Scaffolding as a Teaching Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Scaffolding is the notion originated from the concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) conceptualized by Lev Vygotsky, the father of sociocultural theory who considered social interaction the key to language acquisition. As the name has implied, ZPD refers to the gap between the learner's actual developmental level and that of his potential one. To bridge the gap which means to develop language proficiency, more capable language users or instructors scaffold less-advanced learners with prompts, guidance for appropriate goal, explanation of distinctive feature of a task and demonstration of strategies. Scaffolding can help novice learners to step up into their zone of proximal development (ZPD). Scaffolding is, thus, applied in language teaching and valued as one of the best effective teaching strategies. This paper aims at explaining the concept of scaffolding, providing in-depth analysis, and illustrating how to put the concept into use.

Keywords: *Scaffolding, language proficiency, teaching strategies*

INTRODUCTION

English teachers and educators have been trying to find the best teaching strategy which helps develop student's English proficiency and meet their expectation. Most theories of second language acquisition are related to cognitive processes, and the emphasis is not significantly placed on social interaction. On the contrary, the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) conceptualized by Lev Vygotsky, a psychologist who pioneered sociocultural theory, considers interaction as top priority (Lightbown & Spada, 1999) Furthering study on the ZPD allows the

educators to values scaffolding, the notion which emanates from his sociocultural theory and the concept of the ZPD.

This paper falls into 2 sections. The first presents the definition of scaffolding and related theories, the second looks at the types of scaffolding and principles of this notion, the role of teacher in scaffolded instruction, advantages of scaffolding, and an example of scaffolded lesson.

DEFINITION AND RELATED THEORIES

Definition

When hearing the word "scaffolding", we tend to think of a raised platform for workers to repair or build a building. When this job is done, the scaffolds will be removed. Thanks to their help, the repaired or new building will be able to stand firmly by itself. The concept of scaffolding in teaching plays the same role (Dodge, 1998).

Gibbons (2002) explained that the term "scaffolding" was first used by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) in their examination of parent-child talk in the early years. It is a good metaphor used to describe this strategy. Education Department of Western Australia (1999) mentioned that the scaffolding teaching strategy can be used to teach a specific aspect of basic skills. Teacher is in charge of constructing "a scaffold" around the area, otherwise students might get lost. When students tend to be able to deal with the task, "the scaffolding" can then be gradually removed until students no longer need it. A significant aspect of scaffolding is thereby the temporality. To sum up, scaffolding describes the process of giving temporary guidance and support, which can be verbal or non-verbal, to students so as to move than from one level of competence to another (Haffman, 1993, as cited in MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). The "scaffold" in teaching is the social environment which assists the students to explore new meaning, relationship and knowledge as well as consolidate what student is about to learn (Macnaughton & Williams, 2004, p.331).

Related Theories

The Profound Relationship between Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding

According to Gibbons (2002), it is stated that the notion of scaffolding originated from Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Being a psychologist who developed a sociocultural theory, Vygotsky proposed that society furnished the interactions which play the fundamental role in development of cognition. Geerson (2006) cited Vygotsky's work (1978) in his article. He provided a clear definition of the zone of proximal development, "the difference between the child's development levels as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaborate with more capable peer." (p.48) Wink and Putney (2002) clarified that Vygotsky used a ZPD as a means of viewing what children are coming to know. As a teacher and a researcher, Vygotsky realized that with help or guidance of someone more advanced, children could perform a task which was beyond their development level. Goldfarb (2000) also restated that the ZPD consists of all the functions and activities that students can perform merely with someone else's assistance. A child can learn a language effectively via scaffolding technique by applying the scaffold within their ZPD. A parent, teacher or peer who is considered a more capable language user can be involves in this scaffolding process (MacNaughton & Willams, 2004). Field (as mentioned in Safadi & Rababah, 2010) depicted the relationship between scaffolding and ZPD. He clearly pointed out that more advanced language users or instructors help novice learners with prompts, guidance for appropriate goal, explanation of distinctive feature of a task and demonstration of strategies. Scaffolding plays a vital role in supporting novice learners to step up into their ZPD. Thanks to ZPD, instructors have a guideline on how to support (or scaffold) learners at each step of learning. It is recommended that teachers provide learners with tasks that are of a bit higher level than their actual performance and teach them the rules which can help them step up to the next stage without help.

INSTRUCTION AND AN EXAMPLE OF SCAFFOLDED LESSON

Types of Scaffolding

Saye and Brush (as cited in Safadi & Rababah, 2012) classified scaffolding into two level: soft and hard scaffolding. The former refers to the fact that a teacher walks around and talks with students questioning their approach to a difficult task and provide them with supportive feedback. Unlike the latter, it is designed beforehand so as to help students with difficult task.

Six Principles of scaffolding

Referring to Van Lier (as cited in Barnard & Campbell ,2005) six principles of scaffolding are formulated:

1. Contextual support – a safe but challenging environment: errors are expected and accepted as part of the learning process
2. Continuity – repeated occurrences over time of a complex of actions, keeping a balance between routine and variation
3. Intersubjectivity - mutual engagement and support: two minds thinking as one
4. Flow – communication between participants is not forced, but flow in a natural way
5. Contingency – the scaffolded assistance depends on learners' reactions: elements can be added, changed, deleted, repeated, etc
6. Handover – the ZPD closes when learner is ready to undertake similar tasks without help.

The Role of Teacher in Scaffolded Instruction

What are the teacher's role in scaffolding instruction? According to MacNaughton and Williams (2004), there are 3 steps of teacher's role while using scaffolding as teaching strategy:

1. Teacher has to carefully decide when students are ready to move from one step to another (Read et al., as cited in MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). Teacher needs to thoroughly behold and note the social, cognitive and communicative competencies of the student (Meadow & Cashdan 19, mentioned in MacNaughton &

Williams, 2004). That is to say, teachers are supposed to know the students' ZPD so as to apply the appropriate scaffold within their ZPD (Gibbons, 2002)

2. Teacher needs time to support, guide and help students with stepping from one level to another (Smith, as cited in MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). Teacher has to spend time assisting students on a one-to-one basis or in small group (Fleer, mentioned in MacNaughton & Williams, 2004).

3. Teacher is in charge of finding the best way to assist or guide students in moving to advanced competence. Teacher may use verbal or non-verbal technique to bring about students' understanding and more sophisticated skill. Teaching techniques supporting scaffolding include models, cues, prompts, hints, partial solutions, think-aloud modeling, and direct instruction . (Meadow & Cashdan 1988, mentioned in MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). The role of teacher or how teacher should behave depends upon the nature of activities. He or she has to opt for a role or roles which are commensurate with the activities. A teacher can play a role of an organizer, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, investigator and facilitator (Harmer, 1992).

Advantages of Scaffolding

The attitude towards scaffolding of Wood, Bruner and Ross (as cited in Geerson, 2006) and that of Mckenzie (1999) has a lot in common. These educators posit three main advantages of this notion:

1. Scaffolding provides clear direction. Teacher makes an attempt to foresee the problem and therefore supplies students with step-by-step instructions to maximize their understanding and minimize their confusion. Mckenzie (1999) restates what Wood, Bruner and Ross (mentioned in Geerson, 2006) have characterized the functions of scaffolding. The three researchers also considered it task simplifier.

2. Scaffolding keeps students on task. Provided step-by-step instruction by scaffolded lesson, students are able to move along route without the danger of being "off road" or "getting lost" (Mckenzie, 1999) That is to say, it helps simplify the task (Bruner & Ross, mentioned in Geerson, 2006).

3. Scaffolding offers assessment to clarify expectations. Sample works, rubrics and standard of excellence are declared from the beginning, thus, students know what constitutes quality work and what they are expect to do. This benefit of scaffolding is also noticed by Wood, Bruner and Ross (as cited in Geerson, 2006) They point out that scaffolding displays a standardized picture of students' work.

4. Scaffolding reduces uncertainty, surprise and disappointment. Teacher tests each step of the lesson to analyze what possibly causes difficulty. Hence, he can develop the lesson beforehand (Mckenzie, 1999). Wood, Bruner and Ross (mentioned in Geerson, 2006) revealed that scaffolding functions as a controller of frustration during problem solving.

Example of Scaffolded Instruction

Safadi and Rababah (2010) conducted research to implement a scaffolding instruction program to discover its impact on 11th grade Jordanian EFL learners' reading comprehension skills. An example of their scaffolded lesson plan is illustrated below.

The topic of the reading material is "Coffee House". The pedagogical activities are divided into three phases: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading.

In the pre-reading stage, the teacher uses realia (a cup of coffee) to lead students to the discussion. Then she writes down the title of the reading material on the board so that students can start thinking if the title gives them some clues about what they are to read. After that, the teacher teaches students to activate their background knowledge and provides them with guided questions, such as, "Have you ever been told about coffee houses by your father or grandfather? "What did he say?" Then, the teacher elicits from students what they want to know about coffee and coffee house in order to motivate students, stimulate their curiosity, and make them owners of the task. Next, she tries to link students' prior knowledge to the new material by asking whether they have been to a coffee house and what they do in there. After that, prompts which play the role of guidelines for the students as they think of the reading text come onto the scene. The prompts are in

the form of guided question. For example, “Look at the title of the story. What words come into your mind?” The teacher then introduces the cognitive strategy of making predictions and students are to write down their predictions in a sheet of paper.

In while-reading stage, the teacher models think-aloud protocol and show students how to guess the meaning of unknown vocabulary by using context clue. She lets students work in groups to discuss the main idea of the first two paragraphs and then predict what they will read in the following paragraph. The teacher monitors students’ progress and facilitates their learning process. Cues and prompts are also provided when students get struck or feel confused. She also participates in discussion when students tend to go off topic. Next, the teacher leads the whole class discussion to help students correct their predictions. Forming questions is encouraged. The teacher models the kinds of questions to be asked by giving hints. After that, students are asked to write down a summary for the first two paragraphs. A few students are asked to read their summaries; the teacher gives them supportive comment. In groups, students are assigned to read the third paragraph using the same strategy: demonstrating think-aloud process, guessing meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary, predicting information, posing question and evaluating their learning. The teacher has to walk around monitoring students’ progress and make sure everyone is participating in the task and active in discussion. After every group finishes their assigned task, the teacher leads the whole class discussion to monitor the learning process. In the last two paragraphs, the scaffold is gradually removed. The teacher is still monitoring, encouraging group work, assisting students when necessary, but less prompts are provided.

In post-reading activity, students are asked to complete the review worksheets and individually write their reflective journal and hand it in for evaluation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, scaffolding is considered technique to use to broaden student's cognition competencies (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004) Some research studies such as that of Berk and Spuhl (as cited in MacNaughton & Williams, 2004) support the idea of effectiveness in teaching and learning by using scaffolding strategy. In their research, it is clearly stated that scaffolding encourages students to talk to themselves while working on task. As doing so, students are more capable of solving problem than when they neglect to consult themselves. Another example is that of Ingram (mentioned in MacNaughton & Williams, 2004) According to this research, Ingram insisted that scaffolding does work in constructing the children literacy skills as well. In agreement with these findings, Brunch's research study (as cited in Safadi & Rababah, 2010) revealed gradual, consistent progress among students when scaffolded in their literacy acquisition. Bruch used Developmental Reading Assessment, checklists, observational data, writing samples and running records as the means of data collection. Her scaffolding techniques include specific prompts, guided reading and writing groups, direct and explicit teaching, mini lesson, small group instruction, and instruction driven by performance based assessment.

All in all, the idea of developing learners' ability via scaffolded instruction is widespread and deserves mentioning for the philosophy behind the theory is interesting. It can be assumed that scaffolding is one of the best teaching strategies.

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