

# Support learning activities

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



Describe how a learning support practitioner may contribute to the planning, delivery and review of learning. What learning support strategies have you used or could you use to meet the needs of your learners?

Learning support practitioners can be an invaluable resource in the successful planning, delivery and review of learning. They can offer immeasurable support to the teacher and, most importantly, to the pupils. However, that support is only truly effective if it is organized, structured and consistent – both in terms of the learning objectives set by the teacher and the pupil's own learning needs. There are many ways in which a learning support practitioner can contribute to the Classroom Process Cycle<sup>1</sup> (planning > preparing > doing > reviewing etc. ) but let's look at just some of them.

Planning is essential to working efficiently and effectively as a learning support practitioner (or teaching assistant). Without planning how you intend to support the pupil's learning you run the likely risk of not just wasting their time whilst you organise yourself, but also providing inconsistent and often conflicting or confusing messages to the children. If you are not 'on the same page' as the teacher then there is a possibility of inadvertently contradicting them which in turn confuses the pupil, clouding their understanding and ultimately creating obstacles to them achieving their learning objectives.

This is counteractive to learning, which could not be further from the purpose of the teaching assistant role. The ways in which a learning support practitioner can contribute to the planning are numerous, from the obvious

preparation of equipment and a safe environment conducive to learning to providing insightful input regarding pupil's individual learning needs and abilities based on their own experience.

Offering your own observations of effective support strategies based on your acquired knowledge of a pupil's abilities can be a priceless resource for the teacher, who may never themselves have the chance to gain such insights into an individual child's learning style. The opportunities for one to one time between teachers and pupils are very few and far between so the observations of a teaching assistant, who works more often with smaller groups and individuals, can be vital in providing a more in depth and detailed view into what strategies he or she thinks will work – especially when dealing with specific or specialist learning needs.

The truth is, of course, that there is never one learning strategy that works for any one child. Learning support strategies need to be fluid and the support practitioner needs to be able to adapt from one to another as and when the situation requires. You may need to remind the pupil of the teaching points, make sure they are concentrating, question them and encourage them to ask questions themselves.

My own experience of working with a small group preparing a presentation on the six wives of Henry VIII was that there was a constant need to continually remind the five pupils of the aim of the exercise – namely that they needed to have a finished, structured and lucid presentation at the end of it! The temptation amongst them was to concentrate on the more 'fun' aspects of their research (in this case tales of extra-marital affairs, incest and beheadings!) and on preparing skits and drawings but they were clearly

losing sight of the fact that all this had to hang together as a coherent presentation with equal participation from each pupil.

Making sure the pupils concentrated and didn't get sidetracked, reminding them of the teaching points and giving them constant encouraging yet guiding feedback were key strategies I used in making sure the task was completed successfully. The delivery of learning support is not complete, however, until you have fed back to both the pupil and the teacher and reviewed your own success as a learning support practitioner.

In feeding back to the pupil it is vital that your feedback is constructive. This does not necessarily mean it has to be positive but it is vital that it is not destructive. It should serve to encourage and help the pupil. Feeding back to the teacher is equally as important as this will provide the teacher with information as to individual pupils' progress, any difficulties they might be having (or indeed that you might be having) and this in turn will feed into planning for the next lesson as per Wilkinson's Classroom Process Cycle.

The importance of the role of teaching assistant should not be underestimated as they provide essential support to both teachers and pupils alike. As the demands put upon teachers are increased seemingly year by year, the learning support practitioner is there to contribute to all aspects of the planning, delivery and review of learning giving a broader support structure for the teachers and a more complete learning experience for the pupils.