

Planning effective tutoring sessions

Support offered within a tutoring session should be carefully targeted to the student's current needs. This involves addressing specific homework tasks, or spending time practising a target area of language or literacy development. To support your understanding of how you can most effectively assist your student, the educational ideas of Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development' and Bruner's 'Scaffolding' are helpful to understand. Vygotsky developed the Zone of Proximal Development to explore the area of learning where a student needs active support to progress. Scaffolding originates from the work of Bruner and is a process of providing the necessary support for your student to be able to learn new tasks. Scaffolding can be used as a metaphor for learning: when constructing a new building, scaffolding is put up around the building to facilitate the progress of the building's development; when the building is complete, the scaffolding can be removed. In education, scaffolding is used to support (in different ways, shapes and forms) and provide structure to assist learners to move towards new skills, concepts or levels of understanding. For EAL learners providing visual scaffolding is also of critical importance. Like construction, scaffolding, is removed when the learner has developed independence.

When planning for your tutoring sessions it may be helpful to consider including the following areas where possible.

Confidence development

Building a student's confidence will assist with their capacity to learn. Consider how you can give them opportunities to succeed with small and targeted activities. Reinforce the view that making mistakes is an important part of the learning process. Where possible model the skill being worked on so the student can see what they are working towards. Ensure activities are diverse and engaging so that energy levels are high and encourage active student participation. Encourage a move towards independent learning in small steps.

Learning to learn skills development

A focus on learning how to learn is important for students' academic advancement. Look at study and organisational skills alongside the use of educational facilities including staff members and technology. Reinforce the purpose and value of homework and the benefit of working both cooperatively with other and independently. Develop exam skills such as understanding instructions, timings, writing legibly and scoring.

Homework and broader educational support

Some students may bring specific homework tasks that they would like support with. Others may not know what they want to work on. Depending on the situation the session can focus on preparing for specific school work, including assessment tasks and homework tasks, or exploring targeted aspects of learning that students need assistance with. Providing lots of practice time to recycle ideas, language and skills from previous sessions is really helpful as making the purpose of learning explicit by connecting it to existing content and skill areas.

New content areas

It may be appropriate to introduce students to new areas of content knowledge if a gap has been identified, such as aspects of Australian history, a scientific procedure, or broader social and cultural concepts. When doing so try to use real life and concrete examples connected to the student's life and interests and provide visual support where possible. Limit the number of new concepts introduced at one time and follow up with opportunities for exploratory talk and application of the ideas. Check for understanding by asking specific questions and giving immediate feedback. To understand more about the content areas students are learning about, explore the National Curriculum (<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>) and the Australian Curriculum in Victoria (<http://ausvels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>).

Language and literacy development

All school based learning uses English and therefore the opportunity to practice all four macro skills of language - speaking, listening, reading and writing - is really important. When doing so provide opportunities for listening before speaking, and reading before writing. Ensure that specific language features needing support are practised in a targeted manner. Specific attention to practising literacy skills is valuable with time allocated to reviewing reading and writing. Ensure sufficient time is allowed to complete all tasks. Remember that all students will have different strengths which can be utilised to support areas needing development.

Conclusion

No two tutoring sessions will be the same. Indeed, you may work consistency with one student every week, or you may be helping different students all the time. By considering the areas discussed above you will be able to provide a wide range of support to whichever students you tutor.