teaching pupils what a compare and contrast essay would be like or what a newspaper article would look like. When doing this you can use effective questioning to draw out known information.

Finally, both when writing and editing work, using a checklist can act as a great scaffold. For example, when I was teaching, I would often suggest to their learners in exams to put the punctuation at the top of the page and whilst they were writing tick them off. Being able to critically look at your own piece of work is difficult, and editing is hard at any age so having a criterion to check your work against helps make the implicit explicit.