

Think alouds

Let your pupils hear your thoughts as you plan and carry out tasks. Think-alouds show pupils how you arrive at decisions, how you would approach a task, how you avoid pitfalls, the strategies you use when faced with a problem and how you deal with mistakes, etc. They should show your thinking very clearly – allowing the pupil to see the metacognitive processes at work. Top tips: keep the think aloud brief, pay attention to your own thinking processes as you design your think-aloud, use ‘I statements instead of ‘you’ statements, name your cognitive and metacognitive processes e.g. “Ok, that didn’t work, so I have to try a different formula” (problem solve), “I know I usually understand the article better if...” (self-regulating learning). Encourage peer think alouds.

Removing barriers

As we practice something we often switch into an automated mode. It could be argued that if you can do certain functions with ease, such as write, spell, read, make notes, type, etc., that it frees up working memory for higher order thinking, including the opportunity to think about your own thinking. Help pupils to master some of the basics to ensure they have the necessary head space for more complex thinking. You can also remove barriers by: providing extra time and support for engaging in thinking about their own thinking, supporting pupils to develop the vocabulary they need for thinking about thinking (e.g. vocabulary for analysis, reflection, learning processes), and teaching how to use tools, such as thinking maps to help them express their ideas.

Types of praise and reward

Pupils are quick to work out what you value. Praise, reward and celebrate improvements in learning, trying out new strategies, going the extra mile, supporting others, first drafts and final drafts, achieving milestones, learning, responding to feedback, making changes to their approach as a learner, etc. Set pupils high standards and build growth mindsets.

Feedback and self-assessment

Feedback is a high impact strategy if you can get it right. Too much feedback and pupils are overwhelmed, too little and they don’t know how to move forward. Too surface and little actually changes. Too deep and they can’t take the first step. Most importantly pupils need a chance to act on feedback, whether it is verbal or written, from the teacher or their peers.

Teachers can use think alouds to help pupils develop the skills of how to actually respond to feedback. They can use models of pupil work to show what a good ‘response to feedback’ actually looks like. Pupils can work together to respond to feedback, developing better quality answers and seeking to remove errors. How do you set high standards for the quality of response expected?

How do you help pupils improve their ability to self-assess? What opportunities and support is provided to practice self-assessment?

Modelling

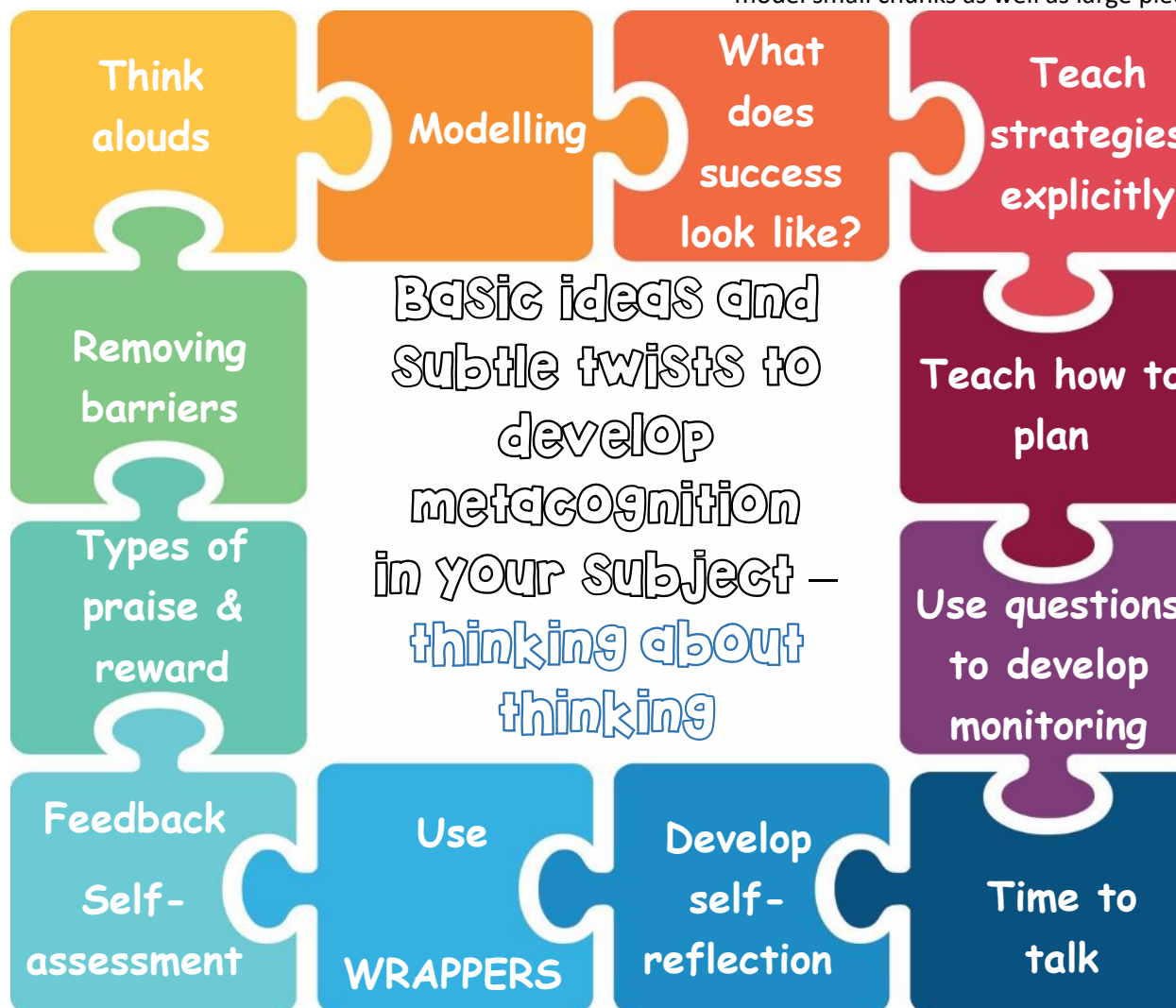
Modelling helps pupil to understand the processes they are about to try. For example, modelling how to write a really good explanation and examining all the features that make it so, or modelling how to create a two sided argument for a history question. Modelling can also focus on other types of learning processes, for example modelling how to correct a mistake, or how to check your answer, or how to improve a conclusion. Modelling can be especially powerful when combined with elements of a ‘think aloud’. Encourage peer modelling.

What does success look like?

Knowing your destination helps you to achieve it. Being able to look at a completed, successful example of work and unpick the elements that make it a good piece of work can really help pupils to plot their own path to success. You can use professional work, the work of past pupils or even work from the current class as models. It can be particularly effective at raising standards when pupils know it is another pupil that has created the work. Teach pupils how to examine and deconstruct a model and create their own success criteria. (Don’t forget to model small chunks as well as large pieces of work.)

Teach strategies explicitly

How many ways are there to memorise a list of facts? How many ways do your pupils know? How do they know which of these strategies is the most effective for the task at hand? Are pupils aware that not everyone is using the same strategy? Do they get a chance to evaluate the effectiveness of their strategy and test out new strategies? The ‘scissor kick’ won’t get you to the Olympics, but what if you don’t know the Western Role and the Fosbury Flop even exist? What would the key strategies be in specific subjects and how do you make them explicit?



Use wrappers

Wrappers can be used around a variety of different type of activities such as exams, note taking, problem solving, essay writing. Step 1: the teacher helps the pupil to consider a strategy they are going to use for note taking whilst watching a historical documentary. The teacher may support pupils by teaching them a new strategy to try. Step 2: The pupils then use the chosen strategy. Step 3: After completing the activity, they are given the opportunity to reflect on the strategy. Would they use this strategy again? What would they need to do to make the strategy more effective? Would they combine this with other strategies? Etc. They make a plan / commitment of what they will do next time. The pupils are given further opportunity to complete the same type of task, each time modifying their strategy and evaluating it.

Developing self-reflection

How could you increase your pupil’s ability to be reflective? How could you help them to have a more systematic approach to self-reflection? How could you help them be more analytical and more sophisticated in their reflection? On many occasions the plenary adds little value because the depth of thinking is surface level or too quick. The type of reflection we are talking about here is where pupils are evaluating their approach, their strategies, their efforts, their end product with sophistication which results in some kind of change being made.

Teach pupils how to plan

Planning (generally) improves outcomes. You need to help pupils develop the kind of questions that are useful when first approaching a task. E.g. “What will be the trickiest part of this task?”, “What kind of mistakes did I make last time and how will I avoid them this time?”, “What equipment will I need?”, “What is the success criteria?” Too often instead of developing pupils’ ability to ask themselves these questions we do the thinking for them. Help them to learn HOW to analyse the task requirements. Modelling and think alouds can be useful in achieving this, e.g. “The first thing I do is to look at the subheadings and then read through the questions at the end of the chapter. I’ve found this helps because...”. Deconstructing models can also be useful, e.g. “What do you think the writer had to do first?” Once the pupil understands the task requirements, they then need a strategy for planning. Teach pupils how to plan and help them to evaluate their planning skills.

Use questions to develop monitoring

Ask pupils to think aloud as they carry out a task. Get them to verbalise the questions they are asking themselves. Hearing the internal dialogue of others can help a pupil consider what they asked or didn’t ask in comparison to other pupils. Another strategy is to provide pupils with banks of questions that might help them to think about their thinking and learning during the task. Pupils select a few questions to ponder on at a mid-point and discuss with these with other pupils. Use ‘plan-monitor-check’ menu cards and question banks to stimulate discussion. Teachers can also model the internal questions they ask themselves.

Time to talk

Give pupils time to talk about how they have approached the task, what difficulties they experienced, how they solved the problems they ran into, how they corrected mistakes or made changes to their approach, what would they do differently next time etc. Help them to discuss in pairs or groups the strategies and the effectiveness of these strategies. Vicky Crane www.ictwand.com