

[Moving forwards and mobilising metacognition](#) (EEF blog, 6 September)

Education lecturer and former primary school teacher [Kirstin Mulholland](#) explains how metacognition can support pupil learning in the new academic year.

As we move into the new academic year, many schools will be contemplating how best to promote pupils' independence and resilience.

This has long been the 'million-dollar question' in schools, but perhaps in the year ahead it holds even more importance, as school staff look to move pupils' learning forwards in the wake of COVID.

The EEF [Moving Forwards, Making a Difference](#) school planning guide is designed to support teachers and school leaders in identifying and addressing key priorities for their settings in the year ahead. Written in response to some of the latest [findings](#) around the impacts of the COVID pandemic, it offers practical advice and signposts evidence-informed resources on a variety of areas of teaching practice, from maximising the quality of teaching to removing non-academic barriers to attainment.

However, on re-reading the guide, I was struck by how much of the advice relates back to metacognition. For example, metacognitive strategies form one core element of the 'Five-a-day' approach, which identifies evidence-informed 'best bets' that can have a positive impact for all pupils, including those with SEND.

Whilst some dismiss the term as 'jargon', there's no doubt that metacognition is critical to successful learning. In simple terms, metacognition involves teaching pupils specific strategies for planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning. It's one of the most promising approaches in the EEF [Teaching and Learning toolkit](#), with an average impact of an additional seven months' progress over the course of a year.

By developing metacognitive strategies and skills, we can help pupils to take increasing ownership over their work, enabling them to understand why particular strategies support effective learning. This equips pupils with a bank of strategies to choose from, as well as the skills they need to select the most suitable for a given task.

Metacognition and 'Think Alouds'

In the classroom, we can promote the development of metacognition through explicit modelling and scaffolding. EEF guidance suggests we can do this by adopting a [Think Aloud](#) strategy, where teachers narrate their thought processes to provide a model of how 'expert' learners approach tasks.

Whilst 'Thinking Aloud', it can be helpful to ask yourself some [key questions](#). Some examples of these can be found in the 'Think Aloud Planning Tool' below.

As well as modelling, we can use questioning to prompt these reflections from the pupils themselves through the

[Debrief](#). The debrief supports pupils to consider the success of the approaches they've used, how they could be used more effectively, and to identify other scenarios in which these could be useful.

Key questions include:

- What exactly did you do?
- Why did this help you?
- What was challenging? Why?
- Is there a better way to ...?
- What changes would you make? Why?

The debrief provides a model for pupils in the class, developing their understanding of the range of approaches open to them.

However, it also helps us, as teachers, to better understand pupils' thinking, enabling us to support pupils in developing more efficient strategies where needed.

Ultimately, practical classroom approaches like the 'Think Aloud' and the Debrief can help teachers establish effective strategies for their new classes. They can help pupils in grappling with tricky topics after a summer away from the classroom.

