

Using Scaffolding Techniques to Teach a Lesson about the Civil War

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ABSTRACT

As literacy specialists we believe that all teachers should use scaffolding in the development of lessons in all content area subjects. When teachers use scaffolding as an instructional technique they model the desired learning strategies or tasks for the students throughout the lesson. Scaffolding can be applied in a variety of ways to a variety of lesson formats. This study examines the outcomes of a lesson on the teaching of three Civil War Letters to four sixth-grade special education classes in two school districts. The use of the three letters and the envelope artifacts requires that the teacher teach knowledge by asking the right questions. For some students, to discover or acquire new information seems to be a challenge. This lesson was designed to activate the discovery process through the use of a problem solving approach with the use of a series of vocabulary and comprehension directed reading thinking activities.

Keywords: *Scaffolding, Social Studies, Discovery, Special Education, Learning Disability, Technology, Zone of Proximal Development, Critical Thinking, Comprehension, Vocabulary.*

Introduction

When scaffolding is done correctly, students are encouraged to develop their own creativity, motivation, and resourcefulness (Vacca, 2008). When a new building is constructed the builder uses scaffolding on the outside of the building to give the builder access to the emerging structure as it is being created. When the building is able to support itself, the builder removes the scaffolding. Like the builder the classroom must provide essential but temporary support to their students. This temporary support will

assist students to develop new understandings, new concepts, and new abilities. As students develop control of these abilities, the teachers need to withdraw support and only provide further help for extended or new tasks, understandings, and concepts. In the classroom, scaffolding is a process by which a teacher provides students with a temporary framework for learning. When scaffolding is done correctly, students are encouraged to develop their own creativity, motivation, and resourcefulness. As students gather knowledge and increase their skills on their own, fundamentals of the framework are dismantled. At the completion of the lesson, the scaffolding is removed altogether; students no longer need it (Lawson, 2002)

As literacy teachers for more than 30 years, we believe that teachers should use scaffolding in the development of lessons in all content area subjects. When teachers use scaffolding as an instructional technique they model the desired learning strategies or tasks for the students throughout the lesson. They also teach the students to comprehend the relevant information in levels or stages of comprehension that will then gradually shift responsibility of learning about the concept to the students. Finally, the students' ability to learn is improved because scaffolding emphasizes that teachers interact with students and students interact with one another as they complete a task. This study examines the outcomes of a lesson on the teaching of three Civil War Letters to four sixth-grade self-contained special education classes in two school districts. The Special Education classes had 10 to 12 students who were classified with severe learning disabilities. The students had average reading levels at the second grade level.

Scaffolding can be applied in a variety of ways to a variety of ways to a variety of lesson formats. The use of the three letters and the envelope artifacts requires that the teacher teach knowledge by asking the right questions. For some students, to discover or acquire new information seems to be a challenge. This lesson was designed to activate the discovery process through the use of a problem solving approach with the use of a series of vocabulary and comprehension directed reading thinking activities. For some students, to discover or acquire new information seems to be a challenge. This Civil War lesson was designed to activate the discovery process by using a problem-solving approach with a series of vocabulary- and comprehension-directed reading and thinking activities. The lesson was scaffolded according to Vygotsky's four stages for the ZPD and Herber. How teachers interact with students and how students interact with one another as they complete a task is important to students' ability to perform an activity. Scaffolding is an instructional technique whereby the teacher models the desired learning strategy or task and then gradually shifts responsibility to the students. This type of interaction is consistent with Vygotsky's (1934/1978) belief that learning and cognitive development are culturally and socially based. This means, moreover, that learning is a social process and not an individual one, and it occurs when students interact with their teacher and with one another in the classroom.

Although Vygotsky (1934/1978) did not use the term scaffolding, it does have a theoretical basis in his description of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He defined the ZPD 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 teacher guidance and interaction and collaboration with more capable student peers (Doolittle, 1997). The ZPD is represented in a model with four stages (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). This model illustrates the scaffolding process, and it represents the relationship between teacher and student interaction in group settings. Table 1 show how the four ZPD stages relate to the three levels of comprehension defined by Herber and Herber (1993).

In stage 1 of the ZPD or scaffolding, there is frequent teacher and student interaction because the teacher needs to provide the student with the literal facts, details, key names, and dates related to the concepts or ideas being taught. In stage 2, students work together in small groups, and the teacher provides them with activities that encourage interpretation through metacognition and guided practice. In stages 3 and 4, the students continue to work together and independently while applying the information that they have learned to new ideas and concepts. Using this framework as a guide, we extended the implementation ideas to include different types of text about the Civil War that social studies teachers are likely to use in the classroom.

How Can Scaffolding Be Applied to the Teaching a Social Studies Lesson about three Civil War Letters

The lesson was based on a series of three letters written by a fifteen year old soldier to his parents in 1862. The use of the three letters and the envelope artifacts required that the teacher teach knowledge by asking the right questions. For some learning disabled students, to discover or acquire new information seems to be a challenge. This lesson was designed to activate the discovery process through the use of a problem solving approach with the use of a series of vocabulary and comprehension directed reading thinking activities.

Lesson Objectives

The students will be able to:

- Observe and describe what they see as they observe the envelope and letters.
- Develop and ask a series of additional questions about the artifacts and to seek answers about what they want to know.
- Compare and contrast information contained in the letters and the person who wrote each letter.
- Make inferences, conclusions and generalizations about the letters based on the Information the students have gathered.

Lesson Introduction

The lesson began with a presentation of a story about the Civil War Soldier who wrote the letters. The soldier's name was Galutia York and he was the oldest son of a farm family from Hubbardsville, New York. In 1862 President Lincoln called for

300,000 volunteers to enlist in the Union Army and in that summer Galutia enlisted. He was 19 years old when he joined Company G of the 114th New York State Volunteer Infantry. On September 6, 1862, the 114th left Norwich, in Chenango County, for Binghamton, and from there they went to Baltimore, Maryland. They served in the VIII Corps in the Defense of Baltimore until early November when the regiment sailed for Fort Monroe at the mouth of the James River in Virginia. When General Banks' Expedition was formed in December, the 114th sailed for New Orleans, Louisiana.

Galutia stayed behind at Chesapeake Hospital until February of 1863. At that time he rejoined his comrades in Louisiana. Galutia died on May 20, 1863, in Berwick City. He had never been in a shooting battle, but the enemy he fought was just as deadly as any Rebel sharpshooter – disease (Greenhagen, 2009). The students then observed the following envelope and letter page artifact samples that were projected on a smart board screen.

Activities and Procedures

Activity 1: High Level of Teacher Interaction With Students –ZPD Stage 1-Literal Level

Directions: The students were divided into small groups of four. The following Written Document Analysis Worksheet was next distributed to the students. Each group of students was asked to discuss among themselves each of the items on the worksheet.

Civil War Written Document Analysis Worksheet Discussion Activity
Worksheet (From Pappas, 2010) <http://www.edteck.com/dbq/index.htm>

Written Document Analysis Worksheet

1. TYPE OF DOCUMENT (s) (Check one):

- Newspaper
- Letter
- Patent
- Memorandum
- Map
- Telegram
- Press release
- Report
- Advertisement
- Congressional record
- Census report
- Other (envelope)

2. Unique Physical Qualities of the Documents (Check one or more):

X_ Interesting letterhead



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- ☒ Handwritten
☐ Typed
☒ Seals
☐ Notations
☐ "RECEIVED" stamp
☒ Other (Picture, Stamps)

3. Date(S) of Documents: October 16, 1862

4. AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT: _____

POSITION (TITLE): son, soldier- Union
Army _____

5. FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?

Written to _____ parents _____

6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

1. date of letter _____

2. address _____

3. postmark of letter _____

B. Why do you think this document was written?

the writer was lonely _____

the writer wanted his family to know that he was OK _____

C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document. _____

D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:

E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:

Activity 2- High Level of Teacher Interaction with Students –ZPD Stage 1-Literal Level of Comprehension

Directions for List-Group-Label: The teacher asked the students to look at the list of Twenty two words and organize the words under five categories that were written on the white board in the front of the classroom. The students were told that the categories related to the three letters they were going to read. The twenty six words listed were

Camp	Money	Onions	Quarentine
Guard	Sickly	Cheese	Buried
Company	Soar Throat	Johnnycake	Government Rations
Boots	Paper	Rifle	Coral Ring
Checkers	Walnuts	Photographs	
Uncle Sam	Chestnuts	Convulsive Fit	

The five categories that were written on the white board were:

Military Terms
Recreational Activities
Nutrition
Illness

List Group Label Student Activity

Category/ Vocabulary Words	Military Terms	Leisure Activities	Nutrition	Illness
	Camp Guard Company Boots Rifle Uncle Sam	Money Paper Photographs Checkers Coral Ring	Onions Cheese Johnny Cake Rations Walnuts Chestnuts	Quarantine Sickly Soar Throat Convulsive Fit

Reflections

It was interesting to observe how the students interacted with each other throughout the lesson. They were very active with each task and very little time was wasted. In addition, the use of the Smart board gave the students an opportunity to immediately display their work. By the conclusion of the lesson the Special Education students not only knew the information that was most important to the Civil War letters, but also they had no difficulty relating to the boy soldier who wrote these letters. Comments from the students like “this was fun” and “we want to do more” were heard after the lesson was concluded. The teacher and teacher aides who assisted the students during the lesson said that they were excited about the activities and the pace of the lesson. They said they want to use more scaffolding techniques in developing other classroom lessons. Most of all the lesson demonstrated that scaffolding techniques are needed to effectively teach content area subject materials to elementary and middle school students in self-contained Special education classes.

Final thoughts

Based on our more than three decades of teaching Literacy and Special Education, we believe that there are many positive benefits for teachers in using the Smart board in combination with scaffolding techniques in the development of lessons in all content area subjects. The Smart board helps the students interact immediately with each other, the content and activities of the lesson and with the internet, if needed. In addition, the use scaffolding as instructional techniques helps the teachers model the desired learning strategies or tasks for the students throughout the lesson. They also teach the Special Education students to focus on and discuss the germane information in levels or stages of comprehension that will then gradually transfer responsibility of learning about the idea to the students. The students learn more about the concept and they communicate more effectively with each other. And finally, with the use of scaffolding techniques it is apparent the students grow in confidence about what they are learning. They also seem to retain the content information over a longer duration of time after the lesson has been taught. and Herber's three levels of comprehension. The following are some suggested ways that teachers can improve student learning by using scaffolding in their lessons (Vacca, 2008).

- Establish continuity from one task to the next, and, if necessary, repeat some tasks with variations. Most of all make sure that the tasks are connected to one another according to the literal, interpretive, and applied levels of thinking.
- Provide contextual support for the learners by encouraging them to explore, access, and discuss the content that they are learning using a variety of different available resources.
- Establish rapport with the students and encourage mutual engagement among the learners. Motivate them to discuss the content with non threatening participation and practice in a positive sharing classroom environment.
- Adjust the task procedures depending on actions, contributions, and discussions of the learners.
- Observe carefully the learners' readiness to take over increasing parts of the tasks and then handover the role and responsibility of completing more rigorous tasks to the learners as their skills and confidence with the content increase.
- Establish a flow and balance with the skills and challenges of the tasks and make sure that the learners are focused on the tasks at all times and that they are respectful of one another when they are answering questions and discussing the content.

In the Special Education classroom, scaffolding is a process by which a teacher provides students with a temporary framework for learning. When scaffolding is done correctly, students are encouraged to develop their own creativity, motivation, and resourcefulness. As students gather knowledge and increase their skills on their own, fundamentals of the framework are dismantled. At the completion of the lesson, the scaffolding is removed altogether; students no longer need it (Lawson, 2002). Walqui (2002) maintained that scaffolding can be thought of as three related pedagogical scales:

1. Providing a support structure to the students to enable certain activities and skills to develop
2. Carrying out of particular activities in class
3. Providing assistance in moment-to-moment interaction

Fournier and Graves (2002) use the example of training wheels on a bicycle example of scaffolding. The training wheels are adjustable and temporary and they provide the child with the support the she or he needs while learning to ride a two-wheeler. Without the training wheels learning to pedal, balance, and steer all at one time becomes very difficult, if not impossible for the child. Like the training wheels, scaffolding-aids the child to learn concepts in a supportive, directed, purposeful guided fashion. According to McKenzie (1999) the best lessons always make significant use of scaffolding to organize and support the student investigation or inquiry, to keep students from going too far off the path while seeking "the truth" about whatever issue, problem or question was driving the project. The least successful lessons assume too much about student skills, organizational abilities and commitment and the students are sent off on expeditions with little in the way of structure or guidance. McKenzie maintains that there is no appropriate (educational) definition in a dictionary. The term is relatively new for educators, even though the concept has been around for a long time under other names. McKenzie believes that structure is the key word. Without clear structure and precisely stated expectations, and purpose many students are vulnerable to drifting away from what they are supposed to learn. The predicament, according to McKenzie, is how we provide sufficient structure to keep students productive without confining them to straitjackets that destroy initiative, motivation and resourcefulness.

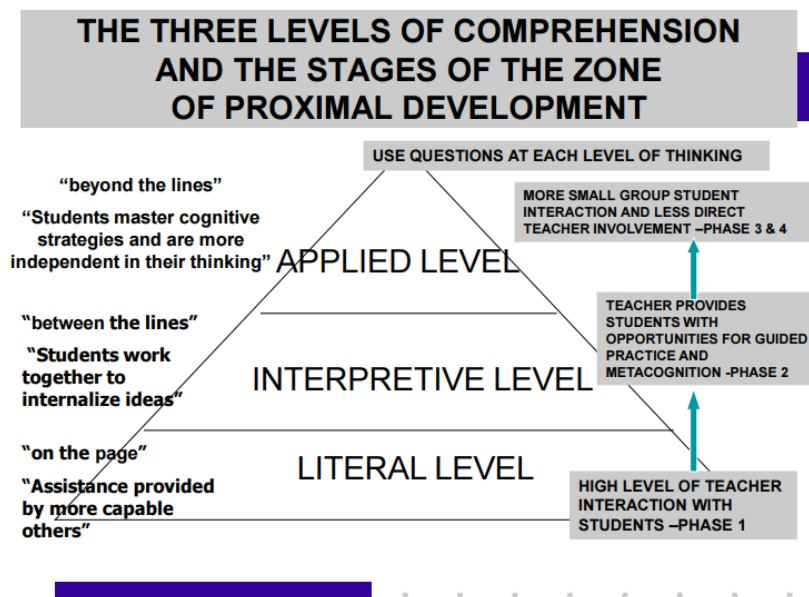
Robb (2003) presents many ideas for using informational texts and artifacts (trade books, letters, newspapers, magazines, or textbooks) in the classroom. The author shows teachers how to engage in responsive teaching and how to scaffold student learning from text. Robb examines and refutes the following four assumptions common to content area reading:

- that textbooks are the main information resource,
- that lecture and copying notes are great ways to teach new information,
- that review questions at the end of each chapter help students study and determine what they understand, and
- that students learn to read in the lower grades and don't need reading instruction in intermediate and middle school content subjects.

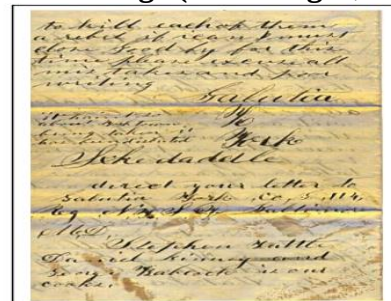
She describes the following five roadblocks that affect teachers and students when reading and comprehending materials in social studies, science, and math: (1) student avoidance of textbook reading; (2) student inability to read the textbook; (3) the myth of the concept of learning to read versus reading to learn; (4) the traditions of reading instruction at the intermediate and middle grades (time allocations, too much curriculum to cover; lack of preparation for teaching reading); and (5) the implementation of the Transmission Model of Learning, in which knowledge is transmitted to students through

The author also maintains that each chapter should conclude with Pause and Reflect, a time for each student to reflect on classroom teaching practices. This strategy, Robb maintains, reinforces the relationship between that reading is reasoning have with each other. This Show Me, Help Me, and Let Me scaffolding strategy suggested by Robb and used in with the Civil War lesson was designed to give a gradual release of responsibility from teacher modeling to student independence as students become more proficient at constructing meaning from the materials.

Table 1



Civil War Envelope (Greehagen, 2009) Sample Letter Page (Greenhagen, 2009)



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