Teaching Assistant
Support Learning Activities
Evaluate own strengths and weaknesses in relation to supporting learning activities and how these may impact on the support that can be provided

Teamwork Challenge

You will find that you have specific strengths and weaknesses that can help or hinder your ability to support learners, and knowing what these are is a very helpful exercise.

Understanding the effects of your own abilities on the children you support is also useful, and means that you are less likely to find yourself in the position of trying - and failing - to support someone adequately in a subject area that you yourself are not confident with.

This doesn't mean that you can opt in and out of whatever tasks suit you at school, but it means that you will be able to offset your weaknesses with specific strategies that will make that difficulty less important. It also means that you can make the most of those areas in which you feel most confident.

For example, if you are particularly good at reading and writing, and you understand the different ways in which pupils can be taught the same things, you may usually prefer to support children in literacy classes. You may even have a particular group of children who have additional needs or who just need a little bit of a boost of special attention from an adult while they are learning to read and write more effectively.

On the other hand, if you know you are not so good at maths, and there are some concepts within maths that you never felt you really understood, you may want to read up on strategies that can help you understand these things better, or ask the teacher for some ideas on how to deliver the information better. Being prepared certainly helps with confidence, and cannot be underestimated as a strategy for lessons you don't feel as strong at.

The reason that your personal strengths and weaknesses are important is because ultimately they impact on the children under your care. If you do not fully understand a subject or activity, you may find it difficult to communicate it adequately to pupils. You may also find it difficult to structure their learning so that the activity culminates in an identifiable end point or outcome.
It is easy to feel overwhelmed, out-of-your-depth, and stressed, when faced with a topic that you know you have difficulty with, so wherever possible, you should try to address whatever issue it is in a constructive way. This could include asking the teacher to explain certain aspects, reading up on the subject and researching it on the Internet, or other methods of research.

Strengthening your own weaknesses in learning support.

**Reflective practice as a retrospective evaluation**

One way in which you can effectively evaluate your own strengths and weaknesses is to keep a reflective journal for your work. We looked a little at reflective practice in the last unit, and this same type of activity can assist in a variety of ways.

If you are able to think back about the way in which you dealt with a lesson you thought was quite hard for you to fully understand, how you might have done it better, and what you might do the next time around, you will be in a much stronger position going forward.

**Evaluating strengths and weaknesses prior to lessons**

If you wanted to do a more quantifiable type of evaluation, you could create a document with two sections, one headed 'strengths' and the other 'weaknesses'. In the two sections, place each of the different learning activities for the next week, assessing as you go whether or not you feel confident or not so strong about each one.
Create a second column to the right of each section, and head it up as 'Impact'. Then write a couple of words against each strength and each weakness that summarise the way in which you feel your strength or your weakness will affect the children under your care.

If you want to go a step further, in the 'weaknesses' section you could create a third column and head it up as 'Improvement'. Think about how you can improve the outcomes for the children, given that you are aware of your weakness. How you can make yourself more effective, how you can find out more about the lesson or address the gap in your own knowledge and understanding, prior to the lesson.

This is a form of reflective practice and is a useful way to evaluate a situation before you get to the stage of doing the lesson itself.