

Scaffolding learning - Primary

By Katherine Fas

Scaffolding is the term that refers to a variety of instructional techniques and resources that are used to move pupils toward stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process

Three key things that have supported me across the curriculum to scaffold learning are:

- Worked examples, sometimes known as WAGGOLS which stands for 'What A Good One Looks Like'
- Checklists
- Thinking aloud

Worked examples or WAGOLLS are brilliant resources that demonstrate the final outcome expected to pupils. They can be used to model the skills and standards expected through shared or guided writing, or they can simply be shared with your pupils who might find it challenging when conceptualising the expected outcome of a task. These WAGOLLS can then be displayed as a visual prompt for learners to access throughout the sequence of lessons and support them in magpie-ing ideas for their own work.

Checklists are amazing. Giving pupils a checklist of criteria to meet when answering a question or completing a task is a really simple but massively effective way of scaffolding. A checklist provides a visual prompt and gives pupils an idea of how many steps they need to take to be successful, as well as the order in which they should take them.

'Thinking aloud' or verbalising your thought processes as you complete a task is one of the most effective ways to demonstrate to pupils how they can apply their skills and prior learning to support them in achieving the learning goal. Talking through the steps and orally rehearsing example phrases shows pupils that answers aren't automatic and take careful thought and planning. It's also important to allow the pupils time to do this with their peers. Orally rehearsing the steps that they might go through first and giving feedback to each other before putting pen to paper is a really effective way of developing their metacognition and supporting them achieve.

Once pupils have been successful at a task using scaffolds, it's important to challenge the learners to become more independent in their work. Over time, physical scaffolds should be removed so pupils don't become dependent on them and, instead, internalise the scaffold so they can draw upon it whenever they need. If we think of a house that has scaffolding round it, we wouldn't want to keep the scaffolding up once the work had been completed! We would want to show off all the work that has gone on in developing it!

The first thing I would say when removing scaffolds is, it's really important not to take away everything all at once. I would often start by reducing one element from my scaffolding bank, for instance: covering up the WAGOLL, or reducing the thinking aloud to just 'thinking time', where pupils have time to plan the next stage of their work independently, whilst keeping all of the other components there. I would often vary this for different learners, depending on their needs. For instance, I found that children who struggle with processing, benefit from discussing things out-loud more frequently, so I grouped these pupils together and encouraged the rest of the class to work independently using the checklist and WAGOLL alone. I would always remove the checklist last, and only when I was sure the items on them had been achieved whilst using it. To *slowly* remove the scaffold that the checklist provided, I wouldn't take away the whole thing, but instead would leave gaps in the checklist according to my assessment of what the pupils were attaining. I then slowly reduced the number of items on there until pupils were completing the task independently. I would always build periods of reflection



into this process whereby pupils could assess their progress against in their independent piece and make amendments where necessary.