TEACHERS' VOICES 8

Explicitly supporting reading and writing in the classroom

editors: Anne Burns and Helen de Silva Joyce

National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research

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Contents

Abbreviations

AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
AMES	Adult Migrant English Service
ASLPR	Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating
CSWE	Certificate in Spoken and Written English
ESL	English as a Second Language
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ISLPR	International Second Language Proficiency Rating
L1	first language
OET	Occupational English Test
OHP	overhead projector
OHT	overhead transparency
TESOL	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney
ZPD	zone of proximal development

Introduction and acknowledgments

This volume of *Teachers' voices*, the eighth in the series, and its accompanying DVD form a professional development package produced as part of two national projects conducted for the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Research Centre at Macquarie University in Australia in 2003–04. The projects arose from the common interest of two researchers, the editors of the volume, and a number of AMEP teachers from Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales. The research interest was the issue of supporting and scaffolding teaching and learning in adult ESL classrooms. Over the course of the research, a number of participants were unable to continue and the two projects converged to focus on the theme presented in this volume — *explicitly supporting reading and writing in the adult ESL classroom.*

This volume of *Teachers' voices* represents something of a departure from others in the series as it includes illustrative excerpts from the teachers' classrooms that relate to the events they describe. It also provides a number of focus activities that can be used by readers, either individually or as groups, to experiment with the ideas and classroom tasks presented. In the spirit of the action research orientation of the projects and of the *Teachers' voices* series, readers are also provided with suggestions for conducting small-scale action research projects that allow for application of the ideas in their own classrooms.

As with all the *Teachers' voices* volumes it would not have been possible to complete the projects without the very willing cooperation and enthusiasm of the teachers involved. In addition, a number of other people provided valuable contributions through theoretical and practical input and technological expertise. We would like to acknowledge and thank the teachers who were involved in the various stages of the project:

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Series editors
Anne Burns and Helen de Silva Joyce

SECTION ONE
Theoretical ideas

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1 *Explicitly supporting learning: An overview*

Anne Burns and Helen de Silva Joyce

It is important that teachers look beyond the purpose of individual language learning activities to develop teaching sequences that provide learners with adequate levels of support and that this support is only withdrawn when learners can achieve tasks independently.

The project

This volume of *Teachers' voices* and its accompanying DVD form a professional development package produced as part of two national projects conducted for the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Research Centre at Macquarie University in Australia in 2003–04. The projects arose from the common interest of two researchers, the editors of the volume, and a number of AMEP teachers from Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales. The research interest was the issue of supporting and scaffolding teaching and learning in adult ESL classrooms. Over the course of the research the two projects converged to focus on the theme presented in this volume — *explicitly supporting reading and writing in the adult ESL classroom.*

Before the project began, the teachers were sent a reading list and a package of readings focusing on explicit support and the scaffolding of reading, writing and learning in second language classrooms. One of these readings by Jennifer Hammond and Pauline Gibbons, discussing the notion of scaffolding, is presented in Chapter 2 of this volume. The teachers then attended a two-day introductory workshop and three further meetings where they identified themes and questions for action research and, later, drew out the main classroom-generated theories that they believed informed their research.

The project began with a two-day workshop in Sydney focusing on the concepts of scaffolding and action research. The first day involved a presentation by Dr Jennifer Hammond, from the University of Technology (UTS) Sydney, entitled *The ESL scaffolding project: Why scaffolding and what is it anyway?* This presentation outlined a wide-scale scaffolding project being conducted in primary and high schools by the NSW Department of Education and UTS with funding from the Commonwealth Government. Jenny focused on the background to the project and showed a number of video examples of explicit teaching practices designed to support students. She then outlined relevant features of explicit teaching revealed through the project describing what has been learnt in terms of supporting ESL learners. Jenny concluded her session with a discussion of the contribution that the ESL scaffolding project would make to the broader context of ESL education.

A presentation on the second day of the workshop focused on scaffolding in reading. David Rose, from the University of Sydney, outlined a methodology for teaching reading to low-level learners. David had initially developed this when working with Indigenous students and had subsequently modified it when he worked with secondary and ESL students. The methodology, called *Learning to read: Reading to learn*, is a system of literacy teaching strategies that enable learners with weak literacy skills to learn to read rapidly at levels appropriate to their age. It is based on scaffolded teaching where learners are supported to practise at much higher literacy levels than they can manage on their own.

This initial two-day workshop also involved an introduction to the concepts and processes of action research, the central focus for the *Teachers' voices* projects (see Chapter 3 for a brief overview of action research and the kinds of questions raised in the workshop). During this session the participants were also given an opportunity to think about their initial research focus.

In subsequent meetings each participant led a discussion on an article from the reading package for which they had prepared a summary to present to the group. They also gave updates on their research and explored and discussed the teaching tasks, approaches and theoretical concepts emerging from their classroom research explorations. Feedback from the teachers indicated that they were concerned with:

- *learning-centred* approaches and understanding strategies that would support learning and ensure learner success
- *task-based* approaches and developing practical tasks that would support learning
- *text-based* approaches and how to maintain a focus on whole texts as the ultimate goal of learning.

At a later point in the project cycle teachers were asked if they would be willing to have their teaching approaches videoed. The video director for the project attended one of the final meetings to discuss aspects of the filming process with them.

The DVD accompanying this volume illustrates a range of strategies and activities that can be used in adult ESL classrooms by teachers who wish to take a learning-centred, task-based and text-based approach. The presentations show classes of adult migrant learners, many of whom have very limited educational experiences. While these extracts focus on particular learner groups, we believe that the approaches illustrated could be adapted for learners in other age groups and types of programs.

Theoretical principles adopted in the project

With the introduction of communicative language teaching in the 1980s, the focus in the adult ESL classroom tended to move away from teaching sequences to focus on individual language activities that would address the macro-skills. The reason for this was that it was felt important to introduce learners to authentic materials, from the beginning of their formal language learning. This project aimed to question these approaches and to place a major emphasis on the notion of a *learning-centred* classroom, where the teacher designs explicit teaching sequences to support learning, rather than arranging a series of individual learning activities. Central to the project were concepts of the kind of support and scaffolding that could be most effectively provided by a teacher.

The key teaching and learning principles underpinning the research were drawn from Vygotsky and the associated work of Bruner and his colleagues. Lev Vygotsky was a Russian developmental psychologist whose work has become important in influencing recent thinking about teaching and learning. His ideas about learning bring together the cognitive development of an individual and the social world in which this development occurs.

Vygotsky believed that development and learning are embedded in social environments, where children learn from their interactions with the world around them and the people in that world. Learning and cognitive development are *socially* mediated by more skilled and knowledgeable others within the immediate social context of the learner. These 'skilled people' in the context play a significant part in make learning accessible. Vygotsky saw language as a critical tool for learning, both

socially and individually, as it provides the symbols (words) through which knowledge can be organised.

Vygotsky developed the concept of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) to extend the notion of intelligence. Rather than seeing intelligence as something to be measured individually, he suggested that intelligence was better understood as what a learner could do with skilled help (see Cameron 2001: 6). While at first learners may rely heavily on the help of others, they gradually shift towards greater independence as they acquire skills and knowledge for themselves. Vygotsky offers some key principles to guide teachers who wish to develop teaching/learning experiences that adequately support learning. These principles are:

- Individual learning takes place through interaction with others in social contexts.
- Language is fundamental to cognitive development as it is a tool for thinking and doing.
- Learning is mediated by skilled others who support learners in the tasks they undertake.
- Learners can achieve more learning with the support of skilled others than they can achieve alone.
- Learners move towards greater independence as their knowledge and skills increase.
- Teachers can gradually withdraw support as learners achieve success.

Like Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner acknowledges the importance of language in mediating learning. Bruner and his colleagues investigated the forms of effective support offered by caretakers (American mothers) to their children when carrying out various tasks. The caretakers used a range of strategies (Cameron 2001: 8) that can be applied to all learning contexts:

- They made the children interested in the task.
- They simplified the task, often by breaking it down into smaller steps.
- They kept the child on track by reminding the child what the goal of the task was.
- They pointed out what was important or showed the child other ways of doing parts of the tasks.
- They controlled the child's frustration during the task.
- They demonstrated an idealised version of the task.

Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) developed the term *scaffolding*, as a metaphor to describe the role played by the interactional talk between learners and skilled others. Bruner also identified other important concepts that have relevance for successful learning — *formats and routines*. Bruner suggests that important spaces for new learning lie within events that are familiar to the learner. For example, in the case of children developing literacy, a routine that has a typical format is the bedtime story (Heath 1983; Barton 1994). Children become familiar with the formats, events and sequences of reading a bedtime story. Over time the more skilled adult varies the level of questions and interaction or 'talk around the text' that takes place and the children take over more of the storytelling themselves, as their literacy skills develop. Thus new learning takes place in the spaces that open up within an already familiar event. Key ideas for language teachers that arise from these first language learning contexts are:

- Effective scaffolding is tuned to the needs of learners and constantly adjusted in response to what they are able to do.
- Support is gradually reduced as skills and knowledge are acquired.
- Learners are more likely to be successful when tasks are broken down into achievable parts.

- Demonstration and modelling are important aspects of scaffolding learning.
- Focusing continually towards the whole task and the goals to be achieved is central to effective scaffolding.
- Learners have success with new tasks when they are located within formats and routines that are already familiar.

These concepts developed by Vygotsky and Bruner have great relevance to adult second language learners in the AMEP, many of whom have not been involved in formal language learning before. It is important that teachers look beyond the purpose of individual language learning activities to develop teaching sequences that provide learners with adequate levels of support and that this support is only withdrawn when learners can achieve tasks independently.

It is important to assess what knowledge and skills familiar communicative activities demand of learners and to lead up to these activities through scaffolded teaching sequences. Such communicative activities often throw learners in 'at the deep-end' where they experience the frustration that comes from high challenge and low support (see Hammond and Gibbons, this volume). For many language learners, authentic materials also present a high challenge which they are not ready to meet. It is the role of the teacher to produce pedagogic texts and activities that will support students to develop the skills and knowledge they need to eventually deal with authentic texts.

A professional development resource

This volume of *Teachers' voices* presents something of a departure from others in the series. It provides a variety of components that can be used for professional development:

Section One   Theoretical ideas on the concepts of scaffolding and explicit teaching and suggestions for further reading (Chapters 1 and 2)

Section Two   An introduction to action research (Chapter 3)

Section Three   Accounts of classroom activities and materials to support reading and writing development (Chapters 4–8)

- A DVD showing each of the teachers in action in their classrooms.

Throughout the volume reflection points and action points provide further suggestions for professional development activities:

Reflection points are tasks that ask you to:

- reflect on how your own beliefs, experiences or practices relate to those in each chapter
- discuss key theoretical and practical ideas with others
- find out more about a particular issue.

Action points are mini-action research processes that ask you to:

- try out activities used by the teachers in the project
- collect information about what happens
- reflect on what you find or what changes you could make.

Using the materials for individual professional development

If you are interested in exploring concepts of scaffolding and looking at how explicit teaching can be implemented in the adult ESL classroom, we suggest that you: 8

- view the whole DVD to get ideas about supporting reading and writing for different learner groups

- read the volume to gain an overview of the tasks used by the teachers to support learning
- use the teaching sequences and materials shown on the DVD as a basis for planning your own lessons
- use the reflection points to reflect on your own teaching practices
- try out the activities suggested in the action points
- read the articles presented in the reading list at the end of this chapter to further develop your knowledge.

Using the materials for professional development sessions

The DVD provides material to trigger professional discussion with groups of teachers. If you are interested in using the resource to work with teacher groups, we suggest that you:

- focus on particular presentations on the DVD and discuss your reactions with other teachers
- work together to adapt or add to the teaching sequences
- work together to develop additional materials to share in your teaching centre
- form groups relating to learner levels and, based on the relevant presentations, help each other to plan appropriate lessons
- select issues from the reflection points for group discussion and compare responses
- draw on the action points as the start for action research projects on supporting learning
- ask each member of the group to choose an article from those listed in the readings list at the end of this chapter and to lead a discussion at a later meeting.

Using the materials in teacher education

It is important that teacher education courses focus on the area of explicit teaching in adult ESL. If you are interested in using the resource in teacher education courses, we suggest that you:

- incorporate the first two chapters in course readings
- incorporate readings from the list at the end of this chapter into course reading lists
- use the chapters written by the teachers as illustrations for action research projects
- use the whole DVD or particular parts of it to provide footage of adult ESL classrooms
- use or adapt the reflection points for course assignments.

Conclusion

As you will see in the teachers' accounts and in the DVD of their classrooms, those involved in this project were concerned to understand what explicit support means in the adult ESL classroom. They were keen to think logically about the aims of their teaching, to provide their learners with learning challenges and to develop teaching approaches that adequately supported learning. This involved developing pedagogical reading texts — which could act as a bridge to authentic texts — and planning linked sequences of activities which supported their learners towards achieving curriculum outcomes. It also involved investigating their classrooms and their teaching practices and systematically sharing their insights and ideas with other colleagues. It is our hope that this volume of *Teachers' voices* will inspire others to do the same.

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2 What is scaffolding?

Jennifer Hammond and Pauline Gibbons

... our understanding of the nature of scaffolding includes both the micro-level scaffolding which occurs in the ongoing interactions between teacher and students and a more macro-level scaffolding which is related to larger issues such as program goals and the selection and sequencing of tasks.

In this chapter, we begin to explore questions about the nature of scaffolding. *What is scaffolding? What does it have to offer in terms of extending our understanding of teaching and learning? How do we know it when we see it? How is it different from (or similar to) good teaching? Where does the metaphor come from, and how far can it be pushed in order to explore a socially and linguistically oriented theory of teaching and learning?*

We start by focusing on the metaphor itself.

Scaffolding, as most people know, is placed around the outside of new buildings to allow builders access to the emerging structure as it rises from the ground. Once the building is able to support itself, the builder removes the scaffolding. The metaphor of scaffolding has been widely used in recent years to argue that, just as builders provide essential but temporary support, teachers need to provide temporary supporting structures to assist learners to develop new understandings, new concepts, and new abilities. As the learner acquires these skills, so teachers need to withdraw that support, only to provide further support for extended or new tasks, understandings and concepts.

While the metaphor has some obvious limitations, scaffolding is a term that resonates with teachers. Over the past 20 years or so it has been taken up with enthusiasm and, although sometimes used loosely to refer to different things, its popularity indicates that it captures something that teachers perceive to be central to their core business — something that is at the heart of effective teaching. Mercer (1994) suggests that teachers find the concept of scaffolding appealing because it resonates with their intuitive conceptions of what it means to intervene successfully in students' learning. He argues that the term offers what is lacking in much of the literature on education — that is, an effective conceptual metaphor for the *quality* of teacher intervention in learning.

As well as exploring the ways in which the term scaffolding has been used in educational contexts, and its theoretical underpinnings, we will also address questions on the nature and quality of teacher intervention in learning.

The nature of scaffolding in educational contexts

Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) were the first to use the term scaffolding as a metaphor in the learning context. They used the term to describe the nature of parental tutoring in the language development of young children. They showed that parents who were 'successful scaffolders' focused their children's attention on the task at hand and kept them motivated and working on the task. Such parents divided the task into manageable components and directed their children's attention to the essential and relevant features. In addition, these parents demonstrated and modelled successful performance, while keeping the task at an appropriate level of difficulty. In this way the parents provided support through intervention that was tailored to the demands of the task, and determined by the child's ability to complete it. Bruner (1978: 19) describes scaffolding as:

> ... the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom taken in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring.

In the context of classroom interaction, the term scaffolding has been taken up to describe the temporary assistance that teachers provide for their students to assist them to complete a task or develop new understandings, so that they will later be able to complete similar tasks alone. Maybin, Mercer and Steirer (1992: 186) describe this as the 'temporary but essential nature of the mentor's assistance' in supporting learners to carry out tasks successfully. There are a number of significant features in this use of the term.

Key features

Extending understanding

Scaffolding refers to support that is designed to provide the assistance necessary to enable learners to accomplish tasks and develop understandings that they would not be able to manage on their own. As Mercer explains (1994: 96): 'Scaffolding represents the kind and quality of cognitive support which an adult can provide for a child's learning, which anticipates the child's own internalisation of mental functions'. Teachers, through sequencing activities and through the quality support and guidance, are able to challenge and extend what students are able to do. It is by participating in such activities that students are pushed beyond their current abilities and levels of understanding, and this is when learning occurs and students are able to 'internalise' new understandings.

In a discussion of the implications of teaching, Mariani (1997) explores the classroom consequences of various combinations of high and low teacher support and challenge. He describes the frustrations, insecurity and anxiety experienced by students in learning contexts where there is high challenge but inadequate or low support. Such contexts present students with demands beyond their capabilities that are likely to result in failure (see Figure 1). In contexts with low challenge and low support students are unlikely to be motivated to do much at all. This results in little learning taking place with students more likely to be bored, and perhaps expressing this boredom through misbehaviour.

Challenge	
Demands too high; failure likely	Extension of learning and capability
Low motivation; boredom and behaviourproblems likely	Comfortable/Easy; little learning likely
	Support
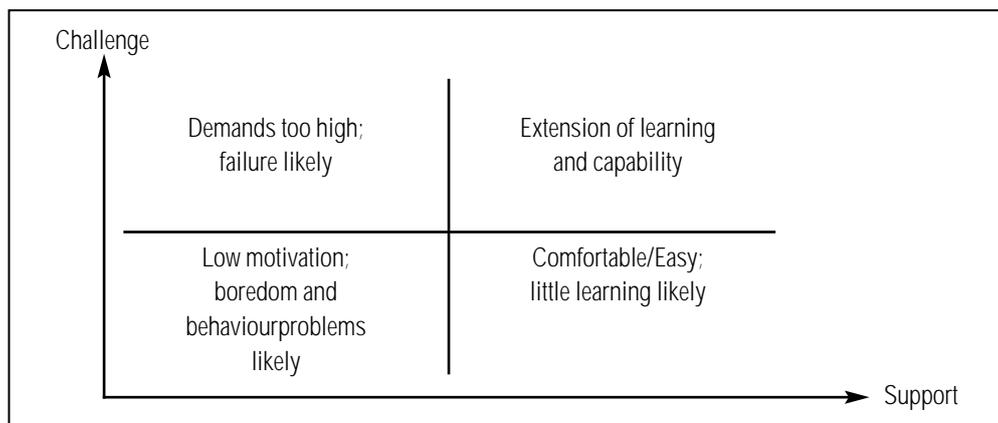
Source: Adapted from Mariani, L. (1997). Teacher support and teacher challenge in promoting learner autonomy. Perspectives *23(2), Italy.*

Figure 1: Framework of learning contexts

With low challenge and high support, students will operate within their comfort zone and may enjoy their classroom experiences, but they are unlikely to learn a great deal. It is when the learning context provides both high challenge and high support that most learning takes place. At such times, students are pushed beyond their current capabilities. As Vygotsky (1978) wrote, good learning is that which is ahead of actual development. A major feature of scaffolding is its ability to capture the role of the 'expert', or more knowledgeable other (typically the teacher), in assisting students' learning, and the role of that knowledgeable other in extending students' current levels of understanding or current capabilities.

Scaffolding therefore is not only teacher support but assistance that is designed to help learners to work with increasing independence — to know not only *what* to think and do, but *how* to think and do, so that new skills and understandings can be applied in new contexts.

Temporary support

An important feature of scaffolding is its temporary nature. Because it is aimed at enabling students to learn independently, teacher support is gradually withdrawn as the learners become increasingly able to complete a task alone. *Timely* support is critical to effective scaffolding. This requires teachers to have a good understanding of where their learners are 'at' — that is, of what their learners know (or do not know) at the beginning of an activity. To be effective, such support needs to be progressively adjusted to address the needs of different students within the one classroom.

This ability to customise support for specific learners is what van Lier (1996), Wells (1986) and others refer to as *contingency*. The notion of contingency emphasises the importance of teaching strategies being based on, and responsive to, students' current understandings. It is characterised by how well the teacher is able to judge the need and quality of assistance required by the learner, and related to the way help is paced on the basis of students' developing understandings. Ideally, the teacher accommodates learner initiatives as a new concept or process is grasped, but also provides further support if learners begin to falter. The sensitivity and skill involved in responding contingently to students is sometimes seen as the defining quality of teaching. Van Lier (1996: 199) suggests that 'even though it does not show up in lesson plans or syllabuses, this local or interactional scaffolding may well be the driving force behind good pedagogy, the hallmark of a good teacher'.

Macro and micro focuses

In addition to a focus on learners and their current levels of understanding, scaffolding also requires a clear focus on tasks. In our view, it therefore requires that teachers have a good understanding of:

- the curriculum area or field of inquiry of their learners and
- the demands of specific tasks that will enable learners to achieve relevant goals.

So scaffolding needs to be thought of in relation to the development of overall programs and curriculums, as well as to the selection and sequencing of tasks and to the specific classroom interactions that are part of those tasks. It extends beyond the moment-by-moment interactions between teacher and student to include also the nature and design of the classroom program.

Effective scaffolding requires clearly articulated goals and learning activities that are structured to enable learners to extend their existing levels of understanding. The

goals for any one specific task need to be located within the broader framework of a planned program (with its own clearly articulated goals). This means that the learning that occurs as a result of support provided at a micro level of interaction (at a task level) needs to be located within the macro framework of a planned program, so that there is a clear relationship between sequential tasks and also that these tasks relate to articulated program and curriculum goals. Mercer (1994: 101), who takes a similar view, argues:

> It is probably in making a direct conceptual link between two very different aspects of teachers' involvement with pupils' learning that the concept of 'scaffolding' has most to offer to educational research — the pursuit of curriculum-related goals for learning and the use of specific discourse strategies when intervening in children's learning.

The relationship between scaffolding and good teaching

A look at the key features of scaffolding gives rise to questions about the relationship between scaffolding and teaching more generally. *Do these features apply specifically to scaffolding? Do they distinguish scaffolding from other kinds of teaching? In what ways is scaffolding different to what could simply be described as good teaching?*

Questions of 'what counts' as scaffolding in the classroom, and of the relationship between scaffolding and what might be thought of as 'good teaching', have been tackled by a number of researchers (eg Maybin et al 1992; Mercer 1994; Webster, Beveridge and Reed 1996). Maybin et al (1992) write:

> [Scaffolding] is not just any assistance which helps a learner accomplish a task. It is help which will enable a learner to accomplish a task which they would not have been quite able to manage on their own, and it is help which is intended to bring the learner closer to a state of competence which will enable them eventually to complete such a task on their own.

Mercer (1994), drawing on his earlier work with colleagues, proposes the following criteria for distinguishing scaffolding from other kinds of teaching and learning:

- Students could not succeed without the teacher's intervention.
- The teacher aims for some new level of independent competence on the students' part.
- The teacher has the learning of some specific skill or concept in mind.
- There must be evidence of students successfully completing the particular task at hand.
- There must also be evidence that learners are now able to go on to deal independently with subsequent related tasks or problems.

Mercer argues that such criteria allow educational researchers to 'discuss and explain differences in the quality of intellectual support which teachers provide for learners, while sufficiently stringent to exclude some kinds of "help" which teachers provide'.

As a simple example of the difference between 'scaffolding' and 'help', consider a situation in which a student is unable to spell a particular word. In this situation, the teacher could 'help' by providing the correct spelling. Alternatively, the teacher could 'scaffold' how to think about the spelling by, for example, encouraging the student to think about the sounds of the word, and how they could be represented. Of course,

there are times when on-the-spot 'help' is a valuable kind of assistance. The point we are making here is that scaffolding, in our definition, is qualitatively different from 'help' in that it is aimed at supporting students to tackle *future* tasks in new contexts — or, as we argued earlier, to know how to think, not simply what to think.

Key theoretical concepts in understanding scaffolding

We have so far discussed the nature of scaffolding — what is meant by the term and how to recognise it when we see it in a classroom context. Here we discuss the theoretical underpinning of scaffolding, looking in particular at how it fits with more general theories of teaching and learning.

An important element in any discussion of the theoretical basis of scaffolding is its relationship with Vygotsky's theories of learning. Although Vygotsky himself never used the term scaffolding, its theoretical basis lies within a Vygotskian framework and his work is frequently cited by those who have taken up the notion of scaffolding in the context of educational research.

Broadly, Vygotsky (eg 1978) argued that learning and cognitive development are culturally and socially based. In other words, learning is a social process rather than an individual one, and occurs during interactions between individuals. He argued that learning involves a communicative process whereby knowledge is shared and understandings are constructed in culturally formed settings. In emphasising the social and cultural basis of learning, his work differs significantly from views that have dominated Western thinking about education. In particular, his views differ from Piagetian theories that have portrayed learning as an essentially individual enterprise.

In Bruner's original work on scaffolding in child language development (1985), he drew on the Vygotskian notion that social transaction and interaction, rather than solo performance, constitute the fundamental vehicle of education. It was, he said, the *transactional* nature of learning that enabled a person's entry into a culture via induction by more skilled members. He argued (p 25):

> Too often human learning has been depicted as a paradigm of a lone organism pitted against nature — whether in the model of the behaviourists' organisms shaping up responses to fit the geometrics and probabilities of the world of stimuli, or in the Piagetian model where a lone child struggles single handedly to strike some equilibrium between assimilating the world to himself or himself to the world.

The argument that learning is essentially a social and cultural process is central to the theoretical basis of scaffolding. To explore the implications of this argument, we need to consider another key concept — the zone of proximal development.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD)

Perhaps the best known and most relevant aspect of Vygotsky's work to the theoretical basis of scaffolding is his notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978: 86) argued that the ZPD is a key element in the learning process, and he defined this as:

> ... the distance between the actual development level (of the learner) as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

In relation to education, the major significance of the ZPD is that it suggests the upper and lower limits, or the 'zone', within which new learning will occur. If the instruction is too difficult, or pitched too high, the learner is likely either to be frustrated or to tune out. If it is too low, the learner is presented with no challenge and simply does not learn anything. The notion of the ZPD underpins Mariani's discussion of the merits of high support and high challenge for an effective teaching–learning relationship. The point here is that learning will occur when students are working within their ZPD and when teachers, through their mediating support role, are able to assist students to extend their current understandings and knowledge.

It is important to note that the concept of ZPD has been widely taken up in educational contexts, and often differently interpreted. Vygotsky died at a young age and, as Wells (1999) points out, the place of the ZPD in his overall theories was not fully articulated. Some have interpreted ZPD as a kind of individual attribute — something that each learner possesses, that they take with them from one situation to another, and something that can be individually assessed. Others — and we include ourselves here — take a different view.

Wells (1999: 330) argues that 'rather than being a "fixed" attribute of the learner, the ZPD constitutes a potential for learning that is created in the interaction between participants as they engage in a particular activity together'. That is, the ZPD is *constructed* in and through the activity in which learners and teachers jointly participate. Wells goes on to argue that as problems are resolved and solutions are constructed, so the potential for further learning is expanded, and new possibilities are opened up that were initially unforeseen. Thus, the ZPD is co-constructed through the talk that occurs between teacher and students as they participate in a particular task. It is an attribute of those tasks or events, rather than an attribute of the learner. This also means that the upper limits of the ZPD may change as the task unfolds. In other words, effective scaffolding is able to extend the upper limit of the ZPD, perhaps making it possible for learners to reach beyond what they are thought to be capable of.

While educational experiences should not be completely beyond the capability of the learner, Vygotsky's notion challenges the traditional concept of learner 'readiness' by suggesting that it is the teacher who is largely responsible for initiating each new step of learning, based on their understandings of what students are able to do. This does not mean that students' own interests and goals are ignored; indeed, they are an important consideration at the macro level of program planning and identification of goals. However, it does mean that when introducing new concepts, the teacher is responsible for the sequencing and pacing of learning, and for challenging students to extend their current levels of understanding.

The notion of the ZPD also challenges teachers to maintain high expectations of all students, while providing 'contingent' scaffolding in order to assist learners to complete tasks successfully. Gibbons (2002) argues that, as far as possible, all learners, including second-language learners, need to be engaged with authentic and cognitively challenging tasks. It is the *nature* of the support — customised support that is responsive to the needs of particular students — that is critical for success.

The following example is given to illustrate the principles we have been discussing. It is a short extract in which a father and mother talk with their 14-month-old son, Nigel. Before the conversation occurred, Nigel had been to the zoo. While he had been looking at a goat, it had tried to eat a plastic lid that he had been holding. The keeper had explained that he shouldn't let the goat eat the lid because it wasn't good for it. As you read this dialogue, look particularly at what the parents are doing, and the effect this has on Nigel's language.

13

Nigel	Try eat lid.
Father	What tried to eat the lid?
Nigel	Try eat lid.
Father	What tried to eat the lid?
Nigel	Goal … man said no … goat tried eat lid … man said no.
Later	
Nigel	Goat tey eat lid … man said no.
Mother	Why did the man say no?
Nigel	Goat shouldn't eat lid ... [shaking head] good for it.
Mother	The goat shouldn't eat the lid; it's not good for it.
Nigel	Goat try eat lid … man said no … goat shouldn't eat lid ... [shaking head] good for it.

Halliday (1975)

Notice the kind of scaffolding that the parents provide. Nigel's initial utterance is far from explicit — anyone who had not shared the experience with him would not be able to understand the significance of what he is saying. First, it is not clear what or whom Nigel is referring to, and the father's question *what?* shows Nigel what information he needs to provide. Having extended the initial three-word utterance to something significantly more complete, Nigel relates this more extended version to his mother, who pushes the dialogue forward with the question *why?* While Nigel does not take up his mother's use of *shouldn't* (using, instead, the strategy of indicating a negative by shaking his head), he does provide the reason his mother is seeking (it's not good for it). By the end of these two small conversations, he has elaborated on and made more explicit his original short utterance. Most important, it is clear that what Nigel achieves — the final story he tells — has not simply come from him and his own linguistic resources; this story is a collaborative endeavour and has been jointly constructed.

This co-construction is important in that, by assisting Nigel to recount his experience at the zoo, his parents are at the same time extending his understanding of the *significance* of these events. Through countless such interactions, Nigel is enculturated into ways of representing and valuing his world.

Educational implications of a social view of learning

An implication of the view of learning that we have been outlining here, and of the place of scaffolding within it, is that knowledge is collaboratively constructed rather than simply passed on, or handed from teacher to learner. That is, knowledge is constructed in and through joint participation in activities where all participants are actively involved in negotiating meaning. Clearly, learners construct new and extended understandings through their collaborative participation in scaffolded activities. But in doing so, they are doing more than simply absorbing information or digesting chunks of knowledge. Their active participation, with support from the teacher, enables them to construct and, potentially, transform understandings.

Through talk, in particular, information and ideas can be shared, points of view explored, and explanations presented. In the process, new ways of thinking and understanding may be constructed. These new ways may represent only minor shifts, but they are significant in the ongoing construction of knowledge and the

development of alternative perspectives. Not only do teachers impact on students' learning; students in turn impact on teachers' understandings. More broadly, this process of negotiating understandings contributes to ongoing development of social and cultural understandings and ways of thinking about the world. In this sense we can therefore argue that teaching and learning are reciprocal processes (Mercer 1994).

Such a view of learning also recognises that both teacher and students are active participants in a collaborative learning process and thus moves away from the well-worn debate around teacher-directed versus student-centred learning. As Webster, Beveridge and Reed suggest (1996: 42), teaching and learning are constructed 'as a social enterprise which draws on the immediate resources of the participants' — that is, both teacher and students.

A further implication for this view of learning is that, as we saw in the example above, language is integral to the learning process. Vygotsky has argued that the external dialogues in which learners take part are gradually internalised to construct the resources for thinking — outer speech eventually becomes inner thinking. As learners talk through a problem, or as they 'talk their way to understanding', they are developing the 'thinking' tools for later problem-solving — tools which will eventually become internalised and construct the resources for independent thinking.

It follows, then, that the kinds of talk that occur in the classroom are critical in the development of how students 'learn to learn' through language, and ultimately how they learn to think. Clearly, any discussion of the nature of scaffolding must consider the role of language in teaching and learning.

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SECTION TWO

Action research

3 Understanding action research

Anne Burns

Action research is one of a group of activities associated with the idea of reflective teaching. Advocates of reflective teaching argue that the voices of teachers have been absent too long from the research literature.

Introduction

During the workshops for the project the participants raised a number of questions and issues about action research. As they are questions I am frequently asked by teachers interested in conducting action research, I will set out them out here and offer some brief responses.

Reflection point

Before you read further, develop your own definition of action research based on what you currently know about it.

What questions would *you* ask about action research?

What is action research? How is it different from other types of research?
Many articles on action research begin with definitions so the features and characteristics are becoming better known. Below is one definition that we discussed and used in the workshop.

> Action research involves a self-reflective, systematic and critical approach to enquiry by participants who are at the same time members of the research community. The aim is to identify problematic situations or issues considered by the participants to be worthy of investigation in order to bring about critically informed changes in practice. Action research is underpinned by democratic principles in that ownership of change is invested in those who conduct the research. (Burns, in Cornwell 1999)

One key feature is that action research is *done by the participants* themselves in a particular social situation, rather than by outside researchers. This is a considerable departure from other types of research and it highlights a central difference in purpose. The main point of action research is to find out more about what goes on in *your own local context* in order to *change or improve current practice*. In other words, action research is about deliberately intervening in and reflecting on your current practice. This is different from other research approaches, which may aim to hypothesise, describe, analyse, interpret and generalise — but not to *change* the research situation.

Action research is one of a group of activities associated with the idea of reflective teaching. Advocates of reflective teaching argue that the voices of teachers have been absent too long from the research literature. They argue that teachers should be

recognised as thinking professionals who can 'both pose and solve problems related to their educational practice' (Zeichner and Liston 1996: 4).

In action research, problem posing is achieved through a *reflective research cycle* of planning, action, observation and reflection, where the researchers:

- *Identify* a focus area of their practice that presents a 'puzzle', problem or question.
- *Collect* information systematically on this focus area.
- *Reflect* on the data they have collected and analyse what the data reveal about their practice.
- *Act* as necessary to change or improve the practice.

At this point the participants may enter the cycle again by trying out the changes they have planned to see what happens. In broad terms, action research involves investigating, analysing and changing practices by collecting information systematically in a specific social situation.

Reflection point

Have you ever been involved in an action research project? Do the steps outlined above correspond with your experience? Were there any variations or additional steps and processes?

What is the status of action research as a research methodology? Isn't it less valued than experimental research?

Action research has a long and well-recognised history going back over the last 60 years at least (see Burns 1999; 2005) and it is used in many contexts (for example, business and health) apart from education. However, it has become better known in English language teaching and applied linguistics only over the last 15 years. Broadly speaking, the more traditional and well-established types of experimental research — quantitative approaches involving a hypothesis, and an experimental and control group — are widely considered to be more acceptable forms of academic research. In addition, academic researchers and teachers in the applied linguistics and TESOL fields are generally trained in these more scientific methods. As a result, teachers, and especially university-based researchers in my workshops often feel nervous about conducting action research as they fear it may be seen as not worthwhile, or even invalid research.

Reflection point

What are your own reservations about action research? Discuss them with your colleagues to see whether they agree.

While this is understandable, it is also true to say that over the past decades there has been a shift towards qualitative and practitioner research in TESOL research (for example, *TESOL Quarterly* introduced guidelines for qualitative research papers in 1995). Researchers who adopt these approaches are interested in exploring the qualitative nature of the world in which people operate. They see the perspectives of the participants in the research process and the context (the insider, or *emic*

perspective, as it is sometimes called) as a central part of the research. The approaches, methods and processes associated with this kind of research — for example, ethnography, case study, narrative biography — are now increasingly recognised as a viable alternative to scientific methods.

Action research is associated with the qualitative approach. It is regarded as particularly useful in situations where teachers work collaboratively with colleagues or academic researchers to introduce changes in curriculum, materials, classroom interactions, school practices and so on. This way of researching — by investigating realistic and relevant issues in people's workplaces — is also often seen as having a more lasting impact on practice than presenting teachers with ideas or recommendations imported from elsewhere. Although action research is still gaining recognition in applied linguistics and TESOL as a systematic research approach, it is part of the trend towards socially constructed and contextualised research and is likely to become more widely used in future.

What kinds of research questions should you ask? Must you have a hypothesis?
The kinds of questions asked in action research will be different from those adopted in experimental approaches. Action research does not set out to prove or disprove hypotheses, but to broaden and deepen your insights into a challenging teaching or learning issue in your own situation. People who conduct action research may well develop 'hunches' or 'hypotheses' about the way they or their students behave, and as they collect data they may change or adapt these hypotheses. But these are not the same kinds of hypotheses that are set up in scientific research where teaching or learning variables are carefully controlled, typically in order to search for cause and effect relationships. Frequently in action research the question you start out with is not the question you still wish to ask at the end of the process. Sometimes you do not have a specific question in mind when you begin; the questions emerge as you observe and reflect on your classrooms over a period of time.

Whether or not you have a specific question when you begin the research, it is useful to have some kind of focus area. There are some useful ways to develop ideas about the kinds of questions you may wish to pose, especially if you can work with colleagues and share your ideas:

- Keep a diary or brief notes of teaching, learning or administrative activities in your workplace over a chosen period of time (eg a week, a month). Read over the diary at the end of this time and identify some of the key thoughts, ideas or concerns that emerge.
- Brainstorm some starter statements:
  I don't know enough about how my students…
  My students don't like… Why is this?
  I'd like to find out more about what my students do when they…?
- Make a list of questions about things in your workplace that have puzzled you for some time. Ask other teachers for their 'favourite puzzles'. (Are they similar? If so plan to work together.)
- Observe (preferably over a period of time) a typical situation in your place of work. What stands out for you from your observations? What research questions or issues do they suggest?
- Find a favourite article (for example, from *Prospect*, the AMEP journal). Think about how the issues it presents might be related to your classroom. What questions or issues does the writer address? What questions or issues does the writer leave out that you would like to know more about?

These were some of the questions that teachers suggested at my recent workshops:

- What kinds of learner grouping arrangements will work best in my classroom?
- What strategies or activities can I develop to encourage learners to speak more?
- What are some effective ways of teaching grammar?
- What kinds of communicative activities work best in my classroom?

In *Teachers' voices 8*, where teachers focused on supporting learning in their classrooms, you will find questions and focus areas such as:

- How can I scaffold reading in order to address gaps in learners' background knowledge of context, content, structure and lexis? (Lee-Jones)
- What activities can be developed to enable preliminary level learners to begin learning to read? (Buchanan)
- How do commercially produced teaching materials support teaching in the classroom? (Brawn)
- How does a focus on building knowledge of the topic or field assist learners to develop their reading skills? (Annesley; Marshall)

How valid is action research? Isn't the data collected in action research subjective?

This is a frequent criticism, but it misses a major point about action research. The answer to the second question is really both *yes* and *no*. Action research data are subjective in the sense that they come from real and subjective situations in the researcher's workplace. The personal views and actions of the researcher and other participants are the focus of the data collection process. There is no attempt to control the complexity of classroom or the school as it actually exists. This is an accepted aspect of qualitative or interpretive approaches to research. However, in another sense action research is *not* subjective. When doing action research we are focusing on collecting data in a systematic way and using the data to try to identify what themes or patterns of behaviour, interaction or language emerge. The results may contrast with what we just assume to be the case, when there are no data to inform us.

A technique used to decrease the subjectivity of this kind of data is *triangulation.* This means getting data from more than one source. The researcher then crosschecks to see whether these different sources are pointing to the same interpretations or themes. For example, in Chapter 7 Aino Lee-Jones describes the sources of data she used to research her class:

> I kept a journal of observations, which I wrote up after each teaching session. The classroom tutor also observed the students and we had an informal discussion after each session to share our observations. I recorded some of the teaching, although this was not as extensive as it could have been. (p 63)

This enabled her to build up a composite picture that would not have been available if she had just relied on one set of data. Another way of decreasing

subjectivity is to check your interpretations with colleagues to see whether they would reach the same conclusions.

Reflection point

Think of any previous experiences you have had of conducting qualitative or action research.

How did you guard against subjectivity in conducting this research? Did you use triangulated data sources? What were they and how well did they work for your research?

Discuss your experiences with your colleagues.

What are the best ways of collecting action research data?

Generally, we use data collection methods that are common in qualitative approaches when carrying out action research. This does not mean that our data cannot be analysed quantitatively. Test scores, percentages and totals are all ways in which we might show the findings from our data numerically. I have found it convenient in my workshops and discussions with teachers to classify the most common methods into two types: *observational* methods and *non-observational* methods.

Observational methods, as the term suggests, involve observing and recording what is going on in the research context (a central approach in ethnographic and qualitative research). Teachers I have worked with have collected data on their observations by:

- Making factual notes of the events they observe by recounting exactly what happened in an objective way.
- Writing diaries about the events plus their own evaluations or comments.
- Video or audio-recording activities in the classroom.
- Making transcripts of parts of these recordings.
- Drawing maps of the classroom that show how the learners interact (photographs can also be useful).

Non-observational data, on the other hand, try to get 'below the surface' of the observations to find out what people believe, think, value or are able to produce. These techniques are commonly used:

- Developing questionnaires or surveys that ask people's views through closed, ranked or open questions.
- Conducting interviews or discussions with key participants, such as learners, other teachers, curriculum developers, administrators.
- Collecting students' written texts or recordings of their oral productions to find out what they can do before or after certain types of instruction.

Many techniques that are used in communicative classrooms can double up as research methods. It would be fairly straightforward for example to develop a survey that learners can use as an activity that also relates to issues you are researching. Similarly, asking learners to keep journals on such topics would provide additional data that could also be a language learning activity. One teacher I worked with developed an ingenious way of finding out about her learners' experiences and strategies for learning English. She asked her class to write letters at the end of their course to the learners she would be teaching the following year. This provided her with data for her research, as well as a writing exercise for her current students and a set of reading texts for her to use with her future students.

Reflection point

Look back at the action research questions you (and your colleagues) developed earlier. Which of the methods above would best enable you to research these questions?

How should the data be analysed?

While the data collection methods described above address the *how* of conducting action research, data analysis involves describing the *what* and the *why*. In action research, as in qualitative research in general, you are likely to find yourself analysing the data continually and responding to what they seem to be telling you. This is because the research is very much located in your context of practice and what you find is continually being evaluated and compared with your previous impressions or assumptions. As you move through the cycles of action research, you will be evaluating what you do, forming hypotheses and questioning what you find. The cycles of action research involve a *formative* process of analysis.

Although the data analysis process is fluid and ongoing while you are in the research cycle, there comes a time when you will want to develop some overall findings and interpretations. The typical steps for undertaking this *summative* analysis are:

- assembling all the data
- reducing and coding the data
- comparing and contrasting the various sources of data
- building meanings and interpretations from the data.

Depending on the types of methods you use you might reduce the data by:

- providing tables of numerical data, for example, responses to survey questions
- developing categories of different types of behaviour you have observed your students using
- identifying key words or themes that are repeated throughout the data
- clarifying patterns of classroom language that typify your own or your students' interactions
- identifying key extracts or quotes that highlight particular kinds of behaviour or viewpoints.

What is the best way to write up action research?

Typically, action research is carried out by teachers, and written accounts are usually welcomed by other teachers who may be working with similar classes. These accounts can give a sense of how to address common teaching problems and situations and they focus on sharing expertise and experiences.

However, the way the accounts are written up will depend on the scope and purpose of the research. Teachers enrolled in formal courses with an action research component will usually be required to produce genres of writing that follow academic conventions: for example, rationale, literature review, methodology, findings and conclusions. For less formal projects, teachers can experiment with styles that 'tell the story of the research', such as the chapters in this volume. Those records where the processes of the research and the personal voice of the teacher come through are often more appealing to other teachers. A basic format that I have suggested to groups of Australian teachers I have worked with, including the authors whose work appears here is:

1 title and author's name
2 the setting for the research — background, context, class, type of students
3 the reasons for the research and the questions or focus
4 the steps taken in the research, the teaching–learning techniques used and the data collected
5 the findings or realisations that came out of these steps and the interpretations made
6 the author's response to the findings and the research
7 any further details of interest to the reader — readings, teaching material or techniques (these could be included in section 4 or in an appendix at the end).

Over the last decade, several publications containing accounts of teachers' action research have begun to appear (eg Burns and Hood 1995; Bailey, Curtis and Nunan 2001; Burns and de Silva Joyce 2001; Edge 2001). They provide useful models for writing up action research projects. However, written accounts are not the only ways to let others know about your action research. Others possibilities include:

- posters
- individual or group presentations
- short synopses or summaries
- video or photographic displays.

Presenting your research to other teachers is an invaluable professional development activity, in whatever form you decide to do it. By writing or talking about the research you will understand it more thoroughly and this becomes a deeper reflective dimension of the process. You will also enable other teachers to share and learn about action research and you can also get valuable feedback from them. Finally, sharing your findings gives a sense of finishing the research process.

Reflection point

You can read more about action research projects conducted in the AMEP at:

http://www.immi.gov.au/amep/reports/pubs/papers/burns.htm

Conclusion

In this Chapter 1 have tried to provide some brief responses to questions raised by teachers in this and other AMEP action research projects. These are questions that come up frequently when teachers begin to engage with action research. It is useful to remember that there is no 'one size fits all' approach. It always involves a *process* which is likely to be modified as you go along. This will depend upon the problems and issues in your own situation, the time you have to do the research and the types of data you are able to collect. Perhaps the best encouragement for AMEP teachers who want to get started in action research comes from other teachers:

> My experience of action research is that it is difficult to grasp or explain the concept until one is in the process of doing it. It is in the doing that it starts to make sense and become clear. (Jane Hamilton, cited in Burns 1999: 20)

Collaborative action research is a powerful form of staff development because it is practice to theory rather than theory to practice. Teachers are encouraged to reach their own solutions and conclusions and this is far more attractive and has more impact than being presented with ideals which cannot be attained. (Linda Ross, cited in Burns 1999: 7)

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(This chapter is an adapted version of a paper first published in 2002 in *Thai TESOL Focus*, 15(2), 5–11.)

SECTION THREE
Teachers' accounts

4 Bringing beginner readers to a text

Mary Annesley

I started this project with the view that scaffolding *my teaching was more or less what I did anyway, and I have come across many teachers who say the same. But I have found that the required focus on methodology over an extended time has led to quite profound changes in my teaching.*

Introduction — personal views on methodology

Scaffolding

In discussions with colleagues, I have found that the pedagogical metaphor of scaffolding seems to evoke two different concepts. One view focuses on the appearance of scaffolding, as would be seen on a building under construction with layers and levels. Those who hold this view talk about scaffolding in methodology as going *step by step* and building up layers. The other view focuses on the function of scaffolding. Here the structure enables work to be done that would not otherwise be possible and takes the student to a new level. Those who hold this view believe that the teacher's role is to put in place activities that enable learners to achieve something that they could not carry out before. As they achieve the task, or master the skill, the scaffolding can be gradually removed.

> **Reflection point**
>
> How familiar are you with the term *scaffolding*? What images does it raise for you? What are your ideas about how scaffolding could be used in a learning context?

These are two different ways of looking at the same concept. Some of the learning activities selected by the proponents of each view might be similar, but I believe that the difference is significant and leads to differences in both the philosophy and practice of teaching. I hold the latter view and believe that scaffolding is what enables learners to work within, what Vygotsky (1934/78) calls the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) and to thus make significant gains in learning. My understanding is that when learners are working within their knowledge framework and communicating, reviewing and consolidating, they are working in the zone of *actual* development. They are using and refining what they know, but not making significant gains in learning. It is when they participate in activities that increase the bounds of their knowledge framework that they are operating in the ZPD and it is here that they make significant gains in learning.

Reading

There are three main factors I consider essential for all reading. These are awareness of the context, knowledge of the vocabulary relevant to the context (and text) and student motivation. Motivation arises from the interest, importance and/or relevance

that the subject matter holds for the reader. I try to develop reading experiences to cover these three factors.

The choice of text is important. I believe that texts should be useful, as well as interesting. For learners who need to learn so much in the short time allocated to them in AMEP classes, texts that are useful, relevant and accessible have their own intrinsic interest. At the beginner level I believe it is a good idea for the teacher to create most of the texts for the learners, in order to control the level of complexity and to ensure their relevance for the students. Each term different ideas arise. Some topics I have presented to learners, in addition to those described in this paper, include: *Anzac Day, Daylight saving, Our excursion, Autumn, Spring* and letters and notices about real events or situations in the Australian context.

Beginner readers, without a strong background of reading in English, need to work at the word level with phonics, word patterns and sight vocabulary. It is very important to develop and continually practise these skills but it is also vital for learners to gain awareness of *reading for meaning* at the same time. I feel this is encouraged at low levels by helping learners to become very familiar with the context and content of texts, before they are left to read alone. In my classroom I frequently use *vocabulary cards*. I print words in large format on A4 paper, cut up the words and clip them together with paper clips. I store these word sets in plastic sleeves with master-word sheets such as the one below.

fire	alarm
classroom	bag
purse	wallet
phone	don't

My classroom is almost always set up with groups of three or four learners around a table and they are encouraged to work cooperatively. All the activities are done in groups, with learners taking turns and helping and testing each other.

Class level and profile

I worked on the AMEP Reading Project over two terms. During this time, I had two different learner groups that were very similar in profile. The numbers of learners varied between 14 and 18.

In both terms, the learners were mainly from the Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Kurdistan and Iraq. In the first term, there were also learners from Thailand, Nepal, Indonesia, Togo and Cambodia who had Australian spouses. The learners were generally in their thirties and there were several women who were sole parents with a number of children. There were significantly more women than men, with a ratio of three or four to one. Most of the learners could be described as pre-literate in L1, with little or no schooling. Some were from cultures where education was not a priority for females; for some, poverty was the issue and others had been in refugee camps where there was limited schooling for a lucky few.

Reflection point

It can be very useful for teachers to learn about the countries from which their learners come in order to understand their cultural and learning backgrounds. You can find out more about the following countries by searching: http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/publications/books/factsheets.html

Ethiopia

Eritrea

Iraq

The Sudan
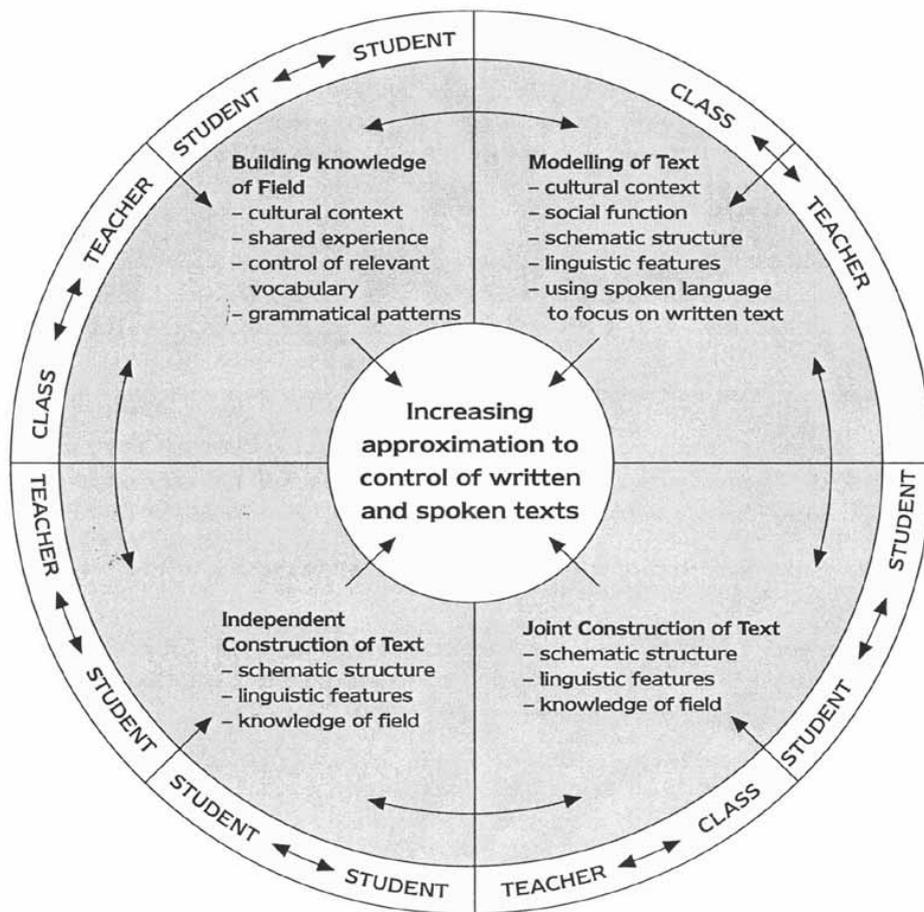
Somalia

Sierra Leone

Rwanda

The learners were mostly in their second English class, though a few were new arrivals who had started learning overseas. They already knew the alphabet and were beginning to use some basic word attack skills. The International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR) level in all skills was generally about 0+, but some had higher communication skills, with speaking and listening scores of around ISLPR1.

The language learning course aimed to cover all the major areas of macro-skill development and settlement information, but the major focus was on the development of reading skills.

Research focus

Over the years I have frequently seen bewilderment and frustration in pre-literate learners who are faced with an English text that they can make no sense of and offers no clues to its meaning. For new migrants, the meaningless text in front of them has significance and is linked to survival and settlement in their new country.

Using the teaching–learning cycle, Figure 2 below (see also Feez 1998), I decided to focus on the stage of *building the field* as a way of giving learners the vital clues and landmarks they would need for a specific text. By spending time on the field of the text and ensuring that the learners experienced many small successes through the field-building activities, I believed that they would have a better chance of being able to read the text.

Figure diagram

Building knowledge
of Field
– cultural context
– shared experience
– control of relevant
  vocabulary
– grammatical patterns

Modelling of Text
– cultural context
– social function
– schematic structure
– linguistic features
– using spoken language
  to focus on written text

Increasing
approximation to
control of written
and spoken texts

Independent
Construction of Text
– schematic structure
– linguistic features
– knowledge of field

Joint Construction of Text
– schematic structure
– linguistic features
– knowledge of field

STUDENT · STUDENT · STUDENT · TEACHER · CLASS · TEACHER · CLASS · TEACHER · STUDENT · STUDENT · STUDENT · STUDENT · CLASS · TEACHER · STUDENT

Source: Burns and Joyce 1991 (adapted from Callaghan and Rothery 1988) in Hammond et al 1992: 17.

Figure 2: The teaching–learning cycle

The activities in this stage of the teaching–learning cycle focus on developing understanding of the topic or subject matter of a text. With beginner learners, it includes familiarising them with the context within which the text is set as well as the vocabulary used.

In this report of my action research, I will describe four units of work in which I followed more or less the same methodology. I used the concept of *designed-in scaffolding* in planning the units of work. Scaffolding was deliberately planned into the lesson to give the learners the input and guidance they needed to move from not being able to read the text to being able to read it successfully. I tried to foresee what would support and strengthen learning for my learners and built this into the plan.

During the lessons, at points where I considered extra activities or explanations would extend learner understanding, I used *contingent scaffolding* to address special needs as they arose. Learners can constantly surprise teachers with what they do not know and contingent scaffolding deals with these surprises as they come up. My strategy included quick reviews of recently learned sound or word patterns, clarification of word meanings and brief pronunciation practice of words being used.

Reflection point

In what ways do you build *designed-in* scaffolding into your lesson planning?

Think back to a recent lesson when you used *contingent* scaffolding. What features characterised the interaction (eg the nature of the questions used by teacher or learners; the way in which meaning was negotiated; how miscommunications were handled)?

Discuss your ideas with a colleague.

Unit 1   Evacuation procedures

Mary's nine step teaching sequence on the fire drill features on the accompanying DVD.

Aim: To enable the learners to read a fire drill text written in simplified language

Fire Alarm

Our English school is in a big building.
It is on the 4th and 5th floors.
If we have a fire we must know what to do.
We practise every term.

If you hear the fire alarm
1. Go out of the classroom.
2. Take your bag or purse or wallet, and your phone.
3. Don't take all your books and folders.
4. Don't run. Walk.
5. Don't go in the lift. Go down the stairs.
6. If you can't walk down the stairs, tell your teacher.
7. Stay with your teacher and classmates in Hindmarsh Square.
8. Go back to the classroom when everything is OK.

Context: Teachers at my teaching centre are obliged to give learners information about emergency procedures every term. A fire drill was scheduled for the following week.

The text: The fire drill text had immediate relevance for the learners and provided them with a challenge.

Timeframe: The main work on this text was done over two days to allow time for repetition of new vocabulary. The text was then practised again many times during the next couple of weeks.

Teaching sequence

Step 1: **Putting the text in context**

We began by talking about the context: where we were located, the name and address of the school, the number of floors in the building and the consequent importance of good evacuation procedures in an emergency. This might appear complex for a low level class, but any experienced teacher of this level will know how it can be done with diagrams and enthusiastic dramatics. We began to build the vocabulary on the board.

Step 2: **Building vocabulary**

I elicited an oral procedure for evacuation by using questions to guide reproduction of the fire drill sequence. Once again, realia and demonstration were essential. During the process of eliciting, I wrote key words on the whiteboard and referred to known phonic and word patterns to arrive at the spelling.

Step 3: **Reinforcing vocabulary**

I then repeated the oral text we had developed as an oral cloze exercise, stopping and pointing to words on the board, which were to be read into the gaps by the learners.

Step 4: **Sequencing**

I gave the learners the text cut into individual instructions and asked them to sequence it. I then asked them to locate each instruction as I read it out. In this way we ensured that the whole text was sequenced correctly. The learners then read in small groups of three or four. They took turns and helped and encouraged each other. The assistance of a tutor is very helpful in this exercise, if one is available.

Step 5: **Reading for meaning**

We then read the full text together on the board from an overhead transparency (OHT). The learners were encouraged to use chunking, or reading in meaningful phrases, instead of word by word. I guided this by underlining the chunks with different coloured pens.

Step 6: **Revising the alphabet**

I then asked the learners to *play* with the vocabulary cards to develop their word recognition, for example to find words that started with the sound /b/, to look for certain words and to put words in alphabetical order.

Step 7: **Decoding words**

I had prepared vocabulary cards of the words on the board, and we did another oral cloze exercise in which the learners located the correct card for each gap.

Step 8: **Reading text for recognition**

I gave out individual copies of the text and allowed a few minutes to see how the learners approached the text. I wanted the learners to attempt to read it and to see that there was a lot that they could now read. I limited the time for this because individual reading was still very challenging for these learners.

Step 9: **Reading text for meaning**

We then read the text together several times, with the learners chanting together after I read the steps. Again I used chunking to encourage fluency and understanding. The learners then read the text as a whole group.

The fire drill did take place and the learners had to physically carry out the steps set out in the procedure. When we returned to the classroom, we referred to the text to check that we had followed it correctly. This caused some mirth because a few learners admitted that they had not joined the class group for roll call and others had carried

unnecessary paraphernalia downstairs. However, most of them were very familiar with the text and could easily locate the parts they were looking for. There was a delightful feeling of competence at being able to handle the text effectively.

Reflection point

In this unit, Mary uses a text she developed herself. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of teacher-developed reading material for learners at this level.

What kinds of decisions does a teacher need to make when producing such texts?

Unit 2   A story

Aim: To enable the learners to read a story

Context: The context for this unit had already been developed over a few days, as we had been studying the vocabulary for health, including parts of the body and the names of common ailments. I decided to include a story for a change of pace and as a reading challenge.

The text: The story was about someone's illness and was presented in two parts: Part 1 — *Alan is sick* and Part 2 — *Alan is better*.

Step 1:   Setting the context

I introduced Part 1 of the story, *Alan is sick*, by talking about my friend Mara to set the context. Again I wrote the key words on the whiteboard as I told her story. I also elicited the spelling, encouraging the use of known phonics and word patterns. I went through the whole story orally, telling it as a personal story.

Alan is sick

Mara lives in Adelaide.

She lives with her husband and three children.

She has 2 sons and 1 daughter.

Yesterday her younger son, Alan, was sick.

He had a sore throat and a fever.

Mara took him to the doctor.

The doctor examined him.

She looked down his throat.

She checked his breathing.

She took his temperature.

The doctor said Alan must stay in bed.

He must take capsules.

He must drink a lot of water.

I hope Alan is better soon!

Step 2:   Oral cloze
The learners completed an oral cloze exercise by reading the missing words from the board into the gaps.

Step 3:   Vocabulary work
We continued with vocabulary card work using the key words from the board, practising sound and word recognition, alphabetical order and categorisation.

Step 4:   Individual reading
The learners were then given a copy of the text and again I allowed some minutes for them to see what they could read individually before we read it together.

The first time I presented this text (which I had just written), the learners found it quite difficult. It was their first attempt to read a complete text and it included some unfamiliar vocabulary. I went home at the end of that lesson with that *down* feeling teachers get when they feel they have got it wrong. However, I thought giving up would be bad for student morale, as well as my own. So the next day I repeated all the steps above, giving the learners more time to become familiar with the words, using initial sounds, known phonics and word patterns. What a difference a day makes! By the end of that lesson the feeling of achievement and excitement was tangible. The ZPD was buzzing! From that experience I learnt two things. First, it is important not to rush ahead too quickly and second, rough patches can be negotiated and are not necessarily disastrous.

Following the successful reading of Part 1, I wanted to allow some time for consolidation, so I developed Part 2 of the story: *Alan is better.*

Alan is better

On Monday Mara was upset.

Her son Alan was sick.

He had a sore throat and a fever.

Mara took him to the doctor.

The doctor examined him.

She looked down his throat.

She checked his breathing.

She took his temperature.

Alan stayed in bed for two days.

He took capsules.

He drank a lot of water.

Today Mara is happy.

Alan is better!

This was more or less the same story, but this time it was in the past tense, and with a different ending. I followed the same procedures as before. Although this was a new text so much of the context and content were now familiar that success came quite easily. There was a marked increase in student confidence. I realise some teachers

would not teach past tense at low levels, but I deal with language points as they arise naturally in texts and I find that low-level learners can handle such things effectively when they are addressed in context. This gives the students access to a broader range of interesting texts than if they were restricted to certain language forms.

Reflection point

Do you agree with Mary's views on how she introduces grammatical points?

What are your own views about when and which language points to introduce to learners at this level?

Unit 3   An excursion

Aim: To prepare the learners for a short walk to familiarise them with the local area and facilities

Context: The reading exercise for this unit was designed to prepare the learners for a short excursion.

Step 3:   Vocabulary cards
I told the learners that we would be going out of the teaching centre and handed out vocabulary cards. I told them where we would be going and what we would see, replicating the text of my explanation on the board. I asked them to locate the correct cards and put them in the same order as I described. I reminded them to look for initial-sound letters and to check that the whole word was the correct match with what they were looking for.

Step 2:   Oral cloze
We completed an oral cloze, with the learners calling out the words to fill the gaps.

Step 3:   Joint reading
I handed out the text and we practised reading it together through a listen and chant approach.

Go out today — 1. Citicentre Arcade

1. Go down in the |lift|.
2. Can you see a |public telephone|?
3. Can you see a |bank|? How many banks? _____
4. Can you see a |public toilet|?

    for men

    for women

    for babies
5. Can you see a |Post Office|?
6. Can you see a place to buy a |bus ticket|?
7. Can you see a place to buy a |phone card|?
8. Can you see a place to |pay your bills|?
9. Can you see a place to get something to |eat or drink|?

Step 4:   The excursion

We went on our excursion and the learners took worksheets and pencils to tick off the various things mentioned in the text as they saw them. The learners were quite happy to read aloud and remind each other to tick the boxes or answer the questions. We noted the signs and symbols that identified the various places and practised unfamiliar place names.

Step 5:   Checking the answers

Back in the classroom we went over the text again and checked the answers together.

Step 6:   Reading a recount

In the next lesson, we read a recount of the excursion incorporating the past tense forms and the answers we had found on the excursion.

Citicentre Arcade

On Monday we went out to Citicentre Arcade.

We went down in the lift.

We saw some public telephones in Rundle Mall.

We saw the ANZ Bank.

We saw some ATMs.

We saw public toilets for men, for women and for babies.

We saw two places to buy bus tickets.

We saw two places to buy phone cards.

We saw a post office. We can pay bills there.

We saw many places to get something to eat and drink.

We came back along Pulteney Street.

We walked through Hindmarsh Square to Twin Street.

Then we went up in the lift and came back to the classroom

The learners obviously enjoyed the *read and do* aspect of the exercise, as it required immediate responses to what was read. They demonstrated increasing confidence in their reading ability.

Unit 4   A crossword

Sometimes I like to use crosswords with learners, as they are a way of reviewing vocabulary and having fun. However, experience shows that crosswords are a challenge for low-level learners. For example, in the past some of my learners have avoided writing downwards by turning the page to write sideways. In this particular exercise I was conscious of the need for deliberate scaffolding to enable the learners to achieve something that would otherwise not have been possible.

Aim: To enable the learners to complete a simple crossword in a competent manner

Context: The crossword provided an opportunity for the learners to review vocabulary, practise their reading skills and feel that they were in control of a situation.

Text: I used Crossword Genius to prepare a crossword focusing on words from recent lessons and providing a familiar context that would enable the learners to revise the vocabulary they had learned.

Step 1: **Setting the context**

I showed the crossword to the learners and asked if anyone had come across such a thing before. Two or three had and they were all intrigued. I told the learners they would get the crossword later but we needed to prepare for it.

Step 2: **Finding the clues**

I had enlarged all the crossword clues on strips of paper and handed a pack of these to each group. I asked them to spread them out so they could see them all. I then asked them to find the ones I indicated. For example: *Find the clue starting with 'You see with'*. When the learners found the correct clue, they decoded it and read out the whole phrase. This was repeated for the benefit of those who needed more practice.

Step 3: **Answering the clues**

I asked the learners for the answers to the clues. For example, *You see with these.* I wrote the answers on the board as we went along, eliciting the spelling and referring to known phonics and word patterns. By the time this exercise was completed, the slips were lined up in order and the answers were all on the board. We read through all the clues again, noting the answers as we went.

Step 4: **Sample answers**

I showed an OHT of the crossword grid and we went over the concepts of across and down. We did the first four clues on the OHT grid so the learners could see how to write the words on the crossword.

Step 5: **Completing the crossword**

I handed out individual worksheets and the learners worked cooperatively in groups to complete the crossword. There was a lot of reading aloud of the clues and spelling out of the answers, which were still on the board but not in the required order.

The crossword activity went very well. The learners were stimulated by the puzzle aspect and happy that they knew what to do. The reading of the clues still had enough challenge to be interesting, and the direct link between what they read and the answer they needed made the reading meaningful.

Reflection point

View the DVD of Mary's teaching sequence for Unit 1. As you watch, note any teaching techniques or interactions she uses to scaffold learning that strike you as particularly useful.

Discuss these techniques with other colleagues. To what extent are they ones that you already use? Are there any techniques used by Mary that you would like to adopt in your own classroom in future?

Conclusion

I started this project with the view that *scaffolding* my teaching was more or less what I did anyway, and I have come across many teachers who say the same. But I have found that the required focus on methodology over an extended time has led to quite profound changes in my teaching.

Now I plan learning activities with more consciousness of what I am aiming to achieve, and more confidence in my ability to make a difference in the learners' learning. I have the satisfaction of seeing a significant relationship between what and how I teach, and what the learners learn. The groups I have worked with have made clearly discernable advances in their reading skills, and have grown in confidence. I also enjoy the feeling of working within a methodology that I have consciously tested and which has proven to be really effective.

References

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Hammond, J. (Ed.). (2001). *Scaffolding: Teaching and learning in language and literacy education.* Sydney: Primary English Teachers Association.

Hammond, J., Burns, A., Joyce, H., Brosnan, D., & Gerot, L. (1992). *English for social purposes: A handbook for teachers of adult literacy.* Sydney: NCELTR.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1934/1978). *Thought and language.* (Translated by A. Kozulin.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Action point

In two of Mary's units, learners work with texts that are related to physical activities and experiences carried out by her learners — the fire alarm drill and the excursion.

1. Plan to teach one of these topics (or a similar one involving a related physical activity), using the same teaching sequence as Mary.

2. As you teach, observe your learners' responses closely. Pay particular attention to points where it is necessary to scaffold the interaction in order to support their learning. Make some notes on this as soon as possible after the lesson.

3. If possible, make an audio or video recording as you teach a step in the sequence that involves a new teaching technique for you.

4. Analyse the information you have collected.

Are there any aspects of the lesson that you were unaware of before?

What aspects of the lesson went particularly well?

What aspects would you like to improve?

As far as possible, work with a colleague and compare your responses.

5 Reading in a preliminary English class

Elizabeth Buchanan

The students developed skills and confidence that may be further developed and extended to other areas, well beyond the classroom experience. The development of a solid foundation of reading skills ultimately flowed on to the other macro-skills. The collaborative involvement of the students was a credit to their perseverance. Their achievements certainly exceeded my expectations.

Introduction

The opportunity to explore reading had immense relevance for me and the research parameters provided an opportunity for me to explore and further develop the dynamics and potential of student–teacher relationships within the learning environment.

My research focused on the development of reading at the preliminary level, with very positive results for all involved. This focus had a surprising, broader impact across all the macro-skills and developed a strongly supportive camaraderie in my classroom. As the reading challenges increased, the dynamics within the class strengthened and new arrivals were swept along on the learning journey. At the same time my teaching was influenced by the challenging engagement with philosophical ideas, theory and practice.

Demographics

During the period of the research, I was teaching Class A at AMES, TAFE Launceston in which approximately 90 per cent of the students were refugees. This is the class where new students begin their encounter with English language skills in a formal setting. All students in this class have an Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating (ASLPR) rating of 0. The majority have little or no schooling in their first language. Most of the students join the class soon after arriving in Australia, when accommodation and child-care or schooling issues have been resolved.

During the initial stages of the research in 2003, the class enrolment reached 22 and the students were predominantly Sudanese, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali. Six months later the number of students had dropped to 15, with students from Afghanistan and East Asia joining the class. As the research drew to a close, approximately two new students arrived every week and other students moved on to the next class.

At the beginning of the research I deliberately chose to involve the whole class. This decision was made partly because it seemed unfair to expend time and energy on only one section of the class and partly because I wanted to observe the interaction between the upper and lower level students as the project progressed.

The first attempts at supporting reading were undertaken when there was a large upper level group in the class with the lower level group beginning their first experience in a formal learning context. As the research proceeded, and the numbers of new students increased, a greater percentage of the students had not had any prior formal education.

Within the overall research population approximately 80 per cent of the students were female, with a small number of older learners. About 40 per cent, again predominantly female, had no prior education and about 30 per cent were not literate in their own language. During the research period there was a broad age distribution with some students in their late teens and others in their sixties.

A personal perspective on student learning at this level

Being involved in the research project gave me an ideal opportunity to investigate my own views and perspectives on supported learning, and on reading in particular. Through journal entries I tracked the research as it developed and also recorded my cognitive meanderings and I was surprised to find there were changes in my thinking.

There are many influences on individual learning as students settle into Tasmania. They may need to deal with issues such as grief, trauma, isolation, cultural differences, family, accommodation, climate, health and food. Problems with eyesight often become apparent as reading ability develops and students can find smaller print difficult to read. On rare occasions I suspect some students have learning difficulties or speech impediments. To assist me to deal with these issues in the classroom, I work with a superimposed lens incorporating Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Bernstein, Roy, Srull and Wickens 1991) and Piaget's developmental theory (Berk 1989). The recent traumatic conditions from which many students come may mean that they are operating at or are moving on from a lower level in Maslow's hierarchy. Living with heightened stress and trauma may also have affected communication, learning and health with the result that cognitive functioning may have temporarily regressed to the stage of concrete operations as posited by Piaget. In my teaching it is important for me to retain this lens through which to engage with the students, retaining empathy and optimism as they move on with their lives.

Reflection point

Elizabeth identifies a variety of factors that might affect learning by students from refugee backgrounds. If this is a new area for you, you might like to read some of the following resources available online and then discuss them with your colleagues:

Aristotle, P. (1999). The role of the AMEP in building a holistic settlement and multicultural program: responding to the needs of refugees and survivors of trauma and torture.
http://www.immi.gov.au/amep/reports/pubs/papers/aristotl.htm

Duignan, J. (2002). Past tense: curriculum and professional development issues in working with torture and trauma survivors.
http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/pdamep/june/fs12full_text.html

Isserlis, J. (2000). Trauma and the adult English language learner
http://www.cal.org/ncle/DIGESTS/trauma2.htm

Through the research project I have developed a heightened awareness of what I term *metaknowledge* in student learning. To explain what I mean by this I will take an example from a language-learning classroom where three distinct groups of students develop. Imagine that drills or concepts have been presented a number of times and some of the students in the class already have these committed to memory and also have some skill in applying the knowledge. Other students are on the verge of *knowing* and are carried by the first group into exploring the concepts, while the third group continues to struggle to commit the concepts to memory and apply them. I liken scaffolding in teaching to a mechanism that supports all three groups and allows different strata of metaknowledge to be made increasingly available and activated to support learning. This results in greater risk taking in the extension and use of knowledge, leading to increased ownership of learning. Students cannot be expected to have exceptional memory retention or a smooth learning path, but scaffolding can increase confidence to utilise and manipulate the known or almost known.

When students begin to read in English, they call on the associated literacy skills they have developed through their first language and other acquired languages. They also call on some level of understanding in the use of English. It is this learning and understanding that is expanded into *vocabulary banks*, by way of a rich learning environment, which can be used to support the reading process.

A student-centred approach has always underpinned my teaching, as I see the teacher as a bridge to learning and knowledge. It is the teacher's role to provide an enriched learning environment and a pedagogically sound program. With adult learners, personal aspirations, abilities and opportunities can limit or make possible the realisation of desired outcomes. Acknowledging this, it is important to support all students, including those who are unlikely to continue studying or to enter the workforce. All students are encouraged to develop their own abilities as fully as possible. Learning is an asset not a race.

Building respect and validating each other's culture is an important part of new associations and friendships (Bansberg 2003). In addition to this, I also expect respect and acceptance of learning differences and efforts, this support being very necessary in a classroom where risk taking, particularly with oral reading activities, takes a great deal of confidence. Confidence to experiment with articulation, initially through word reproduction and later through word production in speaking and reading, is important.

> **Reflection point**
>
> Here, Elizabeth sets out some of her beliefs about teaching and learning reading. How similar are your own beliefs? Do you hold beliefs that are different or additional to Elizabeth's?

Teaching reading

A range of teaching activities which Elizabeth uses with low level students features on the accompanying DVD. The rich classroom environment which she provides for her learners is evident.

In my class, reading is an important part of the ongoing learning process and plays an important role in introducing the students to their new culture. Below I outline some of the activities and approaches I use.

Place cards

Initial contact with reading in the class is through place cards, on which I print the students' given names and their country of origin — *I come from Ethiopia*. This card provides a template for copying their details when necessary, for example in a form-filling exercise. I also produce a reading book — *Where do you come from?* — to support this initial reading.

Vocabulary

Most students have not yet mastered the alphabet but we work on simple alphabetical word lists, using words volunteered by the students. This is done prior to writing/printing exercises. Beyond this we also explore basic vocabulary through single words or simple phrases, especially nouns to identify people, animals and objects in pictures and texts.

Known structural vocabulary, including articles, pronouns and verbs, is identified in texts and homophones (often homophones to their ears and not to mine, eg *mouse* and *mouth*), word families, rhyming words and synonyms are explored.

The work towards reading is accompanied by a deliberate build up of vocabulary and grammatical structures through oral presentation, building what I term a *vocabulary bank*. For example, every day we routinely identify the day of the week, the weather and what it is like outside, eg *Today is Thursday. Today it is frosty and sunny. It is freezing outside.* I elicit the information, write it on the board, we read the text and then the students generally copy the text into their books. Pieces of relevant news or information may also be incorporated into this routine. Another useful contribution to the vocabulary bank is when we take a break to do some exercises after concentrating hard on an activity. Giving oral instructions and demonstrating gives the students a good understanding of verbs, parts of the body and pronouns, not only reinforcing known vocabulary but also building a bank of language concepts before the words are confronted in a written text. Instructions such as *touch your nose, shake your hands, up high, two steps backwards, brush your hair* and so on are quickly understood. This activity

becomes a more challenging mnemonic exercise when the students are asked to perform a short sequence of activities.

Incorporating cultural and language comparisons into lessons

Incorporating cultural and language comparisons into lessons is important, especially when related to the topics or themes we are studying. If students are given the opportunity to give vocabulary items in their own languages in response to questions in English, they develop confidence when later responding in English. I frequently list basic vocabulary, phonetically representing the varied language equivalents together with simple pictures beside the English words (see word sheet below). This assists the students to *recognise/read* the words in their language and in English and also provides an introduction to the mnemonic aspects of word use.

These English words are placed into a range of grammatical and linguistic contexts as learning proceeds. Another benefit from this kind of activity if it's not actually on the DVD, is that the students become adept at identifying similarities in spoken and written language. During the research period I became increasingly aware of the value of this strategy and encouraged the students to contribute words from their first languages. My serious, but sometimes rather unsuccessful, attempts to repeat these

words has frequently been the cause of much laughter. Witnessing my struggle and lack of competence prompts some students to speak out individually for the very first time in the class.

Spelling

Spelling has also become part of the learning process, as another way of looking at language. The students greatly enjoy this as a way of exploring words and expanding their vocabulary. A sheet of about 10 pictures with word labels is given to each student. These words have the initial or the final letter missing. Moving from left to right we name each successive picture. Once each picture is named I repeat the word clearly and sound it out, I then repeat the word again and give the missing sound. The students then identify this letter and write it down. This listening exercise develops word attack skills and is a very popular activity.

Reading aloud

To further link reading with the macro-skills, nearly all written work completed in the classroom is read back to me or to a native speaking volunteer. Students also read their texts aloud to themselves or in chorus. This was a clear development from the project. Reading aloud promotes confidence in word recognition and hesitations or mispronunciations allow me to identify where individual or group work is required. A variant on the process has also evolved where students with stronger reading skills take the lead in choral reading with the weaker students. I try to provide a model of pronunciation.

Simple map reading

Simple map reading is encouraged and initially happens when the countries that the students come from are identified. I use a large globe of the world and find that this puts the concepts of *near, very close, neighbours, next-door* and so on into a context. From this beginning, work on map reading progresses from a bird's eye perspective to symbols and written information. Locating a position on a flat plane can be difficult and to increase confidence with this task we do a great deal of work identifying and circling objects, numbers and letters. Through map reading and atlas work the students use grid references to find named objects and learn concepts such as *left* and *right* and how to use an index.

Coming to books

Since being appointed to teach the preliminary level students, I have endeavoured to provide an enriched classroom environment that supports the learning and psychological needs of the students. I have found that books are difficult to handle for some of them and confusing for those who come with a right-to-left reading direction. Students seem to prefer hand-sized alphabet and vocabulary cards which promote increased communication and cooperative learning.

Repetition of basic vocabulary in a range of genres is an important aspect of learning in my class but there is a dearth of specific learning material available for this level. I spend a great deal of time developing simple readers which are based on basic vocabulary and displayed in folders, eg *The fish book* for written numbers, *The eye book* and *Verb-to-be book*. These are readily accessible and used by the volunteer teaching assistants for pair or individual reading. I also have an assortment of conventional readers and a wide range of books available.

Reflection point

Which of these activities have you tried in your own classroom? How effective did you find them? What adaptations would you suggest?

Reading material

A major step in my research was the search for reading material with appropriate vocabulary and enough repetition for preliminary level students. Lengthy searches through school libraries and private collections were not successful. Nothing seemed to be suitable because the texts were too advanced, written for young children, too long with too many pictures, culturally inappropriate or used inappropriate or outdated vocabulary. Finding suitable material was definitely the most difficult part of getting started and continued to be a problem, as the general level of ability of the class fluctuated with new students arriving and those with more advanced skills moving on. My initial goal was to challenge all individuals in the class, yet keep the learning environment safe enough to prevent deep levels of discouragement that would impede learning. But, if I didn't know what material I was going to use, how could I plan the research? I was lacking a critical element in the teaching of literacy — appropriate materials.

Common sense eventually prevailed and I began to work from the known, from already established routines of greetings, days and weather, songs already being sung, chants, computer work and storybooks such as *The nose book* (Perkins 1970) and *Great day for up* (Seuss 1974) in which students enjoyed the vocabulary, rhyme, rhythm, quirky humour and subject matter. I placed greater emphasis on vocabulary building and extending reading activities. Even though this was a comprehensive form of repetition and revision for us all, it was also a time of renegotiation and expansion of skills. In reworking materials from a broad range of genres we were able to move from safe ground into a new framework through developed skills that were appropriate and adaptable to future learning situations. Repeated use of vocabulary within a broad range of linguistic activities provided a strong support that assisted the reading of text.

Reflection point

Elizabeth refers to a problem that is commonly identified by teachers of students from pre-literate backgrounds — finding appropriate material. She also outlines the solutions she adopted.

Can you suggest any others that might be used? What materials, resources and activities have you found useful for such learners?

Share your ideas with your colleagues and build up a bank of resources for early literacy development at your teaching centre.

Coming to the text

After a long search for appropriate material, I chose the story of 'Juan Bobo and the pot' (Kasser and Silverman 1986) as the first major text for our involvement in the supported reading, which was the focus of my research. I felt this story was well above the collective ability of the group and my expectations of success were not high. However, I was disregarding the old maxim drummed into me so long ago: *a good teacher should never assume.* Working with a thematic approach through a broad range of genres had already given the students some grounding in basic reading — confirming the literature which states that the broader the linguistic experience provided to students the more confidence they will have in approaching reading tasks (eg Rasmussen 2001; Rose 2003). It all seemed so logical.

I introduced the story of Juan Bobo and the task of reading by showing the title and the single picture that accompanies the story on the overhead projector (OHP). Through the picture the main character and the pot were introduced. On the whiteboard I copied the title and drew outlines of Juan Bobo, his home and the pot. Once these clues had been labelled and reviewed, the words from the title *Juan Bobo* and *pot* were underlined using different coloured pens.

We then moved on to the story which I presented on the OHP. The first task was to find the words *Juan Bobo* and *pot* in the text. As each line was revealed the students were guided in scanning from left to right and all called out the words as they were identified. To ensure that all students had identified the vocabulary, individual students came to the front, pointed to the words and read them. I then proceeded to underline the vocabulary items in the text. The students told me which colour to use to underline the words. Both weak and strong readers participated in this activity.

Once the words had been identified and underlined in the text, I added pictures of Juan Bobo's mother, his friend's house and a smashed three-legged pot to the whiteboard. These pictures were also labelled and then all vocabulary on the whiteboard was reviewed. The picture/word clues were in sequence across the whiteboard and with these, and the assistance of the students, I gave a brief outline of the story.

The students were instructed that I would read the story but they would all have to help me by calling out the words *Juan Bobo* and *pot* when they appeared in the story. Through a combination of reading and pointing to the picture clues and word labels on the board the activity was successfully accomplished and the reading was repeated.

My journal notes, after this first attempt at scaffolding the reading task, included these comments:

- from picture some irrelevant vocab elicited (beware)
- story culturally appropriate — students knew of pots with three legs
- all enjoyed the work
- obviously stretched all
- story perhaps a bit too long
- only vocab requiring attention at end was 'thought'
- 'smashed' — likened by students to a picture of smashed car on side wall (related to a road safety sub-theme).

After a weekend break the task was repeated. This time I mixed stronger students with weaker students and pairs of students were given a copy of the text to underline the target words. In the first slow reading the target words were underlined with different coloured pens and in the second reading the students assisted me with the story telling. To increase the difficulty I then included *three legs* in an oral cloze activity

and we repeated the procedure of identifying the words, underlining them and then reading the text. The students were encouraged to contribute to the reading where they could.

I had great concerns about the degree of difficulty of the text but I was amazed at the concerted effort put into the activity by the students. Their success and elation was obvious.

Reading on

The reading process described above was repeated and refined in the following weeks and months with the use of a wide variety of other texts, some proving to be more appropriate than others.

It was a new experience for me to choose texts that appeared beyond the perceived ability of my students. At first this did not sit easily with me as the gap seemed too great. However, I became more accepting of this approach, providing I had pre-taught the basic concepts and much of the vocabulary in the proposed text. It often felt as if we were nearing saturation point in the attention to vocabulary. It also became an enormous challenge to ensure the students had been engaged with a broad range of genres. In fact, as we proceeded with the research I found that because of the preliminary intensive vocabulary and concept work there was less and less immediate preamble to the actual reading. I did not assess vocabulary retention but the reading of the texts became an informal assessment tool to gauge overall achievement.

As new students arrived, and more students moved on, it became necessary to adjust the level of text difficulty. The search for appropriate texts was an ongoing problem throughout the project. Although short scripts from language books, recipes, songs, chants and other material were used, by far the best material was that which I developed specifically for the class to accommodate a theme or topic of interest (see story sheet opposite). The use of word repetition and phrases in these texts was modified, as necessary, to provide a challenge to all.

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday
Sunday

Going shopping

It is Saturday.

I am going shopping.

This is my shopping list.

I will buy milk.

I will buy coffee.

I will buy bread.

I will buy jam.

I will buy beans.

I will buy potatoes.

I will buy eggs

and salami.

Conclusion

Looking back over the period of the research, I recognise the benefits that explicitly supporting the reading process had for the students. They developed skills and confidence that may be further developed and extended to other areas, well beyond the classroom experience. The development of a solid foundation of reading skills ultimately flowed on to the other macro-skills. The collaborative involvement of the students was a credit to their perseverance. Their achievements certainly exceeded my

expectations. Working from the known, even if the known was only one or two shakily known clues in a text, and then methodically dealing with other clues in the text through a range of strategies, encouraged sound learning practice for the future. Success at the group level promoted higher levels of risk taking and success at the individual level engendered very noticeable increases in confidence, self-esteem and dignity.

I felt the effort and energy the students expended in learning to read the English language could be equated to the efforts that a friend was making in learning how to speak again after a stroke. This was particularly noticeable in those who made the cognitive shift from right-to-left reading and writing.

I now direct greater concentration to letter formation in the air, when teaching students to print. This involvement of their gross motor skills allows for further use of phonetic repetition and vocabulary such as the prepositions — *up, down, around* and *across* — words that are, at this preliminary level, very difficult to define in the middle of a reading passage.

I now use class readers more frequently as a whole class activity, not only to practise text reading skills but also for greater reinforcement of the left-to-right sequencing of pages and script. The very new students gain enormous satisfaction when they can follow page numbers and find that they have turned to the same page and picture that everyone else has.

Although not as individualised as I would have liked, the teaching sequences explored through this project definitely supported a broad development of pre-reading and early reading skills, allowing for safe experimentation and a smooth transition to the formal reading process. Now I am making a conscious effort to include more individualised, learner-centred support prior to the group effort of working with the task. I see intensive lead-up preparation as essential for students working at this level. However, I must emphasise that the group effort remains the primary goal as it became evident that the increased level of cooperative learning certainly promoted increased levels of questioning, free reading and student-initiated learning activities involving individual, pair and group participation.

As a teacher, involvement in the research gave me a great deal. I gained benefits in professional development from the readings, presentations, planning, preparation and teaching. All gave me an opportunity to view my teaching philosophy and practice from a totally different perspective. It provoked self-directed questioning — *Why did I do that? What could have made it better? What are the logical ongoing processes? How can I better link this to that?* The questioning became an ingrained routine that led to further research reading and discussions with colleagues. However, my thinking always returned to classroom tasks and classroom interaction, becoming a somewhat repetitive spiral, which on reflection, proceeded with considerable momentum and angst.

The biggest change in my teaching is in the expectation I have of the students. Previously I prepared to give them a comparatively low-level challenge but now I aim considerably higher. To illustrate this, one-third of the class (who you can see on the DVD accompanying this book) had begun class only the week before, yet their participation is evident. The integration and progress of these students in reading and other class activities in such a short time further illustrates what is possible through explicit and supportive teaching.

Reflection point

Elizabeth states:

'It was a new experience for me to choose texts which appeared beyond the perceived ability of my students'.

What kinds of tasks and texts would you currently consider to be beyond your learners' abilities? What influences your thinking about this?

What changes in your teaching could you experiment with to challenge your students in the kinds of ways suggested by Elizabeth?

In committing my thoughts to paper, I asked myself this question: *What was really different or new in my teaching during the project?* Perhaps being involved in the research project channelled my thinking and practice to focus particularly on supported reading strategies within ongoing class work. Yet, in retrospect, no other areas of class work appeared to suffer and there seemed to be a beneficial flow-on.

Another question I asked myself was: *If the sustained focus was so beneficial, should it be maintained?* However, it would be so easy to become mechanical or rigid within a teaching framework. Reading is but one part of the required learning competencies and the much-needed development of other areas must not be ignored. Besides, through exploring other areas of teaching, my new perspective on reading may well develop further as I view it from teaching other skills.

In my teaching it is an absolute must that I enjoy the journey along a developmental pathway. Without energy and enthusiasm in my preparation and presentation, little reciprocal enthusiasm for learning can be expected from my students. So it was stimulating to be involved in a project that pushed me to research and explore well beyond my comfort zone. Involvement in the research, although at times a frustrating challenge, broadened my philosophical thinking and extended my teaching practice to accommodate and move towards what I hope are increasingly flexible and pedagogically sound strategies.

Reflection point

Have you ever been involved in an action research project, such as the one described by Elizabeth? What changes did it produce in your thinking? What changes did it produce in your teaching?

The research project is now completed. On a broader front the student population continues to increase rapidly and classes are changing, builders are busy working on our heritage-listed school and, coincidentally, tiers of metal scaffolding are swathed around it. There is so much to do and accommodate, but those of us who were involved in the reading research project will certainly take the new skills we have gained from it to our future students.

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Action point

Select a text that you would like to use with your pre-literate students. Use the teaching sequence that Elizabeth describes for 'Juan Bobo and the pot'.

After class, make brief journal notes as Elizabeth did to evaluate how effective the lesson was and what your students' reactions were. You might also want to reflect on your own teaching practice during the lesson(s) using Elizabeth's questions:

- Why did I do that?
- What could have made it better?
- What are the logical ongoing processes?
- How can I better link this to that?

Describe your lessons to one or more colleagues and discuss your reflections with them. Alternatively you might want to ask them to pose the questions above to you again.

6 Creating teaching materials that support learning

Pornsawan Brawn

Even low level learners, such as those in my evening class, who only met twice a week for six hours, can become accustomed to explicit processes of support and manage to follow activities and teaching materials.

Introduction

According to Vygotsky (1934/1978), learners do not learn new skills if they are presented with tasks that they can easily achieve. Such tasks only enable them to practise what they already know. However, if students are working in their *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) they are working with tasks that are just beyond their current skill level and this is where learning occurs. As Mariani (1997) explains, when students are confronted with challenging tasks and at the same time receive high support from their teacher, they can achieve new learning and become more confident and more capable of eventually tackling the tasks independently.

Reflection point

From your reading of this volume so far, what do you understand by the term *zone of proximal development*?

In what ways do you aim to provide your students with support that enables them to carry out tasks 'that are just beyond their current skill level'? Think about how you:

• select activities that build up the skills needed to achieve the task outcome

• select and prepare resources to enable students to practise the skills

• provide feedback that enables students to complete the task.

Compare the teaching practices you use to address these areas with those of colleagues.

Background

I was interested in joining the AMEP research project to investigate how materials could support the teaching and learning processes in the classroom. I was interested in the following questions:

• How can teachers support a disparate group of ESL adult learners?
• How do commercially produced teaching materials support teaching in the classroom?
• Do activities around reading such as vocabulary work, silent reading, syllabification practice, language games and dictation support the development of reading skills?

- Do instructional materials play an explicit role in supporting learning?

During the period of the project I was teaching at the NSW AMES Hornsby Centre and I was assigned to three classes in Term 4, 2003. However, for the purpose of this paper I will focus on teaching reading to the CSWE I–CSWE II evening class, using a commercially published ESL reader of which I am the author.

Evening class

I taught the class on two evenings for a total of six hours per week. At the beginning of the course, half the class had almost no literacy and oracy skills in English. The disparate nature of the group made the teaching–learning process even more challenging. The class profile is outlined in the following table.

Bands:	A, B and C
Ages:	35–65
Gender:	8 females
	6 males
Language backgrounds:	Korean
	Chinese
	Spanish
	Farsi
ISLPR:	0 to 0+

The class ran from 6.00 to 9.00 each evening and for the last hour of the lesson I used the NSW AMES reader, *Our island home* (Brawn 2002a) to develop reading skills.

Reflection point

Pornsawan's class met for six hours a week on two evenings. How many hours and at what time of day do your learners attend class?

What impact does this have on the way you plan units of work and lessons? What factors do you need to take into account to ensure that learners receive the most effective learning support?

Preparation is crucial to ensure success and increase learner confidence but in my enthusiasm to start the project I was oblivious to the fact that my learners lacked the basic language skills needed to tackle the reading text. The initial outcome was rather negative and one evening two Chinese students, a husband and wife, with no basic education in L1 (first language), came to me with this letter.

Dear teacher

Would I give you some advise for this course? Would you mind slowing down the speed on the class, and teaching us step by step? Because our English are poor. We cannot understand some you teached.

Thank you

In spite of my best efforts to pace the teaching very slowly, evidently my teaching was not slow enough for these students who had only completed a low elementary education in L1 and were feeling frustrated by the settlement process.

I made a decision that I would start with basic ID and very simple structures with *being* and *having* verbs and later proceed to action verbs. I also introduced a text that I had prepared to teach classroom language and instructions, eg *read, write, listen carefully, match.* I enlisted the help of another student — the best in the class and who spoke Chinese. However, due to lack of formal learning these two students still found it difficult to cope with learning even with L1 assistance.

In my attempt to accommodate them I was losing my other students. So I decided to proceed at a medium pace with more individual practice, class activities and pair work before launching into reading a story in the reader. I hoped this would allow me to be able to support the husband and wife, who were slower than the other students due to their lack of learning strategies. At the same time I wanted to keep my other students interested. The husband in particular never studied at home, never did any activities outside the classroom and hence made minimal progress. Through an interpreter, I encouraged the couple to learn and practise outside the classroom and I also designed group work activities to allow me to support them. After incorporating these new strategies into my teaching I was informed by my colleague, who was teaching the husband and wife in a bilingual class on Saturdays, that they had told him they were now happy in my class and realised they were making language gains.

Reflection point

Pornsawan describes a decision she made in order to slow down the pace of her teaching and a further problem that arose as a result.

Consider a time when you had a problem with pacing your lesson (or any other problem). What steps did you take to solve it? How effective was the solution? Did other issues arise as a result?

Discuss your experiences with a colleague.

Using an ESL reader

Pornsawan's teaching sequence focusing on the ESL reader is on the accompanying DVD.

According to Hammond (2001), educational programs need to focus equally on assisting students to develop control both of relevant curriculum knowledge and the language that enables them to construct that curriculum knowledge. Even low level learners, such as those in my evening class, who only met twice a week for six hours, can become accustomed to explicit processes of support and manage to follow activities and teaching materials.

I decided to focus on the first story in *Our island home* (see below). Tarik's story provided an opportunity to cover personal identification and family relationships, eg *son, daughter-in-law, grandson, grandchildren.*

TARIK

This is Tarik Aziz. He comes from Iraq. Now he lives in Australia, with his son.

He is married. His wife's name is Fatima. He is sixty-two years old and his wife is sixty-one. They have ten children and forty-five grandchildren.

At home Tarik works in the garden and listens to Arabic radio. His wife helps their daughter-in-law in the kitchen. They cook Iraqi food for the family.

Tarik likes Australia but sometimes he is homesick for Baghdad. Baghdad is a big city with many people. He has many friends in Iraq but he only has a few friends in Australia.

Tarik goes to the mosque once a week. He meets some friends there. They speak Arabic and talk about Iraq. Sometimes he takes his grandsons with him.

Tarik's grandchildren speak good English because they were born in Australia. They are Australian.

This reader is also accompanied by a workbook (Brawn 2002b) which I used to provide some activities for my teaching sequence. For example, there is a form-filling activity that provided practice for a later assessment task. Another activity asks the students to match words from the story with their shapes. An Iranian student, with almost no literacy, could see the contour of the words and, to his delight, managed this activity.

Through the term we followed Tarik's story with others from the reader including: Min Chen, Anna and Jung Hee. These stories about migrants and refugees were of great interest to the students and they led to discussions that improved spoken language skills.

Half of the class were Korean students and they enjoyed reading about Jung Hee. They related to someone from their own cultural background and appreciated the story and the events experienced by the character. In the story of Jung Hee, the main character has difficulty reading and understanding a street sign and says that learning English is difficult. As we read the story together students nodded in recognition of the common plight they shared with the character. They appreciated the fact that the materials in class acknowledged the difficulties they had in learning language.

In another story we read about Anna, a refugee who had lost her husband. Although the students were from various cultural backgrounds, they had a common understanding about the peril of wars and the trauma experienced by refugees in a new country. Anna's story did not prove to be a negative subject, rather it seemed to promote understanding about immigrants from different backgrounds and their, sometimes, deplorable circumstances.

Reflection point

Are readers such as *Our island home*, designed for beginner learners, part of your teaching practice? What features do you look for in a commercially published reader?

Share your ideas on effective readers with your colleagues (eg recommend particular resources that you have used; think about what makes an effective reader; suggest activities you have developed based on a specific reader available in your centre).

Activities around the ESL reader

The following activities were designed to provide explicit support to students in reading the story of Tarik.

Silent engagement

Teachers should provide learners with time to engage with a text silently for approximately 7–10 minutes. This can help students to tune in to the text without pressure. My students took this time to look up the meanings of new words. As language is a resource for making meaning, the students were satisfied once they were in control of the meaning of the text they were reading. Silent engagement also allowed them the freedom to explore and familiarise themselves with the text and its layout. This process relaxed the learners before the explicit teaching started.

Illustrations

The stories in *Our island home* are accompanied by clear illustrations related to the events and people in the story. Good use of illustrations can help prepare learners for reading and contextualise vocabulary. I copied the illustrations on to an OHT, which focused everyone's attention on the story. I asked questions about the pictures and even the students who had very limited English managed to provide relevant answers and simultaneously learn new words which appear in the story.

Recorded texts

According to Rose (2003: 4):

> Very weak readers may be struggling to spell out each word, letter by letter and are only able to interpret a few common spelling patterns, and a few 'sight words' that they have memorised. These readers are using so much cognitive effort at this level that they will get very little comprehension out of a complex text.

Our island home is accompanied by a cassette on which trained actors read all the stories. I played the recordings to the class who enjoyed the dramatic reading while also learning the correct pronunciation of words. With their limited English, the students had not previously been able to engage in extended listening activities but they were able to listen to the recording of the story. This helped not only with pronunciation but also with word recognition and fluent reading.

Activities

Follow-up activities in the *Our island home* workbook allowed the learners to have a second look at the text, the language structures, reading strategies and cultural aspects of the stories.

Reflection point

Consider the activities outlined above and watch other activities used by Pornsawan on the DVD.

Which of these activities do you use in your classroom? Which would you like to use? Would you make any adaptations to these activities for this group of learners?

Observations on the teaching activities

The students continued to improve and develop their reading from the first time they attempted to read the story of Tarik. I had abandoned this task earlier in the term because the students were not ready to tackle any reading at that stage. However, by providing explicit support for the students, they became relaxed about reading and became actively engaged in any reading activity presented to them. The couple who had initially expressed concern about my teaching gradually became orientated to learning and settled into the class. I realised that their initial complaints were justified and stemmed from the fact that they had received limited basic education in their country of origin and had few learning skills. Through encouragement and praise, they began to learn at their own pace and persevered and practised at home. Explicit support and revised pacing seemed to work for them.

As the students in the evening class were doing well after reading stories from *Our island home* and undertaking the related activities, I decided to push them into a more challenging zone of learning by choosing a higher level reader, *When things go wrong* (Brawn 2001). Although the pre-reading exercises in the reader were helpful in preparing the students for the vocabulary, the stories are much longer than those in *Our island home* and the students found it too challenging at this stage.

Revisiting the research questions

- *How can teachers support a disparate group of ESL adult learners?*

I realised that there is no easy solution to the best teaching practice for a disparate group of ESL adult learners (see Burns and Hood 1995). However, explicit support and a focus on pacing seemed to have worked with my CSWE I class. This required a large amount of patience and perseverance from both teacher and learners. Teachers have to accept the inevitability of disparate class groupings due to funding constraints, which are beyond their control. They need to meet the challenge by providing more explicit support where it is needed.

- *How do commercially produced teaching materials support teaching in the classroom?*

It is not practical to expect materials to provide for all the explicit support required in a classroom. Teacher assessment, strategies and preparation need to work in combination with the materials to provide the support needs that arise in a class. When deciding on materials to use in a teaching sequence these questions adapted from Gibbons (2003) may help:

- What is the starting point of the teaching sequence in terms of students' prior knowledge and experience, current understandings and current language abilities?
- How can I explicitly link to students' prior experience?
- What should be the sequencing of the tasks?
- Will I need to use mediational texts, as well as the chosen materials?
- How can I use the materials to create abundant language sources (ie those that supply the learner with expanded rather than reduced input to support learning)?
- What will be the metacognitive focus and the metalinguistic focus of the sequence?

Reflecting on the reading materials I chose for the class, I think the following points need to be considered when designing commercial or teacher prepared materials.

Grammatical structures need to be consistently reinforced and consolidated throughout the text. Grammatical structures such as simple present tense need to be used in a context that allows students to link them with real-life contexts. If a new concept is introduced, there needs to be a clear link to preceding sentences or phrases used in the text. This should lead to a wholistic approach to language learning.

Words should keep reappearing in the text and contribute to the continuity of the text. This provides reassurance — as students read the text they can recognise recurring items. It also helps to consolidate understanding so that the learners should be able to use the words in other contexts. Words in a text should also help students develop confidence and broaden their vocabulary. It is a good idea to have synonyms and antonyms in the same text.

- *Do activities around reading such as vocabulary work, silent reading, syllabification practice, language games and dictation support the development of reading skills?*

The answer to this question is *yes*. In a non-homogeneous class, students need to be brought together to work as a group but also need to have opportunities to work at their own pace. By using a range of activities developed around a text, teachers are able to assist students who need more support.

- *Do instructional materials play an explicit role in supporting learning?*

Materials can support learning but in the low level language classroom there is a lot of work to be done by classroom teachers who must provide appropriate support and related materials. Material writers should seek to support learning explicitly and help teachers to shape their lessons. The support needs that arise within the immediate circumstances of the classroom must be met by the teacher.

Material writers should try to put themselves in the situation where they have to teach the classes they are writing for. They should project and anticipate the grammatical structures and linking materials that will be needed outside the reading or listening texts. They must consider that more repetition is needed for lower level students in order to reinforce vocabulary and grammatical structures, as well as text structure.

Good materials should provide units that minimise the need for teachers to provide support at the macro level of teaching sequences. However, at the spontaneous micro level of the classroom, due to its unpredictable nature, it is not possible for materials to be all things to all students. It is the teacher's role to respond to the emerging support needs of the classroom.

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Action point

Focus on the reading materials you have selected in your classroom for a particular unit of work.

As you teach with these materials, select one or two of the questions from Gibbons (2003) as a focal point for your teaching. Write notes soon after each lesson to reflect on your teaching and to develop your thoughts:

- What is the starting point of the teaching sequence in terms of students' prior knowledge and experience, current understandings and current language abilities?

- How can I explicitly link to students' prior experience?

- What should be the sequencing of the tasks?

- Will I need to use mediational texts, as well as the chosen materials?

- How can I use the materials to create abundant language sources?

- What will be the metacognitive focus and the metalinguistic focus of the sequence?

What themes or insights emerge from your reflections? Do you see the need to make any changes in the materials or tasks you have selected? If possible, carry out this action point with a colleague and discuss your reactions.

7 From sheep to Ginza!

Aino Lee-Jones

Students were more confident after each cycle of reading. By observing students I could see how they used the different reading strategies they had acquired…

Introduction

My initial interest in the research project was motivated by two factors. The first was student requests to be able to read more efficiently and fluently and with greater understanding. The second was students' lack of confidence in tackling new reading material independently.

Students may lack background knowledge of the social and cultural purposes of many of the texts used in class. They do not always understand that texts are structured differently to convey different meanings, which are dependent on the social and cultural values attributed to them. Students need to understand the systems of grammar and vocabulary that are involved in structuring different spoken and written texts. They also need to develop reading strategies to help them with their reading and they need to know how to use the context to understand a deeper level of meaning.

Reflection point

Here Aino identifies areas of need in reading development that are important for her students.

Do they reflect your own observations and experiences? Are there other areas that you would add for your own students?

My research question became: *How can I scaffold reading in order to address these gaps of background knowledge of context, content, structure and lexis?* This led me to explore the different ways that reading could be scaffolded by using various genres within the same context and with the same vocabulary. I was interested in using a top-down approach to teaching reading. This would emphasise the reconstruction of meaning rather than the decoding of form.

During the course of the project, the composition of my CSWE II class changed many times. However, for the last six weeks it remained fairly stable at 16 students, although four of these students only attended part-time. There were four international students, seven refugees and five migrants. It was a diverse class with nine different nationalities, ages ranging from 19 years to 57 years, and educational backgrounds ranging from no formal education in first language to university study.

Reflection point

Aino's class is at an intermediate level. Consider an intermediate class you are currently teaching or have taught in the past. To what extent was the class similar or different? How did the composition of the class influence your teaching decisions?

To research the effect of scaffolded teaching tasks I kept a journal of observations, which I wrote up after each teaching session. The classroom tutor also observed the students and we had an informal discussion after each session to share our observations. I recorded some of the teaching, although this was not as extensive as it could have been. More recordings would have provided valuable information on student-to-student discussions, interactions and negotiations.

Teaching approach

I used the genre of fables or folk tales (eg Janssen 1981) as the initial text type since most, if not all, of the students would be familiar with this genre in either spoken or written form from their own cultures. The texts I used were about 500 words in length and were always accompanied by an illustration. The cultural context of the text was changed for each teaching cycle to reflect the cultural diversity of the students because as Nunan (1995: 11) states: 'the lack of appropriate background knowledge [is] a more significant factor in the ability of second language learners to comprehend … texts, than linguistic complexity'.

My approach to choosing texts was underpinned by the Vygotskyan principle of providing learning tasks that are slightly above the current capabilities of the students, that is in their *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) (Vygotsky 1934/1978). My approach to teaching reading was to provide scaffolded support through various strategies to enable the students to deal effectively with these texts.

Teaching sessions varied in length from 30 minutes to 60 minutes, depending on the activities undertaken, the difficulties encountered and the level of student interest and interaction. Within each session I used a scaffolding interaction cycle (Rose 2003: 11) which includes:

- preparation for context, sequence and meaning within sentences
- responding to affirm student contributions
- elaboration of meanings beyond sentence level by defining, discussing and explaining.

Initially, only a few students responded to questions but eventually all students were able to contribute to the discussions as they became more confident.

Pre-reading activities

Before reading the chosen text, I asked the students to look at the accompanying illustration and the title of the story and then brainstorm relevant vocabulary. The key vocabulary was discussed using both student knowledge (peer scaffolding) and teacher explanations. This vocabulary was then listed on the board and related vocabulary was added, as necessary, eg additional words associated with sheep — *ram, ewe, flock, lamb* and *shepherd*. Visual aids were used where needed. Students who were more familiar with the context, such as those from farming or rural backgrounds, shared their knowledge with the others. In this way the context was also built up through student scaffolding. As the context was changed with each new text, all students had an opportunity to share their knowledge and understanding. I found that once the context was clear, the reading process became smoother.

Students wrote the vocabulary items with a meaning either in English or in their first language on the front cover of their story. Some students chose to use an illustration instead of a word to help them remember, using the *keyword method*

(O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 119–20 in Wigglesworth 2003: 111). This list, which was added to over the following sessions, served as a point of referral and revision.

I then asked the students to predict the content of the story by asking: *What do you think the story is about?* This related their prior knowledge and experience to the present context. Students were also encouraged to give reasons for their predictions.

Teaching sequence

Aino's teaching sequence features on the accompanying DVD.

Step 1   Reading the story
I read the story while the students followed the written text. At this stage the students were directed to read for the gist of the story, and not to focus on the individual unknown vocabulary items. I actively discouraged the use of dictionaries at this stage.

Step 2   Reviewing the story
An oral discussion about the general meaning of the story followed using teacher-guided questions. By allowing the more able students to explain the meaning, and how they came to that understanding, the students who were having difficulties were not put under any pressure to contribute. Specific parts of the text were referred to, thus allowing the less able students to answer specific questions. We also discussed in general terms how language was used to show relationships between the characters in the story, as well as between the writer and the reader. Students were then encouraged to reread the text at home.

We reviewed the story via an oral discussion looking at the main ideas and concepts. We also reviewed the basic vocabulary, scanning to find the specific vocabulary items, with additional items added such as different landscape features that were mentioned, eg *steep mountain path* and *mountain peaks*, thus building on existing knowledge.

I read the story again, stopping at various points to ask leading questions, for example: *What happened next?* and *What did he do when he reached the top?* This affirmed student responses and allowed for elaboration.

Reflection point

What other 'leading questions' could be used to extend the students' understanding of the text and to encourage them to reconstruct the meaning?

Step 3   Reading in groups
The students then divided into two smaller groups of mixed abilities with a teacher or a classroom tutor as facilitator. The students read the story aloud in turn. The facilitators assisted with turn-taking and in guiding understanding through peer scaffolding. Despite the literature that states that reading aloud is usually something students are uncomfortable with, I found no evidence of this. The students had a good working relationship with each other in a secure environment and there was no fear of ridicule. The students enjoyed the interaction in the smaller groups, because it allowed them opportunities to ask questions and to seek clarification from each other as well as

from the facilitator. This strategy of *question for clarification* is defined as 'eliciting from a teacher or peer additional explanations, rephrasing, examples or verification' (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 120 in Wigglesworth 2003: 111).

Reflection point

Is reading aloud part of your teaching practice? What advantages or disadvantages have you observed while reading aloud? What are your students' views of reading aloud in class, individually or together?

The facilitators encouraged the students to work out the meaning of unknown words from the context using a deductive strategy such as reading some words before and some after the unknown ones. The majority of students were not familiar with this strategy of using the surrounding text to find the meanings of words. We asked guided questions to come to an understanding, when additional assistance was needed.

The whole class then gathered together and we looked at the language that was used. The discussion was guided by questions such as:

- Why did the writer choose that particular language?
- What was the author trying to convey?
- How would a different form of language change the meaning or the social relationships in the story?

Step 4   Writing in groups

The students were divided into groups of three or four to write a synopsis of the story. I ensured that within each group there were no students who spoke the same language, there was at least one student with good literacy skills and there was at least one student with good oracy skills. By grouping the students in this way, each student was able to contribute to the overall construction of the synopsis.

This writing task involved:

- Cooperating and collaborating 'or working together with one or more peers to solve a problem, pool information, check a learning task … get [and give] feedback or oral [and] written performance' scanning the text to refresh memories, as well as to find specific words and to check spelling.
- Asking clarification questions from peers, mainly if meaning was still unclear, elaborating or 'relating new information to prior knowledge, relating different parts of new information to each other or making meaningful personal associations with new information'.
- Recombining or 'constructing a meaningful sentence or larger language sequence by combining known elements in a new way'. (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 120 in Wigglesworth 2003: 111)

This task was as much a communicative task as a writing task, as the students communicated about language and problem solved context, grammar and spelling issues in producing their summaries of the story.

Step 5   Sequencing the text

I rewrote the original text using some of the student summaries from the previous session. The text was therefore not the same as the original but contained a synopsis of it. This was then cut into strips and the students were asked to put it in the correct order. This again involved cooperation and a lot of discussion as the students

rationalised their decisions to each other and ultimately to me. They discussed the language clues that had helped them and this resulted in some quite animated debate.

Step 6   Performing the story

I rewrote the story as a play. The basic vocabulary items were now familiar to most students so we could move into a new format that was not familiar to all students. We were able to discuss the differences in the text, for example character names are followed by what the character actually says, and there are stage instructions and language features peculiar to a play. Reading strategies, such as following the script in order to be ready to read, were also discussed. We noted how the spoken language differed from the written language in terms of vocabulary and grammatical features and how it depends on intonation, loudness, tempo and paralinguistic features. This gave the students an awareness of how language changes in different situations. We also discussed the design features of a script, such as the use of italics and bold and upper-case letters. This was an effective and fun activity, with laughter accompanying the various interpretations of stage directions, characterisation and so on.

Reflections

This cycle of reading was repeated several times. Setting the context of the story seemed to be the most important phase of teaching and once this was clear, the rest of the reading process progressed smoothly and students were able to develop understanding through vocabulary building. Through understanding how different texts are organised and how grammar works to achieve certain meanings, students began to see similarities and differences in texts. They were then able to look at the vocabulary and see how it was used in different ways, for example in a play, in a newspaper article reporting an incident, in a postcard where the incident is described by a participant and so on.

Students were more confident after each cycle of reading. By observing students I could see how they used the different reading strategies they had acquired, such as predicting meaning and confirming or correcting those predictions, scanning for information, reading for gist, questioning for clarification and using deductive strategies. Students also became more confident tackling a new text without specific guidance and more students began borrowing books to read at home.

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Action point

If possible, do this activity with a colleague and exchange your responses and ideas.

1   Watch the sequence of activities from Aino's classroom, which are based on the steps described above.

2   Select one or more of the teaching techniques that she uses and try them out in your own classroom. It might be one that is new for you or one that you have used many times before.

3   Collect information on what happens when you use this technique, for example:

   • ask a colleague to observe you

   • record the classroom interaction

   • write notes on what you did and how it worked

   • interview students about their views of this technique.

4   Reflect on:

   • what you learned from your observations

   • what went well

   • what you would like to improve or change.

8 Developing advanced writing and speaking skills

Max Marshall

Generally speaking the scaffolded methodology I used has provided me with a sound basis for the development of a well-theorised and well-resourced series of units which allow my advanced students to study meaningful language quickly and achieve some real learning outcomes.

Introduction

Australian applications of the concept of scaffolding to methodology in language learning have allowed teachers to better theorise and explicitly structure their teaching with impressive results in a range of school contexts. In this paper I outline how I have developed a scaffolding methodology for refugee and migrant advanced learners of English, who need to improve language skills for academic or professional workplace situations. This particular variation of scaffolding enables students to improve their writing and speaking skills rapidly and develop critical knowledge of language, text and fields of knowledge relevant to their settlement in Australia.

The articulation of what it means to scaffold learning (Applebee and Langer 1983; Hammond 2001) in Indigenous educational contexts is best described by Rose, Gray and Cowey (1999) who outline theories of learning and of language. Their theory of learning relies on Vygotsky's theories of learning. Vygotsky sees learning as essentially a shared, social interaction, which is achieved when learners accomplish tasks above their current level of competence. Such tasks are said to lie within the learners' *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) (Vygotsky 1934/1978) and present the learners with a challenge which is achievable with support from the teacher.

Rose, Gray and Cowey (1999) also utilise a functional model of language based on Halliday (1994). Texts, whether oral or written, are seen as social constructions that are exchanged between speakers, writers and readers to achieve particular social purposes.

> Each text involves three levels of organisation, as sequences of meanings (discourse semantics), as patterns of wordings that realise these meanings (lexicogrammar) and as soundings or letter patterns that realise these wordings (graphophonics). (Rose, Gray and Cowey 1999: 32)

Introducing scaffolding to adult ESL students

The opportunity to apply a scaffolded methodology came when I began working for LM Training Specialists, an Adelaide-based private provider of language and vocational short courses. LM Training has a contract with the Department of Education to supply language and numeracy courses for migrants at advanced levels. I was lucky enough to work with these students, who have strong motivations to learn English, clearly articulated goals and have already achieved success in formal learning contexts.

68

I use a state-based SA TAFE curriculum, *Certificate IV in English Language Proficiency (Second Language)* to prepare students for a range of outcomes including:

- exam success: International English Language Testing System (IELTS), International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR), Occupational English Test (OET) tests
- further study at TAFE, undergraduate or post graduate level
- work, usually in a particular professional area
- completion of the Certificate.

Intuitively I feel that my students needed to know they were achieving fairly demanding learning outcomes that would put them on the way to achieving their life goals. I also believe it is important to challenge them through complex reading, writing and speaking tasks, commensurate with their past achievements as successful students and professionals in their country of origin.

Class organisation

Because LM Training is a small company, flexibility is needed to fulfil the terms of contracts, as stipulated by various funding bodies. There is also a continuous intake of students, which means new students come to the class almost every week. The personal circumstances of the students are such that they may stay until they get a job or go on to further study and so students stay in the class from one week to 40 weeks. This presents particular difficulties with continuity but I have developed an approach where each teaching session is self-contained and also part of a longer sequence.

I develop my teaching around fields of knowledge and the successful attainment of substantial tasks. These provide a focus for teaching and learning and allow the students to make sense of what happens in the classroom, even though they may join the class halfway through a three or four week unit of work. Students work with me from a minimum 12 hours a week to a maximum 20 hours a week. In-class work is supplemented with integrated computer and self-study negotiated language modules, allowing students to work on their own in areas of self-identified need.

I try to mimic conventions of Australian workplaces and universities. Students in the advanced high class are expected to be punctual, inform me when they are sick or unable to attend, turn off their mobile phones, pre-read articles in preparation for class reading and writing activities and complete certain tasks out of class time.

Reflection point

Here, Max outlines some of his guiding principles for teaching and managing his class, taking into account the particular constraints and opportunities in his educational context.

What constraints and opportunities exist in your teaching context? What impact do they have on your teaching? What strategies do you use to address/solve them?

Do you have particular approaches to managing the class as Max does?

Fields and texts

I particularly like the idea of developing a field of knowledge and working fairly deeply within that field with my students to achieve a shared understanding of knowledge and vocabulary. Development of a field is often the starting point for many ESL teachers in Australia. At LM Training it is a feature of teaching at all levels. The theoretical basis for this approach has been argued elsewhere (Hammond, Burns, Joyce, Brosan and Gerot 1992), but for me field development is central to successful language development.

With migrants who are advanced speakers of English there are many possible fields that can be used both to teach language and provide background settlement knowledge. Over the past 18 months I have trialled a number of fields and aligned these to particular tasks. Sample fields and tasks are outlined in the following table.

• The problems of the Murray River (biology/environmental science)	Explanation essay Powerpoint presentation
• The causes of unemployment in Australia (economics)	Explanation essay
• The changing nature of work in Australia (economics/society/unions)	Discussion
• Comparison between Australia and home country	Oral presentation
• Crime in Australia (criminology/law)	Exposition
• English in Australia (Australian society/linguistics)	Oral presentation
• Australian English in an Australian film	Information report
• Australian systems and structures (Australian systems: politics/tertiary education/professional bodies)	Short research report
• Graphs and diagrams	Short report
• Australia's aging population (sociology/demography)	Information report

Along with the above fields texts are central to the units of work. Texts are essential artefacts of communication between speakers and listeners and readers and writers (Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks and Yallop 2000). I carefully select those that are relevant to the topic, along with a model of the text that the students need to produce. Text selection is dependent on the requirements of the curriculum and the immediate language development needs of the students. It is also dependent on the authenticity of the text. I select something that is topical, relevant to the field and presents a higher level of difficulty for students.

Reflection point

Max refers to text *authenticity* as an important aspect in his choice of texts.

How important is this for your learners? When would you consider it important for a teacher to use a non-authentic text (eg a graded/simplified reader, a teacher-produced text, a learner-produced text)? To what extent does the learner profile of the class need to be considered in making such decisions?

In thinking about these questions, you might want to consider the alternative views put forward by Mary (Chapter 4) for her class of beginner readers.

Tasks

Students are expected to develop knowledge of the field through vocabulary development, that is reading and deconstructing model texts through guided in-class activities. The students are given an outline of their set task at the beginning of the unit in the form of a unit outline. This outline provides:

- a description of the task and the due date
- the marking scheme for the task — related to curriculum requirements and teaching points
- grammar, writing and presentation topics to be covered
- copies of the readings related to the field
- a copy of the text that provides a model answer for the task which could be an essay, a report or an oral presentation.

In this way students have a clear idea of the task and in-class activities that we will cover in the following weeks. Students who come late to the unit can then pick up on the task and the activities and catch up if they feel the need. Otherwise I negotiate some variation of the task.

Reflection point

How do you present the tasks in units of work to your students? Compare your responses with a colleague. What aspects of Max's task outline could be used for the students you teach? Are there other points you would include?

You can find a further example of how an AMEP teacher of intermediate students, Jean Harris, programs a writing class to cater for multi-level students at:

http://nceltr.edu.au/conference2002/papers/Jean_Harris.pdf

The tasks are either substantial writing tasks of 1000 words or oral presentations of various forms. I use Kalantzis and Wignell's (1988) booklet to inform the sort of writing that I require of students. These authors say that in senior secondary school the usual types of writing required are explanatory essays, expositions and discussions. I find this a useful starting point for students to recognise and build their knowledge of what is required at tertiary level, which also includes annotated bibliographies, critical reviews and reading logs.

Some students do not intend to study at tertiary level and require skills that are needed by professionals in the Australian workplace such as writing effective reports, which I also cover. However, there is not always a perfect match between the tasks or types of writing selected and the needs of the students. Nevertheless students become competent in:

- analysing texts for audience and purpose
- paragraph writing
- writing more complex sentences
- grammar related to the writing tasks
- analysing and writing essays and reports.

Overall the central task of each unit represents something that the students cannot do at the beginning but can achieve by the end of the unit, through teaching support. Students are also able to collaborate and share learning in the social context of the classroom. The

task, reflecting a functional view of language, also represents, as near as possible, a real-life task such as an essay or report with a developed context, audience and purpose.

The background readings to the main task usually involve two substantial readings taken from up-to-date sources. The readings are analysed carefully (after Harvey 1993), usually through comprehension activities and paired work. They are analysed for:

- audience and purpose
- structure
- meaning at word, phrase, sentence and paragraph level
- targeted grammar such as tense
- technical language
- spoken versus written forms.

Through this analysis students develop an understanding of the required task and some content knowledge and vocabulary.

The model text is a model answer for the question and is in the form of an answer acceptable to myself as the teacher. These model answers I have collected over the years, or written myself, as a way of showing students what sort of writing is required in response to a given task. So — if students are asked to discuss the changing nature of work in Australia in 1000 words — I can give them an essay of that length that represents an appropriate response. We also analyse these model texts for such things as coherence, nominalisation and modality.

The teaching cycle

Max's teaching cycle features on the accompanying DVD.

The teaching cycle I implement in the classroom moves from speaking oriented tasks through reading to writing as outlined in the following table.

	General activity	Sample teaching activities
SPEAKING	Introduction to the new field of knowledge	• Class discussion about personal experiences in relation to the field • Contrasting local and overseas knowledge and experience • First new technical language introduced
	Understanding text in context at discourse semantic level	• Discussion of readings and model text in relation to field • Discussion of audience and purpose • Discussion of text organisation and text sequencing • Analysis for presentation and referencing

	General activity	Sample teaching activities
READING	Understanding meaning of words, phrases, concepts at lexicogrammatical level	• Close reading of readings and model text • Comprehension activities • Analysis of readings and model text for such things as: – targeted grammar, eg tense, prepositions, articles, verbs that take *to* or *ing* – sentence complexity – paragraph complexity – technical language – nominalisation – written vs spoken forms
WRITING	Writing sentences and paragraphs at lexicogrammatical level	• Writing sentences • Planning and writing paragraphs • Grammar activities
	Whole text production at context level	• Students write plans at whole text level • In-class and out-of-class writing • Completion of task by due date

The students who come through my course seem to relate to the methodology and do improve their writing skills. However, the students who spend more time on their work have obviously better results than those who do not put in as much effort. Interestingly, some of the more confident students do not seem to take on board the embedded culture of academic writing in the writing task, and tend to play down the importance of one aspect or another — usually the referencing requirements. However, when they come to see me after starting university, they acknowledge the importance of referencing and other conventions of presentation.

Reflection point

Max's focus is on how he can use *designed-in scaffolding* when planning units of work. In the table above, Max outlines the sequence of skills and activities he uses in his teaching cycle. To what extent does this reflect the approach and sequence that you adopt?

Select a topic or 'field of knowledge' relevant to your learners and adapt Max's outline to plan a unit of work. If possible work with colleagues who are teaching a similar group of learners.

At the end of one particular unit I surveyed my students about their learning in relation to the scaffolded methodology. Students endorsed it and were particularly pleased with:

- the required length of the writing task
- the discussion of the topic at the beginning of the unit
- the fact that the writing was required to be academic in style
- the fact that the readings and model texts were closely analysed.

The students were generally challenged by the fields of study and one student stated: *I really learnt how to write and speak for further study but the main thing was I really learnt about Australia.* There was a mixed response to analysing grammar in context and this may be a reflection of the experience most second language learners have of working with decontextualised grammar activities, rather than embedded contextualised grammar activities.

The scaffolded methodology I use has provided me with a sound basis for the development of a well-theorised and well-resourced series of units that allow my advanced students to study meaningful language quickly and achieve some real learning outcomes. My approach, as with other scaffolding approaches, is a deep involvement with language that is particularly useful for advanced students. Although I have recounted the general approach from the perspective of writing, I have also applied the methodology to spoken language tasks such as oral presentations, where the same teaching–learning cycle applies.

In my experience the application of scaffolded methodology to adult language learning contexts has been reasonably successful. It has allowed me to better theorise and structure my approach to language learning and to develop a coherent approach to classroom practice. At the same time the concept of scaffolding has been applied rather cautiously to adult learning and arguably there is a research space which could be further addressed. The incorporation of adult learning theory is one area where this could be done. Another is to see how the teaching scripts used by teachers (Department of Education, Science and Training 2004) in their scaffolded units at primary level could be adapted and applied to adult learners.

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Action point

Try out the unit of work you planned based on Max's outline over several lessons. If you planned the unit with colleagues ask them to teach it at the same time. After each lesson make notes on the following:

- Did the *designed-in* scaffolding on which you based the unit result in an effective sequence of activities?

- How do you know they were effective?

- What changes would you want to make if you taught this lesson again?

- What changes do you need to make to be able to move to the next lesson in the unit?

If possible, ask your students what changes they would like in the sequence of the unit.

At the end of the unit, discuss your responses with your colleagues. What do you feel you have learned from teaching this unit?

. . . . . .

About the authors

Anne Burns is Professor of Linguistics in the Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University and Dean of the Division of Linguistics and Psychology. Anne has been associated with the Adult Migrant English Program for 24 years as a teacher, teacher educator, curriculum developer, and researcher. She sees the classroom and its interactions as central to effective language programs and therefore is an enthusiastic advocate for action research.

Helen de Silva Joyce is the Director of Community and Migrant Education in the NSW Department of Education and Training. Helen has worked in action research and professional development programs with teachers in the AMEP for over 20 years.

Jennifer Hammond is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Technology, Sydney. She teaches in the fields of language, literacy and ESL education, as well as research design and methodology. Her research interests lie in language and literacy development; classroom talk and its role in constructing curriculum knowledge; and ESL pedagogy. Her recent research focuses on the contribution of 'scaffolding' to challenge and support in ESL pedagogy.

Pauline Gibbons teaches postgraduate TESOL courses at the University of Technology, Sydney. Her language teaching experience includes teacher training in Hong Kong, Laos, Thailand, Singapore, South Africa, Marshall Islands, UK and Australia. Her research interests are in content-based ESL pedagogy, and classroom discourse. Pauline's recent publications include *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: Teaching ESL students in the mainstream classroom* (Heinemann 2002).

Mary Annesley came to Australia from South Africa in 1982 and has lived in Adelaide ever since. She has been teaching in the South Australian AMEP at English Language Services since 1986. Mary has taught all levels in the AMEP but is especially interested in the literacy needs of learners coming from pre-literate or non roman script backgrounds.

Elizabeth Buchanan currently teaches the Preliminary English class at the Institute of TAFE Tasmania, Launceston. She has a particular interest in language acquisition and has found that the research focus on scaffolding in reading not only challenged but also reoriented her thinking on the learning of foundation skills. Within the class reading environment, Liz also advocates self-instigated learning and the promotion of a generational acceptance of the culture of education.

Pornsawan Brawn is a teacher at New South Wales AMES. She has been involved in adult second language education for over 25 years. She was engaged in teacher training while serving as a Regional Curriculum Officer and a member of the Certificate in Spoken and Written English 2003 reaccreditation team. Pornsawan has written a range of ESL teaching materials.

Aino Lee-Jones has been an ESL teacher for 12 years and currently teaches at TAFE College in Launceston, Tasmania. She has explored different methods of teaching reading to students of low literacy levels. Aino believes that students are generally

About the authors • • • • • •

not exposed to sustained reading tasks using a single text, and that by scaffolding learning at all stages and by revamping the text into different genres, students will gain the confidence to read independently and, more importantly, choose to read for enjoyment.

Max Marshall is a teacher at LM Training Specialists in Adelaide. He teaches advanced level students who need to upgrade their qualifications at university or TAFE, or find professional employment. Max adapted the scaffolding methodology, which he first came across while teaching in an Aboriginal community, for these students and witnessed great success.