Scaffolding Techniques for English Language Learners: Part 2

By Veronica Vasquez | Categories: Making Meaning, Being a Reader, Teaching Tips, Being a Writer, ELL, Collaborative Literacy, Implementation

In part 1 of this blog series, we considered two overarching types of scaffolds that support English language learners:

1. **Verbal Scaffolds** use language to support students during instruction
2. **Procedural Scaffolds** are tools and resources to support students as they access the learning

Collaborative Literacy includes a multitude of scaffolds embedded in the lessons that support the teacher in planning for instruction. The goal of these scaffolds is to make the academic content comprehensible while promoting the students' English language development. Here are just a few examples of ways these scaffolds support teacher planning and student learning.

**Verbal Scaffolds**

This type of scaffold provides prompts, questions, and elaboration to facilitate students' movement to higher levels of language proficiency, comprehension, and thinking. The combination of the verbal scaffolds with effective teacher-student interaction promotes confidence, which in turn leads to language competence. All three programs, Making Meaning, Being a Reader, and Being a Writer consistently embed verbal scaffolds in the daily lessons. Here are examples of the types of scaffolds with brief explanations.

**“You might say:” note**

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You might say:

“This poem includes a lot of movement words that helped me imagine how the seal is swimming through the water. At the beginning of the poem, the words zoom and dart let me know that the seal is moving very fast. In the middle of the poem, the lines ‘See how he swims/With a swerve and a twist’ made me think that his movements are also graceful—he is able to swerve and twist easily. I'll write: The poem ‘Seal,’ by William Jay Smith, includes many words that helped me visualize how the seal moves. When I read the words ‘zoom’ and ‘dart,’ I pictured the seal swimming through the water really fast. When I read the lines ‘See how he swims/With a swerve and a twist,’ I pictured him moving gracefully in the water, like a dancer.”
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This verbal scaffold invites the teacher to model a “think-aloud.” In this example, the think-aloud includes modeling writing. After the teacher walks the students through his or her thinking, the students engage in similar thinking and discussion.
Reinforcing contextualized definitions

Read Aloud

Read the story aloud slowly and clearly, showing the illustrations as you read. Clarify vocabulary when you encounter it in the story by reading the word, briefly defining it, rereading it in context, and continuing (for example, “The kids in Room 207 were misbehaving again”—misbehaving means 'behaving, or acting, badly'—‘The kids in Room 207 were misbehaving again!’).

Suggested Vocabulary

misbehaving: behaving, or acting, badly (p. 3)
rapped: hit sharply or quickly (p. 10)
drawn: closed (p. 18)

ELL Vocabulary

English Language Learners may benefit from hearing additional vocabulary defined, including:

spitballs: little balls of chewed paper (p. 3)
act up: (idiom) act, or behave, badly (p. 8)
loaded them down with homework: gave them a lot of homework (p. 13; refer to the illustration)
case: crime or mystery that the police investigate (p. 17)
shades: window coverings (p. 18)
know-it-all: person who thinks he or she knows everything (p. 24)

The rigor of the tasks that Collaborative Literacy students engage in increase across the weeks and days of instruction. For this reason, it is imperative that students have a solid understanding of the text. Specific ELL vocabulary suggestions reduce some of the cognitive load for ELL students giving them immediate access to the read-a-loud text. Vocabulary words are defined in the context of the read-aloud in a way that minimizes impact on the flow and pacing of the instruction. This support ensures that students are able to engage in meaningful conversations about the text.

Procedural Scaffolds

Procedural scaffolds make content comprehensible by providing tools, resources, and other types of support before, during, and after instruction. Students need access to the content of the text, but it is equally important that students feel safe enough to take academic risks as they collaborate within a classroom community even when they make mistakes. The combination of this low-affective-filter environment and these scaffolds accelerate students' learning and acquisition of language. Here are some examples of procedural scaffolds within Collaborative Literacy lessons that support both academic and social goals in support of language acquisition.
Asking open-ended questions with support

ELL Note
Support students with limited English proficiency by providing prompts such as “I remember...” and “She drew...”

Discussion Prompts
I agree with __________ because...
I disagree with __________ because...
In addition to what __________ said,
I think...
Collaborative Literacy offers seven facilitation techniques that enhance teaching and learning. This example is of the procedural scaffold of asking open-ended questions. This type of question requires students to think critically and go beyond simple answers. Because responding to open-ended questions may be challenging for ELL students, lessons include layered support. The first support is a list of general discussion prompts that are supportive for all students as they collaborate and add to each other’s thinking. For students at different proficiency levels, additional language support is offered in an ELL Note.

Explicit pre-teaching and modeling

Facilitation Tip

During this unit, we encourage you to focus on two questioning techniques: asking open-ended questions and using wait-time. Notice that most of the questions we suggest are open-ended, inviting many responses. These questions cannot be answered with a single word and often begin with words like what, how, and why. We encourage you to try asking the questions as they are written and noticing how the students respond. Because the questions require thought, we suggest that you use at least 5-10 seconds of wait-time after asking a question before calling on anyone to respond. This gives everyone a chance to think before talking. To see this Facilitation Tip in action, view “Asking Open-ended Questions and Using Wait-time” (AV18).
The “Do Ahead” section is a support for weekly planning. Considerations for supporting ELL students are included in this section when appropriate. In this example, the Do Ahead suggests that the teacher preview the unit’s read-aloud selections with the ELL students before whole-class instruction. The preview can be a combination of reading the text, discussing the text, and/or discussing the illustrations. Furthermore, these suggestions might serve as a springboard for making instructional decisions about any additional support that might be needed. This support could include building specific background knowledge as needed so that the students can engage in the tasks at hand in the upcoming weeks.