Early Career Framework

Core Induction Programme

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Week

8: Using groupings to support specific needs

Session Elements

- self-assessment
- practical exercise

Learning Intentions for this session

You will learn that:

4.9 Paired and group activities can increase pupil success, but to work together effectively pupils need guidance, support and practice.

5.1 Pupils are likely to learn at different rates and to require different levels and types of support from teachers to succeed.

5.2 Seeking to understand pupils' differences, including their different levels of prior knowledge and potential barriers to learning, is an essential part of teaching.

You will learn that:

5.5 Flexibly grouping pupils within a class to provide more tailored support can be effective, but care should be taken to monitor its impact on engagement and motivation, particularly for low-attaining pupils.

5.7 Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities are likely to require additional or adapted support; working closely with colleagues, families and pupils to understand barriers and identify effective strategies is essential.

Introduction

In your recent mentor session, you focused in detail on the role of key professionals and how to break content down for different pupils. You discussed the need to locate the education of children with SEND within inclusive policy and practice, with emphasis on improving the whole learning environment and the combination of teaching and learning processes applicable to all children. This is an approach that should serve to prevent some children from needing to be identified as having special educational needs.

In this self-study session you will extend your knowledge of teaching pupils with special educational needs. You will consider where to access the information you need to inform planning and explore the range of strategies that can be deployed when teaching pupils with a variety of different needs and backgrounds. Alongside this you will also consider again the importance of grouping pupils effectively.

Research and Practice Summary

This reading will help you understand some of the theory behind this week's topic. We will start by introducing some of the key concepts (these are in bold). You will also see some suggestions of how to put these concepts into practice. **When using these concepts in your own practice you will need to take account of your pupils' characteristics, the context of your classroom and the nature of the material that you are teaching.**

> Molly is a Year 8 pupil with a moderate learning difficulty. She has been identified as having limited working memory capacity, which means she has difficulty in memorising important concepts and factual information crucial to her success in most subjects. Teachers regularly observe that

Molly will remember something within a lesson, and a day later appears to have no recollection of this information.

What challenges could this difficulty pose for Molly if you were teaching her? What steps could be put in place during a lesson to ensure information is embedded for Molly?

Barriers to learning are specific factors which prevent pupils from making progress and acquiring new knowledge and skills. These can be additional learning needs such as dyslexia, or external factors such as bereavement or challenging home circumstances. There can also be barriers to learning within the classroom, such as poor behaviour or lack of facilities and equipment. A pupil's socio-economic circumstances can also result in significant barriers to learning.

To help you identify and overcome pupils' barriers to learning, you should:

- work closely with the SENCO, your Designated Safeguarding Lead and other special education professionals who work in or visit your school
- use the SEND Code of Practice, which has guidance on supporting SEND pupils
- learn more about your pupils' barriers by liaising with their families and other colleagues
- if you have them, talk to teaching assistants or learning support advisors who may be keyworkers for the pupils you teach

Molly's teachers know that she has a moderate learning difficulty but they may not all understand what strategies have proven to work well for her. Specialist and experienced colleagues can help with this, such as the SENCO; the SEND Code of Practice contains practical guidance. Molly's family have a lot of insight into what helps their daughter succeed; they can help guide her at home as well as talking to her teachers about these strategies.

One of the most important aspects of teaching is the ability to establish an accurate understanding of the pupils' **prior knowledge** within a given subject or domain. In this way, the teacher can start with where their pupils are and help them from there, rather than working backwards from a long-term learning goal. It is also understood that increased prior knowledge reduces working memory load. When pupils encounter familiar problems, this activates information from long-term memory and supports working memory, where problem-solving occurs. Novice pupils therefore

find complex activities like problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity particularly effortful, as they have fewer experiences (and therefore less prior knowledge) and the problems they encounter are more likely to be novel. Where prior knowledge is weak, inaccurate or misapplied, it can have a distorting effect both on the immediate activity, and on the learning that results from this.

To help you address the prior knowledge needs of your pupils where they have specific learning needs, you should:

- wherever possible, talk to colleagues who taught them before, or who teach them in other areas now, so you can benefit from their experience
- carefully assess their prior knowledge when planning how much new information to introduce (you may have to adapt your teaching in-lesson, as you realise that their prior knowledge is not secure)
- provide explicit modelling and guidance, breaking problems down into steps (e.g. keywords and sentence starters for written work, simple teacher demonstration for practical tasks)
- use worked examples with clear and minimal steps (including step-by-step visual guides)
- identify likely misconceptions and plan to prevent them from occurring (if you are able to co-plan with colleagues, that will help here)
- give them regular purposeful practice so they can consolidate learning in their long-term memory

Which of these strategies would be likely to be effective with Molly?

Adaptive teaching involves the teacher being flexible and responsive about the methods they use in lessons, to ensure that they can meet the needs of all their pupils and deviate from the lesson plan where necessary. Adaptive teaching requires a reflective approach, since the teacher needs to be able to acknowledge the need to change the strategy being used. Although adaptive teaching is easier with experience, it can be achieved early in a teacher's career through careful planning – by anticipating pupil misconceptions before they arise, for example. It is important that this be done in response to pupils' needs, not an artificial process which breaks the flow of the lesson. Adaptive teaching includes providing targeted support to pupils who are struggling, but creating separate distinct tasks for different groups is less likely to be valuable: it risks lowering expectations for some, and it can add unnecessarily to workload.

To adapt your teaching without creating separate distinct tasks you should:

- intervene within lessons with individuals and small groups (e.g. as Mr Andrews did with Molly)

- divide your support between the whole class, specific groups and individuals (e.g. it is often possible to set up a whole-class independent task, freeing you to give extra support to a group or individual)
- while maintaining high expectations for all, you can vary the quantity of work you demand from some or the amount of time you allow some to complete it
- use and reuse templates, writing frames, key concepts mats and other worked examples as scaffolds you can easily introduce or withdraw as you adapt your teaching

> Mr Andrews (as you will see next) mainly adapted his teaching for Molly in this lesson by dividing his support between her and the whole class, and by using visual prompts as a scaffold he could introduce and gradually remove.

Deliberate, purposeful **practice** is essential if pupils are to retain the new knowledge and skills they have been taught. This requires the pupils themselves to put sustained effort into improving their performance within a given domain. Deliberate practice is positively correlated with performance. Each time memories are recalled, they are strengthened. In order to embed new learning in their long-term memory and be able to retrieve it for future use, pupils need to regularly retrieve new knowledge and skills, and apply them in new and diverse contexts.

To help your pupils with specific learning needs to learn through practice you should:

- design learning sequences that give your pupils regular opportunities to practise, and to retrieve from memory what they have previously learned (so much the better if you can make this low-stakes and low-stress)
- design practice tasks to ensure a high success rate for your pupils, but
- over time, increase the challenge, for example by removing scaffolding or by increasing the length of time between visits to the topic

> Mr Andrews planned a Year 8 lesson on the 'problems of living in a city'. The pupils were provided with several paragraphs of information on the given topic. Pupils needed to break down the information via a series of small illustrations/symbols, which would later serve as visual memory prompts. Pupils could write only a maximum of four key words to support their work.
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> - For Molly, the next step to secure this knowledge further was to have her use her illustrations and word prompts to recall this information verbally to a study partner, before attempting any comprehension work or written work about the topic. Beforehand, Mr Andrews modelled for

them how he wanted them to conduct their paired talk. He knows that pairings such as this can increase success for Molly, but also that he needs to give her and her partner clear guidance. He has discovered that, for now at least, this pairing seems to have improved the behaviour and motivation of both Molly and her partner, but he is keeping an eye on this and will assess the impact also on their attainment.

- Using easy visual prompts gave Molly an extra step in embedding the information. Using these regularly across a series of lessons, and gradually taking the visual prompts away, ensured Molly could transfer this information more easily into her long-term memory. Mr Andrews is prepared to give Molly this specific type of support because he is aware that she learns at a different rate to most of the other pupils in the class.

Self-Study Activities

Review: 10 mins

Read the Research and Practice Summary on this week's topic. As you read, reflect on:

1. the practices that you are already doing well
2. the practices you are doing some of the time, but could do more of/more consistently
3. the practices you don't use in your teaching yet

As you work through the activities in this week's self-directed study session and mentor meeting, aim to both refine and extend what you already do well, and to build your skill and confidence in using practices which are not yet a regular part of your teaching repertoire.

Plan: 10 mins

Self-assessment

Which aspects of the research and practice summary – or of the example of Molly's geography teacher – are most relevant to the challenges you are experiencing in your teaching at the moment?

Note in your Learning Log the two or three key messages you are taking away for your own teaching. For example, what insights has it given you for how you support pupils with specific needs through:

- how you group your class
- what you know about the different levels of support they need
- understanding their barriers to learning
- how you guide them in group and paired activities
- liaising with colleagues and families
- adapting your practice without creating separate tasks

Theory to Practice: 20 mins

1. Practical exercise

Focus on a specific group of pupils or a class. Below are a set of 'challenges', for which you have to plan your practical response. You may want to dwell on some more than others. Some hints are given.

Challenge	Hint	Practical response
What are the potential barriers to effective collaboration in your classroom?	A learning need, behaviour, family, socio-economic?	
What specific guidance and support will you need to provide your pupils to ensure effective group work takes place?	Assign roles to your pupils or issue strict protocols	
How can you monitor the impact of your groupings on the engagement and motivation of pupils with specific educational needs?	Monitor the engagement and motivation of a smaller group of pupils	
Can you build flexibility into your attainment groupings to avoid a fixed mindset being established?	Experiment with different types of within-class groupings, such as by near prior attainment, or by mixed prior attainment	
How will you adapt your teaching for those pupils who are learning at a different rate to others?	Vary the attention you give to different pupils, the time you allow, the quantity you expect	

Next Steps: 5 mins

Complete this practical activity, ready for your next mentor meeting. Think about any questions you may have for your mentor in relation to using groupings to support pupils with specific needs.

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