

High-Quality Interactions & Scaffolding Learning

Week 1: What Is Scaffolding and Why Does It Work?



Slide 1 – Title

Welcome to the first session in our new TA Sparks series, **High-Quality Interactions and Scaffolding Learning**.

Across this series, we're going to think carefully about the interactions we have with pupils every day and, importantly, how the support we provide can help pupils become increasingly confident and independent learners.

Today, we're starting with scaffolding: what it actually means, why it works and how we can make sure our support helps pupils learn rather than simply helping them complete a task.

Slide 2 – Safeguarding Spark: What is Radicalisation?

Before we begin, take a moment to consider today's safeguarding question.

What is radicalisation?

The correct answer is **A: the process by which a person adopts extreme views or ideologies that may lead to harmful actions.**

Radicalisation can happen to children and young people both online and offline, and there is no single profile of what a child at risk will look like.

As school staff, our role isn't to investigate or determine whether radicalisation is taking place. Our responsibility is to remain professionally curious, notice concerning changes or behaviours and report concerns in line with our school's safeguarding procedures.

Slide 3 – The Journey Ahead

This is our six-week journey.

Today we're establishing the foundations by understanding scaffolding and why it works.

We'll then move into using prompts rather than simply telling pupils what to do, effective questioning techniques, developing independence and resilience, giving feedback without giving away the answer and, finally, recognising when it is time to step back.

There is a deliberate progression here.

Across the six weeks, we're essentially asking one question:

How can the way I support a pupil today help them become less reliant on my support tomorrow?

Your six-session journey is clearly mapped in the presentation.

Slide 4 – What Is Scaffolding?

Scaffolding is **temporary support that helps a pupil access learning they cannot yet manage independently.**

The word *temporary* is really important.

Think about physical scaffolding around a building. It provides additional support while the building needs it. But nobody constructs a building with the intention of leaving the scaffolding there forever.

Learning scaffolds should work in much the same way.

A pupil may need additional adult support, a visual, a worked example or another structure today. As their knowledge, confidence and competence develop, that support should gradually reduce.

So we move through:

support, success, reduce, independence.

The goal isn't to create pupils who are brilliant at working with an adult beside them. The goal is to develop pupils who can increasingly manage learning for themselves.

Slide 5 – Why Does Scaffolding Work?

There are four important reasons scaffolding can be so powerful.

First, it allows pupils to **access challenge**. We don't necessarily need to make the learning easier because a pupil is struggling. Instead, we can consider what support will enable them to access the same ambitious learning.

Second, scaffolding helps pupils **connect learning**. A reminder, resource or carefully chosen question can help a pupil connect today's problem with something they already know.

Third, it enables pupils to **experience success**. We want pupils to experience challenge, but also to recognise that they have strategies available to overcome that challenge.

And finally, effective scaffolding **builds independence**. As pupils become more capable, we gradually reduce the support so that responsibility moves from the adult to the learner.

These four purposes are set out in the deck as accessing challenge, connecting learning, experiencing success and building independence.

Slide 6 – What Can a Scaffold Look Like?

It's important to remember that scaffolding doesn't simply mean having an adult sitting beside a pupil.

A scaffold might be **verbal**. A short prompt could be enough to restart a pupil's thinking.

It could be **visual**: perhaps a word bank, number line, diagram, checklist or vocabulary prompt.

It might be **a model**, such as an example or worked example that reminds the pupil what successful learning looks like.

Or it could be **a structure**—perhaps a sentence stem, writing frame or sequence of steps that makes a complex task more manageable.

Part of developing independence is helping pupils recognise and use these scaffolds themselves.

Rather than automatically asking an adult, we want pupils to begin thinking:

What is available to me that could help?

Slide 7 – Scaffolding or Doing?

This distinction is incredibly important.

Look at the examples on the slide.

On one side we have questions such as:

"What do you already know?"

"What could help you?"

"Where could you look?"

These keep the thinking with the pupil.

Compare those with:

"I'll show you."

"Write this."

"Do this next."

"The answer is..."

Both approaches might result in a completed piece of work.

But the amount of thinking the pupil has done can be completely different.

So a useful question during any TA-pupil interaction is:

Who is doing most of the thinking here—the adult or the pupil?

That's not to say we should never explain or model. Of course we should when pupils need it. But we should notice when our support begins to remove the thinking from the learner.

Slide 8 – Finding the Right Level of Support

Effective scaffolding is about finding the right level of support.

If we provide **too little**, a pupil may remain stuck, become frustrated or disengage.

If we provide **too much**, they may complete the task successfully but become increasingly reliant on adult intervention.

We're looking for the space in the middle:

just enough support.

Enough support for the pupil to access the learning and experience success, but enough challenge that they still have to think, make decisions and solve problems.

That's why the phrase on this slide is so useful:

Enough support for success—enough space for thinking.

Slide 9 – Temporary Means Temporary

Scaffolding should change as the pupil changes.

Initially, a pupil may need an adult model alongside significant support.

Later, perhaps they only need a prompt and access to a resource.

After further practice, they may need nothing more than a small reminder.

Eventually, the aim is for the pupil to manage independently.

That reduction doesn't necessarily happen neatly or quickly. A pupil might need more support again when the learning becomes more complex.

But we should regularly ask:

Does this pupil still need the level of support I'm currently providing?

Because a scaffold that is never reduced can unintentionally become a dependency.

Slide 10 – What Does Successful Scaffolding Look Like?

One of the biggest shifts we can make is moving away from asking:

"Did they finish the task?"

Completion isn't necessarily evidence of independence.

Instead, look for the behaviours on this slide.

Is the pupil beginning to **start** without immediately looking for reassurance?

Can they **select** an appropriate resource themselves?

Do they **try** a strategy before asking an adult?

Are they beginning to **check** their own work and notice mistakes?

And can they **persevere** for slightly longer when learning becomes difficult?

Those small changes are incredibly important.

The finished worksheet tells us what was produced.

Increasing independence tells us something about what was learned.

Slide 11 – Common Pitfalls

There are several habits we need to watch out for.

The first is **stepping in too quickly**. Silence or hesitation can feel uncomfortable, particularly when we want to help. But sometimes pupils simply need processing time.

Another is **focusing too heavily on finished work**. A beautifully completed task may actually involve substantial adult input.

We also need to be careful about becoming a pupil's **permanent support**. Constantly sitting alongside the same pupil can unintentionally reduce their opportunities to interact with their teacher, peers and classroom resources.

And finally, we need to avoid leaving scaffolds in place simply because they've always been there.

Keep asking:

Does this pupil still need this?

Slide 12 – Spark Forward ⚡

Here's our small Spark to take into practice this week.

Choose **one pupil you regularly support**.

Before you intervene, try three things:

Pause. Watch. Decide.

Pause and give the pupil genuine thinking time.

Watch what they attempt independently. What do they already know? What strategies do they try?

Then **decide**:

What is the smallest amount of support this pupil needs to move forward?

We're not withdrawing support pupils genuinely need.

We're simply becoming more deliberate about when and how we provide it.

Your challenge this week is to notice what happens when you give **slightly less help and slightly more space for thinking**.

Slide 13 – Final Reflection

Before we finish, take a moment to reflect on your own practice.

Do you sometimes step in before pupils have had enough time to think?

During your interactions, who tends to do most of the thinking?

Are there particular pupils who may have become reliant on your support?

And are there any scaffolds that could now begin to be reduced?

Finally, complete the sentence on the slide:

"One change I will make to my support this week is..."

Keep it small and achievable.

We aren't trying to remove support.

We're trying to make our support **more purposeful, responsive and temporary**.

Slide 14 – Evidence

Today's session is underpinned particularly by the Education Endowment Foundation's work on the effective use of teaching assistants, SEND and metacognition.

A consistent theme across this evidence is the importance of high-quality support that develops pupils' ability to engage with learning and become increasingly independent.

As we continue through this series, we'll build on that evidence and look more closely at the everyday interactions that can make that happen. Your final evidence slide draws on EEF guidance on teaching assistants, SEND, and metacognition and self-regulated learning.

And the final message is a simple one:

The best scaffold is one we can eventually remove.

Our success as a teaching assistant isn't measured by how much a pupil needs us.

Sometimes, the greatest evidence of our impact is that, over time, **they need us less.**

