

Scaffolding



Scaffolding is a modular system of metal pipes which provides temporary support for people constructing buildings. It enables them to build much higher than they could reach from the ground.

Scaffolding is a metaphor we use to describe how learners can be helped to achieve things which they are not yet ready to do on their own. It is a useful

description because it highlights that this help is only temporary; it is removed once the learner has the necessary knowledge and experience to be independent.

Scaffolding is often provided by a teacher, although it can be provided by a more proficient peer, or group of peers.

The aim of scaffolding is to enable a learner to move from a position where she cannot achieve a task alone, to a position where she is fully independent. In language-learning terms, it might be as simple as helping a learner to build an utterance from:

‘yesterday I go shops Tanya’ to

‘yesterday I went shops Tanya’ to

‘yesterday I went shopping with Tanya’.

Teachers have a variety of techniques to achieve this, such as reformulating, prompting, questioning, gesturing, echoing, modelling ...

Once the learner is confident of how to say what they want in a situation, they will be able to use their linguistic knowledge in other situations, without scaffolding. The knowledge/skill/understanding needed will have been internalised, and can now be utilised without external support.

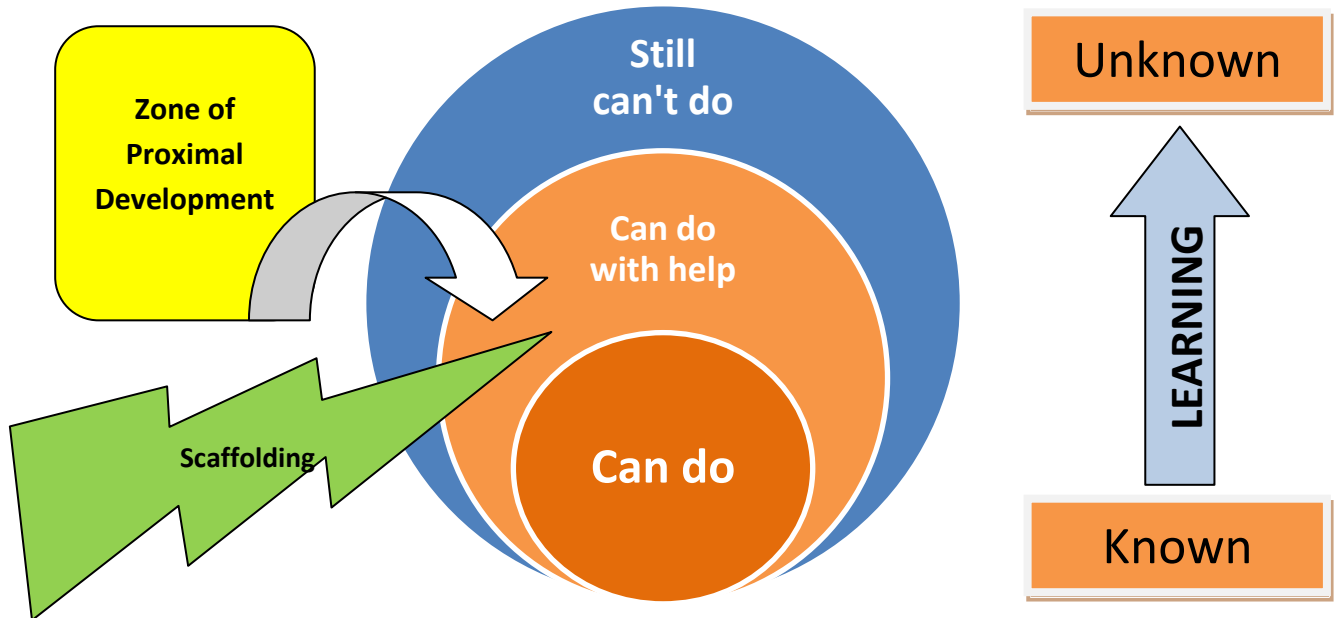
Scaffolding takes many forms. For example, when scaffolding the skill of listening, we might help a learner grasp meaning by focussing their attention on the form of a particular tense used; in reading, the questions the teacher asks about a particular text can guide the reader to a clear understanding; writing skills can be developed through model texts, or the use of graphic organisers to help organise ideas.

Scaffolding, Support, & Internalisation

Between “not knowing where to start”, and “being able to achieve something without help”, there is an intermediate area where a learner has some knowledge of how to proceed, but needs support to be able to succeed. This area is described by Vygotsky’s metaphor of the Zone of Proximal Development, which underpins the concept of scaffolding. Vygotsky

believed that when a student is at the ZPD for a particular task, providing the appropriate assistance will give the student enough of a "boost" to achieve the task.

Here's [an interesting article](#) on scaffolding.



In time, with scaffolding, LLs internalise what they are learning, and scaffolding is decreased. The Can Do area grows and it is now time to move on to the next zone of proximal development.

