SCAFFOLDING

The key to comprehensible learning, and to the skill of teaching, is knowing how to scaffold. For content to be learned sufficiently, i.e., at grade-level language usage, it initially needs to be distilled through multiple, context-embedded, gradually more complex practice opportunities. This is scaffolding and it is the subject of this Bulletin.

Scaffolding is not about simplifying language; rather, scaffolding is about "unwrapping" language to the point where a concept is understood, then "rewrapping" it with language to the point where it is grade-appropriate in both structure and word usage. A concept or an idea is separate from language, and as such can be understood apart from language. The challenge in scaffolding is to find a way to make a concept understood with minimal language, then to gradually add on language for more precision, focus, and detail in articulating the meaning and use of the concept.

An example of a natural way is the way in which we scaffold for our children. A child might say, "Look, doggy running!" to an adult. The adult in turn might respond, "Yes, look at the dog running. Why is the dog running?" The adult is acknowledging the child's use of language but in a slightly more articulate manner, followed by a question to challenge the child to expand upon the observation of the running dog. In other words, the adult is providing a gradually more complex response opportunity for the child.

SEQUENCING SCAFFOLDING

A common and effective progression in teaching incorporates scaffolding in the following manner:

a. Teacher-centered - Teacher presents new material through brainstorming for prior knowledge and by direct instruction;

b. Teacher-assisted - Teacher helps students learn this new material through assistance with the tasks and activities that increase student learning of the content;

c. Student-assisted - Students help one another through collaborative and cooperative activities such as jigsaw;

d. Independent study - Students work on their own using resource materials.
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**SCAFFOLDING TECHNIQUES**

The following are some techniques through which teachers can scaffold student learning:

1. **Restatement.** Restatement is the technique of expanding upon a student's utterance by restating it in a more precise and complex manner. For example, if a student says, *The soldiers did not like the British taxes,* the teacher might respond by restating, *Yes, the colonists were angry about the British system of taxation without representation.*

2. **Questioning.** The teacher may scaffold within the framework of a posed question. Here is an example: *How did the colonists show, or manifest, their anger?*

3. **Posing questions/requesting clarification.** Here are some examples of common and frequently used expressions for scaffolding:
   - *Can you say that again?*
   - *I don't quite understand. Can you explain it another way?*
   - *Tell me a little more.*
   - *Expand on that a bit more.*
   - *What do you mean by...?*
   - *Explain it again.*

4. **Definition reinforcement.** This technique is embedding a definition of a word immediately within the framework of the utterance. Here is an example: *It was an earthquake. The ground was shaking and the buildings were falling apart.*

**OTHER WAYS TO SCAFFOLD**

The categories below are organizational frameworks for thinking about scaffolding:

- **Speech adaptations** - Slowing down and/or chunking delivery of language, as well as careful, calculated use of vocabulary;
- **Group processing** - Various small and large group formats for peer-assisted content work;
- **Summarizing** - Techniques for students to practice encapsulating important content information;
- **Graphic Organizers** - Visual frameworks for organizing and prioritizing information in written texts;
- **Focus Materials** - Audio and visual aids to help students concentrate on essential information;
- **Learning Resources** - Various support materials such as reference texts and dictionaries for assisting students in comprehending material;
- **Background Knowledge** - Ways of enabling students to connect previously known information with new content;
- **Study Aids** - Guided and marginal notations for helping students to identify important information in texts;
- **Checks for Understanding** - Ways of posing questions and enabling students to process newly acquired information;
- **Vocabulary Development Strategies** - Strategies for assisting students to independently develop and expand their vocabulary; and
- **Assessment** - Modifications such as extended time and oral vs. written formats for helping students demonstrate learning.

(Please see Bulletins, Vol. 2, No. 6 or Vol. 6, No 3 for detailed descriptions of the above ways to scaffold.)

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In summary, there are multiple ways to scaffold language and content. Always helpful, especially for English Language Learners, is requiring talk and journaling about what is being learned. These provide important scaffolding opportunities for students to engage in learning.

**SOURCE**
